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“You Sick Geeky Bastards!”: A Gender-Based Analysis of Impoliteness Strategies in American Comedy Series

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Abstract

This paper examined impoliteness strategies used by characters and their resulting reactions in five American comedy series. Drawing on Culpeper's models (1996 & 2003), the comedy series were watched several times with one month interval to make sure that the impolite utterances and their reactions were put in the correct categories. The results of the study revealed that sarcasm was the most frequently used strategy among other strategies, and male and female characters were not distinct in using this strategy. However, male characters exploited the bald on record strategy more than their female counterparts. One striking result was the frequent use of offensive reactions by male actors. The reasons behind the variable use of these strategies are twofold. First, impoliteness is used as a tool to show off the power of the male characters. Second, using impoliteness strategies in comedy series reflect the entertaining role of sarcasm used by the actors.

Keywords: impoliteness strategies, Culpeper's framework, gender, American comedy series

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1. Introduction

Considering different aspects of everyday interactions, politeness and impoliteness are two features of paramount importance. However, it might be a pragmatic blunder to talk about politeness and impoliteness without considering *face*. Face is defined as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness, which is based on Goffman’s view of *face* (1967), introduced a new dimension of polite behavior and argued that “universal principles underlie the construction of polite utterances” (Brown, 2015, p. 327). Hobbs (2003) considered Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory the best-known account of politeness in communication. Based on this theory (1987), polite utterances take addressees’ feelings into account by exploiting verbal strategies that show respect to their face. Also in this respect, “defining impoliteness is a real challenge” (Culpeper, 2011, p.22). Rooted in the disciplinary fabric, Culpeper defined impoliteness as “the use of communicative strategies designed to attack face by the speaker to cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper et al., 2003). He also considered the role of context in interpreting impoliteness utterances and added that “impoliteness is very much in the eye of the beholder, that is, the mind’s eye” (p. 22). He believed that an act can be considered impolite if “the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or the hearer perceives behavior as intentionally face-attacking or a combination of both” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 23).

Impoliteness has been studied in different contexts, among which movies and TV shows are the most popular. Lorenzo-Dus (2009) examined impoliteness in a discourse context marked by double articulation (i.e., broadcasting) in the television show, *Dragon’s Den* (BBC 2, UK). The study aimed to explore face-threatening behavior by those involved in the interaction within the studio. Responses to a questionnaire showed a high agreement level regarding the assessment of *Dragon* and the contestant behavior. The result also showed that isolated instances of marked face-threatening behavior determined overall scores of impoliteness for given speakers and those individual speakers were seen more or less impolite depending on their co-interactant’s behavior.

Another study was also done on an American drama, *Dr. House’s* character, in the TV series of *House* (Pillière, 2013). Pillière focused on the main character, Dr. House, since his speaking attitude was rude and impolite, and was not congruent with his position and social status. Dr. House’s use of impoliteness strategies was attributed to the humorous nature of offensive language. To put it another way, she argued that much of the comedy comes from a mismatch between the context model held by television audience and communication act between Dr. House and his addressee. This finding complied with Laitinen’s (2010) study which showed that bald on record strategies and sarcasm were the impoliteness strategies that House used most frequently.

A recent study has focused on the impact of gender and culture in exploiting impoliteness strategies in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, which is a popular comedy series (Al-Yasin & Rabab’ah, 2018). The data were gathered from 25 episodes of this sitcom, and 151 impolite utterances were

found. The result of the study indicated that male characters utilized more impoliteness strategies than their female counterparts. It also indicated that negative impoliteness strategy and sarcasm were the most frequently used strategies by the characters. However, no significant differences were found in resulting reactions.

Rababa'h and Rabab'ah (2021) analyzed impoliteness strategies in Jordanian and American sitcoms. To collect the data, 20 episodes of *The Bing Bang Theory* (the American sitcom), and 30 episodes of *Jalta* (the Jordanian one) were chosen in order to identify the examples of impolite utterances. Bousfield's 2008 impoliteness taxonomy was used to classify impoliteness strategies. They also adopted a mixed-methods design to analyze the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results of the study revealed that both American and their Jordanian counterparts showed more tendency in exploiting impoliteness strategies. Considering culture as another variable, the result indicated that American male and female characters utilized impoliteness strategies almost in the same way; however, significant differences were found in using impoliteness strategies between Jordanian male and female actors.

In a similar study, the role of gender and culture was examined in exploiting impoliteness strategies in an American and a Persian comedy series (Karimi et al., 2021). Based on Culpeper's framework, impolite utterances were analyzed both in terms of impoliteness strategies and their resulting reactions. The data of this study were gathered from *Modern Family*, the American series, and *Haft Sang*, which was considered its Persian facsimile. The result of the study revealed that both Persian and American male and female characters exploited sarcasm to threaten the interlocutors' face and ridicule them. Further analysis also showed that, while American male and female actors utilized impoliteness strategies in almost the same way, their Persian counterparts observed religious and cultural limitations in using impoliteness strategies.

To date, the research on impoliteness strategies in TV shows and series has paid far too little attention to impoliteness strategies and their resulting reactions in comedy series where impoliteness is one of the main interlocutors' means to make viewers laugh. In addition, the crucial role of gender has not been treated in much detail in most studies, though it is believed that gender is inextricably linked to impoliteness (Mills, 2005). To pursue the goals of this study, the current research raised the following questions:

1. What impoliteness strategies are frequently used by American male and female characters in the five American comedy series?
2. What reactions do the American male and female characters receive in response to impolite utterances?
3. To what extent does gender have a bearing on impoliteness strategies use and the following reactions in these series?

2. Methodology

2.1. The Data

The data chosen for this study are comprised of five popular American comedy series which are considered as the mostly-viewed series based on IMDb ranking. It is believed that IMDb is “the world’s most popular and authoritative source for movies and TV series which has about 150 million monthly visitors” (Boyle, 2014, p. 31). Choosing these series enables researchers “to study the language over a period of time, within a changing context” (Pillière, 2013, p.60). It is also believed that the major benefits of using televised shows is that “the data are readily available” (Bousfield, 2008, p. 7).

The American series chosen for the study included: 1) South Park (2015) (IMDb ranking: 8.8/10), 2) Friends (1994) (IMDb ranking: 9/10), 3) The Bing-bang Theory (2007) (IMDb ranking: 8.3/10), 4) Modern Family (2009) (IMDb ranking: 8.5/10), 5), and The Office (2005) (IMDb ranking: 8.8/10).

2.2. Framework

Culpeper’s model (1996, 2003) formed the bedrock of this study. Based on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework of politeness strategies, Culpeper (1996) developed a model for impoliteness strategies that caters for communicative strategies of attacking one’s interlocutor and causing disharmony. Culpeper categorizes impoliteness strategies as bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. In what follows, Culpeper’s impoliteness strategies are first discussed in some detail. Then to gain a thorough understanding of his model, the impolite utterances of each series are exemplified.

1. Bald on Record

The Face Threatening Act (FTA) is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized (Culpeper, 1996, p. 356).

2. Positive Impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s positive face wants.

3. Negative Impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s negative face wants.

4. Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

The FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere and thus remain surface realization.

5. Withhold Politeness

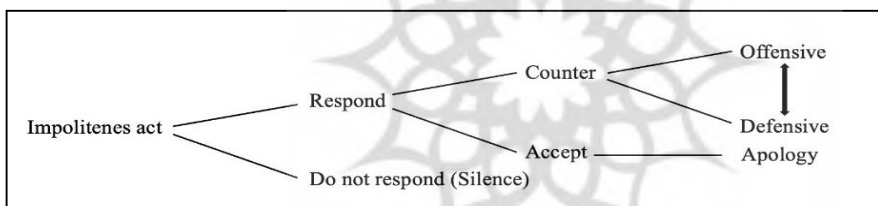
The absence of politeness work where it would be expected.

Culpeper (2003) viewed impoliteness strategies from a new perspective. He believed that "research on both politeness and impoliteness has tended to overlook what the recipient of a face threat or face attack does" (Culpeper et al., 2003, p. 1562). According to Culpeper, this is vital since the response to an utterance can show much about how that utterance is to be taken.

Theoretically, when a recipient is exposed to an impolite utterance, they have two choices open to them: they can respond or choose not to respond (silence). The second choice, silence, makes a problem for the researcher, since he has to rely on contextual factors in interpreting the meaning of silence. On the other hand, if the participants decide to respond, there are two other choices: they can either accept the face attack or they can counter. If the recipients accept it, they accept the responsibility of impolite utterances and end it with an apology. However, if the recipient does not take the responsibility, again they have two choices: being offensive or defensive. As Culpeper stated, "offensive strategies primarily counter face attack with face attack", and "defensive strategies mainly counter face attack by defending one's own face" (p. 1563). The following figure is a revised summary of response options.

Figure 1.

Summary of Response Options



Following are excerpts of the movies selected for analysis in this study. Each excerpt is a short conversation in every series; both the impolite utterance and the following response are underlined.

#1

South Park (2017 Presidential Debate)

Garrison: I don't know what the f*** I'm doing (**Positive strategy**). I had no idea I would get this far, but the fact of the matter is, I should not be president, OK? I will f*** this country up beyond repair. (**Positive strategy**). I am a sick, angry little man. Please, if you care at all about the future of our country, vote for her. She's the one who at least has some experience. She's not as bad as you think, I promise. And unlike me, she's actually capable of running this country.

Hillary Clinton: My opponent is a liar¹ and he cannot be trusted². (**Offensive**)

Garrison: I am giving you this, lady. What the fuck are you doing? (**Defensive**)

#2

Friends (Joe and Chandler are entering Monica's apartment.)

Ross: Aw, is it broken?

Joe: No, but I gonna wear this thing for a couple of weeks.

Ross: Did you tell the doctor you did it jumping up and down on your bed? (**Sarcasm**)

Joe: No, I had a whole story worked out (**Defensive**).

Suddenly Joe looked at Monica, she was making jam.

Joe: Jam? I love jam. Hey, how come we never have jam at our place?

Chandler: Because the kids need new shoes (**Sarcasm**)

Joe: (**Silence**)

#3

The Big Bang Theory

Sheldon: I have to say, I slept splendidly. Granted not long, but just deeply and well.

Leonard: I'm not surprised. A well-known folk cure for insomnia is to break in your neighbor's apartment and clean. (**Sarcasm**)

Penny (their neighbor came in): Son of the bitch (**Positive**).

Leonardo: Penny's up.

Penny: You sick geeky bastards! (**Positive**)

Leonardo: How did she know it was us! (**Sarcasm**)

Penny: You came into my apartment last night while I was sleeping.

Leonardo: Yes, but only to clean. (**Defensive**)

Sheldon: Really more to organize (**Defensive**). You aren't actually dirty.

#4

Modern Family

Gloria: Hi, I'm Gloria Pritchett.

A stranger: That man must be your dad. (**Sarcasm**)

Jay Pritchett: No, I'm her husband. (**Defensive**)

A stranger: (**Silence**).

#5

The Office

Phyllis: Stanley is having an affair.

Michael: We can't believe everything here¹, like Stanley is having an affair. That's crazy². (**1& 2 Bald on record**)

Phyllis: (**Silence**)

2.3. Procedure

In order to gather an adequate sample, 10 episodes of each series were chosen. Then each episode was watched meticulously to find the examples of impoliteness strategies and their following reactions. The chosen utterances were subsequently put in the correct categories. Since it

was demanding and confusing to choose a correct category for each utterance after the first watching, whether an impolite utterance or the following reaction, the series were watched for the second time with one-month interval. The main problem in categorizing the utterances was with mock politeness strategy since a number of contextual factors such as the interlocutors' relationship, the context of the conversation, and socio-economic status of the interlocutors had to be taken into account in choosing these strategies. The following example may clarify the point.

#6

The Bing Bang Theory

Sheldon: One o'clock: I'm not a raccoon.

Howard: If you're tired, have some coffee.

Sheldon: What? You have some coffee? (**Sarcasm**)

Howard: I'm having coffee. (**Defensive**)

This excerpt is taken from *The Bing Bang Theory*, and this conversation took place at Sheldon's home. Howard who is Sheldon's close friend encouraged him to drink coffee since he could not stay up late. Sheldon's reaction to his opinion was considered as sarcasm, while it was hard at first to take it as mock politeness. Because of the relationship between the interlocutors, the context of this conversation made it hard to decide whether this utterance was a sarcastic remark or bald on record. With the help of contextual clues and the interlocutor's intonation, it was first categorized as bald on record; however, by watching this part a number of times it was placed in the category of sarcasm. Another example is taken from *Friends* where deciding how to categorize impoliteness strategies was complicated since the relationships between interlocutors were intimate. The conversation took place between a couple, Chandler and Monica, who tended to adopt triplets, and since Chandler made fun of everything, he also talked about the triplets sarcastically. Monica also exploited sarcasm to react to his sarcastic utterance. First, it was tough to decide whether Chandler's utterance was impolite. Having watched it several times, we gathered that it could not be categorized as an impolite utterance since he did not want to threaten Monica's face intentionally. The contextual clues assisted us to put the following impolite utterances in the correct categories.

7

Friends

Chandler: It's funny. Every time you say *triplets*, I think of three hot, blond, 19-year-olds!

Monica: That's sweet! Drink your hair! (1. **Sarcasm**/ 2. **Bald on record**)

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, to give a thorough understanding of impoliteness strategies and the following reactions, an excerpt from each series is provided, and then the analysis of the frequency of occurrence and percentage of each category of impoliteness strategies and their resulting reactions were calculated and tabulated in *Tables 1&2*.

3.1. Research Questions 1 & 2: Impoliteness Strategies and the Resulting Reactions

The first example (# 8) happened in Sheldon and Leonard's apartment. The night before, Leonard's parents argued a lot and his mother was humiliated by his ex-husband (Leonard's father). The above conversation (example 8) took place the next day. This extract includes a number of mock politeness strategies. Penny, Leonard's fiancée, exploited the first impoliteness strategy when she said, "*Do yourself a favor*". By saying this, she used sarcasm to tell Leonard and Sheldon not to be nosy. Sheldon also used sarcasm when he said "*it was nice of her to show us playing dumb with an example*" since Leonard's mother was at the door and was watching them. It is worth mentioning that Leonard's reaction to penny's impolite utterance is silence. On the contrary, Penny's reaction to Sheldon's utterance is defensive. Leonard continued the conversation until Sheldon utilized sarcasm again when he said "*Ok, why? What's wrong?*" to react to Leonard's mother as she did not want to attend Leonard and Penny's wedding party. Sheldon also ignored Leonard's father's behavior and asked Leonard's mom "*Did he humiliate you?*" and he received an offensive reaction by Leonard's mother.

8

The Big Bang Theory (BBT)

Penny: I'm gonna go pick up my family. Like an hour and half, two hours. Depending on traffic.

Leonard: Ok. Drive safe.

Penny: Oh, hey, and do yourself a favor, all right? When Beverly gets there, don't bring up last night All right? As far as you're concerned, you don't know anything, you didn't see anything. I want you just to play dumb? (**Sarcasm**)

Sheldon: It was nice of her to show us playing dumb with an example. (**Sarcasm**)

Penny: What? Oh. Ok. Hey there, I got.... I'm sorry, I got to go now. (**Defensive**)

Beverly: Penny! Wait.

Penny: Why?

Beverly: I wanted to thank you for going through all the trouble of planning a second wedding ceremony for me, but unfortunately, I cannot attend.

Leonard: Well, why? What's wrong?

Sheldon: What are we still doing the dumb thing? Okay, why, what's wrong? (**Sarcasm**)

Beverly: I just cannot stay here while your father goes out of his way to humiliate me.

Sheldon: Oh, did he humiliate you? (Sarcasm)

Beverly: Stop it Sheldon! (Offensive)

9

South Park

Harry Gints: Gerald Broflovski?

Gerald: Yes.

Harry Gints: My name is Harry Gints and this is my wife, Elise. We're from Canada.

Gerald: I can tell. (Sarcasm)

Harry Gints: My wife and I had a child a few years back, and we weren't ready to have a child, so we put him up for adoption. We were told that you might be the....

Peter's mom: Peter! Oh, God! Harry! It's our son! Peter! It's mommy!

Gerald's wife: Gerald! What the hell is going on? (Bald on record)

Gerald: I'm not sure.

Harry Gints: It was a tough time for us. It just seemed we couldn't take care of a baby.

Peter's mom: So, we put him up for adoption. But as the years passed, I just felt an emptiness in my heart. Oh! It's so good to see him.

Gerald's wife: Well, we wish you all the best Mr. and Mrs. Gints, but to be honest, I think it would be best for Ike (Peter) if you didn't come around again. (Bald on record)

Peter's mom: I don't think you understand! We didn't come to visit Peter. We came to take him back. (Defensive)

Gerald: What???

Harry Gints: We want to take Peter home, to Canada.

Gerald's wife: Are you crazy? (Positive strategy)

Gerald: Look, you gave Ike up. You can't just change your mind. (Defensive)

The above example is taken from *South Park*. Broflovski's family is living in the United States. They adopted one of their sons long ago, and now their son's birthparents came to take him back to Canada. The first impoliteness strategy was used by Shelia Broflovski when she is angry with Ik's (his adopted son) birthparents. It seems that she addressed her husband (Gerald); however, her real aim is Ik's birthparents. The reaction is silence. Then, Shelia exploited a bald on record strategy by saying "*I think it would be best for Ike, if you did not come around again*". The following reaction is now defensive. As Mr. Gints said, "*We want to take Peter (Ike) home to Canada*", Shelia became mad at him and utilized another impoliteness strategy (female-male). When Gerald said, "*You can't just change your mind?*" he used a bald on record strategy to support his wife. These examples of positive and bald on record strategies are the verbal tools exploited by characters when they were filled with anger.

10

Modern Family

The following conversation happened at Dunphy's family home. Luke, the youngest person in Dunphy's family, was wearing unusual glasses. As he was coming downstairs, his family members reacted differently to his glasses. Bald on record was exploited when Haley said, "*What's with the fake glasses?*" to ridicule Luke. Although Haley is the oldest child in the family, Alex, the middle child is the most powerful since she is a genius. The second and third impoliteness strategies were exploited by Alex. She utilized bald on record and sarcasm to blame and ridicule Luke. By inference, deploying two impolite utterances boosts the effect of these strategies and consequently attacks interlocutor's face severely. Although Luke's sisters used bald on record to show their tendency toward his outdated glasses, the intention and function of this strategy were completely different. To put it another way, both Haley and Alex exploited bald on record; however, Haley exploited this strategy to ridicule his brother, and Alex deployed the same strategy to blame him.

Luke: Hey, all y'all.

Haley: What's going down? My opinion of you what's with the fake glasses? (**Bald on record**)

Alex: As an actual glasses wearer, this is offensive¹. It's like non-disabled people who park in handicapped spaces². (**1. Bald on record/ 2. Sarcasm**)

Claire: I was in and out in three minutes, young lady, and it was your style medication I was picking up. That's a lot of bracelets there, buddy. (**Sarcasm**)

Clearly, exploiting the term *bracelets* is a sarcastic way to emphasize Luke's girlish taste in wearing the glasses. As an illustration of a positive strategy, by saying *ignore them*, Phil utilized a positive strategy toward his wife and daughters to save his son's face. However, as Phil saw Luke's friends, he exploited a negative strategy by saying, "*Are you in a boy band?*" to make fun of his son. After a short conversation between Luke and his friends, they said "*Deuces!*"; and as he did not understand the meaning of this utterance, he exploited another positive strategy. The role of power in exploiting impoliteness strategies was clearly illustrated in this example (#10). Phil seemed to be the most powerful person in the family since no impoliteness strategy was exploited toward him.

Phil: *Just ignore them.* They're being sheep. If I'd listened to what other people said, I'd never have rocked my 90's frosted tips. We've got pictures. (**Positive strategy**)

Claire: No, we don't.

Phil: You're an original, son. When they made you, they broke the mold?

Luke's friend: What's good, Luke.

Phil: Luke, um, there's no easy way to ask this. Are you in a boy band? (**Negative strategy**)

Luke's friend: So, we're gonna go hang at the pier. You in?

Luke: Sounds cool, but I don't know if I can.

Phil: That's right. We got a big day planned. He's coming to work with the old man.

Luke: Sorry.

Luke's friend: Next time. Deuces.

Luke: Deuces.

Phil: Word to your mothers. (Positive strategy)

#11

Friends

Phoebe: Hey! I brought you my old maternity clothes.

Rachel: Oh, Phoebe! That's so sweet. Oh! Those are so cute. (Sarcasm)

Phoebe: Look, see how they expand as the baby grows. And after the baby's born, they're great for shoplifting melons! (Offensive)

Monica: Good, you're all here. Thanksgiving, tomorrow, 4:00. Guess who I invited? Remember Will Culvert from high school?

Rachel: No.

Monica: He was in Ross's class, marching band. He was kind of overweight. Really overweight. I was his thin friend. (Sarcasm)

The conversation took place in Joey and Chandler apartment. Phoebe brought Rachel her maternity clothes, and since they were not chic and fashionable, Rachel exploited sarcasm to show her intention indirectly. However, Phoebe's explanation about post-use of those clothes cannot be categorized as an impolite utterance; that is, because they are close friends and this utterance is considered normal among close friends. Then Monica came and invited her friend to Thanksgiving party. She used sarcasm to talk about her ex-classmate. By saying "*I was his thin friend*", she wanted to point to her friend's unusual overweight.

The following extract is taken from *The Office*. Michael Scott, the manager of the office, asked his employee to remind other staff about the company rules; however, he did not do it properly. The first impoliteness strategy was exploited by Michael when he said, "*I just want to remind everyone about the company rules involving PDA.*" To defend himself against Michael, Toby, the disobedient staff, used a defensive reaction. As Toby said, "*Some people in the office have complained.*", Michael utilized a negative strategy to ridicule him.

12

The Office

Michael: Hey Toby. What's this? I just want to remind everyone about the company rules involving PDA, or public displays of affection. (Bald on record)

Toby: Yes. Some people in the office complained. (Defensive)

Michael: Oh, really? (Negative)

Toby: About other people engaging in PDA.

A set of statistical analysis was used to analyze the data quantitatively. Table 1 provides the frequencies and percentages of impoliteness strategies exploited by American male and female characters and offers further information about the differences. The table demonstrates that sarcasm is the most frequently used strategy; however, the American male and female characters showed only marginal differences in exploiting this strategy. Considering withhold as the least used strategy, American males utilized it 1.97% while female actors employed it much less (.98%). As indicated by the table below, American male and female characters were also different in exploiting the bald on record strategy. Regarding positive and negative strategies, both groups exploited this strategy approximately in the same way and no major difference was detected. Finally, only a minority of characters employed the withhold strategy in their interactions.

Table 1

Impoliteness Strategies Exploited by American Male and Female Characters

Strategy	Male	%	Female	%	χ^2	<i>p Value</i>
Bald on	254	18.49	202	15.20	5.93	0.01
Positive	189	13.76	173	13.02	0.707	0.40
Negative	151	10.99	129	9.71	1.729	0.18
Sarcasm	753	54.80	812	61.10	2.224	0.13
Withhold	27	1.97	13	0.98	4.9	0.02
Total	1374	100.00	1329	100.00		

The reactions to the above strategies are illustrated in Table 2. The differences in using defensive and offensive strategies were shown to be statistically meaningful. American males exploited defensive strategies most frequently and offensive strategies least frequently in their exchanges, while acceptance appeared to be the most frequent strategy used by their female counterparts. Likewise, offensive strategies did not attract American females. Similarly, both groups marked close tendencies in silence and acceptance.

Table 2

American Male and Female Characters Reactions to Impolite Utterances

Reactions	Male	%	Female	%	χ^2	<i>p Value</i>
Silence	134	18.36	153	24.72	1.258	0.262
Accept	232	31.78	247	39.90	0.47	0.493
Defensive	292	40.00	196	31.66	18.885	0
Offensive	72	9.86	23	3.72	25.274	0
Total	730	100.00	619	100.00		

3.2. Research Question 3: Does Gender Have a Bearing on Impoliteness Strategies Use and the Following Reactions in these Series?

Addressing the third research question, the findings of this study provide some evidence regarding the role of gender in exploitation of impoliteness strategies and the resulting reactions. As it is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, generally men utilized more impolite strategies than woman. Concerning the resulting reactions, it can be seen that American male actors reacted to impolite utterances more than their female counterparts. It should be noted that sarcasm was the most frequently used strategy, and women show more tendency toward using this strategy. Given resulting reactions, while male characters prefer to defend themselves against impoliteness strategies, the female ones tend to accept impolite utterances.

Studies on impoliteness have identified a wide range of factors that influence speaker's perception of impolite language including the "social context, attitudes, emotions, intentions, power, and considerations of face" (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017, p. 389). However, gender is one of the distinguishing features playing an important role in exploiting impoliteness strategies. The relationship between impoliteness and gender has been widely investigated (Mills, 2003; Mills, 2005; Aydinoglu, 2013; Jalilifar & Karimi, 2015). It has also been argued that "gender-specific ideologies of impoliteness assume that men and women behave differently, as far as impoliteness is concerned" (Kienpointner & Stopfner, 2017, p. 71). In this regard, the current study has taken gender as one of the main variables. The main reason to focus on gender is the "complex relationship between impoliteness and gender" (Mills, 2003, p. 263). The importance lies in the fact that men and women have different ideas toward conversations: to men "conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand" while based on women's views "conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support and to reach consensus" (Tannen, 1990, as cited in Aydinoglu, p. 65, 2013).

3.3. Discussion

Given the first and second research questions, the results of the study revealed that *bald on record*, *positive* and *sarcasm* were the predominant types of strategies employed by both American male and female characters. Next in rank was the *negative strategy*. Male and female characters, compared to *sarcasm*, *bald on record*, and *positive strategies*, used this strategy less frequently. Regarding the reactions, the tendency of male and female characters toward using *defensive* and *acceptance* turned out to be completely the opposite. While defensive was the major strategy used by men, female characters opted for *acceptance* the most. For both groups *silence* was the second strategy in order of use. Considering the meaningful difference is using the *offensive* strategy, male characters showed more inclination to express impoliteness by using this strategy.

American male and female characters, except for *withhold* and *bald on record* strategies, did not show any significant tendency toward exploiting other impoliteness strategies. The findings of this study corroborate Holms (2008) that in the Western society, depending on men's and women's social status, they mostly exploit the same speech forms. These findings also correspond to other studies acknowledging an almost equal use of impoliteness strategies by American male and female characters (Jalilifar & Karimi, 2015; Rabab'ah & Rabab'ah, 2021). In terms of *bald on record* and *withhold* strategies, the findings of this study lend support to Holm's (1992), as cited in Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003), as she believed that "women's speech style is always cooperative and facilitative whereas male style is always more competitive and verbally aggressive". The following examples may give a clear picture of how men and women utilized sarcasm in the same way.

13

Modern family

Alex (Phil's daughter): Oh, I don't know Haley. I mean he's really cute and really smart and really funny, but, oh! He's always wearing clogs.

Haley (Phil's daughter): Oh, no. If he's not a chef, a nurse, or a tulip salesman, you need to run.

Phil (to his daughters): Hey! If you're mother had that attitude about a man in clogs, you two wouldn't have a dad. (Sarcasm)

#14

Friends

Phoebe: Have you seen Frank Jr.? He's meeting me here with the triplets.

Chandler: It's funny. Every time you say *triplets*, I think of three hot, blond, 19-year-olds!

Monica (to Chandler): That's sweet! Drink your hair². (1. Sarcasm/ 2. Bald on record)

In contrast to impoliteness strategies, it is approximately evident that American male characters and their female counterparts *reacted* to the strategies in different ways. Women accepted the verbal abuse in most of their interactions, while male characters defended themselves against impolite utterances, and this is not consistent with what Holmes claimed. In terms of the resulting reactions, the findings of this study support Poynton (1989) that women are always in the soft side in their interactions. Aydınoglu (2013) also assumed that women in the Western societies hold the secondary status as they try to avoid using impolite utterances.

Another reason behind the differences between male and female actors is the role of media in representing the image of men and women. Wood (1994) believed that media have an influence on how men and women are viewed. Media play a significant role in underrepresenting women; they are depicted as weak, susceptible creatures who cannot defend themselves. On the other hand, men are always portrayed as powerful creatures who are completely the opposite of women. Wood (1994) and Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) argue that "in cross-sex interaction women are

usually in the low status position" which has resulted in accepting face-threatening acts. Excerpt 15, shows that the female character preferred to remain silent, while in excerpt 16, the male character (Gerald) exploited the defensive strategy.

#15

The Office

Phyllis: Stanley is having an affair.

Michael: We can't believe everything here¹, like Stanley is having an affair. That's crazy². (1& 2 Bald on record)

Phyllis: (Silence)

#16

South Park

Harry Gints: We want to take Peter home, to Canada.

Gerald's wife: Are you crazy? (Positive strategy)

Gerald: Look, you gave Ike up. You can't just change your mind. (Defensive)

In all the above examples, context plays an undeniable role in categorizing impoliteness strategies and resulting reactions, and the main reason lies in the fact that "although some verbal behaviors are impolite, they will not always be impolite it depends on the situation" (Culpeper, 2011, p. 22). Considering the crucial role of context, Simpson (1993) maintained that contextual factors should be taken into account since language does not happen "in a contextless vacuum" (p. 6). A number of factors such as the interlocutors' relationship, intimacy, emotion, and social status can also affect the way interlocutors exploit impoliteness strategies. Kienpointer (2008) highlighted the role of emotion in social conflicts and disharmony, and claimed that emotions have a decisive role in our understanding of impoliteness. The relationship between impoliteness and power has also been of prime consideration in some studies (Culpeper, 1996; Mirhosein et al., 2017). Power and impoliteness are considered to be inextricably linked and verbal impoliteness can easily be shown in the form of impoliteness strategies (Mirhoseini et al., 2017).

4. Conclusion

This study focused on using impoliteness strategies and their resulting reactions in five popular American comedy series. Having selected the movies, we began searching for impoliteness strategies following Culpeper (1996, 2003). The process of categorizing the data was not fairly straightforward since contextual factors, interlocutors' relationships, and power status influence the use of impoliteness strategies. The results of this study indicated that sarcasm was the most frequent candidate by both male and female characters. The study showed that both groups utilized positive

and negative strategies relatively in the same way. However, the difference in using bald on record was meaningful. Contrary to females, the male characters relied on this strategy in their interactions. The analysis also revealed that male and female actors behaved differently regarding the resulting reactions. While male actors exploited more defensive strategies, women preferred to accept the impolite utterances.

A number of reasons account for using these strategies. According to Xia (2013), men and women express their feelings and react to impolite language in different ways. While men utilize the bald on record strategy to express their feelings when they are met with a cutting language, women prefer to remain silent the other reason relates to the nature of comedy series. It is believed that “all the comedy shows heavily rely on verbal abuse, which seems to suggest that laughter is often triggered by impolite interaction in a sort of comic catharsis” (Jobert, 2013, p. 75).

Impoliteness is a young field of study that needs more explorations. The data for the present study were collected from five American comedy series. Further studies are needed to focus on sociolinguistic factors like social class, ethnic background, and age in other contexts like TV shows, different movie genres since they go hand-in-hand with impoliteness strategies. Moreover, further research might explore cross-cultural differences regarding the concept of impoliteness. Considering the undeniable role of technology in everyday life, and as technology continues to advance, it is believed that more and more people are engaged with different forms of technology to interact with other people in their daily interactions (Graham & Hardaker, 2017). As politeness and impoliteness are crucial characteristics of everyday communication and as “digital interaction is an ever-present component of daily life” (ibid, p. 785), these two characteristics are worth further investigation in the digital world.

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study. This study has only examined gender as the main variable. However, other variables such as age, social class, and ethnic backgrounds play decisive roles in utilizing impoliteness strategies. Controlling all of these variables was not in the scope of the present study. Another source of weakness in this study which could have affected the result was the genre of these five series. Since the genre was comedy, and the style of the speakers is mostly sarcastic, it can be inferred that the genre itself limits the style of the interlocutors' verbal communication. Last but not least, this study did not consider the role of intonation and prosodic aspects in analyzing impoliteness strategies due to some practical problems.

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