

How does (Im)politeness characterize the Protagonist in The Pursuit of Happyness?

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Abstract

The Pursuit of Happyness was a famous movie directed in 2006 about the life struggle of Chris Gardener. This paper would analyze an excerpt of The Pursuit of Happyness to explore how (im)politeness characterizes Chris Gardener with Brown and Levinson's politeness model and Culpeper's impoliteness model. The excerpt is the scene when Chris has just left the prison to attend the interview for a broker internship. This paper argues that impoliteness reflects Chris's underprivileged background while the use of politeness characterizes honesty, respect, confidence, humor, and wit. Despite his inherent rudeness stemming from his attire, his lacklustre educational background, and his limited stock market expertise, Chris managed to project a positive image and win the interviewers over with well-executed politeness strategies. Although politeness theories are originated for real-life encounter in the Anglo-American world, they also play a vital role in characterisation in western popular culture. This paper aims to complement existing literature on the implementation of (im)politeness theories in digital discourse.

Keywords: characterisation; discourse analysis; impoliteness; politeness