

Lana S. Jovanović¹

University of Nis

Faculty of Philosophy

Doctoral Academic Studies of Foreign Philology

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7925-4448>

IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES USED IN STAND-UP COMEDY BY DAVE CHAPPELLE²

This paper explores the use of impoliteness strategies in Dave Chappelle's stand-up comedy, focusing on how he combines positive and negative strategies to intensify face-threatening acts (FTAs) and enhance humor. It conducts a descriptive pragmatic discourse analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, of a stand-up comedy transcript downloaded from the Internet. It categorizes excerpts following Culpeper's (1996) framework on positive and negative impoliteness strategies and examines their combinations. The analysis reveals a frequent use of multiple strategies, particularly the combination of the negative strategies of condescending and associating a person with something unfavorable with the positive strategies of using taboo words and offensive labels to refer to a person. These combinations are frequently and simultaneously employed and as a result create a stronger FTA, but they do not intensify the humorous effect. Positive strategies, such as using taboo words and calling the other names, predominantly function as intensifiers that strengthen the impact of negative strategies, rather than as the main sources of humor. Negative strategies, including condescension, scorn or ridicule, and explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect, are the ones having a primary role in employing FTAs in the corpus. The multilayered use of impoliteness strategies demonstrates their important role for FTAs in comedic discourse.

Keywords: Multiple Impoliteness Strategies, Positive Impoliteness, Negative Impoliteness, Stand-Up Comedy Humor, Face-Threatening Act

Introduction

Despite being shaped to a considerable extent by cultural interpretations, humor may be said to be “a universal aspect of human experience, occurring in all cultures and virtually all individuals throughout the world” (GUIDI 2017: 18). It is also an inevitable part of stand-up comedy and stand-up comedians' main tool. Some of the definitions of the term “stand-up” include “a form of talk...that implies a context that allows for reaction, participation, and engagement on the part of those to whom the stand-up comedian is speaking” (BRODIE 2008: 153), and “performance by a single person telling jokes and funny stories on stage” (CAMBRIDGE ONLINE DICTIONARY). In Bhargava and Chi-

1 l.jovanovic-19602@filfak.ni.ac.rs

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ana's (2023) work, humor is described as a tool for challenging social norms and offering critical perspectives on political and societal issues while stand-up comedy is portrayed as a form of performance where comedians interact directly with their audience, using humor to not only entertain, but also to criticize and examine power structures.

Regarding the origin of the term "stand-up", there is no agreement upon the exact date of its coining. Namely, Double (2014) explains that initial findings reveal the earliest recorded usage of the term "stand-up" in a 1966 article from "The Listener" while the subsequent research uncovers earlier instances of the term in publications such as Webster's Third New International Dictionary and a radio interview with Lenny Bruce dating back to 1959. However, following Zachorska (2020), the term "stand-up" in comedy context was first recorded in 1948 when Lou Holtz was referred to as a "stand-up comic" by Variety magazine as well as that it originated from the upright posture of comedians during performances and developed into a popular form of entertainment. Regarding the term "humor", as noted by Hempelmann (2017), it is relatively modern considering the fact that its current broad sense gained prominence in the 20th century. Prior to this, its meaning was much narrower, originating from classical concepts of dominant character traits such as choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, or sanguine. Namely, in Latin, humor means fluid and becomes part of medieval medical language, representing the four main bodily fluids and their relation to temperaments (HEMPELMANN 2017).

Additionally, humor and therefore stand-up comedy can also be used as a powerful tool for performing the so-called face-threatening acts by employing impoliteness strategies. Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are communicative actions that challenge or undermine an individual's face, which refers to their social identity and self-image in interaction. It can either threaten their desire for approval and respect (positive face) or their desire for autonomy and freedom (negative face) ((BROWN, LEVINSON 1987; LACHENICHT 1980; AUSTIN 1990; SPENCER-OATEY 2002). Culpeper et al. (2003) were among the first to take into consideration the possibility of *multiple strategies*, that is, the possibility of the simultaneous use of positive and negative impoliteness strategies to perform FTA, but following their work, numerous authors have studied the application of Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies within the area of entertaining impoliteness (CULPEPER 2005; CULPEPER, HOLMES 2013; TODDINGTON 2015; HAFISA, HANIDAR 2020; ALMAMOORY, ALWAN 2022; ŞEKERCI 2023; ELKHOLY, AHSANI 2023), and particularly in Stand-Up Comedy discourse (YUANITA, 2019; OGOANAH, BLESSING 2020; ZACHORSKA 2020), but only a few have dealt with the possibility of their combinations (KUBÍČKOVÁ 2022). What specifically has been suggested is that one face-threatening act may include the attack on both positive and negative face of the interlocutor which in turn makes FTA stronger. This paper addresses this gap by investigating whether combining these strategies in stand-up comedy can intensify the FTA and enhance the humorous effect.

Theoretical Background

Despite the multitude of disciplinary perspectives analyzing it (psychology, sociology, philosophy, linguistics etc.), humor theories are commonly categorized into three main groups: incongruity/cognitive, relief/release, and superiority/aggression (FERGUSON, FORD 2008; BANAS et al. 2011; SCHEEL, GOCKEL 2017; ATTARDO, RASKIN

2017). According to the incongruity theory of humor, laughter emerges where there is an unexpected clash between two contrasting ideas, creating a cognitive conflict that triggers laughter (LARKIN- GALIÑANES 2017). However, criticisms of this theory highlight its lack of standardized definitions and inconsistencies in terminology, arguing that humor is not solely dependent on incongruity, as other factors influence its interpretation as well (FILANI 2016; LARKIN- GALIÑANES 2017). The superiority approach to humor, present among ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle up until the 19th century, suggests that laughter often arises from a feeling of superiority over others' misfortunes, especially in areas like politics, ethnicity, or gender (FILANI 2016; LARKIN- GALIÑANES 2017). Nevertheless, following Filani (2016), critics argue that not all expressions of superiority lead to laughter, and there's a risk of laughter being negative and aggressive. The release or relief theory, prominent from the 19th century onwards but previously already implied by classical writers (such as Aristotle, Cicero, Kant) (FILANI 2016; LARKIN- GALIÑANES 2017), suggests that humor serves as a way for people to ease tensions since laughter occurs when individuals release stored psychic energy thereby transforming socially unacceptable impulses into acceptable ones (FILANI 2016). This explanation can also be found in Freud's (1991) writings although critics suggest that his emphasis on laughter might detract from the broader understanding of humor.

Impoliteness, often overshadowed by politeness studies, has received more attention from scholars like Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008), who challenge the notion that impoliteness is merely the opposite of politeness. Drawing upon Goffman's (1967) concept of face, which involves the effort to maintain a favorable social image, they argue that impoliteness specifically targets an individual's face, resulting in face-threatening acts (FTAs). These FTAs can be directed at either positive face (the desire to be liked and included) or negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from others' influence) (BROWN, LEVINSON 1987; LACHENICHT 1980; AUSTIN 1990; SPENCER-OATEY 2002).

Culpeper (2011) further categorizes impoliteness into affective, coercive, and entertaining types, which can overlap. Affective impoliteness involves expressions of anger and negative emotions, ranging from strategic to impulsive reactions. Coercive impoliteness seeks to gain power over the target, often emerging in situations with unequal social dynamics. Entertaining impoliteness, relevant to this paper, involves humor at the target's expense, where the audience, rather than the target, finds amusement, similar to the dynamics in stand-up comedy performances. Following Larkin-Galiñanes (2017), using the target for the entertainment of spectators has been characteristic for European culture since ancient times, as seen in activities such as gladiatorial contests.

Method and Research

This research performs a descriptive pragmatic discourse analysis of a performance of a stand-up comedy transcript downloaded from the Internet page named "Scraps from the Loft" (Scraps from the Loft, n.d.). The comedian whose performance is analyzed is called Dave Chappelle. Dave Chappelle is an American stand-up comedian and actor. "The Dreamer," shot in Chappelle's hometown of Washington, D.C., at the Lincoln Theatre, was Chappelle's seventh comedy special premiered globally December 31, 2023, on Netflix. The excerpts of this special represent the corpus for this paper. Dave

Chappelle has been chosen for our analysis due to his freedom to unconventionally approach different topics in his performances, his willingness to experiment and take risks on stage as well as inevitable hilarious effects he manages to have on his audience. “The Dreamer” has been met with great impressions of the audience and has been regarded very successful. The total number of excerpts analyzed is 43 and the choice of the excerpts was based on the face-threatening act being involved in joke performed in accordance with the use of Culpeper’s (1996) framework. As far as the enhancement of humorous effect is concerned, the audience’s reaction to the jokes was observed, including whether they responded with an applause, a standing ovation or some other forms of approval.

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitatively, it categorizes excerpts by Culpeper’s (1996) positive and negative impoliteness strategies and examines their combinations. Quantitatively, the research examines the most commonly used strategy combinations.

Positive and negative impoliteness whose simultaneous use this paper examines is by Culpeper (1996) defined as follows:

“Positive impoliteness output strategies: Ignore, snub the other - fail to acknowledge the other’s presence, Exclude the other from an activity, Disassociate from the other - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together, Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, Use inappropriate identity markers - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains, Use obscure or secretive language - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target. Seek disagreement - select a sensitive topic., Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk, Use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language, Call the other names - use derogatory nominations etc.

Negative impoliteness output strategies: Frighten - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur, Condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives), Invade the other’s space - literally (e.g., position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g., ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship), Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect - personalize, use the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’, Put the other’s indebtedness on record, etc.” (CULPEPER 1996: 357—358).

It should be noted that despite the fact that Culpeper, whose classification of strategies this paper uses, has continued to publish works on impoliteness, including significant contributions in later years (2005, 2011 as well as co-authored works in 2003, 2013), his 1996 work has remained the most influential within the field of impoliteness, with no other author providing an alternative classification, and is most relevant to our focus of study in this paper, which is why it has been chosen for our analysis.

Results

Examining the classification of categories following Culpeper (1996) and their combinations as presented in Table 1 and 2³ (see the link in the footnote), what has been noted is that positive and negative impoliteness strategies are employed simultaneously

3 <https://shorturl.at/0BbkW>

in the given corpus. More precisely, the positive impoliteness strategies of “using taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language” and “call the other names - use derogatory nominations” are shown to be most frequently combined along with the negative impoliteness strategies of “condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives)” and “Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect.”

As presented in Table 1 below, the positive impoliteness strategy “use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language” with 27 instances (43%) and “call the other names - use derogatory nominations” with 22 instances (35%) are the most frequently combined positive impoliteness strategies. “Use taboo words - swear or use abusive or profane language” is most frequently combined with “condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives)” (43%) while the combination of call the other names- use derogatory nominations with condescend, scorn or ridicule follows it (35%). Most frequently combined negative impoliteness strategies are “Condescend, scorn or ridicule” and “Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect.” The combinations of the mentioned positive impoliteness strategies with the negative impoliteness strategy explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect are much lower in number (8 and 6 instances), but still important since they altogether contribute to the impoliteness being intensified.

Positive Impoliteness Strategy	Negative Impoliteness Strategy	Number of Instances	Percentage
Use taboo words	<i>Condescend, scorn or ridicule</i>	27	43%
	<i>Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect</i>	8	13%
Call the other names	<i>Condescend, scorn or ridicule</i>	22	35%
	<i>Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect</i>	6	10%

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Positive and Negative Impoliteness Strategies in Stand-Up Comedy

Moreover, on 6 occasions (instances in Table 3: DC09, DC11, DC12, DC13, DC25, DC38) all 4 strategies (“use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language”, “call the other names - use derogatory nominations”, “Condescend, scorn or ridicule” and “Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect”) have been used simultaneously. It seems that in such cases, they contribute to the face attack being performed more strongly. It can be concluded thus that the corpus exhibits four-layered face-attacks within stand-up comedy discourse as being the most common and most effective. For instance, in the excerpt [1] “This ngga sounds like Juicy Smoo-yay” [DC09], all four impoliteness strategies are evident. Firstly, the use of the racial slur “ngga” represents a taboo word, introducing profane language to create shock and offense. Secondly, the nickname “Juicy Smoo-yay” is a derogatory term, mocking the person by twisting their name into a silly and belittling version. This serves as a form of name-calling. Thirdly, the entire joke embodies condescension and scorn by ridiculing the individual and treating them with contempt. Lastly, the negative association is created by using a racial slur and a mocking

distortion of the person's name, which collectively portray the individual in derogatory terms. Another excerpt [2] "I've been trying to repair my relationship with the transgender community... It's about a Black transgender woman whose pronoun is, sadly, ngga..." [DC11] presents a 4-layered FTA. The use of the racial slur 'ngga' represents the use of a taboo word. The word "sadly" conveys condescension, since it implies that the transgender woman's pronoun choice is something to be pitied or regretted, mocking her identity. Furthermore, the woman is explicitly associated with a negative racial stereotype of the black community thereby being portrayed as someone rather inferior or shameful.

Furthermore, on 15 occasions (DC01, DC02, DC04, DC08, DC10, DC19, DC22, DC23, DC26, DC27, DC28, DC30, DC35, DC37, DC42), 3 strategies: the positive ones of "using taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language" and "calling the other names" together with the negative one of "condescend, scorn or ridicule" have been found to combine in the corpus. Another combination of 3 strategies: the positive one of "using taboo words" together with the negative ones of "calling the other names" and "explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect" has been observed on two occasions (DC15 and DC41). It seems that this three-layered face-attack also has stronger effect than the one being performed with the use with only one or two strategies. For instance, in the excerpt [3] "I wanted him to see me do something he couldn't do. I skipped. That ngga was mad" [DC08], the racial slur "ngga" serves as both a taboo word and a derogatory name, adding insult and shock. The joke ridicules the person by implying they are upset over something as trivial as skipping, which belittles their reaction. These elements together strengthen the face-threatening nature of the joke through a mix of shock, mockery, and derogation. The excerpt [4] "Chris got slapped in the face at the Oscars... by Will Smith... 'Did it hurt?' He said, 'Yes, ngga, it hurt'" [DC19] presents a 3-layered FTA. First, the use of the racial slur "ngga" introduces a taboo word, while at the same time represents the use of the positive strategy "call the other names." Moreover, the excerpt ridicules the seriousness of the incident of being slapped in a public event like the Oscars.

Two-layered FTAs were present in 8 instances (DC06, DC14, DC17, DC21, DC31, DC32, DC36, DC39) while the use of a single FTA was present on 12 occasions (DC05, DC07, DC16, DC18, DC20, DC24, DC25, DC29, DC33, DC34, DC40, DC43). The two-layered FTAs include the combination of the positive impoliteness strategy "call the other names" with the negative impoliteness strategy "condescend, scorn or ridicule" (DC6), the positive strategy "use taboo words" and the negative strategy "condescend, scorn or ridicule" (DC17, DC31, DC32 DC36, DC39), the combination of two negative impoliteness strategies: "condescend, scorn or ridicule" and "explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect" (DC14), the combination of two positive strategies: "use taboo words" and "call the other names" (DC21). The 2-layered FTA in the excerpt [5] consists of the combination of two impoliteness strategies: by saying "f*uck y'all," [DC39] the speaker uses a taboo word and at the same time conveys scorn and superiority, challenging the producer's authority by mocking and rejecting the advice and warning given to him. As opposed to the excerpts discussed above, the excerpt [6] "I screamed, Jim Carrey!" And everyone said, 'No! Call him Andy,'" [DC03], the use of a single strategy of ridicule while being effective, only addresses one aspect of the insult and as a result does not make the FTA as strong as in [3], [4] and [5] where FTAs are multi-layered. This leads

us to conclude that the more strategies are used, the stronger FTAs are performed.

No other strategy combinations have been found in the corpus.

4-layered FTAs	3-layered FTAs	2-layered FTAs	A single FTA
DC09, DC12, DC25, DC38	DC01, DC02, DC04, DC08, DC10, DC15, DC19, DC22, DC23, DC26, DC27, DC28, DC30, DC35, DC37, DC41, DC42	DC06, DC14, DC17, DC21, DC31, DC32, DC36, DC39	DC05, DC07, DC16, DC18, DC20, DC24, DC25, DC29, DC33, DC34, DC40, DC43

Table 3. *Classification of FTAs based on the Number of Layers*

Nevertheless, the simultaneous use and the number of impoliteness strategies used did not show to contribute to the humorous effect being intensified; in other words, the audience’s reaction to multilayered FTAs was no stronger than to single-layered FTAs. This suggests that the complexity or number of impoliteness strategies employed does not necessarily lead to a more intense comedic response and that the audience’s reaction is not simply determined by the quantity of FTAs.

Discussion

Upon performing the analysis, it is evident that both positive and negative impoliteness strategies are frequently and simultaneously used to intensify face-threatening acts (FTAs), but do not seem to have any contribution to the enhancement of humorous effect. The positive impoliteness strategies of using taboo words and calling the other names are shown to be the most commonly used. These are often paired with negative strategies such as “condescending, scorn, or ridicule”, and “explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect.” Specifically, the strategy of “using taboo words” was observed in 43% of the instances while calling the other names appeared in 35%. These strategies were most often combined with condescending, scorn, or ridicule (43% and 35% of the instances, respectively). Although the combination of positive strategies with “explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect” was less frequent (8 and 6 instances), it still plays an important role in reinforcing the impoliteness and enhancing the humorous effect. Interestingly, there were six cases where all four strategies (“using taboo words,” “calling the other names,” “condescend, scorn or ridicule,” and “explicitly linking the other to a negative aspect”) were employed together. This combination of all four strategies greatly intensified the face-threatening act (FTA). Furthermore, there were 11 cases where a three-layered approach was used, combining the positive strategies of “using taboo words” and “calling the other names” with “condescension, scorn, or ridicule.” This approach created a stronger FTA compared to instances with fewer strategies. No difference in the reaction of the audience to the simultaneous and non-simultaneous FTAs was observed, which leads to the conclusion that combining various impoliteness strategies in stand-up comedy intensifies the FTA, but does not enhance the humorous effect.

Nevertheless, what has also been noticed is that positive impoliteness strategies such as “using taboo words” and “calling the other names” primarily function as intensifiers rather than being the main sources of humor. These strategies strengthen the impact of the negative impoliteness strategies, which play a more central role in the face-threat-

ening acts. Negative impoliteness strategies, including “condescension, scorn, or ridicule,” and “explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect,” are crucial in forming the essence of the humor and accentuating the face-threatening elements of the jokes. For example, in the excerpt [1] mentioned above, “This ngga sounds like Juicy Smoo-yay” [DC09], positive impoliteness strategies like the use of the racial slur “ngga” and the mocking nickname “Juicy Smoo-yay” function primarily as intensifiers. While these elements add shock value and mockery, they are not the main sources of humor. Instead, they strengthen the impact of the negative impoliteness strategies.

Conclusion

This study offers a descriptive pragmatic discourse analysis of Dave Chappelle’s stand-up special, “The Dreamer,” drawing upon Culpeper’s (1996) framework of impoliteness strategies. Through the analysis of 43 selected excerpts, it is clear that both positive and negative impoliteness strategies are frequently and simultaneously employed to intensify face-threatening acts, but do not seem to amplify humorous effect. Furthermore, positive impoliteness strategies, such as “using taboo words” and “calling the other names,” predominantly function as intensifiers that heighten the impact of negative strategies. Negative impoliteness strategies, including “condescend, scorn or ridicule,” and “explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect,” significantly enhance the face-threatening nature of the jokes.

The findings reveal that positive strategies are most effective when combined with negative strategies. Specifically, “using taboo words” appeared in 43% of the instances, and calling others names appeared in 35%, often paired with negative strategies like “condescend, scorn or ridicule,” and “explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect.” Notably, the combination of all four strategies (taboo words, derogatory names, condescension, and negative associations) was observed to create a highly intensified FTA. The multilayered FTA did not show any effect on enhancing the humorous effect though.

Overall, the research shows the presence of the simultaneous use of positive and negative impoliteness strategies in Dave Chappelle’s performance “The Dreamer”, which in turn strengthens the impact of face-threatening acts, but do not enhance the comedic effect. Regardless of the fact that further research is required, these results illustrate how these strategies can be effectively applied in comedic discourse.

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Lana S. Jovanović

STRATEGIJE NEUČTIVOSTI U STAND-UP KOMEDIJI DEJVA ŠAPELA

Rezime

Ovaj rad istražuje upotrebu strategija neučtivosti u stand-up komediji Dejva Šapela, fokusirajući se na to kako on kombinuje pozitivne i negativne strategije neučtivosti kako bi se pojačao intenzitet ugrožavanja lica kao i sam humor. Ovo istraživanje predstavlja deskriptivnu pragmatičnu analizu diskursa, kvalitativnu i kvantitativnu, na transkriptu stand-up komedije preuzetog sa interneta. Kategorizuju se odlomci prema Kulpeperovim (1996) pozitivnim i negativnim strategijama neučtivosti i ispituju se njihove kombinacije. Takođe se ispituju najčešće korišćene kombinacije strategija. Analiza otkriva čestu upotrebu višestrukih strategija, posebno kombinacija negativnih strategija snishodljivosti i povezivanja osobe sa nečim nepovoljnim sa pozitivnim strategijama upotrebe tabu reči i uvredljivih etiketa. Ove kombinacije se često i simultano koriste, čime se stvara jači napad na lice, ali se pritom ne pojačava humoristički efekat. Strategije pozitivne neučtivosti služe kao pojačavači, a ne kao glavni izvori humora. Pozitivne strategije, kao što su "korišćenje tabu reči" i "prozivanje drugih", pretežno funkcionišu kao pojačivači koji pojačavaju uticaj negativnih strategija. Negativne strategije nepristojnosti, uključujući snishodljivost, prezir ili ismevanje, i eksplicitno povezivanje drugog sa negativnim aspektom, imaju primarnu ulogu u vršenju napada na lice. Višeslojna upotreba strategija neljubaznosti pokazuje njihov značajan uticaj na napad na lice u komičnom diskursu.

Ključne reči: višestruke strategije nepristojnosti, pozitivna neljubaznost, negativna neučtivost, humor u stand-up komediji, ugrožavanje lica