A COMPARATIVE ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES FOUND IN ANIMATED SERIES *JAAN* AND *SOFIA THE FIRST*

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Abstract

The main aim of this research was to compare the type of politeness strategies found in animated cartoon series. The animation series is of two different cultures, i.e. Eastern and Western, nevertheless, both gave the message of goodness. With the help of House and Kasper's (2003) framework of the politeness strategies, which contain 11 main strategies, similarities and differences were found in politeness strategies. These strategies were Politeness Markers, Playdowns, Down-Toners, Hedges, Hesitators, Agent Avoiders, Understanders, Consultative Devices, Commiters, Forewarning, and Scope-Staters. The difference will be analyzed according to Levinson and Gumperz's (2002) "Rethinking Linguistic Relativity", which states that the meaning of utterances is constructed through background knowledge. It was determined that Jaan had more use of politeness strategies. The difference in politeness strategies is mainly due to the fact that in Jaan goodness is taught with respect to Islam, while in Sofia the First, the concept of pointlessness is associated with royalty ethics. Moreover, the difference in politeness strategies is also associated with the difference between the hierarchical community of Eastern civilization and that of Western communities.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Ethnography, politeness strategies, animated series

1. INTRODUCTION

Language tends to act as a carrier for the culture and traditions of the people speaking it, hence it helps in preserving the culture as well (Ahmad et al., 2022; Nair, 2023). Language

acquisition is regarded as an automatic and involuntary act (Amjad et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023). Children tend to learn language from their environment, for example by listening to their parents talk and the people surrounding them. A child may even acquire more than one language if they are constantly exposed to it. For example, in Pakistan, most children end up acquiring the national language Urdu, and the provisional language such as Pashto, Punjabi, or Sindhi. In today's world of advanced technologies (Akram et al., 2021; 2022; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023) electronic devices, TVs and especially cartoons also play an important role. Due to today's busy lifestyle, many parents tend to use TV cartoons to keep their children entertained and focused.

Cartoons are animated illustrations of real-life scenarios hence they can provide pseudo real conversations. They are a simple way for children to learn accents, native-sounding collocations, and interjections. Hence, as time passes, children tend to speak more naturally. If we expose a child, consciously or unconsciously, to an unfamiliar word for a long time, it starts to make sense and eventually is acquired by the child. This phenomenon occurs because each individual is born with Chomsky's Universal Grammar, which provides the ability to acquire and learn language through consistently exposed data (Gotseva, 2011).

In this modern era, cultural understanding maintains the momentum of effective communication particularly in the case of cross-culture exchange (Ma et al., 2024). This era is built on universally complex cultural discrepancies such as social distance, status, etc. The perception of all these universal phenomena differs from culture to culture (Nawaz et al., 2020; Ramzan et al., 2023). They define the acceptable extent to which the individual of culture should show friendliness or submissiveness in case of speech acts such as requests or apologies. Each culture and society has its levels of hierarchy, respect, social deference, and power, which ultimately affect the politeness system of each society. It is one of the central reasons for misunderstanding and miscommunication at the intercultural level. This cultural discrepancy in the use of politeness can be understood by observing the speech act of apology.

According to Nuredden (2008) the Arab's strategy of preserving their positive face even in case of apology by utilizing the strategies of avoiding a direct apology, which can be threatening to the speaker's face. Whereas Ogiermann (2006) described that in English, apologies are more focused on the negative face of both the speaker and hearer.

Even though, speech acts are usually considered to be inherently face-threatening for either the positive or the negative face of the speaker. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), apologies are inherently a part of negative politeness. Whereas the sociologist argues that the speaker's positive face is central to the apology, which makes it a positive politeness. Treating an apology as positive politeness considers the offender's face as well by assuring it of being noted and keeps the relationship conflict-free (Kousar, 2015).

Politeness is used universally to demonstrate etiquette and good upbringing, especially in children. The type of language utilized while talking often judges the politeness of the speaker. According to Leech, Politeness is mainly used to create social distance, demonstrate social power, to ad conflict, and maintain a society (Manik & Hutagaol, 2015). Hence, animation can help children to learn politeness strategies to maintain a healthy community. Unfortunately, it also raises concern, as in Pakistan, some animations are mainly in Hindi and English, which exhibit their respective culture. However, the politeness strategies that are used in different countries are different, which may cause some issues in politeness learning in Pakistani children.

1.1. Research Questions

2. How politeness strategies are utilized in children's cartoons?
3. How does the concept of politeness differ from culture to culture?
4. How much kid's animation series can be helpful in making children learn politeness strategies?

1.2. Significance of Research:

The findings of this study aim for a better understanding of the cultural differences in the use of politeness. With the increase in the popularity of animated series in the younger audience, it is important to determine their cultural influence and appropriability. This analysis will discuss how animated series play an important role in acquiring not only the vocabulary but the different politeness strategies as well. it will help in determining whether the politeness strategies used in an animated series of Western culture are suitable for Eastern culture. This research is beneficial to linguists and parents to understand the role of animated series in acquiring manners and politeness. Finally, this will also help us to understand how politeness is a universal phenomenon. And how it differs from culture to culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Politeness, a Pragmatical Phenomenon

When talking about the meaning of the word politeness, it is often inferred as being respectful and saying words like thank you, sorry, or please, the main aim is to make linguistical choices to maintain appropriate relationships with others. While, in pragmatic meaning politeness is a very important tool in ensuring the quality of speech and communication. (Holmes, 2008). Hence, Hirschova (2006) gives the pragmatical definition of politeness as a specific type of language usage that ensures "smooth communication, self-fulfillment, and self-defense" (ibid.: 171) of two individuals who are interchanging their ideas.

There had been a prevailing discussion on whether politeness is universal or not, as the questions on **Brown and Levinson (1987)** being Western biased arise. Even though it is claimed that their theory of politeness is not limited to Western culture, their initial research was primarily based on the English-speaking cultural norms. The focus on the face of an individual is viewed as contradictory to the hierarchical systems of the Eastern world. We deal with this phenomenon under the concept of linguistic relativity, according to which language and all the strategies used are per one's culture. Hence, the concept of giving respect and being polite may vary from culture to culture.

The main difference between East Asian and Western culture is due to the inclination of the Eastern world toward ideology and its influence in practice. Studies have shown that there might be multiple societies based on how much ideology is utilized in the actual practices of politeness. This suggests the complexity of politeness practices in the Eastern world (Cook, 2022). Even though, there is some variation in culture, norms and politeness strategies used across societies. However, the underlying concepts such as respect, social harmony, and face-saving are present in each culture. Hence, politeness strategies can be used in different ways in the same context across cultures.

The comparison between the politeness of Europe and Western culture was done by Sinkevičiūtė (2010) by comparing the politeness strategies used in the first encounter conversation in the British movie, Love Actually and the Spanish movie, Va a ser que nadie es Perfecto. Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies (1987) was applied to

demonstrate the difference between the two cultures, it was concluded that the Spanish culture tends to use positive politeness while the British culture leaned toward negative politeness. New tendencies of using politeness strategies were found in Peninsular Spanish.

The observation of the politeness strategies in the Shanghai Knights film enables the reader to analyze the effect of cultural background on politeness (Ernovilinda, 2020). The difference between the cultural backgrounds is shown through the politeness strategies used by the two main characters of the film. The study is qualitative and descriptive utilizing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. It was concluded that to understand the face-threatening act it is important to understand different politeness strategies especially to achieve effective communication. The most used strategy was the bald on record while the least used strategy was off record politeness strategy, by the main characters.

Another article by Fitri (2022) discusses the politeness theory with the effect of cultural background by analyzing the Disney animated movie "Mulan". The main character is from China and the story takes place in China as well, where more focus on politeness is present. It was a qualitative study, utilizing a checklist formed with the help of the Brown and Levinson (1987) framework of politeness strategies. Positive politeness was most frequently used in the movie. While the negative and bald on record were the second most used ones. The off record and don't do FTA did not occur rarely in film, depicting the culture effecting the usage of politeness strategies.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Linguistic Relativity

Linguistic relativity suggests that language plays a crucial role in shaping our thoughts and understanding of the world around us (Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024). This concept of relativity is also related to the politeness theories. It means that the language of each culture reflects its various norms and strategies regarding the expression of politeness. Each culture has its use of speech acts, strategies, or honorifics (Ramzan et al., 2023). Hence this whole relation suggests that the perception of polite language is different in each culture; what is considered polite in one culture might not be considered so in other cultures.

2.2.2 House and Kasper politeness strategies

House and Kasper (2003) provided a taxonomy in Watts (2003) that provided eleven politeness structures to represent the Explicit Performative Markers (EPMs) of politeness. EPMs are present in varying forms of social interactions in different linguistical practices. Their absence is often marked by impoliteness.

a. **Hedges**

c. **Understaters**

d. **Downtoners**

e. **Politeness Markers**

f. **Play-downs**

f. **Committers**

g. **Consultative device**

h. **Forewarning**

i. **Hesitators**

j. **Scope staters**

k. **Agent avoider**

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is related to the use of politeness strategies in their animation series and their difference in use caused by social context. Two children's cartoons with the message of goodness are being used. One is *Jaan* which is a Pakistan-based animation series with the main message of goodness according to Islam, while the other is *Sofia the First* which is an American-based animation series, with the message of good ethics and morals in relation to royalty. The House and Kasper (2003) framework of politeness, which was presented in Watts's "Politeness", is used to observe the politeness strategies used in both shows. This research utilizes a mixed methodology and it is ethnographic in nature.

3.1 Research Tool

The research utilizes two tools; observations and Antcoc 4.2.2 software to extract the uses of politeness strategies. The use of Antcoc 4.2.2 software is to ensure the accuracy of the data collected by the observation. Mainly two functions of the Antcoc software are utilized; keyword in context and the words tab sorted by frequency. The observation will provide the

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qualitative data, while the Antcoc will provide both quantitative and qualitative data for the comparison of the two series.

3.2 Nature of the Research

As research is the comparison of the politeness strategies utilized in the animated series and how it is affected by the social and cultural context, it is ethnographic research. It employs a mixed-method approach to the research. The observations provide qualitative data and the Antcoc 4.2.2 provides both qualitative data through keyword in context and quantitative data through words sorted by frequency.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Population

The data is collected from the animated series *Jaan* and *Sofia the First*. Both series are taken with the intention of obtaining series from different cultures.

3.3.2 Sample

A 10,000-word sample is taken from each series. The sample was taken from the first few episodes of both series. Almost the first five episodes of *Sofia the First* were used to get 10,000 words and the first nine episodes of *Jaan* were used to get 10,000 words. It is a systematic sampling.

3.4 Research Design

The research aims to compare the use and context of the use of politeness strategies in the animated series *Jaan* and *Sofia the First*. Firstly, the first 5 episodes of *Sofia the First* almost forming 10,000 words and the first 9 episodes of *Jaan* forming 10,000 words, will be observed to find the linguistic relativity and the utilization of politeness strategies. Then each 10,000 words data will be analyzed through Antcoc version 4.2.2 as a corpus. To analyze it, two functions of Antcoc; keyword in context (KWIC) and the word sorted by frequency will be used. It will help to form the quantitative and qualitative data for the final analysis.

Frequency of Politeness Strategies in animated series		
Politeness strategies	*Jaan*	*Sofia the First*
Hedges	106	117
Understaters	32	19

Downtoners	55	52
Politeness markers	380	196
Playdowns	62	48
Committers	20	19
Consultative devices	38	12
Forewarnings	69	37
Hesitator	174	119
Scope staters	0	1
Agent Avoider	37	7

5. DISCUSSION
5.1. Discussion Analysis
5.1.1. Usage of Politeness Strategies in Animations
a. Animation as pseudo-real world

The main aim of animations for kids is to provide a medium of entertainment while simultaneously providing some educational benefits as well. These types of animations usually try to teach everyday skills like problem solving, how to act in society, and teamwork (Rafiee, 2023). These examples can be found in both animated series that are taken for analysis. For example, for problem-solving, Sofia tries to cover the broken window, or Jan tries to remake the box that he had accidentally broken. For teamwork, Sofia works with her sibling to help the trolls regain their honor, and Jan works with his friends together to find the moon. For how to act in society, Sofia learns that one should treat all of their friends equally irrespective of their social status and Jan learns that we must help and donate to help the poor.

They also aim to teach kids essential social traits such as bravery, kindness, respect, and politeness. The language used in the animation is one of the important mediums to convey these messages. The storyline of these cartoons provides the kids with a way to experience different scenarios, which ultimately allows them to practice and learn the language to communicate effectively.

b. Politeness through paralinguistic feature

Para-linguistical features can be the body language, intonation of the voice, facial expression, etc. In the series, the help of paralinguistic features constantly showed politeness. In

the animated series "Sofia the First" some examples of the use of paralinguistic features showing politeness are; the bowing down in front of the king and the queen of the kingdom, Sofia constantly had a smile while talking to others. She maintains a constant slower tempo of speech and a polite demeanor while talking to others. However, when she is stressed and talking to herself, her animals, and even sometimes with her siblings and friends, she talks at a rapid pace, indicating impoliteness. This suggests that Sofia talked politely with her parents and other elderly figures, but tends not to use much politeness strategies when she is talking to people who belong to the same age group as her.

While in the animated series *Jaan*, Jan talks at a slower pace and pays attention to others while talking constantly throughout the show. The main protagonist Jan is shown living in a society that is centered on Eastern culture and religious teaching. Hence, his politeness throughout the show can be viewed on Eastern cultural grounds. It is also the reason why, Jan seldom shows impolite behavior through paralinguistic features.

c.   Politeness through linguistical feature

In both series, politeness is mainly expressed through linguistic features. The eleven strategies of House and Kasper politeness are utilized in both series. In the corpus of about 10,000 words of *Jaan*, these strategies are used 979 times, while in the corpus of *Sofia the first* they are used 627 times. Normally it's used as a word that softens the illocutionary force of the statement. They are usually utilized when there is a statement that suggests some personal opinion, social issue, request, advice, insufficient information, etc. Words and phrases like thank you, you are welcome, greeting, sorry, honorifics, etc., are generically used to indicate politeness. However, "That", "sort of", "kind of", "modal verbs", "think", "feel", "just", "like" etc., are also used for politeness purposes mainly to weaken the illocutionary force.

Indirect tenses, passive voice, or past tense are used to indicate politeness. The use of these tenses, allows the addressee to feel like they have the power and authority. The use of these tenses and words allows the speaker to transfer the social authority to the addressee. They minimize the speaker's assertive nature, creating some space for doubt. Politeness cannot be judged based on the transfer of authority by choice of tense or words, but the overall cultural context is also important.

5.1.2. Difference in the Concept of Politeness Between Eastern And Western Culture
a. Differences in politeness caused by culture.

Although the same strategies were present in both series, there was a difference in the way they were utilized and by whom they were utilized. These differences were mainly due to the social systems. Eastern societies are more leaning toward collectivism, there is an emphasis on authority power distance based on social status and age difference. On the other hand, western society leans toward Individualism, autonomy, and an overall flatter social structure. The language used and the politeness strategies used in both series portray this difference.

In the series, *Jaan* there is the constant use of "Ap", which is a politeness marker, a polite and most formal way to address someone in Urdu. Especially the character Jan who is the youngest in the series addresses everyone most formally. One of the noticeable differences in politeness was the constant use of honorifics for everyone. In the case of family members, there was an addition of "Jan" translated as "dear" to indicate love and respect for the elders in the family. While in "Sofia the First", the series took place in the royal setting, there was the use of royal honorifics like princess, queen, king, and your royal highness only. While within the royal family and for common people, there was not much use of honorifics. This signifies the role of power distance based on age and social status.

Similarly, the Western favor for individualism and Eastern favor for collectivism can be observed in the use of the consultative device, which shows that the protagonist of *Jaan* almost does everything after obtaining permission and taking advice from his elders, while "Sofia" tends to do things on her own without letting her parents know about it. The use of agent avoider to advise someone with the help of generalization is used a lot more in *Jaan* than in *Sofia the first*.

The difference in the politeness strategies used in both cultures is seen in the frequency of usage of politeness strategies. These strategies are used more frequently in *Jaan* even though in the series all the characters mostly fulfill all the maxims but still use the politeness strategies for the sake of being respectful and polite to each other. However, in the *Jaan* series, there are no instances of refusal and on the rare circumstances when there is a presence of refusal it is indirectly and accompanied by the face-saving politeness strategies for both the hearer and speaker.

The difference in the use and the context of the use of politeness can be seen in the use of the expression of gratitude in both series. In *Sofia the First,* there is a greater use of "thanks" rather than "thank you". "Thanks" is deemed as an informal version of the formal "thank you".

Similarly, the difference in kinship titles highlights the difference in the value of family harmony in both cultures. In the series "Jan", the main protagonist constantly uses kinship titles such as Ammi (mother), Bhai (older brother), khala (mother's sister), Dadi (father's mother), etc. Whereas, in Sofia, there was the use of only "mama", "papa", and "aunt" and she addresses her older sibling by name. In *Sofia the First* aunt was used generally for the sister of the parent and unlike "Jan" where it is used to address women, it was specified only for family members.

There was a more prominent use of politeness strategy forewarning in Eastern culture. Especially in the case of approval, apology, and request, it is utilized to make these requests as subtle as possible to preserve the face of the speaker and maintain harmony in relation.

Whereas, in *Jaan*, he uses the forewarning to prepare the listener and then uses politeness markers such as please for requesting.

b. Generalized politeness

Irrespective of the differences in the culture of Eastern and Western society and their use of politeness. Some politeness principles are generalized. For example, the use of hedges is done almost in every culture to save one's face. It is because hedges are simply used to tone down the impact of impoliteness and the floating of the maxims of conversation. The maxims of conversation should be fulfilled in each culture, as they are universal in making the conversation more effective. This could also be seen in both series where there is almost equal use of the hedges. Similarly, there is the use of other techniques such as playdowns, committers, Understaters, etc., which all are used to soften the illocutionary impact. Even though the receiver of these techniques and the context of their use is different, nevertheless their presence and abundance cannot be disregarded.

Furthermore, there is use of the expression of gratitude and apology can be seen in both series. There is the use of kinship titles like mama, papa, aunt, etc. That is considered universal. Politeness markers such as good morning and good night are used in both series as well. There is the use of expression of request in the form of please and in the form of can, could, and would. These modal verbs are also used in both cultures as consultative devices for requesting or asking

for advice. There is the use of honorific titles such as Sir, madam, Mr. And Mrs., etc. There is the use of universal greetings as politeness markers such as good morning, good night, etc.

5.1.3. Can cartoons play a role in making the children learn politeness strategy?

In the antecedent discussion, we have established the fact that the animations aim to provide a pseudo-real-world, but more stylistically and imaginatively. Along with the constant use of politeness strategies and the recreation of life-based scenarios in animation, it would not be wrong to claim that cartoon does play an important role in making children learn the politeness strategy. However, the difference between the cultural values can make us question the extent to which animation can make a child acquire learning politeness in a culturally appropriate way.

Even though politeness strategies are used universally, yet there is a difference in the context they are used and with whom. These are defined by the cultural norms and define the society. Along with issues in intercultural communication it can cause, subconscious inappropriate acquisition of cultural value, resulting in an impolite way of communication.

A kid's perception of social norms of the country that he/she is living in may alter corresponding to the shows that they watch. This influence will ultimately result in the kid adapting to the social norms of the other cultures, creating difficulty and confusion in navigating through the social situations.

The long-term consequence can be the loss of cultural identity. As the child adapts to the norms of another culture in an age where they don't have a deep understanding of their social value, can generate disconnection from their own social and cultural root that ultimately help them in defining their identity.

Watching the animated series of another can cause children to form cultural stereotypes, as they tend to believe whatever is being shown on these shows. This can lead to them not respecting other cultures, or even their own culture, and not understanding the boundaries of cultural sensitivity.

Parents should encourage open discussion with the kids. A safe environment should be provided to the kids where they can voice out their doubts about the stereotypes and the content they watch. This open discussion could also help a parent in providing them with identity, and

significance of their own culture, and the ability to distinguish it from others while simultaneously respecting others as well.

Through parental guidance, it is important to steer the kids toward the positive influences and away from the negative ones. For the positive influence, to develop, the content consumed by them should be monitored and they should be educated about cultural and social norms.

5.2 Conclusion

Animated series are usually considered as one of the most commonly used ways of passing free time of children. As they tend to keep children's attention occupied easily for a long time. Yet this seemingly harmless way of passing free time could have both negative and positive influence on the kids. The research discusses the difference in the way the politeness strategies are used by using the politeness framework of the House and Kasper. Although according to linguistical relativity, there is a constant use of politeness strategies proposed by House and Kasper, the difference in the context and frequency of their use could be easily found in both series. The animated series "Jan" portrayed the high frequency of use of politeness strategies in a wider context influenced by the social distance and appropriate formality level according to various variables such as age, religion social statutes, etc. Hence, the influence of the social and cultural norms could be easily found in the animations and their use of politeness strategies.

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