

# Positive Impoliteness Strategies In The Movie “The Good Wife” Season 1

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## **Abstract:**

*This study was conducted to find out what positive impoliteness strategies appear in the Movie “The Good Wife” season 1. 58 conversations in 23 episodes of the movie were analyzed. The result shows that nine out of ten strategies suggested by Culpeper (1996) are used by characters in the movie. The strategy with the highest percentage of occurrences is seeking disagreement and ignoring the other has the lowest percentage of occurrences.*

**Keywords:** *impoliteness, face, positive impoliteness strategies*

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## I. Introduction

Communication can be simply understood as a basic human activity to transmit and receive information. The communication process is governed by a lot of factors such as subjects, purposes, circumstances, methods, ect. For this process to be successful, communicators should demonstrate linguistic and non-linguistic politeness. However, in reality, in addition to the positive aspect of communication to maintain harmony, which is politeness, there exists an opposite side or the negative side, which is impoliteness.

Intentional impoliteness in communication is a behavior with the purpose of hurting hearers' reputation or face. Compared to studies on politeness strategies in social interactions, impoliteness strategies have not really received much attention (Lana Jovanovic, 2021). Building on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Culpeper (1996) developed a theoretical framework for impoliteness, which is a necessary complement to the politeness theory. Culpeper's impoliteness model includes five superstrategies which are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness and withhold politeness. This study investigates positive impoliteness strategies used conversations taken from the American movie “The Good Wife”, season 1.

## II. Literature Review

### Face and Impoliteness

Erving Goffman, a sociologist noted for his studies of face and related rituals of social interaction, defines face 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). Deriving from Goffman's definition, Brown & Levinson (1987) contend that “face is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. They suggest face consists in two related aspects which are positive face and negative face. Positive face is the desire that an individual's wants and needs are respected by others, whereas negative face is the desire for “freedom of action”. The definition of face is the core from which politeness and impoliteness theories have been developed.

While the focus of politeness theory has been on the use of communication techniques to foster social harmony in interactions, the focus of impoliteness one is the opposite. According to Bousfield (2008), “impoliteness is the broad opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully delivered.” It is clear that impoliteness can occur when interlocutors engage in a non-cooperative conversation, therefore, the identity and face of communicators are damaged. Culpeper (2005) states that “impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).”

### Impoliteness strategies

Based on Brown & Levinson’s politeness superstrategies, Culpeper (1996) suggests impoliteness superstrategies as follows:

- *Bald on record impoliteness* - the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way.
- *Positive impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.
- *Negative impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.
- *Sarcasm or mock politeness* - the FFA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.
- *Withhold politeness* - the absence of politeness work where it would be expected.

He also suggests a list of strategies for positive and negative impoliteness. This research only focuses on positive impoliteness strategies which include:

- Ignore, snub the other
- Exclude the other from an activity
- Disassociate from the other
- Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic
- Use inappropriate identity markers
- Use obscure or secretive language
- Seek disagreement
- Make the other feel uncomfortable
- Use taboo words
- Call the other names

### III. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to analyze a corpus of 58 conversations taken from the movie “*The Good Wife*” broadcast on CBS in 2009, season 1 with 23 episodes. The movie is about Alicia Florrick and her husband, Peter Florrick, who is a former district attorney of Cook County, Illinois. He is imprisoned after a political and sexual corruption scandal. At that time, Alicia, who has spent the previous 13 years as a stay-at-home mother, returns to work as a lawyer to provide for her two children.

Steps for collecting and analyzing data are:

- Step 1: Download the movie script on the website: [https://sublikescript.com/series/The\\_Good\\_Wife-1442462](https://sublikescript.com/series/The_Good_Wife-1442462)
- Step 2: Watch the movie and select conversations that contain impolite speeches. The episode, time, setting, characters are also recorded.
- Step 3: Reread each conversation, and categorize all strategies based on impoliteness strategies suggested by Culpeper's (1996).
- Step 4: Analyze the data.

### IV. Results And Discussion

The total number of impoliteness strategy occurrences in 58 conversations is 111 times, in which positive impoliteness strategies appear 59 times. The table below presents the proportion of each strategy in details:

Positive impoliteness strategy	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Ignore the other	2	3.4%
Exclude the other from an activity	11	18.6%
Disassociate from the other	7	11.9%
Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic	8	13.6%
Use inappropriate identity markers	3	5.1%
Seek disagreement	16	27.1%
Make the other feel uncomfortable	4	6.8%
Use taboo words	5	8.5%
Call the other names	3	5.1%
Total	59	100%

**Table 1. Frequency of positive impoliteness strategies**

The results show that the strategy of seeking disagreement is used with the highest frequency, accounting for 27.1% of the total number of positive impoliteness strategies. This is followed by strategies of excluding the other from an activity, being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, disassociating from the other, using taboo words, making the other feel uncomfortable, calling the other names, using inappropriate identity markers, and ignoring the other. The strategy of using obscure or secretive language does not appear in this research corpus.

Next, positive impoliteness strategies will be analyzed in order of the highest to the lowest occurrence rate.

**(a) Strategy of seeking disagreement or avoiding agreement**

This strategy appears 16 times, accounting for 27.1% of the positive impoliteness strategies. In communication, the speaker always needs the hearer to support and agree with his/her opinions, which means his positive face is enhanced. However, in many situations in the research corpus, the characters express disagreement with each other.

Conversation 1: Below is the conversation between Alicia and her husband, Peter.

*Peter: Hey, listen, thanks for playing the breadwinner for a while. It's not going to last forever. Lawyers think the appellate court is going to hear my case. If they overturn it, **everything goes back to normal** .*

*Alicia: **It's not, Peter. It's never going back to normal** .*

(Episode 1)

This conversation takes place in prison when Alicia visits Peter. At this time, Alicia has returned to work as a lawyer after many years of staying at home to take care of the family. Peter expresses his wish that everything will be as good as before, but Alicia denies it by using the negative structure " **It's not, Peter. It's never going back to normal**".

**(b) Strategy of excluding the other from an activity**

This strategy appears 11 times, accounting for 18.6% of the positive impoliteness strategies. The interlocutor's positive face desire is to participate in a common activity, but in this case the speaker separates the addressee from that activity, causing his positive face to be damaged.

Conversation 2. This is the conversation between Alicia, Richard and Terry outside the courtroom:

*Richard: You want to explain to me why the attorney I hired for my son just got turned away?*

*Alicia: Didn't Lauren tell you? I was there when...*

*Terry: Terry Strega. And excuse me for saying so, Mrs. Florrick, but I think you ran over your head.*

*Richard: Terry's been a defense attorney for more than 20 years. He's a top-rated ABA member. He's well-known and well-respected. So thank you for your time, but **we'll take it from here, okay?***

*Alicia: Your son asked me to represent him.*

(Episode 3)

Richard's son is under investigation for murder and he asks Alicia to represent him in court. This is not what Richard wants, as he has hired a more reputable lawyer, Terry. Richard uses the statement " **we'll take it from here**" and the question " *okay?*" as an indirect request that Alicia not participate in the case any further and Alicia's reaction shows that she does not accept the request. This is the strategy of excluding someone from an activity.

**(c) Strategy of being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic**

This strategy appears 8 times, accounting for 13.6% of the positive impoliteness strategies. The speaker shows no interest, no sympathy, no concern for the hearer, which violates the hearer's need for positive face. The consequences of this strategy can cause disharmony, affecting the relationship between the communicators.

Conversation 2. This is the conversation between Alicia and Gerald Kozka, who used to be Peter's subordinate.

*Gerald: Mrs. Florrick. Gerald Kozko.*

*Alicia: Yes, I know who you are.*

*Gerald: I just need a minute.*

*Alicia: I'm leaving now.*

*Gerald: Please. I ...I want you to give your husband a message. I want you to tell him that my son had nothing to do with this. I was the one that made the deal with Childs. I'm cleaning up my mess. My son is completely...*

*Alicia: **No***

*Gerald: Mrs. Florrick.*

*Alicia: **No, that's it** . Mr. Kozko , **I'm not your go-between** . You want to give Peter a message, pick up the phone.*

*Gerald: Mrs. Florrick, you don't realize...*

*Alicia: Yes, **and I don't want to realize. I've had enough of everything** .*

*Gerald: You don't understand, I don't have anybody.*

*Alicia: You know what? **I don't care. I don't know you.** You don't know me.*

*Gerald: Help me.*

(Episode 20)

Gerald comes to see Alicia with the hope of gaining her sympathy in order to convince Peter to forgive him for his betrayal (colluding with Peter's rival). However, in the above dialogue, Alicia clearly shows that she does not care and pay attention to Gerald and his problem through the direct refusal: "No", "I'm not your go-between", "I don't want to realize. I've had enough of everything", "I don't care. I don't know you".

**(d). Strategy of disassociating from the other**

This strategy appears 7 times, accounting for 11.9% of the positive impoliteness strategies. Positive face includes the desire to be liked and to be considered as a member of the group. When the speaker wants to create distance, deny the relatedness or common points, it means that he is implementing this strategy, disassociating from the other.

Conversation 3. Peter and Alicia get to church and meet the bishop:

*Bishop: Welcome. Mrs. Florrick, would you ever like to talk sometime, just the two of us?*

*Alicia: No*

*Bishop: I have respected the way you stood by your husband. It's a lesson in forbearance.*

*Alicia: Well, it's a lesson in something*

(Episode 19)

When the bishop asks to speak to Alicia privately, she gives a direct refusal "No". This refusal shows that Alicia deliberately creates distance with the bishop, refuses to cooperate with him. In the research corpus, this strategy is expressed by refusals and requests such as "don't you ever come into my office without my permission" (episode 11).

**(e) Strategy of using taboo words**

This strategy appeared 5 times, accounting for 8.5% of the positive impoliteness strategies. Taboo words, including swear words, are words that are not viewed positively by society because they refer to inappropriate and offensive things. Taboo words often violate social norms and religious beliefs, are unpleasant and aggressive language, and should therefore not be used.

Conversation 4. Grace, Alicia's daughter, has a new friend, Shannon. Peter's mother, Jackie, goes to Shannon's house and meets Shannon's mother. Shannon's father is also in prison.

*Jackie: Your husband is in a much worse prison than my son. We should be worried about you, not us.*

*Shannon's Mom: Okay. You want to know why? Because your son put my husband in prison.*

*Jackie: He did not.*

*Shannon's mother: He was the state's attorney. My husband never sold a drug a day in his life, and your son put him in prison for ten years for something he didn't do.*

*Jackie: You're a very gullible woman.*

*Shannon's Mom: **And you're a bitch.***

*Jackie: My son is an honorable man. If he put his husband in prison, he deserved it.*

*Shannon's mom: **Go to hell.***

(Episode 10)

In the above conversation, two characters constantly use impolite words to attack each other's face. The strategy of using taboo words is used by both: "You're **a bitch**" and "Go to **hell**". According to Oxford dictionary, "bitch" is an offensive word when used to call a woman; "hell" is a swear word that some people use when they are upset and this word can cause discomfort to the interlocutor. In the research corpus, "hell" is used 5 times, "bitch" once and "damn" once.

**(f) Strategy of making the other feel uncomfortable**

This strategy appeared 4 times, accounting for 6.8% of the positive impoliteness strategies. This strategy is expressed when the speaker mentions sensitive topics that the hearer does not want.

Conversation 5. This is the conversation of Alicia, Daniel Golden (Peter's lawyer), the counselor, and the judge.

*Counselor: Mrs. Florrick, you mentioned the apartment is a threebedroom and you have two children. Would they share a room?*

*Alicia: No.*

*Counselor: So, you and your husband would share a room?*

*Alicia: Yes.*

*Counselor: You're saying under oath that you intend to share a bed with a man?*

*Daniel: Objection, Your Honor. Relevance?*

*Counselor: I'm simply establishing that there truly is a place for Mr. Florrick in everything that's...*

*Daniel: This is a private family matter, Your Honor.*

*Judge: That's enough, Counselor. Whether they intend to share a bed is of no concern to this Court.*

*Counselor: Thank you, Your Honor.*

(Episode 8)

At the trial, the counselor asks Alicia whether she and her family are ready to welcome Peter back. Although Alicia answers " Yes " to the counselor's first question " you and your husband would share a room? ", he continues to ask "You're saying under oath that you intend to share a bed with a man?". This time, Alicia does not answer. Her silence when asked the second question clearly shows that she is not comfortable with the counselor's question. Furthermore, this is also recognized by the lawyer and the judge when they intervene in the conversation by asserting that the question is really inappropriate because it is a private family matter.

#### g. Strategy of calling the other names

This strategy occurs 3 times, accounting for 5.1% of the positive impoliteness strategies. With this strategy, the speaker uses derogatory nominations which hurt the hearer's face.

Conversation 6: This is the conversation between two lawyers, Will and Diane, after a trial. In the trial, the prosecutor feels that Diane uses her personal relationship to affect the case.

*Will: You don't have the courtesy. You don't understand what you did to this company.*

*Diane: Okay, I'm getting out of here.*

*Will: Did it even happen for you to tell me?*

*Diane: No, it didn't. I was under the mistaken impression that it was my life.*

*Will: It's your life when it doesn't impact our clients.*

*Diane: It didn't impact our clients.*

*Diane: The jury ate it up. It was sex. It wasn't GSR or ballistics. It was sex.*

*Diane: I'm going home.*

*Will: If you had just told me, if you had just given me a sign...*

*Diane: Come on, come on. Don't be a hypocrite .*

*Will: A hypocrite? How am I a hypocrite?*

*Diane: Alicia.*

(Episode 18)

In this situation, both Will and Diane express their strong anger. Will blames Diane for bringing about negative effects on their company and their clients. When criticized by Will, Diane calls Will " a hypocrite," which makes Will even angrier.

#### h. Strategy of using inappropriate identity markers

This strategy appeared 3 times, accounting for 5.1% of the positive impoliteness strategies.

Conversation7: The situation takes place at the retrial of Clarence Wilcox, who was convicted of murdering a police officer. Matan Brody is the state's attorney who wants to prove Clarence Wilcox guilty.

*Judge: Now, Mr. Gardner, I'm finding now reason to reverse myself. And I think you've made a very strong fruit of the forbidden tree argument. If I can't trust Shores, then I can't trust the evidence that's tied to him. So, the lineup, the Bulls sweatshirt, the artist's sketch, they are now stricken from the record.*

*Matan: Your Honor ...*

*Judge: Oh, shut up, Matan. You've still got the eyewitness. That's the cornerstone of your case anyway. Now, Mrs. Flortick, Mr. Gardner, do you have any other tricks up your sleeve?*

(Episode 6)

In court, a formal setting, judges and lawyers mainly use their last names to address each other politely. However, in the above conversation, the judge refers to Matan by his first name instead of using Mr + last name (Brody). Along with the speech act of ordering to exclude the hearer from an activity, the use of this inappropriate identity marker demonstrates the judge's frustration and dissatisfaction with Matan Brody, therefore, Matan's positive face is also damaged.

#### i. Strategy of ignoring others

This strategy appears 2 times, accounting for 3.4% of the positive impolite strategies.

Conversation 8. Lemond Bishop, a new client, arrives at the law firm of Lockhart & Gardner to hire a lawyer.

*Lemond: Nice touch bringing the black guy*

*Julius: For your information, I'm an equity partner.*

*Lemond: Where are you from?*

*Julius: None of your business.*

*Lemond: I have a corporation. A large one. With a lot of employees.*

(Episode 16)

Lemond Bishop expects only Will and Diane to be present at the meeting, so Lemond is surprised and curious about Julius Cain's presence. When Lemond asks, "Where are you from?", Julius shows his disregards

for the question with the affirmative sentence “*None of your business*”. Thus, the hearer's positive face, the need of being noticed and shared, is violated. Eventually, Lemond has to accept this positive impoliteness strategy by changing the subject.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the result of this research shows that 9 out of 10 positive impoliteness strategies appear in the research corpus. Each of these strategies needs to be placed in context to clearly recognize the speaker's intention and the reason for positive face attacking. Hopefully, this study may be helpful to sociologists, writers, discourse analysts, playwrights, film critics and those who are interested in. Because of time constraint, negative impoliteness strategies haven't been investigated and they would be the topic of the next study.

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