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## A Pragmatic Study of Bullying in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of bullying as a prominent sociocultural element within the American film "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" serve the dual purpose of providing amusement to audiences while also conveying messages of communication, morality, culture, society, and education. In addition to that, bullying remains a widespread problem within the educational institutions. Students, especially those with special cases are constant victims of bullying. The data will be subjected to analysis based on pragmatic theories, such as speech acts and strategies of impoliteness. The questions that the paper tries to answer are: what are the types of verbal bullying and its directness, what are the types of speech acts, what are the illocutionary acts and the directness of speech acts, and what are the impoliteness strategies? This study aims to identify the types and directness of verbal bullying, investigate the types of speech acts in the selected data whether it is used directly or indirectly, identifying the illocutionary acts, and investigating the impoliteness strategies and it is sub-types in "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" movie. Working on these aims, it is hypothesized that direct verbal bullying of verbal abuse is the predominant type, all the types of speech acts are employed by bullies, the impoliteness strategies are used equally. The study's findings indicate that the predominant kind of bullying observed is direct verbal bullying, characterized by instances of verbal abuse and name-calling. The direct expressive speech acts of mocking/taunting are widely used by girls in "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" movie. Positive impoliteness strategy is the most frequent strategy.

**Keywords:** American Movies; Bullying; Impoliteness; Pragmatics; Speech Acts

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### INTRODUCTION

The notion of bullying has obtained the interest of researchers in sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and pragmatics. Several studies have been conducted under the title of bullying with various perspectives and various purposes. A strong societal interest in

bully and victim problems is aroused firstly in Sweden in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Heinemann 1972; Olweus 1973 as cited in Olweus 1993). And it is quickly extended to the other Scandinavian countries (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is not a new phenomenon. The phenomenon in question has been documented in both classical literary works and contemporary films (Bell Carter & Spencer, 2006).

Regarding the historical development of the idea of bullying, Rigby (2002) asserts that it is important to acknowledge that while the systematic examination of bullying is a relatively new, the phenomena of bullying itself is not. The phenomenon of bullying has garnered significant and revitalized attention during the final decade of the twentieth century.

Professor Dan Olweus is widely recognized as the pioneering researcher who conducted extensive data collection on the phenomenon of bullying among children in Scandinavia. His research aimed to address fundamental inquiries, such as the underlying motivations behind children's engagement in bullying behaviors. What are the defining attributes of an individual who engages in bullying behavior? What are the repercussions of bullying on individuals who are victimized? How can the prevalence of bullying be diminished? What are the many strategies that can be employed to mitigate instances of bullying? Rigby (2002).

According to Smith, Pepler, and Rigby (2004), Olweus's research conducted in Scandinavia during the 1970s is the initial comprehensive investigation on the characteristics and prevalence of bullying within educational settings. Subsequent to that time, a substantial corpus of scholarly research has provided insights into the characteristics of bullying and the resultant distress it can inflict.

Stephenson and Smith (1989) define traditional bullying as "a form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual [the bully] exhibits aggressive behavior which is intended to and does in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual [the victim]. The aggressive behavior may take the form of a direct physical and/or verbal attack or may be indirect when the bully hides a possession that belongs to the victim or spreads false information about the victim" (p. 45).

There is no universally agreed definition of this phenomenon; anyway, a pervasive and effective definitions of bullying is that of Olweus (1993): "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p. 9). "Negative actions " are fulfilled by words (verbally) for example, by threatening, teasing, taunting him or her and calling him or her by hurtful names. Bullying is a negative action when others hit, push, kick, pinch or restrain an individual physically. Negative actions can be carried out by doing faces expression or gestures, intentionally ignoring and excluding an individual from a group of friends (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying is an action that can only be easily recognized when individuals experience it. Bullying can happen to absolutely everyone at any age and anywhere whether at school, home or even in a workplace (Montgomery, 1994).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Related Terms of Bullying

Academic researchers often employ various terminologies to describe similar processes, which may eventually become established as independent concepts and subfields. As a result, the phenomenon of bullying, characterized by one child subjecting another to verbal or physical abuse, has been examined by various scholars who have proposed alternative terms such as "mobbing," "aggression," "verbal aggression," "school violence," "teasing," "harassment," "peer victimization," "rejection," and "insult or abuse" (Harris, 2009).

#### 1. Mobbing

Mobbing is defined as "ganging up on someone", "bullying", and "psychological terror". In this type, the victim is exposed to a systematic, stigmatizing process and infringement of his or her civil rights. Mobbing does not have the characteristic of bullying, because it is done in a very sensitive way with stigmatizing effects. Bullying is described by physical aggressive acts while mobbing is described by sophisticated behaviors for instance, isolating the victim socially (Zapf & Leymann, 1996).

#### 2. Aggression

Baron & Richardson (1994) as cited in krahe (2021, p. 2) defines aggression as "any form of behavior intended to harm or injure another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment". The term "harm" encompasses various types of undesirable treatment inflicted upon persons, including physical injury, emotional distress, the dissemination of rumors, and the disruption of their social connections (Krahe, 2021). Olweus (1993) points out that bullying can take the form of physical and emotional aggression (direct or indirect), but bullying differentiates from aggressive behavior that it has two criteria, repetitive behavior and imbalance of power.

#### 3. Violence

Olweus (1999, p. 12) defines violence as "aggressive behavior where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body or an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon another individual". Violence as with aggression is hurtful or damaging and is also intended. According to Olweus, violence needs to be physical acts, but bullying does not need to be physical and must include individuals as perpetrators and victims (Smith, 2014).

#### 4. Peer Victimization

Peer victimization is utilized to indicate to "a form of peer abuse in which a child is frequently the target of peer aggression" (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996, p. 1305). Therefore, bullying is a specific case of peer-victimization; since the ultimate does not include similar criteria of repetition, intent and imbalance of power which are included in the bullying's definition (Hunter et al, 2007).

#### 5. Harassment

Harassment is another term of bullying which is very identical to bullying, specifically in terms of repetition or persistence. It tends to be utilized more in situations of bias bullying. Essentially as in sexual harassment and racial harassment (Smith, 2014).

## 6. Abuse

This term is also identical to bullying. Abuse involves an imbalance of power. It tends to be utilized more in the family contexts as in kids abuse, which may be physical or sexual (smith, 2014).

### **Types of Bullying**

In order to establish a comprehensive understanding of the concept of bullying, scholars have put forth many models that aim to delineate its distinct forms. As an illustration, Olweus (1993) posits the existence of two forms of bullying: "direct" bullying, which occurs in face-to-face interactions, and "indirect" bullying, which is characterized by implicit actions and may include a third party, such as spreading rumors or engaging in exclusionary behaviors (Lee, 2004).

In his classification, Rigby (1996) has placed emphasis on the concept of intent, distinguishing between two types of bullying: 'malign' bullying, characterized by deliberate and intentional actions, and 'non-malign' bullying, which is perceived by the perpetrators as harmless or only a kind of amusement. In his analysis of 'non-malign' bullying, the author elucidates the notion of educational bullying, wherein adults, such as teachers, engage in actions that may cause harm, albeit without any deliberate desire to do so (as referenced in Lee, 2004). According to Rigby (2007), the concept of malign bullying refers to a form of bullying that is characterized by a conscious intention to cause harm to another individual. This type of bullying involves the deliberate exploitation of a power imbalance, which is considered to be the source of its malicious nature (p. 15).

The categorization of bullying conduct is based on specific criteria established by renowned specialists in the field:

1. The manner in which behavior is enacted can be categorized as either direct (face-to-face) or indirect (subtle) bullying.
2. Whether the behavior is intended (malign) or mindless (non-malign) bullying, and
3. The various methods employed to engage in abusive behavior, including verbal, physical, and emotional techniques.

Lee (2004) posits that there exist three fundamental categories of bullying, which can manifest in various direct and indirect manifestations:

1. Physical bullying (punching, kicking, taking possessions, damaging property, threat of violence, gestures and body language).
2. Verbal bullying (name-calling, offensive, threatening and insulting).
3. Social bullying (exclusion from the friend group or intimidation within the group).

### **School Bullying**

In recent decades, the issue of bullying in educational settings has garnered significant attention from scholars and authors alike. When Dan Olweus starts his studies in Scandinavian schools, School bullying; indeed, it is mainly pupil-pupil bullying which becomes the focus of research up until now. The main types of bullying include physical and verbal bullying such as hitting, kicking, teasing, name-calling and

social exclusion and indirect bullying such as excluding a person from social groups and spreading nasty rumors (Smith, 2011).

According to Olweus (1993), a significant portion of bullying incidents occur within the school environment, namely in areas such as corridors, classrooms, and playgrounds. As individuals progress through the stages of development. Pupils' self-reports indicate a decrease in engagement with the bullying process, or a shift towards different forms of bullying as they age, transitioning from physical and direct bullying to more indirect and relational forms. Boys are more than girls to be bullies, but girls' bullies use indirect and relational bullying while boy bullies use physical and direct bullying. School bullying is widespread and most children probably experience it at some stage. Either as bullies, victims or as witnesses. Large-scale surveys exhibit that it happens across the world, though it can include different behaviors and have different meanings in different countries (James, 2010).

## METHODS

The design of the present study is of a mixed method; that is qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method is used to analyze bullying phenomenon because it allows comprehending the bullying language used. In addition to, it is appropriate for analyzing the speakers' intentions. The quantitative method is frequency used to quantify the number of the repetition of bullying language 'An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong' movie.

The current paper has chosen 'An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong' movie for the analysis of the bullying phenomenon. This study encompasses elementary school students and examines the phenomenon of antisocial conduct known as bullying, which entails the targeted mistreatment of a socially or mentally vulnerable student by one or more individuals. The researcher proceeded to acquire the complete video recordings of the movie, then followed by obtaining the corresponding transcripts. The video of 'An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong' is taken from the website <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1JCZKbpgv00> and the script video is taken from the website [https://sublikescript.com/movie/An\\_American\\_Girl\\_Christa\\_Stands\\_Strong-1340418](https://sublikescript.com/movie/An_American_Girl_Christa_Stands_Strong-1340418).

In the analysis procedures of this study, various methodologies are employed to examine the movie "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong." Initially, the accuracy of the movie's transcript is assessed through direct viewing. Subsequently, instances of bullying within the dialogue are identified by applying Searle's felicity conditions (1969). The investigation then delves into the different types of bullying using Stephenson and Smith's model (2002). Moreover, Searle's model (1979) is employed to scrutinize the speech acts employed throughout the movie. As a comprehensive approach, Culpeper's model (1996) is utilized to analyze the diverse methods of impoliteness present in "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong." This multifaceted analysis aims to provide a thorough understanding of the various linguistic aspects embedded in the film.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The eclectic model developed in the previous section is used for analyzing the bullying situations in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” movie under study (see 3.1). Data are analyzed according to the qualitative and quantitative analysis.

### Qualitative Analysis

In the qualitative analysis, the examination of data unfolds in the following manner: a) Identification of Verbal Bullying Types: This involves discerning the type of verbal bullying, whether it manifests as direct or indirect verbal bullying; b) Pragmatic Analysis: The analysis takes a pragmatic approach to scrutinizing bullying expressions. Specifically, it investigates the representation of speech acts within the data, with a particular focus on the use of illocutionary acts by the characters, both directly and indirectly. Additionally, the analysis delves into the various impoliteness methods employed by the individuals engaging in bullying.

These analytical aspects are presented in the table below where fourteen situations holding numerous utterances are analyzed:

**Table 1.** The Qualitative Analysis of the “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

Utterance of Bullying	Verbal Bullying		Speech Act		Impoliteness Strategy
	Type	Directness	Type	Illocutionary act	
1. "Tara: oh, look Sonali. It's your lunch buddy. Is she going to sit here? Sonali: don't look at her Tara, Sonali, and Jayden: Hahahah	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Excluding /ignoring	Direct Positive impoliteness/ignoring
2. "Tara: "you are the loser girl and no one likes you. Happy valentine's day, from you know who". Tara: You go send it. You know who. Tara: watch this Jayden: happy Valentine's Day Tara: wait until she open it Sonali: happy when she gets it, sad when she reads it"	Belittling others	Direct	Expressive	Insulting/offending	Direct Positive impoliteness/Calling names
3. Mr. Beck: okay, guys. It's time to open the mailboxes Sonali: finally Jayden: I'll even open mine Tara: I have so many; I know it's over flowing Jayden: flowing Sonali: flowing Tara: you didn't get any valentines, how sad. Sonali: homemade, Dud? Chrissa: yeah. I like making them myself Tara: really? I like buying them way better Sonali: hey, may be yours fell on the floor Tara: yeah Jayden: she believed it Tara: I can't believe she fell for it Well, we can't have anyone in our club who didn't get any Valentine's Day. Can we? Sonali: No Jayden: No, we can't	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Insulting/Offending	Direct Negative impoliteness/Personalizing
	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ Taunting& Humiliation	Indirect Sarcasm or mock politeness
	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Excluding/ Ignoring & Triangulation	Direct Bald on record impoliteness

5. "Tara: Hi, Tyler Tyler: Hi. Tara: I heard you're new. Tara: I can't believe he fell for it. Sonali: I know Tara: boys are dumb. Hahahah"	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Insulting/ offending & Humiliation	Direct	Negative impoliteness/ Being contemptuous Positive impoliteness/ Calling names
5. "Tara: Gwen I love the hat Sonali: Gwen, up here Tara: I can't believe you have that outfit Jayden: oh, are you near here? Tara: like the loser Sonali: oh, she's leaving Tara: oh, poor Gwen Sonali: she's a loser"	Verbal Abuse	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ Taunting	Indirect	Sarcasm or mock politeness
6. "Tara: oh, loser 1's making friends with loser 2 how sweet What? ... Did you see her face? Totally pathetic"	Name- calling	Direct	Expressive	Insulting/ Offending & Humiliation	Direct	Positive impoliteness/ Calling names
7. "Tara: you know, I let you win I don't really try until the competition Mr. Beck: you know. Chrissa, I'm goanna put you on the relay team with Tara, Alexandra and Rachel, okay? You're goanna swim second. Tara: Second? Mr. Beck: good job Tara: that's where they put the weakest swimmer"	Verbal Abuse	Direct	Expressive	insulting/ offending	Direct	Positive impoliteness/ Making the other feel uncomfortable
8. "Chrissa: hey, you guys see my clothes? Tara: no, no sorry. Come on Sally, let's go Tara: Gee, Chrissa, something really stinks"	Name- calling	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ taunting	Indirect	positive impoliteness/ calling names
9. "Tara: okay. Face me. This is how you cut bangs my mom showed me. Do you like it? Gwen: yes. I love it Sonali: you look great, Gwen Tara: come on. Oops. I made a little mistake Now, you really look like a homeless person... Come on girls Hahahah"	Verbal Abuse	Direct	Expressive	Insulting/ Offending & Humiliation	Indirect	Negative impoliteness/ Being contemptuous
10. "Chrissa the Loser Llama Girl"	Name- calling	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ Taunting & humiliation	Direct	Negative impoliteness/ Negative association
11. "Tara: Gee, Chrissa, I guess nobody likes you Jayden: Guess not Chrissa: Tara, you have to cut this out	Verbal abuse	Direct	Expressive	Insulting /offending & Humiliation	Direct	Positive impoliteness/ Unsympathetic

<i>Tara: what? We didn't do anything, did we?</i>						
<i>Jayden: no"</i>						
12. "ask Chrissa Maxwell about her contagious disease. Should she really be swimming in the same water as the rest of us?"	Spreading rumors	Indirect	Expressive	Excluding Ignoring & humiliation	Direct	Positive impoliteness/ Excluding others
13. "Tara: I bet you can't do it, Tyler. Because it's too hard, my corkscrew has two twists, you won't do it. Chrissa: Stop it. Tara: chicken, I'm the only one that can do it"	Name-calling	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ taunting	Direct	Negative impoliteness/ Negative association
14. "Chrissa: Mr. Beck Mr. Beck: yes, Chrissa Chrissa: I have an idea for our project Mr. Beck: well, I love your enthusiasm...but we're talking about that next week Chrissa: but I have an idea today Tara: what have a llama-bean omelet this morning?"	Name-calling	Direct	Expressive	Mocking/ Taunting & Humiliation	Indirect	Negative impoliteness/ Negative association

### Quantitative Analysis

The subsequent part provides a quantitative examination of the data. The analysis has multiple stages that aim to validate or disprove the hypotheses through the utilization of frequencies and percentages. The initial segment provides a quantitative examination the types of verbal bullying. The subsequent section presents an overview of the speech acts identified within the dataset. The final portion comprises a quantitative analysis of the tactics employed to convey impoliteness, along with its various subtypes.

#### 1. Types and Directness of Verbal Bullying in "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" movie

This section centers on the types of verbal bullying that the bullies in the film "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" endure. Bullying that is verbal may be direct or indirect. Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages of types of verbal bullying employed by the bullies in the film "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong".

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of Types Verbal Bullying in "An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong" Movie.

Verbal Bullying	Frequency	Percentage
Verbal bullying of verbal abuse	10	52.64%
Verbal bullying of name-calling	7	36.84%
Verbal bullying of spreading rumors	1	5.26%
Verbal bullying of belittling others	1	5.26%
Total	19	100%



As shown in Table 3, the total number of types of verbal bullying used by the bullies is nineteen (19) frequencies. Verbal bullying of verbal abuse represents the most commonly used super strategy in the data under study with ten (10) frequencies with a percentage of (52.64%) followed by verbal bullying of name-calling with seven (7) frequencies with a percentage of (36.84%). While verbal bullying of spreading rumors and belittling victims comes with one (1) frequency for each one with a percentage of (5.26%).

**Table 3.** Frequencies and percentages of directness of verbal bullying in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

Directness of verbal bullying	Frequency	Percentage
Direct verbal bullying	17	89.48%
Indirect verbal bullying	2	10.52%
Total	19	100%

As indicated in Table 3, the total number of directness of verbal bullying used by the bullies is nineteen (19) frequencies. Direct verbal bullying is the most frequently used with seventeen (17) frequencies at (89.48%) while indirect verbal bullying with two (2) frequencies at (10.52%).

## 2. Speech Act in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

This section focuses on the direct and indirect expressive speech act of mocking/taunting, insulting/offending, excluding/ignoring, humiliation, and triangulation that are exploited by bullies in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” movie.

**Table 4.** Frequencies and Percentages of Speech Act in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

Speech Act	Frequencies	Percentages
Expressive speech act of mocking/taunting	5	26.32%
Expressive speech act of mocking/taunting & humiliation	4	21.05%
Expressive speech act of insulting/offending	3	15.79%
Expressive speech act of insulting/offending & ignoring/excluding	0	0%
Expressive speech act of insulting/offending & humiliation	4	21.05%
Expressive speech act of humiliation	0	0%
Expressive speech act of excluding/ignoring	1	5.26%
Expressive speech act of excluding/ignoring & humiliation	1	5.26%
Expressive speech act of excluding/ignoring & triangulation	1	5.26%
Total	19	100%

**Table 5.** Frequencies and Percentages of Directness of Expressive Speech Act in “An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong” Movie

Directness of speech act	Frequencies	Percentages
Direct expressive speech act	<b>14</b>	<b>73.68%</b>
Indirect expressive speech act	<b>5</b>	<b>26.32%</b>
Total	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

As indicated in Table 4, the total number of expressive speech act are nineteen (19) frequencies. Direct expressive speech act of mocking/taunting represent the most commonly used in ‘An American Girl: Chrissa Stands Strong’ movie with five (5) frequencies at (26.33%) and followed by the combination of expressive speech act of mocking/taunting and humiliation with four (4) frequencies at (21.05%) then the combination of direct expressive speech act of insulting/offending and humiliation with same frequency (4) at (21.05%), and as indicated in Table 5, the total number of directness of expressive speech act is nineteen (19) frequencies. Direct expressive speech act is the most commonly used with fourteen (14) frequencies at (73.68%) and followed by indirect expressive speech act with five (5) frequencies at (26.32%) followed by insulting/offending with three (3) frequencies at (15.79%). It is also found that the three last sub-types of expressive speech act are equal with one (1) frequency at (5.26%).

## CONCLUSION

The research findings highlight that direct verbal bullying, encompassing verbal abuse and name-calling, stands out as the most prevalent form. Bullies prefer direct methods to target victims, employing them as a means to showcase power, assertiveness, and strength. This tendency correlates with the bully's social influence and peer support. Additionally, bullies frequently engage in expressive speech acts, particularly mocking/taunting, combinations of mocking/taunting and humiliation, and combinations of insulting/offending and humiliation, indicating a desire to assert power and dominance or maintain social standing among peers. Direct expressive speech acts prove to be more predominant than indirect ones. The study also reveals that the most frequently employed strategy is positive impoliteness, suggesting that bullies often seek power and control over their victims. Positive impoliteness serves as a tool for mocking, involving the intentional use of disrespectful or sarcastic language to demean and humiliate the victim. Notably, the data also indicates the use of a negative impoliteness strategy, wherein bullies directly mock and humiliate the victim by drawing comparisons to monster characters and employing derogatory nicknames.

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