Impoliteness Strategies of Dark Humour in South Park Series: A Sociopragmatic Study

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Abstract

This study presents a socio-pragmatic analysis of dark humour in South Park, an American animated sitcom. According to Mindess et al. (1985and Baldick 2001), dark humour is defined as a kind of humour that treats sinister subjects like death, disease, deformity, handicap or warfare with bitter amusement and presents such tragic, distressing or morbid topics in humorous terms, that why dark humour is most likely to be considered offensive. The current study investigates both pragmatic and social strategies in manifesting dark humour in the chosen data. It answers questions as: What are the impoliteness strategies used to manifest dark humour by the interlocutors in South Park and which ones are the most frequent? which ethnic group is the most discriminated in South Park? It aims at figuring out the impoliteness strategies that are used in expressing dark humour by the interlocutors, determining the most frequent ones, and discovering which ethnic group is the most discriminated. It is hypothesized that all of the impoliteness strategies are used and bold on record is the most frequently used to express dark humour, both Asians and African Americans can be found discriminated, but African Americans are the most to get discriminated in the chosen data. The study uses an eclectic model for the analysis of the chosen data based on Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness strategies, and one social factor namely ethnicity for the sociolinguistic analysis based on Hudson's (1996) point of view.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Sociolinguistic, Dark Humour, Impoliteness Strategies, Animated Sitcoms

1. Introduction

The central topic of investigation in this paper is a special category of humour that has received very little attention in linguistics, being more frequently discussed in literary and sociological research, as well as psychology. Researchers, that investigate dark humour, observe it as a new social phenomenon, sociolinguistic issue, literary device and pragmatic perspective (Brom Weber, 1973, p.41). There is no study which combines the production and the perception of dark humour in both sociolinguistic and pragmatic views concerning the participants in the genre of American animated sitcoms, therefore this study aims to bridge this gap by presenting a new sociopragmatic study. According to Brom Weber (1973, p. 388), dark humour is defined as humour that finds a reason to laugh at things that are typically regarded as very serious for humour, such as "the death of men, the breakdown of social institutions, mental and physical disease, deforming, suffering, anguish, privation, and terror. This study is concerned with studying this wicked type of humour. It raises the following questions:

    1. What are the impoliteness strategies used to manifest dark humour by the interlocutors in South Park and which ones are the most frequent?

    2. Which ethnic group is the most discriminated in South Park?

1.1 Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Figuring out the impoliteness strategies that are used in expressing dark humour by the interlocutors in South Park and determining the most frequent ones.

2. Discovering which ethnic group is the most discriminated in South Park.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

It is hypothesized that:

1. All of the impoliteness strategies are used but bold on record is the most frequently used to express dark humour in South Park

2. Both Asians and African Americans can be found discriminated, but African Americans are the most to get discriminated in South Park.

1.3 Procedures of the Study

1. Surveying the related literature, watching the episodes, then collecting the data scripts from the relative official sites, and finally describing the data related to South Park.

2. Making an eclectic model for the analysis of the chosen data based on Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness strategies, and one social factor namely ethnicity for the sociolinguistic analysis based on Hudson's (1996) point of view.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The study is limited to the investigation of dark humour sociopragmatically in one American animated sitcom, namely: "South Park". It is thought that this series is fertile with the existence of verbal dark humour between the participants. Besides, they are analyzed according to the eclectic model which is based on Culpeper impoliteness strategies (1996) and one social variable which is ethnicity. Accordingly, three random episode scripts are selected from the American animated sitcom "South Park" to serve as data for analysis.

1.5 Pragmatics

Mey (1993, p. 42) considers pragmatics to be the study of conditions that humans use which social context affects. Moreover, Thomas (1995, p. 1) believes that pragmatics main concern is with meaning, adding that the most common definition of pragmatics is meaning in use or meaning in context.

According to Crystal (1997, p. 379), pragmatics is the study of language from the perspective of users, especially in terms of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter while using language in social interaction, and the implications of their language usage on the individuals who are part of communication. As a discipline within language, its roots lie in the work of many linguists whose research contributes to the development of this

field. Finch (1998, p. 231) sees that pragmatics is the study of the situational and interpersonal factors which affect the meaning of utterances.

1.6 Impoliteness

Within the domain of pragmatics, the concept of impoliteness comprises a new and interesting field of studies next to and complementing politeness studies. Impoliteness is a break from the hypothesized norms of a community of practice. It is attributed to a speaker based on assessments of his intention and motivations (Mills, 2005, p. 122).

Impoliteness is described by Culpeper (1996) as "the opposite of politeness." Although Culpeper (2005, p. 355) reformulates his model of impoliteness as "the parasite of politeness," his first work is based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. Additionally, Culpeper modifies his model to take into account how discursive social interaction is. Impoliteness is intended to harm a person's identity and face. According to Culpeper (2003), impoliteness is the use of strategies that aim to put the hearer's face in danger and cause social tensions and conflict (Culpeper et al, 2003, p. 1550). Impoliteness is an attitude that is triggered by particular behaviours in a particular context (Culpeper, 2011, p. 42).

1.7 Culpeper Strategies of Impoliteness (1996)

Culpeper highlights that impoliteness develops during social interactions. Therefore, he promotes the adoption of a more culturally and contextually sensitive model of the face. Brown and Levinson's strategies are inverted by Culpeper (1996, p. 356) to characterise impoliteness, and they aim to attack the Hear's face rather than trying to save them and outline the 'inherent impoliteness'. It refers to "the act that does not involve virtual or potential offence; it is in its performance very offensive and thus not amenable to politeness work" (Culpeper, 1996).

a- Bald on Record

According to Culpeper (1996) by this strategy, the S shows his anger or his impoliteness utterances by attacking the H's face as obvious utterances He is far away from ambiguity. He uses a brief utterance because of his clarity with the addressee. It can be clarified that the intent of assaulting the addressee's face can cause harm to him with direct utterances. Examples

1. A. Can I see what you have? B gives a negative statement to A by saying shut up. Therefore, the S utterance in this context was direct and clear because his response was unambiguous without any reservations.

b- Positive Impoliteness

Culpeper (1996) states in this strategy, the attacker intents to insult the H's positive face. Additionally, it is not regarded as a part of the situation when he decides to attack him.

Culpeper (1996) states the side of positive impoliteness realization, which is in the form of disassociating from others, calling the other name, and utilizing taboo words. Therefore, He listed several output strategies of positive impoliteness are:

A) Fail to acknowledge the other's presence when it is about ignoring, or snubbing the other. B) Excluding someone from the participants. C) Disassociating from the others. For example, when someone avoids someone else to sit beside him D) When the attacker shows his unsympathetic, unconcerned and disinterest in something or actions that concern his opponent. E) Use title and surname with inappropriate identity markers) Mystifying the other by using jargon, or using a code which everyone knows, but the target does not. Thus, it will be obscure or secretive language. G) Disagreement with a conflicted topic. H) Making the other

in an uncomfortable situation. I) Using taboo words, when someone attempts to swear or use abusive language. J) Calling the other names for using inappropriate nominations for insult.

c- Negative Impoliteness

Culpeper (1996) states that this strategy has the purpose of attacking or damaging the recipient's negative face wants. A negative face is the want of every member that his/her actions be involved by others. Thus, it has the meaning of desiring freedom action.

In addition, this strategy has several realizations., asserts that those strategies are condescending scorning or ridiculing, associating the other with a negative aspect explicitly, and invading the other's space. However, the following are the output of negative impoliteness strategies:

A) Frighten in which instils fear that others will suffer as a result of certain behaviour. B) Condescending, scorning or ridiculing which emphasizes the relative power. As well as be contemptuous. It means that do not make a serious challenge to the other. Make fun of the other for example using diminutives. C) Invading the other space: Literally (e.g Locate yourself as close to the other as the partnership permits.) or metaphorically (e.g request or discuss details that are too sensitive for the partnership). D) In an Explicit way the attacker associates the other with a negative aspect: personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'You'. e) Put someone in less power than the other one.

d- Sarcasm and Mock Politeness

Culpeper (1996) asserts that sarcasm is concerned with the face-threatening act by producing politeness strategy insincerely. This strategy is created for the opposite meaning of what the participant wants to produce in his utterances. Hence, it is not the real or the literal meaning of the utterances because the attacker has an intention to show his insult in the way of mocking. Additionally, the output of this strategy will be about insincere politeness.

e- Withhold Politeness

According to Culpeper (1996), this strategy is produced when someone wishes to remain silent when a respectful action is supposed to be done by somebody else. Being inactive and refusing to thank are examples of withholding politeness. Consider the following Example:
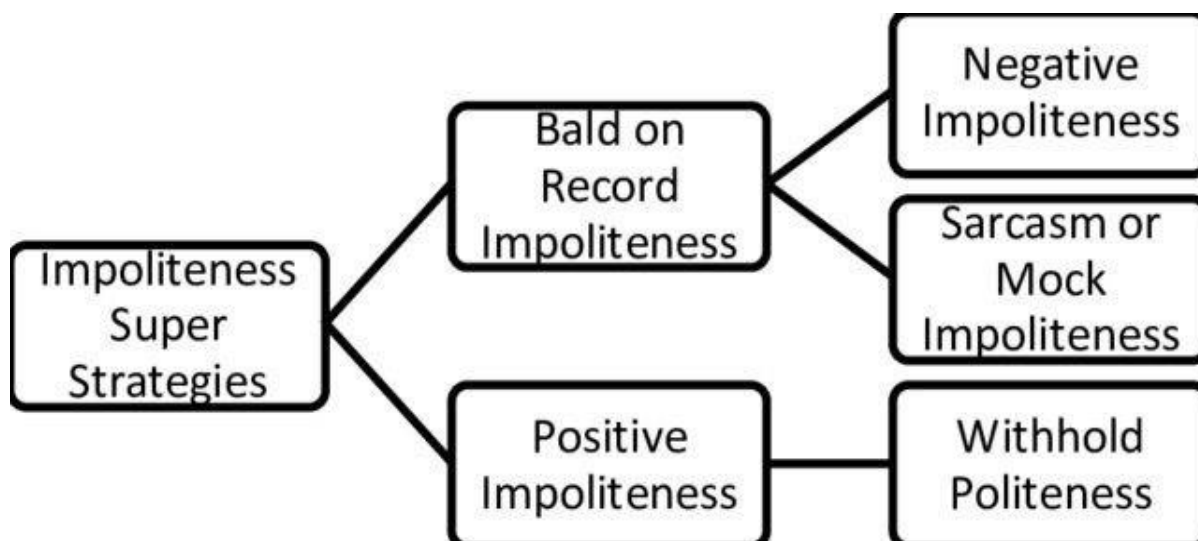
2. A: Hello! How are you today? B: (Silent)

Figure 1. *Impoliteness Super Strategies Proposed by Culpeper (1996).*

2. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is defined by Hudson (1996, p. 1-2) as the study of language that is associated with society. The value of sociolinguistics is the interest that generally depends on the nature of language or the merits of some particular languages. There are a set of social variables within this field.

Fasold (1990, p. 223-24) defines "sociolinguistic variable" as "a set of alternative ways of saying the same idea, although the variants have social significance." A sociolinguistic variable is a linguistic element that co-varies with a number of additional linguistic independent variables, such as social class, gender, age, ethnic group, or context, in addition to other linguistic components. According to language users, this means that language conveys information on the speaker's identity that exposes his/ her group membership (social class). Language does this by revealing the speaker's place of origin, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, etc. This study will be limited to only one social variable with is ethnicity. Fought (2006, p. 4) observes that ethnicity is a "socially constructed category" that exerts influence on language use. Moreover, Ylänne (2008, p. 168) considers ethnicity as a non-speech attribute and appearance feature that causes significant linguistic differences, but it, at the same time reinforces social unity among those who belong to the same ethnic group.

3. Dark Humour

Humour, according to Mark Twain, is "mankind's wonderful blessing." People frequently laugh when they hear funny stories. According to social studies, humour is a social phenomenon that appears in amusing interaction and communication. The ability to grasp and produce cognitive processes through smiles and laughing is a defining attribute of a person (Svebak, 2014). However, some comedic stories aren't just meant to make people laugh and giggle; as a result, viewers and readers may be left wondering whether to laugh or cry. This humour is frequently referred to as "dark humour" (DH) or "black humour". The first person to use the term "dark humour" was the French surrealist Andre Breton. This term appears in his 1940 book Anthologie de l'humour noir. Svebak (2014).

Although there have been numerous attempts to define DH, no one description has gained widespread agreement. As a result, it has been referred to by various critics, artists, and writers by many titles, including black, dark, grim, gallows, grotesque, morbid, and sick humour (Mindess et al. 1985; Oxford dictionaries 2016). According to Maxwell (2003), DH is perceived as morbid, nasty, psychopathic, twisted and often very funny. The term is also defined as a kind of humour that treats sinister subjects like death, disease, deformity, handicap or warfare with bitter amusement (Mindess et al. 1985; Baldick 2001) and presents such tragic, distressing or morbid topics in humorous terms, that why DH most likely to be considered offensive (Oxford dictionaries 2016).

DH, in contrast, is described by Mitchell Reece Pentzer (2015) as "the humorous exploitation of taboos like sexual immorality, cannibalism, and especially death." Janoff (1974, p. 303) effectively summarises DH because it is impossible to characterise DH as pessimistic or as merely lacking an affirmative moral voice. Instead, it exists outside of these bounds in a space of horrifying sincerity regarding very extreme situations. As the general qualities of the works that are connected with it, DH is usually associated with chaotic chronology, narratives

that are going nowhere, and a conflicting, or even unreliable, narrative attitude. It explores violent or shocking incidents, questions the readers' ideologies, and values both the disturbing and the hilarious (Janoff, 1974, p. 305).

3.1 Types of Dark Humour

Different forms of DH are communicated by different means and for different purposes. Some of this humour comes via the mass media, such as radio's witty comments; television provides us with verbal DH in the form of sitcoms, blooper shows, stand-up comedy, political satire, and dark humorous advertisements; also, in newspaper comic strips and cartoons, this genre is found in comedy movies, and humorous books (Martin, 2007, p. 10). These different forms are presented as ' Verbal DH or 'Non-verbal Verbal DH. While the former is done through language, the latter can be done through non-verbal acts. This kind of humour depends on visual stimulus rather than verbal. Non-verbal Verbal DH is beyond the scope of this study. The present study deals only with Verbal DH.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data and Model of Analysis

Animated situation comedies generally known as animated sitcoms (AS) have been popular since the first release of the successful prime-time animation, The Flintstones (produced by Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc., in 1960) (Wells 2003). Although The Flintstones was not targeted solely at children, the content has remained family-friendly over the years, while AS created in the 1980s (e.g., The Simpsons, South Park, Family Guy) have been primarily targeted at an adult audience (Turner, 2004). It is not by chance that these shows have been so popular-the domestic sitcom has proven to be a reliable formula since the beginning of television. Through the use of animation, television writers have found a wide arena in which they can combine the social criticism typical of television drama with the satire and comedy typical of the sitcom tradition to address a wide variety of issues ranging from the realistic to the fantastic (Pennington, 2012). AS often dissect controversial or sensitive social and political issues (e.g., gun control, gay marriage) using malicious humour, and stereotyping (Raymond, 2013). Social criticism is also a central element of these cartoons, which can be understood in a United States context (Raymond 2013).

4.2 South Park

South Park (1997- present) is an AAS created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone and developed by Brian Graden for Comedy Central. The series has 25 seasons with more than 315 episodes (Wells 2003). South Park revolves around four boys Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman, and Kenny McCormick and their exploits in and around the titular Colorado town. South Park became infamous for its profanity and dark, surreal humour that satirizes a wide range of topics for an adult audience. (Wells 2003, p.11).

4.3 Model of Analysis

Six extracts are chosen randomly from three episodes to be analyzed. They are taken from an official website that is related to South Park which is mentioned in the references. The model of analysis to be adopted is an eclectic one. It is based on Culpeper's impoliteness strategies (1996) and one social variable which is ethnicity shown in figure (2).

The researcher selects six various extracts from three different random episodes across different random seasons. The analyses of the following extracts are based on the model mentioned above.
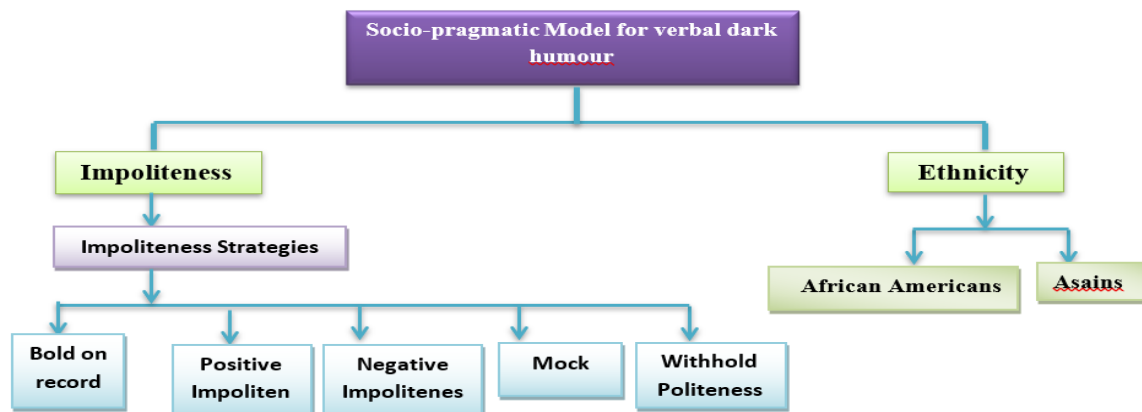
Figure 2. *The Model of Analysis*

Extract 1

Pat Sajak: come on Mr Marsh make everyone proud,

The category is [the words appear onscreen] People Who Annoy You.

We give you help [the letters: ERS]. We just need three more consonants and a vowel.

Randy: I'd like a B, an N, a G and An O, please.

Pat Sajak: More letters light up: NGG, but no O: N_GGERS.

Randy: I know it but I don't think I should say it.

Pat Sajak: Five seconds, Mr Marsh.

Randy: Oh all right uh, I'd like to solve the puzzle! Its Ni**ers!

The African American crowd: BOOO!!

Randy gets the buzzer for the wrong answer [the last letter turned-A-]

Randy: Oh naggers. Of course, naggers. Right.

This extract is taken from S11, Ep1, which goes by the name "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

Randy uses the negative impoliteness strategy when he uses the N-word which is extremely offensive and aims to attack the audience's negative face of feeling free of any imposing.

2. Ethnicity

Randy offended the whole race of African Americans when he uttered the N-word because this word is considered very offensive amongst African Americans and holds the idea of white people seeing African Americans as nothing but slaves.

Extract 2

Stan: Token! Hey, wait up! I just wanted to say, I get it now.

after that "little person" talk at that assembly the other day

I understand how you feel about somebody saying the N-word.

Tolkien: So, you mean to say black people are midgets?

Stan: God dammit!

This extract is taken from S11, Ep1, which goes by the name "With Apologies to Jesse Jackson"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

Stan uses the negative impoliteness strategy, Stan caused damage to Tolkien's negative face by comparing him and every other African American with midgets.

2. Ethnicity

A strong sign of discrimination towards the race of African Americans when being compared with "little man" and with "midgets" which are tiny black insects as being looked at as little and worthless people with no value, that get laughed at and ignored just because they are born with dark skin.

Extract 3

Lisa: Uh, excuse me. Butters?

Butters: Oh. Yes?

Lisa: Um, well, I was just wondering if... maybe...

you would like to go to a movie this weekend.

Butters: Oh. Oh, like a date? Oh no thanks, Lisa.

I really appreciate the offer, but you're too fat for me.

Lisa: Okay, thanks.

This extract is taken from S17, Ep10, which goes by the name "The Hobbit"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

Butters uses the positive impoliteness strategy that attacks the positive face of the little girl by saying she's too fat for him.

2. Ethnicity

Both Butters and Lisa are white American, no other ethnicity is found.

Extract 4

Butters*: I'm sorry, Wendy, but I have a different standard*

when it comes to my women. I want a woman who

takes care of herself and knows how to look good, who's got

perfect skin and no splotches on her legs, and perfect everything.

Wendy*: This is a fantasy, you moron! You ever heard of Photoshop?!*

Kim Kardashian is a short, overweight woman who manipulates her image

and makes average girls feel horrible about themselves!

Butters*: You're a liar!*

Wendy*: Look it up, stupid! In real life,*

Kim Kardashian has the body of a hobbit!

This extract is taken from S17, Ep10, which goes by the name "The Hobbit"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

In this extract, the negative impoliteness strategy is used by Wendy three times in (*This is a fantasy, you moron!*) She ridicules the other person's ideas and negative face and compares him to a monkey referring that she considers him stupid. And in *(Kim Kardashian is a short, overweight woman who manipulates her image and makes average girls feel horrible about themselves!)* And when she says (*Look it up, stupid!*) She called him a bad name in order to attack his negative face. And in (*Kim Kardashian has the body of a hobbit!*) In order to attack the negative face of Kim Kardashian and devaluate her and her image and to show that she's less than pretty.

2. Ethnicity

Both Wendy and Butters are white American kids, no other ethnicity is found.

Extract 5

Yates*: You son of a bitch, you told me this guy was African-American!*

Harris*: It says right here on the final sheet he is!*

Yates*: Does that look like a black guy to you?!*

Harris*: It said on the final sheet!*

Yates: Jesus Christ Monkeyballs! We could have made

an innocent man go to jail who wasn't black! Oh!

This extract is taken from S8, Ep6, which goes by the name "The Jeffersons"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

Yates uses the negative impoliteness strategy two times, the first in (*You son of a bitch, you told me this guy was African-American!*) Here Yates attacks the negative face of his man by calling him a son of hoe for giving him false and inaccurate information, he intended to destroy his negative face and inflict harm to his feelings and self-image. The second in (*We could have made an innocent man go to jail who wasn't black!*) Yates attacks the negative face of African Americans of being free of any imposing, his words are intended to inflict harm and cause the African American guy to go to jail.

2. Ethnicity

The whole extract shows an undeniable amount of hate and discrimination towards African Americans that they usually get from the police and how they often get framed and charged for crimes they didn't do or commit.

Extract 6

Yates: Hello, this is Sergeant Yates over at the

Park County Police Department in Colorado.

Snetzl: Yes, sergeant. What can I do for you?

Yates: Well, we've been trying to frame this guy

who just moved into our town, and the fil-o-fax says

he moved from your area. One Martin Jefferson?

Snetzl: Hm. No, we never had any rich African-Americans

named Jefferson here. If we had, we would have framed him ourselves.

Yates: Well, he doesn't really look that black.

This extract is taken from S8, Ep6, which goes by the name "The Jeffersons"

1. Impoliteness Strategies

Snetzl uses the negative impoliteness strategy to ridicule the fact that there's no African American in town if there is he would be already thrown in jail. The S attacks the negative face of all African Americans.

2. Ethnicity

In this extract, a clear sign of discrimination and hate is found, which proves the common stereotype of policemen hating and framing African Americans that are rich or of high rank in society because they refuse to see a minority get a high position or live the lifestyle that white Americans are having.

5. Discussion of Analysis

The present study has two objectives. The first one is to specify the impoliteness strategies that are used in expressing dark humour by the interlocutors in South Park and the second is determining the most frequent ones. The present study has two objectives. The first one is to specify the impoliteness strategies that are used in expressing dark humour by the interlocutors in South Park and the second is determining the most frequent ones.

Table 1. *The Frequencies and Percentages of Impoliteness Strategies of South Park Series*

Item	Strategies	Frequencies	Percentages
Impoliteness Strategies	Bold on record	0	0%
	Positive impoliteness	1	11%
	Negative impoliteness	8	89%
	Mock and sarcasm	0	0%
	Withhold politeness	0	0%
Total		9	100%

Table (1) shows that not all impoliteness strategies are used, only two are found which are negative impoliteness strategy which has the highest frequency of eight times and a percentage of 89% which makes it the most dominant by far than the one that comes second which is positive impoliteness strategy with the number of frequency of only one time, then comes the last three strategies which are bold on record, withhold politeness, mock and sarcasm with zero frequencies and percentages.

Concerning the social variable of ethnicity, the present study discovers which ethnic group is the most discriminated in South Park.

Table 2. *The Frequencies and Percentages of Social Variables of South Park Series*

The Item		Frequencies	Percentages
Ethnicity	African Americans	4	100%
	Asian	0	0%
Total		4	100%

Table (2) shows that the most ethnic group to get discriminated is the African American by four times and complete dominance of 100% than that of the Asians which comes least with zero frequency and percentage.

6. Conclusions

After analyzing the chosen data in accordance with Culpeper's impoliteness strategies, it is concluded that not all the impoliteness strategies are used in this work and that the negative impoliteness strategy is the most dominant by far, this indicates that characters in South Park tend to use DH with a strategy that aims to inflict harm sond attack others and impose their freedom and ridicule their feelings, it also indicates that South Park is an offensive animated sitcom that goes to an extreme and its characters can get very hurtful and intense in some

situation just to get some wicked and twisted laughs. It is also concluded that South Park is racist TV series that aims to discriminate minorities and especially African Americans, and make a joke out of them whenever possible.

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