

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, studies the relationship between language and its context of use. This field examines how utterances are understood based on communicative situations. According to Cutting (2005), meaning in pragmatics does not solely arise from linguistic structure, but also from who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, and in what situation the utterance is made. This view is supported by Yule (2010), who states that pragmatics concerns speaker meaning, which is interpreted by the hearer within a specific context.

One important aspect of pragmatics is politeness strategies, which refer to how speakers use language to maintain social harmony, avoid conflict, and show respect toward their interlocutors. According to Kádár & Haugh (2013), politeness is not merely a linguistic form but a social practice shaped by culture, norms, and interpersonal relationships. Locher & Watts (2005) even describe politeness as a form of “relational work,” that is, the effort made by speakers to maintain or repair social relationships in particular interactions. Holmes (2013) also emphasizes that politeness strategies are essential to maintaining effective communication, as they can soften intent and reduce the potential threat to social relationships.

In various social interactions, an apology is one of the verbal expressions that is closely related to politeness strategies. An apology functions to repair social relationships that have been disrupted due to norm violations or mistakes made by the speaker (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). For example, someone who is unable to attend an important event might say, “I’m sorry I couldn’t come yesterday

because I was sick,” which demonstrates an effort to maintain the relationship by showing responsibility and empathy. Explicit apologies involve direct expressions such as “I’m sorry”, while implicit apologies express regret without using the word “sorry”, for example by saying “I know I hurt you” or “It’s my fault. Although apologies are generally regarded as polite expressions, the way people deliver apologies can vary greatly and does not always succeed in creating a better atmosphere or reducing conflict. Some apologies even violate politeness maxims. For instance, the utterance “I’m sorry, but from the beginning you were the one who misunderstood” shifts the blame and fails to show real politeness, which means it does not fully follow Leech’s principle. Factors such as who the speaker is, to whom the apology is addressed, the severity of the offense, cultural background, as well as the personality and intentions of the person apologizing, greatly influence the effectiveness of the apology (Leech, 2014; Trosborg, 1994).

Moreover, not all apologies necessarily align with the principles of politeness. Sometimes, an apology may sound insincere, confusing, or even worsen a conflict due to the way it is expressed. For example, some apologies may violate politeness principles when the speaker shifts blame or refuses responsibility. Analyzing such cases can enhance the understanding of how politeness strategies are used in complex and emotionally charged contexts. Therefore, research on politeness strategies in apologies is essential, as an apology is not merely a formality but a linguistic action that plays a significant role in repairing interpersonal relationships, especially in situations involving emotional or psychological tension.

Politeness strategies in apologies can be found both in real-life situations and in fictional works such as films. This indicates that politeness strategies in apologies do not always function effectively and may even worsen relationships. *The Whale* (2022) directed by Darren Aronofsky, presents various apologies that are emotionally charged and reflect complex relationships between characters. Apologies are expressed by the main character, Charlie, both explicitly and implicitly to his daughter Ellie and his friend Liz, and also by other characters such as Ellie, Liz, Mary, and Thomas. Each character conveys apologies in different ways, depending on their emotional condition, the background of their relationship, and their personal motivations

Most previous studies have examined politeness strategies in general, without specifically focusing on apologies as emotionally driven expressions. For instance, a study by Widiyari & Muttaqin (2023) entitled *Politeness Strategies Performed by the Characters in The Lion King Movie* examined politeness strategies used by the characters in general, but did not focus on apology expressions as the main object of analysis. The study analyzed general strategies of politeness but did not distinguish between explicit and implicit forms of apology, so the relation between politeness, emotion, and the specific ways people apologize was not deeply explored. In fact, apologies play an important role in repairing disrupted social relationships, especially when expressed in psychologically complex situations. This topic is interesting to study because the apologies in *The Whale* are not only about saying “sorry,” but also reveal guilt, inner conflict, and the speaker’s effort to repair relationships in highly emotional situations. This study specifically chooses *The Whale* (2022) because the movie portrays complex emotional and psychological struggles through its characters’ interactions. The film contains numerous explicit and implicit apologies that reflect attempts to repair broken relationships, especially between Charlie, his daughter Ellie, and his close friend Liz. Compared to other movies, *The Whale* provides richer data for analyzing politeness strategies in apologies because

it highlights guilt, regret, empathy, and reconciliation. The connection between the movie and politeness strategies lies in the fact that apologies—whether explicit or implicit—function as linguistic tools to reduce conflict, show empathy, and rebuild broken relationships. Therefore, analyzing this film helps to better understand how politeness strategies operate in emotionally complex contexts. Therefore, the thesis statement of this research is to analyze how politeness strategies are employed in apologies by the characters in *The Whale* in order to show how language reflects and affects interpersonal relationships through both explicit and implicit apology strategies. This study fills the research gap because previous studies rarely focused on apology strategies, especially those expressed explicitly and implicitly in emotionally complex conditions.

Using Leech's (2014) politeness theory, this research contributes to the field of pragmatics by giving a clearer, deeper, and more detailed explanation of how politeness strategies are used in apology expressions, especially in the dialogues of the characters in *The Whale*. At the same time, this study also helps to build a better understanding of how language shows not only the social relationships between characters, but also their psychological conditions and emotional states as presented in a film, which functions both as a form of artistic expression and as a reflection of real-life communication.

1.2 The Problems of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problems of the study are formulated as follows:

1. What types of politeness strategies were employed by the characters in their apologies in *The Whale*?
2. What were the communicative functions of these politeness Strategies In conveying apologies In *The Whale* ?

3. How did these politeness strategies contribute to maintaining or repairing interpersonal relationship among the characters in *The Whale* ?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems stated above, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the types of politeness strategies used by the characters in their apologies in *The Whale*.
2. To explain the communicative functions of these politeness strategies in delivery of apologies in *The Whale*.
3. To analyze the role of these politeness strategies in maintaining and repairing interpersonal relationship among the characters *The Whale*.

1.4 Significances of the Study

This study was expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it contributed to the development of pragmatic studies, especially in analyzing politeness strategies used in apology speech acts. By applying Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle, this research enriched the references and applications of the theory in analyzing modern literary works, particularly films. Additionally, this study can serve as a reference for future research that focused on politeness strategies in communicative contexts involving psychological pressure or complex emotional relationships in fictional media.

Practically, this study was expected to broaden the understanding of English literature students and linguistics researchers about the importance of using politeness strategies in apologies as a way to maintain harmonious social relationships. It could also be used as a reference in learning pragmatics, particularly in applying Leech's theory in audiovisual contexts. Through the analysis of the film *The Whale* (2022), this study showed how language

use in films can reflect social, psychological, and cultural values that were relevant to real life. Therefore, the findings of this study were also useful as learning material and for developing a deeper understanding of more sensitive and human-centered interpersonal communication in functional works.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This study focused solely on the analysis of politeness strategies in verbal apologies, both explicit and implicit, delivered by the characters in *The Whale* (2022). The analysis applied Leech's (2014) politeness principle theory, concentrating on word choice and language structure in the utterances. Non-verbal aspects such as facial expressions, intonation, and body movements were excluded, as they fall outside the scope of this study. The data was also limited to apology utterances made by relevant characters, allowing the analysis to be more focused and in-depth in line with the research objectives.