



Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies in Requests in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

Risma Putri Windani¹, Zulfa Sakhiyya²

^{1,2} Universitas Negeri Semarang

Corresponding E-Mail: zulfa.sakhiyya@mail.unnes.ac.id

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Abstract

Politeness is one aspect in communication that helps people maintain harmony in interactions and avoid social conflicts. In performing speech act that is inherently face-threatening, such as request, politeness strategies are used to help minimizing the threat to the addressee's face. This study explores the manifestation of politeness and impoliteness strategies in making requests portrayed in American TV Series *The Office* and British TV Series *The IT Crowd* along with the similarities and the differences between them. The findings hold significance for communication studies as they offer insights into how cultural values and social hierarchy influence the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in workplace interactions in American and British context. This study used qualitative research approach and content analysis method. The total number of requests found in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* are 277 and 140, respectively. By drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies, findings show that the bald on-record strategy is the most frequently employed in both politeness and impoliteness, whereas the off-record strategies are the least utilized. Despite the similarities, some differences were also observed. In *The Office*, there is greater variation of positive politeness strategies employed, whereas in *The IT Crowd*, the negative politeness strategies employed are more varied. Furthermore, in *The Office*, negative impoliteness emerges as the second most commonly employed strategy, followed by positive impoliteness. Whereas in *The IT Crowd*, the second most used strategy is positive impoliteness, followed by negative impoliteness. These similarities and differences are related to the background culture and humor style of each series.

Keywords: American Sitcom, British Sitcom, Workplace Communication, Impoliteness Strategies, Politeness Strategies, Request

Introduction

Politeness is one aspect in communication that helps people maintain harmony in interactions and avoid social conflicts. Displaying the act of politeness during communication shows that the speaker is being respectful and has positive feelings towards the addressee. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), people use various politeness strategies with the intention to protect and maintain their face, which refers to the public self-image that each individual has. The positivity of one's face should be maintained or even increased as it reflects one's likeability and how they fit in the society. When communicating, a person should simultaneously favour his/her own face as well as the addressee's. Reducing or even avoiding threat to the other person's face during conversation is important as it makes him/her feels valued and induces the feelings of being allies.

In social interaction, there is a speech act that is inherently face-threatening and imposing other person's freedom. That is the speech act of requesting. By making a request, it indicates that the speaker has no intention to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom and also gives pressure on the addressee to do or not to do certain actions (Erlinda, 2019; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, the use of politeness strategies is closely linked to this speech act as they are needed to help minimizing the threat to the addressee's face.

Politeness is a universal concept that exists in every culture. However, despite its universality, the standards and practices of politeness may vary according to the culture. Some cultures may have the tendency toward positive politeness and some others may be more negative-politeness oriented. Cultures that prioritize positive politeness encourage familiarity and solidarity, which reduce social distance and reinforce social bonds between speaker and addressee. On the other hand, cultures that are more negative-politeness oriented highlights freedom from imposition and formality, which maintain social distance and respect the addressee's personal space.

Some previous studies show that native English speakers tend to be indirect when delivering a request and that they perceived requests delivered in a direct manner as impolite and authoritative (Al-Khatib, 2021; Hendriks et al., 2023). In contrast, L2 English speakers, such as Libyan people, considered direct request as a way to show friendliness and intimacy towards the addressee (Al-Khatib, 2021). It suggests that cultural difference may affect the way people assess politeness. Something which is considered as normal and polite in one culture might be perceived as the opposite by another culture.

These differences are what make it important to conduct a study on politeness. As much as it is important to conduct a study on politeness, exploring the use of impoliteness is also equally important. It is because, in social interactions, it is not uncommon for people to perform impoliteness whether it is intentional or unintentional. Therefore, this study will analyze both the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies, specifically in making requests.

However, since we have relatively limited opportunity to meet or encounter native English speakers in our daily lives, other alternatives to study about the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies by native English speakers should be chosen. One of the options is through multimedia, more specifically TV series. TV series are varied in genre, from thriller to situation comedy (sitcom). In this present research, two TV series that belong to sitcom genre, *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*, are chosen. These two TV Series are from different countries, which are United States and United Kingdom. Both series focus on the same theme which is working life in an office.

Several studies regarding the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in multimedia had been conducted prior to this present study. The studies done by Musyafaah et al. (2022), Leihitu and Triprihatmini (2021) Fridolini et al. (2021) Isabella et al. (2022), Probosini (2020), Dewanti (2022), and Ula and Mujiono (2020) show that the characters in movies and TV Series mostly used positive politeness strategies when communicating. This phenomenon happens most likely because the storyline of the movies and the TV series analyzed in these studies portray the situations where the characters have close relationship with each other. The use of positive politeness strategies, therefore show intimacy, friendliness, and camaraderie between the speakers.

Unlike the studies mentioned previously that explored all four types of politeness strategies, studies by Permadi (2018), Nurlayli and Widyastuti (2022), Susana et al. (2022), Marpudianto (2020) focused only on the use of positive and negative politeness strategies. Permadi (2018) found out that there are 13 out of 15 positive politeness strategies occurred in *Midnight in Paris* movie. They are *exaggerated, notice, attend to H, intensify interest to the hearer, use in-group identity markers, seek agreement in safe topics, avoid disagreement, joke, assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for the hearer's wants, offer promise, be optimistic, include both the speaker and the hearer in the activity, give or ask for reasons, and give gifts.*

The study by Nurlayli and Widyastuti (2022) revealed that in the TV Series *Emily in Paris* there are 5 out of 10 negative politeness strategies that occurred, such as *giving deference, apologizing, questioning, or hedging, stating the FTA as a general rule and being conventionally indirect.* The study by Marpudianto (2020) revealed that, in *Charlie Ross Show* with Donald Trump, there are 10 strategies found which are *exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy) to hearer, strengthen interest to hearer, use in group identity markers, avoid disagreement, presuppose/raise/common ground, assert or presume speaker's knowledge and concern for hearer wants, offer / promise, assume or assert reciprocity, give hints to hearer and be optimistic.*

The study by Susana et al. (2022) slightly differs from the previous three studies mentioned here. Instead of focusing on only one strategy, their study explored two strategies namely positive and negative politeness. Their findings

show that *avoid disagreement* and *be optimistic* are the most frequently used positive politeness in the movie and the characters use only two negative politeness, which are *be pessimistic* and *give deference*

However, to the researcher's knowledge, studies that aim to compare the use of both politeness and impoliteness strategies in two TV series and explore the different cultural contexts of the series are still limited. Many of the previous studies usually analyzed politeness and impoliteness separately and only focus on finding out the most frequently used strategies and the factors in one movie or one TV show only. Therefore, this present study fills those gaps by analyzing the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in making requests by the characters in two TV Series, *The Office* (US) and *The IT Crowd* (UK) using Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Culpeper's (1996) theories as well as exploring the cultural differences and humor style between the two with research questions as follows:

1. How is the use of politeness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* TV Series?
2. How is the use of politeness strategies in requests by the characters in *The IT Crowd* TV Series?
3. How is the use of impoliteness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* TV Series?
4. How is the use of impoliteness strategies in requests by the characters in *The IT Crowd* TV Series?
5. What are the similarities between the use of politeness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* TV Series?
6. What are the differences between the use of politeness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* TV Series?
7. What are the similarities between the use of impoliteness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* TV Series?
8. What are the differences between the use of impoliteness strategies in requests by the characters in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* TV Series?

Method

This study employed qualitative research as the research approach. According to Leavy (2017, p.266), qualitative research is suitable for research that aims to explore, describe, and explain. Therefore, this approach was employed so that the researcher could provide in-depth explanations about the way the characters in the TV Series *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* use politeness and impoliteness strategies when expressing requests.

The method used in this study is content analysis method. It is a qualitative research method that focuses on categorizing and organizing recorded communication to interpret and understand meaning (Bengtsson, 2016). It is chosen as it is in line with the objectives of this study which require the researcher

to investigate human utterances in two TV series and interpret them beyond the literal meaning based on context, including the social and cultural norms of the situation in which the communication occurs.

In this study, the subjects analyzed are politeness and impoliteness strategies used in performing requests. Politeness strategies were selected because politeness is a crucial aspect in social interactions. It is performed in order to build relationship, to maintain harmony and to avoid social conflict. Impoliteness strategies were also analyzed since they are often used in communication whether intentionally or unintentionally. In addition, request was specifically chosen since it is a speech act that can be quite face-threatening towards the addressee.

Thus, it requires the speaker to be extra careful in carrying it out as not to offend the addressee. In addition, the objects of this study are the utterances of requests of the main characters in TV series *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*, more specifically in season 1.

The Office is an American TV series aired from 2005 until 2013 in an American Television channel called NBC. This series is about work lives of the employees in a branch of a company called Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. The characters whose utterances will be the objects of this study are the main characters namely Michael Scott, Dwight Schrute, Jim Halpert, Pam Beesly and Ryan Howard. On the other hand, *The IT Crowd* is a British TV Series aired from 2006 to 2013 by British television network called Channel 4.

This series focuses on the office dynamics of the IT department employees in a company called Reynholm Industries. The characters whose utterances will be the objects of this study are the main characters namely Roy Trenneman, Maurice Moss, Denholm Reynholm, and Jen Barber. These two TV series were chosen because they give representation of work office life in two native English-speaking countries, United Kingdom and America. Moreover, season 1 of each series was specifically chosen in order to have better understanding of the characters' social dynamic and social relationship and to avoid any context misunderstanding.

The subject and object of this study were chosen with the hope that the result can be useful for the reader, especially EFL learners, for gaining knowledge on how native English speakers perform politeness strategies in making request in formal setting, like work office. Furthermore, the main characters in *The Office* and in *The IT Crowd* were chosen as the focus of this study as they play central roles in driving the interactions in each series. As the primary sources of dialogue, these characters engage in majority of speech exchanges that reflect the workplace communication styles portrayed in their respective cultural context.

Moreover, their interactions with each other or with other characters frequently involve request-making situations, which are essential for examining the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies. The first stage of the data collection procedure was watching the TV Series *The IT Crowd* and *The Office*. After watching the series and gaining a complete understanding of the story and the

context of the dialogues, the utterances said by the main characters in each TV Series were identified and noted down. Transcripts of both TV series were made separately to avoid mixing up the data.

In this study the data was extracted and analyzed manually by the researcher. This approach emphasized the researcher's role in interpreting the phenomena in the study which allow a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. For the instruments, four sets of data sheet designed based on the politeness strategies theory proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness strategies by Culpeper (1996) were used to help the researcher identifying and analyzing the utterances from each TV series. The models of the data sheets are as shown below:

Table 1. Politeness Strategies in *The Office* TV Series

Code	Data	Politeness Strategies				Context
		BR	PP	NP	OR	
02/05:21/Michael/PP/PP13	Hey, hey why don't you run it by me and I'll run it by him.		✓			Dwight wanted to say something to Mr. Brown during the seminar, so Michael ask him to tell him first before he say it to Mr. Brown.

Note:

02/05:21/Michael/PP/PP13→ Episode 2/Time Stamp/Name of the Character/ Type of Politeness (Positive Politeness)/Strategy (Strategy 13 *give or ask reasons*)

Table 2. Impoliteness Strategies in *The Office* TV Series

Code	Data	Impoliteness Strategies				Context
		BRI	PI	NI	ORI	
02/12:14/Michael/PI/PI9	And you should just get the hell out of here.		✓			Toby made a racist joke, so Michael asked him to get out of the conference room.

Note:

02/12:14/Michael/PI/PI9→ Episode 2/Time Stamp/Name of the Character/ Type of Impoliteness (Positive Impoliteness)/Strategy (Strategy 9 *taboo words*)

The data collected in this study was analyzed by following three phases namely the contextualization phase, the categorization phase, and the compilation phase

(Bengtsson, 2016). In the first phase the researcher read through the transcripts in order to become familiar with the data, acquire the sense of the whole and to make sure all the utterances of the main characters in each TV series have been covered. After completing the first phase, the researcher moved on to the categorization phase. In this phase, the utterances were categorized based on the fact whether they contain requests or not.

The utterances are considered as request if they contain expressions of telling an addressee what to do or what not to do and are performed in order to give benefit to the speaker or a third party. The utterances which contain requests then were noted down. The last stage was the compilation phase. This was where the analysis process started. The utterances which contain requests were analyzed based on the politeness strategies proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) and impoliteness strategies by Culpeper (1996) using the data sheets which have been explained previously. Furthermore, the researcher also investigated the similarities and differences of the use of the politeness and impoliteness strategies in the two TV Series.

The type of triangulation method which is used in this study is expert judgment. It refers to the process of seeking objective and professional opinions from experts who specialized in this topic to ensure the validity and reliability of this research. In this study, the experts' judgments were achieved from two English lecturers whose academic background, expertise, and work experiences are in line with the purpose of this research. Therefore, their opinions and suggestions were used to validate the content, the research instruments, as well as the result of this study. The agreement level of both experts was high which indicates reliability of this study.

Result

The Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by Characters in The Office TV Series

The data were taken from the first season of *The Office* TV Series which contains 6 episodes. Each episode runs for about 22 minutes. The numbers of requests uttered using politeness strategies by the four characters throughout the entire season were 277 utterances. Those utterances were then analyzed and categorized into the four types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and the result of the analysis is as follows:

Table 3. The Frequency of Politeness Strategies Use in Requests by *The Office* Characters

No.	Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bald On-Record	141	50,9%
2.	Positive Politeness	62	22,382%
3.	Negative Politeness	65	23,466%
4.	Off-Record	9	3,24%

Total	277	100%
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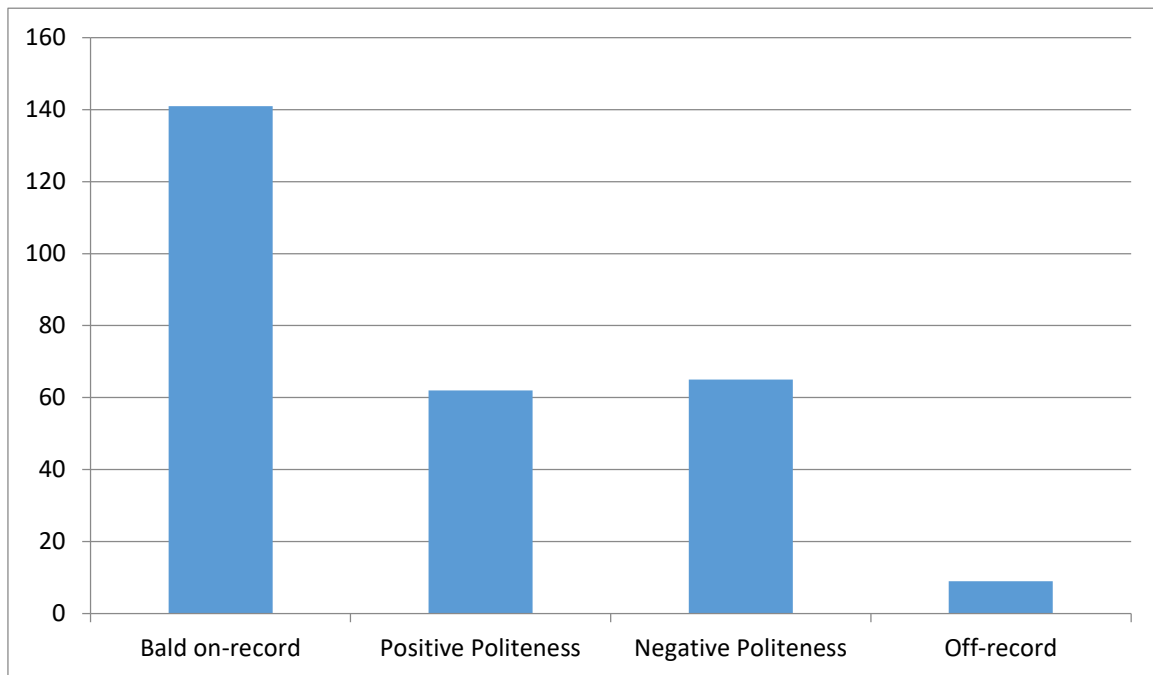


Figure 1. Politeness strategies distributions in *The Office*

The result shows that bald on-record is the most frequently used strategy (50,9%) followed by negative politeness (23,46%) Off-record requests occur least often (3,24%) The following parts illustrate how the characters employ politeness strategies when making requests:

Bald on Record

Bald on-record requests are those that are delivered in straight-forward manners and without any mitigating devices to minimize the possible threat of the imposition towards the addressee's face. In *The Office* TV Series, Michael as the manager of the Scranton branch office often employs this strategy to his employees.

(1) 01/04:09/Michael/BR

Michael: "Back to work."

The utterance above was directed to Jim and Dwight. Before the occurrence of that utterance, Michael walked toward Jim and Dwight's desks to greet them and to have some small talks. Then, he walked back to his office while saying that to Jim and Dwight.

Not only Michael, other characters also frequently used this strategy when making request. They usually use it between colleagues who are close to each other or have similar authority.

(2) 02/16:51/Dwight/BR

Dwight: "Okay, do me."

That request was addressed to Pam. That day, Michael asked his employee to do role-play in pairs for 'Diversity Day' seminar in the conference room. During the

role-play session, Dwight uttered that request to Pam asking her to say something to him so that he could give reaction to it.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is the type of strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in which the speakers orient themselves towards the addressee's desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated. This strategy emphasizes on solidarity, camaraderie and friendliness.

From the analysis it was revealed that there were 62 requests from The Office season 1 expressed using positive politeness and the strategies are *notice, attend to hearer, intensify interest to hearer, use in-group identity markers, offer, promise, be optimistic, include both speaker and hearer in the activity, and give or ask reasons*. In addition, the most frequently used strategy is *include both speaker and hearer in the activity* (50%), followed by *give or ask reasons* (16,129%). The least common used were *notice, attend to hearer* (1,613%) and *offer, promise* (1,613%). The followings show the examples of the utterances by the characters:

(1) 02/08:49/Michael/PP/PP12 (Include both hearer and speaker in the activity)

Michael: "Pam, could we change something on this?"

In that scene, Mr. Brown who was the speaker for the Diversity Day seminar handed out a pledge to Michael. However, Michael didn't agree with the content of the pledge and asked Pam to edit it. In delivering this request, Michael minimized the imposition by showing inclusiveness with the use of 'we'. It was used to show that Michael spoke for both of them even when it was actually directed only to Pam.

(2) 03/08:19/Michael/PP/PP13 (Give or ask reasons)

Michael (to Dwight): "Why don't you go in there, Dwight, and find these people a plan that will work for them?"

The context behind this utterance is Dwight had just picked a new healthcare plan for his colleagues, but they were unsatisfied with it. They complained to their manager, Michael, and he immediately asked Dwight to change it. The request was delivered in a form of question asking Dwight reasons why he cannot cooperate and since he had no good reason to not cooperate, the FTA was then accomplished.

(3) 05/11:00/Jim/PP/PP1 (Notice, attend to hearer)

Jim: "So if you wanna save big on brand names, and Roy has to work, which he will, because I'm also competitive, you should feel free to come along."

In the episode where this utterance occurs, Michael, Jim and some other employees are planning to play against warehouse staffs in basketball game after work. One of the warehouse team members is Pam's fiancé named Roy. Michael said that the losing team would have to work on the weekend. However, Pam and Roy had already had a plan for that weekend. Jim is so confident about winning the game so he asks Pam to join him to go to the mall with him instead. In delivering his request, Jim shows his attention towards Pam's interest and condition which

means that he is attending to Pam's positive face.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a strategy in which the speakers show their concern for the addressee's freedom and desired not to be impeded upon. From the analysis it was revealed that there were 65 requests from *The Office* season 1 expressed using negative politeness. The sub-strategies used are *be conventionally indirect*, *hedges*, *minimize the imposition*, *give deference*, *impersonalize*, and *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring a debt*. The result shows that the most frequently employed strategy was *be conventionally indirect* (50,76%), followed by *minimize the imposition* (26,154%). The strategy that was least frequently used was *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring a debt* (1,538%). The followings are the examples of the utterances:

(1) 01/16:03/Jim/NP/NP1(Be conventionally indirect)

Jim: "Do you like to go out at the end of a week for a drink?"

Here, Jim is asking Pam to join him and other employees for a drink. The request is delivered in a form of question that has contextually unambiguous meaning to convey his want while simultaneously avoiding imposing on Pam's freedom to refuse.

(2) 04/18:47/Michael/NP/NP4(Minimize the imposition)

Michael: "Hold on, just a second, okay?"

The situation behind this utterance is Michael and all of his employees had just held a surprise birthday party for Meredith. Everyone was about to walk away after the party ended, but Michael asked them to stay for a while to listen to him. In his request, he used 'just a second' to show the minimum state of the matter.

(3) 04/14:00/Dwight/NP/NP10(Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring a debt)

Dwight : "Please, please, I am your inferior and I'm asking you this favor."

In this episode, it is shown that Dwight is attracted to the purse saleswoman that comes to their office named Katy. In one of the scene, Michael offered Katy a ride home. When Dwight finds out about this he asks Michael to make a promise. In his request he said that his request is a favor which then minimizes the imposition towards Michael.

Off-record

Off-record is a politeness strategy in which the speaker is being unclear about his/her intention and expecting the addressee to interpret the desired outcome of his/her utterance. From the analysis it was revealed that there were 9 requests from *The Office* season 1 expressed using off-record strategies. In delivering those requests, 4 off-record sub-strategies are used by the characters, namely *give hints*, *use rhetorical questions*, *be vague* and *be incomplete*, *use ellipsis*. The result shows that the most frequently used strategy was use rhetorical questions (44,44%) and the least commonly used were give hints (11,11%) and be vague (11,11%). The

followings show the examples of the utterances:

(1) 04/11:17/Michael/OR/OR10(Use rhetorical questions)

Michael: "So, uh, Pam, is this your lunch break or was that earlier when you were eating in the kitchen with those guys?"

This dialogue takes place in the conference room. Michael found Pam and Kate are talking about purse during the working hours. The implication of Michael's utterance is requesting Pam to go back to work. However, instead of asking her directly, he delivered his request in the form of rhetorical question. When a speaker performs this strategy, he or she asks a question to the addressee without expecting an answer. Rhetorical questions leave their answer hanging in the air.

(2) 01/10:15/Michael/OR/OR12(Be Vague)

Michael (to Pam): "I'm sorry"

In the situation where that utterance occurred, Michael was talking with Pam and said that he deserves a raise. Pam replied it with 'Don't we all?' with low voice and Michael couldn't hear it clearly. Therefore, he asks her to repeat it.

The Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by Characters in IT Crowd TV Series

The utterances analyzed in this study were collected from the first season which, similar to *The Office*, also contains 6 episodes. Each episode is approximately 24 minutes long. The numbers of requests uttered by the four characters throughout the entire season, specifically which contained politeness strategies were 140 utterances. Those utterances were then analyzed and categorized by following the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). The result of the analysis is as follows:

Table 4. The Frequency of Politeness Strategies Use in Requests by *The IT Crowd* Characters

No.	Politeness Strategy	Number of Data	Frequency
1.	Bald On-Record	83	59,28%
2.	Positive Politeness	15	10,71%
3.	Negative Politeness	33	23,57%
4.	Off-Record	9	6,42%
Total		140	100%

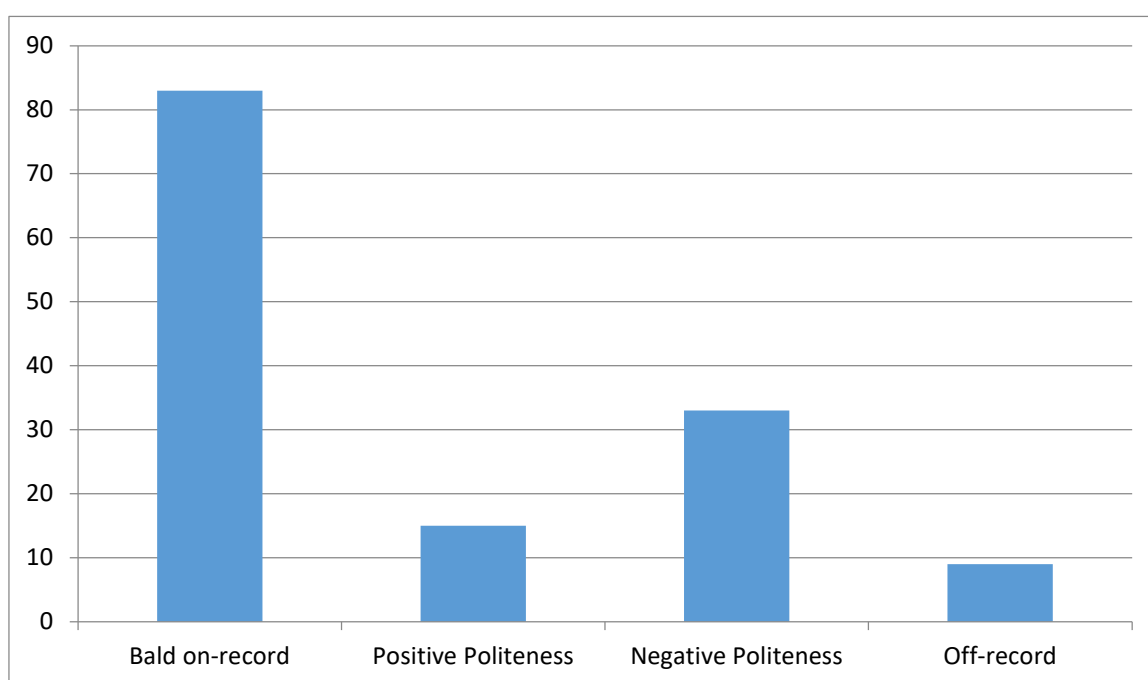


Figure 2. Politeness strategies distributions in *The IT Crowd*

The result shows that bald on-record is the most frequently used strategy (59,28%) followed by negative politeness (23,57%). Off-record requests occur least often (6,383%) The following parts show some examples of request utterances containing different politeness strategies:

Bald On-record

Bald on-record is a politeness strategy in which the speakers convey their messages in direct manners and without any mitigating devices to minimize the FTA towards the addressee's face. The followings are some excerpts from *The IT Crowd* showing how the characters employed this strategy.

(1) 01/14:44/Denholm/BR

Denholm: "Escort them from the premises and do it as a team."

Denholm is the CEO of Reynholm Industries. Prior to this utterance, he had just fired everyone on the 4th floor for not being able to work in a team. Therefore, he called one of the security guard and gave a bald on-record request to escort the employees he had just fired.

(2) 02/19:43/Roy/BR

Roy: "OK, put the stress machine in Jen's room."

Moss made a machine that can test out someone's stress level. Jen, their manager whose office is in the same room as Roy and Moss, told them that he was on his way to their office. Roy didn't want him to find out about the machine so he asked Moss to put the stress machine away.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is a strategy which emphasizes on solidarity, camaraderie

and friendliness. In this strategy the speaker focuses on attending the addressee's positive face which is their wish to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated. From the analysis of *The IT Crowd* season 1, it was found that there are 15 requests which were expressed using positive politeness strategies and the strategies used are *use in-group identity markers, avoid disagreement, be optimistic, include both speaker and hearer in the activity, and give or ask reasons*. Among all those strategies *include both speaker and hearer in the activity* was the most commonly used sub-strategy with the percentage of 40% and the least used was *avoid disagreement* (6,667%). The followings show the examples of the characters' utterances:

(1) 04/02:21/Roy/PP/PP12(Include both hearer and speaker in the activity)

Roy: "OK, well let's see it then."

In this scene Moss is telling Roy that he has a new customized cup with his picture printed on it. Therefore, Roy is asking Moss to show him the picture. This strategy is carried out by indicating that the speaker speaks for both the addressee and himself even when the request is actually only directed to the addressee only. Words like 'us', 'we', 'let's' are usually used to express this strategy.

(2) 04/03:36/Roy/PP/PP6(Avoid disagreement)

Roy: "Give us a look at the picture, then."

Moss is bragging about his new customized cup that had his picture printed on it to Roy. Therefore, Roy asks him to show the picture. In his utterance, he use 'then' which is a word that signals pseudo-agreement. The use of 'then' in pseudo-agreement is to show that the speaker is reaching a conclusion based on a collaborative line of reasoning with the addressee.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a strategy in which the speakers show their concern for the addressee's freedom and desired not to be impeded upon. From the analysis of *The IT Crowd* season 1, it was found that there were 33 requests which were expressed using negative politeness strategies. Throughout the first season the characters employed 7 strategies of negative politeness namely *be conventionally indirect, hedges, minimize the imposition, give deference, apologize, impersonalize, and go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring the hearer*. The most frequently used strategy was *be conventionally indirect* (60,6%) and the least used was *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring the hearer* (3,03%). The followings are the examples of the utterances:

(1) 04/06:40/Jen/NP/NP1(Be conventionally indirect)

Jen: "Will you get up there now, please?"

This utterance was directed to Roy. The intended goal is to ask Roy to go to the 4th floor to fix Samantha's computer. However, instead of directly saying 'Get up there now', Jen formulated her request in a form of question which indicate that she acknowledges Roy's freedom to comply or decline.

(2) 04/17:27/Denholm/NP/NP10(Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer)

Denholm: "I'll thank you to keep out of this Jen."

The utterance above shows that Denholm made a request to Jen to not get involved in his problem with his friend and also expressed that he acknowledged it as a favor.

Off-record

Off-record is a politeness strategy in which the speaker is being unclear about his/her intended message and expecting the addressee to interpret the desired outcome of his/her utterance. From the analysis of *The IT Crowd* season 1, it was found that there were 9 requests which were expressed using off-record politeness strategies. The strategies used were *give hints*, *give association clues*, and *be incomplete, use ellipsis*. The most used was *give association clues* (77,8%) and the least used were *give hints* (11,1%) and *be incomplete, use ellipsis* (11,1%).

(1) 03/01:12/Roy/OR/OR2(Give association clues)

Roy: "Quite fancy a cup of tea, though."

Roy and Patricia had just arrived at Patricia's house after their dinner date. Patricia was trying to find her key in her purse, whereas Roy was waiting for her to invite him inside. However, she didn't say anything even after she finally found the key. Therefore, Roy expressed his request using this strategy and expected Patricia to understand his intention.

(2) 05/07:43/Moss/OR/OR1(Give hints)

Moss: "Yeah, well, we all have to go sometime"

Prior to that utterance, Bill came to the IT department's office looking for Jen. Moss lied and told him that Jen died. Bill then expressed his disbelief on the news. Moss didn't want to talk about it any longer because he was worried that he would find out about the truth. Therefore, the utterance above is his request addressed to Bill to get out of his office. He didn't want to be so obvious. So, instead of saying it directly, he made an implication with that utterance while gesturing his hands towards the door.

The Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by Characters in The Office TV Series

The numbers of requests that were delivered by the four characters using impoliteness strategies found in the first season are 18. Those utterances then analyzed and categorized by following the theory of impoliteness strategies by Culpeper (1996). The table below shows the result of the analysis:

Table 5. The Frequency of Impoliteness Strategies Use in Requests by *The Office* Characters

No.	Impoliteness Strategy	Number of Data	Frequency
1.	Bald on-record	8	44,44%

	impoliteness		
2.	Positive impoliteness	3	16,66%
3.	Negative impoliteness	7	38,88%
4.	Off-record impoliteness	0	0%
5.	Withhold Politeness	0	0%
Total		18	100%

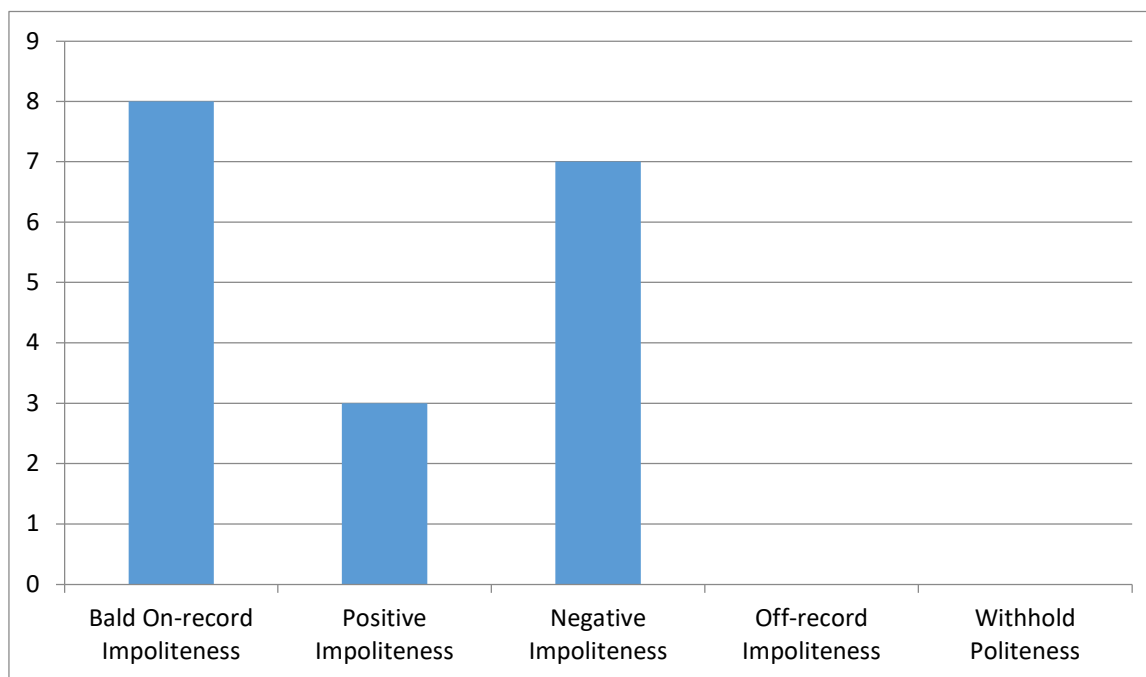


Figure 3. Impoliteness strategies distributions in *The Office*

It can be seen from the table and figure above that the most frequently occurred strategy is bald on-record (44,44%), followed by negative impoliteness (38,88%). Off-record impoliteness and withhold politeness are the strategies that were never used by the characters throughout the entire first season. The following sections provide excerpt of the request utterances containing impoliteness strategies in *The Office* TV series:

Bald On-record Impoliteness

Bald on-record impoliteness is a strategy in which the speaker carries out an FTA in a straightforward, clear, unambiguous and concise way in situations where face still matters and is not less important.

In *The Office* TV Series, specifically season 1, Michael and Pam are the two characters that often employed this strategy when expressing impolite requests.

(1) 02/12:14/Michael/BRI

Michael: "Get out."

The utterance above was directed to one of his employee named Toby. Michael

and all of his employees were entering the conference room to attend a seminar. While entering the room, Toby made a racist joke and laughed at it. Therefore, Michael was mad and asked him to get out of the room.

Michael used bald on-record impoliteness mostly towards his subordinates, because he has the highest position in their office. Pam, on the other hand, used bald on-record only to her fiancé who also works in the same company as her.

(2) 04/15:44/Pam/BRI

Pam: "*Cut it out.*"

In that situation, Pam was mad at Roy. He came to her desk and kept asking whether she's mad at him or not. It irritated her, so she asked him to stop asking.

Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness is a strategy which attacks the addressee's positive face which is the desire to be liked, respected and approved of. From the analysis, it is revealed that there are two output positive impoliteness strategies used by the characters in *The Office* namely, strategy 4 *be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic* and strategy 9 *use taboo words*. The most used strategy of positive impoliteness is strategy 4 *be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic* (66,67%), followed by strategy 9 *use taboo words* (33,33%). The followings show the examples of the characters' utterances:

(1) 01/10:20/Michael/PI/PI4(Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic)

Michael: "*If you are unhappy with your compensation, maybe you should take it up with HR, ok?*"

In that situation, Michael and Pam were having a small talk. Michael then jokingly said that he deserves a raise to 6 million dollars. Pam responded with 'Don't we all?' Michael wasn't happy with Pam's response, so he attacked her positive face by delivering that request.

(2) 02/12:14/Michael/PI/PI9(Use taboo words)

Michael: "*And you should just get the hell out of here.*"

This inappropriate utterance was directed to Toby. In that scene, Michael and all of his employees were entering the conference room to attend a seminar about racism. When they were still on their way inside the room Toby made a racist joke in front of everyone and even laughed at it. His action made Michael mad, so he asked him to get out. In that utterance, Michael used the word 'the hell' which is a swear word directed towards Toby's positive face.

Negative Impoliteness

This is a strategy in which the speaker attacks the addressee's negative face, which is their freedom or desire to not be imposed upon. In *The Office*, there are three output negative impoliteness strategies employed by the characters namely, strategy 1 *frighten*, strategy 2 *condescend, scorn or ridicule* and strategy 4 *explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect*. The most used strategy of negative

impoliteness is strategy 2 *condescend, scorn or ridicule* (57,14%) and the least used is strategy 4 *explicitly associate the other* (14,29%). The followings show the examples of the utterances:

(1) 06/05:54/Michael/NI/NI2(Condescend, scorn or ridicule)

Michael: "Yeah, well, blah-dee-blah, techno babble. Just do it, okay?"

The situation leading to that utterance is that Michael asked Ryan to look after the purses in the conference room. However, Ryan refused by saying that he's still installing File Share on all of the computers in their office. Michael didn't want to accept his excuse and said that utterance.

(2) 01/10:27/Michael/NI/NI4(Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect)

Michael: "Pam just be professional."

Michael and Pam were having a small talk. Michael then jokingly said that he deserves a raise to 6 million dollars. Pam responded with 'Don't we all?' Michael wasn't happy with Pam's response, so he attacked her negative face by implying that she's being unprofessional.

The Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by Characters in The IT Crowd TV Series

The numbers of request utterances by Jen, Moss, Roy and Denholm that contain impoliteness strategies found in the first season are 44. Those utterances then analyzed and categorized by following the theory of impoliteness strategies by Culpeper (1996). The table below shows the result of the analysis:

Table 6. The Frequency of Impoliteness Strategies Use in Requests by *The IT Crowd* Characters

No.	Impoliteness Strategy	Number of Data	Frequency
1.	Bald on-record impoliteness	27	61,36%
2.	Positive impoliteness	9	29,45%
3.	Negative impoliteness	8	18,18%
4.	Off-Record impoliteness	0	0%
5.	Withhold politeness	0	0%
Total		44	100%

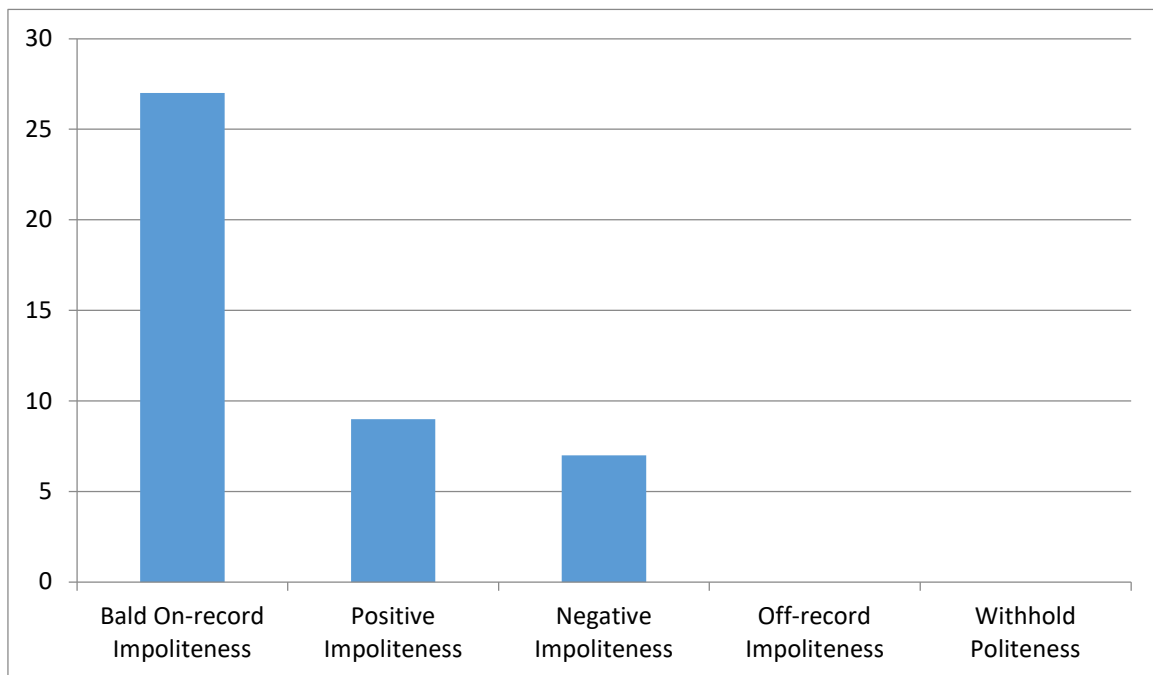


Figure 4. Impoliteness strategies distributions in *The IT Crowd*

The result shows that bald on-record impoliteness is the most frequently used strategy (61,36%) followed by positive impoliteness (29,45%) Off-record impoliteness and withhold politeness are the strategies that were never used by the characters throughout the entire first season. The following parts show how they used impoliteness strategies when making requests:

Bald On-Record Impoliteness

This refers to when the face-threatening act is carried out in a straightforward, clear, unambiguous and concise way in situations where face still matters and is not less important.

(1) 01/01:15/Jen/BRI

Jen: "Make up your mind."

The utterance above was said to Denholm. It's Jen's first day at work, and Denholm said it must be scary for her. She told him that she wasn't scared, but he said that she should be. Later on, he repeatedly shifted between telling her to feel scared and not to be. His indecisiveness irritated her, so she told him that.

(2) 01/07:35/Roy/BRI

Roy: "Shut up, Maurice."

In this scene, Roy wanted to impress Jen, so he was pretending to be smart in front of Jen by talking about classic books to Maurice. However, Maurice didn't understand the situation and keep asking questions to him. Thus, he asked Maurice to shut up.

Positive Impoliteness

This refers to strategies used by a speaker to harm the addressee's positive face or desire to be liked, respected and approved of. In *The IT Crowd*, the characters used 5 output strategies of positive impoliteness namely, strategy 1 *ignore, snub the other*, strategy 4 *be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic*, strategy 7 *seek disagreement*, strategy 9 *use taboo words*, and strategy 10 *call the other names*. The most frequently used positive impoliteness strategy is strategy 9 which is *use taboo words* (44,44%) and the least used are *ignore, snub the other, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic*, and *seek disagreement* (11,11%) The followings show some examples of the utterances:

(1) 02/02:26/Roy/PI/PI9(Use taboo words)

Roy: "Come on, you crazy bitch."

The scene shows Jen entering the office while rambling about a pair of shoes that she saw on the way to the office. Roy cut off Jen's ramble by saying that utterance while simultaneously leading her out the door to attend a meeting with their boss. In his utterance, Roy used the word 'bitch' which is a curse word and also a misogynistic remark. Therefore, this word is a direct attack towards Jen's positive face.

(2) 06/11:05/Roy/PI/PI1(Ignore, snub the other)

Roy: "Oh will you get off that?"

In that episode, Roy and Moss were being moody and easily agitated. While touching the food packaging lay out on the desk, Jen said to them that the food they ate probably affected their mood. Her remark made Roy annoyed, so he said that utterance.

(3) 01/13:10/Jen/PI/PI7(Seek disagreement)

Jen: "Will you stop trying to undermine me?"

In that episode, Roy kept bringing up Jen's lack of knowledge about computer. He also accused her of not knowing anything about computers. His remarks made her upset, so she said the utterance to him.

Negative Impoliteness

This refers to strategies used to attack the addressee's negative face that is their desire to be free and not being imposed upon. In *The IT Crowd*, the characters used 3 output strategies of negative impoliteness namely, namely, strategy 2 *condescend, scorn or ridicule*, strategy 3 *invade the other's space* and strategy 4 *explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect*. The most frequently used strategy is strategy 2 *condescend, scorn or ridicule* (62,5%) and the least used is strategy 4 *explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect* (12,5%).

(1) 01/03:57/Roy/NI/NI2(Condescend, scorn or ridicule)

Roy: "Well why don't you come down here and make me then."

The context behind this utterance is Roy was talking on the phone with one of the employee from the upper floor who asked him about how to fix her broken computer. He gave her instructions on how to fix it but she was still confused. Her

inability and responses made Roy mad, so they ended up arguing.

(2) 05/03:39/Jen/NI/NI4(Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect)

Jen: "Don't use my name to start leching around on 5th."

The excerpt above is Jen's request to Roy. She said it because he kept asking her about a girl in the 5th floor. She wouldn't tell him and told him that instead. In her request she used the word 'leching' which is British informal word that means to show too much sexual interest in someone.

The Similarities in the Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

Table 7. Comparison of Politeness Strategies Frequencies in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*

No.	Politeness Strategy	<i>The Office</i>		<i>The IT Crowd</i>	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bald On-Record	141	50,9%	83	59,28%
2.	Positive Politeness	62	22,382%	15	10,71%
3.	Negative Politeness	65	23,466%	33	23,57%
4.	Off-Record	9	3,24%	9	6,42%
Total		277	100%	140	100%

Despite being set in different countries and presenting characters with distinct personalities, both series share some common patterns in how politeness is used when making requests. In both series, all four Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are used. Moreover, the most commonly occurred strategy in both series is also the same, which is bald on-record. It is because United States and United Kingdom are generally categorized as low context culture, in which people typically emphasize on directness and clarity in communication (Yang, 2021; Vrij et al., 2020; Hall, 1976).

Negative politeness comes second as the most used strategy by the characters in both series, followed by positive politeness. In employing these two strategies, the characters also tend to use the same output strategies. Both in *The Office* and in *The IT Crowd*, the characters most frequently use strategy 12 of positive politeness which is *include both speaker and hearer in the activity* and strategy 1 of negative politeness which is *be conventionally indirect*.

The Differences in the Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

Based on the analysis, it was found that there are several distinct differences in the way the characters use politeness strategies to deliver requests. From the data,

it can be seen that the varieties of strategies used when employing different politeness types are different between the two series. In employing positive politeness, the characters of *The Office* used 7 strategies namely strategy 1 *notice, attend to hearer*, strategy 3 *intensify interest to hearer*, strategy 4 *use in-group identity markers*, strategy 10 *offer, promise*, strategy 11 *be optimistic*, strategy 12 *include both speaker and hearer in the activity*, and strategy 13 *give or ask reasons*. On the other hand, the characters in *The IT Crowd* employed fewer strategies which are strategy 4 *use in-group identity markers*, strategy 6 *avoid disagreement*, strategy 11 *be optimistic*, strategy 12 *include both speaker and hearer in the activity*, and strategy 13 *give or ask reasons*.

In *The Office*, the strategies of negative politeness used are strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect*, strategy 2 *hedges*, strategy 4 *minimize the imposition*, strategy 5 *give deference*, and strategy 10 *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer*. On the other hand, the characters in *The IT Crowd* used more strategies namely, strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect*, strategy 2 *hedges*, strategy 4 *minimize the imposition*, strategy 5 *give deference*, strategy 6 *apologize*, and strategy 10 *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer*.

Regarding the use of off-record politeness, the characters in *The Office* used 4 strategies such as, strategy 1 *give hints*, strategy 10 *use rhetorical questions*, strategy 12 *be vague*, and strategy 15 *be incomplete, use ellipsis*. However, in *The IT Crowd*, they only used 3 strategies namely strategy 1 *give hints*, strategy 2 *give association clues*, and strategy 15 *be incomplete, use ellipsis*. Furthermore, the most commonly used strategies of off-record in both series are also different. In *The Office*, they most frequently used strategy 10 *use rhetorical questions*, whereas in *The IT Crowd* the most frequently used strategy was strategy 2 *give association clues*.

The Similarities in the Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

There are some similarities observed between the two series in terms of impoliteness strategies use in requests utterances. The first similarity is regarding the type of impoliteness super-strategies employed by the characters. The findings show that there are three super-strategies of Culpeper's impoliteness that are used by the characters to make impolite request. They are bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, and negative impoliteness. Out of those three strategies, bald on-record is the most frequently used strategy in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*.

This strategy is done by attacking the addressee's face in a straightforward, blunt and often even in an aggressive way. Another similarity that the two series share is the preferable strategy of negative impoliteness. The findings reveal that when the characters use negative impoliteness to make requests, they tend to choose strategy 2 *condescend, scorn or ridicule*. This strategy refers to when the speaker talks down to the addressee, mocks him/her, or treats him/her as inferior or ridiculous.

The Differences in the Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

Table 8. Comparison of Impoliteness Strategies Frequencies in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*

No.	Impoliteness Strategy	<i>The Office</i>		<i>The IT Crowd</i>	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Bald On-Record	8	44,44 %	27	61,36%
2.	Positive Impoliteness	3	16,66%	9	29,45%
3.	Negative Impoliteness	7	38,88%	8	18,18%
4.	Off-Record	0	0%	0	0%
5.	Withhold Impoliteness		0%	0	0%
Total		18	100%	44	100%

Based on the analysis, some differences of impoliteness strategies use were found across both series. The first difference is regarding the second and the third most frequent strategy used. In *The Office*, negative impoliteness is the second most commonly used strategy, followed by positive impoliteness. However, it is the other way around in *The IT Crowd*, positive impoliteness becomes the second and negative impoliteness is the third.

The next difference is the characters in *The IT Crowd* are more explicit compared to *The Office's* characters when it comes to the use of positive impoliteness strategies. *The IT Crowd's* characters more frequently employ strategy 9 *use of taboo words* and strategy 10 *call the other names* compared to the characters in *The Office*. Throughout the entire first season of *The Office*, only one request utterance contains swear words, which is when Michael said "And you should just get the hell out of here." to Toby after he made a racist joke. In *The IT Crowd*, on the other hand, there are 6 requests utterance containing swear words occurred.

The swear words used are "bitch", "bastard", and "arse". The examples of the utterances are when Roy said "Come on, you crazy bitch." to ask Jen to go to the meeting and when Jen said "Stop telling everyone I slept with you, you bastard!" to

her date partner, Billy. Not only swear words, there is also derogatory nomination used in the series, which is 'goblin'. This word was used in the request utterance "Yes and leave me alone you goblin!" which was said by Denholm to his old friend, Reynholm, because he didn't like the way he call him by his first name.

Discussion

Interpretation of Politeness Strategies in The Office

The findings reveal that, in *The Office*, bald on-record strategy is the most frequently employed when making requests, followed by negative politeness and positive politeness. The high frequency of bald on-record strategy's occurrence is because the request utterances found are mostly from the boss to subordinates or between co-workers. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), the use of bald on-record is considered appropriate in several conditions such as when speaking on the phone with bad connection, when the interaction is task-oriented, when the speaker is more powerful than the addressee, or when the relationship with the interlocutor is close. In this series, Michael, the regional manager, often makes bald on-record request such as 'Back to work', 'Tell him about the kung fu, and the car and everything', or 'Go', to his subordinates.

This demonstrates how power dynamics allow superiors to be straightforward and blunt without fear of threatening the other's face or losing their own face. This finding is in line with some previous studies by Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), Rahayuningsih et al., (2020), Probosini (2020), and Joahnnis (2022) which revealed that in formal situations it is common for superiors to use bald on-record strategy to communicate with their inferiors, for examples a boss with an employee, a senior with a junior, a teacher with a student, etc.

Furthermore, other characters namely Jim, Dwight, and Pam also often use this strategy when making requests to each other or to other characters. The use of bald on-record between Jim and Dwight is acceptable without damaging their faces because they have similar position of authority in the office which is sales representative. On the other hand, Jim and Pam can be direct to each other because they are friends. Thus, their closeness in social relationship allows the use of bald on-record between the two of them without jeopardizing anything.

As stated previously, *The Office* is an American TV show and the characters are Americans. Therefore, the finding showing high frequency of bald on-record use by the characters, especially in making requests, supports the previous study by Hendriks, Van Meurs and Kakisina (2023). In their study, it was revealed that American English speakers are more lenient regarding the lack of politeness modification such as 'maybe', 'I was wondering if', or 'could' in writing requests in emails.

The use of negative politeness is also prominent, suggesting that despite their directness the characters also often attempt to maintain face and minimize imposition when making requests. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there

are 3 factors that should be considered when employing politeness strategies, namely social distance, power, and rank of imposition. In addition, previous studies by Aasi et al. (2023) and Muhammad (2024) also stated that people commonly use negative politeness in bottom-up interactions, such as when communicating with older people or those with higher social status. That is why Dwight, Jim and Pam often use this strategy when making requests to Michael.

However, in this series, negative strategies aren't only used when making requests to the higher-ups or strangers. Michael, who is part of the higher-ups, also often uses this strategy type when making requests to his employees. It is because United States is considered as low power distance country (Liu et al., 2025). In low power distance countries, equality is more valued and hierarchal difference is less prominent (Santini, 2024). In American workplaces, equality is reflected in efforts to create flat hierarchies and promote respectful, inclusive working environment (Weissburg, 2022). Furthermore, a survey done to 5037 American workers also revealed that 70% of them felt respected and trusted by their higher-ups (Orrell et al. 2022).

Furthermore, the characters also often use negative politeness strategies when making request to people they're not close with. For example, when making a request to Kate, a saleswoman who came to their office once, Dwight used strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect* and said 'Could I talk to you for a second, in private?' In that situation, Dwight and Kate are socially distant since it's their first day to meet. Therefore, he cannot be too straightforward in order to avoid being disrespectful or rude. His way of conveying request in a form of question shows that he attempted to minimize the pressure towards Kate, thus giving her freedom to refuse.

In addition, the findings reveal that this strategy is the most preferable sub-strategy amongst the characters when employing negative politeness. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), *be conventionally indirect* is used when the speaker is facing two opposite tensions which is the desire to be straightforward and also the desire to give the addressee option to refuse. Since this series takes place in an office, it means that they need to be efficient when communicating especially when making request. Therefore, this strategy allows the speaker to balance the need to be efficient and the need to minimize impositions.

The findings also show that the proportion of negative and positive politeness strategies is relatively close, with negative politeness appearing slightly more often. This result suggests that while still maintaining professionalism and respect, the characters also attempt to build solidarity, friendly relations, and camaraderie among them. When employing this strategy to make requests, they most commonly used strategy 12 *Include both speaker and hearer in the activity* and often use word like 'let's' and 'we' to demonstrate inclusiveness. For example, when Michael want Dwight to give his opinion, instead of saying 'I want you to find out what motivates people more than anything else.' he said, 'Well, first what we

have to do is find out what motivates people more than anything else.' The use of 'we' in his request indicates that he speaks for both of them. It creates cooperative assumptions and therefore minimizes the FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The least used politeness strategy in this series is off-record strategy. This can be explained by the workplace context of this series. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy allows the speaker to avoid responsibility of his request by providing himself various defensible interpretations. Therefore, the request made with this strategy is often ambiguous and risks misunderstanding. Workplaces normally emphasize on efficiency and clarity in communication. Thus, vague requests can be seen as impractical and a waste of time.

When this strategy does appear in the series, it is mostly using strategy 10 use rhetorical questions to create comedic effect. For example, in episode 6, Michael caught Pam talking and laughing in the conference room with Kate during working hours. Instead of asking her directly to go back to work, he said, 'So, uh, Pam, is this your lunch break or was that earlier when you were eating in the kitchen with those guys?' Following Brown and Levinson's theory his rhetorical questions help to avoid attacking Pam face whereas from a comedic perspective it creates humor through awkwardness.

Interpretation of Politeness Strategies in The IT Crowd

The result shows that, in *The IT Crowd*, bald on-record is the most commonly used strategy to make requests, followed by negative politeness and positive politeness. This high frequency of bald on-record can be explained by the fact that most requests found in the series are made by superiors and addressed to their inferiors or made by co-workers that have close social relationship. This finding is in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory stating that some conditions in which the use of bald on-record is perceived as appropriate are when the speaker is more powerful than the addressee or when the relationship between the interlocutors is close.

In the series, Jen, who is a manager of the IT Department, often makes requests with bald on-record strategy such as 'Help me get my shoes on.', 'Push it', or 'You investigate.' to Moss and Roy who are her subordinates. This shows how her position of authority allows her to make direct requests without appearing as rude or impolite. Roy and Moss also often make blunt requests to each other. Their choice of politeness strategies is acceptable not only because they have similar position in the office hierarchy, IT technician, but also because their close social distance as friends.

The IT Crowd is a TV series that takes place in United Kingdom and the characters use British English in the show. According to Culpeper and Gillings (2018), negative politeness strategy is a 'general feature of politeness' in Britain. In addition, Degenhardt (2023) also stated that British English speakers perceived directness and the underuse of politeness markers in making requests as more

face-threatening and less acceptable. However, the findings of this study reveal otherwise.

It is shown that the characters often ignore the use of politeness markers and deliver their request bluntly. The contradictory result of this present study, however, doesn't necessarily invalidate the results of the previous studies. As previously explained, the requests utterance of this study are mostly made by superiors and close friends. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record is acceptable in situation in which the gap between the interlocutors in regards to social distance or power difference isn't big. Thus, this explains the dominance of bald on-record in this present study.

Although bald on-record is the most dominant strategy to make request in this series, the use of negative politeness is also prominent and becomes the second most frequently used strategy. This result is in line with Phúc & Yến (2016) and Hannah (2025) statements that say, compared to positive politeness, British people prefer negative politeness more in their interactions. In this series, the occurrences of negative politeness requests suggest that the characters occasionally recognize the potential threat of their requests and attempt to minimize the imposition.

This strategy often appears when the characters are unfamiliar with the addressee, avoid conflict, or seek cooperation. For example, when speaking to employees from other department or someone unknown on the phone, Moss and Roy often deliver their request in indirect manner such as 'Just sort of stay away from this whole area, while we come to terms with the loss.' or 'Have you tried forcing an unexpected reboot?' These findings are in line with a statement by Masruddin et.al (2023) saying that in communicating with unfamiliar people or an individual whose social standing is unclear, employing negative politeness is deemed as the safest option to avoid being rude.

It is because negative politeness strategies emphasize the speaker's hesitance to impose the addressee, thus minimizing the pressure towards them. When employing this strategy to make requests, the characters tend to use strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect*. This strategy allows the speaker to be less imposing but still being clear about their desired goal (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Moreover, it is also ideal considering the setting of this series which is a workplace where efficiency is emphasized.

The third most used strategy is positive politeness. Despite being less dominant than bald on-record and negative politeness, this strategy still plays a role in shaping interactions among the characters. This strategy is employed when the characters want to build rapport, reduce social distance or to emphasize friendship. For example, Jen made a request using this strategy to the employees from other departments on her first day of working in Reynholm Industries. She said, 'You guys should come down here more often.' In her request she used the identity marker 'you guys' to address the employees whom she just met that day.

This addressing form fosters a sense of closeness between them and also makes her request less demanding. Furthermore, this strategy is also often used by Roy to make request to Moss. In the series, Roy and Moss are portrayed as friends. Thus, the use of positive politeness in Roy's requests emphasizes the friendship between them which can eliminate any possible threat in his requests. Off-record politeness is the least frequently used strategy in this series. This result indicates that the characters rarely rely on hints and implications to convey requests.

The setting of this series, which is an office, requires the characters to be clear with their request in order to avoid misunderstanding and to create effective communication. Therefore, the use of off-record is less preferred. However, when off-record requests do occur in the series, they typically appear in awkward situations. For example, when Moss lied to Billy and told him that Jen was dead, he used off-record requests to ask him to leave his office. When Billy was talking about his disbelief in Jen's death and mourning over it, Moss said awkwardly 'Yeah, well, we all have to go sometime.' while making a subtle gesture towards the door with his hands.

The use of off-record strategy in his utterance allowed Bill to interpret his utterance, thus minimizing the FTA. The awkwardness created by this strategy is also used as a tool to create comedic effect in this series.

Interpretation of Impoliteness Strategies in The Office

In contrast to the frequent use of politeness strategies in making requests by the characters in *The Office*, the frequency of impoliteness strategies is relatively rare. There are only 18 requests found containing impoliteness strategies throughout the first season. This can be explained by the setting of this show which is an office. In *The Office*, people normally will be respectful and polite to each other. Moreover, requests are already face-threatening by their nature (Erlinda, 2019). Therefore, the use of impoliteness strategies will only enhance the imposition of the utterance which could turn the situation into an unwanted social conflict.

However, the finding shows that when impoliteness strategies do occur in the show, they are dominantly delivered using bald on-record strategy. This strategy is mainly used when the characters are angry or annoyed with the addressee. Thus, they employ bald on-record impoliteness to deliberately attack the addressee's face. For example, in episode 2 of *The Office*, Michael said 'Get out.' to Toby, one of his employees, in front of the other employees after he made a racist joke and laughed at it. As stated by Culpeper (1996), bald on-record impoliteness refers to communication strategy when the face-threatening act is carried out in a straightforward, clear, unambiguous and concise way in situations where face still matters and is not less important. Thus, Michael's request in that situation is

considered as bald on-record impoliteness as he bluntly asked Toby to get out of the room in front of his co-workers which, as a result, damaging his face.

The next most use impoliteness strategy in this show is negative impoliteness. Culpeper (1996) stated that this strategy threatens the addressee's negative face by ignoring their desire for freedom of action often through threats, condescension, or direct interference. In *The Office*, the dominant output strategy of negative impoliteness is *condescended, scorn, or ridicule*. This finding reflects that when employing negative impoliteness to make requests, the characters undermine the addressee's negative face by intruding their freedom while also belittling or mocking them at the same time.

An example of the use of this strategy is when Michael said 'Yeah, well, blah-dee-blah, techno babble. Just do it, okay?' to Ryan, one of the employees. For context, in that scene, Michael asked him to look after the purses in the conference room so that they wouldn't get stolen. However, Ryan refused by saying that he's still installing a program for all of their computers. Thus, Michael mocked him and told him to just do what he had asked.

Positive impoliteness is the least used strategy by the characters. Throughout the first season, there are only 3 requests delivered with this strategy. This shows that the characters rarely attack the other person's positive face even when they make impolite requests. However, on the few occasions this strategy did occur, they mainly used to be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic output strategy proposed by Culpeper (1996). For example, when Pam said to Michael that everyone deserves a raise and not only him, he said to her, 'Pam, if you are unhappy with your compensation, maybe you should take it up with HR, ok?' This clearly shows Michael's ignorance towards Pam.

As the regional manager, he obviously has higher salary than her. However, instead of sympathizing with her and offer to help as the regional manager, he deliberately attacks her positive face.

Interpretation of Impoliteness Strategies in The IT Crowd

The data shows that the frequency of the use of impoliteness strategies by the characters of *The IT Crowd* when making request is relatively lower compared to the politeness strategies use. Only 44 requests were found containing impoliteness strategies in the first season of this series. The relatively rare occurrence of impolite requests in the series reflects the main setting of this series, which is an office. An office is a formal environment where people will normally act more polite and respectful.

Therefore, the use of impoliteness strategies is less frequent compared to more casual places. Moreover, as stated previously, the speech act of requesting is inherently face-threatening (Erlinda, 2019). Thus, using impoliteness strategies in delivering it will only increase the threat towards the addressee's face and may trigger a social conflict between the interlocutors.

Nonetheless, when *The IT Crowd* characters did use impoliteness strategies in their requests, they tended to employ bald on-record impoliteness strategy in delivering them. The data shows that they often used this strategy when they were angry, annoyed, or when they simply choose to be rude. For example, in episode 1, Jen asks Denholm, "Make up your mind." In the scene where that utterance occurs, Denholm who is the head of the company asks Jen whether she is scared as it is her first day of work. Thus, she says that she isn't.

Denholm then says that she should be scared but then he changes his mind again and tells her not to. This happens repeatedly to the points that it annoys her and makes that request.

According to Culpeper (2011), impoliteness is when someone's behavior or action in a certain situation is considered as rude or offensive due to the fact that it goes against what people expect, want, or believe is appropriate in social interactions. In that situation, Jen and Denholm are distant in terms of social relations and level of power and authority. Therefore, she is expected to be polite towards him. Moreover, following Culpeper's (1996) theory, her request falls to the bald on-record impoliteness category as it is carried out in a straightforward, clear, unambiguous and concise way and done in a situation where face still matters and is not less important.

The next most commonly occurs strategy of impoliteness in this series is positive impoliteness. According to Culpeper (1996), positive impoliteness refers to strategies used to harm one's positive face or desire to be liked, respected and approved of. The data shows, that throughout the first season, *taboo words* is the most used positive impoliteness output strategy by the characters in making impolite requests. This output strategy is carried out by the characters by using swear words or profane language with the intention to intensify the force of their requests and undermine the other person's positive face.

They usually employ this strategy when they're frustrated or impatient. For example, in episode 5, Jen says to Bill "Stop telling everyone I slept with you, you bastard!" Here, Jen is frustrated because Bill keeps spreading misinformation by telling everyone in their office that they slept together. Therefore, she chooses to be rude by calling him "bastard" which, as a result, forces him to comply with her request.

Furthermore, negative impoliteness is the strategy with the lowest frequency in the data. However, in the rare occasions where it does appear, the most common output strategy is *condescend, scorn, and ridicule*. This finding shows that when the characters do employ negative impoliteness in their requests, they tend to undermine the other person's face by belittling or mocking them. For example, in episode 3, Jen said to Moss "Oh, be a man, Moss." to ask him to get rid of the spider in her office. Her utterance directly attacks his face by questioning his masculinity and implying that he is weak. Thus, it forces him to help her achieve her desired goal.

Similarities in the Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd

Despite the differences in the origin and characters composition, *The Office* and *The IT Crowd* display some significant similarities regarding the use of politeness strategies when making requests. The data shows that the characters in both series tend to use bald on-record when delivering requests. This tendency can be related to the cultural context of the origin countries of both series, United States and United Kingdom. Both countries are generally categorized as low context culture (Yang, 2021; Vrij et al., 2020).

In such culture, speakers typically emphasize on directness and clarity in communication (Hall, 1976). Therefore, the high frequency of bald on-record in the data reflects this cultural orientation toward direct communication. Moreover, the characters in both series mostly use this strategy in interactions with their subordinates, co-workers, or those with close social relationship. This finding aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1984) theory stating that the use of bald on-record is considered appropriate when the speaker is more powerful than the addressee, when the relationship between interlocutors is close, when the interaction is task-oriented or in urgent situations.

Regarding the use of negative politeness, the data shows that this strategy is the second most dominant in both series. This result can be attributed to the workplace setting of both series. The formality of a workplace environment prompts the characters to use negative impoliteness to maintain respect and professionalism despite their preference in employing bald on-record to make requests. In addition, the result also shows that the characters of both series prefer to use *be conventionally indirect* when employing negative politeness in their requests.

This reflects the low-context culture of their respective countries, United States and United Kingdom, which emphasized on directness and clarity in communication (Yang, 2021; Vrij et al., 2020; Hall, 1976). As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), *be conventionally indirect* strategy can be used when the speaker wants to give the addressee's option to refuse by being indirect but at the same time still wants to talk straight to the point. Thus, by employing this strategy the characters can balance their desire to be direct and their need to soften the imposition.

Furthermore, the previous explanation also clarifies why off-record politeness appears as the least used strategy in both series. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), off-record politeness is done by conveying the intended message in an unclear way, thus leaving the utterance open to different interpretations. This means that the use of off-record contradicts the characters preference to be straightforward. Moreover, it also doesn't align with the workplace settings which normally emphasize on efficiency.

Another similarity was also found regarding the most dominant positive politeness strategy. The data shows that, in *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*, the characters commonly used *include both speaker and hearer in the activity* strategy when delivering requests with positive politeness. This strategy is done by using words reflecting inclusivity such as “let’s”, “we”, or “us” to formulate the request so that it appears as if the speaker will also take part in achieving the desired goal (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In both series, this strategy is used not only in horizontal interactions but also in top-down interactions. This finding reflects the characters attempts to build close relationship among all the workers in *The Office*.

Differences in the Use of Politeness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd

Although both series share similar dominant strategies of politeness in their requests, there are also some notable differences revealed in the data. The result shows that there are significant differences in the output strategies variety of positive, negative and off-record politeness employed by the characters in each series when making requests. In *The Office*, the positive politeness strategies employed when making requests are more diverse compared to those in *The IT Crowd*. The characters in *The Office* employed 7 strategies namely strategy 1 *notice, attend to hearer*, strategy 3 *intensify interest to hearer*, strategy 4 *use in-group identity markers*, strategy 10 *offer, promise*, strategy 11 *be optimistic*, strategy 12 *include both speaker and hearer in the activity*, and strategy 13 *give or ask reasons*. On the other hand, the characters in *The IT Crowd* employed fewer strategies which are strategy 4 *use in-group identity markers*, strategy 6 *avoid disagreement*, strategy 11 *be optimistic*, strategy 12 *include both speaker and hearer in the activity*, and strategy 13 *give or ask reasons*.

However, in context of negative politeness strategies, *The IT Crowd* characters employed more varied strategies than *The Office* characters. The characters in *The IT Crowd* used 6 strategies namely, strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect*, strategy 2 *hedges*, strategy 4 *minimize the imposition*, strategy 5 *give deference*, strategy 6 *apologize*, and strategy 10 *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer*. Whereas the characters in *The Office* only used a few strategies namely, strategy 1 *be conventionally indirect*, strategy 2 *hedges*, strategy 4 *minimize the imposition*, strategy 5 *give deference*, and strategy 10 *go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer*.

These differences can be explained by cultural tendencies of their countries. In interpersonal level, workplace culture in United States generally emphasizes on camaraderie and social engagement which motivates them to use different types of positive politeness to build rapport and foster a sense of closeness (Orrell et al., 2022; Hannah, 2025). However, British culture, especially in a workplace, is more formal and restrained (Harvey, 2023; Hannah, 2025). This explains the variation of the negative politeness strategies used in their requests.

Moreover, the data also shows that the characters in *The Office* use wider-range of off-record strategies compared to *The IT Crowd* characters. The characters in *The Office* used 4 strategies such as, strategy 1 *give hints*, strategy 10 *use rhetorical questions*, strategy 12 *be vague*, and strategy 15 *be incomplete, use ellipsis*. However, in *The IT Crowd*, they only used 3 strategies namely strategy 1 *give hints*, strategy 2 *give association clues*, and strategy 15 *be incomplete, use ellipsis*. This finding is mainly related to the humor style of these series. *The Office* is a documentary-style sitcom that often relies on sarcasm and awkwardness to create comedy. On the other hand, *The IT Crowd* is a conventional sitcom with laugh tracks to accompany the humor. Therefore, this show relies more on absurdity and eccentric delivery, rather than ambiguity and implicitness to create comedic effects.

Similarities in the Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd

The Office and *The IT Crowd* show some notable similarities regarding the use of impoliteness strategies when making requests. The findings reveal that the characters in both series commonly use bald on-record impoliteness when they want to deliver impolite requests. They perform this strategy by directly deliver the request without any mitigation, even when the factors that normally justify such bluntness are not met. This strategy is mostly used by the characters to show anger or annoyance towards the addressee.

For example, in episode 2 of *The Office*, Michael sends one of his employees, Toby, out of the conference room by directly saying "Get out." in front of other employees before the Diversity Day seminar starts. The intended goal of his request itself is inherently face-threatening. However, Michael amplifies the threat by delivering it bluntly and with stern intonation, which in result attacks Toby's face. An example from *The IT Crowd* is when Jen said "Make up your mind." to Denholm, the head of the company, on her first day of work. Her bluntness is considered inappropriate because there are big gaps in the social distance and power difference between them in that situation.

Another similarity is the most common used output strategy of negative impoliteness. When employing this strategy, the most commonly used output strategy among the characters is *condescend, scorn and ridicule*. This reflects the characters preference to undermine or belittling the other person when employing negative impoliteness to make request. The belittling remark in the utterance is used by the speaker to assert dominance or express annoyance, which in result amplify the force of the request.

Differences in the Use of Impoliteness Strategies in Requests by the Characters in The Office and The IT Crowd

Despite the similarities, there are also some significant differences between the two series regarding the use of impoliteness strategies in making requests. The first difference is related to the second and third most used strategy in each series. The result shows that in *The Office*, negative impoliteness comes second after bald on-record then followed by positive impoliteness. On the other hand, in *The IT Crowd*, positive impoliteness appears as the second most used and negative politeness becomes the third one.

These facts can be connected to the overall comedy style of each series. *The Office* is a mock-documentary style sitcom which means that it is filmed as if it were a documentary of the characters' working lives. The comedic humor in this show often comes from awkwardness, social discomfort or tension in workplace interactions. Therefore, negative impoliteness strategy, specifically *condescend, scorn, and ridicule* strategy, is used to generate those situations and create comedic effects. *The IT Crowd*, on the other hand, is a conventional sitcom, in which the humor comes from exaggerated characters, bluntness, and overt punchlines. Therefore, positive impoliteness strategies, especially are often used to create humor in this show.

The next difference is the characters in *The IT Crowd* are more explicit compared to *The Office's* characters when it comes to the use of positive impoliteness strategies. *The IT Crowd's* characters more frequently employ strategy 9 *use of taboo words* and strategy 10 *call the other names* compared to the characters in *The Office*. The frequent use of profane language and derogatory words in delivering positive impoliteness strategies in *The IT Crowd* can be attributed to the workplace culture in United Kingdom.

In British workplaces, swearing is more culturally tolerated compared to American workplaces (Dewaele, 2015; Difford, 2025; Jennings, 2025) Throughout the first season, the characters in *The IT Crowd* use various swear words such as "bitch", "bastard", "arse", and a derogatory term such as "goblin" to make requests. *The Office*, on the other hand, only displays a swear word once throughout season 1, which is "hell".

Conclusion

This study examined the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in requests performed by the characters in two sitcoms *The Office* (US) and *The IT Crowd* (UK). The analysis followed Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies and Culpeper's (1996) theory of impoliteness strategies. The result shows that in *The Office*, bald on-record strategy is the most frequently employed politeness strategy, followed by negative politeness and positive politeness. Similar to *The Office*, the dominant politeness strategy in *The IT Crowd* is also bald on-record, with negative politeness becomes the second and positive politeness becomes the third.

The dominant use of bald on-record strategy when delivering requests aligns with the cultural classification of the United States and United Kingdom as low context societies in which directness and clarity in communication are valued (Hall, 1976; Yang, 2021; Vrij et al., 2020). Negative politeness consistently being the second most employed super-strategy in both series can be connected to the workplace setting of the series. The formality of a workplace environment prompts the characters to use negative impoliteness to maintain respect and professionalism despite their preference in employing bald on-record to make requests.

The fact that positive politeness ranked third in both series suggests that while still maintaining professionalism and respect, the characters also attempt to build solidarity, friendly relations, and camaraderie among them. Moreover, off-record strategy becomes the least employed in both series is because the workplace settings of the series. Requests made using this strategy are often ambiguous and may lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, it doesn't align with the workplace setting which requires efficiency in communications.

Although, negative and positive politeness have similar ranks in both series, the varieties of the output strategies used are different. The data shows that the characters of *The IT Crowd* perform more varied negative politeness strategies compared to those in *The Office*. Whereas the characters in *The Office* perform more varied positive politeness compared to those in *The IT Crowd*. This can be explained by cultural tendencies of their countries. In interpersonal level, workplace culture in United States generally emphasizes on camaraderie and social engagement which motivates them to use different types of positive politeness to build rapport and foster a sense of closeness (Orrell et al., 2022; Hannah, 2025).

However, British culture, especially in a workplace, is more formal and restrained (Harvey, 2023; Hannah, 2025). This explains the variation of the negative politeness strategies used in their requests. When making impolite requests, the characters in both series generally prefer bald on-record impoliteness strategy. This strategy is mostly used by the characters to show anger or annoyance towards the addressee. The second and the third most used impoliteness strategies are different in the two series.

In *The Office*, negative impoliteness comes second after bald on-record then followed by positive impoliteness. On the other hand, in *The IT Crowd*, positive impoliteness appears as the second most used and negative politeness becomes the third one. These facts can be connected to the overall comedy style of each series. *The Office* is a mock-documentary style sitcom which means that it is filmed as if it were a documentary of the characters' working lives. The comedic humor in this show often comes from awkwardness, social discomfort or tension in workplace interactions.

Therefore, negative impoliteness strategy, specifically *condescend*, *scorn*, and *ridicule* strategy, is used to generate those situations and create comedic effects. *The IT Crowd*, on the other hand, is a conventional sitcom, in which the humor comes from exaggerated characters, bluntness, and overt punchlines. Therefore, positive impoliteness strategies, especially *taboo words* and *call the other names*, are often used to create humor in this show. The frequent use of profane language and derogatory words in delivering positive impoliteness strategies in *The IT Crowd* can also be attributed to the workplace culture in United Kingdom.

In British workplaces, swearing is more culturally tolerated compared to American workplaces (Dewaele, 2015; Difford, 2025; Jennings, 2025). Therefore, this explains why swear words and derogatory term appear more often in *The IT Crowd* transcript than *The Office* transcript. The findings of this study are significant for both communication studies and also EFL pedagogy. For communication studies this study can provide insights into how cultural values and social hierarchy influence the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in workplace interactions in American and British context.

Whereas for EFL learning, it provides authentic examples of how native speakers employ politeness and impoliteness in workplace context which can enhance learners' pragmatic competence and also broaden their knowledge of sociocultural appropriateness. However, it must be acknowledged that this study is not without its limitations. Some limitations of this present study include small sample size, sitcom genre-specific findings and also the scripted nature of the utterances.

Therefore, several suggestions can be proposed for future research. Future studies could analyze every character's utterance and every season of *The Office* and *The IT Crowd*. It would also be beneficial to investigate series in different genres such as, action, science fiction, romance or even reality shows, to find out whether the patterns found in this study are specific to the sitcom genre or represent other genres. Including series originated from other native English-speaking countries would also provide valuable insights into how politeness and impoliteness strategies are realized in other cultures.

Future studies could also explore other speech acts other than request, such as complaining, inviting, refusing, apologizing etc. in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how politeness and impoliteness strategies are used in different communicative situations.

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Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies in Requests in The Office and The IT Crowd TV Series

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