

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers an overview of the research project, including a background of research, statement of problem, research purposes, research significances, and a definition of the key terms used.

1.1 Background of Research

The scholarly investigation of popular culture has undergone a profound paradigm shift, evolving from peripheral dismissals to a rigorous interdisciplinary field. In contemporary academic discourse, television is recognized as a sophisticated semiotic artifact capable of constructing and reflecting complex social realities through telecinematic discourse (Bednarek, 2010, 2018). Unlike traditional feature films constrained by a self-contained three-act structure, serialized television is defined by narrative complexity and temporal prolongation (Mittell, 2015). This seriality enables long-form media to function as a "longitudinal laboratory," allowing researchers to observe the gradual, "slow-burn" psychological and linguistic development of characters across dozens of hours of interaction.

In serialized drama, dialogue serves as "consequential writing," where every utterance redefines social positions, authority, and interpersonal relationships. Because television dialogue represents a structured, "polished" version of natural speech, it offers an optimal dataset for diachronic pragmatic analysis—the study of linguistic functional change over time (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2013). Through dialogue, character identity is continually performed, contested, and transformed.

Among contemporary television dramas, Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) stands as a landmark narrative of character transformation, tracking the moral and psychological descent of suburban high school chemistry teacher Walter White into the ruthless drug lord "Heisenberg." While media scholars have extensively analyzed this

arc through sociological, moral, and cinematic lenses, the specific linguistic mechanisms driving his transformation remain insufficiently mapped. The protagonist's trajectory—famously summarized as turning "Mr. Chips into Scarface"—is fundamentally enacted through dialogue, moving systematically from face-saving social mitigation to unmitigated discursive domination.

Pragmatically, analyzing such character transformations requires integrating Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Searle's taxonomy (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) provides a systematic framework for categorizing how characters perform social actions through speech. Complementarily, Brown and Levinson's politeness model illuminates how speakers manage interpersonal "face" through strategic variation along a continuum from indirect hedging to bald-on-record directives.

Within pragmatics, mitigation refers to the linguistic devices (e.g., hedges, downtoners, indirect structures) employed to soften the illocutionary force of unwelcome speech acts and preserve social harmony (Fraser, 1980; Caffi, 1999). Conversely, domination represents the strategic deployment of coercive discourse, unmitigated bald-on-record commands, and aggravated Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) that eliminate the hearer's conversational agency to enforce power asymmetries (Fairclough, 1989; Culpeper, 2011). In *Breaking Bad*, Walter White's shift from submissiveness to criminal sovereignty is audibly indexical: his early interactions are saturated with mitigation, whereas his late interactions are defined by unmitigated directives and absolute declarations.

Existing literature applying pragmatic frameworks to telecinematic texts has remained largely synchronic. Recent studies (e.g., Rantau, 2018; Kinansha & Hanidar, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2024; Kusuma, 2025) have applied Searle's speech acts or Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies to isolated films or single television seasons. These cross-sectional designs capture static pragmatic snapshots rather than dynamic, longitudinal trajectories. Even developmental studies (e.g., Rashidi & Ghafar, 2025;

Putri, 2025) focus either on short cinematic runtimes or comparisons between only two seasons, failing to track multi-year, multi-season pragmatic shifts.

Consequently, a critical gap exists in current media linguistics: no study has undertaken a season-by-season, diachronic pragmatic mapping of a single protagonist's evolution across a complete five-season serialized drama. Specifically, the systematic erosion of mitigation devices and the corresponding emergence of coercive domination strategies across Walter White's five-season arc remain unquantified. Existing critiques treat his transformation metaphorically, lacking a structural, data-driven linguistic baseline.

This research directly addresses this gap by conducting a diachronic pragmatic analysis of Walter White's speech acts across all five seasons of *Breaking Bad*. By combining Searle's taxonomy, Brown and Levinson's politeness model, Fraser's (1980) mitigation framework, and Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness/domination theory, this thesis provides a granular account of how dialogue texture enacts identity shift. Ultimately, this study demonstrates how scripted dialogue functions as a precise mechanism for performing power, identity, and moral decay over time.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The central research problem of this thesis is: "How does the pragmatic function of Walter White's speech acts, particularly in terms of mitigation and domination strategies, evolve diachronically across the five seasons of *Breaking Bad*?" To address this overarching problem, this study is divided into three specific sub-problems:

1. What are the dominant types of speech acts (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) used by Walter White in pivotal interactions in the early versus late seasons?
2. How do his politeness strategies (mitigation) and face-threatening acts (FTAs) change over time?
3. How does this linguistic evolution correlate with and manifest his shifting identities (from the "Teacher" to "Heisenberg")?

1.3 Research Purposes

The primary aim of this research is to diachronically map and explain the transformation of Walter White's pragmatic strategies across the five-season arc of the television series *Breaking Bad*. This involves identifying and classifying speech acts in selected pivotal interactions, analyzing the evolution of mitigation devices, and describing the correlation between these linguistic choices and his developing persona. The research is designed to move beyond qualitative description toward a systematic, data-driven understanding of character development through the lens of pragmatic evolution.

To achieve this primary aim, the research seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Identify the dominant types of speech acts (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations) employed by the protagonist at various stages of the narrative.
2. Analyze shifts in politeness strategies—from hedging and negative politeness to unmitigated bald-on-record speech—to reveal the erosion of social conscience and the rise of coercive power.
3. Explore how specific speech act patterns act as the "building blocks" of identity, confirming that transformation is not just a change in circumstance but a change in the way "self" is performed through language.

1.4 Research Significances

This research offers significant contributions across three distinct domains, providing value for theorists, practitioners, and educators alike.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This research extends the application of Speech Act and Politeness theories to long-form serialized media. While these frameworks are often applied to static interactions, this study demonstrates their utility in tracking dynamic multi-year character arcs. It contributes to the growing field of media linguistics by theorizing how "telecinematic discourse" acts as a longitudinal laboratory for studying character evolution and

identity construction. By providing a longitudinal analysis of speech acts, the study challenges traditional synchronic linguistic models and offers a more robust framework for understanding character development in narrative media.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

For screenwriters and media professionals, this study provides a "scientific" understanding of how "dialogue texture" and speech act choices contribute to a character's perceived power and authenticity. It offers a template for creating realistic character growth through systematic and linguistic shifts. Furthermore, for educators and students of linguistics, this study serves as a methodological template for applying complex pragmatic theory to popular cultural artifacts, making abstract concepts more accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. The findings can be used to inform the development of dramatic dialogue that accurately reflects shifting social hierarchies and power dynamics.

1.4.3 Methodological Significance

This research demonstrates the value of a qualitative diachronic descriptive design in narrative analysis. By blending traditional discourse analysis with the longitudinal format of a television series, it offers a novel approach to studying language change in fictional settings. This methodology provides a way to "quantify" character development through systematic coding, establishing a foundation for future comparative studies in telecinematic stylistics. The approach of using complete series transcripts and purposive sampling provides a rigorous model for future linguistic studies of serialized narratives.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, several key terms are defined within the specific context of diachronic pragmatic analysis and telecinematic discourse.

Telecinematic Discourse A term that encompasses the linguistic and multimodal analysis of both films and fictional television series. It involves the study of scripted dialogue as a structured representation of natural interaction that yields critical insights

into social dynamics.

Speech Act The basic unit of human communication, defined as an utterance that does not merely describe reality but performs a social action. According to Searle (1976), these acts are understood at three levels:

Face The public self-image that every individual strives to maintain and attend to in social interactions.

Politeness Theory A framework that analyzes the interpersonal management of face through various strategies :

Mitigation: Linguistic strategies and devices (such as hedges, downtoners, and indirectness) used to attenuate or soften the illocutionary force of unwelcome speech acts and minimize interpersonal threat (Fraser, 1980; Caffi, 1999).

Domination: The discursive enforcement of asymmetrical power dynamics through unmitigated, bald-on-record speech acts, coercive directives, and strategic impoliteness that systematically overwrite or eliminate the hearer's conversational and social agency (Fairclough, 1989; Culpeper, 2011).

Diachronic Pragmatic Analysis The study of linguistic change over time, tracking the trajectory of change rather than synchronic snapshots.

Narrative Complexity A hybrid form of storytelling that balances episodic self-containment with serialized arcs traversing multiple seasons.

Multimodality The study of how language works in concert with cinematography, sound design, performance, and editing to create a coherent storyworld.

1.6 Organization of Writing

This thesis is organized into seven chapters that sequentially build toward a comprehensive diachronic analysis of Walter White's linguistic transformation.

Chapter I: Introduction Establishes the context of telecinematic discourse, identifies

the research gap, and outlines the theoretical framework, statement of the problem, research questions, and significances of the study.

Chapter II: Literature Review Expands on the theories of speech acts and politeness while reviewing existing scholarship on *Breaking Bad* and the linguistics of television dialogue.

Chapter III: Research Methodology Provides a detailed account of the qualitative diachronic descriptive design, including the purposive sampling criteria for pivotal interaction scenes and the coding procedures used for transcript analysis.

Chapter IV: Finding and Discussion This chapter is an explanation and discuss of finding data. includes an analysis of the data found on discourse deixis using the theories and theories and methods discussed in the previous chapter.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestion This chapter is contain the conclusion and suggestion so that future research can even better.

