

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES IN BRITISH TV-SERIES *SHERLOCK*

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Abstract

This research investigates impolite acts performed in British TV-series *Sherlock* using pragmatic approach. It is aimed at describing the types and functions of impoliteness strategies, and identifying the characters' responses toward the impoliteness strategies performed in *Sherlock*.

This research employed descriptive qualitative method. The data were in the form of utterances, while the context of the data was the dialogues spoken by the characters in the TV-series. The sources of the data were three episodes of the first season of *Sherlock* and the transcript. In this research, inductive approach was used in analyzing the data. To enhance trustworthiness as well as obtaining credibility and reliability of the data, triangulation was used.

The results of this research are stated as follows. (1) All types of impoliteness strategies are used by the characters in *Sherlock*. They are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withhold politeness. Negative impoliteness is the most dominant type of impoliteness strategy while withhold politeness is the least strategy to occur in this research. Negative impoliteness strategy becomes the most frequently used type of impoliteness strategies in *Sherlock* because the characters in *Sherlock* tend to use it as a means to make other characters follow their order by attacking the negative face wants. (2) The characters in *Sherlock* frequently employed impoliteness strategy with coercive impoliteness function. By employing coercive impoliteness, the speakers want to gain more benefits or get their current benefits protected. (3) In *Sherlock*, countering face attack by defensive strategy is the most frequently used response by the characters. The characters choose to use this response because they tend to defend their faces from the face attack.

Keywords: impoliteness, strategy, types, functions, responses, *Sherlock*

INTRODUCTION

In social interactions, there are unwritten rules called social norms that are understood and followed by a society. These norms are the rules used by society to define what are appropriate and inappropriate. As language is a means of communication in the society, the use of language is bounded by social norms. People use language in the society in order to maintain good social interactions with others. In doing so, people must be able to obey the social norms by performing good attitude or being polite.

However, even though politeness is an important aspect of social interaction, violating politeness, or in other words being impolite, is inevitable. Culpeper (in Bousfield and Locher,

2008: 36) defines that impoliteness requires communicative behavior which intends to cause the target's "face loss" or what the target identifies to be so.

There are numerous researches on politeness. Those researches have focused on how communicative strategies are used to maintain harmony in social interaction. On the contrary, the opposite phenomenon, impoliteness, has not gained nearly as much attention. In this way, this research is conducted under the field of linguistic research to give additional contribution to impoliteness phenomenon. One of the branches under linguistic approach is pragmatics. Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by the speaker and

interpreted by a listener. It enables people to understand that through this approach, it is possible to know about the speaker's implied meanings, their assumptions, purposes, and the types of actions that they are doing when they speak. This approach is suitable for analyzing impoliteness which sometimes is applied by using sarcastic utterances.

Culpeper (1996) builds a framework for impoliteness in relation to the politeness strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987). He proposed a model of five impoliteness strategies with one revision developed in 2005. Those strategies are bald on record impoliteness, negative impoliteness, positive impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withhold politeness. In addition, Culpeper (2011) proposes three functions of impoliteness; they are affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness, and entertaining impoliteness.

Albeit the fact that researchers of both politeness and impoliteness tend to overlook what has been done by the recipient of face threat, Culpeper et al (2003: 1562) points out that it is crucial to know the response to an utterance since it is capable of revealing how that utterance is perceived. There are three choices open to a recipient of a face threatening act (FTA) or impoliteness acts, i.e. accepting the face attack, countering the face attack, and choosing not to respond.

The researcher chooses a television series entitled *Sherlock* as the data source of this research. *Sherlock* is a popular TV-series with unique characters who create remarkable dialogues. It is an interesting object to be analyzed

in term of impoliteness strategies. Adapting Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's very famous and iconic *Sherlock Holmes*, *Sherlock* presents the modern version of the detective story. The British television crime drama modernized the famous 19th century detective story into a new one in early 21st century London.

The phenomena of impoliteness in *Sherlock* leave several problems that can be identified. The first problem is related to the types of impoliteness strategies used in *Sherlock*. The second problem is on the function of impoliteness strategies used by the speakers. The third problem is related to how the characters respond to impoliteness strategies.

There are three objectives of this research; they are (1) to find out the types of impoliteness strategies used in *Sherlock*, (2) to describe the function of impoliteness strategies used in *Sherlock*, and (3) to identify the characters' responses to the impoliteness strategies used in *Sherlock*.

There are some benefits offered by this research. First, this research is expected to enrich the research in linguistics field, especially in pragmatics study, and particularly in term of impoliteness strategies. Second, this research may be useful as a reference for other researchers to conduct other researches in pragmatics. Moreover, the concept of impoliteness asserted in this analysis can give some information about impoliteness in daily communication. Thus, people will be more cautious in choosing certain strategies in order to maintain good communication with others and to gain their goal through that communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

Descriptive qualitative method was employed in this research as the purpose of the research was to describe the phenomena of impoliteness strategies by interpreting the collected data. According to Vanderstoep and Johnson (2009: 167), the qualitative research's purpose is more descriptive since it focuses on in depth understanding of the research participants' point of view. They propose that communication and interaction are the factors which construct knowledge and that these factors lay within individual's perception and interpretations. Hence, in order to analyze and understand an entity, examining a larger context where people and knowledge function is more effective than analyzing its parts only (Vanderstoep and Johnson, 2009: 166).

The data in this research were in the form of utterances which were uttered by the characters in *Sherlock* TV-series. Accordingly, the context of the data was the dialogue among the characters which contain impoliteness. The main sources of the data were three beginning episodes of *Sherlock Series 1*, i.e. *A Study in Pink*, *The Blind Banker*, and *The Great Game*.

Since this research employed qualitative method, the primary instrument of the research was the researcher herself. The researcher used the help of secondary instrument in the form of data sheet. The data sheet was in the form of a table and was used to note the impoliteness strategies performed through the utterances by the characters in *Sherlock*.

In collecting the data, the researcher conducted several steps. First, the researcher

watched the series, followed by downloading the transcript. Second, the researcher re-watched the series and checked the accuracy of the transcript, while at the same time gave mark at the impoliteness strategies performed in the series. Last, the researcher classified the collected data into data sheet.

In order to gain credibility and reliability of the data, this research employed a methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation employed different data collection strategies to gain greater accuracy of a phenomenon. In addition to methodological triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation were used in this research. Using investigator triangulation, the researcher discussed and consulted the data with her supervisors. Furthermore, the researcher also asked fellow linguistics students to triangulate the data. The theory triangulation was achieved by using multiple theories in the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. Each single set of the data was interpreted by using Culpeper's theory of types, functions and responses of impoliteness strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are five types of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper. Those types are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withhold politeness. In this research, each of Culpeper's strategies can be found in the data but some strategies are more frequent than others.

The most dominant type of impoliteness strategy used by the characters is negative

impoliteness strategy with 21 data or 27.6%. Negative impoliteness strategy is followed by off-record impoliteness strategy with 20 data or 26.3%. Then, bald on record impoliteness comes at the third place with 17 data or 22.4%. At the fourth place, there is positive impoliteness strategy with 15 data or 19.7%. Finally, the least strategy to occur in this research is withholding politeness which appears 3 times or 3.9%.

Negative impoliteness strategy is the most frequently occurring strategy in this research because the characters in *Sherlock* tend to use this strategy as a means to make other characters follow their order by attacking their freedom of action. Different from negative impoliteness strategy, withhold politeness is the most rarely used strategy in *Sherlock*. The characters in *Sherlock* prefer to express their impolite act rather than choosing not to be polite.

In relation to the second objective which is to describe the functions of impoliteness strategies, all functions of impoliteness occur in *Sherlock*. As proposed by Culpeper, there are three functions of impoliteness, i.e. affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness, and entertaining impoliteness. Among those functions, coercive impoliteness is the most frequently used function with 42 data or 55.3%. Coercive impoliteness is followed by affective impoliteness with 25 data or 32.9%, and the last position goes to entertaining impoliteness with 9 occurrence or 11.8%.

Coercive impoliteness becomes the most dominant function used in *Sherlock* because the speakers want to get more benefit or get their current benefits protected. The characters also

want to show his/her power over the target. This function is suitable with negative impoliteness strategy.

Following to the third objective of this research, there are three types of responses toward impolite act, i.e. accepting the face attack, countering the face attack, and choosing not to respond or non-verbal response. In addition, countering the face attack has two sub-strategies; they are offensive strategy and defensive strategy. All four responses of impoliteness strategy are found in *Sherlock* with different frequencies of occurrence. The most dominant response used by the characters in *Sherlock* is countering face attack by defensive strategy which occurs 33 times or 43.4%. Another countering face attack strategy, offensive strategy, follows in the second place with 19 occurrence or 25.0%. In the third place, choosing not to respond or giving non-verbal response follows with 17 occurrences or 17.4%. Meanwhile, accepting the face attack has the least occurrence with 7 data or 9.2%.

In this research, the characters choose to countering the face attack by defensive strategy because they want to defend their faces by blocking or managing the face attack. On the contrary, accepting the face attack becomes the least used response in *Sherlock* since they do not want their public self-image to be damaged.

Further explanation about the types of impoliteness strategies, the functions and the responses toward impoliteness strategies can be seen in the following examples.

The first example is a conversation which happens when Sherlock brings John to a crime scene and they meet Agent Donovan. Sherlock

and Agent Donovan do not have a good relationship because Agent Donovan thinks that Sherlock is very weird since he loves to solve cases without being paid.

- Donovan : Er, who is this?
 Sherlock : Colleague of mine, Doctor Watson. Doctor Watson, Sergeant Sally Donovan. *(His voice drips with sarcasm)* Old friend.
 Donovan : **A colleague? How do you get a colleague?! What, did he follow you home?**
 Sherlock : (Silent)
 (14-1/NI/EN/NR)

Sergeant Sally Donovan performs negative impoliteness strategy as she makes fun of the fact that Sherlock introduces John Watson as his friend. She does not believe that someone like Sherlock can make a friend. She uses the impoliteness strategy as an entertaining impoliteness because she finds it funny that Sherlock has a friend. Sherlock who has known Donovan's dislike towards him gives no response to the face attack and chooses to stay silent.

The next example is taken from a conversation between Sherlock and Detective Inspector Dimmock. Dimmock wants to help Sherlock solve a murder case since he is responsible for the case.

- Dimmock : Anything else I can do?
 To assist you, I mean.
 Sherlock : **Some silent right now would be marvelous.**
 Dimmock : *(Silent)*
 (51-2/PI/CR/AC)

Sherlock seems unconcerned with Dimmock's offer to help him. Instead, he sarcastically asks Dimmock to be quiet by saying "Some silent right now would be marvelous." He performs positive impoliteness strategy with

coercive impoliteness function. He does not only attack Dimmock's face but he also wants to show Dimmock that although Dimmock is the one who has the authority on the case, Sherlock is the one who can solve it. Thus, Sherlock has more power over the case. In response, Dimmock accepts the face attack by being silent.

In another example, Sherlock is in his flat with John and some police officers, trying to solve a murder case. Sherlock is finally able to solve the mystery when the others are still in confusion.

- Sherlock : **Oh, look at you lot. You're all so vacant. Is it nice not being me? It must be so relaxing.**
 Rachel is not a name
 John : Then what is it?
 (39-1/OR/EN/DE)

Sherlock employs off record impoliteness strategy as he teases other people in the room. He uses entertaining impoliteness by making the others his object of entertainment. Sherlock finds it annoying yet amusing that he is the only one who understands the mystery behind the word 'Rachel'. Thus he performs entertaining impoliteness even though he is the only one who gets entertained with it. In response to Sherlock's FTA, John uses defensive strategy to manage the face attack. He sets aside the face attack and asks about what actually Rachel is.

The characters in *Sherlock* perform impoliteness strategies with certain functions. It shows that the types and functions of impoliteness strategies are closely related. For example, by using negative impoliteness strategy, the characters try to get more benefit or get their current benefit protected. It can be seen from the data where negative impoliteness strategy as the

most frequently used strategy is commonly used by the characters to employ coercive impoliteness function. In addition, generally, the characters in *Sherlock* try to manage the face attack addressed to them so that they can maintain their public self-image.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

It can be concluded that first, all the five types of impoliteness strategy occur in *Sherlock*. The strategies are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withhold politeness. The most frequently occurred strategy is negative impoliteness. This strategy becomes the most used strategy in *Sherlock* because the characters in *Sherlock* tend to use this strategy as a means to make other characters follow their order by attacking the negative face wants. On the other hand, the least strategy that occurring in this research is withholding politeness. Withhold politeness becomes the most rarely used strategy in *Sherlock* because the characters prefer to express their impolite act rather than choosing not to be polite.

Second, there are three functions which appear in the series, i.e., affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness, and entertaining impoliteness. Coercive impoliteness becomes the most frequently occurred function in *Sherlock*. This function is the most dominant function used in this research because the characters in *Sherlock* want to get more benefit or get their current benefit protected. On the contrary, entertaining impoliteness becomes the least used function in *Sherlock* since the main purpose of impoliteness

strategies appeared in *Sherlock* is not used as a means of entertainment.

Third, three types of responses are used in the series. The three responses are accepting face attack, countering face attack, and non-verbal response. Additionally, countering face attack has two sub-strategies, i.e. offensive strategy and defensive strategy. The most dominant response used by the characters in *Sherlock* is countering face attack by defensive strategy. The characters choose to use defensive strategy in responding an impoliteness act because they want to save their faces. On the contrary, accepting the face attack has the least occurrence because the characters in *Sherlock* cannot accept the face attack performed toward them.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusions as shown above, the researcher proposes some suggestions for several parties. First, the researcher suggests the students of English and Literature Study Program, especially those who are majoring in linguistics, to learn and conduct research on impoliteness. Pragmatics covers various phenomena of language use including impoliteness, but the phenomenon of impoliteness in language use has not gained much attention.

Furthermore, the researcher expects other researchers who want to conduct research about impoliteness to investigate other problems in impoliteness strategies such as the triggering factors of impoliteness and the realization of impoliteness.

Finally, it is expected that the concept of impoliteness asserted in this research can give

some information about impoliteness in daily communication. For this reason, the readers can be more cautious in choosing certain strategies in order to maintain good communication with others and to gain their goal throughout that communication.

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