

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Pragmatics and pragmalinguistics are interrelated branches of linguistic inquiry that focus on how meaning is shaped and interpreted within context. As Yule (1996) notes, pragmatics primarily concerns the process through which meaning is communicated by the speaker and interpreted by the listener, emphasizing that meaning in communication is context-dependent rather than purely literal. Similarly, Kuatbaevna (2024) explains that while linguistics deals with the structural aspects of language—phonetics, morphology, and syntax, pragmatics examines how utterances function in real social contexts. Within this scope, pragmalinguistics bridges the two fields by studying how linguistic forms encode pragmatic meaning, connecting structural choices with communicative intentions. Leech (1983, p. 11) situates pragmalinguistics as one of two complementary side of pragmatics, the other being sociopragmatics, which is concerned with the social conditions of certain interactions. Taking into account relative power, social distance, and the rights and obligations between interlocutors that make one linguistic choice more appropriate than another in a given interaction (Leech, 1983, p. 10; Culpeper, 2009, p. 3). In this study, pragmalinguistic is used as a tool to analyze linguistic manipulation Walter White impose upon other characters in the series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), while sociopragmatic considerations account for the social positioning and power relations that shape how that manipulation is strategically calibrated. Therefore, to explore the complexity of the theme of

manipulation, this study is grounded in two complementary layers of pragmatics identified above. Operating at the pragmalinguistic layer, the first being the Searle's Speech Act Theory and the second, operating at the sociopragmatic layer, is the Politeness and Impoliteness Theory by Brown & Levinson and Culpeper, respectively. Linguistic manipulation parameters are also devised by synthesizing key ideas from existing manipulation discourse theory by Handelman (2009), Goodin (1980), and Van Dijk (2008). Using this layered ecosystem, spanning both the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions of pragmatics, this manipulation analysis would be based upon systematic framework that debunks how implicit intentions are realized through language.

To start, this study is pragmalinguistically grounded in the Speech Act Theory that was spearheaded by linguist John Langshaw Austin and refined by John Searle. Speech Act Theory posits that language performs actions, utterances are not mere strings of words, but tools to accomplish communicative goals and are commonly given more specific labels such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request (Yule, 1996, p.47).

Speech Act Theory came with several classifications. Initially, Austin (1962) classified speech acts in three classification: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. In response to that, Searle (1976) refined Austin's taxonomy of speech acts, particularly the illocutionary act into several specialized types, which are: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. This refinement by Searle is what is being employed to serve as the theoretical basis for this study. The Speech Act theoretical basis is restricted only to Searle's illocutionary act types due to lack of clarity between Austin's type of illocutionary

acts. Searle (1976, p.1) stated that “it lacks of clear criteria for distinguishing one kind of illocutionary force from another”. Furthermore, Austin’s classification of illocutionary acts (verdictives, exercitives, commissives, expositives, and behabitives) tend to lean towards classification of illocutionary verbs rather than illocutionary acts.

Since the Speech Act Theory is coined to classify what actions certain utterances can do, Politeness & Impoliteness Theory steps in to dissect the interaction from the sociopragmatic standpoint. This shift marks a move from the pragmalinguistic to the sociopragmatic dimension of the analysis . The notion of “politeness” itself is based upon the concept of “face” coined by Goffman (1967). According to Goffman, “face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes, albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself” (p.5). From there, Brown & Levinson (1987, p.61) emphasizes that “‘face’ is tied up with the notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or ‘losing face’. Thus, face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction”. Additionally, it is also understood that people cooperate and assume each other’s cooperation in maintaining face in interaction. Thus, “politeness” can be defined as means employed to show awareness of another person’s face in an interaction (Yule, 1996, p.60). Suffice to say that Politeness Theory concerns itself with how social harmony is maintained through safeguarding each other’s face by using language. In relation to Politeness Theory, Impoliteness Theory is in contrast concerns itself with deliberate “face attack” to cause social disharmony and conflict (Culpeper et al., 2003, p.1546). Both

politeness and impoliteness strategies, therefore, function as sociopragmatic mechanisms: they operationalize social distance, power, and face as the variables that govern the appropriateness, or deliberate inappropriateness, of Walter White's linguistic choices (Culpeper, 2009, p. 3).

Described pragmatics theories above could be operationalized to deliver manipulation linguistically. According to Handelman (2009), manipulation is a motivating action that employs indirect, invisible, and covert means to mentally intrudes target's critical autonomy to do what the manipulator wants. Similarly, Van Dijk (2008, p.212) clearly described that manipulation implies the exercise of a form of illegitimate influences by means of discourse in which manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interests of the manipulator and against the best interests of the manipulated. Within a linguistic framework, Asya (2013, p.3) stated that "linguistic manipulation is influence exercised by one person upon another or a group of people through speech and non-verbal means oriented toward achieving a certain goal that consists in changing of the addressee's behavior, perceptions, and intentions in the course of communicative interaction". Moreover, as far as language use is concerned, manipulation is argued to be inclined more towards pragmatic due to its characterization by pragmatic features other than cognitive or psychological ones (Al-Hindawi & Kamil, 2017, p.9).

In short, *Breaking Bad* is focused on the character development of its main character, Walter White, an ordinary family-man and chemistry teacher, whose life takes a turn when he was diagnosed with a terminal lung cancer. From that revelation, he was then motivated to make large money for his family to inherit by cooking methamphetamine before he pass away. To secure his criminal activities,

Walter White uses linguistic manipulations projected towards other characters, the prominent ones but not limited to being his criminal partner, Jesse Pinkman and his wife, Skyler White.

Breaking Bad is comparable to other fictional narratives such as the legal drama *Better Call Saul* (2015 – 2022) or the political thriller *House of Cards* (2013 – 2018) due to their synonymity in the theme of manipulation. Provided a wide range of subject of study, the researcher chose *Breaking Bad* due to the nature of its main character, Walter White, being a powerless and inferior figure compared to Jimmy McGill of *Better Call Saul* or Frank Underwood of *House of Cards*. According to a character analysis, Walter White is described as “an ordinary man living an ordinary life. He is married, has one child. He works as a chemistry teacher and presents with a bland, almost colorless personality” (Waivio, 2024). This is the contrast of Frank Underwood’s persona in the series *House of Cards*. Frank Underwood is portrayed as an immoral politician who utilizes all means to achieve his political agenda. Jimmy McGill, also known as, Saul Goodman, a flamboyant attorney of *Better Call Saul*, is also distinct from Walter White in the way he exerts influence. In that sense, Jimmy influences people through humor, wit, and social intelligence. It is clear that those two characters distinct very much in their persona compared to Walter White, which make him more relatable and thus, unique in his own way for the researcher.

Several pragmalinguistics theories have been applied in prior linguistic analysis of *Breaking Bad*, for instance, Najem and Abbas (2024) conducted a pragma-stylistic study focusing on emotional blackmail in the series, using a combination of pragmatic and stylistic approaches to examine how speech acts and politeness markers reflect power dynamics. Likewise, Pasha (2025) analyzed deixis in

Breaking Bad from a pragmatic perspective, identifying how person, spatial, and temporal references shape narrative coherence. However, while these studies successfully explored stylistic and deictic aspects, they did not specifically address how Walter White's manipulative discourse functions pragmatically. Thus, there remains a gap in the literature concerning a detailed pragmalinguistic analysis of his linguistic strategies as instruments of manipulation.

The present study seeks to fill that gap by adopting a pragmalinguistic approach using Searle's classification of illocutionary acts, Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness theory, and Culpeper's impoliteness theory (1996) along with manipulation framework dissected from ideas of Handelman (2009), Goodin (1980), and Van Dijk (2008) as the analytical grounding to uncover how Walter White, despite his powerless persona, control people to achieve his goals. Unlike Najem and Abbas's (2024) pragma-stylistic perspective and Pasha's (2025) deixis-focused research, this study offers a novel contribution by examining the pragmatic mechanisms that highlights how Walter White uses linguistic manipulation to influence.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What types of illocutionary acts are used by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad?
2. What types of politeness and impoliteness strategies are used by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad?
3. How are direct and indirect illocutionary acts distributed in Season 1 of Breaking Bad?

4. How are direct and indirect manipulation operationalized through speech acts and politeness or impoliteness strategies in season 1 of Breaking Bad?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the research questions above, the purposes of the research can be elaborated as follows:

1. To explore the types of illocutionary acts employed by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad.
2. To explore the types of politeness or impoliteness strategies employed by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad.
3. To reveal the distribution of direct and indirect illocutionary acts employed by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad.
4. To explain how Walter White realizes direct and indirect manipulation through speech acts and politeness or impoliteness strategies in season 1 of Breaking Bad.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to analyzing the exercise of manipulation with the means of illocutionary act functions, politeness, and impoliteness strategies that are attempted by Walter White in season 1 of Breaking Bad (Episode 1-7)

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study aims to provide an empirical study of sociopragmatics for academics by contributing to how manipulation can be achieved with the utilization of the illocutionary act functions and how its directness can be measured by the politeness

strategies, both in fictional and real-world contexts. For that reason, it is expected that this study can serve as a reference point for future analysis for academics who are interested in researching the usage of sociopragmatics such as Speech Act Theory, Politeness, and Impoliteness Theory to analyze linguistic manipulation. Additionally, this study is also expected to evoke readers' awareness of manipulation attempts by guiding them on how manipulation can be exercised through language.

1.6 State of the Art

Despite the abundance of research on fictional television works concerning pragmatics, there is a gap in the research on manipulation techniques, especially those exercised by Walter White. This study aims to bridge that gap and serve as a novelty for further study around the intersection of the Speech Act Theory, Politeness & Impoliteness Theory, and Manipulation Studies in both fictional and real-world contexts.