

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This final chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and discussion analyzed in the preceding chapters. This chapter provides a summary of how politeness strategies function in the romantic communication between the characters Margot and Robert in Kristen Roupenian's short story *Cat Person*, as analyzed through Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Tannen's (1990) gendered communication theory, and Knapp's (1978) Relational Development Model. This chapter attempts to conclude the answers to the three research questions addressed in the earlier chapters and provides suggestions for future researchers who may wish to build on the findings of this study.

5.1 Conclusion

This study analyzes 156 instances of politeness strategies found in the dialogues and narrative passages of *Cat Person*, distributed across five relational stages: initiating, intensifying, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating. The analysis reveals that Robert and Margot employ all four types of politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record but with markedly different frequencies, functions, and trajectories across the stages of their romantic relationship.

In response to the first research question regarding the types of politeness strategies used by Robert and Margot, the findings show that the two characters

demonstrate opposing dominant patterns. Robert's most frequently used strategy is bald on record, employed consistently across all five relational stages through direct commands, evaluative questions, and unmitigated demands without social softeners. This dominance of bald on record is sustained regardless of the nominally decreasing social distance between the characters, indicating that Robert's communicative orientation is driven by a stable tendency toward control and directness rather than situational recalibration. Margot, by contrast, relies predominantly on negative politeness throughout the initiating, *intensifying*, and *stagnating stages*, expressed through hedging, self-deprecation, and repeated apologies. Her use of bald on record only emerges for the first time in the *avoiding stage*, while in the *terminating stage* she produces no verbal communication at all, her silence functioning as a complete withdrawal from the system of face management.

In response to the second research question regarding how power, social distance, and rank of imposition function as tools of negotiation, the findings demonstrate that all three variables operate asymmetrically and shift across the relational stages of the romantic relationship. Robert enters the relationship with high perceived power, low social distance on his own terms, and a low estimation of rank of imposition conditions that enable and sustain his persistent use of bald on record without mitigation. Margot enters from a position of relative equality but progressively occupies a lower power position as the relationship develops, experiencing the highest rank of imposition precisely at the stages where she is most verbally silent. The *avoiding stage* marks the only point at which this asymmetry is disrupted: Margot recalibrates all three

variables at the same time, approaching power equivalence, actively increasing social distance, and ceasing to calculate rank of imposition on Robert's behalf. By the *terminating stage*, the power dynamic has fully inverted Robert's verbal escalation through all four strategies at the same time reflecting a speaker attempting to recover communicative power he no longer holds, while Margot's silence renders his face-threatening acts without effect.

In response to the third research question regarding how politeness strategies reflect communication patterns in the romantic relationship, the findings show that the dominant strategies used by each character align consistently with distinct communicative orientations as theorized by Tannen (1990). Robert's reliance on bald on record and his use of bald on record combined with off record in the early stages reflects a report talk orientation throughout communication directed toward asserting position, maintaining status, and controlling the interactional frame rather than building genuine connection. Even his adoption of positive politeness and negative politeness in the *avoiding stage* does not represent a genuine shift toward rapport talk but functions instrumentally as the only available tools once his preferred strategy is no longer effective. Margot's trajectory follows the opposite arc: her rapport talk orientation deepens from the initiating through the *intensifying stage*, undergoes a functional transformation in the *stagnating stage* from connection-building to communicative a survival mechanism, shifts abruptly to report talk in the *avoiding stage* as she asserts a direct boundary for the first time, and disappears entirely into silence in the *terminating stage*. This evolution across Knapp's relational stages reveals that politeness strategies in this romantic

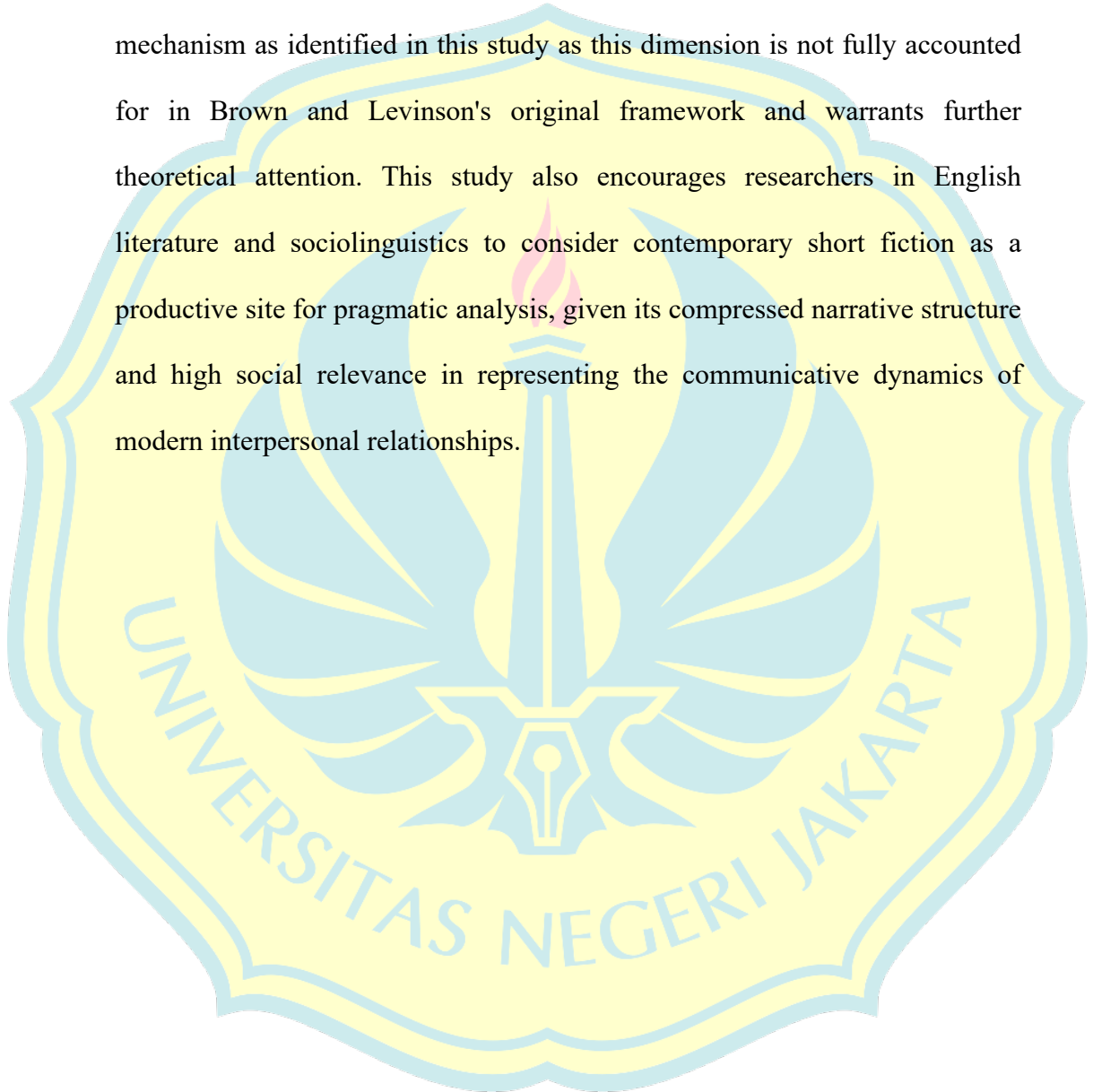
relationship do not function as neutral social conventions but as dynamic instruments through which communicative power is negotiated, performed, and ultimately withdrawn.

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that politeness is not merely a matter of social courtesy in the context of Cat Person; it is the primary medium through which the asymmetric power dynamic between Margot and Robert is constructed, maintained, and ultimately dismantled. The consistent use of bald on record by Robert and the progressive transformation of negative politeness by Margot into a survival mechanism illustrate how gendered communicative orientations, when operating within an unequal romantic relationship, can reproduce and sustain power imbalance through the very strategies that are ostensibly designed to protect face. Margot's final silence, the complete absence of any politeness strategy, stands as the most decisive communicative act in the entire relationship: a refusal not only of Robert's messages, but of the interactional system that had for so long placed the burden of relational maintenance entirely on her.

5.2 Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are offered for future researchers. Future studies may apply the integrated framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Tannen's (1990) gendered communication theory, and Knapp's Relational Development Model to other contemporary short stories or literary works that depict intimate relationships, in order to examine how politeness strategies function dynamically across relational

trajectories rather than as static patterns. Future researchers may also expand the analysis of how politeness functions for speakers in low-power relational positions particularly the transformation of negative politeness into a survival mechanism as identified in this study as this dimension is not fully accounted for in Brown and Levinson's original framework and warrants further theoretical attention. This study also encourages researchers in English literature and sociolinguistics to consider contemporary short fiction as a productive site for pragmatic analysis, given its compressed narrative structure and high social relevance in representing the communicative dynamics of modern interpersonal relationships.



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