

CONTAGIOUSNESS OF POLITENESS ON YOUTUBE

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Abstract

This study tries to shed a light on whether politeness strategies used in YouTube comment sections' online discussion are contagious. Particularly, it explores the politeness strategies used in comments and replies from the three most popular videos in 2018 of "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" YouTube channel. By using a qualitative design with computer - mediated discourse analysis approach, this study confirms that politeness strategies used in the comment sections are contagious. It is also revealed that impolite strategies dominate the whole discussions even in funny content and the level of impoliteness increases as the degree of disagreement gets higher.

Keywords: Politeness, Computer mediated discourse analysis, Online Discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Internet gives people freedom and creativity to share what they have, both in sharing ideas and activities. The limitless opportunities in expressing themselves could lead to other people's reactions and comments. The various features in social media facilitate them to have online discussions. In specific, comment sections on YouTube are acknowledged as more interesting features rather than video timelines as people can find more hidden information related to the posted videos. Moreover, even though YouTube requires the users and commenters to sign in with a Google+ account (Ferenstein, 2012), it still contains many inconsiderate comments, both from the authentic and fake profile - users. It indicates that the profile identification required by YouTube could not limit the users to share what they think about the content, positively or negatively.

The issues on YouTube's comment sections and other online discussions have been conducted by many researchers. In contrast, some studies show different results. Poche (2017) mentions that 30% of all comments in YouTube give beneficial information to the content creators, from the problems of the videos until recommendations for the next content. Kim and Herring's (2018) study also proves that politeness used in the comment section is contagious, especially the positive ones. These studies show that despite the high

occurrences of abusive comments in comment sections, there are many user comments still use positive comments in various politeness strategies.

Moreover, CuriousGhu (2017), who conducts a study on text analysis on YouTube comments, reveals that comments on news and politics content are longer and more negative than comments on other types of content. This result indicates that the types of content influence the kinds of strategies used in the user comments. It can be argued that funny content should be able to get more positive comments than the political content. In fact, there are many funny contents in some YouTube channels still get impolite comments. Among thousands of funny YouTube Channels, "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" is one of the funniest channels, among other 14 funniest YouTube channels (Jenkins, 2019), which also get impolite comments. This channel is hosted by a comedian named Jimmy Fallon. Among other funny YouTube channels, this channel is well-known with its' host hilarious abilities. Viewers are interested to see his ability to challenge famous celebrities into acting extremely silly on the show, including his incredible music parodies, ridiculous games, hilarious comedy sketches, and celebrity interviews. Their popularities and unpredictable spontaneity make the contents are very genuinely humorous and attract more attention and comments from viewers, users, and subscribers.

This study, therefore, tries to address the contagiousness of politeness found in the comment sections in "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" YouTube channel. To gain a deeper understanding of this problem, it uses a Computer - Mediated Discourse Analysis focusing on the analysis of face - managing and face - threatening language used in comments and how these comments affect replies or the other user comments.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim began YouTube in 2004 as a way to post and share video material. Then, on February 15, 2005, the domain "YouTube.com" was officially started under the slogan "Broadcast Yourself". A year later, YouTube was sold to Google with 100 million views activity rate and over 65,000 daily video uploads (Paolillo, 2008). Since then, YouTube becomes one of the most visited websites on the Internet with one billion users (Covington et al., 2016) who watch hundreds of millions of hours of videos daily (YouTube, 2017). Nowadays, YouTube is the world's most popular social media site and its user numbers exceed Facebook or Wikipedia.

Besides the video upload facility, YouTube also offers a text facility for viewers to post comments on the uploaded video files. This feature facilitates the viewers or YouTubers to share, negotiate, agree, and challenge opinions, not only related to the posted videos but also other viewers' comments. According to Strangelove (2010), because YouTube does not ask the authentic personal identity of the users, then anonymous users have bigger chances to give online comments. As in computer - mediated communication people do not need to have direct or face to face communication, it is easier for them to give disagreement, criticism, judgment, etc. Hence, face - threatening acts are commonly

found in this kind of communication as people easily could violate politeness norms. Here, strategies of politeness become a significant topic to talk about.

Politeness, according to Holmes (2013), can be defined as somewhat formal behaviour and distancing, where the intention is not to intrude or impose. It means that to be polite people, they should express their respect to others and avoid offending them. Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987) define the face as the public self-image that every adult person wants to claim themselves. Faces can be threatened by certain acts and they propose four strategies for doing face-threatening acts (FTA) namely bald record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record.

1. Firstly, bald on record is doing the FTA directly and clearly without reducing the impact of FTA. For example, asking request by saying "close the window", this utterance uses bald on the record because it describes clearly that the speaker requests someone to close the window.
2. Secondly, positive politeness which is oriented through the positive face of hearers to claim his positive image. Positive politeness can be delivered through various ways such as to provide the listeners' wants, interests, or needs.
3. Thirdly, negative politeness provides the audience with the freedom to do what they want. The negative politeness can be performed through minimizing imposition and using apology. There are several strategies of negative politeness such as be pessimistic about a thing or using hedges. For example, the utterance "Could you open the window please?" is a kind of request in interrogative form by using the hedging word "could".
4. Finally, off-record is using indirect or ambiguity toward the hearer. For example, the speaker who requests someone to close the window by saying "the wind outside the house is very hard" the utterance is descriptive, but the speaker intends to perform the request to someone indirectly to close the window.

Analyzing politeness strategies in computer - mediated communication contexts could be done by using an approach known as Computer - Mediated Discourse Analysis. It is the analysis of verbal interactions, such as characters. Words, utterances, messages, exchanges, threads, archives, etc. in online interaction (Herring, 2004). It applies methods adapted from language - focused disciplines, such as linguistics, communication, and rhetoric to the analysis of computer - mediated communication (Herring, 2001). Moreover, she classifies domains of CMDA into five:

1. Structure: analyzes the use of special typography or orthography, novel word formations, and sentence structure
2. Meaning: analyzes the meaning of words, utterances, and macrosegments
3. Interaction: analyzes turn - taking, topic development, other means of negotiating interactive exchanges
4. Social behavior: analyzes linguistic expressions of play, conflict, power, and group membership over multiple exchanges

5. Participation: analyzes frequency and length of messages posted and responses received.

Accordingly, Kim and Herring (2018) distinguish the politeness strategies in CMDA into four types of politeness behavior:

1. Observation of positive politeness (+P): strategies used to satisfy the addressee's desire to maintain a favorable self - image and get approval or agreement from other parties (appreciation, compliments, approval, support).
2. Observation of negative politeness (+N): strategies used to respect the addressee's desire to maintain their autonomy without imposition from other parties (hedged requests, offering choices, apologies, inquiries, respecting/acknowledging the other's view)
3. Violation of positive politeness (-P): strategies used to challenge the addressee's desire for approval and closeness with others (flames, insults, bald disagreement, snubs, sarcasm, jokes targeting addressee)
4. Violation of negative politeness (-N): strategies used to impose the addressee's autonomy of thinking and behaving (commands, requests, ignoring or overriding another's preferences).

+P and -P are categorized as polite strategies, while -P and -N are categorized as impolite strategies.

METHOD

This study is conducted in a qualitative design with computer - mediated discourse analysis approach. The approach focuses on the level of social behaviors and it is used to analyze the data collected from "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" YouTube channel. This channel, just like other YouTube channels, has the video lines posted. Under each video posted, there is a comment section that can be viewed by any visitor and commented by the users. The comment is also completed with a reply feature attached to the comment, where other users can reply to the attached comments.

The comments with replies found in the top 3 most popular videos in 2018 are taken as the data. The videos are "Musical Genre Challenge with Ariana Grande", "Kevin Hart is Terrified of Robert Irwin's Animals", and "Jack Black Performs His Legendary Sax-A-Boom with The Roots". The first video is "Musical Genre Challenge with Ariana Grande". This funny and interesting video is about Jimmy Fallon and Ariana Grande who sing songs in different genres of music. Since it was uploaded on May 1st, 2018, this video has more than 58 million viewers and gets more than 40 thousand comments in the comment section. The second video This video was uploaded on September 19th, 2018. Since then, it has been viewed by more than 36 million viewers and contains many laughs and has more than 32 thousand comments. There two guests invited in this video segment, Kevin Hart and Robert Irwin. As a son of Steve Irwin, Robert loves animals and brings out kingsnakes, a tarantula, and a falcon to the show. While Jimmy could still handle his fear, Kevin struggles to keep his fear. This 14.51 - minute duration video is very funny and all

audiences in the stage are laughed at them loudly, including the three of them themselves. This 2.21 - minute long video has been viewed more than 30 million times since it was uploaded last year. In the video, Black as the guest is asked to perform using a saxophone toy instrument. He pretends to play it successfully and all audiences enjoy his performance. This very short video gets more than 25 thousand comments.

These videos are taken because of their popularity just in one year. The popularities are based on the numbers of the viewers, which automatically most of them write some comments or replies to the videos. After watching these funny videos, the data are collected by reading the whole comment sections and focus on the comments with replies. Comments with more than five replies are noted and analyzed based on politeness strategies. After classifying the strategies of the comments, the strategies of the replies, and the addressee of comments and replies are also made. After that, they are analyzed based on the social behavior level of analysis to see the linguistic expressions of play, conflict, power, and group membership over multiple exchanges.

DISCUSSION

This study is intended to know further whether the politeness strategies used in comments would lead the viewers to give replies or responds with the same ones or the different ones. It is found that the politeness strategies used both in comments and replies in those three videos are varied. The strategy mostly used in the comments is the violation of positive politeness (-P). Among those three videos, the first video gets the highest number of violations of positive politeness (-P). From more than 44 thousand comments, the commenters mostly give sarcasm comments. The commenters use sarcasm to describe the size and model of Grande's dress, that it is more suitable worn by kids. One of the sarcasm comments in the comment section is "*Ariana is amazing even when she looks like a cupcake*". This sarcasm comment is started with a compliment but it is not the real compliment at all since it compares her with a piece of the cupcake because of the way she dresses. This comment violates Grande's face by comparing her with a cupcake.

Violation of positive politeness is also found in most of the comments in the second video's comment section. Since the video is very funny, the comment sections should be filled in with funny comments as well, unpredictably, it gets many disagree, flame, and sarcasm comments; as in "*Poor Robert just wanted to talk about animals*". This comment indicates that it is not appropriate to talk about animals in the show. It violates Robert's face because the commenter pretends to feel pity with Robert for talking only about animals. Otherwise, everyone knows that Robert loves animals, just like his father. He is invited to the show to talk about wild animals and it is his time to talk about animals, it is a part of the show.

Moreover, the same strategy is also found in the third video. On the other hand, there are some comments which are expressed differently, one of which is "*The coolness of this man is so underrated*". This comment violates Black's face by insulting his performance during the show. The other viewers are happy with his performance, but this comment

shows that the commenter is not happy with his performance and tends to insult him by saying that his performance is not cool at all.

The next politeness strategy mostly used by the commenters is observation of negative politeness (+N) and this strategy is found several times in the first video, such as in *"Someone get this girl some contact lenses"*, *"Somebody grab Ari some damn glasses"*, or *"I am sorry to say this, her outfit was giving me anxiety"*. These comments still try to respect Grande's desire to maintain their autonomy without imposition from others. The requests used here are for asking someone to get glasses or contact lenses for Grande so she gets clear vision, as during the show she has to come closer to the screen to read the song title or the song lyrics. Also, the apology here is not the real apology, it is just to make the statement more polite and not imposing too much. Just like in the comment section of the second video, there is no imposition in this comment *"This kid needs his own show that features a celebrity guest each episode. Lol"*.

Observation on positive politeness strategy (+P) is also used, but not dominant, in the comments in those three videos. Appreciation, compliments, and approval are employed by the commenters in giving comments. Among other aggressive comments, this strategy could be seen in *"Humble in Goth Rock was the most beautiful out of all she sang"* in the first video comment section. Here, the commenter gives a compliment on Grande's version in singing other singers' songs. She is appreciated for her singing ability in singing the song in a different music genre of hers. The same type of comment is also found several times in the third video.

Furthermore, there are also some comments in violation of negative politeness (-N) in the third video. One of them is *"You know you're getting old when Jack black is getting OLD"*. This comment imposes the viewers to realize that they are all getting older along with Jack Black. This comment does not directly say that Jack Black is old, but rather focuses on reminding all that they are growing and getting older together. This comment does not mean to violate others directly but the word "OLD" is written in capital letters to show that this word is the point of the statement.

Accordingly, these findings reveal that most of the comments in the comment sections tend to violate others by using a violation of positive politeness (-P) strategy. Even though there are some very positive comments, in observation on positive politeness (+P), but these kinds of comments get limited replies from other commenters. It seems that violation of positive politeness (-P) affects more replies and attracts others' attention to join violating others' or sometimes imposes others' faces by request. This strategy gets a great number of replies and some replies also use the same strategy of the comments. They give agreement replies to the sarcasm comments given by the initiated commenters. Replies are very easy to do and most are done by the users through the reply feature attached to the comments and other replies.

Interestingly, it is also revealed that most of the replies are in violation of positive politeness (-P) strategy and it can be found in the comment sections of the three videos. This type of strategy is used to reply to any politeness strategy of comments. However,

replies on violation of positive politeness (-P) are mostly found to reply to the violation of positive politeness (-P) comments. It can also be said that the strategies used in comments might lead other commenters to give responses and to participate more in the comment sections of YouTube online discussion. It could be found in *"Lol yeah ahahaha her dress is so fricking short like wtf"*, *"Pretty sure her dress is actually a skirt"*, replies in responding *"her hair is longer than her dress"* comment.

However, violation of positive politeness (-P) is also used to reply in observation of positive politeness (+P) comments and other types of politeness strategies. It can be found in *"His father was a wanker who harassed animals"* in responding *"His father would be so proud"*. This finding is in line with what is found by Kim & Herring (2018), that replies violating positive politeness (-P replies) are prevalent for all types of comments. On certain occasions, comments on observation of positive politeness (+P) get a larger percentage of violation of positive politeness (-P) replies than other types of comments, as well as the highest level of discursive incivility of replies. However, this finding contradicts with Borah (2012), who states that impolite comments on news stories attract less involvement of the readers in online political discussions.

Moreover, violation of positive politeness (-P) comments might get harder violated replies. It suggests that the commenters try to show their agreement with what is said in the comment they replied to. To show the agreement or disagreement, they use very strong or even stronger statements. These strong arguments are produced to save their public self - images. The processes of saving their public faces are in intersection of polite and impolite strategies, as what is explained by Naab (2016), that the commenters and repliers try to construct and maintain a favorable public self - image and autonomy in opinion formation and respond to each other's face by going through dichotomy of politeness and impoliteness.

These strong arguments also lead to the next bigger and harder statements and sometimes it also brings new topics to discuss, just like in *"Her hair is fake, Her nose is fake, Her lips are fake, her body is fake. She has a couple good songs thou. I don't love her, don't hate her. She's just blah. Lol"* in replying to the previous reply *"show us the receipts bitch. where did you hear that she had plastic surgery??? i'm okay with you not liking ariana but telling her that she has fake everything and she had anything done??? your comment is so unnecessary. you could've just said she was meh for you but instead you tell someone she's fake???"* and *"her nose isn't fake and she doesn't have fake boobs or anything so what are you talking about?"* in responding the same comment above. These replies use the same strategy as the comment, but even here some commenters show their disagreements by trying to violate the previous replies' faces.

Meanwhile, observation of positive politeness (+P) replies is used a couple of times to reply to the same type of strategy of comments. There is also a small chance of using observation of negative politeness (+N) strategy to reply to the observation of negative politeness (+N) comments. In contrast, there is no reply in violation of negative politeness (-N) found among the replies. It shows that the commenters do not tend to impose others.

They want to make their replies brief and to the point, without asking others to think about certain things they say in their responses.

It is known that commenters' politeness behavior can attract more replies in the online discussions. The participation increases and becomes more critical when the commenters use the violation of positive politeness (-P) and repliers have different views and opinions with what the commenters said. In expressing their disagreement, the repliers most of the time tend to be more impolite to underline their stands and to save their faces by violating other faces.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the type of content does not guarantee the strategy of politeness used in the comment sections. It is found that there is a significant influence on the comments' politeness strategies with replies. While comments are dominated by the violation of positive politeness (-P), violation of positive politeness (-P) in replies more dominate the online discussion in the comment sections.

The analysis of this study is focused only on the politeness strategies used in comments and replies in YouTube comment sections from three videos. The limitation seems very clear when this study does not discuss the addressee of the comments and replies. As an alternative, the addressee might refer to something details, which is quite out of the focus of the video. Both the commenters and repliers violate the guests' or even the host's faces by giving sarcasm, jokes, or even request comments because they seem unsatisfied with their performances and want to criticize them in the show. It means that any detail in the video could be the topic to be commented on, though it is not the focus of the video. Finally, as the understanding of face and politeness vary in different places, the next studies might explore the cultural factors related to politeness strategies used in computer - mediated communication, especially in the online discussion.

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