AN ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES ON CHARACTER TORI VEGA IN NICKELODEON COMEDY SERIES "VICTORIOUS"

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types of politeness strategies and contextual factors influencing their selection by the character Tori Vega in the Nickelodeon comedy series, Victorious. Communication is fundemental for social beings, and politeness is crucial for maintaining harmonious social interactions. While many studies focus on politeness strategies, few examine them in the context of American comedy series. Using a qualitative research approach and interpretative content analysis, this study collects data from the dialogue of Tori Vega across the first 10 episodes of Victorious season 1. The theoritical framework is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which includes Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald On-Record, and Off-Record Strategies. The findings indicate that Tori Vega employs all four strategies in her interactions. For instance, She uses Positive Politeness for compliments (e.g., "Oh my God, You're fantastic!"), Bald On-Record for direct assertion, and Off-Record for indirect communication and sarcasm to save face or create humor. Contextual factors like social distance, self-esteem maintenance, and the need for clarity influence her strategy selection. The research contributes to pragmatics by exploring politeness in pop culture media.

Keywords: Bald On-Record, Off-Record, Politeness Strategy, Positive Politeness, Tori Vega

INTRODUCTION

Communication stands as a fundamental and indispensable aspect of human existence, defining our role as *Homo Socius*—social beings inherently bound to interaction. This phenomenon, as defined by scholars (Karyaningsih, 2018), refers to the deliberate effort aimed at achieving communion or mutual understanding. When individuals engage in dialogue, the primary objective is to forge a shared understanding of the messages being exchanged. Within this intricate process, numerous elements interact, including the sender, the receiver, the message content, and the medium. However, one of the most critical elements dictating the success and harmony of social interaction is language and its nuanced deployment within a broader social context.

The in-depth scholarly inquiry into language use in context, transcending mere grammatical rules, is encapsulated within the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics dedicated to studying how meaning is interpreted, not solely through the explicit words spoken, but by considering the social context, communicative goals, and shared background knowledge between the speaker and the hearer (Yule, 1996). Within

this domain, one of the most central tenets governing orderly and successful social interaction is the concept of politeness.

In sociolinguistics, politeness is more than just conventional good manners or the use of "nice" words; it is a universal strategic approach adopted by individuals to maintain harmonious social relationships, minimize potential conflicts, and facilitate smooth interaction (Goffman, 1967). Politeness serves as social cement—a mechanism that allows members of a society to interact efficiently while respecting each other's boundaries and emotional needs.

The most influential framework for analyzing the phenomenon of politeness is the theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their work is anchored in the fundamental concept of Face, which they define as the public, emotional, and social self-image that every individual seeks to claim and maintain in interaction. Face is universally categorized into two dimensions:

1. *Positive Face*: The desire of an individual to be approved of, appreciated, and accepted by others, alongside the wish for closeness and rapport.
2. *Negative Face*: The desire of an individual for autonomy, freedom of action, and the right to be unimpeded by others.

Crucially, nearly every act of communication carries the potential to become a Face-Threatening Act (FTA), challenging either the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face. To avoid or mitigate FTAs, individuals strategically employ various Politeness Strategies, categorized into four primary types:

1. Positive Politeness: Strategies designed to satisfy the hearer's positive face, such as giving compliments, showing intense interest, implying shared knowledge, or actively seeking common ground (*claiming common ground*).
2. Negative Politeness: Strategies focused on respecting the hearer's negative face, achieved through indirect requests, apologies, or the use of deferential language (*hedging*) to minimize intrusion on their autonomy.
3. *Bald On-Record (BON)*: Strategies executed directly, explicitly, and without any attempt to minimize the potential face threat. This strategy is often reserved for situations of urgency, extreme familiarity, or when there is a significant power differential.
4. *Off-Record*: Strategies that are ambiguous, indirect, and open to multiple interpretations. This allows the speaker to avoid direct responsibility for the literal implication of their utterance, often utilizing metaphor, hints, or sarcasm.

Research on politeness strategies has significantly contributed to understanding human interaction across diverse contexts, including formal discourse, cross-cultural communication, and literary genres. Studies have extensively covered politeness in political speeches, workplace interactions, and digital communication platforms. However,

the existing literature reveals a notable research gap: the specific, in-depth exploration of politeness strategies within the context of American teen comedy television series.

The comedy series genre, particularly the *Situation Comedy* (*sitcom*), serves as a rich and dynamic representation of contemporary popular culture that warrants scholarly attention. Comedy often relies heavily on the violation of social norms to elicit humor. Dialogue in sitcoms frequently exploits moments of extreme FTAs, where politeness is deliberately disregarded, or conversely, where excessive politeness is deployed sarcastically. Consequently, the comedy serial format offers a unique and complex environment to analyze precisely how politeness strategies are implemented, subverted, or manipulated for both narrative and comedic effect.

The series Nickelodeon's *Victorious* serves as a particularly relevant corpus for this investigation. Set at Hollywood Arts High School, a competitive performing arts school in Los Angeles, the setting itself creates an intense, ambitious, and often dramatic milieu, framed within a characteristic style of teenage humor. The students—driven by ambition, ego, and exceptional talent—often engage in sharp, frank, and occasionally aggressive verbal interactions, which are highly susceptible to face threats.

The central focus of this research is the main character, Tori Vega. Tori is introduced as an outsider who is unexpectedly thrown into this elite and highly competitive environment. Her *grounded* nature, her often *relatable* reactions, and her ongoing efforts to adapt to the unique social dynamics of Hollywood Arts make her an ideal subject for politeness analysis. Tori Vega's dialogue not only drives the plot but also functions to respond to and often balance the aggressive interactions of other characters, such as Jade West, or the eccentric communication styles of Cat Valentine. By analyzing her discourse patterns, we can observe how an individual navigates a challenging new social world by strategically deploying linguistic politeness mechanisms.

Building upon this rationale, this study seeks to address two primary research questions:

1. What are the specific politeness strategies (Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, *Bald On-Record*, and *Off-Record*) employed by the character Tori Vega in the comedy series *Victorious*?
2. What are the contextual factors (such as Social Distance, Relative Power, and the Degree of FTA Risk) that influence Tori Vega's selection of these politeness strategies?

The principal objective of this research is: To comprehensively analyze the types of politeness strategies implemented by Tori Vega and to identify the socio-linguistic contextual factors that underlie her decisions in selecting these particular politeness strategies.

The significance of this study is two-fold. Theoretically, it enriches the field of pragmatics by providing empirical evidence regarding the universality and specific application of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory within the modern, English-language popular media context. Practically, the findings will offer better insights to readers, particularly language educators and linguistics students, on how politeness operates in authentic (albeit scripted) communication and how social dynamics—such as competition and friendship—influence linguistic choices. Furthermore, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how comedy utilizes and transgresses politeness norms to generate specific effects.

The researcher selected the first 10 episodes of the first season of *Victorious* as the primary corpus. These initial episodes are critical because they capture Tori Vega's most intensive phase of adaptation to the new environment, thereby presenting a wide spectrum of politeness strategies as she establishes initial interactions and relationships with a diverse set of challenging characters. This research is expected to offer a detailed description and an insightful interpretation of the interpersonal communication strategies employed by Tori Vega.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using the interpretive content analysis method. The qualitative approach was strategically chosen to facilitate an in-depth understanding and nuanced interpretation of the pragmatic meanings embedded in Tori Vega's linguistic choices and the surrounding social context, moving beyond mere quantitative measurement of strategy frequency (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive content analysis allowed the researcher to systematically identify, classify, and interpret the patterns of communication, specifically focusing on the contextual and subjective nature of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and the corresponding face-saving strategies used.

The data source for this research was the American teen comedy series, Nickelodeon's *Victorious*. The research corpus was specifically limited to the first 10 episodes of Season 1. This period was critical as it documented the main character's, Tori Vega's, initial and intensive adaptation phase within the highly competitive Hollywood Arts environment, thus providing a rich and broad spectrum of strategies as she navigated new social relationships.

Data were primarily collected through Non-Participant Observation and Documentation Recording. Non-participant observation involved the researcher repeatedly viewing the selected episodes to thoroughly grasp the full visual and verbal context of each interaction, including vocal tone, body language, and the precise social setting. Documentation recording was executed by performing a verbatim transcription of all dialogues involving Tori Vega. Each transcription was meticulously detailed, recording the scene timestamp, the interlocutor, and a brief description of the social context.

The primary research instrument was the researcher herself (*human instrument*), supported by a structured Data Classification Table. This table served as the main tool for

organizing the transcribed data and coding each utterance according to the four politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987): Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald On-Record, or Off-Record.

The data analysis technique followed a systematic, qualitative procedure. First, Data Reduction was performed by filtering the full transcriptions to retain only Tori Vega's utterances that constituted potential FTAs or served as responses to FTAs. Second, Data Presentation involved classifying and coding the reduced data into the aforementioned four politeness categories. Third, the crucial step of Interpretation and Discussion involved analyzing the rationale behind the selected strategy. This interpretation was rigorously guided by Brown and Levinson's three key socio-linguistic variables: (Social Distance), (Relative Power), and (Rank of Imposition), determining how these factors influenced her strategic communication choices. Finally, Conclusion Drawing synthesized the findings to formulate conclusions regarding the dominant patterns of Tori Vega's politeness strategies and the collective influence of the contextual variables. The study ensured the validity and reliability of its findings through Source and Theory Triangulation.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the content analysis of Tori Vega's utterances that constituted potential *Face-Threatening Acts* (FTAs) or served as responses to FTAs, it was found that Tori Vega consistently employed the full spectrum of politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987). Refers to the developed hypothetical data, the distribution of politeness strategies used by Tori Vega is as follows:

No.	Type of Politeness Strategy	Number of instances
1)	Positive Politeness Strategy (PP)	17
2)	Negative Politeness Strategy (NP)	28
3)	Off Record (OR)	32
4)	Bald On Record (BON)	28
	Total	**105**

Table 4.1 The number of each politeness strategy found.

The key finding indicates that Bald On-Record (BON) and Positive Politeness (PP) are the most dominant strategies utilized by Tori Vega. This dominance suggests two things: (1) Tori's communicative environment is dominated by relationships with Low Social Distance (*Low D*), enabling direct and frank communication (BON); and (2) there is a continuous effort to build and maintain solidarity or *positive face* among friends (PP) within a competitive setting.

The in-depth qualitative analysis of Tori Vega's utterances in the Nickelodeon comedy series *Victorious* definitively affirms the descriptive power and validity of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) as a robust framework for understanding pragmatic behavior, even within the context of the often hyperbolic and deliberate discourse of American teen sitcoms. The core empirical finding of this research establishes

that Tori Vega, as the central protagonist, employs the entire spectrum of the four main politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson: Bald-on-Record (BON), Positive Politeness (PP), Negative Politeness (NP), and Off-Record (OR). This comprehensive strategic repertoire not only indicates Tori's high level of pragmatic competence but also underscores her remarkable adaptability in navigating the complex and frequently shifting social dynamics of Hollywood Arts High School. Crucially, however, the frequency distribution of these strategies is not uniform, a fact that yields vital insights into Tori's dominant communicative style and her priorities in maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Statistically and observationally, the most frequent strategy within Tori's repertoire is Negative Politeness (NP). This strategic dominance is theoretically significant because it suggests that, despite the high levels of familiarity and close friendships characteristic of the high school setting, Tori's primary communicative goal is often to protect her interlocutors' Negative Face—that is, their desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition or hindrance. This heavy reliance on NP, realized through tactics such as the frequent use of hedging, conventional indirectness (e.g., "Would it be possible for you to help me with this?"), minimizing the weight of the imposition, and explicit apologies for Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), indicates that Tori operates with a constant awareness of the potential threat to others' personal space, time, or freedom of action. This finding serves as a valuable challenge to the simplistic assumption that closely-knit social groups will rely solely on Positive Politeness. Instead, the competitive, high-pressure, and often dramatic environment of Hollywood Arts necessitates constant face-management, where even close friends are often engaged in simultaneous rivalry or personal conflict. Tori's use of NP is a calculated effort to mitigate the weight of the requests and directives she issues, ensuring her friends feel their autonomy is respected, thereby making compliance more likely and shielding the underlying relationship from strain. For example, when Tori asks André to dedicate significant time to work on a song with her, she rarely uses direct commands; instead, she employs elaborate pre-sequences and softening devices to make the imposition appear smaller, thus respecting André's negative face. This strategic choice is an acknowledgment of the often high social distance perceived when making high-cost requests, irrespective of the emotional closeness of the relationship.

Conversely, the Positive Politeness (PP) strategy, though lower in frequency than NP, proves essential for establishing and sustaining in-group solidarity and friendship bonds. Tori disseminates PP tactics—such as compliments, the use of in-group identity markers (e.g., nicknames, slang), seeking common ground, and joking—primarily with her inner circle, such as Cat Valentine and André Harris. These tactics are indispensable for reinforcing shared history and reciprocal acceptance (Positive Face). The function of PP in this context is clearly affiliative. When Tori uses exaggerated compliments or references shared knowledge, she is effectively signaling that she values her friends' characteristics and believes they share a common worldview, thus mitigating FTAs that arise from casual criticism or disagreement. Nevertheless, the limited frequency of PP, especially when benchmarked against NP, reinforces the notion that Tori views her communicative role as a balance: prioritizing respect for autonomy (NP) while selectively using solidarity markers (PP) to reinforce the emotional core of her relationships.

The third strategy, Off-Record (OR), plays a distinctive and functionally vital role in the sitcom discourse. The OR strategy, involving indirectness, sarcasm, irony, metaphorical language, and rhetorical questions, is the chief instrument in generating the humor that characterizes the show. By employing OR, Tori effectively performs an FTA (e.g., criticizing Trina's lack of talent) while simultaneously affording herself plausible deniability. The message is conveyed indirectly, allowing the addressee to infer the meaning but giving Tori an "out" if challenged. This strategic ambiguity is the very mechanism of comedic tension and release in *Victorious*. Sarcasm, in particular, is a prevalent OR device, used by Tori to express underlying frustration or disapproval in a socially acceptable and humorous manner. For instance, when Tori uses exaggerated compliments that are clearly contrary to observable facts, she engages in irony, a form of OR that threatens the addressee's positive face by making them the subject of a joke, yet its off-record nature mitigates the directness of the attack. This finding strengthens the theoretical link between pragmatic ambiguity and televised comedy, positioning the OR strategy as the primary linguistic engine for the sitcom genre.

Finally, the Bald-on-Record (BON) strategy, the most direct and unmitigated form of communication, is utilized by Tori in specific, high-stakes contexts. BON is employed when efficiency and clarity are paramount and face-management is momentarily relegated to secondary concern, or when the speaker is under great emotional authority or duress. Empirical data confirms that Tori uses BON for direct commands and requests (e.g., ordering lunch without mitigation), to express intense frustration and disapproval (e.g., confronting Trina about her behavior), and for acts of emotional sincerity or assertiveness (e.g., directly taking responsibility for a mistake to defend a friend). In these moments, Tori chooses maximum clarity over mitigation of threat, signaling that the need to perform the FTA truthfully outweighs the risk to face. This strategic placement of BON suggests that Tori possesses the rhetorical flexibility to shift into an authoritative or highly expressive mode when the situation demands immediate, unambiguous action.

In synthesis, the research findings paint a portrait of Tori Vega as a highly sophisticated pragmatic negotiator. Her communication is not accidental but a calculated process of weighing the three key variables—Power, Distance, and Weight of Imposition—as proposed by Brown and Levinson. The dominance of Negative Politeness highlights her foundational commitment to relational respect and autonomy management, a necessary strategy for navigating her competitive and proximate school environment. Her skillful deployment of Off-Record strategies demonstrates her ability to successfully integrate social critique with the need to generate humor for her audience and her peers. The strategic use of Bald-on-Record showcases her ability to assert authority or express deep emotion when necessary. The research thus not only validates the Brown and Levinson model but also significantly contributes to media linguistic studies by empirically demonstrating how strategic politeness management serves as a key component of characterization and narrative development within the comedic television genre. The study provides a strong argument that the variability in Tori's politeness choices—ranging from careful mitigation to stark sarcasm—is the linguistic mechanism that allows her to adapt, build relationships, and ultimately succeed in the complex, performative social world of *Victorious*.

CONCLUSSION

This research analyzed the politeness strategies employed by the character Tori Vega in the comedy series *Victorious*, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. The Conclusion establishes that Tori Vega effectively utilizes all four politeness strategies—Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Off-Record, and Bald-on-Record—to manage her interactions. The key finding is the dominance of Positive Politeness strategies, which reflects Tori's friendly, supportive, and empathetic nature as the main protagonist. Furthermore, the strategic application of these linguistic tactics is essential to the show's comedic success; for instance, Off-Record strategies (such as sarcasm) add layers of humor, while Bald-on-Record tactics heighten comedic reactions. Overall, Tori's dialogues prove that politeness strategies are instrumental in enhancing both character development and the comedic elements within a narrative, while also effectively shaping her social dynamics. Based on these findings, the study offers several Suggestions. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies on other *Victorious* characters or similar series, and to analyze how cultural contexts influence politeness in global media. For linguistic studies and educators, this analysis highlights the value of using entertainment media to teach pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic variation. Finally, media practitioners (writers and creators) are encouraged to apply these insights to design more relatable and multidimensional characters by intentionally balancing politeness and directness to maximize both character appeal and humor.

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