

# An Analysis of Conflict Discourse in *Why Women Kill* from the Perspective of Impoliteness Theory

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**Abstract:** Conflict discourse exists widely in daily communication and is one of the important research orientations of discourse analysis. However, few studies have combined pragmatics, especially impoliteness theory, with the analysis of conflict discourse between couples. Based on the impoliteness theory proposed by Bousfield, this article adopts marital conflict discourse in American TV series *Why Women Kill*, with qualitative and case analysis methods, to explore the output and termination strategies of conflict discourse. Besides, this study also attempts to identify the underlying reasons for impolite phenomena in domestic situations. The results show that some of Bousfield's output and termination strategies are reflected in this study, including "hindering/ blocking", "disassociating from the other", "seeking disagreement/ avoiding agreement" and "submission to opponent", "compromise" and "withdrawal". Unequal family status and personality differences are the reasons that lead to conflict discourse. This study expands the scope of application of impoliteness theory, enriches the study of conflict discourse in domestic context, and helps to avoid conflicts and promote the construction of a harmonious family and society.

**Keywords:** Conflict discourse, impoliteness theory, *Why Women Kill*.

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## 1. Chapter One Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

Conflict, expressed in language dispute or physical violence, often affects the harmony of conversation. Interpersonal conflict exists in all human social activities and is particularly prevalent in interpersonal communication. It is vital for us to study conflict discourse. As an interdisciplinary research topic, the generation of conflict discourse is not only influenced by the speaker's language, but also by several disciplines such as intercultural communication, folklore, pragmatics, and so on.

Conflict is frequently associated with impoliteness. However, early research paid little attention to impoliteness, as it was traditionally seen as the opposite of politeness. In recent years, scholars like Culpeper and Bousfield have explored impoliteness theory. They provided definitions, frameworks, and explanations of the various pragmatic functions of impoliteness, contributing significantly to the advancement of this field. Impoliteness has been examined from multiple perspectives, using diverse discourse corpora such as political, doctor-patient, teacher-student, and other institutional interactions. Nevertheless, studies on impoliteness within family settings, particularly in marital conflicts, remain limited.

In marriage, conflict is a common feature of verbal exchanges between spouses. Improper handling of conflicts can lead to relationship breakdowns or divorce. Investigating marital conflict discourse allows us to better understand the causes of such conflicts during societal changes, helping to resolve them and enhance communication effectiveness between partners. To foster a harmonious family environment, this article focuses on couple conflict conversations as linguistic data. Despite its prevalence in daily communication, gathering authentic conflict discourse between couples is challenging due to privacy concerns. Therefore, this study utilizes language material from the TV series *Why Women Kill*, which is closely related to real life, making the data as natural

as possible.

*Why Women Kill* is an American comedy-crime television series that aired on August 15, 2019. The show follows three women from different eras including a housewife in the 60s, a socialite in the 80s, and a lawyer in 2019, dealing with the infidelity in their marriages.

### 1.2. Research significance and objectives

Interpersonal conflicts are prevalent in various human social interactions. These conflicts can arise due to several factors, such as differing personal interests, communication obstacles, and variations in perception. Conflict-related discourse is an integral part of daily social life. If not managed appropriately, it can negatively affect interpersonal relationships and impede the development of a harmonious society. Therefore, this research aims to apply the theory of impoliteness to analyze the output and termination strategies of impoliteness used in conflict discourse, along with the underlying causes of such conflicts. When both parties involved in communication possess a thorough understanding of conflict discussions, they can select appropriate language forms or strategies, effectively preventing conflict escalation and fostering the creation of a harmonious society.

As is well known, conflict is one of the elements that constitute films and television dramas, and it can be viewed as the punchline that promotes plot twists. Film and television creation come from daily life, as well as the language. As a result, for the study of conflict discourse, discourse in films and TV dramas can be research materials.

This study takes the conflict discourse between spouses in the series *Why Women Kill* as its research object, and analyzes the conflict talks from a pragmatic perspective. To some extent, the research results are beneficial to enrich the research on conflict discourse. Furthermore, the author hopes to assist people in making more reasonable use of conflict discourse in actual communication, avoiding its negative impact on communication, and promoting the smooth completion of communication activities by providing practical and feasible strategies and means for alleviating and

eliminating communicative conflicts in daily interactions.

In the research process, this paper attempts to analyze pragmatic strategies of marital conflict discourse as well as the reasons of conflict discourse. The research questions for this study are as follows:

What kinds of output and termination strategies are used in conflicts between couples?

What triggers impoliteness utterance in marital conflict discourse based on the linguistic data?

## **2. Chapter Two Literature Review**

### **2.1. An introduction of conflict discourse**

People's views toward the same thing vary in daily interactions due to differences in their personalities, values, social backgrounds, and other factors. These differences often lead to verbal disagreements, debates, and even physical confrontations. Conflict discourse can be defined as the language employed in communication that explicitly reflects communicative conflict. This type of language, which directly embodies communicative tension during interactions, is categorized as conflict discourse.

Broadly speaking, conflict refers to conflicts or controversies between groups or individuals due to different perspectives, interests, and objectives (Ran Yongping, 2010). It has been observed that incompatibility and opposition are defining characteristics of conflict discourse. Regarding this concept, scholars both domestically and internationally have provided their definitions. Grimshaw (1990) was the first scholar to introduce the term "conflict discourse" in his work. According to him, conflict discourse represents a form of oral communication involving confrontational interactive speech acts such as arguments and quarrels. Additionally, Zhao Yingling (2004) suggests that conflict discourse is an ambiguous and broad concept encompassing various speech acts and events. She explains that when one party in communication opposes the other's statements or actions, or when both parties express differing views or opinions about someone or something, conflict discourse emerges. Ran Yongping (2010) claims that conflict discourse is communicative participation on the basis of his extensive research. He regards communicative conflict as the result of different viewpoints, interests, principles and purposes of groups or individuals, and a state of behavior characterized by antagonism and bidirectional behavior.

In summary, conflict discourse is a dynamic and interactive communication process that both parties are involved in communicative activities. And the two conflict parties have different interests, opinions, positions, attitudes, or communication needs.

### **2.2. Previous studies of conflict discourse**

The exploration of conflict discourse initially stemmed from an interest in the phenomenon of verbal debates. While some pioneering studies were conducted by scholars in this area, others viewed conflict as a form of disordered communication, leading many language researchers to hesitate in studying this perceived negative linguistic behavior. As a result, conflict discourse did not receive significant attention in the 1970s. However, with advancements in research methodologies such as conversation analysis, along with improvements in corpus collection and transcription techniques, researchers began to recognize the value of analyzing conflicting language

phenomena. This understanding highlighted its potential to ease interpersonal tensions and foster healthier relationships among communicative participants.

Since the late 1970s, scholars initiated investigations into the structural patterns of conflict discourse. Lein & Brenneis (1978) and Boggs (1978) were among the first to explore argumentative discourse. In 1977, Brenneis and Lein examined quarrels among children of varying ages across three distinct cultural and racial groups: Black, White, and Indigenous. Lein concentrated on the structural patterns of children's arguments, identifying three fundamental characteristics: repetition, inversion, and escalation. Additionally, it was observed that children from different cultural and racial backgrounds exhibited unique features in their argument structures. Boggs (1978), meanwhile, studied the evolution of verbal disputes among Hawaiian children from childhood through adolescence, noting that these children frequently used the word "not" to provoke conflict. Chen Xiaochun (2001) was the pioneering scholar in China to explore conflict discourse and provide theoretical interpretations. He introduced the findings of foreign researchers regarding discourse coherence, emphasizing that conversational coherence is shaped not only by linguistic elements but also by individual, social, and situational factors. Zhao Yingling (2004) concentrated on the structural sequence, discourse patterns, and pragmatic features of conflict discourse. She proposed that conflict discourse can be categorized into three phases: initiation, conflict, and conclusion. Additionally, she outlined specific dialogue structures for each phase based on conversation analysis. Tan Aiping (2021) concluded that in criminal trials, court conflict discourse involves two initial speech acts, five conflict-related speech acts, and five concluding speech acts.

As research on conflict discourse has advanced, it has expanded beyond single-conflict behaviors to encompass various perspectives, such as cross-cultural, gender, power dynamics, causes of conflict discourse, resolution strategies, and context-specific conflict discourse. For instance, Thomas Rizzo (1990) conducted a comparative study of conflict discourse from a cross-cultural viewpoint, revealing that Indian children engage in more disputes than their American counterparts. Boxer (2002) examined "nagging" through a sociolinguistic lens, highlighting the significance of gender, social differences, status, and power.

Scholars have also explored the origins of conflict discourse from multiple angles. Zhao Zhongde and Zhang Lin (2005) investigated these origins using relevance theory, discovering that dialogues with more negative information are more likely to lead to conflict. Jing Ran (2018) identified 15 impolite strategies, two impolite response patterns, and three pragmatic functions based on the conflict discourse in the debate of American presidential candidates. Wang Xiaoling (2019) connected the cause of conflict discourse with the contextual relevance components of adaptation, exploring the contextual relevance components from three aspects: the physical world, the social world, and the spiritual world, and proposed seven constructive strategies. As for conflict resolution strategies, Tannen (1990) discussed silence as a conflict resolution strategy in literary and dramatic works. Kuo (1992) and Sheldon (1996) also analyzed conflict resolution strategies, involving the study of social culture and gender differences. Conflict discourse is also studied in different situations. Nguyen (2010) studied the conflict discourse between patients and pharmacists, bringing conflict

discourse into the field of medicine.

In summary, scholars have conducted research on conflict discourse from multiple perspectives, with some scholars studying it from a pragmatic perspective, combining conflict discourse with adaptation theory, relevance theory and impoliteness theory, etc. However, few studies have systematically analyzed conflict discourse between couples on the basis of the impoliteness theory. Based on Bousfield's Impoliteness Theory, this paper attempts to explore the output and termination strategies of impoliteness and tries to figure out the causes of different impoliteness speeches.

### 3. Chapter Three Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1. Development of impoliteness

The development of impoliteness research can be divided into three distinct phases. In the initial phase, investigations into impolite discourse primarily relied on Face Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the theoretical framework of the Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983). In 1978, Brown and Levinson introduced the Politeness Principle and Face Theory. During this period, a key figure from this era is Lakoff (1975), who contributed significantly to gender difference discourse. Lakoff (1989) categorized politeness in medical discourse into three categories: polite behavior, impolite behavior, and rude behavior. She defined rudeness as instances where individuals failed to employ politeness strategies when they were necessary. According to her explanation, rudeness represents one form of impoliteness.

In the second phase, scholars began constructing a theoretical framework specifically for impoliteness research. Culpeper (1996) contended that the Politeness Principle and Face Theory were insufficient for fully explaining impolite utterances. Building upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Theory, Culpeper (1996) developed an impoliteness theory and applied it to discourse analysis. He aimed to create an impoliteness framework that paralleled yet opposed Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework. Inspired by Culpeper (1996), Bousfield (2008) published the book *Impoliteness in Interaction*, signifying the gradual shift from politeness studies to impoliteness studies. This book provides a new research perspective for pragmatics. Besides, it extends impoliteness to the discourse level.

The third stage of impolite discourse research is to study impolite speech from the perspective of interpersonal pragmatics. With the continuous development of pragmatics, interpersonal pragmatics has gradually grown as a branch of social pragmatics and has become a hot topic in pragmatics research. So far, research on (im) politeness has no longer focused on how individuals implement politeness, but has gradually turned towards studying interpersonal relationships (Culpeper, 2010). Spencer-Oatey called this shift the "relationship turn" and elevated interpersonal relationship management to the research object of interpersonal pragmatics. It mainly explores how people use language to construct, maintain, change, or deconstruct interpersonal relationships.

In short, impoliteness is related to politeness, context and face. This paper will adopt Bousfield's definition of impolite: impolite is regarded as the speaker's intentional attack to the listener's face, or indirectly convey impolite words through hint and other means, impoliteness is the face attack in a specific context (Bousfield, 2008).

#### 3.2. Bousfield's impoliteness theory

A group of scholars have begun to recognize the function and uniqueness of impoliteness thanks to the development and improvement of pragmatic theory. Subsequently, under the joint efforts of linguists such as Lakoff (1975), Culpeper (1996), and Bousfield (2008), a systematic theory of impoliteness was developed. This article will apply Bousfield's (2008) impoliteness model as the theoretical basis.

##### 3.2.1. Impoliteness output strategies

Based on Culpeper (1996) model, Bousfield (2008) developed its simplified version, which divided impoliteness strategies into "On record impoliteness" and "Off record impoliteness". On record impoliteness is the most common strategy which is about the speaker deliberately and directly using impoliteness strategies to attack the listener's face, or using face-threatening strategies when the face is at stake, leading to poor communication and broken relations. Off record impoliteness is the phenomenon of indirectly damaging the interests and rights of audiences with euphemism, which seems harmonious but actually offends others when the context is considered.

As Bousfield (2008) stated in his book, he pointed out that using an existing model that have been tested in big data sets is wise. Meanwhile, for the sub-strategies, in addition to Culpeper's impoliteness output strategies, including (1) snub, (2) disassociate from the other, (3) be uninterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, (4) use inappropriate identity markers, (5) seek disagreement/ avoid agreement, (6) use taboo words, (7) threaten/frighten, (8) Condescend, scorn or ridicule, (9) 'explicitly' associate the other with a negative aspect, (10) sarcasm/mock politeness, (11) withhold politeness, he added some new strategies, such as "criticize", "enforced role shift", "challenge", and "hinder/ block".

In fact, Culpeper (1996) stated that the lists of sub-strategies he provided are open-ended lists. Therefore, these strategies are not all of the same order, and they can be combined to achieve specific effects. Although a single strategy may seem perfectly logical and attractive, it is complex in real conversations. For this reason, Bousfield (2008) considered a number of factors to make it dynamic and realistic.

##### 3.2.2. Impoliteness termination strategies

Impoliteness can lead to substantial harm in interpersonal relationships, making it crucial to clarify the terminations of such discourse. According to Bousfield (2008), limited attention has been devoted to the resolution of impolite discourse. Vuchinich (1990), a scholar specializing in conflict terminations, classified conflict terminations into five types: (1) submission to opponent, (2) dominant third party intervention, (3) compromise, (4) stand-off, and (5) withdrawal, which were adopted by Bousfield (2008) to address impoliteness. The detailed introduction of each strategy is as follows.

"Submission to opponent" refers to one party giving up their own ideas and accepting the other party's views. This termination is common in many data sets as key factors that may trigger impoliteness including "power", "distance", "ranking", etc., are usually distributed unevenly between interlocutors, especially in the context of military training. "Dominant third-party intervention" means that the interruption of conflicts between ongoing interlocutors by a third party, usually a superior or someone with certain authority over the interlocutors. However, this does not mean

that only those who prioritize the interlocutors can intervene in the conversation. In the process of resolving conflicts, this termination is not always effective. When a third party has no power over other participants in general context, the already tense situation may worsen due to his/her participation, especially if he/she has bias over one direction. “Compromise” means that both parties make concessions to a certain extent, in order to ease the conflict. This strategy is relatively difficult to implement, so there are not many successful or attempted compromises found in the data set. This may be partly due to people’s lower emotional control in impolite situations. The conflict may also end as “stand-off”, in other words, neither side will submit. After both parties realize that the other party will not compromise, the conversation may end with a defensive counter-response, such as changing the topic. If the next conversation turn still triggers impoliteness, the interlocutor can withdraw at the end of the conversation. “Withdrawal” is the most commonly used termination strategy in impolite situations, referring to the other party stopping the conversation or leaving the conversation area to terminate the conversation. When the interlocutor does not want to escalate the tension, he or she may use this method to end the conversation.

Compared with research in the field of politeness, impoliteness research is still deficient although significant progress has been made in recent years. After 2008, due to the successive publications of Bousfield (2008) and Culpeper (2010), it was a crucial year for the study of impoliteness. However, there is still few research on impoliteness in many authoritative pragmatic monographs. In addition, the theory of impoliteness also has its own shortcomings: it is complex and not comprehensive enough. At present, there is still insufficient research on impoliteness in family discourse, especially between couples. Therefore, this article will use a relatively comprehensive model summarized from the data to explore the conflict discourse of American marital conflict conversations.

## 4. Chapter Four Analysis and Discussion

Based on the impoliteness theory proposed by Bousfield, this article analyzes the conflict discourse in *Why Women Kill*, focusing on the pragmatic research and analysis of impoliteness, attempts to explore the output and termination strategies of impoliteness and tries to figure out the causes of different impoliteness speeches.

### 4.1. Research method and procedures

Due to the privacy of conflict discourse, it is difficult to collect continuous discourse in real life. Tannen (1990) proposed that the research object of conflict discourse can be shifted to the study of conflict discourse in novels, dramas, movies, and TV series. Therefore, in this study, TV series are a good choice for data collection.

This article applies case analysis method and qualitative analysis to analyze the conflict between the main characters in the TV series of *Why Women Kill*. As for the qualitative analysis, on the basis of collecting and sorting out the speeches related to this study, this paper summarizes the impoliteness output and termination strategies according to different interpersonal relationships and tries to figure out the causes of different use of impoliteness strategies. In terms of case analysis, the article selects the representative and

targeted discourse texts in *Why Women Kill* as examples. Then, the discourses are analyzed to seek strategies for resolving conflict discourse in relevant contexts, and explore its general rules.

Taking Bousfield’s theory of impoliteness as the theoretical framework, this study classifies the impolite output and termination strategies of the speaker in relevant conflict discourse during the TV watching process, and conducted a qualitative analysis of the impolite turn. Then, by summarizing the characteristics of people’s conflict discourse in husband-wife relationship, this paper analyzes the reasons for its occurrence.

The main task of this chapter is to test the impoliteness model using data collected from the impolite speech acts in TV series. Research questions would be answered in detail one by one. In order to avoid unnecessary repetition, one type of impoliteness strategy is presented by one case in this study.

### 4.2. Impoliteness output strategies

#### 4.2.1. Hindering/Blocking

This strategy can be seen as a variant of “invading other’s space”, but the realization is completely different from the definition given by Culper (1996). This article introduces it as an individual strategy which means to prevent interlocutors from taking a conversational turn. In short, it is an effective means of threatening the target’s freedom of action. At the same time, this strategy also indicates that the views of the interlocutor are not wanted or taken seriously.

##### Example 2:

Simone: You son of a bitch!

Karl: All right, um, if you’ ll just let me explain.

Simone: Shut up. I’m counting pills.

Karl: I-I admit I may... I may have dropped a few.

Simone: There are over 40 pills here. You said you swallowed the whole bottle. How many did you really take? Two? Three?

Karl: They pumped my stomach.

Simone: I’m not paying for that. Not when a good burp would have saved you. And where’s your cane? Shit.

Karl: Please understand. I was trying to prove I love you.

Simone: By faking a suicide attempt?

Karl: You don’t respond to small gestures!

After discovering that her husband Karl was cheating and homosexual, Simone decided to end their marriage. As a result, Karl swallowed pills and prepared to commit suicide. Karl wanted to explain to Simone, but was strongly refused and interrupted. Karl just wants to prove that he loves Simone, but Simone’s focus is on confirming Karl’s safety. The different information concerns of both parties have triggered conflict discourse.

#### 4.2.2. Disassociating from the other

“Disassociating from the other” means that the interlocutor denies any connection or commonality with others, and wants to draw a clear line with the listener, which is reflected in the use of “I”, “we”, “my”, “our” and “you”, and “yours” in the conversation. It will widen the pragmatic distance between the interlocutors in communication.

##### Example 3:

Karl: Christ, what an evening. I’m exhausted.

Simone: Oh, you’re not staying here tonight.

Karl: Is that so?

Simone: I want you to pack your things and leave, now.

...

Karl: Oh, fuck you! I’ve spent my whole damn life

controlling myself, hiding the central fact of my existence so I wouldn't disappoint my family, my friends or my wife. Hector was the only person who ever saw me for the man I truly am, not the one I was pretending to be. You have no idea what he meant to me.

Simone: Stop romanticizing your grubby little fling.

Karl: I loved him! He asked me to run away with him. Um, but I-I had made a commitment to you, so I chose to stay.

Simone: I am your wife. Am I supposed to be grateful that you didn't walk out?

Karl: I just want you to see it from my perspective for once. Just think about what it may have cost me to honor the vow I made to you. So no, Simone, I do not expect you to be grateful for the sacrifice I made, but for fuck's sake, at least acknowledge it. I am going to bed. Not in the guest room. In our room, in our bed. You sleep where you like.

In Example 3, Simone discovered that Karl was gay, which may affect their daughter Amy's wedding. As a result, Simone asked Karl to pack up and leave immediately, which is a manifestation of drawing a clear line with Karl. After Karl's emotional outburst, he used words such as "I", "me" and "you" to indicate his estrangement from Simone. The couple jointly drew a clear line with each other, ultimately leading to an escalation of the conflict, which ended in Karl rushing out of the room.

#### 4.2.3. Seeking disagreement/Avoiding agreement

There have been no specific examples of "seeking disagreement" in previous research. However, Bousfield (1999) proposed the 'flip side' of this strategy, which is "avoiding agreement" as a variant or sub-strategy of the "seeking disagreement" strategy. Then, he gave us an example, from the late 1990s to the early 21st century, in the popular videotape television series documentaries on British terrestrial television channels, it tells the story of a conversation between a clamper and a driver. At present, conflict talk between couples which uses "avoiding agreement strategy" would be shown below.

##### Example 4:

Rob: You left the gate open?

Beth Ann: No. I'm sure I locked it.

Rob: You're sure? Then how did Emily get out of the backyard? The latch is six feet off the ground!

Beth Ann: I don't know. Maybe I forgot.

Rob: You didn't lock the gate. You didn't lock the gate, and you let her out to play.

Beth Ann: I had to make dinner.

Rob: That's no excuse. Our baby is dead.

Beth Ann: I'm sorry. I thought it was locked.

In Example 4, the conversation between Beth Ann and Rob occurred after their daughter was killed by a car due to an unlocked door. Beth Ann has always believed that her daughter ran into an accident due to her negligence in not closing the door. She has been living in deep regret. When her husband Rob accused her, she first denied it and later apologized helplessly. However, it turned out that it is Rob's lover ran out of his house that day and forgot to close the door in panic. So Rob just wanted to transfer his sense of guilt to his wife Beth Ann. Rob was deliberately concealing the fact of his infidelity and avoiding agreement with his wife, which led to the emergence of conflict discourse.

### 4.3. Impoliteness termination strategies

#### 4.3.1. Submission to opponent

Submission to opponent refers to the participant "gives in"

and accepts the position of the other. Except in an absolutely tense atmosphere, one party can ultimately accept the opinions of the other party. This is also a way to return to a harmonious atmosphere. The following example will clearly illustrate this resolution.

##### Example 6:

Beth Ann: Rob, what are you doing? We're going to be late.

Rob: I'm looking for my old baseball glove. Maybe I can get Sandy Koufax to sign it.

Beth Ann: Don't bother Mr. Koufax tonight. He'll be working.

Rob: Eh, he can sign one glove.

Beth Ann: Maybe it's in one of the boxes in the garage.

In example 6, Beth Ann never had the right to make decision at home as a housewife. Therefore, when Rob wanted Sandy Koufax to sign on his baseball, she suggested that it is better to not disturb Mr. Koufax during working hours. Due to Rob's insistence, Beth Ann acquiesced to Rob's method and pointed out the possible location of the gloves to avoid the conflict with submission.

#### 4.3.2. Compromise

The difference between "compromise" and "submission to opponent" is that compromise is a concession from both sides, while submission is a concession from only one side. This termination, which is difficult to achieve in tense situations, is usually realized through negotiation. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve in ranking relationships with significant status differences. Here is an example to illustrate the emergence of a compromise position.

##### Example 7:

Eli: Damn it, Taylor, this is a really big favor.

Taylor: I know, baby.

Eli: All right, fine, one night.

Taylor: I told her she could stay the weekend.

Eli: Two nights.

Taylor: Monday is Labor Day, so technically...

Eli: Three nights. Final offer.

Taylor: Thank you.

In this example, Eli and Taylor are discussing how long Jade can stay at their home. After continuous bargaining between them, Eli reluctantly compromised that Jade was able to stay for three nights. In fact, this is a compromise made by both parties for the final outcome: Eli can only agree Jade to stay for a maximum of three nights, and Taylor will no longer strive for more accommodation time.

#### 4.3.3. Withdrawal

This termination strategy is to end the conversation by the other party stopping the conversation or leaving the talking area. In intimate relationships, one tends to use this termination strategy frequently for interlocutors having relatively equal status and power, giving both parties an opportunity to calm down and solve the problem rationally.

##### Example 9:

Eli: How do you know that?

Taylor: I put *Find My Friends* on her phone.

Eli: You're tracking her?

Taylor: I got to go.

In this example, Eli learned that Taylor had installed a tracker on Jade's phone and realized that Jade attached great importance to Taylor. So he continued to ask questions. Facing with such a disadvantageous situation for herself, Taylor believed that directly answering the question might cause conflict, so she left the conversation area and chose to withdrawal to avoid the conflict.

## 4.4. Causes of Conflict Discourse

In family, conflicts and contradictions are inevitable. Attempting to identify the causes of conflict discourse can help promote harmonious family and society. The triggers of impoliteness speeches in husband-wife relationship in this article including imbalance of status and personality.

### 4.4.1. Imbalance of status

The wedding vows state that husband and wife have equal rights in marriage. However, in real life, many marriages break down due to the imbalance of status in the family, including the imbalance of social status, economic status, and discourse power. Compared to people of low status, people of high status are less likely to be the target of direct angry speech acts (Bousfield, 2008), and they are always the utterer of impoliteness speech acts. At the same time, although the lower status party is unlikely to frequently use offensive language, the accumulation of possible resentment can also lead to the generation of impolite speech. In *Why Women Kill*, the status of these couples is also relatively unbalanced, and many conflicts are caused.

#### Example 10:

Taylor: In fact, this is what's gonna happen right now. You and I are gonna take a tour of this house, and you're gonna show me where you've been hiding your stash.

Eli: There's no stash. I just...

Taylor: And you know what, Eli, put all that shit down, because you have absolutely no reason to unpack. You're going to rehab first thing in the morning.

Eli: Are you kidding? Rehab?

Taylor: Come on. I want your wallet. And your phone. You are cut off. No cash, no cards, no PayPal, no Venmo. Do you understand?

Eli: You know, I understand why you're upset, but you don't have to humiliate me in front of Jade, too.

Taylor: Wrong. You should be humiliated. After what we went through last time, the idea that you would even put us through this again...

In this example, as a lawyer, Taylor discovered that Eli was engaged in illegal drug use. In order to help Eli get rid of drugs faster, Taylor asked Eli to go to the rehabilitation center tomorrow and cut off all his financial resources. From Taylor's perspective, all of this is to reduce losses and guide Eli in the right direction. But for Eli, he believes that Taylor's outburst in front of Jade made him feel humiliated and seriously damaged his face and self-esteem. Therefore, although he knew it was his fault from the beginning, he believes that Taylor did not save his face, and thus conflict discourse generated.

### 4.4.2. Personality

In this TV series, personality is one of the important factors leading to impolite speech act. People who are magnanimous and gentle do not lose their temper easily. While those who are irritable and narrow-minded are more likely to have conflicts with others. Due to the uncertainty of communication, when the two parties are unable to adapt to the other party's personality, it may evolve into conflict negotiations at any time. In *Why Women Kill*, people often use sentences with implicature due to different personalities.

#### Example 11:

Taylor: What's the plan?

Eli: Okay, so I'm gonna knock on the door. When Duke answers, I'll confront him...

Taylor: No confronting. Duke is a violent felon. Are you crazy?

You brought a hammer?

Eli: I prefer to call this "Plan B."

Taylor: That's your plan B, aggravated assault?

Eli: It's not assault if he hits me first.

Jade: Oh, he will definitely hit you first.

Eli: Great, great, anyway, so while we're struggling, Jade's gonna rush in, she's gonna grab the dog, and then we run.

Taylor: Honey, that is a stupid plan.

In this example, Taylor and Eli are about to rescue Jade's dog, but Jade's boyfriend Duke is violent and has a criminal record. As a professional lawyer, Taylor clearly realizes that Eli's plan to use a hammer against Duke was unreasonable, and therefore strongly opposes Eli's plan. Taylor believes that violent criminals should be treated with wisdom rather than violence. In this conflict, due to the different professions and personalities of both parties, their ways of handling things also differ, resulting in conflict discourse.

## 5. Chapter Five Conclusion

Applying Bousfield's impoliteness theory, this article studies conflict discourse in *Why Women Kill* between couples from the perspective of impoliteness theory, explores the impoliteness output and termination strategies of conflict discourse, and attempts to provide the reasons for the emergence of conflict discourse. This study tries to analyze some strategies for avoiding and reducing marital conflicts, and enrich the study of marital conflict dialogue in this field.

Based on the analysis, this paper finds that many impoliteness strategies proposed by Bousfield are used in conflict discourse including hindering/blocking, disassociating from the other and seeking disagreement/avoiding agreement. For maintaining harmonious relationship in the family, couples should avoid to use these strategies and try to communicate with each other calmly. As for impoliteness termination strategies, couples in *Why Women Kill* use strategies like submission to opponent, compromise and withdrawal to construct a harmonious family. Besides, there are two elements triggering the impolite conflict discourse: imbalance of status and personality. Both husband and wife should equally communicate with each other, respecting personality while maximizing commonality.

This article also has inevitable limitations. For example, there is limited number of discourse data so that the data set is not big enough. In addition, limited by the length and number of words, the selection of dialogue turns in this article is not very complete. Future research can constantly pay attention to the development of impolite strategies in conflict discourse so as to provide theoretical framework for a more comprehensive and standardized study of impoliteness discourse. Besides, other elements should be taken into consideration, such as prosody, gender difference, education level and so on.

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