

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHODS

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

This section explores the theories used to analyse the data gathered for this study. Particularly, the theories used in this research include:

2.1.1 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

A theory created by Brown and Levinson (1987) explains how people protect their self-image when interacting with others. Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) are acts that can damage or threaten the way someone sees themselves or wants to be seen by others during conversations. When this happens, speakers try to use polite ways of speaking to protect each other and avoid conflicts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:61), face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself,” which is connected to notions of being embarrassed or losing face. This means face is something that can be lost, kept, or even improved, so people need to be aware of it in every interaction.

There are two types of face that everyone has. The first is negative face, which means every person wants to be free from interference or the desire not to be controlled by others. The second is positive face, which means every person wants their goals and personality to be liked and appreciated by others. People generally try to protect each other’s face when they speak, but sometimes what we say can still threaten someone’s face, whether we mean to or not.

2.1.2 Politeness Strategies

Being kind and respectful to others is the essence of politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), being polite can lessen the negative effects of face-threatening acts. They aim to help communication without causing emotional harm to one another. The theory shows that being polite helps people maintain good relationships and avoid conflicts. Brown and Levinson (1987:69) identified four different strategies people use when they need to say something that might threaten someone's face: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

2.1.2.1 Bald-on-Record

This strategy means saying what you want to say in the most direct, clear, and straightforward way, without trying to soften or reduce the threat to the other person's face. Brown and Levinson (1987:94) explained that a speaker uses this strategy when they care more about getting their message across efficiently than about protecting the listener's feelings. This strategy is typically used in urgent situations where being quick and direct matters more than being polite, in close relationships where people are comfortable being blunt with each other, or when the speaker has much more authority than the other person.

Brown and Levinson (1987:95) identified several situations where bald-on-record is used, such as urgent warnings like "Watch out!" or "Help!", task-focused commands, welcoming someone into your home with "Come in!", or farewells. In these cases, being direct is actually considered more polite because it shows sincerity and confidence.

2.1.2.2 Positive Politeness

This strategy focuses on making the other person feel good, liked and valued. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:101), this strategy is used when the speaker wants to show that they care about and share what the listener wants and feels. Building relationships and showing common interests are common uses of positive politeness, where the speaker speaks in a warm, friendly way to make the listener feel included and appreciated.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:103), there are fifteen strategies under positive politeness, grouped into three main areas. The first area is claiming common ground with the listener, which includes noticing the listener's interests, exaggerating approval, intensifying interest, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, pointing out shared knowledge, and joking. The second area is showing that the speaker and listener are cooperators, which includes showing concern for the listener's wants, making offers and promises, being optimistic, using inclusive "we," giving reasons, and emphasizing mutual help. The third area is directly fulfilling the listener's wants by giving gifts, sympathy, understanding, or cooperation.

2.1.2.3 Negative Politeness

This strategy is about respecting the other person's need for freedom and independence, and making sure they do not feel pressured or controlled. Brown and Levinson (1987:129) said that negative politeness is the most common form of politeness in many cultures and is what most people think of when they imagine formal or respectful behaviour. It uses indirect language, hedging words

like “maybe” or “perhaps,” and formal language to reduce the pressure on the listener.

Brown and Levinson (1987:131) identified ten strategies under negative politeness. These include being conventionally indirect rather than stating things outright, questioning or hedging assumptions about what the listener wants, being pessimistic about whether the listener will agree by using phrases like “You wouldn’t happen to...,” making the request seem small and unimportant, showing deference to the listener by treating them as superior, apologizing for the imposition, making the FTA less personal by avoiding direct reference, stating the request as a general rule rather than a personal demand, using more formal or noun-heavy language to soften the impact, and acknowledging that the speaker is in the listener’s debt.

2.1.2.4 Off-Record

This strategy means being indirect and unclear about what you really mean, so that the listener has to figure out your true intention. Brown and Levinson (1987:211) explained that when someone goes off-record, there is more than one possible interpretation of what they said, so the speaker cannot be held responsible for any one meaning. Off-record allows the speaker to avoid taking blame if the other person reacts negatively, but it is risky because the listener may not understand what is really meant.

Brown and Levinson (1987:213) identified fifteen strategies under off-record, divided into two groups. The first group involves inviting the listener to figure out the meaning through hints or indirect clues, and includes giving

hints, giving association clues, using presupposition, understating, overstating, using tautologies (saying something obvious like “war is war” to express a deeper meaning), using contradictions, being ironic, using metaphors, and asking rhetorical questions. The second group involves being deliberately vague or unclear so that the true meaning stays hidden, and includes being ambiguous, being vague, over-generalizing, directing the FTA at someone other than the real target, and leaving sentences unfinished or incomplete.

2.1.3 Sociological Factors

Brown and Levinson (1987:74) found that how serious a face-threatening act is depends on three social factors that affect which politeness strategy people choose. These are social distance (D), relative power (P), and the rank of imposition (R). It is important to note that these factors are not based on objective measurements, but rather on what the people involved mutually believe and assume about their relationship.

Social distance (D) is about how close or familiar the speaker and listener are with each other. Brown and Levinson (1987:76) said this includes things like age differences, social background, and how well they know each other. The greater the social distance between the speaker and listener, the more polite strategies they tend to use with each other.

Relative power (P) is about who has more control in the situation. Brown and Levinson (1987:77) said power comes from two sources: material control, which means having control over money and physical force, and metaphysical control, which means being able to influence what others do through authority or

social position. The bigger the difference in power between two people, the more the less powerful person is expected to show respect and deference.

The ranking of imposition (R) is about how much a particular act is seen as interfering with someone's face wants (Brown and Levinson, 1987:77). The bigger the imposition, the more polite strategies the speaker is expected to use, regardless of whether it threatens the listener's negative or positive face. For example, a very large or uncomfortable request would require more polite strategies, such as negative politeness or off-record approaches, compared to a small and simple request.

2.1.4 Speech Acts

Speech acts theory was first introduced by Austin (1962), who proposed that language is not only used to describe the world but also to perform actions. Building on Austin's work, Searle (1979) developed a more systematic classification of illocutionary acts. Searle (1979:12) defined an illocutionary act as an act performed in saying something, where the speaker commits themselves to a certain communicative purpose through their utterance. This means that when people speak, they do more than convey information, as they also perform actions such as claiming, promising, requesting, or declaring. Searle (1979:12) classified illocutionary acts into five basic categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

2.1.5 Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts are those in which the speaker commits themselves to the truth of a proposition. The direction of fit of assertives is words to world,

meaning the speaker tries to make their words match reality. The psychological state expressed is belief, meaning the speaker genuinely believes in the truth of what they are asserting (Searle, 1979:12). Then in 1985, Searle and Vanderveken identified several types of assertive speech acts that are relevant to this study, including assert, claim, state, argue, accuse, criticize, and praise.

2.1.5.1 Assert and Claim

Searle (1985:183) explained that assert and claim have the same illocutionary point, mode of achievement, degree of strength, and sincerity conditions. Both are used when the speaker takes a stand on something or commits themselves to the truth of a proposition. However, claiming and asserting are more closely connected to the notion of the speaker's rights, as when one claims something or asserts their position on something, while asserting is the most basic form of committing to the truth of a proposition.

2.1.5.2 State

Searle and Vanderveken (1985:183) explained that stating something is connected to the notion of setting something forth or representing something normally for the benefit or edification of the listener. In ordinary speech, the notion of a statement has to do with giving a full account of something or taking an official position on something.

2.1.5.3 Argue

Searle and Vanderveken (1985:184) explained that arguing is always either for or against a certain thesis. When one argues that P, one asserts that P and gives reasons which support the proposition that P, normally with the intention of

convincing the listener that P. This makes arguing different from simply asserting, because arguing requires the speaker to provide supporting reasons for their proposition.

2.1.5.4 Accuse

Searle and Vanderveken (1985:190) explained that to accuse is to assert to someone with the propositional content that predicates responsibility to some individual for the existence of a state of affairs, with the preparatory condition that this state of affairs is bad. In other words, accusing is asserting that someone is responsible for something negative.

2.1.5.5 Criticize and Praise

Searle and Vanderveken (1985:190) explained that criticism and praise form a pair. To criticize someone or something is to assert that a certain state of affairs that has to do with them is bad while expressing disapproval. On the other hand, to praise someone or something is to assert that a certain state of affairs that has to do with them is good while expressing approval. Both criticizing and praising commit the speaker to presupposing that the state of affairs is either bad or good, respectively.

2.2 Research Methods

I use a socio-pragmatic approach in this study. According to Leech (1983), socio-pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between language use and social context, examining how social factors such as power, distance, and rank of imposition influence the way people communicate. This approach is chosen

because analysing politeness strategies in assertive speech acts requires understanding not only the linguistic features of Elle Woods' utterances but also the social contexts and power relations in which they occur throughout the film.

2.2.1 Data and Data Source

The primary data are Elle Woods' utterances that show the use of politeness strategies in her assertive speech acts. I took the data from dialogues between Elle Woods and other characters in the film: Professor Callahan, Warner Huntington, Vivian Kensington, and other important characters. The data source is the American comedy film *Legally Blonde* (2001), directed by Robert Luketic. I access this film through digital platforms and also use the film script and subtitles for more accurate data collection.

2.2.2 Population and Sample

I use a purposive sampling technique because I only take the data relevant to my study focus. The population is all of Elle Woods' assertive speech acts throughout the film. The sample consists of Elle's assertive speech acts that clearly show politeness strategies in her interactions with characters who have a different power level from her. I select an utterance as data when it shows how Elle uses her words and politeness strategy differently depending on who she is talking to, and when the type of assertive speech acts is easy to identify.

2.2.3 Method of Collecting Data

In collecting the data, I use an observation method with a note-taking technique by applying the following steps:

1. Observe the *Legally Blonde* film to understand the story and character interactions.
2. Read the film script and subtitles to ensure the dialogue accuracy.
3. Note and select Elle Woods' utterances that contain politeness strategies in her assertive speech acts.
4. Categorize Elle Wood's utterances according to the politeness strategies based on their linguistic features and contextual usages.

2.2.4 Method of Analysing Data

To analyse the data, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is used within the following steps:

1. Interpreting each utterance within its context by considering the situation and the relationship between characters.
2. Identifying the type of assertive speech acts in each utterance, including claiming, arguing, accusing, stating, asserting, praising, and criticizing.
3. Classifying all utterances according to the types of politeness strategies by identifying their linguistic features, including bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.
4. Conducting a sociological factors analysis for each utterance by examining relative power, social distance, and rank of imposition to explain why Elle Woods chooses specific politeness strategies in different situations.
5. Analysing how Elle Woods' politeness strategies in her assertive speech acts reveal power relations by examining whether Elle's strategy choice indicates higher, lower, or equal power positioning.