

A Pragmatic Analysis of Gendered Speech Acts and Politeness Strategies in Judges' Feedback on 'Britain's Got Talent'

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes1141>

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Received: 24.7.2025

Accepted: 17.12.2025

Published Online: 20.12.2025

Abstract: This study provides a pragmatic analysis of the gendered speech acts and politeness strategies that the judges of *Britain's Got Talent* employ in their commentary. The study aims to examine how male and female judges differ in their linguistic choices, including directives, expressives, and politeness strategies, within the evaluative context of talent performances broadcast on TV. Using Searle's typology of speech acts and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, this study uses a qualitative method with discourse analysis to look at general patterns and specific reactions to typical performances. The corpus consists of typed verbal responses from five of the episodes that were released between 2020 and 2024 (Seasons 14–17) that result in a rich but narrow sample. The study bridges a gap in the pragmatic approaches to reality television research, addressing the understudied areas of gender, evaluation, and discourse. It points out the role played by gender in determining the modus operandi of communication even in comparable positions and comparable contexts. Evidence indicates that female judges frequently make use of expressive acts and positive politeness, while male judges utilize directives, bald-on-record tactics, and humour as mitigation. The differences exist in reactions to the same performance, too.

Keywords: Britain's Got Talent, communication process, humour, politeness strategies, pragmatic variation, public performance, reality television, tv judges

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, televised talent shows have become potent media of communication in which the aspects of performance, entertainment, and public scrutiny become closely knit. Such shows as *Britain's Got Talent* become not just entertaining performances, but lively places of social discourse in which the language used by judges contributes significantly to the formation of the audience perception and the emotional and professional path of the participants (Borrego 2025). The language that is being used in these television situations is rather strategic and performative, both carrying the intentions of a speaker as well as the general sociocultural norms and identities.

The evaluative commentary offered by judges in such programs is a particularly rich site for pragmatic analysis. It has a mixture of spontaneous, rehearsed material, and in it one can hear expressive praise, critical comments, directives, and emotional appeal, all of which correspond to what Simba (2023) has in mind when he thinks of performative speech acts as systematized more recently

by Kulsawang and Ambele (2024). Using language, judges manage to do several things: evaluate, guide, amuse, and in many cases lead public identities not only of the competitors but also their own (Brummernhenrich, Paulus, and Jucks 2025). Linguistically speaking, power relations, observance of politeness, and face (both theirs and those of contestants) also influence the pragmatic decisions that are taken by judges. In this context, the politeness theory developed by Wallis (2023) is particularly important because it provides the answer to how to address face-threatening acts by using such strategies as indirectness, mitigation, or by aligning emotional state.

One of the factors that matters in the implementation of such pragmatic strategies is gender. Sociolinguistic and discourse studies have been continuously demonstrating that communicative styles of men and women are characterized by differences in the case of speaking publicly and in the context of evaluative speech (Childs 2022). Females tend to be more emotional and indirect, displaying a high degree of positive politeness, and males tend to be defensive and aggressive as far as directness and competitive turns are concerned (Wedawati and Ayomi 2023). These trends are not entirely prescriptive, but they also stand very much in view when it comes to empirical studies in different fields such as education, business, or even media. Nonetheless, even though the field of gendered discourse and speech acts has expanded in the recent past, there is no empirical research that describes how such phenomena play out in reality TV, especially in live judging practices such those occurring in *Britain's Got Talent* (Furkatovna, Jurabekovna, and Mamurjonovna 2021). Although other authors have already examined the discourse of the media, either in the news or in talk shows, none of them have discussed the relations between gender, speech acts, and politeness strategies at the boundaries of competitive performances (Esfahlan and Boroumand 2020). The aim is to discover how the gendered linguistic conduct occurs in pronounced evaluative interactions that are widely public and high stakes, and what it informs us regarding the role of pragmatics in media communication nowadays. While previous discourse-analytic studies have applied pragmatic frameworks such as speech act theory and politeness strategies to media or entertainment contexts (e.g., Blitvich, Bou-Franch and Lorenzo-Dus 2013; Lin 2020; Migdadi 2024), they have not systematically examined gender as a variable. This study therefore contributes to the field by comparing male versus female judges across multiple pragmatic dimensions—speech acts, politeness strategies, and cooperative principle violations—within a televised talent-show context (*Britain's Got Talent*). This gender-based analysis, embedded in an intercultural and performative media environment, marks the novel contribution of the research.

1.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to discover how the gendered linguistic conduct occurs in pronounced evaluative interactions that are widely public and high stakes, and what it informs us about the role of pragmatics in media communication nowadays.

1.2 Research questions

To achieve the above aim, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do male and female judges differ in their use of speech acts in *Britain's Got Talent*?
2. What types of politeness strategies are most frequently used by each gender?
3. In what ways do the judges' utterances flout or adhere to Grice's maxims, and how does this relate to gendered communication styles?

2. Literature review

The present study integrates three interrelated pragmatic frameworks—Speech Act Theory (Searle 1969), Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson 1987), and Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle. to analyse gendered evaluation in media discourse. Each framework reveals a distinct yet interrelated dimension of meaning: Speech Act Theory illustrates how language performs communicative values; Politeness Theory shows how face and social harmony are maintained through interaction; and Grice's Cooperative Principle reveals how implicatures and humour emerge when conversational maxims are observed or violated. Together, they provide a cohesive model for understanding how evaluative discourse operates in performative media contexts, revealing both explicit and implicit gendered meanings.

2.1 Speech act theory

Searle (1969) expanded Austin's foundational work by systematizing illocutionary acts into five functional types—representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—a taxonomy that underpins later pragmatic models such as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory (see Degen 2023). Among the comments that were analysed, a total of 160 comments were provided as feedback by the judges revealed that five major types of speech acts were always adopted (Abdulateef and Ali 2023). These speech acts are derived from Searle's taxonomy, and they are expressives, representatives, directives, Commissives, and declarations. Directives like *You need to work harder* are often used, and the effect is still there, regardless of the context of the evaluator (e.g., TV judge) of the target (e.g., a contestant) within the context of the televised evaluation, especially that of the talent shows. According to Miller (2022), pragmatic analysis can be used to gain a better understanding of how speakers exploit language to achieve interpersonal

goals in real-time interaction, particularly those taking place in a broadcast or performance context.

2.2 Politeness theory

The politeness theory is based on the construct of face, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), and discussed by Song et al. (2023). This is a very well-developed model used in the study of how speakers reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs). The theory makes the distinction to separate the so-called positive politeness (aimed at creating solidarity and rapport) and negative politeness (the demonstration of respect and deference to the autonomy of the hearer) (Bousfield 2023). The following part uses the politeness theory outlined by Bousfield (2023), based on Brown and Levinson's framework to analyse face-saving strategies used by the judges in *Britain's Got Talent* show in their verbal responses. *Britain's Got Talent* judges usually have to deal with the dilemma of being honest yet not demoralizing the performer, a good number of whom are not professionals, and some might even be emotionally insecure. Hedging, compliments, humour, and strategic ambiguity play an important part in the management of face (Hu et al. 2022). Politeness is not simply about facing an individual to express something nice, but rather a complex relational work, which varies depending on the roles, audiences, and institutional circumstances. This combination of candor and tact is particularly visible in competitive media.

2.3 Gender and language

Studies on language and gender have always indicated that language and gender differentiation are all over, where men and women are believed to differ in their usage of language in both the domestic and public spheres (Abd Aliwie 2025). Previous studies noted by Benedetti (2024) indicated that women mostly used tentative speech and a polite tone, whereby the social statuses were noted. Although this model of a deficit has been criticized extensively studied, subsequent critics, such as Charoenroop (2021) and De Maiti, Franza and Fišer (2023), have stressed that these linguistic patterns are not the speaker's fault, but instead the tactical in terms of tactical discursive choices in the light of social roles and expectations.

2.4 Pragmatics in media and entertainment discourse

The discourses of media, especially entertainment formats, have been perceived to be rich fields of pragmatic analysis. Reality television and talent competitions combine the naturalistic aspect of a conversation with the performed aspect of a script, which is why they are the best way to study the role of language in performing social identities and keeping the audience interested (Csulich 2022).

Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey, and Rodríguez-Vázquez (2021) consider how the strategy of using impoliteness in relationships has been used in quiz shows and assert that the face-threats in the shows are ones that people undertake to entertain people. On the same note, Brummernhenrich, Paulus, and Jucks (2025) emphasized methodological issues of investigating media dialogue that is usually

designed to look like something spontaneous but aims at narrative or entertainment purposes. Nevertheless, such complexity has not received much attention concerning the use of speech acts and politeness strategies in televised feedback, especially as practiced by both genders within high-stakes settings (Miller 2022). Analyses of spontaneous gendered talk have been left unaddressed in most literature, as they mainly consider interviews, news discourse, or scripted TV. What unites these studies is their recognition of media discourse as a rich pragmatic arena; yet none of them directly compare how gender and politeness strategies co-occur in live evaluation formats such as *Britain's Got Talent*.

2.5 Research gap

Even though the literature related to speech acts, politeness theory, and gendered communication is extensive, it could be noted that there still exists a gap in the literature that has tried to investigate how the latter can intersect with the live telegenic evaluation environment. The paper aims to fill that gap by providing a pragmatic investigation of gendered speech acts and politeness strategies in the discourse of judges on the show *Britain's Got Talent*. A combination of episode-to-episode and intra-performance comparisons makes the study significant to the discussion of gendered language in media environments, which are both competitive and fragile, as well as performance-wise. Together, these frameworks—speech act, politeness, and cooperative principles—provide complementary lenses for examining evaluative discourse, revealing both explicit and implicit gendered meanings.

3. Dataset description and accessibility

The present research relies on a verified dataset created in the course of a systematic composition of 160 comments of verbal feedback given by the judges on the British televised talent show *Britain's Got Talent*. It contains data on five full-length episodes aired in 2020-2024, attributed to Seasons 14 to 17. The episodes that were included were deliberative in the sense that they illustrate different levels of interactions, that is, auditions, semifinals, and final competition, which represent different pragmatic relationship factors between judges and performers. The data reflect a broad spectrum of communicative environments, that is, spontaneous emotional response, on the one hand, and more considered evaluative speech, on the other, the semifinals and the finals. Every episode will consist of eight to ten acts, and each action usually has three to four judges giving their response. The comments were selected purposively to represent balanced gender participation and episode diversity. Coding reliability was ensured through double-coding by two researchers with an agreement rate of 0.91 (Cohen's Kappa).

All the remarks are transcribed by hand and made based on publicly accessible YouTube records of *Britain's Got Talent* episodes, comprising full episodes, separated acts, and commentaries of judges. The transcription was consistent with qualitative discourse-analytic conventions and included retaining intonation, stressing, pausing, and performance traits (e.g., laughter or applause).

Non-verbal cues have been observed when it is important, but are not a formal part of any analysis since they lie outside the scope of linguistic pragmatics. As a precaution to analytical consistency, all the elements of the dataset concentrate on four repeat judges, namely, Simon Cowell and David Walliams (male), and Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon (female). Such characters did not vary during the chosen seasons and pointed to the same comparing ground to make gendered speech analysis.

Table 1. Overview of dataset structure

Season	Year	Episode Type	Acts per Episode	Judges per Act	Estimated Total Comments
Season 14	2020	Audition	10	4	40
Season 15	2022	Audition	8	4	32
Season 16	2023	Semifinal	8	4	32
Season 17	2024	Semifinal	8	4	32
Season 17	2024	Grand Final	6	4	24
Total	—	—	—	—	160 Comments

3.1 Dataset representation

Table 2 presents a sample of comments representative of you being presented with the table of definitions of a speech act, which is based on Searle (1969) and specifies which speech act is identified in the particular case (represented by a speaker).

In the next sections, the dataset will be examined using three interrelated pragmatic frameworks:

- The taxonomy of speech acts: Tomasello (2023) specifies the main communicative purpose of each speech act, originally defined by Searle (1969).
- To investigate how judges can deal with facework in the process of delivering feedback, Wijana's (2021) politeness strategies are going to be considered.
- The cooperative maxims proposed by Sbisà (2022), to detect the implicit meaning that could be expressed through flouting strategies.

Table 2. Sample of feedback comments and speech act types

Comment ID	Judge	Feedback Comment	Speech Act
1	Amanda Holden	"You touched every soul in this room."	Expressive
2	Alesha Dixon	"I think it might have been too theatrical..."	Expressive
3	Simon Cowell	"That was boring. I didn't feel anything."	Expressive
4	David Walliams	"I couldn't tell if that was modern art or a seizure—but I liked it!"	Expressive
5	Amanda Holden	"That was magical—like watching a dream unfold."	Expressive
6	Alesha Dixon	"You've got potential, but this wasn't your best."	Commissive
7	Simon Cowell	"That performance made no sense to me."	Representative
8	David Walliams	"It reminded me of a trip to Vegas—loud and wild!"	Expressive
9	Amanda Holden	"Stunning, I'm blown away!"	Expressive
10	Alesha Dixon	"I guess it was okay... I've seen better, though."	Representative

3.2 General gendered patterns in judges' speech acts

A preliminary thematic analysis of the dataset showed that various consistent trends could be identified in the construction and delivery of the speech acts of the male and female judges on *Britain's Got Talent*. The relevance of gender to these patterns is not the only attribute; performance context, emotional salience, and audience reaction influence it as well (Keller 2023). In the responses of the judges, the pragmatic biases have been noted, albeit not blatantly, which is also evidenced in the evaluative speech of the judges and does not contradict the opinion that gender is one of the factors that influence the style and strategy of verbal functioning when evaluating performing skills.

Among the other significant conclusions, it is necessary to mention that female judges (Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon) more often used expressive speech acts and affiliative ones in their speech, unlike their male colleagues (Nowak 2023). They also made emotional remarks or comments that moved me to tears. Conversely, male judges (Simon Cowell and David Walliams) were more inclined to use directives and evaluative representations, especially the ones that would entail technical or critical comments. Presumably, they would include such things as You should go to work on that singing, that was disappointing, or This is not

competitive (Boyd, Collins and Ringhand 2025). These ways of expressing oneself are not always rude, though they are more task-oriented and bald on record.

The gender difference was also apparent in the usage of mitigation and hedging. Female judges tended to mitigate criticism by writing modal auxiliaries, tags, or hedges (e.g., I suppose you should have tried a bit harder with the choreography or It was good, right?). On the other hand, male judges, especially Simon Cowell, were a lot more likely to contravene the maxim of manners by being deliberately rude or sarcastic, and this was usually done as a form of entertainment (Livermore et al. 2024). As an example, the phrase that Cowell says, it was like watching paint dry, breaks the maxim of relevance and still performs the humorous, engaging of the audience, therefore, demonstrating a pragmatic violation of maxims to convey rhetorical force.

Another contrast lies in how compliments are structured. Women judges tended to provide two-step compliments by moving on two levels at once, personal and artistic (e.g., You are such a beautiful person and such a skilled dancer), whereas men tended to only refer to the objective success or potential of the act in question (This is a Vegas-level performance). Collectively, these findings have some implications that gendered tendencies in *Britain's Got Talent* judging discourse can be viewed in the light of a larger sociolinguistic pattern observed in the earlier literature (Oakes et al. 2021; Livermore et al. 2024). Nevertheless, these patterns are also influenced by individual personality and performance setting, which commends the requirement to interpret them in a detailed and situation-specific way (Ehrlich and Romaniuk 2021). Women are more likely to embrace an affective or supportive tone, whereas men are more inclined to use whatever is direct and authoritative, or even make jokes as a pragmatic measure.

3.3 Intra-performance comparative feedback

To explore more the pragmatic variation of the discourse of the judging parties, the following section offers a comparison of various receptions of the same performance by the different judges. Feedback provided against a specific personality during a particular episode can be considered in isolation, and by so doing, it can be stated that the minor but significant variations in speech acts, politeness strategies, and gendered communication style, particularly in reaction to the same stimulus, can be observed (Zanin, Marr, and Avalos 2024). For example, there is the episode of the semifinals of 2023 (Season 16), which involves a much-admired performance of Tom Ball. All four judges uttered on-the-spot verbal comments, having heard one of his powerful ballad performances, and it would be hard to describe them in any other terms than reflecting various pragmatic dispositions as they all responded to the same performance.

Amanda Holden (female) opened with an emotionally charged expression:

“I was genuinely moved... I had goosebumps the entire time.”

There is an apparent expressive act with this comment, and positive politeness can be observed here in the affective contact and emotional sharing.

Intensifiers (genuinely, the entire time) used by her serve to support sincerity and

solidarize the author with the performer and audience members (Wedawati and Ayomi, 2023). On the other hand, Simon Cowell (male) gave his preferences in a more judgmental representative speech act:

“That was technically one of the best-sung vocals that we have heard all season.”

Simon’s remark is less emotional and it is more analytical. It brings to the fore the objective value of the performance (the optimal term would be technically) and employs an exemplary performance to claim his authority as a judge (de Guzman, Mesana and Roman 2023). His response conveys a bald-on-record type of reaction, which was straightforward and took little wording, as he had to align with his image in society, a masculine type of interaction. Next, Alesha Dixon (female) gave a combination of emotionality and criticism:

“You always bring your heart with you, and this time you also brought control.”

In this case, Alesha likes to mix a supplementing note on emotionality with an implicit joke on technological weakness (Lu 2022). The use of the term this time point an implied a criticism of previous performances, but put a positive spin to prevent the face-threatening effect. David Walliams (male), an actor of humorous origin, provided an answer and made a mockery of Gricean maxims:

“I do not want to tell you to win, but you should win.”

The maxim of quantity, which is breached intentionally by using this comment, is that it states something indirectly when it could have been stated simply. It also carries the apparent of sarcasm and causes laughter among audiences, as it also refers to the confirmation of contestants (Wedawati and Ayomi 2023). This ambiguity is calculated, as David makes light and creates a positive face, and yet keeps in a spontaneous and characteristic tone of off-record politeness.

Such variations imply that in the same performance, judges also speak following individual dress, gender conventions, and executing roles (Van Raalte and Wallis 2022). Although each of the four brought out praise, their selection of frame, tone, structure, and politeness shows how the same object of reference (the performance of Tom Ball) was assessed using different pragmatic glasses.

3.4 Application of politeness strategies and Grice’s maxims

The present section uses two influential pragmatic frameworks, politeness strategies described by Abdulateef and Ali (2023), and the cooperative principle proposed by, to explain how the judges of *Britain’s Got Talent* formulate the verbal feedback. Based on the data set that is outlined in Table 1, 160 feedback messages from five episodes broadcast from 2020 to 2024 are analysed. Such occasions of speech demonstrate the intricate interaction between the linguistic ingenuity, indirectness, humour, and expressive expressivity, made up by the audience, a high-stakes character unique to televised performance judging.

3.4.1 Politeness strategies in judges' feedback

Brown and Levinson divide politeness strategies into four broad classes, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record (Hilal 2023). All four were seen throughout the data and were mostly dependent on or affected by the sex of the judge, the media personality, or the tone of the episode.

a. Positive politeness

It was the primary ploy as far as female judges are concerned, at least Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon. To illustrate it, one could mention saying that, in the semifinal of 2023, the singer Tom Ball was praised by Amanda:

“You touched every soul in this room. I just wanted to stand up and hug you” (Season 16, Semifinal Episode, Minute 43:17).

This statement shows support and emotional indiscretion that goes with a positive face reinforcement. The presence of an intensifier, every soul, and a desire to be hugged increase the feeling of human, emotional unity between a judge and a performer (Csulich 2022).

b. Negative politeness

This practice, which involves hedging or indirectness, was exhibited where the judges provided negative criticism and tried to modulate the imposition. Alesha Dixon often used this when expressing mild criticism (Esfahlan and Boroumand 2020). For instance:

“I think it might have been a bit too theatrical for this stage... but that’s just my view” (Season 15, Audition Episode, Minute 28:03).

The use of modal verbs such as might and subjective frames such as that is just my opinion minimises the risk of criticism and leaves the face of the contestant intact with dignity. This conforms with the idea of deference and mitigation of (Ardi et al. 2021).

c. Bald-on-record

Simon Cowell, predictably enough, tended to give unabridged, straightforward feedback, avoiding the politeness strategies:

“It was boring. I didn’t feel anything” (Season 14, Audition Episode, Minute 21:12).

This is a stereotypical act of bald-on-record, which is concerned with efficiency and clarity, although it may pose a threat to the face of the speaker (Csulich 2022).

d. Off-record

David Walliams made constant use of ambiguity and humour to create the impression of criticism or appreciation without explicit messages. Speaking in one of the 2024 final performances of a dance group, he said:

“I couldn’t tell if that was modern art or a seizure—but I liked it!” (Season 17, Grand Final, Minute 52:05).

This is a flagitious infringement of the maxim of clarity, and it has to depend upon the grossest imagination to amuse, and it has to dangle appreciation.

As an example, one may consider the following:

“I couldn’t tell if that was modern art or a seizure—but I liked it!” (David Walliams, Season 17, Grand Final, Minute 52:05).

It is a break to the rule of clearness and is understood lightly, relieving the tension and involving the viewers (Lu 2022).

Table 3: Frequency of politeness strategies in judges’ feedback (n = 160)

Strategy	Amanda Holden	Alesha Dixon	Simon Cowell	David Walliams	Total (%)
Positive Politeness	28	26	5	9	68 (42.5)
Negative Politeness	9	11	3	4	27 (16.9)
Bald-on-Record	3	2	24	5	34 (21.3)
Off-Record	4	3	2	22	31 (19.3)
Total	44	42	34	40	160 (100)

The breakdown of each participant of *Britain's Got Talent*- the judges, in how they use politeness strategies in giving their feedback, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 also supports the quantitative information shown in Table 3 and reflects major trends that depend on gender and the personality of each judge:

- Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon enhance the usage of positive politeness strategies on the overwhelming side. The highest bars that they have in this category are concerning how naturally inclined they are towards emotionally supportive and affirming language (Hastings 2022).
- Simon Cowell shows a sharp contrast. He tops the bar in the bald-on-record level, which highlights his famous straightforward, at times aggressive approach.
- There is a peculiar profile of David Walliams: his bar is the higher the one in the off-record department (Lailiyah et al. 2023). This affirms his affection for humour, sarcasm, and ambiguity as constructs of peripheral feedback.

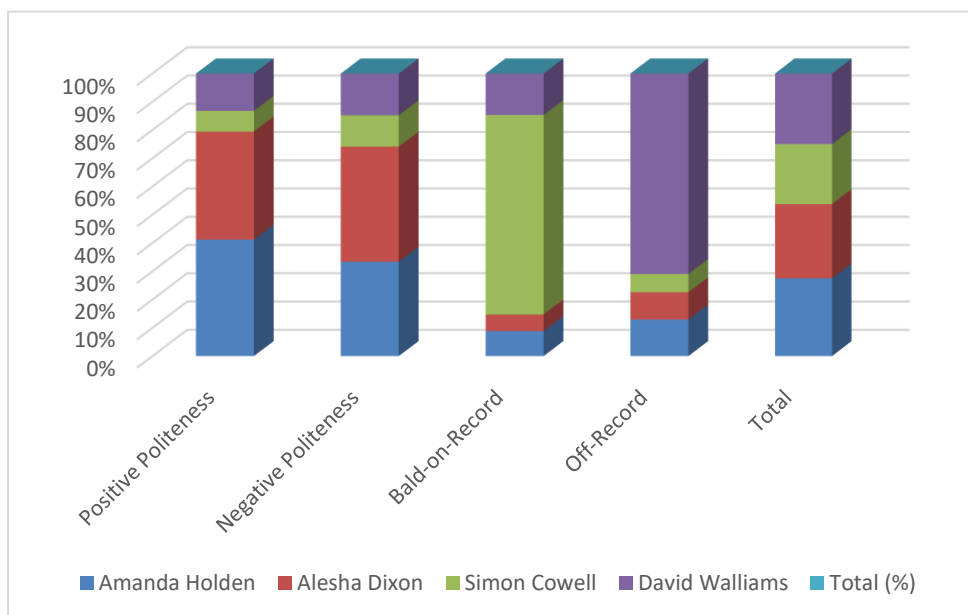


Figure 1. Distribution of politeness strategies used by the judges on *Britain's Got Talent*

Figure 1 also stresses that all the judges employ the use of negative politeness, i.e., the use of hedges or attenuation devices when offering criticisms in moderate dosages, except Alesha Dixon, who does it most of the time (Sbisà 2022). This implies that she speaks of praise and constructive criticism more than what her peers are used to. These distributions align with prior gender-pragmatics findings on evaluative talk (e.g., Ardi et al. 2021; Hu et al. 2022; Abd Aliwie 2025), indicating a female preference for affiliative expressives and a male tendency toward task-oriented directness and humor.

3.4.2 Flouting of Gricean maxims for entertainment and emphasis

The cooperative principle by Grice postulates that speakers should adhere to the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner (Grice 1976, in Hossain 2021). Yet, when their violation is intentional, the maxims may be flouted strategically, and perhaps with particular success in performative, media-saturated venues, such as talent shows. (Abd Aliwie 2025).

a. Maxim of quantity

David Walliams commonly misrepresented or underplayed information to be humorous or ironic. During a 2022 episode, he told a ventriloquist:

“That’s the single greatest act in the history of television—maybe the entire galaxy” (Season 15, Audition, Minute 34:44).

This goes contrary to both quantity and quality, though it aims at entertaining the reader, rather than deceiving, performing the role of hyperbolic praise that cannot work without raising audience responsiveness (Khatimah, Ma'ruf and Sulistyowati 2024).

b. Maxim of quality

Amanda Holden once commented after a high-stakes performance:

“You just gave us a Broadway finale on a rainy Tuesday night in London” (Season 16, Semifinal, Minute 46:51).

It is metaphorical, but it is made in a specified manner because of deliberately exaggerating the magnificence of the action (Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo 2022).

c. Maxim of relevance

Sometimes, the judges lose track of the act and talk about personal anecdotes, mainly David Walliams:

“That reminded me of the time I tried ballet... I dislocated my hip” (Season 14, Audition, Minute 25:09).

This humorous aside, despite being irrelevant, helps in the generation of a good rapport with the audience, helps in branding the judge, and helps in easing the transitions between acts of the performance (Hakim and Novitasari 2022).

d. Maxim of manner

Simon Cowell was direct, but at other times he resorted to being cryptic. In 2024, he said:

“That wasn't bad... It wasn't good either. It was... there” (Season 17, Semifinal, Minute 37:42).

This ambiguous phrasing intentionally violates the maxim of manner. The ambiguity serves as an indirect commentary that is supposed to be read with laughter, and not a fight. The analysis assures that the judges on *Britain's Got Talent* use a tactical combination of politeness and implicature depending on their jobs, character, and expectations of people (Wijayanti et al. 2022). Women judges tended to focus on emotional involvement and softened their comments with positive and negative politeness, whereas men judges were attracted to directness, humour, or strategic evasions, and would often breach Gricean norms (Aini, Sari and Efendi 2024). The above-mentioned findings prove the abundance of media discourse as the local context in which the applied pragmatics is to be studied richly, when the integrative role of both the senses of speech as evaluation and performance is being played.

3.5 Speech acts analysis

The speech acts were also studied using the taxonomy of Searle; the pragmatic functions of the speech act were further clustered to determine how judges will praise, criticize, encourage, or soften their judgment in the televised performance reviews (Sbisà 2022).

3.5.1 Classification of speech acts

Among the comments that were analysed, a total of 160 comments out of the 200 total comments that were provided as feedback by the judges revealed that five major types of speech acts were always adopted (Abdulateef and Ali 2023). These speech acts depend on the taxonomy by Searle, and they are expressives, representatives, directives, Commissive, and declarations.

The most used were the expressives, which were 52 in number (32.5 percent). These were verbal manifestations of emotion like praise, admiration, or disappointment (Wijayanti et al. 2022). Such high frequency can be seen in the fact that judges not only review performances, but also emotionally react to them, which increases their involvement and the performance aspect of the show.

Representatives were second with 43 instances (26.9 percent). These are the judicial statements in which the judges are found to make a statement, make a judgment, or give an evaluation of the performances (Wijana 2021). This type presents the judging element of their work, since judges should comment with clarity and sometimes in adverse ways.

Orders, which are pieces of advice or suggestions given to performers, were seen 36 times (22.5%). The indication of such speech acts is the presence of a guiding role, where judges, especially those with a professional background, can find themselves as mentors.

The promise or commitments (Commissives) were registered 19 times (11.9%). However, they are less frequent, and these speech acts might be observed when judges say that they choose to help the contestants in the future or vow to watch them advance through the competition (Wijana 2021).

The least frequent was the declarations, with just 10 (6.2%). These include performance announcements, e.g., confirmation of a participant having passed one round or failed. Such speech acts have institutional significance, and they tend to be used in judgments.

Table 4. Distribution of speech act types in judges' feedback (n = 160)

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Expressives	52	32.5
Representatives	43	26.9
Directives	36	22.5
Commissives	19	11.9
Declarations	10	6.2

3.5.2 Analysis of illocutionary forces

Besides the identification of the types of speech acts, the 160 comments have also been coded by their illocutionary force, i.e., the functional or purpose of the utterance in the context of performance feedback (Miller 2022). Such a study gives a better understanding of the communicative intentions of the judges and the pragmatic functions of their words outside the literal meaning.

Other illocutionary forces can be seen in the form of statements like, that was magical; to elevate and, positively, reinforce a performance. Criticism, in contrast, contains criticism such as You were off-key in the second verse, and contains a connotation of disapproval, or provides an area of improvement (Miller 2022). Complimentary remarks, e.g., (You have come so far since your audition) are aimed at encouraging and patting the contestants on both the emotional and psychological fronts. Tradition has it that suggestions are usually made in the future, i.e., the performer should do this or that to be better or to give the act some improvement.

Other illocutionary acts. There are other illocutionary acts, such as sarcasm (e.g., Well, that was...something), which may hide real meaning and question the sincerity of feedback, usually playing a humorous or critical role (Lailiyah et al. 2023). Surprise (e.g., I did not anticipate such kind of behaviour from you) implies the speech that shows this reaction to unforeseen moments of performance. The reassurance (e.g., even the best mess up sometimes) can have a reparative effect, or help smooth the negative feedback (Nowak 2023). Such words as You are a star There is to be a strong feeling of appreciation, and apologies, you know, I was sorry, it did not go with me are soft expressions of judgment, and although they are personal, they are not brutally, crazy. Table 2 presents the frequency of each force:

Table 5. Comparative distribution of illocutionary forces by gender (n = 160)

Illocutionary Force	Male (Simon and David)	Female (Amanda and Alesha)	Total (%)
Praise	22	34	56 (35)
Encouragement	12	19	31 (19.3)
Critique	27	11	38 (23.7)
Humor/Irony	15	5	20 (12.5)
Sympathy/Support	8	17	25 (15.6)
Total	84	86	160 (100)

The aspects of the speech acts with their illocutionary intentions are further contrasted by gendered terms and the context of the politeness theory and Gricean maxims in the next analytical sections.

4. Results and findings

This part represents the data by 160 feedback comments of four primary judges of the British music and talent show *Britain's Got Talent* discussed during five episodes of this show that ran between 2020-2024.

4.1 Speech act typology

The utterances of the feedback were categorized according to the taxonomy given by Searle (1969), divided into the five major classes, namely representatives, directives, expressives, Commissives, and declarations (Tang 2025).

Table 6 can be interpreted as:

- Female judges used expressives far more frequently, indicating a stronger tendency to engage emotionally with performers.
- Together with names like Simon Cowell, male judges made great use of representatives and instructions, which is in line with authoritative and evaluative communication (Simba 2023).
- The show was also marked by the scarcity of Commissives and declarations because judges cannot do a lot to commit or openly declare something (Keller 2023).

Table 6. Comparative distribution of speech act types by gender.

Speech Act Type	Male (Simon and David)	Female (Amanda and Alesha)	Total (%)
Representatives	36	27	63 (39.4)
Directives	22	15	37 (23.1)
Expressives	14	37	51 (31.9)
Commissives	3	4	7 (4.4)
Declarations	1	3	4 (1.2)
Total	76	86	160 (100)

4.2 Illocutionary forces in feedback

While speech act categories reflect structural form, illocutionary forces capture the communicative intent, such as *praise*, *critique*, *humour*, or *encouragement*.

Table 7. Comparative distribution of illocutionary forces by gender on *Britain's Got Talent* (2020–2024)

Illocutionary Force	Male (Simon and David)	Female (Amanda and Alesha)	Total (%)
Praise	22	34	56 (35)
Encouragement	12	19	31 (19.3)
Critique	27	11	38 (23.7)
Humor/Irony	15	5	20 (12.5)
Sympathy/Support	8	17	25 (15.6)
Total	84	86	160 (100)

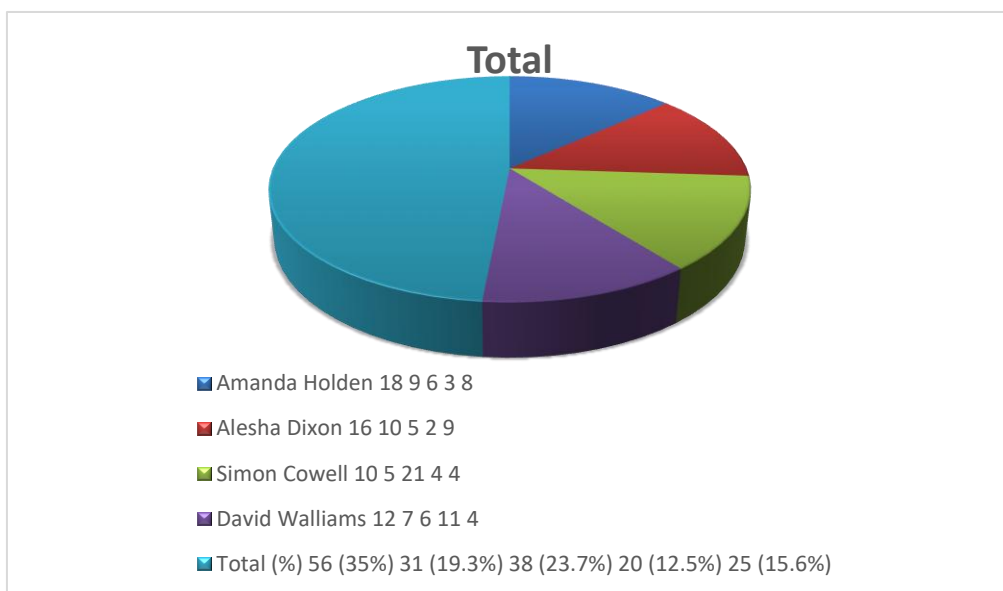


Figure 2. Gender-based differences in illocutionary forces in judges' feedback

Figure 2 clearly demonstrates the illocutionary forces a difference by gender lines; female judges ended up talking more in terms of praise and empathy, male judges ended up talking more in terms of a critique and humour. These distributions align with prior gender-pragmatics findings on evaluative talk (e.g., Ardi et al. 2021; Hu et al. 2022), indicating a female preference for affiliative expressives and a male tendency toward task-oriented directness and humour.

4.3 Politeness strategies in use

Applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework revealed distinct patterns as Table 8 shows.

The number of positive and negative politeness employed by female judges is depicted in the bar chart, whereas it is old-fashioned bald-on-record and off record used by male judges. Amanda and Alesha express their feedback more often in strategies that don't cause face and rapport loss. The bald-on-record comments made by Simon Cowell tended to allow him to keep his image in the media as candid but plain-speaking. Off-record humour was applied by David Walliams to hide criticism and entertain.

Table 8. Patterns of politeness strategies in judges' evaluations

Strategy	Amanda Holden	Alesha Dixon	Simon Cowell	David Walliams	Total (%)
Positive Politeness	28	26	5	9	68 (42.5)
Negative Politeness	9	11	3	4	27 (16.9)
Bald-on-Record	3	2	24	5	34 (21.3)
Off-Record	4	3	2	22	31 (19.3)
Total	44	42	34	40	160

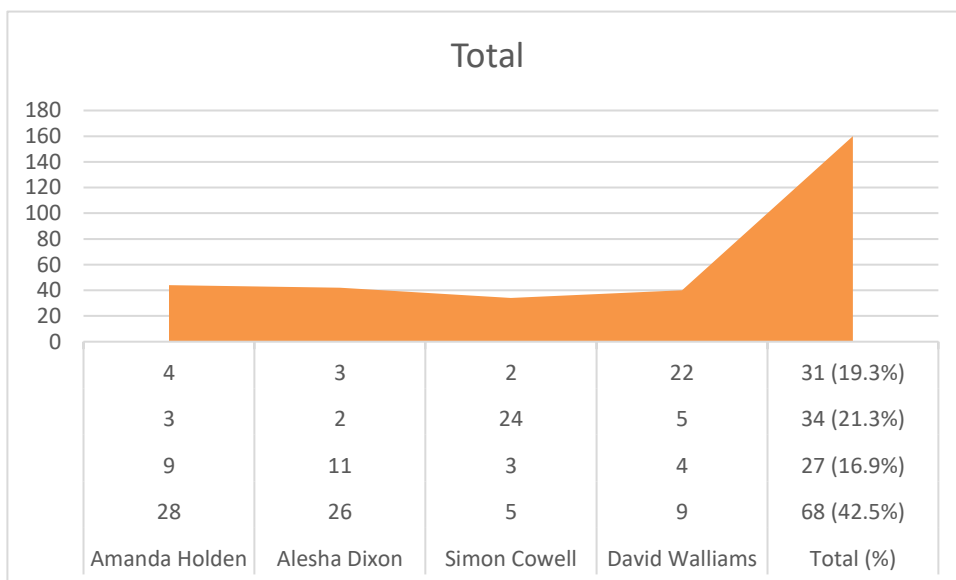


Figure 3. Patterns of politeness strategies distribution in the judges' evaluations

4.4 Flouting of Gricean maxims

The judges on *Britain's Got Talent*, in numerous cases, have deliberately violated the Gricean Maxims to reach a rhetorical, humorous, or dramatic purpose. These were not indicating communicative malfunctions, but tactical decisions in line with the performative and the entertainment-oriented context of reality TV. Willingness to exaggerate was based on violations of the Maxim of Quantity, which obliges speakers to inform as much as is necessary (Abdulateef and Ali 2023). As an illustration, his quote, which David says, “That is the most fantastic act this year-- or probably in the history of the Earth,” exemplifies beyond a doubt the level of

informativeness indeed, obviously runs towards the humour and hyperbolism to enhance praise and amuse the audience.

There was also the Maxim of Quality, which says the person should say nothing that he feels is not the truth, which was knowingly violated. The remark made by Amanda, “You gave us a Broadway finale on a rainy Tuesday in London,” must not have held quite the literal truth, but it paid the performance a high compliment by creating exaggeration to the action, besides putting it in the eyes of the viewer as a finer performance as it stretches the imagination (Hossain 2021). By violating the Maxim of Relevance, judges were able to add personal stories or inapplicable jokes in a way to contribute to their popularity and set a freer attitude. The statement, offered by David when he says, “Reminded me of my ballet disaster, I dislocated my hip though it has nothing to do with the performance itself, still helps to entertain, to make a joke,” helps to create a bond with the audience.

Table 9. Summary of key results.

Dimension	Key Finding
Speech Acts	Representatives (39.4%) most common; female judges leaned on expressives (Sbisà, 2022)
Illocutionary Forces	Praise and encouragement are more frequent among women; critique among men (Khatimah, Ma’ruf, and Sulistyowati, 2024).
Politeness Strategies	Positive politeness dominant; male judges used more bald-on-record strategies (Hakim and Novitasari, 2022)
Gricean Maxims	Frequently flouted for effect; humour, emphasis, or persona-building (Abdulateef and Ali 2023)

4.5 Discussion

The results that have been obtained through the data source present stratified information on the role of pragmaticity of behaviour among the judges *in Britain's Got Talent* based on gender, situational context, and individual manner of communication (de Guzman et al. 2023). Applying the individual theories of speech acts, performance of illocutionary force, and implementing Brown and Levinson politeness theory, and the theory on the cooperative principle as formulated by Grice, some important points are noted.

To begin with, the gendered difference in terms of expressive versus representative acts was pointed out by the speech act analysis. The presence of female judges Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon was more dependent on expressives and encouragements, which is consistent with the sociolinguistic studies according to which the speech of women is commonly presented as a more empathic, relational engagement (Livermore et al. 2024). Similarly, the powers of Simon Cowell in getting representatives and directives reaffirm more of a

transactional surface and authoritative style that is typical of a masculine discourse in the public space. Another contrast lies in how compliments are structured. Women judges tended to provide two-step compliments by moving on two levels at once, personal and artistic (e.g., You are such a beautiful person and such a skilled dancer), whereas men tended to only refer to the objective success or potential of the act in question (This is a Vegas-level performance). Collectively, these findings have some implications that gendered tendencies in *Britain's Got Talent* judging discourse can be viewed in the light of a larger sociolinguistic pattern observed in the earlier literature (Oakes et al. 2021; Livermore et al. 2024). Nevertheless, these patterns are also influenced by individual personality and performance setting, which commends the requirement to interpret them in a detailed and situation-specific way (Ehrlich and Romaniuk 2021).

Second, the illocutionary force analysis illuminated how the utterances of the judges satisfied underlying communicative goals than form (Wedawati and Ayomi 2023). The most prevalent force was praise, but the way the praises were expressed was varied; the female judges punched their praises with emotion and details, but the male judges, more so Simon, were stingy with their praises but were evaluative (Oakes et al. 2021). The comedy used by Walliams also acted as an easier pill to digest any criticism, and in many instances, inserts laughter as a filter to all the negative criticism—this is associated with off-record politeness.

The politeness strategy distribution strongly echoed these tendencies. Female judges used positive politeness most often, which has helped them to evoke solidarity among the contestants and audiences through warmth, use of inclusive language, and terminologies animated with compliments (Ardi et al. 2021). Mitigating criticism was reflected through negative politeness as well, which was also evident in the feedback of Alesha Dixon (Hilal 2023). Conversely, the bald-on-record style of Simon Cowell is a style as suggested by media persona but of strategic stance, non-observance of face-saving as a way of developing a credible or shock value persona in entertainment.

The maxims of Grice were violated throughout the data, not due to failure in communication, but to employ them as rhetorical devices. As an example, the violation of the maxim by David Walliams and Simon Cowell helped to create the branding of the judge, the laughter of the audience, and the vividness of the discourse (Abdulateef and Ali 2023). The findings in this regard add value to applied pragmatics by showing the effects of speech acts, politeness, and implications on a high-stakes situation of the ejection from the public performance (Hossain 2021). They also confirm the topicality of the study of the discourse of entertainment as a miniature of the general trends in sociolinguistics and media-created pragmatics.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has aimed at discussing the pragmatic issues of televised feedback on Britain Got Talent, touching on speech acts and aspects of illocution, politeness, as well as Gricean maxims in 160 judge remarks in five television shows that aired between 2020 and 2024. The scheme of discussion analysis revealed critical tendencies about the role of gender, persona, and context of the feedback in shaping the structure and purpose of the judges/givers. Among the other significant conclusions, it is necessary to mention that female judges (Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon) more often used expressive speech acts and affiliative ones in their speech, unlike their male colleagues (Nowak 2023).

It was found that using expressive speech acts and positive politeness strategies, female judges more often than not displayed that they were empathetic and sympathetic. Male judges, especially Simon Cowell, preferred representative and didactic acts, and they were often conveyed in the form of bald-on-record techniques. David Walliams acted as a pragmatic outsider who regularly resorted to off-record tricks and humour, which demonstrated the combination of media dramaturgy and personal mitigation. Furthermore, the use of the so-called "illocutionary forces" like praise, criticism, encouragement, and humour proved that there is a variety of communicative intentions that lie behind seemingly uncomplicated talk of an entertaining nature.

In the light of the findings of the current study, several directions for future research can be proposed, which may further expand and refine the scope of the present analysis. Such directions may include:

1. Involving additional seasons: Investigating other seasons and cross-nation variations of the show (e.g., *America's Got Talent*, *Arab's Got Talent*, etc...) may increase cross-cultural correlations and reinforced generalizability.
2. Adding non-verbal clues: An extended multimodal analysis can consist of gestures, facial expressions, or the tone to unveil the relations of paralinguistic features to the verbal pragmatics contradicting or supporting each other.
3. Investigating audience reception analysis: A pragmatic impact would be deepened by an investigation into the interpretation of these acts of speech by the audience through commentary or responses on social media.
4. Focusing on contestant responses: A pragmatic analysis of how the participants of the show react to feedback can be used to reveal the politics of interaction and politeness reversal.
5. Integrating to other Media studies: There is a possibility that, perhaps, collaborations with scholars in the field of media and communication can provide more information on how televised feedback adds to the judge branding, show narratives, and audience participation.

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