



folklor/edebiyat - folklore&literature, 2024; 30(1)-117. Sayı/Issue -Kış/Winter
DOI: 10.22559/folklor.2504

Araştırma makalesi/Research article

Characterisation through Linguistic (Im) politeness in *A Doll's House*

Dilbilimsel Nezaket/Kabalık Stratejileri Bağlamında
Bir Bebek Evi'nde Karakter Nitelemesi

Müjde Demiray*
Ömer Şekerci**

Abstract

Pragmatic aspects of characterisation have currently been of great interest to scholars. Characterisation is a process of introducing characters in a play to the audience by the playwright. It is also an artful attempt to make the audience indulge in the characters' private or public life. Additionally, characterisation is crucial for a playwright to construct his/her characters with unique and different character traits with whom the audience can easily feel sympathy or empathy. Everyday interactions and dramatic dialogues are full of character faces. Naturally, everyone wants and desires to keep their faces unassailed for smooth interaction and conversation. The paper examines the linguistic strategies of (im)politeness

Geliş tarihi (Received): 09-06-2023 Kabul tarihi (Accepted): 15-01-2024

* Arş. Gör., Süleyman Demirel University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of English Language and Literature/ Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü. Isparta-Türkiye. mujdedemiray@sdu.edu.tr. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5370-0049

** Prof. Dr., Süleyman Demirel University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Department of English Language and Literature/ Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü. Isparta-Türkiye. omersekerci@sdu.edu.tr. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9074-3841

in dramatic text, namely Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), according to Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's Politeness Theory (PT) and Jonathan Culpeper's Impoliteness Strategies. This play has been chosen for our analysis because *A Doll's House* is one of the masterpieces of Ibsen, known for his social realistic plays. Moreover, it is one of the renowned modern plays depicting strong characterisation. The paper also focuses on analysing the dramatic interactions of the major characters, Nora and Helmer, living in a patriarchy-driven society from a linguistic and discourse-oriented perspective. It also demonstrates that Nora has transformed from a subservient, meek and obedient character to a rebellious and independent one, while Helmer Torvald has become a submissive, tolerant and accepting character.

Keywords: *characterisation, FTAs, politeness theory, impoliteness strategies, A Doll's House*

Öz

Karakter nitelemenin edimbilimsel unsurları, günümüzde edebiyat araştırmacılarının ilgisini büyük ölçüde çekmektedir. Karakter niteleme, oyun yazarının bir oyundaki kişileri seyirciye tanıtmaya eylemdir. Oyun yazarı, karakterlerin özel veya sosyal hayatlarının derinliklerine izleyicileri çekebilmek için ustaca bir girişimde bulunur. Ayrıca oyun yazarının, izleyicinin kolayca sempati duyabileceği veya duygudaşlık kurabileceği çeşitli ve kendine özgü kişiliklere sahip karakterleri yaratmak gibi son derece önemli bir görevi de vardır. Günlük konuşmalar ve dramatik diyaloglarda oldukça fazla karakter yüzü (face) vardır. Doğal olarak, sorunsuz bir iletişim ve konuşmanın sağlanabilmesi için, insanlar yüzlerine koşulların gerektirdiği gibi hitap edilmesini ister. Bu çalışma, Henrik Ibsen'in *Bir Bebek Evi* (1879) oyununu Penelope Brown ve Stephen Levinson'ın Nezaket Teorisi ile birlikte Jonathan Culpeper'in Kabalık Stratejileri ışığında dilbilimsel bir açıdan incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. *Bir Bebek Evi*, toplumsal gerçekçi oyunlarıyla tanınan Ibsen'in başyapıtlarından biridir. Bununla birlikte, karakter nitelemesini güçlü bir biçimde yansıtan ünlü bir modern oyundur. Ayrıca bu çalışma, ataerkil bir toplumda yaşayan baş karakterlerin, diğer bir deyişle, Nora ve Helmer'in, birbirleriyle olan diyaloglarını dilbilimsel ve söylem odaklı bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, ayrıca Nora'nın itaatkar ve uysal bir karakterden nasıl asi ve bağımsız bir karaktere dönüştüğünü ve Helmer Torvald'ın ise nasıl itaatkar, hoşgörülü ve kabullenici bir karaktere dönüştüğünü ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: *karakter niteleme, FTAs, nezaket teorisi, kabalık stratejileri, Bir Bebek Evi*

Introduction

Drama, one of the oldest genres of literature, has various definitions. It is a written text in dialogue form to be staged or read aloud. Drama has religious roots at its origin, and it is considered to have emerged from the rituals held for the honour of Dionysus in ancient Greece. Tragedy and comedy are significant types of drama (Stott, 2014: 5). To Stott,

comedy entertains common people light-heartedly, while tragedy serves the upper classes' entertainment in ancient times. Moreover, according to Aristotle, comedy deals with common and less virtuous people and depicts their weaknesses, while tragedy imitates serious and noble people doing noble and heroic actions (Aristotle, 1996). Drama can only be imagined with dialogue and story or dramatic narration. By this token, Marshall Cassady, in *Characters in Action*, demonstrates this connection as follows:

It [drama] should exhibit a cause-to-effect relationship, with the dramatic question or problem introduced early in the play. It should provide a frame for the action or storyline, established in such a manner that the characters and ideas can reveal themselves before the ending. There also should be a resolution or a purification of the emotions. (1984: 5)

Cassady's contention translates that dramatis personae initiate dialogue by interacting with one another. Action (storyline) and characters in a play act to demonstrate the dramatic question put forward by the playwright. Dialogue and story are indispensable to drama. Additionally, Aristotle lays down six elements of drama in his seminal work *Poetics*, the first treatise written on the nature of drama, particularly on tragedy. The six elements are given from the least significant to the most significant order: spectacle, melody (music), dialogue, thought (intellect), character and plot (sequence of events). The spectacle is about background and scenery. It gives the audience some information about the play. Melody (music) is about the flow of language and rhythm, referring to the characters' emotions and how they express them through dialogues in specific contexts. Dialogue signifies the utterances of the characters or dramatis personae. Dialogue demonstrates the characters' personal traits and social, economic and political backgrounds. Moreover, it aims to establish the mood of the play and change rhythms and tempos in the scenes. Thought (intellect) refers to how the playwright constructs the plot to convey his or her ideas explicitly. It can also act as a vehicle for the playwright and audience to grasp the play's message. Character is an indispensable element in drama because it is the character who can activate and develop the plot of the play. A playwright can draw one individual as a character or a group of people from real life with whom the playwright has already been familiar. Finally, the plot is the last element. To Aristotle, the plot is the most crucial element of a play (Aristotle, 1996). It is a sequence of events. Aristotle contends that plot comes before character. C. Garton notes that "action affects character not only initially but continuously" (1957: 251). It suggests that characterisation within the drama rises in the action. However, modern drama critics put character before plot in a play. In sum, the six elements should properly operate to help the playwright convey his or her ideas to the audience.

It is worth putting some remarks on character and characterisation. Cassady, in *Characters in Action*, defines character as:

Character is one of the most important aspects of a play. Even if a dramatist doesn't start with a character, a principal figure usually is necessary as the primary means of developing the plot and of stating the theme. The type of character chosen often determines the environment. Even the situation is to a large extent prescribed by the characters since any person placed in a specific set of circumstances will react to those

circumstances in a different way than will any other person. Character is that element of a play with which the audience most closely identifies. There are exceptions. In some plays, the character is deemphasized and audiences empathize with the plight of an entire group of people or with a social condition. But in most plays, it is the character as an individual for whom the audience feels empathy or sympathy. (1984: 23)

Cassady's definition of character demonstrates how important a character is to a play. Characters, whether drawn explicitly or implicitly, refer to situations, personal emotions, and plight with which the audience can empathise, sympathise and identify themselves. "Human character is in the foreground of all fiction, however, the humanity might be disguised" (Burroway, 2000: 94). It could be contended that Burroway's contention is valid for a character in the drama, too.

Characters, once properly drawn, propel and reign the plot's direction. Moreover, they interact with each other to reveal the social, political, emotional and psychological background and basis of the play. Most successful plays are built on well-drawn characters; in other words, strong character-based plays can become a success. Lajos Egri, in *Art of Dramatic Writing*, contends that "character is the fundamental material we are forced to work with, so we must know the character as thoroughly as possible" (1960: 32). To Egri, every character should have three dimensions, namely, physiology: sex, age, height, posture, appearance; sociology: class, occupation, education, home life, race, religion; psychology: sex life, frustrations, temperament, complexes, attitudes toward life, qualities.

A bulk of the literature has been written about characterisation in drama plays and novels. Most of those studies largely deal with characterisation in terms of character traits and idiosyncrasies. However, few studies have been conducted on applying (im) politeness strategies to dramatic texts. Our literature survey reveals that there are a couple of studies dealing with (im)politeness strategies in dramatic texts such as R. Brown and A. Gilman's *Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies* (1989) and A. Bouchara's *Politeness in Shakespeare: Applying Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to Shakespeare's Comedies* (2009), P. Simpson's *Politeness Phenomena in Ionesco's The Lesson* (1989) and J. Culpeper's *(Im)politeness in Dramatic Dialogue* (1998), to name a few. In addition, many articles published in academic linguistic journals on pragmatics, speech acts, and face-threatening acts take one aspect of pragmatics or linguistics. Our study aims to show how Brown and Levinson's PT and Culpeper's Impoliteness Strategies are employed in the selected play to demonstrate characterisation and character transition.

Pragmatic aspects of characterisation have currently been of great interest to scholars. Characterisation determines a literary work's success and appeal to the audience. A playwright's success depends on how s/he draws characters, in other words, how s/he does characterisation. Walerie Bodden, in *Dialogue and Characterization*, argues that "characterization-the art of bringing characters to life-is one of an author's [playwright's] most important jobs. Authors must help readers see and hear and know their characters" (2017: 11). The characterisation is a process of introducing them to the audience by the

playwright. It is also an artful attempt to make the audience indulge in the characters' private or public life. Characterisation has a significant role in a drama. It opens new windows to the depth, complexity and psychology of the dramatis personae in a play to propel the story and relate it to the audience. It also impacts the dramatic experience of the audience. In addition, characterisation is a pivotal task for a playwright to construct their characters with unique and different character traits with which the audience can easily feel sympathy or empathy. Bernard Grebanier, in *Playwriting*, contends "the best plays often show the character traits of the persons of the drama in a certain opposition to the situations in which the persons find themselves" (1961: 191). Without some conflict and opposition, a drama cannot appeal to the audience, so one of the major stuff of drama is opposition and conflict among the central characters in the play. Different characters with different and varied characteristics can create contrasts and opposition, sustaining the audience's appeal. Accordingly, Grebanier states that "now, there is no concept in dramaturgy more important for the playwright to bear constantly in mind than this: the quintessence of drama is conflict or opposition" (1961: 190). Throughout the history of drama, most playwrights have chosen to draw one-sided or traditional stock characters. Accordingly, S.W. Dawson, in *Drama & the Dramatic*, reveals:

We find, in Greek and Latin drama, in the Commedia dell'Arte and beyond, a common fund of traditional types, some of which remain essentially unchanged. The young lover, the old miser, the jealous husband, the intriguing servant, the blustering soldier, the ageing beauty, the pedantic official; from this common stock all the great dramatists have drawn. (2018: 49)

With the advent of modernism, characterisation has had various dimensions incorporating psychology, sociology and physiology to create down-to-earth characters. Accordingly, Ibsen's characters are individuated, so they appeal to the audience's intellect and emotions.

Well-drawn characters in a play have opposing and conflicting characteristic traits. Opposing characters can sustain the audience's interest. The playwright convincingly visualises his/her dramatic characters to make the audience believe they see themselves in character. Consequently, without much effort, the audience should be able to construct an impression and representation of the character in their mind while watching or reading the play. Meanwhile, if the characters are drawn from real life, then the audience can find them believable and be concerned with what happens to them. Consequently, the audience can identify themselves with characters who have different or similar values, social roles and conceptions as the audience. It is known that the audience is interested in seeing characters with certain integrity demonstrating the character's psychology; however, enigmatic characters are of great importance to the audience. They stand in strong contrast to round characters. Moreover, they make the audience delve into the vast darkness of their psychologies. Modern drama is full of playwrights drawing enigmatic and well-drawn characters. Moliere, Shakespeare, Ibsen, to name a few (Egri, 1965).

Theoretical background

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's Politeness Theory (hereafter PT) (1987) and Jonathan Culpeper's Impoliteness Strategies (1996) have originated from Erving Goffman's (1967) notion of the face and H. Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP). Brown and Levinson explicate (im)politeness concerning the notion of face. They state face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1987: 61). To them, face is categorised as positive and negative. Positive face means to be approved and connected to a particular group, whereas negative face is the desire and want to be unimpeded, independent, and free from any imposition. Jenny Thomas also defines positive and negative faces as follows:

Two aspects: 'positive' and 'negative'. Moreover, an individual's positive face is reflected in his or her desire to be liked, approved of, respected, and appreciated by others. An individual's negative face is reflected in the desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses. (2013: 169)

Everyday interactions and dramatic dialogues are full of character faces. Naturally, everyone wants and desires to keep their faces unassailed for smooth interaction and conversation. However, some interactions and actions of the interlocutors can threaten the other interlocutor's face. For instance, if we request something from others, this request can threaten their negative faces. However, if we criticise others, we can threaten their positive faces. Such acts are called Face-Threatening Acts (hereafter FTAs). To Brown and Levinson, PT functions according to the interlocutors' relative power, social distance and the rank of the imposition. Additionally, FTAs are done 'baldly on record' and 'off-record', or interlocutors may opt out to do the FTAs at all.

Circumstances determining choice of strategy:

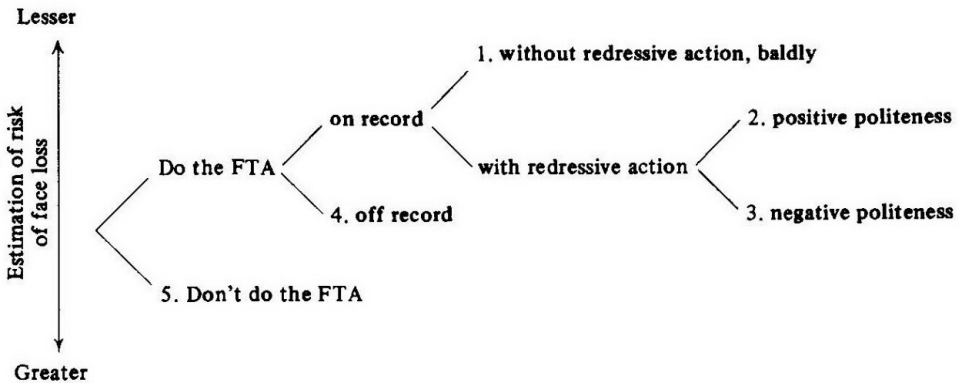


Fig. 1. Possible strategies for doing FTAs. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 60)

Culpeper has devised his impoliteness strategies inspired by the Brown and Levinson's PT. Ömer Şekerci puts it as follows:

Impoliteness as propounded by Jonathan Culpeper in 1996 has recently been of interest to scholars as a linguistic study in the field of pragmatics. It has emerged as the opposite orientation to politeness strategy, theory and studies. The concepts of politeness and impoliteness fall into the field of linguistic pragmatics. (2023: 125-126)

It is noteworthy putting some remarks on impoliteness. Culpeper defines it as: “impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking or a combination of (1) and (2)” (2005: 38).

Culpeper’s impoliteness definition is a kind of FTA, so it resembles Brown and Levinson’s notion of Politeness Theory.

Culpeper’s Impoliteness Strategies are as follows:

- (1) *Bald on record impoliteness* – the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised.
- (2) *Positive impoliteness* – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s positive face wants.
- (3) *Negative impoliteness* – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s negative face wants.
- (4) *Sarcasm or mock politeness* – the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations
- (5) *Withhold politeness* – the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. (Culpeper, 1996: 356, original emphasis)

(Im)politeness strategies are linguistic realisations used for particular purposes and manipulations of the language to achieve a speaker’s goal. It aims to focus on the linguistic strategies of (im)politeness in dramatic text, namely Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, according to Brown and Levinson’s PT (see Fig. 1) and Culpeper’s Impoliteness Strategies. This play has been chosen for our analysis because *A Doll’s House* is one of the masterpieces of Henrik Ibsen, known for his social realistic plays. Moreover, it is one of the best modern plays depicting strong characterisation and the epitome of individual liberation. Kristin Ørjasæter states that “To equip a hero with the female sex and let her symbolise Everyman’s obligation to become free was an immensely important step toward regarding women as dignified humans” (2006: 41). The central event circles around the relationship between wife and husband in a doll-like house involving a domineering husband and a submissive and meek wife. Nora is the self-sacrificing wife of Torvald Helmer. The interactions and relationships between two major characters in the play will be analysed by applying Brown and Levinson’s PT and Culpeper’s Impoliteness Strategies to demonstrate the transition of the two characters from submissiveness to rebellion and protest or vice versa from dominance to diffidence, passivity and acceptance. Ibsen once contended that human civilisation has gone through two kingdoms: the kingdom of paganism and the kingdom of Christianity. Now, it is time to create the kingdom of free-spirited souls. Those linguistic strategies also demonstrate through the character of Nora how the kingdom of free-spirited souls can be established.

Analysis and discussion

A Doll's House begins with Nora Helmer, having just returned home from shopping for Christmas. Her husband, Torvald, busy working in his office at home, hears her arrival and playfully addresses her from his office:

- (1) HELMER [*in his study*]. Is that my little sky-lark chirruping out there?
- (2) NORA [*busy opening some of the parcels*]. Yes, it is.
- (3) HELMER. When did my little squirrel get home?
- (4) NORA. Just this minute. [*She stuffs the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth.*] Come on out, Torvald, and see what I have bought. (Ibsen, 1981: 1-2)

Torvald's turns (1-3) serve as clearly phatic communication. His questions are linguistically FTAs to the woman's negative face. However, Torvald gives his FTAs, demanding confirmation related to Nora's arrival, a positive face value and thus, he employs 'positive politeness strategy' through his diminutive endearments and intimate address forms such as "my little sky-lark" and "my little squirrel". In addition, his in-group solidarity remarks appeal to Nora's positive face want. Torvald's positive politeness stems from their intimacy and his social superiority over Nora, as he is the sole breadwinner of the household, and he largely enjoys a dominant male role within his family in the rigidly driven patriarchal society. They are close to one another as wife and husband, and Torvald is socially and hierarchically superior to Nora, who assumes a doll-like role in her domestic circle. By this token, James McFarlane argues, in *Ibsen & Meaning*, that "for the married woman of Nora's day, the 'home' could be just as disabling as for the child; Nora finds herself reduced to the level of a home-comfort, something that merely contributes to the husband's domestic well-being and flatters his ego at the cost of destroying hers" (1989: 242). Nora becomes possession of her husband and serves to comfort and entertain him.

In addition, the rank of the imposition put on Nora to reply is a relatively minor thing in their daily life. Nora, whose positive face is satisfied, assumes a subservient role and appeals to her husband's positive face in return with her immediate responses in her turns (2-4). In this opening scene in Act One, it can be concluded that their conversation is dominated by the 'positive politeness strategy' of one another. Moreover, Nora's concealment of macaroons and wiping her mouth, given in the stage directions, are examples of the strategy of 'don't do the FTA' because her consumption of the food Torvald deems unhealthy is strictly forbidden. Thus, Nora avoids offending him and delivering a possible FTA to his positive face. Consequently, she does not do any FTA to support his face want and invites him to see what she has bought for Christmas. She desires her positive face to be enhanced further by Torvald. On the condition that Torvald appreciates her due to her Christmas shopping, their exchange of positive politeness is likely to pursue as Nora desires. However, his positive politeness-driven approach comes to a sudden halt when the matter is related to financial issues, which Torvald regards far beyond Nora's intellect.

Torvald chides her for her excessive spending and does an FTA to her positive face with his criticism as “‘Bought’, did you say? All that? Has my little spendthrift been out squandering money again?” (Ibsen, 1981: 2). Although he employs in-group solidarity address form, his choice of the verb “squandering” is a superiority-backed criticism directed at Nora’s positive face want. It serves a purpose to reproach her for what she has done that day. After the FTA on her positive face, Nora miserably resumes her ‘positive politeness strategy’ by saying, “But, Torvald, surely this year we can spread ourselves just a little. This is the first Christmas we haven’t had to go carefully” (Ibsen, 1981: 2). Her usage of “we” indicates their shared familial collaboration and common ground. She also employs the ‘be optimistic’ sub-strategy to provide relief to her husband. It can be inferred that the socially superior male’s FTA is cushioned by the socially inferior female’s positive politeness strategy. However, Torvald is unwilling to abandon his FTAs to her face, as follows:

- (1) HELMER. Ah, but that doesn’t mean we can afford to be extravagant, you know.
- (2) NORA. Oh yes, Torvald, surely we can afford to be just a little bit extravagant now, can’t we? Just a teeny-weeny bit. You are getting quite a good salary now, and you are going to earn lots and lots of money.
- (3) HELMER. Yes, after the New Year. But it’s going to be three whole months before the first pay cheque comes in.
- (4) NORA. Pooh! We can always borrow in the meantime.
- (5) HELMER. Nora! [*Crosses to her and takes her playfully by the ear.*] Here we go again, you and your frivolous ideas! Suppose I went and borrowed a thousand crown today and you went and spent it all over Christmas, then on New Year’s Eve a slate fell and hit me on the head and there I was...
- (6) NORA. [*putting her hand over his mouth*]. Sh! Don’t say such horrid things. (Ibsen, 1981: 2)

Torvald’s turn 1 incorporates a warning against her overspending. It is a ‘bald on record FTA’ to Nora’s negative face. Her face want is rendered irrelevant by Torvald, forsaking his intimate and diminutive address forms as the imposition weighs more. Witnessing the seriousness of his ‘bald, non-redressive FTA’, Nora first employs a ‘negative politeness strategy’ using the ‘be pessimistic’ sub-strategy through her tag question “can’t we?” demanding understanding and empathy in turn 2. Furthermore, she strengthens her negative politeness with the ‘minimise the imposition’ sub-strategy with her utterances “just a little bit extravagant” and “Just a teeny-weeny bit”. She suggests that the intrinsic seriousness of her behaviour is not a big concern, so he should not take it seriously. She indirectly pays him deference, as society obliges women, in general, to fulfil accordingly. She then adopts the ‘positive politeness’ strategy by praising his career, financial status, and his eminent prospect of climbing the social ladder. Consequently, she appeals to his positive face while her own face is manifestly assailed. However, Torvald’s turn 3 runs against her politeness and disappoints her because he disagrees. Moreover, he does not use any mitigating or hedging devices to support her face.

Nora never gives up her in-group solidarity address form “we” and maintains her optimistic view to relieve him in turn 4. No matter how playful he is, Helmer’s utterance “here we go again, you and your frivolous ideas” in turn 5 is an FTA to Nora’s positive face. It is ‘the strategy of positive impoliteness’ because Torvald belittles her capacity to ascertain the financial matters, and he abases her capability to forge and claim common ground with him on equal ground. He exerts his intellectual power and secures his grip on social and hierarchical superiority over her. In addition, his utterance “Here we go again” implicates that Nora incessantly fails to understand what Torvald dictates. His conventional implicature (Grice, 1975) is realised to offend her positive face. Moreover, in the same turn, Torvald draws a bleak picture to frighten her with the probability of failing to repay the borrowed money if they obtain it. Thus, he draws upon “the strategy of negative impoliteness” by instilling a belief that something detrimental to him may occur. On the other hand, Nora, whose positive face and negative face are successively under attack in turn 5, adopts a child-like demeanour and makes his authoritarian figure more salient. The interplay of the linguistic politeness of the socially inferior female and the superior male in their exchange incorporates the female’s positive and negative politeness as opposed to the male’s use of impoliteness.

Consider this:

- (1) NORA. Them? Who cares about them? They are only strangers.
- (2) HELMER. Nora, Nora! Just like a woman! Seriously though, Nora, you know what I think about these things. No debts! Never borrow! There’s always something inhibited, something unpleasant, about a home built on credit and borrowed money. We two have managed to stick it out so far, and that’s the way we’ll go on for the little time that remains.
- (3) NORA. [*walks over to the stove*]. Very well, just as you say, Torvald. (Ibsen, 1981: 3)

Torvald keeps doing ‘negative impoliteness’ to Nora’s face with his nightmarish concern about the financial issues; however, she yields to his FTA hurled at her negative face and adopts positive politeness to stop him in turn 1. She states that she cares for nobody but him in the given circumstances. Thus, she indicates that she has a common ground with him, bolstered by her in-group solidarity and their emotional bond against any possible malicious money-lenders in turn 1. Torvald, failing to grasp her emotional response, regards her positive politeness as an act of defiance in his turn 2. His utterance, “Nora, Nora! Just like a woman! Seriously though”, is a ‘bald on record, non-redressive FTA’ to her negative face. His unmitigated command is a clear, concise and unambiguous way of restricting her wish to be free from any imposition. In addition, he encroaches on her free will with his high-pitched tone in turn 2. His ‘bald on record FTA’ to her negative face stems from his social superiority in the patriarchal society. On the other hand, Nora, deeply offended by him, displays genuine deference in turn 3 and attempts to satisfy his face with her agreement. Her respect for Torvald, an acknowledged superior, is a clear example of the ‘negative politeness strategy’.

Towards the end of Act One, Krogstad comes to the Helmers' home in Torvald's absence to speak to Nora, and he threatens her to reveal her secret. When he is about to depart, Torvald comes and sees him leaving home. In order to find out whether Nora tells him the truth, Torvald asks her if somebody has been there, and she says that no one has. He berates her for lying, and their conversation unfolds as follows:

- (1) HELMER. Nora, I can tell by your face he's been asking you to put a good word for him.
- (2) NORA. Yes.
- (3) HELMER. And you were to pretend it was your own idea? You were to keep quiet about his having been here. He asked you to do that as well, didn't he?
- (4) NORA. Yes, Torvald. But...
- (5) HELMER. Nora, Nora, what possessed you to do a thing like that? Talking to a person like him, making him promises? And then on top of everything, to tell me a lie?
- (6) NORA. A lie...? (Ibsen, 1981: 30-31)

Torvald's turn 1 is a 'bald on record, non-redressive FTA' to Nora's negative face. He compels her to tell the reason why Krogstad has visited her. The FTA is done in the form of a declarative sentence confirming his rightfulness. His turn also insinuates his rage at her attempt to conceal the fact with his utterance, "Nora, I can tell by your face". After her short answer in turn 2, he continues doing his FTA baldly on record without redressing or a face value. His rhetorical questions appear extremely intrusive and coercive to her negative face in turn 3. Nevertheless, she tries to explain it, but her negative face is seriously damaged in turn 4 because he interrupts her. Torvald controls the dialogue, impeding Nora's contribution to the conversation.

As seen in the extract, Nora's contribution to the exchange is highly restricted and limited compared to his. Citing the reason that he is the dominant interlocutor, so he takes relatively long speech turns. Consequently, he blatantly accuses her of telling a lie and does 'a bald on record, non-redressive FTA' to her positive face in turn 5. His 'bald on record impoliteness' renders her face irrelevant to a great extent. When her positive face is attacked blatantly, she is taken aback and highly offended in turn 6. While she assumes a passive role, he becomes an offender. It marks a turning point and a significant transition in their relationship.

In Act Two, she desperately begs her husband to keep Krogstad in the Bank as an employee instead of firing him because she fears that he will reveal her forgery to her husband and it will ruin her marriage and happiness. However, he fiercely rejects it.

Consider this;

- (1) HELMER. The more you plead for him, the more impossible you make it for me to keep him on. It's already known down at the Bank that I am going to give Krogstad his notice. If it ever got around that the new manager had been talked over his wife...

(2) NORA. And what if it did?

(3) HELMER. Oh, nothing! As long as the little woman gets her own stubborn way...!
Do you want me to make myself a laughing stock in the office?... Give the people the idea that I am susceptible to any kind of outside pressure? You can imagine how soon I'd feel the consequences of that! Anyway, there is one other consideration that makes it impossible to have Krogstad in the Bank as long as I am manager.
(Ibsen, 1981: 42)

Torvald's turn 1 begins with a warning restricting her negative face, and it is maximally direct with no politeness markers. His warning, "The more you plead for him, the more impossible you make it for me to keep him on", is a 'bald on record FTA' without a redressing. It is an attack on her negative face. Additionally, the more he speaks about it, the more he switches to doing 'the negative impoliteness'. Consequently, he loses control. His utterance in the same turn, "If it ever got around that the new manager had been talked over his wife..." implies his relatively social and hierarchical superiority. Thus, he exposes his power by condescending and belittling her. To Torvald, decision-making guided by a wife is a shameful act in the eye of the public. As a result, she gets perplexed in turn 2 and asks what if he listened to her. His negative impoliteness is deeply offensive to her face. On the other hand, he fears no retribution and goes on doing his 'negative impoliteness' by this utterance, "Do you want me to make myself a laughing stock in the office?... Give the people the idea that I am susceptible to any kind of outside pressure". He treats her as if she were a stranger and outsider and fails to accept her presence as a precious asset to his life and his children. The interactions show that he is a dominant interlocutor in the structure of the exchange, and he is a mansplaining figure. His negative impoliteness-dominated speech turns (1-3) demonstrate the initial awakening moments for Nora to face the illusion of marriage and her life.

In Act Three, after Torvald reads the letter sent by Krogstad about Nora's forgery, he finds out about the secrecy and then loses his temper. He shouts at her and furiously asks if it is true. She says it is true and takes responsibility for it, and reiterates how much she loves him. By doing this, she appeals to his positive face and attempts to explain why she committed the crime years ago by citing that it was an urgent necessity for him to regain his health; however, he refuses to listen to her.

(1) HELMER. Don't come to me with a lot of paltry excuses!

(2) NORA. [*taking a step towards him*]. Torvald...!

(3) HELMER. Miserable woman... what is this you have done?

(4) NORA. Let me go. I won't have you taking the blame for me. You mustn't take it on yourself.

(5) HELMER. Stop play-acting! [*Locks the front door.*] You are staying here to give an account of yourself. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand? (Ibsen, 1981: 75)

His turn 1 is a clear and direct way of offence to her face. He also aggravates the seriousness of his ‘bald on record impoliteness’ with strong language. He deems her excuse “paltry,” an apparent suggestion of ‘the positive impoliteness strategy’. She is taken aback because of his blatant aggression in turn 2. He keeps on his attacks towards her face and continues his ‘positive impoliteness’ by employing ‘the name-calling’ sub-strategy by addressing her as a “miserable woman”. His purpose is to cause maximum positive face damage to her face. However, she pretends not to hear what he says, not to be disappointed anymore. Thus, she misinterprets what he says and mistakenly presumes that he may take the blame on himself and save her. In turn 4, she approaches with ‘positive politeness’ because she does not want him to risk his reputation for her sake. Her utterance in turn 4 is associated with the cooperative strategy because, generally, no one wants to be held accountable for a crime s/he has not committed, so it is clear that she cares about him and says it openly for his benefit. In turn 5, his response incorporates ‘bald on record impoliteness’. He accuses her of masquerading as innocent. His ‘bald on record FTA’ is also aggravated with ‘negative impoliteness’ because he locks the door. Furthermore, he invades her personal space by frightening her and exerting his self-assumed rightfulness on her. It suggests that he emphasises his ‘bald on record impoliteness’ with either ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ impoliteness strategy if the rank of imposition is at the highest level. His relatively social and patriarchal superiority helps him exhibit his power over his inferior wife.

Spiralling out of control, he verbally attacks her further and also delivers ‘positive impoliteness’ to her extended positive face as:

(1) HELMER. [*walking up and down*]. Oh, what a terrible awakening! All these eight years... this woman who was my joy and pride...a hypocrite, a liar, worse than that, a criminal! Oh, how utterly squalid it all is! Ugh! Ugh! [NORA *remains silent and looks fixedly at him.*] I should have realized something like this would happen. I should have seen it coming. All your father’s irresponsible ways. Quiet! All your father’s irresponsible ways are coming out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of duty... Oh, this is my punishment for turning a blind eye to him. It was for your sake I did it, and this is what I get for it.

(2) NORA. Yes, this. (Ibsen, 1981: 76)

His turn 1 bears accusations and swear words such as “a hypocrite, a liar, worse than that, a criminal”. His positive impoliteness goes well beyond addressing her face. He attacks her extended positive face because he also holds responsible her late father for the crime she has committed. He says, “All your father’s irresponsible ways. Quiet! All your father’s irresponsible ways are coming out in you”. He claims that she takes after her late father. It is linguistically accepted that someone’s face is not only restricted to his/her concept of ‘self’ but comprises other things related to the addressee as well. His positive impoliteness, directed at her late father, can thus be regarded as an FTA to her extended positive face. She gives a short affirmative response in her turn 2. At that time, she explicitly sees the reality before her very eyes. She wakes up from her illusion and begins to question her doll-like persona.

At the end of the play in Act Three, Krogstad sends another letter, including Nora's forged document, as a sign of his apology. It acts as a remedy for his previous FTAs to her negative face. Once Torvald snatches the letter from her and starts reading it, then, he joyfully reacts. He warmly approaches her as if he did not curse her a little time earlier. However, she is deeply offended and is no longer his doll-wife as before. To Nora, their marriage is a kind of playroom in which she is treated like a child.

Consider this;

- (1) HELMER. There is some truth in what you say, exaggerated and hysterical tough it is. But from now on it will be different. Play-time is over; now comes the time for lessons.
- (2) NORA. Whose lessons? Mine or the children's?
- (3) HELMER. Both yours and the children's, my dear Nora.
- (4) NORA. Ah, Torvald, you are not the man to teach me to be a good wife for you.
(Ibsen, 1981: 81)

He acknowledges that she is right to some extent and begins his turn with 'positive politeness' with 'the gift-giving' sub-strategy. In addition, he pays attention to her face and expresses his understanding and empathy by appealing to her positive face want (wish to be cared for, liked, understood and so on). His turn 1 also incorporates the sub-strategy of 'offer and promise' from the positive politeness strategy because he claims that he accepts and promises to fulfil what she desires. Thus, he demonstrates his good intentions by satisfying her positive face and offers to help her realise her wish by establishing common ground with her. In turn 1, his promise is linguistically an FTA to his own negative face as opposed to positive politeness to her face because he puts some imposition on himself while restoring equilibrium with her. However, in turn, 2, she asks a rhetorical question by flouting the Quality Maxim (Grice,1975) to implicate her disbelief in his optimism. Her usage of 'sarcasm or mock politeness' is realised as an FTA to offend his positive face and cause disagreement on purpose. However, he fails to ascertain the FTA done on his positive face and responds with 'the positive politeness strategy' once again with his intimate address form such as "my dear Nora". His offer to help his family learn the mundane matters and guide them as a positively polite act takes a slap on his positive face. She does 'a bald on record impoliteness' to his positive face and rejects anything from him in turn 4. Her 'bald on record non-redressive FTA' is a maximum face damage to him because he has no idea how she can be offensive. Eventually, she fears no kind of retribution from him. Although they are legally wife and husband, she no longer feels intimacy towards her husband. It could be contended that the gap between the social and hierarchical superiority of the couple diminishes as the other determinants, such as imposition and distance, are widened. As a result, she refuses to satisfy her husband's face, and she does not hesitate to offend him because of his unpardonable offence done to her face earlier.

She expresses her disappointment at his first reaction and accusation following Krogstad's first letter. She says that she will leave him and learn the life on her own, standing alone. His response to it is as follows:

- (1) HELMER. Oh, you think and talk like a stupid child.
- (2) NORA. All right. But you neither think nor talk like the man I would want to share my life with. When you had got over your fright—and you weren't concerned about me but only about what might happen to you—and when all danger was past, you acted as though nothing had happened. I was your little sky-lark again, your little doll, exactly as before; except you would have to protect it twice as carefully as before, now that it had shown itself to be so weak and fragile. [*Rises.*] Torvald, that was the moment I realised that for eight years I'd been living with a stranger, and had borne him three children... Oh I can't bear to think about it! I could tear myself to shreds.
- (3) HELMER [*sadly*]. I see, I see. There is a tremendous gulf dividing us. But Nora, is there no way we might bridge it?
- (4) NORA. As I am now, I am no wife for you. (Ibsen, 1981: 84-85)

What most bewilders him is that he has not seen any offensive or rebellious act of his wife before, so he has great difficulty in understanding what goes on and happens to her, and he regards her act as childish in his turn 1. His utterance incorporates the strategy of 'negative impoliteness' to her face because he continues to belittle her and deny her the right to independence and freedom as an individual. Consequently, she adopts an FTA to his positive face and ignores his presence as a true husband and life-long partner. Her positive impoliteness goes on with a direct accusation related to his response to the first letter revealing her forgery. Torvald's negative impoliteness receives positive impoliteness from her as a counterattack in turn 2. In addition, she wonders why she has remained married to a stranger like him for years. The fact that she refuses to stay married to him is a clear example of maximum positive face damage, i.e. positive impoliteness. She rejects establishing in-group solidarity, collaboration and common ground with him outright. Torvald, whose positive face is harshly damaged, employs a 'negative politeness strategy' with the 'be pessimist' sub-strategy. He attempts to appease her frustration and asks, "But Nora, is there no way we might bridge it?" He indirectly expresses his wish to reunite with her but fears doing an FTA to her negative face. Thus, he gives a negative face value to his question, but to no avail; she responds with positive impoliteness and regards him as a stranger. Her positive impoliteness mirrors her transition from a doll to an individual. While she gets ready to abandon her husband and three small children sleeping in their room,

- (1) HELMER. May I write to you, Nora?
- (2) NORA. No, never. You won't let you.
- (3) HELMER. But surely I can send you...
- (4) NORA. Nothing, nothing. (Ibsen, 1981: 86)

Torvald, reduced to powerless being like a doll, asks for permission to write and adopts a 'negative politeness strategy' in turn 1. However, she harshly denies and does 'a bald on record non-redressive FTA' to his face without any mitigating device in turn 2. At that

time, Torvald approaches through 'positive politeness' by adopting the sub-strategy of 'be optimist' in turn 3. His 'positive politeness' is greeted with 'negative impoliteness' because she interrupts him and does not allow him to speak in turn 4. She assumes the controlling role for the structure of their conversation as opposed to her prior subservient and silent persona in Act One. Finally, she leaves behind her dollhouse and enters a world she eagerly wants to know to fulfill her most sacred duty, i.e. making an independent, free-spirited human soul. She walks out to realise her dreams and become an individual independent of family and society's restrictions.

Conclusion

The present paper has explored the role of linguistic strategies of (im)politeness of two main characters, Nora and Torvald, in *A Doll's House* to analyse the relationship between the married couple and their changing personalities, respectively, throughout the play. In a patriarchy-driven society, whose rules determine the very workings of social life, Torvald Helmer, as a protector, breadwinner and the head of the household, enjoys a dominant and authoritative male power. Moreover, he is a highly prestigious bank manager. On the other hand, Nora assumes a socially and hierarchically inferior role as a homemaker, deprived of any financial income. However, she initially seems remarkably content with her peaceful family life, her home's warm shelter, and her doll-like personality. In the beginning, both enjoy their domestic life with their three small children. However, as the play continues and her secret unfolds, their relationship and personalities change.

It has been observed that the couple approach one another with positive politeness due to their intimacy and love. Torvald addresses Nora with intimate address forms, diminutive titles and in-group solidarity remarks. Her husband generally satisfies and sustains her positive face so long as she does not step out of her domestic realm and doll-like role. However, when the matter comes to financial and business issues, he criticises his wife and does FTAs to her positive face. He regards these kinds of matters far beyond her intellect. Nora maintains her positive politeness approach to satisfy her husband's positive face. Furthermore, she abstains from doing any FTA to him to avoid offending his face. Their harmony in their family life depends more heavily on her positively polite acts. Torvald's warnings are also regarded as FTAs to his wife's negative face. Initially, she exhibits positive politeness while Torvald does bald on record FTAs to her either positive or negative face want. It could be, therefore, inferred that the male character secures a dominant and relatively superior position over the female character. He denies her the right to meddle with his business and does not hesitate to attack her face. On the other hand, she desperately displays deference and employs negative politeness in return. After her secret has been revealed towards the end of the play, he aggravates his bald on record impoliteness with abusive words and swears. Thus, he attacks her with positive impoliteness. As a result, she awakens to reality, is deeply disillusioned with her husband's FTAs to her positive face, and begins defying him. She expresses her wish to abandon her doll-like home to become a true individual. Moreover,

she denies yielding to his social superiority and dominance and responds to him with bald on record impoliteness to his positive face. In addition, she employs positive impoliteness by refusing to establish a common ground and in-group solidarity with him as before. After being reduced to a powerless position, Torvald employs negative politeness and positive politeness as a kind of remedy for his prior offence, but to no avail. Their relationship comes to an irremediable point. Nora gets a relatively superior position with her firm and adamant stand as opposed to Torvald, crying and desperately begging her to stay home.

The analyses have dealt with the exchanges of the married couple, Nora and Torvald Helmer, to reveal the role of linguistic strategies of (im)politeness in their complex and changing characteristics towards one another through the play. Their characterisations and changing attitudes have been astutely drawn to prove the importance of the linguistic strategies of (im)politeness. The analyses have also demonstrated that Nora has transformed from a subservient, meek and obedient character to a rebellious and independent one, while Helmer Torvald has become a submissive, tolerant and accepting character. Nora is the epitome of realising Ibsen's goal of establishing the kingdom of free-spirited souls after the kingdoms of paganism and Christianity, which human beings already have gone through. Dramatic texts consist of written dialogues, and they are amenable to applying (im)politeness-based analyses to create further room for multiple and various interpretations.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement:

This is a research article, containing original data, and it has not been previously published or submitted to any other outlet for publication. The author followed ethical principles and rules during the research process. In the study, informed consent was obtained from the volunteer participants and the privacy of the participants was protected.

Araştırma ve yayın etiği beyanı: Bu makale tamamıyla özgün bir araştırma olarak planlanmış, yürütülmüş ve sonuçları ile raporlaştırıldıktan sonra ilgili dergiye gönderilmiştir. Araştırma herhangi bir sempozyum, kongre vb. sunulmamış ya da başka bir dergiye değerlendirilmek üzere gönderilmemiştir.

Contribution rates of authors to the article: The authors in this article contributed to the first author 100% level of preparation of the study, data collection, and interpretation of the results and writing of the article.

Yazarların makaleye katkı oranları: Bu makaledeki yazarlar % 100 düzeyinde çalışmanın hazırlanması, veri toplanması, sonuçların yorumlanması ve makalenin yazılması aşamalarına katkı sağlamıştır.

Ethics committee approval: The present study does not require any ethics committee approval.

Etik komite onayı: Çalışmada etik kurul iznine gerek yoktur.

Financial support: The study received no financial support from any institution or project.

Finansal destek: Çalışmada finansal destek alınmamıştır.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Çıkar çatışması: Çalışmada potansiyel çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

References

- Aristotle (1996). *Poetics*. Malcolm Heath (Trans.). Penguin.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bodden, W. (2017). *Dialogue and characterization*. Creative Paperbacks.
- Burroway, J. (2000). *Writing fiction*. (5th.ed.). Longman Inc.
- Cassady, M. (1984). *Characters in action: A guide to playwriting*. University Press of America.
- Culpeper, J. (2005). Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The weakest link. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture, 1*, 35-72.
- Culpeper, J. (2014). *Language and characterisation*. Routledge.
- Egri, L. (1960). *The Art of dramatic writing*. Simon & Schuster.
- Dawson, S.W. (2018). *Drama & the dramatic*. Routledge.
- Garton, C. (1957). Characterisation in Greek tragedy. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies, 77*, 247-254. <https://doi.org/10.2307/629364>
- Goffman, E. (1967). On face-work. An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. In E. Goffman (Ed.) *Interaction ritual: essays in face-to-face behaviour* (pp. 5-45). Doubleday.
- Grebanier, B. (1961). *Playwriting*. Thomas Y. Crowel Company.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. (In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan, Eds.) *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). Academic Press.
- Ibsen, H. (1981). *Henrik Ibsen four major plays*. (J. McFarlane and J. Arup, Trans.) Oxford University Press.
- McFarlane, J. (1989). *Ibsen & meaning*. Norvik Press.
- Ørjasæter K. (2006). Mother, wife and role model, *Ibsen Studies, 5*(1),19-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15021860510032835>
- Stott, A. (2014). *Comedy*. second edition. Routledge.
- Şekerci, Ö. (2023). Culpeper's impoliteness strategies in Neil Simon's 'Biloxi Blues'. *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture, 13*, 125-141. <https://doi.org/10.22364/BJELLC.13.2023.09>
- Thomas, J. (2013). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. Routledge.



Bu eser Creative Commons Atıf 4.0 Uluslararası Lisansı ile lisanslanmıştır.
(This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License).