

## EMOTION, CONFLICT AND SOCIAL PRESSURE: A POLITENESS STUDY OF FAMILY INTERACTIONS IN *ROMEO AND JULIET* BY SHAKESPEARE

**Alishba Sahar**

[alishbasehar368@gmail.com](mailto:alishbasehar368@gmail.com)

BS English, Govt. Graduate College Dunyapur

**Laiba Mushtaq**

[raolaiba445@gmail.com](mailto:raolaiba445@gmail.com)

BS English, Govt. Graduate College Dunyapur

**Laiba Shahid**

[laiba36201shahid@gmail.com](mailto:laiba36201shahid@gmail.com)

BS English, Govt. Graduate College Dunyapur

**Ramsha Kanwal**

[ramshakanwal8660@gmail.com](mailto:ramshakanwal8660@gmail.com)

BS English, Govt. Graduate College Dunyapur

**Asia zafar**

[ashiimalik324@gmail.com](mailto:ashiimalik324@gmail.com)

BS English, Govt. Graduate College Dunyapur

**Dr. Muhammad Arfan Lodhi\***

Higher Education Department, Punjab

Email: [samaritan\\_as@hotmail.com](mailto:samaritan_as@hotmail.com)

### \*Corresponding Author

**Dr. Muhammad Arfan Lodhi**

Higher Education Department, Punjab

Email: [samaritan\\_as@hotmail.com](mailto:samaritan_as@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

*While William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is traditionally interpreted through the thematic lens of fate, this study argues that the tragic outcome is fundamentally driven by systematic failures in familial and social communication. Grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, this paper investigates how intense emotion, deeply entrenched feuds, and systemic social pressures shape the dialogue patterns that precipitate the tragedy. Employing a qualitative textual analysis of the linguistic interactions within and between the Capulet and Montague households, the study examines how characters navigate "positive face" (the desire for approval) and "negative face" (the desire for autonomy). The findings reveal that under acute psychological and social stress, adolescent characters prioritize immediate emotional relief over established conversational norms. This pressure triggers a abrupt linguistic shift from polite strategies such as hedging and indirection to overt, highly impolite Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), typified by Lord Capulet's authoritarian reprimands. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates how pervasive familial suspicion fosters an insular "gang system" mentality rather than rational discourse. By examining these dynamics through the "social network effect," this study illuminates how parental intervention paradoxically destabilizes familial relationships, translating a private romance into a public catastrophe. Ultimately, this article offers a novel sociolinguistic framework for re-evaluating classical dramatic structures through the mechanics of communicative dysfunction.*

**Keywords:** Politeness Theory; Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; Face Threatening Acts (FTA); Sociolinguistics; Communicative Dysfunction.

### 1. Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has long stood as the quintessential archetype of the tragedy of ill-fated lovers, traditionally interpreted through the thematic lenses of cosmic determinism, tragic flaw, and overarching fate. However, a closer examination of the text reveals that the catastrophic trajectory of the narrative is fundamentally driven by systematic failures in domestic and socio-political communication. The play serves as a profound micro-sociolinguistic laboratory, demonstrating how intense psychological effect, rigid familial

hierarchies, and community expectations dictate the linguistic choices of interlocutors within the domestic sphere. Investigating these conversations is critical because the strategic deployment of language to protect status, preserve honor, and assert authority directly instigates the interpersonal friction that inevitably manifests as physical violence.

By focusing on the intra-household and inter-household interactions of the Capulet and Montague families, this study examines the acute tension between subjective emotional experience and external social expectations. To unpack the mechanics of these volatile communicative exchanges, this investigation utilizes the framework of Politeness Theory established by Brown and Levinson (1987). Specifically, the study employs the constructs of "Face-Threatening Acts" (FTAs) alongside the dual dimensions of "positive face"—the universal human desire to be appreciated and approved of by social peers—and "negative face," which constitutes the claim to personal autonomy and freedom from imposition. Through this analytical lens, the paper explores how domestic conflicts and compounding social pressures systematically alter the pragmatic choices made by characters, shifting their discourse from cooperative interaction to linguistic warfare. While an extensive body of literary criticism addresses the themes of conflict and destiny in the play, the vast majority of scholarship focuses primarily on the lyrical, romantic dialogue between the titular protagonists (Kristeva, 1987; Wells, 2004). This preoccupation has created a significant gap in the literature. Traditional analyses frequently overlook the mundane yet vital conversations involving secondary characters, such as parents, cousins, and guardians, whose linguistic choices actively construct the hostile environment surrounding the lovers. Furthermore, existing research rarely investigates how the deliberate calibration of politeness, or the strategic employment of impoliteness, functions as a mechanism of social coercion that drives the plot toward its tragic denouement.

## 1.2 Rationale of the Study

Although *Romeo and Juliet* has been extensively examined through traditional literary perspectives such as fate, destiny, tragic flaw, and romantic idealism, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the linguistic mechanisms through which conflict is created, intensified, and sustained within the play. Most existing scholarship privileges the poetic exchanges between Romeo and Juliet, treating language primarily as a vehicle for expressing love and emotion. As a result, the communicative practices of secondary characters—including parents, guardians, relatives, and community members—have often remained underexplored despite their crucial role in shaping the social environment that ultimately leads to the tragedy. This creates a significant gap in the literature, as the play's catastrophic ending emerges not only from individual choices or external fate but also from persistent failures in interpersonal communication.

The present study addresses this gap by shifting the analytical focus from broad thematic interpretations to the micro-level dynamics of discourse. Rather than viewing the tragedy solely as the consequence of destiny or inherited hostility, the study investigates how everyday linguistic interactions contribute to the deterioration of social relationships. Through the framework of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), the research examines how characters negotiate, threaten, protect, or violate one another's face needs during moments of conflict and emotional tension. This perspective allows for a systematic exploration of the ways in which language functions as a social instrument of power, control, resistance, and exclusion within familial and communal settings.

The significance of this approach lies in its ability to provide a concrete linguistic explanation for the breakdown of social cohesion in Verona. The longstanding feud between the Capulets and Montagues is not merely maintained through physical hostility; it is continuously reproduced through patterns of discourse characterized by accusation, command, insult,

coercion, and the refusal to accommodate opposing viewpoints. The study argues that repeated Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), coupled with the failure to employ effective face-saving strategies, gradually transform private disagreements into larger social conflicts. Consequently, language becomes a catalyst through which domestic tensions escalate into public crises.

Furthermore, this investigation contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies and pragmatics by demonstrating how sociolinguistic theories can illuminate classical literary texts. By integrating Politeness Theory with Shakespearean analysis, the study moves beyond purely thematic readings and highlights the role of communicative behavior in shaping dramatic action. Such an approach not only enriches our understanding of *Romeo and Juliet* but also illustrates the broader relevance of pragmatic theories in examining power relations, social hierarchies, and interpersonal conflict within literary narratives. Ultimately, this research seeks to establish that the tragedy of Verona is fundamentally a tragedy of communicative dysfunction. The lovers' fate is shaped not simply by chance or destiny, but by a social environment in which emotional pressure, familial authority, and communal hostility systematically undermine effective communication. By revealing how linguistic aggression and the erosion of politeness strategies constrain individual agency and intensify conflict, the study offers a fresh and theoretically grounded interpretation of one of Shakespeare's most enduring tragedies.

### 1.3 Research Questions

To address the identified gaps in the literature, this study is guided by the following three refined research questions:

1. In what ways do intense emotional states and psychological stress compel characters to abandon face-saving linguistic strategies in favor of disruptive, unmitigated Face-Threatening Acts during domestic confrontations?
2. How do predetermined familial roles and hierarchical structures influence the deployment of positive and negative face-saving mechanisms when characters are caught between personal desires and filial obligations?
3. How does the cumulative effect of strategic impoliteness among secondary characters generate the broader socio-political pressure that ultimately constrains the agency of the protagonists and precipitates the tragic outcome?

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it offers a fresh perspective on *Romeo and Juliet* by shifting critical attention from traditional thematic concerns such as fate, destiny, and tragic love to the linguistic processes through which conflict is produced and sustained. Rather than treating communication merely as a medium through which characters express emotions, the study foregrounds language as an active social force that shapes relationships, power dynamics, and ultimately the tragic outcome of the play. By doing so, it reveals how communicative failures, rather than supernatural destiny alone, function as a central mechanism driving the narrative toward catastrophe. From a literary perspective, the study contributes to Shakespearean scholarship by illuminating the overlooked role of secondary characters in the construction of tragedy. While previous analyses have predominantly focused on the romantic discourse between Romeo and Juliet, this research demonstrates that the linguistic behavior of parents, guardians, relatives, and community members significantly influences the protagonists' choices and opportunities. Examining these interactions through Politeness Theory uncovers the subtle ways in which authority, coercion, familial expectations, and social hostility are embedded within everyday conversations. Consequently, the study enriches literary interpretations of the play by presenting tragedy as a product of social interaction and communicative dysfunction rather than solely of fate or individual error. Academically, this

research contributes to the growing interdisciplinary relationship between literary studies and pragmatics. It demonstrates the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to dramatic texts and highlights the value of sociolinguistic approaches in literary analysis.

### 1.5 Conceptual Framework

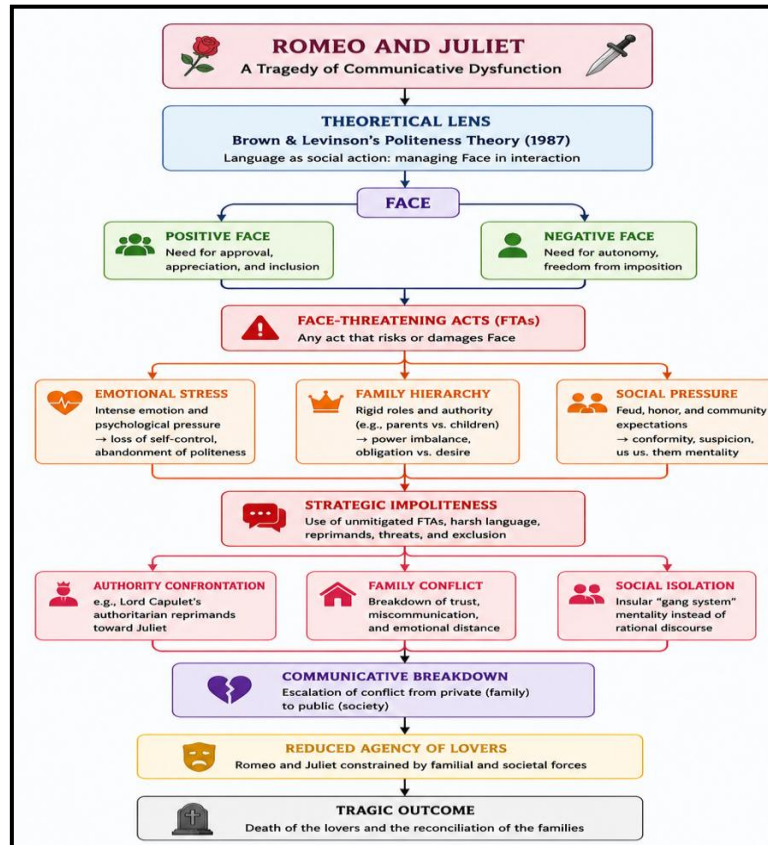


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

### 2. Literature review

The study of politeness has grown from basic manners into a deep look at how we protect our honor and handle social pressure. This field is divided into two waves: the first wave (focuses on universal rules of behavior) and the second wave (focuses on the specific moment and people involved). The foundation of this field was laid by researchers who viewed politeness to avoid social conflict (Grice, 1975; Lakoff, 1973). This model was developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) that centers around the idea of "face" the public self-image we all want to maintain (Fattah, 2014). This study discusses that most interactions violate politeness theory, namely face threatening acts (FTAs). We use positive politeness (acting friendly to be liked) or negative politeness (being indirect to avoid imposing) to keep the peace (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Leech (1983) proposed "Politeness Principle" with specific rules as the Tact Maxim, which focuses on minimizing the "cost" to the person being spoken to. These initial theories face heavy criticism for their inflexibility. Critics point out that these theories overlook the cultural variations and imbalances in shaping power and word meanings. Recent scholars moved away from this concept. Eelen (2001) made a vital distinction between politeness 1 (how people judge behaviors in daily life) and politeness 2 (the scientific concept used by academia). It was argued that no sentence is polite on its own. Instead, politeness is a social judgment rendered by the listener based on the context (Watts, 2003). In this view, being

polite is a conscious choice to go above or beyond what is expected to make someone else feels good (Fattah, 2014). Earlier studies of "Romeo and Juliet" often rely on traditional theories of politeness. Scholars like Lakoff, Grice, Leech, and Brown and Levinson describe politeness as a way for people to try to avoid conflict and maintain respect in conversations. Brown and Levinson's idea of "face" is especially important \_ the need to be liked (positive face) and the need to have independence (negative face). However, recent researchers argue that these old theories are rigid. Eelen (2001) points out that there is a difference between politeness and how researchers define it. The conflict between Montagues and Capulets is a longstanding feud. Alhajeri (2024) describes their feud similar to gang culture. Due to their rivalry, Romeo and Juliet's love is seen as a deception \_ this view challenges the well-known "Romeo and Juliet effect" which suggests that parental opposition makes love stronger.

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain the use of indirect strategies and ambiguity to avoid confrontation. Juliet's responses to her mother in Act 3, Scene 5 are examples of using indirect strategies. Researchers like Rahmani (2008) and Yousef (2014) point out that characters frequently ignore the usual rules of clear communication. Romeo's dramatic descriptions of love are good examples of it. Many scholars connect the play to teenage psychology. Nandana and Indu (2022) argue that Romeo and Juliet act impulsively because of their age. Most of the time, their emotions guide their decisions without considering the consequences. Their speech is also affected by their emotions. Romeo's infatuation for Rosaline changes to intense passion for Juliet at first sight, and Juliet agrees to a secret marriage after knowing Romeo for mere hours reflects their impulsive and emotional nature. Most intense conflict in the play happens within Juliet's family. At first, Lord Capulet seemed caring and respectful but when Juliet refuses to marry Paris, his attitude changes entirely. He shows no concern for her feelings. Romeo and Juliet's marriage makes things worse. On the other hand, Bahri et al. (2026) focus on the moral side of story, suggesting that the families' final reconciliation shows values like sacrifice and unity.

Table 1. Review of the related studies

Author(s)	Year	Study / Title	Framework	Major Findings	Research Gap
Herman, V.	1999	<i>Discourse and Time in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet</i>	Discourse Analysis & Pragmatics	Demonstrated how verbal resources such as deixis, tense, and speech events construct the temporal world of the play.	Focuses on temporal discourse rather than interpersonal conflict, face management, or politeness strategies.
Culpeper, J., Oliver, S., & Tantucci, V.	2022	<i>Politeness Reciprocity in Shakespeare's Dialogue: The Case of Thanks</i>	Politeness Theory	Established that reciprocity plays an important role in Shakespearean interactions and social relationship management.	Does not investigate communicative breakdown or familial conflict in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .
Oliver, S.	2022	<i>A Corpus-Based Approach to (Im)Politeness Metalanguage: A Case Study on</i>	(Im)Politeness Theory; Historical Pragmatics	Identified 234 politeness-related lexical forms and demonstrated how Shakespeare's	Corpus-wide study; lacks close analysis of family relationships and tragic outcomes.

		<i>Shakespeare's Plays</i>		characters evaluate politeness and impoliteness.	
Oliver, S.	2025	<i>A Corpus-Based Analysis of (Im)Politeness Metalanguage and Speech Acts: The Case of Insults in Shakespeare's Plays</i>	(Im)Politeness Theory & Speech Act Theory	Revealed how insults function as impolite events that shape social evaluations and interpersonal conflict.	Focuses on insults generally rather than cumulative communicative dysfunction in a specific play.
Haugh, M.	2007	<i>The Discursive Challenge to Politeness Research: An Interactional Alternative</i>	Discursive Politeness Theory	Argued that politeness emerges through interaction and evaluation rather than fixed linguistic forms.	Theoretical discussion with no literary application to Shakespeare.
Culpeper, J.	1996	<i>Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness</i>	Impoliteness Theory	Established foundational categories of impoliteness and their role in conflict escalation.	Not applied specifically to Shakespearean family discourse or tragic structures.
Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C.	1987	<i>Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage</i>	Politeness Theory	Introduced positive face, negative face, and face-threatening acts as central concepts of social interaction.	Provides theoretical framework but not literary application.

Recent developments in literary pragmatics have expanded the scope of Shakespearean studies beyond thematic and stylistic analysis toward a closer examination of discourse and interaction. This shift reflects a growing recognition that language functions not merely as a medium of expression but as a mechanism through which social relationships, power structures, and interpersonal conflicts are negotiated. Within this emerging tradition, scholars have increasingly explored how communicative practices shape dramatic action and contribute to the construction of meaning. One notable contribution is Herman's (1999) examination of discourse and temporality in *Romeo and Juliet*. Herman argues that Shakespeare employs linguistic resources to structure temporal perception and guide audience engagement with dramatic events. The study demonstrates the significance of discourse in shaping narrative experience and highlights the complexity of Shakespeare's linguistic craftsmanship. However, while Herman's analysis advances understanding of discourse organization within the play, it does not address how interpersonal communication influences relationships among characters or contributes to the tragic outcome.

Attention to interpersonal communication becomes more visible in studies grounded in politeness theory. Culpeper, Oliver, and Tantucci (2022) investigate the role of politeness reciprocity in Shakespearean dialogue and contend that expressions of gratitude perform important social functions beyond mere etiquette. Their findings suggest that reciprocal politeness helps establish solidarity, acknowledge social obligations, and maintain interpersonal harmony. Such observations underscore the importance of politeness as a relational resource within dramatic interaction. Nevertheless, the study primarily focuses on cooperative exchanges and leaves unanswered questions regarding the consequences of communicative failure, hostility, and persistent impoliteness. A broader perspective on politeness and impoliteness in Shakespeare's works is offered by Oliver (2022), whose corpus based investigation examines politeness related meta-language across Shakespearean drama. The study demonstrates that characters frequently evaluate social behaviour through explicit references to civility and incivility, thereby revealing the centrality of politeness judgments within dramatic discourse. Oliver's findings provide valuable evidence that concerns about social conduct are deeply embedded in Shakespeare's linguistic world. Yet the study's corpus wide orientation emphasizes general tendencies rather than the detailed examination of communicative relationships within a single play. Consequently, the specific dynamics of family interaction in *Romeo and Juliet* remain largely unexplored.

Building upon this work, Oliver (2025) investigates insults as manifestations of impoliteness and demonstrates their role in constructing social identities and reinforcing interpersonal conflict. The study reveals that verbal aggression functions not merely as emotional expression but as a strategic means of evaluating and positioning others within social hierarchies. This insight is particularly relevant to Shakespearean tragedy, where verbal confrontation frequently precedes physical violence. Despite its significance, the analysis concentrates primarily on insults as discrete speech acts and does not fully account for how repeated face threats accumulate to produce wider patterns of communicative dysfunction.

The theoretical foundations of contemporary politeness research have also undergone substantial revision. Challenging traditional approaches, Haugh (2007) argues that politeness should not be understood as an inherent property of linguistic forms but rather as an evaluative phenomenon emerging through interaction. According to this perspective, judgments of politeness are negotiated by participants within specific social contexts. Haugh's argument broadens the analytical scope of politeness research and highlights the importance of contextual interpretation. However, the study remains largely theoretical and offers limited discussion of literary texts as sites of pragmatic investigation. Complementing this perspective, Culpeper (1996) develops a systematic framework for understanding impoliteness as a form of linguistic aggression. His work demonstrates that speakers can intentionally employ language to damage the social identity of others and thereby intensify interpersonal conflict. This contribution has become foundational within impoliteness studies and provides a valuable lens through which dramatic confrontations can be examined. Nonetheless, Culpeper's analysis focuses primarily on the classification of impoliteness strategies and does not explore their cumulative role within familial and social networks. Underlying much of this scholarship is the influential framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their concepts of positive face, negative face, and face threatening acts continue to serve as the dominant theoretical model for investigating interpersonal communication. Brown and Levinson maintain that speakers constantly negotiate social relationships through strategies designed either to protect or threaten face needs. Their framework offers a powerful explanatory tool for understanding how linguistic choices shape social interaction. Despite its widespread application across numerous disciplines, relatively little research has employed this model to examine the communicative foundations of tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*.

These studies establish the importance of discourse, politeness, impoliteness, and social evaluation within literary communication. Research has demonstrated how language contributes to the construction of relationships, the maintenance of social order, and the escalation of conflict. However, a significant gap remains. Existing scholarship has largely focused on broad Shakespearean corpora (Oliver, 2022, 2025), specific pragmatic phenomena such as gratitude and insults (Culpeper et al., 2022; Oliver, 2025), or theoretical debates concerning politeness and impoliteness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996; Haugh, 2007). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how face threatening acts, familial authority, emotional pressure, and social expectations interact within *Romeo and Juliet* to create a sustained pattern of communicative dysfunction.

The present study seeks to address this scholarly omission by applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to the communicative interactions that shape the tragedy. Through a close analysis of familial discourse, social hierarchy, and face management strategies, the study argues that the catastrophe of Verona emerges from the gradual erosion of effective communication. In doing so, it advances a pragmatic interpretation of the play and contributes to ongoing conversations at the intersection of literary criticism, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics.

The existing literature demonstrates substantial scholarly interest in politeness, impoliteness, discourse analysis, and Shakespearean language. However, no study has systematically examined *Romeo and Juliet* through Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to investigate how face-threatening acts, familial hierarchy, emotional pressure, and social expectations collectively generate communicative dysfunction. Furthermore, previous research has largely focused either on broad Shakespearean corpora or on isolated pragmatic phenomena such as insults, reciprocity, and temporal discourse. The role of secondary characters in producing social pressure through strategic impoliteness remains significantly underexplored. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by analyzing how the breakdown of face management within family and social networks transforms interpersonal conflict into tragedy.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this paper is Politeness Theory which enables us to examine the impact of social constraints, conflicts and feelings upon familial relationships within Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet".

Brown and Levinson's 1987 work Politeness Theory expands upon the concepts of face developed by Erving Goffman: in human interaction, an individual's public self-image, dignity or face must always be maintained (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The theory identifies two types of politeness strategies that are employed in interactions: positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is defined as solidarity and camaraderie-it is about expressing warm and friendly feelings and is a means of showing solidarity, of showing approval and regard for the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987); negative politeness, meanwhile, entails restraint and carefulness and is about not imposing on the addressee's sphere of autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). When positive or negative politeness is violated or ignored, it becomes a face threatening act; such instances are more prone to lead to tension, arguments, and strong feelings. In this paper, the theory will be used to analyze interactions within Capulet and Montague families, particularly between parents and children. It explains how certain utterances serve to reduce pressure and emotions while others heighten the pressure.

In this framework, the paper gives an even more humane and relatable portrayal of the relationships within the play. Through the study of ordinary conversation-filled with commands, arguments, love, anger, hate, resentment-powerful emotional episodes are created. By analyzing specific family conversations to highlight the heartbreaking conflict that

Shakespeare has presented between one's individual emotion and the overwhelming burdens of family and society.

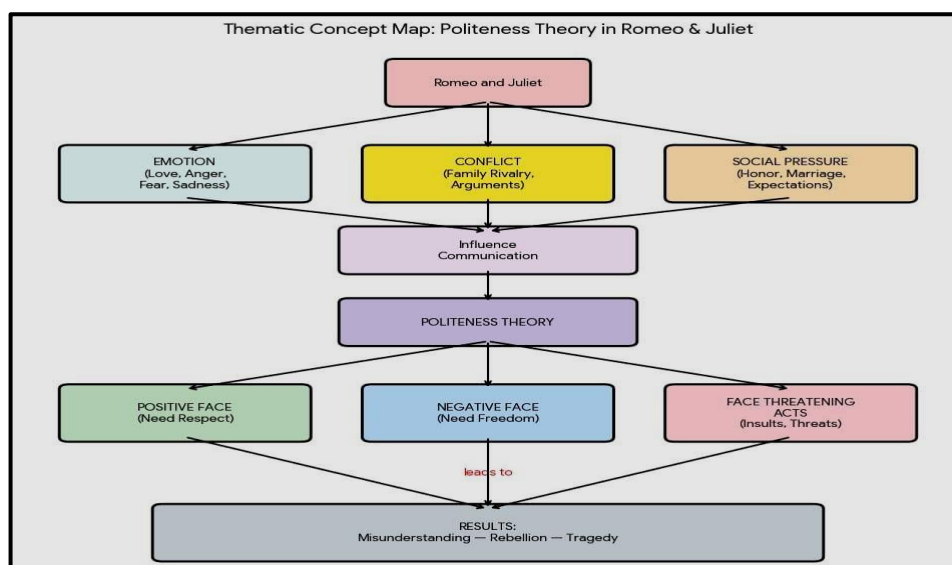


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Textual Analysis

A close reading of "Romeo and Juliet" shows that fate isn't the real cause of tragedy. It's the toxic pressure from their families and all the terrible miscommunication that ruins everything. That stupid old fight between the Montagues and Capulets slowly turns their love into a kind of rebellion. The characters keep hiding their real feelings behind all that beautiful poetry and fancy talk just to survive the strict rules around them. A lot of the disaster comes from pure impulsiveness — those crazy intense emotions that don't give anyone time to breathe or think straight. And honestly, it's the adults' stubborn refusal to just sit down and talk that blows a secret romance into a full-blown public catastrophe.

Table 2. Element 1: Emotion (Love, Anger, Fear, Sadness)

Act	Character	Line from text	Context
1	Romeo	<i>"Ay me! sad hours seem long."</i>	Sadness: Melancholy from unrequited love
3	Nurse	<i>"O, she says nothing... but weeps."</i>	Grief: Reporting Juliet's intense emotional crisis
4	Juliet	<i>"I have a faint cold fear."</i>	Fear: Psychological trepidation before the potion

Shakespeare illustrates how emotions can make us act without a brain and do stupid things. The emotions in Romeo and Juliet aren't merely visitors; they take over them completely. Romeo starts off as heartbroken, weeping over Rosaline. He feels like time is dragging and he wants nothing to do with his friends. The moment he sees Juliet, it all switches, and he essentially questions if he's ever truly loved before. The sudden shift highlights how young love can happen instantly and intensely. Juliet feels the same intense whirl of emotions. She instantly falls in love with Romeo but at the same time feels terror and fear due to the hatred between the families. Once the tragedies start stacking up, Tybalt is killed, Romeo is banished, and Juliet falls apart. She experiences "faint cold fear" at the sight of Romeo in the tomb. The

writer's words still pack such a powerful emotional punch you can feel the pain. Repeatedly, these strong feelings drive the characters into rash, dangerous choices- secret weddings, murdering rivals and making rash decisions. We can subtly tell that there's an element of warning that strong emotions aren't always rational or intelligent, which is why we can relate so strongly with the text today, and are able to feel the instantaneous passion of first love, or the heartbreak and sting of loss.

Table 3. Conflict (Family Rivalry, Arguments)

Act	Scene	Character	Line from text	Context
1	1	Montague	"Thou villain Capulet!"	Rivalry: Hostility between family patriarchs
3	1	Tybalt	"Romeo... thou art a villain."	Argument: A direct attack to provoke a duel
5	2	Paris	"Stop thy unhallowed toil, vile Montague!"	Confrontation: Conflict at the Capulet tomb

The pointless feud between the Montagues and the Capulets is a toxic influence in the whole story; it has turned Verona into a tension filled warzone. The instant we open the story the servants are already brawling on the streets of Verona, their grudge is ancient, pointless and seems never ending, fueled by the adults in the two houses, and the blood thirsty hot-heads like Tybalt who are only too eager to get into a brawl. Tybalt feels that he must fight Romeo purely based on his surname. The killing of Mercutio has such a heartbreaking effect, and, as he lies dying, he cursed "A plague o' both your houses!". He was not involved in the fight but is still a victim of the stupid feuding. This seems like a plea against pointless hatred. The vendetta has also not died down at the very end, due to the ongoing conflict, Romeo and Juliet must keep their relationship a secret, living in constant fear. The play makes it very apparent how detrimental blind family hatred is; it has destroyed the lives of these innocent children, and the families have had to be shown this truth via the tragedy.

Table 4. Social Pressure (Honor, Marriage, Expectations)

Act	Scene	Character	Line from text	Context
1	1	Prince	"Your lives shall pay the forfeit."	Institutional: Legal force used to stop brawls
2	2	Juliet	"Deny thy father and refuse thy name."	Honor: The pressure of family identity
3	5	Capulet	"And you be mine; I'll give you to my friend."	Marriage: Parental pressure to maintain rank

In their time and place, social norms and family honor determine and rule everything that occurs. The younger generations are expected to behave in a particular way to keep their family name in good standing and to honor their parents; even if it will ruin their own life. Juliet experiences this pressure the most in the story. While she is on the balcony, she cries "Deny thy father and refuse thy name". She is then verbally insulted and made to feel stupid by her

father when she refuses to marry Paris; it appears that her father's control and image are more important to him than his daughters' feelings. Romeo is facing similar pressure to hate his enemy and not fall in love with a Capulet; this makes him and Juliet feel lonely and stuck. The fact that young people in this story were forced to suppress their identity and feel trapped by the strict expectations put on them makes it a very relatable theme.

Table 5. Politeness Theory: Positive Face (Need Approval/Respect)

Act	Scene	Character	Line from text	Context
1	2	Paris	"But now, my lord, what say you?"	Respect: Using formal titles to seek approval
2	5	Juliet	"Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me."	Approval: Using affectionate terms for the Nurse
5	3	Capulet	"O brother Montague, give me thy hand."	Solidarity: Reconciliation through shared grief

The characters are so often faced with conflict that it is also important to remember there are also some really nice aspects of their relationships. Paris shows respect when he addresses Capulet as 'my lord'. The Nurse is also called sweet, sweet Nurse by Juliet, and we can sense her mother daughter type relationship; it is clear how much the Nurse cared for Juliet. Perhaps the most poignant example of a relationship in the story is at the very end; after the story of Romeo and Juliet is over, Capulet reaches out to Montague: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand". Two bitter enemies offer their hand in friendship, a little late, but it's never too late for compassion and peace.

Table 6. Politeness Theory: Negative Face (Need Freedom/Autonomy)

Act	Scene	Character	Line from text	Context
1	2	Juliet	"It is an honor that I dream not of."	Hedging: Declining a proposal indirectly
2	2	Romeo	"Shall I hear more, or shall I speak?"	Autonomy: Respecting Juliet's private reflections
4	2	Juliet	"Where I have learnt to repent the sin."	Off record: Misleading the father via pretend duty

Romeo and Juliet are desperately trying to seek a life of independence and freedom but are confined and controlled by the boundaries set by the families, and so must continue their affair in secrecy. Juliet gives an evasive answer in relation to her potential marriage so as not to cause any further conflict between herself and her mother. Juliet also gives her father the impression she has agreed to marry Paris although she has no intention of going through marriage at all. Romeo has been lurking in the shadows and has not been seen. To try and achieve a level of independence the lovers have had to become masters of deception, which then only leads to further risks. This relates to a lot of young people who desperately want their own independence and are not told what to do.

Table 7. Face-Threatening Acts (Orders, Insults, Threats)

Act	Scene	Character	Line from text	Context
1	1	Tybalt	"Turn thee... look upon thy death."	Threat: A "bald-on record" physical threat
3	5	Capulet	"Hang thee, young baggage! wretch!"	Abuse: Severe insults to assert power
5	3	Paris	"I do apprehend thee for a felon."	Order: Direct command of arrest

The story is littered with terrible insults and threats which have a hugely damaging effect and leave no room for conversation. Romeo is threatened by Tybalt with the order of his potential death, Juliet is verbally abused by her father, Paris instantly assumes that Romeo has entered Capulet's house for malicious reasons and insults Romeo. These insults and threats all add to the feeling that the emotions of the characters have no way of being controlled by rational thought and are constantly threatening each other's relationships and the situation the story is in. Overall, Romeo and Juliet are more than just a love story; it's a tragedy fueled by strong emotions, illogical hatred, social pressure, and a desperate lack of communication between young people. The young couple are ultimately isolated and alone, a theme that makes the play so strong and powerful even today because so many young people face and experience similar dilemmas- falling in love, the battle of generation gaps and trying to find your own place in the world. Shakespeare subtly reminds us how hatred can only lead to devastation, but it is hoped that the messages of understanding, love and acceptance may be the solution for future generations.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

Communication among family members in *Romeo and Juliet* reveals significant shifts in tone when characters experience emotional and social pressure. As tension intensifies, speech becomes increasingly abrupt, impatient, and confrontational. Heightened emotions transform minor disagreements into major conflicts, while opportunities for reconciliation gradually diminish. In such moments, language functions not merely as a vehicle of communication but as an instrument through which power, authority, and resistance are negotiated. Each strained interaction contributes to the escalating conflict, narrowing the possibilities for mutual understanding and ultimately shaping the tragic course of events.

The play demonstrates that pressure accumulates not only through spoken words but also through silence, avoidance, and withheld emotions. Consequently, the tragic outcome appears sudden only in retrospect; in reality, it is carefully constructed through a series of communicative failures and interpersonal tensions. Patterns of speech and silence continuously influence the progression of events, creating a sense of inevitability that emerges only after the tragedy unfolds. Politeness Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how emotional intensity affects interpersonal communication within the Capulet household. When emotions such as anger, fear, and frustration dominate interactions, concern for maintaining face and preserving social harmony diminishes. Lord Capulet's harsh treatment of Juliet exemplifies this shift. Rather than protecting her dignity, he openly challenges and threatens her, demonstrating how emotional pressure disrupts conventional norms of respectful

communication. Under such conditions, insults replace courtesy, authority overrides empathy, and verbal aggression becomes a means of asserting control.

The analysis further reveals that family expectations and social norms heavily influence communicative behavior. Family honour and obedience shape what individuals can openly express, often forcing them to suppress their genuine feelings. Juliet's interactions with her parents illustrate this dynamic. Unable to communicate her desires directly, she relies on indirect and evasive responses to avoid open confrontation while simultaneously protecting her autonomy. Such linguistic strategies reflect the constraints imposed by patriarchal authority and social expectations. Characters resort to concealment and ambiguity not because deception is inherently desirable, but because honest communication carries significant personal risks. Through the lens of Politeness Theory, the domestic sphere in *Romeo and Juliet* emerges as a site where emotional pressures and social obligations continuously intersect. Seemingly minor acts of refusal, silence, and resistance gradually expose fractures beneath the appearance of family unity. What appears to be parental duty frequently conceals fear, control, and anxiety, while expressions of care become intertwined with demands for obedience. As characters are compelled to perform roles imposed upon them by family and society, tensions accumulate and emotional distance widens. The conflict between personal desire and social expectation ultimately transforms private disagreements into irreversible tragedy.

The findings suggest that the deterioration of respectful communication plays a crucial role in the development of the play's central conflict. Family pride repeatedly takes precedence over individual emotional needs, creating conditions in which understanding and dialogue become increasingly difficult. As emotional tensions intensify, politeness strategies weaken and communication becomes more confrontational. Deception consequently emerges as a survival strategy, enabling Romeo and Juliet to protect their relationship in an environment where honesty is heavily constrained. Future research may extend this analytical framework to other Shakespearean tragedies that depict family conflict and social pressure. Comparative studies could investigate whether similar patterns of politeness breakdown, face-threatening acts, and communicative tension appear across Shakespeare's dramatic works. Additionally, examining parallels between early modern family communication and contemporary parent-adolescent interactions may offer valuable insights into the continuing relevance of Politeness Theory in understanding interpersonal conflict across historical and cultural contexts.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the value of Politeness Theory in examining the complex relationship between emotion, social expectations, and communication in *Romeo and Juliet*. The analysis reveals that social conventions governing respect, authority, and obedience significantly influence who is permitted to speak, what may be expressed, and how interpersonal relationships are managed within the family structure. These constraints create an environment of unspoken tension in which silence, indirectness, and subtle acts of resistance become as meaningful as direct verbal exchanges. The findings indicate that emotional pressure gradually erodes politeness strategies and weakens opportunities for constructive communication. As tensions accumulate within the Capulet household, interactions increasingly reflect conflict rather than mutual understanding. Expressions of care become entangled with demands for obedience, while parental authority often suppresses individual agency. Consequently, characters struggle to articulate their true feelings and desires, leading to patterns of avoidance, concealment, and misunderstanding.

The study further shows that family expectations and concerns for social reputation frequently outweigh personal emotional needs. The conflict between individual desire and collective obligation creates communicative barriers that prevent open dialogue and compromise. As respect and empathy decline, language becomes increasingly confrontational, contributing to

the escalation of interpersonal tensions. In the absence of a safe environment for honest communication, deception emerges as a necessary strategy for preserving personal relationships and pursuing individual aspirations. Ultimately, the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is not driven solely by fate or external circumstances but also by the gradual breakdown of effective communication within the family. The accumulation of face-threatening acts, emotional pressures, and social constraints contributes directly to the tragic outcome. By highlighting the reciprocal influence of emotion and social expectations on communicative behaviour, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's portrayal of family dynamics and interpersonal conflict. It also demonstrates the continuing relevance of Politeness Theory as a framework for exploring how communication shapes relationships, identities, and social outcomes within both literary and real-world contexts.

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