

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The series entitled *Heartbreak High* by Michael Jenkins in 1994 which was rebooted on Netflix in 2022 for its first season and 2024 for its second season displays various portrayals of Australian teenager experiences and personal struggles during their high school. One of the characters that intrigued the researcher is Spencer White, whose interactions throughout the series reveal a potential shift of the way he communicates with the others. At the beginning of the story, Spencer is seen as someone who frequently utters words without considering the impact, including making false accusations and showing little awareness of the consequences of his words. Yet, by the end of the season, Spencer White starts to acknowledge his mistakes and publicly apologizes to other students during the school prom. These varied moments raise a curiosity in examining whether the changes reflected through Spencer's utterances could represent the process of character development.

Regarding Forster (1927: 117), when the character is capable of surprising the reader in a convincing way caused by its complexity and dynamic nature the character could be categorized as a round character. Thus, analyzing a character's development requires attention not merely to their actions but also to the way they speak. Language has a significant role in fictional narratives due to its functions as a tool for characters to express their thoughts, emotions, intentions, and relationships with others. The linguistic choices made by the

fictional characters could reflect their personality, as language delivers both direct interaction between characters and underlying meanings grasped by the audience (Bubel, 2008; Richardson, 2010; Dynel, 2011; and Brock, 2015 in Hoffmann and Stockhammer, 2024). For instance, the use of ‘hell’ and ‘damn’ by the supporting female character in the US American Show *Gilmore Girls* (2000 - 2006) named Paris, illustrates her character traits as harsh, insensitive, undiplomatic and blunt (Bednarek, 2008). Therefore, the linguistic analysis is able to provide a deeper understanding of how characters are pictured and developed within fictional narratives.

The correlation between language and character illustration could be assessed through the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics focuses on how language users effectively align their utterances with the particular circumstances in which they are most appropriate (Stalnaker, 1972: 383). According to Bach (1998), a speech act is a performance of several acts at once distinguished by different aspects of the speaker’s intention, such as requesting or promising and how one is trying to affect one’s audience. Similarly, Yule (2010) states that every utterance carries a speaker’s intended action toward the listener is named as speech acts. Thus, Spencer White’s utterances can be analyzed not merely as words spoken by a character but also as communicative actions that shows his intentions, attitudes, and changing behavior along the series of season two. This study employs Searle’s (1979) theory of illocutionary speech acts to identify the types and functions of speech acts delivered by Spencer White and analyze how the linguistic patterns relate to his character development.

Among the previous studies that have examined similar topics, some of them only focused on one type of speech act. For example, Sujatna, Meita L. et. al. (2022) analyzed character traits through directive speech acts, focusing on how character expresses commands, requests, and suggestions. Besides that, Rahayu et. al. (2024) and Sari (2014) examined speech acts performed by main characters in different fictional works. However, previous studies have not specifically investigated Spencer White as a character in *Heartbreak High* Season 2 (2024), particularly through a linguistic approach in illocutionary acts. Furthermore, existing studies mainly focus on identifying speech acts types and their functions rather than analyzing how the shifts in a character's speech acts patterns may reflect character development. Hence, this study aims to fill the gap by examining Spencer White's illocutionary speech acts to explore how his language use may reflect his development as a round character based on Forster (1927).

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. What types of speech acts are used by Spencer White throughout the *Heartbreak High* Series Season 2 (2024)?
2. How do the speech acts reflect the portrayal of Spencer White's character development throughout the season 2?

1.3. Research Purposes

In addressing the challenges of the study mentioned above, this study identifies several specific objectives. The purposes of the study are listed below:

1. To identify the types of speech acts which are used by Spencer White's along the *Heartbreak High* Series Season 2 (2024).
2. To describe how the speech acts reflect the portrayal of Spencer White's character development throughout the second season.

1.4. Previous Studies

Previous studies are needed in order to assist this study in achieving its objectives and answering the proposed research questions. Mostly, the previous research on speech acts in fictional works has focused on identifying the types, functions, and intentions of utterances. For example, Salsabila (2025) analyzed speech acts in the movie *Wish* by applying Searle's speech act theory and found that assertive were the most dominant type among the utterances. In the same way with Fitriani et. al. (2020) examined illocutionary acts in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secret* and identified representative, directive, expressive, and commissive acts used by the main character. Besides that, Dewi and Jannah (2022) also investigated illocutionary speech acts performed by the main character in *Brave* and concentrated on Searle's 1979 framework. Similarly, Sihombing et. al. (2021) analyzed illocutionary acts in *Incredibles 2* and found five types of speech acts based on Searle's classification. Moreover, Sari (2014), Rahayu et. al. (2024), and Kusumawati (2023) also analyzed speech acts in fictional narratives which primarily focused on identifying speech acts types and

functions. These previous studies illustrate that speech acts could uncover how fictional characters communicate, construct meanings through language, and express intentions. Nevertheless, the previous studies that are found tend to emphasize the classification and frequency of speech acts rather than analyzing how speech act patterns may represent character development throughout a fictional narrative.

Several previous studies also found by the researcher investigated specifically on one type of speech acts, particularly directive speech acts. Such as, Sujatna et. al. (2022), Fardani and Nirmala (2021), and Apriliana et. al. (2022), mainly analyzed directive acts to reveal characters' personality traits. Even though these studies contain perspectives about the correlation between speech act and character's characteristics, focusing merely on one type of speech act limits the understanding of a character's overall linguistic development. In addition, Sujatna et. al. (2022) explored personality development through directive speech acts by utilizing individual and environmental factors, while Fardani and Nirmala (2021) emphasized that the categorization of illocutionary acts may overlap because in one utterance could carry different illocutionary meanings depending on its context. This insight supports the present study in identifying the complexity of Spencer White's utterances, as his statements may perform multiple illocutionary functions.

Lastly, the only previous study that corresponds with the object of this study but different theory because the object itself is a newcomer was carried out by Rahim (2023) in analyzing the taboo and swear words which is a topic in

sociolinguistic fields. The study seeks to identify and analyze the taboo and swear words used by the main characters in the *Heartbreak High* series. The study found four types of taboo words used by the main characters in the *Heartbreak High* series: lavatory, private parts of the body, religion, and sexual activity. Additionally, they identified two categories of swear words: strong and weak. Furthermore, Spencer White as a character has not been specifically analyzed through illocutionary speech acts to reveal the process of his language use that may reflect his development as a character.

Therefore, this study endeavors to fill the gap by analyzing various types of illocutionary speech acts delivered by Spencer White in *Heartbreak High* Season 2 (2024). Opposite with the other previous studies that mainly focus on one type of speech act and dominant categories, this study explores multiple illocutionary speech acts to uncover the shift in Spencer's language use which may portray his development as a round character based on Forster's (1927) concept of characterization.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Several previous studies have attempted to analyze characters based on speech acts, yet many of them concentrated on a limited category of illocutionary acts. For instance, Sujatna, Meita L. et al. (2022) examined character traits using only directive illocutionary acts, focusing on how characters give orders, make requests, or offer suggestions. While this approach provides perspective into certain aspects of character behaviour, analyzing merely one type of speech act

may not fully represent the complexity of a character's linguistic expression and transformation.

Furthermore, the methodology in this study differs from the previous research by examining various types of illocutionary speech acts produced by Spencer White along the *Heartbreak High* Season 2 (2024). Besides that, two other studies, Rahayu et al. (2024), who analyzed speech acts in the movie *Heidi*, and Sari (2014), in her study *A Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts of the Main Character in State of Play*, examined speech acts performed by main characters which contrast to this current study since neither of those previous studies focused on mapping character development through the employed speech acts. Thus, this study focuses on Spencer White's illocutionary speech acts during the second season of *Heartbreak High* (2024) and serves understanding of how his shifting language use portrays his development as a round character according to Forster (1927) concept of character development.