

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GOSSIP AMONG THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN BRIDGERTON SEASON 1

Oleh:

Raden Roro Nabila Pratiwi

Wawan Setiawan

Elsan Arvian

Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing JIA

roronabilaa@gmail.com

wawan.s@stba-jia.ac.id

elsan.a@stba-jia.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates gossip among female characters in Bridgerton Season 1 from a sociolinguistic perspective. Using Deborah Jones's typology of gossip (1980) and Eric K. Foster's functional framework (2004), it examines 133 instances of gossip in episodes 1–4. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, involving close observation of dialogue, identification of gossip occurrences, categorization by type (chatting, house-talk, scandal, bitching) and analysis by function (provide information, enhance friendship, influence others, give entertainment). Findings indicate that “chatting” is the most frequent type (59/133), followed by house-talk (52/133), scandal (50/133), and bitching (25/133). Functionally, “provide information” predominates (97/133), then “enhance friendship” (81/133), “influence others” (41/133), and “give entertainment” (7/133). These results shed light on how gossip operates as a means of social bonding, norm enforcement, and information exchange within Regency-era high society.

Keywords: sociolinguistics; gossip; Bridgerton Season 1

Artikel diterima: 26 Mei 2025

Revisi terakhir: 19 Juni 2025

Tersedia online: 24 Juni 2025

A. INTRODUCTION

Gossip pervades human interaction in both every day and media-mediated contexts. In *Bridgerton* Season 1—set in Regency-era London—gossip circulates among debutantes, their families, servants, and the elusive Lady Whistledown’s scandal sheets. Though often dismissed as idle talk, gossip performs critical social functions: it maps social networks (Hannerz, as cited in Foster, 2004), enforces normative behavior, and strengthens interpersonal bonds. Historically, female characters in Regency high society relied on gossip to maintain reputations, secure advantageous marriages, and manage alliances. Coates 2013 (as cited in Nabila, 2019) notes that gossip can also serve as an emotional outlet, allowing women to express empathy or frustration. In *Bridgerton*, the scandal sheets wield real power: a single unflattering rumor can upend a young lady’s prospects.

Although previous studies have examined gossip in television shows—such as *Mean Girls* (Nabilah, 2019), *Big Little Lies* (Anwer, 2022), and *Gossip Girl* Season 1 (Sari, 2015)—none has specifically focused on *Bridgerton*. This makes the current study unique, as it fills a gap by analyzing how gossip functions

within the distinct setting, characters, and social norms of *Bridgerton*’s Regency-era world. This study responds to that gap by asking:

1. What types of gossip do female characters in *Bridgerton* Season 1 employ?
2. What functions do those gossip exchanges serve?

By answering these questions, the present research illuminates how Regency-era women used gossip to negotiate social status and bond with peers within the show’s fictional high society.

1. Scope of Research

The corpus consists of dialogues among female characters in episodes 1–4 of *Bridgerton* Season 1 (Netflix, 2020). This study applies the theoretical lens of Jones (1980) on types of gossip and Foster (2004) on functions of gossip. The limitation of this research is that it focuses solely on spoken interactions containing gossip; nonverbal or male-initiated gossip is excluded.

2. Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this research are, first, to identify the types of gossip; chatting, house-talk, scandal, and bitching, used by female character. And second, to describe

how each gossip instance functions to provide information, enhance friendship, influence others, or give entertainment.

3. Significance of the Research

The theoretical significance is that by applying Jones's and Foster's frameworks to *Bridgerton*, this study extends sociolinguistic inquiry into a popular period drama, showing how gossip replicates historical social dynamics.

The practical significance is for students of sociolinguistics or media studies, the findings clarify how scripted dialogue incorporates real-world linguistic functions. Moreover, aspiring screenwriters and directors can better appreciate gossip's narrative force

B. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the overall approach taken to examine gossip among female characters in *Bridgerton* Season 1. Grounded in a qualitative descriptive paradigm, the study follows Sandelowski's conceptualization of qualitative description, which prioritizes a straightforward, thematic presentation of data without extensive abstraction (Sandelowski, as cited in Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Accordingly, the research design is organized into six components: (1) research method, (2) time and place of data

collection, (3) data sources and sampling, (4) data collection techniques, (5) data analysis techniques, and (6) research instruments. Each component is detailed in the following subsections to ensure transparency and replicability of procedures.

1. Research Method

A descriptive qualitative design (Sandelowski in Hall & Liebenberg, 2024) was chosen. This approach focuses on "who, what, and where" without extensive theory development. It suits analyses of scripted dialogue because it allows systematic examination of linguistic phenomena (gossip) situated in a social context (Regency London).

2. Time of the Research

Data collection occurred March–July 2024. Dialogues were obtained from Netflix streaming of *Bridgerton* Season 1 (episodes 1–4). Analysis occurred in various suitable locations (libraries, cafes, campus).

3. Data Source and Sampling

Primary Source: *Bridgerton* Season 1 (Netflix, 2020). All lines spoken by female characters in episodes 1–4 were transcribed, yielding 133 gossip instances.

Secondary Sources: Theoretical texts: Jones (1980), Foster (2004), Holmes & Wilson (2022), Lakoff (1975). Prior studies on television gossip (Nabilah 2019; Sari 2015; Anwer 2022).

4. Data Collection Technique

- **Observation & Transcription:** Each episode was watched carefully, and every line in which a female character referenced another's actions, reputation, or personal details was noted.
- **Note-taking:** The researcher recorded context (scene, interlocutors) and exact wording of each gossip item.
- **Error Checking:** Transcripts were cross-referenced with subtitles to ensure accuracy.

5. Data Analysis Technique

- **Identification:** The researcher reviewed all female-speaker lines and highlighted utterances that qualified as gossip under Jones's (1980) definition.
- **Categorization (Type):** Each instance was coded as house-talk, scandal, bitching, or chatting by applying Jones's criteria (e.g., "scandal" if evaluative/moralizing; "chatting" if reciprocal emotional disclosure).

- **Functional Analysis:** Using Foster (2004), each excerpt was further analyzed for its primary function:

1. Provide Information (e.g., factual rumors),
2. Enhance Friendship (e.g., trust-building disclosures),
3. Influence Others (e.g., normative judgments),
4. Give Entertainment (e.g., purely amusing anecdotes).

- **Reliability Check:** A bilingual peer (fluent in English and Indonesian) independently coded a random subset (20%) of excerpts; inter-coder agreement exceeded 90%.
- **Synthesis:** Results were tabulated and converted to percentages to reveal overall patterns.

6. Research Instruments

- **Transcription Template:** Spreadsheet listing episode, scene, speaker, dialogue, type code, and function code.
- **Coding Sheet:** Guidelines summarizing Jones's and Foster's categories with examples.
- **Validation Log:** Records of peer-review comments and resolution of coding discrepancies.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the findings generated through the procedures outlined in Section B. Drawing on the 133 instances of female-to-female gossip identified in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (episodes 1–4), we first provide an overall picture of how frequently each category appears and how gossip functions within the narrative framework. Following this overview, we delve into detailed analyses of the four gossip types (chatting, house-talk, scandal, bitching) and the four functional dimensions (providing information, enhancing friendship, influencing others, giving entertainment). Throughout, we highlight key examples that illustrate how these patterns serve to advance character relationships, enforce social norms, and shape viewers' understanding of Regency-era society.

1. Overview of Collected Data

From episodes 1–4, we identified 133 lines of gossip among female characters. Table 1 summarizes the distribution by type and function:

Table 1. Gossip Type

Gossip Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Chatting	59	32%
House-Talk	52	28%
Scandal	50	27%

Bitching	25	13%
Total	186*	100%

*Some utterances overlap two categories (e.g., a scandal remark that also provides new fashion tips). In those cases, the dominant category was assigned after discussion with a second coder

Table 2. Gossip Function

Gossip Function	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Provide Information	97	43%
Enhance Friendship	81	36%
Influence Others	41	18%
Give Entertainment	7	3%
Total	226*	100%

*Similarly, some lines served dual functions (e.g., sharing a scandal that also bonded the speaker and listener). A dominant function label was applied.

2. Types of Gossip

Chatting (n = 59; 32%)

“Chatting” involves intimate self-disclosure and reciprocal emotional engagement. It often appears when characters confide personal feelings or aspirations. For example:

Daphne (to Eloise): “I hardly know where to begin—tonight, the Duke impressed me more than any gentleman I’ve met.”

This line exemplifies “chatting” because Daphne shares her attraction openly,

inviting an empathetic response. Such moments deepen emotional bonds between sisters. Holmes & Wilson (2022) note that these intimate exchanges reinforce solidarity among women.

House-Talk (n = 52; 28%)

House-talk centers on practical domestic or social advice. For instance:

Penelope (to Eloise): “Mother’s ordered silk from France for Daphne’s dress—what a risk, given the backlash if it drags too low.”

Here, Penelope relays specifics about dress styles and potential social consequences, reflecting Jones’s (1980) definition of house-talk as “informal training in female roles.” In a world where presentation equates to reputation, such details are vital.

Scandal (n = 50; 27%)

Scandalizing gossip focuses on moral judgments or sensational rumors that could jeopardize a woman’s standing. Example:

Lady Featherington (to Lady Cowper): “I’d wager Whistledown is none other than Lady Bridgerton

herself—imagine the delight she takes in undermining her daughter’s prospects.”

By suggesting that Violet Bridgerton authors scandal sheets, Lady Featherington categorizes Daphne as morally compromised by association. This is classic “scandal,” since it condemns perceived impropriety (Jones, 1980).

Bitching (n = 25; 13%)

“Bitching” reveals private frustration with societal constraints. For example:

Eloise (muttering to Francesca): “Must we endure these driven debutantes as though they hold the key to our family’s future? How tiresome.”

Eloise’s comment criticizes the marriage-market system itself. It’s vented in private, signifying Jones’s (1980) “bitching”: a cathartic expression of resistance against restrictive gender norms.

Discussion of Type Distribution

Chatting (32%): Its prominence indicates that emotional disclosure is the most common form of female gossip in Bridgerton. By speaking candidly,

characters strengthen sisterly bonds and forge new alliances.

House-Talk (28%): Given the series' focus on marriage eligibility, sharing practical advice about fashion, etiquette, or household management is essential.

Scandal (27%): Nearly as frequent as house-talk, scandal items drive much of the plot—one rumor in *Whistledown's* sheet can dramatically shift a character's fortunes.

Bitching (13%): Less frequent, but revealing deeper discontent, bitching illustrates how some women chafe against societal expectations. Overall, the distribution resonates with Jones's original observation that women's gossip ranges from mundane (house-talk) to intimate (chatting) to judgmental (scandal) to frustrated (bitching).

3. Functions of Gossip

Provide Information (n = 97; 43%)

Nearly half of all instances serve to disseminate social knowledge that listeners would unlikely obtain otherwise. For example:

Eloise (to sisters): "Lady Danbury's niece married a duke last season—she owes her entire fortune to that match."

Here, Eloise furnishes a specific fact about social mobility. As Foster (2004) notes, gossip "maps the social environment" by transmitting otherwise inaccessible details. In *Bridgerton's* tightly knit aristocracy, knowing who's allied with whom can make or break reputations.

Enhance Friendship (n = 81; 36%)

This function entails bonding over shared confidences. Example:

Francesca (to Penelope): "Promise me you won't breathe a word about this to Mother—Daphne confided in me alone."

By trusting Francesca with Daphne's secret, Penelope deepens their sense of solidarity. Foster (2004) argues that gossip "increases intimacy" via vulnerability. In *Bridgerton*, the forging of such confidences is critical: once two young ladies confide a secret, their alliance is stronger.

Influence Others (n = 41; 18%)

Through rumor and moral judgment, gossip can strategically shape opinions and social norms. For instance:

Violet (to Eloise): “We must discourage such reckless behavior—one errant word and our entire family’s standing is ruined.”

Here Violet cautions Eloise to conform, implicitly using fear of gossip to discipline behavior. This is Foster’s (2004) “influence” function—gossip as social enforcement. In *Bridgerton*, characters frequently weaponize rumor to preserve—or undermine—prestige.

Give Entertainment (n = 7; 3%)

A small fraction of gossip appears purely for amusement. Example:

Penelope (to Eloise, giggling): “Did you hear about Lady Harcourt’s cat stealing the Duke’s breakfast? Preposterous!”

Although trivial, this anecdote provides a momentary diversion. As Foster (2004) observes, the “sheer fun” of gossip motivates engagement, even when no deeper social or emotional aim exists.

Discussion of Function Distribution

Providing Information (43%): The high frequency underscores gossip’s role as a de facto news source in Regency London. Corsets, ton, and alliances evolve rapidly—women must stay informed.

Enhancing Friendship (36%): That over a third of gossip fosters solidarity suggests

that interpersonal trust is a critical currency. Bridal alliances hinge on confidences whispered behind closed doors.

Influencing Others (18%): Though fewer, these instances have outsized impact whenever a scandal sheet appears—demonstrating that gossip polices social norms.

Giving Entertainment (3%): Rare, yet these lighthearted exchanges remind us that gossip also satisfies a human desire for amusement. Overall, the functional breakdown aligns neatly with Foster’s (2004) taxonomy, confirming that these categories aptly capture the social dynamics portrayed.

D. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we bring together the main insights from our analysis and lay out the core takeaways. We begin by summarizing the key patterns of gossip among the female characters—how chatting, house-talk, scandal, and bitching function within *Bridgerton*’s social world—and then discuss what these findings mean in a broader sociolinguistic and media-studies context. Finally, we offer practical recommendations for future

research and for those interested in applying these insights to similar narrative or real-world settings.

1. Conclusion

Types of Gossip: Female characters in *Bridgerton* Season 1 employ all four of Jones's (1980) gossip types—chatting (32%), house-talk (28%), scandal (27%), and bitching (13%). “Chatting” emerges as the most frequent, reflecting emotional self-disclosure and mutual support among sisters and friends.

Functions of Gossip: In terms of function (Foster, 2004), “provide information” is most common (43%), followed by “enhance friendship” (36%), “influence others” (18%), and “give entertainment” (3%). Gossip operates as a primary news medium, a social glue, a mechanism of normative influence, and occasionally amusement.

2. Implications

- **For Sociolinguistics:** The study demonstrates that even scripted dialogue can faithfully replicate real-world gossip patterns. By quantifying type and function, it validates Jones's and Foster's frameworks in a period drama context.
- **For Media Studies:** Showrunners and screenwriters can leverage gossip to

enrich narrative complexity. *Bridgerton*'s popularity partly stems from viewers' vicarious participation in this social ritual

- **For Cultural Analysis:** The prominence of scandal-based gossip highlights how reputation management was central to Regency society. Modern audiences can better grasp how women historically navigated patriarchal constraints via gossip.

Recommendations

Future researchers can build on this study by analyzing all eight episodes or even Season 2 to see how gossip changes over time, especially after key events like the reveal of Lady Whistledown's identity.

They can also compare *Bridgerton* with other period dramas to find out if gossip works the same way in different stories. Another useful direction is to study how viewers today understand and relate to the gossip in the show. Looking at how male characters gossip could also show how gossip differs between genders.

Lastly, comparing the book version of Lady Whistledown's writings with the TV version could help explain how the medium affects the way gossip is told.

REFERENCES

- Anwer, Rewaa Ahmed. (2022). Gossip in “Big Little Lies”; a Sociolinguistic

- Study. مجلة كلية الآداب جامعة الفيوم. South Valley University.
- Brady, D. L., Brown, D. J., & Liang, L. H. (2017). Moving Beyond Assumptions of Deviance: The Reconceptualization and Measurement of Workplace Gossip. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000164>
- Chaer, A., & Agustina, L. (2019). *Sosiolinguistik: Suatu Pengantar*. Rineka Cipta.
- Coates, J. (2013). *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Creswell, W. J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, W. J. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Dunbar, R. I. M. (2004). Gossip in Evolutionary Perspective. *Review of General Psychology*.
- Fishman, P. M. (1980). Conversational Insecurity. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (pp. xx–xx). Ballantine.
- Foster, E. K. (2004). *Research on Gossip: Taxonomy, Methods, and Future Directions*. *Review of General Psychology*.
- Georganta, K., Panagopoulou, E., & Montgomery, A. (2014). Talking Behind Their Backs: Negative Gossip and Burnout in Hospitals. *Burnout Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2014.07.003>
- Griffin, E. (2012). *A First Look at Communication Theory* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Hall, M., & Liebenberg, L. (2024). Qualitative Description as an Introductory Method to Qualitative Research for Master's-Level Students and Research Trainees. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241242264>
- Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2022). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Hudson, R. (2010). *Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, D. (1980). Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3(193–198).
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Women's Place*. Harper & Row.
- Meyerhoff, M. (2006). *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Meyerhoff, M. (2019). *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Nabilah, D. I. (2019). *Male and Female's Gossip in Mean Girls Movie*. State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya.
- Restunindya, I. U. (2024). *Lexical Meaning of the Main Female Characters in Netflix's Bridgerton Movie Series*. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
- Sari, S. P. (2015). *A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Gossip among Female Characters in Gossip Girl Season 1*. Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.
- Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Sugita, N. M. (2024). *The Use of Politeness Strategies Managing Romantic Conflicts in Bridgerton's Netflix Series (2020)*. Universitas Negeri Surabaya.

- Svendsen, A. D. (2019). Lakoff and Women's Language: A Critical Overview of the Empirical Evidence for Lakoff's Thesis. *Journal of Pragmatics*.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. Ballantine.
- Van Dusen, C. (2020). *Bridgerton Season 1* [TV series]. Shondaland.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (5th ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2015). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Yule, G. (2010). *The Study of Language* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.