

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language not only functions as a communication tool, but it can also serve as a bridge to build, balance, and maintain the power dynamics that arise between the speaker and hearer in social interaction (Fairclough, 1989). In some communication situations, speakers often encounter situations in which they must express rejection or disagreement with other speakers' judgment, opinion, and evaluation. However, disagreement or rejection can be categorised as not a neutral communicative act. Expressing a rejection or disagreement towards other speakers can function as a face-threatening act (FTA) because it has the potential to challenge the hearer's positive face, especially their desire for their opinions to be accepted and agreed upon by others.

In a professional environment, managing word choice, responses, and the language used to address differences of opinion is crucial to avoid threatening other speakers' faces. Interaction in the workplace characterized by hierarchical structures, such as a law firm, often involves evaluative communication, decision-making, and criticism, each of which has the potential to give rise to disagreement or differences of opinion. Unlike casual conversations, in professional institutions, individuals are often positioned within unequal relationships based on writerity, experience, and institutional role. The differences of opinion cannot always be

expressed directly without risking interpersonal tension between superior and subordinate, the increase of conflict, or damage to the relationship between them. Subordinate may encounter the communication barrier when they want to express their disagreement to the superior, as direct disagreement can be considered rude and provocative to their superior. Therefore, speakers often use politeness strategies to mitigate differences of opinion while expressing dispreferred responses without threatening the hearer's face.

In a professional work environment, the language used is rarely neutral but is shaped by social roles, power relations, and interpersonal relationships (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015). In the law firm environment, there is an institutional power, a formal writerity held by an individual by virtue of an official position or post bestowed by a specific institution. These differences in institutional power can influence the power held by others who possess less institutional power than they do. To maintain the power relations, the speaker must satisfy and respect the hearer's feelings to avoid interfering with their 'face'. This embodies the concept of interpersonal communication as portrayed in literary works, such as the application of politeness strategies in the conversation between 2 or more parties. The superior generally possesses higher institutional writerity and power to control, while the subordinate occupies a lower position and is expected to show competence, professionalism, and compliance. As a result, there is a tension in the interaction between the superior and the subordinate, whereas the subordinate must express his disagreement where necessary, while trying to maintaining the profesional manner towards his superior.

The phenomenon is represented in the American TV series *Suits* Season 1, especially in episodes 1 and 2, which best describe conflicts and arguments between superior and subordinate arising from differences in social status, professionalism, and power in the workplace. This series is ideal for learning about these topics because, following the observational scenes, the story is not only set in a corporate law firm with a strict hierarchical structure, but also features numerous conversations between the characters Harvey Specter and Michael Ross, showcasing structured conversational patterns and the differences in the use of polite language they employ to assert their positions of power.

This series, released its season 1 in 2011, tells the story of Michael Ross, an ordinary young man from a poor family with high intelligence, becoming a lawyer in Pearson Hardman law firm even without a law school background, with the help of Harvey Specter, who was looking for an extraordinary subordinate. The series demonstrates how the differences of institutional power that occur between Harvey Specter as a superior and Michael Ross as a subordinate are managed through rejection and disagreement through their conversations with adjacency pairs and the use of their politeness language. As Michael navigates his position in his workplace as a subordinate lawyer towards Harvey, he encounters numerous situations where he challenges Harvey's assessment because of the differences in their intellectual and moral. Nevertheless, due to his educational background and social background, there was a significant difference in power between the two characters, which caused Michael to use a different pattern of politeness towards Harvey than he did towards his other colleagues. The interactions between Harvey, as senior partner,

and Michael, as his associate, show a power relation that is not always static. Even though Harvey has higher institutional writerity, Michael often expresses disagreement towards Harvey's opinion or judgment through his linguistic responses in their conversations. As a result, this research aims to explore conversational patterns in dispreferred responses of adjacency pairs, analyse the politeness startegies employed by Michael Ross while showing his disagreement and rejection, and explain these strategies function in maintaining professional interaction within a difference in hierarchical institutional position as subordinate and superior between Harvey Specter and Michael Ross through the structure of conversation using adjacency pairs by Levinson (1983) and the politeness strategies that are used by the characters in their conversations, using the theory from Brown and Levinson (1987).

The structure of the conversation and the language used play a key role in determining the course of the positions of the participants themselves. To understand conversational sequences consisting of a First Pair Part (FPP) and a Second Pair Part (SPP), in which the first utterance expected a relevant second response, this study employs the concept of adjacency pairs to recognise the conversation structure. This concept explained that conversation is an interrelated series of utterances, where the first speaker requires a particular type of second speaker, such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, and offer-acceptance or refusal (Levinson, 1983). Therefore, through adjacency pairs, we are able to observe how one utterance can create the next utterance regarding certain responses and how

those responses can strengthen or modify the relation of power and the speaker's relationship in the conversation.

Among various adjacency pair structures that existed, there were many indications that Michael used responses that were dispreferred, rather than those expected by Harvey, particularly in the conversation between Harvey and Michael. Dispreferred responses are responses that are unexpected, indirect, and structurally more complex than the preferred one stated by the second pair part. By giving a dispreferred response, the speaker can challenge the statement made by the first speaker (Pomerantz, 1984). However, in the conversation between Harvey and Michael in the context of arguments, the discussion often shows the statement from Harvey and a dispreferred response by Michael. This is interesting because it suggests that disagreement, rejection or refusal has become a pattern communicative practice in their professional relationship, despite the differences in institutional hierarchy between them. In their conversation, Michael cannot always express his rejection or refusal in a direct way without maintaining Harvey's face as his superior and risking their interpersonal relationship. Therefore, Michael, as the responder to Harvey's statement, has to employ some strategies of politeness to manage and mitigate his rejection while he maintains professional interaction.

Politeness strategies refer to the specific linguistic strategies to manage and respectfully treat another person's face or their public self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, using the politeness strategies can avoid offending the hearer's face and maintain a positive environment for conversation. The theory

differentiates between the choices of politeness between the desire to be liked and the desire for autonomy. In the conversation between the superior and subordinate in the workplace, there is an institutional power gap, and the politeness used might function as both a positive face to bring the relationship closer. Meanwhile, in certain situations, the use of indirect language or softened phrases might be employed to protect the negative face. In hierarchical work environments, politeness strategies are often used to maintain harmonious relationships while considering the feelings and social position of the interlocutor, for example, when giving orders, expressing disagreement, rejection, or criticism without harming professional relationships.

By analysing the use of politeness language in each adjacent utterance in dispreferred types of adjacency pairs, this study aims to explore the conversational patterns in dispreferred adjacency pairs, identify the politeness strategies used by Michael to imply his rejection and disagreement, and explain how these strategies are influenced by the differences of power to maintain the professional interaction while reducing face-threatening acts. The use of these two theoretical frameworks allows for a more in-depth study of hierarchical communication representations in audiovisual texts, particularly in the television series *Suits* Season 1. This research may contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly regarding the use of polite language in specific conversations and debates between parties with higher and lower institutional power, demonstrating that power relations are not static like institutional power, but are dynamic, depending on interaction, the linguistic strategies used, and social factors.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background and focus of the research described above, this study was formulated to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of dispreferred adjacency pairs are produced by Michael Ross with Harvey Specter in *Suits* Season 1 (2011)?
2. What politeness strategies are employed by Michael Ross to deliver those dispreferred responses in *Suits* Season 1 (2011)?
3. How does his subordinate position influence Michael Ross's choice of politeness strategies in his dispreferred responses in *Suits* Season 1 (2011)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study's research objectives are according to the research questions above.

Three main objectives will be discussed in this study:

1. To identify and classify the types of dispreferred adjacency pairs that are produced by Michael Ross to respond to Harvey's utterances in the TV series *Suits* Season 1 (2011).
2. To identify and analyze the politeness strategies applied by Michael Ross when delivering his dispreferred response in the TV series *Suits* Season 1 (2011).
3. To explain how the subordinate position influences Michael Ross's selection of politeness strategies within his dispreferred responses in the TV series *Suits* Season 1 (2011).

1.4 Previous Studies

This study shares the same topic as several previous studies in discussing the power relative in verbal interaction. Holmes & Stubbe (2015) emphasised how institutional hierarchies and power shape politeness strategy choices in the workplace. Paramasivam (2007) also explained that, using discourse analysis to see the relationship between power and politeness in negotiation interaction, the study shows that the choices of politeness strategies are based on the relative position of the participant. Subsequently, Bai, Tang, and Wang (2025) defined politeness strategies in diplomatic negotiation Sino-U.S. and found the role of relative power and social roles influencing the use of language used by the speaker.

Meanwhile, Darta et al. (2023) analysed the politeness strategies used by the character in the novel *Maya* and showed that the different of the social status shaped the strategy of politeness used by the character. Terada et al. (2021) also discussed that the use of appropriate politeness strategies in negotiation conversations can enhance the success in negotiations. Although previous studies have highlighted the exploration of relative power in the use of politeness strategies, there has yet to be any research that specifically combines the analysis of power relations with politeness strategies in adjacency pairs within the context of negotiation conversations, leaving a gap in the literature.

Studies on adjacency pairs have been conducted in various contexts. Lestari (2021) studied the form of adjacency pairs in negotiation utterances and indicated that the adjacency pairs become the basic structure for understanding communication responses and strategies to respond to them in negotiation utterances. Mayasari (2018) also analyzed the adjacency pairs in the interview

between Stephen Colbert and Michael Obama, in *The Late Show, CBS TV Series* and found out that the structure of adjacency pairs constructs the flow of interaction. Moreover, Agatha and Matuate (2014) studied the use of adjacency pairs and politeness strategies to analyze conversation structure. Furthermore, Trihartanti and Septiyan (2021) examined the role of adjacency pairs in forming politeness strategies in students' spoken language to show that even with informal utterances, the closeness and politeness stand together. Kanwal and Arslan (2024) explore the role of politeness strategies in adjacency pairs, revealing that adjacency pairs can realise certain politeness strategies. Meanwhile, Yan (2010) explored politeness strategies in adjacency pairs that only focused on a certain type of utterance in a gender study focusing on the use of greetings, compliments, and directive language, and found that women often use positive politeness and men values directive in public. However, these studies have not yet deeply examined how the combination of adjacency pairs and politeness strategies functions in constructing and reflecting power relations in negotiation conversations between superior and subordinate in the workplace. Therefore, this study focuses on the integration of the three aspects, adjacency pairs, politeness strategies, and power relations in the context of negotiation.

Several previous studies used the same study object, which is the American TV series *Suits*. As in the study by Afrina et al. (2022), the series *Suits* was used for exploring the conversation analysis in interruption by analyzing the turn-taking and demonstrating the function of interruptions as a tool of dominance. Brandström (2014) also examined intertextuality as a politeness strategy in *Suits*, finding that

external references can create humour and solidarity. From previous studies that examined the *Suits* series as a subject of discussion, there has not yet been a study that discusses the relationship between adjacency pairs, politeness strategies, and power relations in negotiation dialogues between certain main characters. Therefore, this study offers a more focused analysis of the negotiation interactions between the main characters in *Suits* as the main subject of study.

Most previous studies have discussed adjacency pairs and politeness strategies as separate analytical constructs or applied them to informal contexts or phatic utterances, rather than to ongoing professional conversations between unequal participants with differences in institutional power. Undercovering this gap is important because power is not a static thing, but continuously managed through repeated interaction of pragmatic patterns based on social factors and situational context.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on the language use of politeness strategies in types of dispreferred adjacency pairs for negotiating the power relationship in conversation between Harvey Specter and Michael Ross in the American TV series *Suits* Season 1 (2011), episodes 1 and 2, which focuses on the differences in social status, professionalism, and institutional power. By focusing on pragmatic approaches, it analyses how politeness strategies are employed by Michael Ross in responses to dispreferred types of adjacency pairs and how these responses manage his position or power as a subordinate to Harvey. In addition, the research data is limited to the conversations between Harvey Specter and Michael Ross in a professional context

in the workplace, with a focus on the dispreferred responses delivered by Michael.

These characters were deliberately chosen because of the difference in institutional power, social status, and professionalism between the two characters.

PERPUSTAKAAN
FAKULTAS ILMU BUDAYA
UNIVERSITAS DIPONEGORO