

# Intertextuality as a politeness strategy

A qualitative study of the use and function of intertextuality in the television series *Suits*

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the use and function of intertextuality in the television series *Suits*, and examines the interplay between intertextuality and politeness. Intertextuality allows a text to incorporate other texts and to draw upon connotations that belong to those texts. Politeness theory offers a tool to analyse the pragmatic use of language in social interaction. Analysing occurrences of intertextuality from the first episode of the television series, the paper explores in what ways the fictional characters use intertextuality and for what purposes. It explores if, and how, intertextuality can be used as a politeness strategy. Findings suggest that intertextuality is used for three main purposes, and functions as characterisation and as a means to establish and/or maintain social relations. Detailed analyses of instances of intertextuality propose that intertextuality can be used as a politeness theory, but only in certain ways. The paper discusses these findings and offers a possible explanation for why intertextuality is only used in this restricted way.

## **Keywords**

intertextuality, politeness, politeness strategy, face, face-threatening act, function, characterisation, social relations.

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# 1. Introduction

Fairclough (1992, p.102) states that all texts “are inherently intertextual, constituted by elements of other texts”. In other words, all texts build on other texts and will, potentially, become a foundation for other texts to build on. Therefore, we can expect to find elements of intertextuality in every text we encounter. These elements can be realised in different ways; for example, they can be embedded quotes, or a novel’s plot that echoes the plot of another novel. It is, however, not always evident what parts of a text are instances of intertextuality, since intertextuality can be implicit as well as explicit (Fairclough, 1992, p.104). Thus, it is possible that we do not identify or pay attention to the intertextual features of a text, and how they contribute to its message. Previous research has shown that the use of quotation markers, such as reporting verbs, “[transmit] covert messages in reference to quotation and to its source.” (Shukura-Nara, 2009, p.460)

The present paper is concerned with the actual quotes, rather than the quotations markers, and what the mere presence of intertextuality from a specific source text suggests. The study will investigate this from a politeness theoretical point-of-view. Politeness theory, as introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987), is a theoretical framework that can be employed to analyse what social purposes language, in this case in the form of intertextual utterances, serve in discourse.

This paper aims to examine how instances of intertextuality from other fictional texts, such as quotation of film dialogues and mentioning of other fictional characters, function as a way to construct the characters and maintain/establish social relations in the television series *Suits*. It will further investigate how intertextuality can be used as a politeness strategy to redress face-threatening acts.

## 2. Aim

The aim of the study is to explore the interplay between intertextuality and politeness. It will investigate how intertextuality participates in the characterisation of fictional characters, and how it is used as a means to establish/maintain social relations between these. Applying Brown and Levinson’s model for politeness theory, it will further explore to what extent politeness theory can be used to analyse and determine the purpose of the instances of intertextuality. It aims to answer the following questions:

- Is there interplay between intertextuality and politeness?
- What is the function of the use of intertextuality in the TV-series *Suits*?

Due to the limited set of data the essay will refrain from drawing too general conclusions about the interplay of intertextuality and politeness. Rather, it aims to provide an example of how the two highly influential notions of intertextuality and politeness may be beneficial to combine to conduct discourse analysis.

### **3. Background**

This section will give definitions of the key concepts used in this study. It will also give background information about the relevant concepts of politeness and intertextuality.

#### **3.1 Text, discourse and audiovisual media**

First, the word ‘text’ has to be defined. In everyday life ‘text’, for most people, refer to a collection of written words; e.g. a book. However, a text can be more than that. In fact, Kolker (1998, p.12) defines text as “any event that makes meaning /.../ if we can isolate and define its outside boundaries and its internal structure – and our responses to it”. In other words, what ‘text’ can refer to is quite broad. The texts that will be subject to analysis in this study are six discrete episodes of the TV-series. Each episode is a text of its own, but also part of a bigger text, namely that of the whole season of the show, and possibly subsequent seasons as well. To be more specific, it is the spoken discourse in the episodes that will be looked at. Johnstone (2008, p.2) offers a definition of what ‘discourse’ is, namely that it is “actual instances of communication action in the medium of language”. The material analysed is indeed “instances of communication action in the medium of language”, but the origin of the discourse is an audiovisual medium that uses several communication channels. Delabastita (1989, in Díaz Cintas & Remeal, 2007, pp.46-47) distinguishes four such communication channels: visual presentation – verbal signs, visual presentation – non-verbal signs, acoustic presentation – verbal signs, and acoustic presentation – non-verbal signs. Because of the different channels available, meaning can be distributed over, and conveyed through more than solely the spoken dialogue. As stated above, this study will analyse the spoken discourse of the TV-series, which corresponds to acoustic presentation rendered in verbal signs. If, however, an occurrence of intertextuality requires other communication channels to be analysed as well in order to make sense of the utterance, this will be done. Should that be the case, it will be clearly stated.

#### **3.2 Intertextuality**

The term ‘intertextuality’ was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1986, and refers to “the ways in which texts and ways of talking refer to and build on other texts and discourses.” (Johnstone, 2008, p.164) Kristeva distinguishes between two dimensions of intertextuality: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal intertextuality is a concept that refers to how a text builds on a text to which it is syntagmatically related (Johnstone, 2008, p.164); for example, if a speaker mimics features of another interlocutor’s speech, such as register or dialect. Vertical intertextuality refers to paradigmatic relationships between a text and other texts of either the same or different type (Johnstone, 2008, p.164); for example, the way that emails are written draw upon features from the conventions of traditional letter writing (Johnstone, 2008, p.164). However, there seems to be some dissension regarding the definition of these two terms. Hellspong and Ledin (1997) offer an alternative reading of what constitutes vertical and horizontal intertextuality. According to them, vertical intertextuality is strongly connected to genre conventions (Hellspong & Ledin, 1997, p.56). A newspaper report of today is likely to share features with a newspaper report published 100 years ago; thus, there will be vertical intertextuality between the contemporary report and the older one. Horizontal

intertextuality, on the other hand, is when there are links between texts from different genres and fields; for example, if a news report cites the law there is horizontal intertextuality with the discourse of law. This means that the type of intertextuality that is dealt with in this study, namely intertextuality from other fictional works such as film, which is another, though similar, genre to that of a television series, would be classified as vertical according to the former definition, but as horizontal according to the latter. It thus seems that for the purposes of this study it is not necessary to distinguish between the two types. Notwithstanding, differentiating between intertextuality with fictional or non-fictional source texts could be an alternative division. This is what has been employed in this study.

As stated above, intertextuality can be realised in many different ways (Johnstone, 2008). It can be a direct quote or an allusion to another text's themes. Speakers can use intertextuality to evoke ideas or connotations that the source text carries. Furthermore, speakers can possibly even align themselves with the source, whether it is a film or a speech by a politician (see for example Shukrun-Nagar, 2009, p.478). Fairclough (1992, p.105) points out that "elements of a text may be designed to be interpreted in different ways by different readerships or audiences". In other words, the way we interpret and read a text may vary depending on who we are. This entails that the meaning of an intertextual element will be interpreted according to the addressee's knowledge of, and attitude towards its source.

### **3.3 Politeness theory**

The most influential model for politeness theory is that by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (B&L), first published in 1978 and then revised and re-published in 1987. B&L build their theory on politeness on the notion of 'face'. They explain the term in the following way:

'face' [is] the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [sic], consisting in two related aspects:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition
- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants

(Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61)

The positive and negative aspects of face relate to 'face wants'. An individual's negative face want is "the desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses", and an individual's positive face want is the "desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others." (Thomas, 1995, p.169) Speakers can pay face, i.e. be oriented towards and employ face work to the addressee's positive or negative face want. We can choose to pay face to hearer's (H's) positive face; e.g. by using nicknames, or we can pay negative face; e.g. by using hedges.

An utterance can be face threatening, a so-called face-threatening act (FTA). FTAs can threaten H's positive face (e.g. an insult like "Your new dress is ugly") or negative face (e.g. an order like "Clean your room"). In addition, it can threaten the speaker's (S's) own face, also that divided dually into positive and negative face. An FTA towards S's

positive face could be to admit having made a mistake, and an FTA towards S's negative face could be to offer someone to help with his or her homework.

Potentially, everything that is said can be an FTA to either S or H. Depending on the degree of the FTA speakers choose different strategies to perform it. B&L have three super-strategies for this initial decision on how to perform the FTA. These are: On record, Off record, and Not at all. If the FTA is judged to be too big, the speaker could opt for avoiding it, i.e. to not say anything at all. Further, there are three ways to do the FTA on record: baldly, without any redress; with positive politeness as redressive action; or with negative politeness as redressive action (B&L, 1987, p.69). Redressive action is an action that pays face, which "attempts to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA" (B&L, 1987, p.69). Lastly, to do the FTA off record means that S only implies the FTA; for example, by giving hints, or by being vague or indirect.

Positive politeness is oriented towards H's positive face, and negative politeness is oriented towards H's negative face. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp.102, 131) give 15 examples of positive politeness and 10 examples of negative politeness:

#### **Positive Politeness**

1. Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
3. Intensify interest to H
4. Use in-group identity markers
5. Seek agreement
6. Avoid disagreement
7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground
8. Joke
9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants
10. Offer, promise
11. Be optimistic
12. Include both S and H in the activity
13. Give (or ask for) reasons
14. Assume or assert reciprocity
15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

#### **Negative Politeness**

1. Be conventionally indirect
2. Question, hedge
3. Be pessimistic
4. Minimize the imposition [...]
5. Give deference
6. Apologize
7. Impersonalize S and H: Avoid the pronouns 'I' and 'you'
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalise
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

In order to choose which politeness strategy to use (on record, off record, not do the FTA at all) speakers, according to B&L, do the following calculation: "Social Distance (D) + Power Differential (P) + Ratio of Imposition (R) = degree of face-threat to be redressed by appropriate linguistic strategy" (Grundy, 2008, p.197). Watts (2003) criticises this equation, arguing that R is in fact the sum of D + P. An alternative

equation could look like this:  $D + P = R \Rightarrow$  (which leads to) linguistic strategy used. In one way, Watts has a point that  $R$  is indeed the sum of  $D + P$ , because how high we judge the ratio of imposition depends on both how close we are to  $H$ , and if we are above or below  $H$  in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, we could look at it slightly differently and instead see  $D$  and  $P$  as who the interlocutors are, and  $R$  as what is being said. Let's say I am walking in the street and I need to know what time it is. If I were with a friend, I would presumably ask her, who I am close to ( $D$ ). Since we are friends we are equals; hence, there is no imbalance in power relation ( $P$ ). Asking somebody for the time is not a big imposition ( $R$ ), so I will probably ask for the time bald on record. However, if I were walking by myself I would have to turn to a stranger. Then  $D$  changes, because I am no longer socially close to my addressee, but  $P$  and  $R$  remain the same. I would then possibly perform the FTA on record with positive or negative redress. In other words, I judge the FTA to be a fairly bigger imposition on a stranger (because of factor  $D$ ) so I choose another strategy. So far Watt's alternative equation  $D + P = R$  works. However, if I instead want to ask my friend what her monthly pay is I would probably use another strategy. Then  $D$  and  $P$  would be the same, whereas  $R$  would change. This would have consequences for how I choose to do the FTA, and I would probably do the FTA either on record with positive or negative politeness as redressive action, or off record. I would not, however, ask strangers in the street about their salary, because I deem it to be too big an imposition. I would therefore opt for not doing the FTA at all. This example shows that  $R$ , i.e. what is being said, is a factor that needs to be taken into account. Consequently, Brown and Levinson's equation still seems to be the best alternative.

With the above example in mind, it is important to note that context – i.e. situational context (Malinowski 1923/1946) – is an important aspect in regard to politeness. For example, the notion of 'free' and 'non-free' goods, introduced by Goffman (1967), later elaborated by Lakoff (1974, p.27, in Thomas, 1995, p.130) to involve not only goods but also information, is of relevance. What is free and non-free information, i.e. what is socially accepted to ask about, varies across cultures. Hypothetically, it could be just as socially accepted to ask a stranger in the street for a report of their wages in one culture, as it is to ask for the time in another. B&L (1987, p.59) suggest that politeness is universal, but Thomas (1995, p.177), amongst others, criticises their theory of being "culturally biased". In the present study, however, there is only one culture involved, namely the American pop culture. Furthermore, the instances of intertextuality will be analysed and discussed in accordance to what function they have within the actual TV-series. The culture involved is therefore further limited to the one created in the series itself. Consequently, the question whether politeness is universal or not is not focal to this study.

## 4. Material

The material that is analysed is the six first episodes of the first season of *Suits*. The first episode is 78 minutes long, and the succeeding five episodes are approximately 40 minutes long each. The reason for the choice of episodes is that it is in the first episodes of the first season that the characters are introduced both to each other and to the audience. It is therefore reasonable to believe that these episodes will picture scenes in which the characterisations of the central characters are made.

*Suits* is an American TV-series, created by Aaron Korsh. It was first aired in June 2011 in the USA, and has since then been distributed to multiple countries across the globe. The first season was released on DVD in 2012. It is a comedy drama, and the story line revolves around a New York City law firm. Central to the plot is Mike who is a college dropout with a brilliant legal mind, and who makes his living by taking the Law School Admission Test for others. One day he is offered a job as the associate of one of New York's best lawyers, Harvey. The audience gets to follow Mike's successes and failures as an assumed lawyer. Other important characters in the series are: Jessica, owner of the firm and good friend of Harvey's; Louis, lawyer at the firm who often competes with Harvey for Jessica's attention; and Rachel, the firm's paralegal with whom Mike has a flirtatious relationship.

The TV-series makes great use of intertextuality. It makes several references to other cultural phenomena, both fictional and 'real' ones. For example, they mention Atticus Finch, law practitioner and one of the main characters in Lee Harper's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and 'real life' basketball player Michael Jordan. As described above, this paper will study intertextual items that come from other fictional texts. *Suits* is a fictional story rendered in the medium of TV, but endeavours to come across as a part of the real world. In order to create and uphold the illusion that the law firm and the characters are part of the real world the series needs to tie itself to it. One way of doing that seems to be by using intertextuality, for "intertextuality implies 'the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history'" (Kristeva, 1986, p.39, in Fairclough, 1992, p.102). It is, therefore, possible that the main purpose of intertextual items with non-fictional source texts is to tie the series to the real world, whereas intertextual items with fictional source texts, presumably, have additional purposes.

## 5. Method

In order to see how intertextuality is used, and to what extent it can be classified as a politeness strategy, the material of the study has been analysed systematically. Initially, the instances of intertextuality are identified. The instances are numbered according to the order in which they appear in the series. The source of an intertextual item is called 'source text'. The occurrences are then analysed according to B&L's model for politeness. An initial analysis is made to determine if the utterance in which the intertextual item is present is an FTA or not, and to whose face the utterance is a threat. B&L (1987, p.67) list a number of FTAs and "distinguish between acts that primarily

threaten *H's* [or] *S's* face.” The key word in this quote is *primarily*, because some FTAs may threaten both *H's* and *S's* face at the same time. Therefore, just like B&L do in their model, this study focuses on whose face the FTA primarily threatens. The next step of the analysis is to determine which super-strategy has been employed. The super-strategy that results in the speaker not doing the FTA at all will for natural reasons not be an option in this study, for something that does not exist cannot be accounted for as an instance of intertextuality. In other words, if the intertextual utterance is an FTA, the super-strategy employed must be to do the FTA either on record or off record. If an utterance is performed on record, it will be divided into the three categories *baldly*, *with positive redress*, and *with negative redress*. If it falls in one of the two latter categories the nature of the positive or negative redressive action will be analysed.

The occurrences are then categorised according to their function. There are two main categories: *Characterisation* and *Social relations*. Utterances that belong to the first category assign a character, either speaker or hearer, attributes and personal traits. Utterances that fall into the second category are used for establishing and/or maintaining social relations. This category is further divided into two sub-categories: *Hierarchy*, and *In-group marker*. Both sub-categories are concerned with the social relationships between interlocutors, but the first of the two, i.e. Hierarchy, is concerned with unequal power and detachment, whereas the second category, In-group marker, is concerned with equal power and solidarity. Occurrences may fall into more than one category.

In order to analyse the occurrences context needs to be taken into account, because as Watts (2003, p.89) convincingly points out in his critique against B&L's model:

Since the examples are fictional, as are most of Brown and Levinson's, the context can be changed to display the struggle over politeness. Unless we give considerably more of the interactional context, i.e. more language usage, we can know neither how participants might have evaluated the utterances, nor how we, as researchers, might evaluate them.

Thus, the instances of intertextuality are analysed within both their situational context and the surrounding wording, i.e. the co-text. Previous knowledge about the characters will be taken into account when analysing the data.

## 6. Results

In the six episodes that has been analysed there are 14 instances of intertextuality with fictional source texts. Within these 14 instances there may be more than one intertextual item, but since intertextuality needs to be interpreted within its context (see above) the intertextual items that belong to the same exchange will be treated as one instance of intertextuality. However, in some instances the different intertextual items are part of different FTAs and have different functions. These cases are still counted as one instance, but the different strategies employed and the distinct functions are counted separately.

Of the 14 instances of intertextuality 12 are FTAs, or appear in connection to one as a politeness strategy (see Table 1). The most frequently used strategy is that of off record.

The second most used strategy is on record with positive politeness as redressive action. There are no occurrences where intertextuality is used as an FTA performed bald on record, and no occurrences of on record with negative politeness as redressive action.

**Table 1. Number of occurrences of each politeness super-strategy.**

<b>Politeness strategy</b>	<b>Off record</b>	<b>On record – bald</b>	<b>On record – with positive politeness</b>	<b>On record – with negative politeness</b>	<b>In total</b>
	8	0	5	0	13

As shown in Table 2 below, the intertextual items mainly function as characterisation, as in-group markers or to mark hierarchy. There is one instance in which the intertextuality functions as ‘other’. This category will be explained in more detail below. The most frequent function of intertextuality is that of Characterisation. There are 11 instances of Characterisation, of which 1 occurrence is not an FTA, nor appears in combination with one. The second most frequently occurring category of function is Social relations – In-group marker. There are 6 such occurrences, also of which 1 is not an FTA. There are 3 occurrences of Social relations – Hierarchy. Thus, it seems as though the characters “constantly create and renegotiate their relationships with each other in the process of interacting, via discourse moves that make claims to equality, inequality, solidarity, or detachment.” (Johnstone, 2008, p.139)

**Table 2. Number of occurrences of each function.**

<b>Function</b>	<b>Characterisation</b>	<b>Social Relations – In-group marker</b>	<b>Social Relations – Hierarchy</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>In total</b>
	11	6	3	1	21

The relation between function and politeness strategy employed is the following: Characterisation seems to favour the off record strategy, if only marginally. 6 of the 11 instances of Characterisation are performed off record, and 4 instances are performed on record with positive politeness. Conversely, when the intertextuality functions as an In-group marker the strategy most frequently employed is on record with positive politeness. 3 out of 6 instances are examples of this strategy, and 2 are performed off record. Note that one instance of both these functions are classified as not being FTAs; hence, no politeness strategy employed. Further, the off record strategy is used to mark Hierarchy in 2 out of 3 instances, and on record with positive politeness is used once for this purpose. Lastly, the sole instance that functions as Other is performed off record. For a more perspicuous account of the relationship between politeness strategy and function see Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Number of instances of each function and politeness strategy in relation to each other.**

FTA	FUNCTION			
	Characterisation	Social relations – In-group marker	Social relations – Hierarchy	Other
Off record	6	2	2	1
On record – baldly	0	0	0	0
On record – with p.p.	4	3	1	0
On record – with n.p.	0	0	0	0
No FTA	1	1	0	0
<b>Total:</b>	11	6	3	1

I will now give examples of the four functions. Each example is followed by an analysis where the politeness strategy and function is further elaborated. All examples show the instances in their full length. In most cases it has been clear where the boundaries of the excerpts should be drawn; either there is a cut and change of scene, or the characters change the subject of their dialogue.

The first example is an instance in which the intertextuality functions as both Characterisation and Social relations – In-group marker:

(1)

MIKE: I feel like Michael Corleone in that scene where that fat guy teaches him how to shoot that gun.

HARVEY: Are you saying that I'm the fat guy? 'Cause I'm not the fat guy.

MIKE: Hmm...Do you know what his name was?

HARVEY: Yeah.

MIKE: Cordoza.

HARVEY: Clemenza.

MIKE: I knew that! I was just testing to see if you knew it.

HARVEY: I knew that you knew that I knew.

(Episode 1, "Pilot", 51:03)

Here Mike makes a reference to the highly successful film *The Godfather* (1972), directed by Francis Ford Coppola. He does so by mentioning the character Michael Corleone, one of the film's main characters, and by referring to a particular scene in the film. When Mike says he feels like Michael Corleone it has to do with confidence and power. He has just won his first trial, which makes him feel good about himself; it makes him feel powerful. At the same time he admits to being a beginner, because he compares the situation he is in with the scene in which Corleone is taught how to shoot a gun. Thus, he uses the intertextual item for characterisation.

This instance seems to be divided into two parts. The first part, in which Mike says he feels like Michael Corleone, is not necessarily an FTA. Mike assigns himself

characteristics that he likes, which does not need to be threatening to either S or H. On the other hand, it could be analysed as an FTA towards S's positive face, because if Harvey would have contradicted Mike's statement; for example, by saying: "You are nothing like Michael Corleone. You have no power," it would indeed be threatening to Mike's positive face. By assigning himself power Mike risks that Harvey claims the opposite. Thus, one possible analysis of the utterance is that it is an FTA towards S's positive face, and the strategy used is off record, using intertextuality as a method for indirectness.

However, it is interesting how the second part alters the first part. Rather than picking up on what Mike says about himself, Harvey picks up on the fact that Mike says that he feels like Corleone "in the scene where the fat guy teaches him how to shoot that gun." "The fat guy" is whoever taught Corleone to use his weapon, and in Mike's case 'the weapon' is how to go about and use the law in a courtroom. Therefore, in the context of *Suits*, "the fat guy" would refer to Harvey since he is the one who teaches Mike how to practice law. Hence, Mike performs an FTA towards H's positive face, albeit perhaps unintentionally. Indeed, B&L (1987, p.67) point out that threats towards H's positive face can be made "intentionally or accidentally". It is once again important to stress the necessity of analysing discourse in its context. Attitudes towards obesity, for instance, vary between cultures, even between different sub-cultures in a culture, but in this instance Harvey's reaction to the utterance shows that he does not appreciate being identified as "the fat guy".

In the last bit of the instance Mike and Harvey banter about the actual name of "the fat guy". Mike asks Harvey if he knows the name of the character, and it is reasonable to believe that this is a way for Mike to pay face in retrospect for the FTA he unintentionally performed towards H's positive face; because it seems that this is a strategy used to claim common ground, i.e. to show that they share the same knowledge about the source text. Furthermore, the way that the instance ends, with Harvey saying, "I knew that you knew that I knew", suggests that this is, indeed, the case. Cutting (2008, p.46) shows in one of her examples how an utterance such as "I know that you know about them, just like we do" is a way of claiming common ground. One of the main types of positive politeness is to claim common ground, so the intertextuality here is a realisation of positive politeness. Therefore, the second part of the instance functions as an in-group marker.

The second excerpt from the data is an example of Characterisation:

(5)

MIKE: What have you done with my friend?

TREVOR: You should talk. Look at you. You look like Gordon Gekko's little brother. Are you working on Wall Street man?

(Episode 5, "Bail out", 03:00)

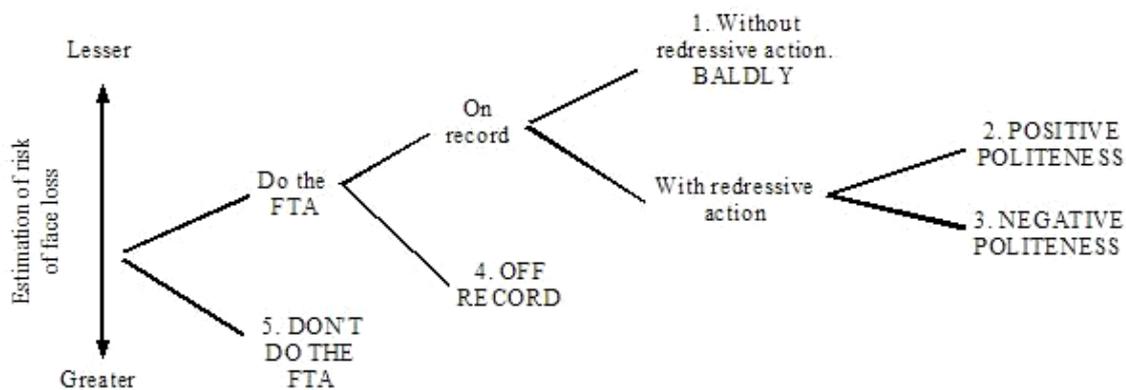
In this scene Mike meets with his old friend Trevor whom he has not seen in a long time. Gordon Gekko is a fictional character in the film *Wall Street* (1987) and *Wall Street: Money never sleeps* (2010), directed by Oliver Stone. Gekko thinks that "[g]reed is good" and has become a fictional symbol of money (Dickenson, 2006,

p.11). Trevor thinks that Mike looks like someone who makes a lot of money; hence, the metaphor “like Gordon Gekko’s younger brother”. Because Gekko is older than Mike, at least in the sequel from 2010, Mike would then be more of the same age as Gordon’s, although non-existent, younger brother.

The function of the intertextuality is Characterisation. Trevor assigns Mike a personal trait; that he looks and dresses like a man working on Wall Street. This is an FTA towards H’s positive face, because it is not certain that Mike likes the picture Trevor draws of him, and it is therefore a possible threat to his self-image.

The occurrence can be analysed in two different ways. Either Trevor does the FTA on record with positive redress, or he does it off record. Instead of telling Mike straightforwardly that he looks rich, Trevor implies it by saying Mike shares some of Gekko’s features. If Mike was offended by this statement and decides to challenge Trevor, Trevor could potentially deny that this was what he meant. This is a typical feature of an FTA made off record, for S can in theory deny the FTA (Cutting, 2008, p.44). This instance of intertextuality could therefore be defined as an off record politeness strategy, being indirect and using a metaphor, which is a linguistic realisation of the off record strategy (B&L, 1987, p.69). Nevertheless, it could be that the FTA is done on record with positive redress. Trevor would then assign Mike characteristics, which there is a risk he may not like. But judged from the paralinguistic features in the scene, it seems that neither Mike nor Trevor deem the size of the FTA as very big, because they are both smiling as they talk. Both Mike and Trevor have struggled financially and now that Mike does better for himself, it is reasonable to believe that Trevor’s remark will be assessed as positive. A plausible analysis would thus be that Trevor uses positive politeness strategy number 7 (Presuppose/raise/assert common ground) because he presupposes that they share the same values (B&L, 1987, p.123). Furthermore, he presupposes Mike’s knowledge about the referents, i.e. Gordon Gekko and the source text. The intertextual item becomes an in-group code and S “assumes that H understands and shares the associations of that code.” (B&L, 1987, p.124)

Speakers will choose which strategy to employ based on their “assessment of the size of the FTA.” (Thomas, 1995, p.169) The bigger an FTA is assessed to be, S will choose the politeness strategy with the highest number, as outlined in Figure 1 below. Because of the contextual clues of this exchange it is possible to claim that Trevor is likely to assess the FTA as being small. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the strategy employed is indeed on record with positive redress, as described above.



**Figure 1. The choice of strategy employed based on the size of the FTA. Figure retrieved from Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.60.**

The third example of intertextuality is one that does not fit into any of the categories Characterisation or Social relations, but rather forms a category on its own.

(4)

HARVEY: So you're saying these claims are baseless?

QUENTIN: We're talking about six terminal patients with a wide array of medical issues and they're saying my company's drug caused this? They were drinking coffee on the Titanic. I don't think that put Leonardo DiCaprio in the water.

(Episode 4, "Dirty Little Secrets", 09:38)

Quentin is a character that only appears in one episode. He is a client of the law firm whose drug company has been accused of selling products that have fatal side effects. In this exchange Harvey asks Quentin about what his response to the accusations are. Quentin's answer is that he finds the accusations against him absurd, but rather than saying this bald on record, he says it off record using intertextuality as a politeness strategy. To be more exact, he uses intertextuality to create a parable to highlight the absurdity of the claims against his company. The first item of intertextuality is "Titanic" and the other is "Leonardo DiCaprio". The source text is the film *Titanic* (1998) directed by James Cameron. Leonardo DiCaprio is the name of the actor playing the film's fictional character Jack Dawson. This intertextual item itself is not fictional and should arguably not be analysed in this study. However, in this particular instance it will have to be assumed that Quentin actually refers to the fictional character but uses the actor's name rather than the character's name since the character's name is not as famous as the actor's. It is thus counted in this analysis.

The FTA performed is not towards neither speaker nor hearer; instead, it is a face threat towards a third party that is not present. This indicates that a speaker might employ face work even though the person whose face is threatened is not aware of the actual FTA. Moreover, the instance of intertextuality does not fall into either of the two categories, and its function will therefore have to be classified as something else. It is the only occurrence of intertextuality in the data that does not fit any of the categories. Instead, its function seems to be to express attitude and opinion. Since many of the other instances also convey attitudes and opinions in their own way, though not as a main

function, the category will simply be labelled *Other* to not cause confusion. It is reasonable to believe that the reason why it functions as neither characterisation nor establishing social relations is mainly because Quentin is not one of the main characters and not a recurrent feature of the series. Hence, no thorough characterisation needs to be done and there is little reason for him and the other characters to establish/maintain their social relations.

The fourth example is an instance that functions to mark hierarchy.

(13)

LOUIS: You know, next week there's a revival of *Cats*.

JESSICA: No.

(Episode 6, "Tricks of the trade", 37:46)

In the scene Louis and Jessica have dinner after having been to see a play. Louis is very happy with their evening, whereas Jessica seems more reserved. What Louis does in this instance is that he asks Jessica out for another play, but rather than asking her bald on record he uses intertextuality to ask the question off record, for it is too big an FTA towards his own positive face, because of the possibility of being rejected, and towards Jessica's negative face. It is clear from both context and co-text that Jessica does not want to spend another evening together with Louis. So if Louis asks her out it is an act "that predicate[s] some future act [...] of H, and in so doing put[s] some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act" (B&L, 1987, p.65). Therefore, Louis chooses to perform the FTA, i.e. to ask Jessica out, off record, only implying that this is what he means. Jessica realises this is what Louis is insinuating, and simply answers "No". The fact that Louis chooses to go off record with his request suggests that the intertextuality deals with social relationships. Jessica is Louis's employer and is therefore superior to him. Louis's off record strategy is thus a result of unequal power relations. As a result, this instance is categorised as Social relations – Hierarchy.

In the fifth example intertextuality functions as Hierarchy, Characterisation and as In-group marker, but here the FTA is performed on record with positive redress.

(14)

HARVEY: Nice touch. Tickets to the Yankee game. Found 'em on my desk. Can't wait.

JESSICA: You're welcome.

HARVEY: Nachos are on you this time.

JESSICA: Oh, those tickets aren't for you and me. They're for you and Louis.

HARVEY: Sunday the 20th... Did I mention that I'm busy that night?

JESSICA: I know you are. You're busy going to the Yankee game with Louis. Son, your ego's writing checks that your body can't cash. Oh, see, that's funny, because now I'm quoting Top Gun and get out of my office.

HARVEY: Very funny. Very funny. Very funny.

(Episode 6, "Tricks of the Trade", 37:57)

Jessica has given Harvey tickets to a Yankee game and he thinks that they are going together. When Harvey finds out that the tickets are for him and Louis he changes his mind and says he cannot go. This is a way of showing disobedience to what his boss, Jessica, has told him to do, i.e. to go to the game with Louis. Jessica responds to Harvey's defiance with a quote from *Top Gun* (1986, directed by Tony Scott): "Son, your ego's writing checks that your body can't cash." In the source text this line is uttered when the protagonist, US naval aviator Maverick, has disobeyed orders. His commander reprimands him and says that he is too daring, reckless and self-righteous. Because of previous instances of intertextuality in the same episode (instance 10, see Appendix) it is known that Harvey is highly familiar with the source text. Jessica can thus convey the same message to Harvey simply by quoting the film. She also makes it clear that she is the one entitled to give orders and that Harvey should do as he is told.

Jessica performs an FTA towards Harvey's positive and negative face. The actual quote threatens his positive face, because it is a reprimand and criticism. However, ultimately what Jessica does is that she forces Harvey to do something that he does not want to do, which is an imposition of freedom, and thus threatens his negative face. She performs the FTA on record, using intertextuality as positive redress. She orders Harvey to go to the game with Louis and then she uses the intertextuality as redressive action to make Harvey feel more at ease and not feel too threatened. To quote a film that Jessica knows Harvey likes is a way for her to show interest in him. It could also be deemed as fairly jovial for a manager to quote films at the office. Jessica has legitimate power to tell Harvey what to do because of her job title. It could, therefore, be argued that she does not need to employ face work when she gives him an order. However, going to a Yankee's game with a colleague is not in Harvey's job description; it is not his "obligation" (Thomas 1995, p.131). This is a possible explanation for why Jessica employs face work although the power balance between them does not require it.

The function of the intertextuality is three-fold. It denotes social relations and it works both as an in-group marker and as a means to indicate hierarchy. It also functions as characterisation because the quote conveys that Jessica thinks that Harvey has a big ego.

The sixth example is classified as not being an FTA. The intertextual item is not an FTA in itself and it is not used as redressive action. But the intertextuality still has a clear function, namely, to mark togetherness.

(12)

MIKE: Oh, I meant to ask you, that big guy that you got in a fight with, Mr. T, was he in on this whole thing?

HARVEY: No, he was just a dick.

(Episode 6, "Tricks of the Trade", 36:23)

In this instance Mike, for the second time in this episode, refers to a man as "Mr. T." This instance thus needs to be analysed and interpreted not only intertextually, but also intratextually, i.e. within the same text, because although the source text is a text other than the TV-series, this instance does not say anything new about the man called "Mr. T". Rather, it draws upon what has been said about him previously (instance 11, see Appendix). In the first instance Mike calls a man who works for the plaintiff in a case

Mike and Harvey are working on “Mr. T.” Even though “Mr. T” is the name of the actor playing the antihero Clubber Lang in *Rocky III* (1982, directed by Sylvester Stallone), it is clear from the co-text that Mike is referring to the fictional character in the source text and not the actual actor. In instance 11 Mike likens Harvey to Rocky, the hero in *Rocky III*. When he calls the man “Mr. T” he thus implicitly says that this man is their enemy. By speaking badly about someone, which is what Mike does when he portraits the other man as being the antihero, he constructs this man as ‘other’. By doing so he also enhances the sense of ‘in-group’ that he shares with Harvey (Coates, 2003, p.2). Consequently, when Mike once again refers to the man as “Mr. T”, using the same intertextual item, he signals the same things as he did in instance 11, namely group membership. Furthermore, Mike uses the intertextual item to claim common ground with Harvey in a second way. He refers to someone with a name that would not give away the referent’s true identity to someone who was not present the first time they referred to the man as “Mr. T”.

The instance of intertextuality cannot be classified as an FTA. Harvey’s response to Mike’s question (“No, he was just a dick”), on the other hand, is an FTA, but it is not immediately tied to the intertextuality. It seems as if Mike uses intertextuality as a politeness strategy on its own, rather than as redressive action. Had it been classified as an FTA, the FTA would presumably be directed towards a third person not present. But as mentioned above, it seems that rather than being evaluative the intertextuality here is only a deictic element, referring to a man whose real name the characters do not seem to know. Therefore, the function of the intertextuality in this instance is Social relations – In-group marker, but it is not an FTA.

Similarly, the last example cannot be classified as an FTA either.

(8)

LOUIS: How did you get these?

JESSICA: You mean tickets to the Royal Shakespeare’s production of *King Lear*?

LOUIS: The show was sold out the minute the tickets were on sale. I live for *King Lear*. How did you know that?

JESSICA: It’s my job to know that.

(Episode 6, “Tricks of the Trade”, 12:51)

In this instance the intertextual item is the same as the source text, namely *King Lear* (c. 1605) by William Shakespeare. The first time *King Lear* is mentioned it is a way to clarify what Louis refers to with “these” in the precedent turn. The second time it is mentioned Louis says he lives for *King Lear*. By saying this he explains how happy he is about receiving the tickets, but the intertextual item does not seem to function in any special way. *King Lear* could be exchanged with something else and the meaning of the interaction would not change significantly. It seems that the instance has to be interpreted in the light of a subsequent instance of intertextuality (instance 10, see Appendix), in which the intertextual element *King Lear* functions as Characterisation. It seems that this instance is preparatory for the subsequent occurrence; therefore, it will be classified as Characterisation.

## 7. Discussion

It is clear that there is interplay between intertextuality and politeness. The result section shows that as many as 12 out of 14 instances of intertextuality are part of an FTA, either as the actual FTA or as redressive action. However, it is not always apparent when an utterance is to be regarded as an FTA or not. B&L (1987, p.65) are rather vague when they propose that “certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face”. It raises the question about who decides whether an act is an FTA or not. The data indicates that it can be either S or H, or both. S may not judge the act to be face threatening and refrain from using politeness strategies, whereas H interprets the utterance as an FTA. This is the case in instance 1, in which Harvey takes offence because he interprets Mike’s utterance as an insult. He thinks Mike insinuates that he is fat; hence, it is an FTA towards Harvey’s positive face. Mike realises his utterance has been received as an FTA and adds redressive action retrospectively. Another analysis could be that Mike is indeed trying to insinuate this to Harvey, and uses intertextuality to perform this FTA off record. The context of the utterance indicates that this analysis is the less plausible of the two, but it shows the complexity of politeness, and one of the difficulties of categorising politeness strategies. Watts (2003, p.88) argues that “the degree of rational choice that speakers are expected to exercise in choosing an appropriate strategy” is problematic. Indeed, it may be that speakers miscalculate the size of the FTA, or judge the utterance as not being an FTA, and therefore choose an unsuccessful strategy. Further, if an FTA is performed accidentally, as in instance 1, it seems unlikely that the politeness strategies employed actually can be planned.

Also, Thomas (1995, p.173) states, “even cartoon characters use [...] politeness”. It seems that this study is further proof that fictional characters indeed do make use of politeness, in this case in the form of intertextuality. However, if the complexities discussed above are taken into consideration it seems that the employment of politeness theory on fiction is somewhat artificial, for even though the dialogue is written to appear as if not written, it is just that – written and planned.

Furthermore, intertextuality seems to add a layer of indirectness to an utterance. For this claim to be true it requires that both S and H are aware that what is being said is intertextual, which is the case in all instances of this study. It could also be argued that the use of intertextual items is also the use of imagery, such as metaphors and parables. If all occurrences of intertextuality are inherently indirect and figurative, it could be argued that FTAs that make use of intertextuality could always, at least partly, be analysed as performed off record. Because if intertextuality entails vagueness it would first and foremost imply meaning and theoretically, then, the meaning of an FTA that consists of intertextuality could be negotiated. This seems to be the case when the intertextual item is part of the actual FTA, such as in instances 1, 4 and 13 (for more examples see instances 2, 6, 7, 10 and 11 in the Appendix). When the intertextual element is part of the redressive action rather than the actual FTA, on the other hand, as in instances 5 and 14, it seems to be used as positive politeness (for more examples, see instances 3, 9 and 10 in the Appendix). This offers a reason for why there are no occurrences of FTAs performed bald on record. The nature of intertextuality, its

indirectness and vagueness, seems to be incompatible with the bald on record super-strategy, which calls for directness and clarity.

As for on record with negative politeness, it seems that, similarly, the nature of intertextuality is in conflict with what the strategy calls for. Although an intertextual element may not always function as an in-group marker, it seems that intertextuality always marks out ‘togetherness’ (again this requires that both S and H are aware of the intertextuality). It minimises the social distance between speakers, just as positive politeness does (B&L, 1987, p.130). Negative politeness, on the other hand, is “useful [...] for social ‘distancing’” (B&L, 1987, p.130). Therefore, it seems to be difficult to fuse intertextuality with negative politeness. Notwithstanding, if negative politeness can be used for social distancing it could entail that negative politeness would be a functional tool for the characters to mark social detachment and unequal power, i.e. Social relations – Hierarchy. However, the results of this study show that the characters of *Suits* do not employ negative politeness in combination with intertextuality to mark hierarchy. This may be an indication that the potential of intertextuality to mark togetherness is ‘stronger’ than its capability to mark social distance.

## **8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has shown that there is interplay between intertextuality and politeness. It has shown that in *Suits* an intertextual item is used either as part of the actual FTA, which is then performed off record, or as positive politeness as redressive action when the FTA has been performed on record. Further, intertextuality in *Suits* is mainly used for three main purposes: to characterise the fictional characters of the TV-series and to establish/maintain social relations, either to mark solidarity or hierarchy. A fourth function is found, namely that of expressing opinions. The findings of the paper suggest that intertextuality entails indirectness and closeness between interlocutors. Because of these, seemingly inherent, features of intertextuality it seems that it cannot be used when an FTA is performed bald on record, or as negative politeness as redressive action.

Because of the limited scope of this paper too general conclusions about the interplay between intertextuality and politeness cannot be made. It would be interesting if further research would investigate if these findings bear any truth when larger sets of data, and data from other sources, both fictional and non-fictional, are analysed.

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# Appendix

## Essay data

### Episode 1: “Pilot”

(1) (51:03)

MIKE: I feel like Michael Corleone in that scene where that fat guy teaches him how to shoot that gun.

HARVEY: Are you saying that I'm the fat guy? 'Cause I'm not the fat guy.

MIKE: Hmm...Do you know what his name was?

HARVEY: Yeah.

MIKE: Cordoza.

HARVEY: Clemenza.

MIKE: I knew that! I was just testing to see if you knew it.

HARVEY: I knew that you knew that I knew.

- **Characterisation and Social relations – In-group marker**
  - **Off record**
  - Intertextual item: Michael Corleone, “that scene where the fat guy teaches him how to shoot that gun”, “the fat guy”, Clemenza.
  - Source text: *The Godfather* (1972, directed by Francis Ford Coppola)
- 

(2) (1:17:01)

HARVEY: Look, we start on this tomorrow.

MIKE: Does this mean we're officially a team now?

HARVEY: I wouldn't move your things into Wayne Manor just yet.

MIKE: So now you're Batman?

HARVEY: Closer to him than Clemenza.

- **Characterisation and Social relations – Hierarchy**
- **Off record**
- Intertextual item: Wayne Manor, Batman, Clemenza.
- Source texts: *Batman* (1938, created by Bob Kane), *The Godfather* (1972, directed by Francis Ford Coppola)

### Episode 2: “Errors and Omissions”

(3) (1:35)

HARVEY: You need to go back to the office and file a patent for the phone.

MIKE: A patent? I don't know how to file a patent.

HARVEY: Figure it out.

MIKE: Can't we do that after...

HARVEY: No, and you keep talking I'm gonna start billing you. And my time runs at 1,000 dollar an hour.

MIKE: "But isn't this our time Mr. Hand?"

HARVEY: I stand corrected. Your *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* quote that... proves you belong at the adult table.

MIKE: Hey, that's... a great movie and it spoke to a generation.

- **Characterisation and Social relations – In-group marker**
- **On record with positive politeness**
- Intertextual items: "But isn't this our time, Mr. Hand?"
- Source text: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982, directed by Amy Heckerling).

#### **Episode 4: "Dirty Little Secrets"**

(4) (9:38)

HARVEY: So you're saying these claims are baseless?

QUENTIN: We're talking about six terminal patients with a wide array of medical issues and they're saying my company's drug caused this? They were drinking coffee on the Titanic. I don't think that put Leonardo DiCaprio in the water.

- **Other**
- **Off record**
- Intertextual item: Leonardo DiCaprio
- Source text: *Titanic* (1997, directed by James Cameron)

#### **Episode 5: "Bail out"**

(5) (3:00)

MIKE: What have you done with my friend?

TREVOR: You should talk. Look at you. You look like Gordon Gekko's little brother. Are you working on Wall Street man?

- **Characterisation**
- **On record with positive politeness**
- Intertextual item: Gordon Gekko
- Source text: *Wall Street* (1987, directed by Oliver Stone)

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(6) (11:40)

HARVEY: You know, I think you've seen way to many reruns of Ally McBeal.

- **Characterisation**
  - **Off record**
  - Intertextual item: Ally McBeal.
  - Source text: *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002, created by David E. Kelley)
-

(7) (20:08)

TAXI DRIVER: The hallmark of America is that the little guy gets to see justice done. We are all equals in the eyes of the law. That is why, out of all the countries in the world, I chose to come here.

JUDGE: What do you got to say about that, counsellor?

HARVEY: I say Atticus Finch makes a good speech here, but this is a fender-bender, not a multimillion-dollar lawsuit.

- **Characterisation**
- **Off record**
- Intertextual item: Atticus Finch.
- Source text: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960, written by Harper Lee)

## Episode 6: “Tricks of the Trade”

(8) (12:51)

LOUIS: How did you get these?

JESSICA: You mean tickets to the Royal Shakespeare’s production of *King Lear*?

LOUIS: The show was sold out the minute the tickets were on sale. I live for *King Lear*. How did you know that?

JESSICA: It’s my job to know that.

- **Characterisation** (in connection with instance 10)
- **No FTA**
- Intertextual item: *King Lear*.
- Source text: *King Lear* (c. 1605, written by William Shakespeare)

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(9) (14:30)

RACHEL: Why is that on my desk?

MIKE: Because the LSATs are a week from Saturday.

RACHEL: Great. Go away I'm busy.

MIKE: There are only four tests a year which means if you miss this one you’re gonna have to wait another 3 months.

RACHEL: I can do math too, Good Will Hunting.

- **Characterisation**
- **On record with positive politeness**
- Intertextual item: Good Will Hunting
- Source text: *Good Will Hunting* (1997, directed by Gus van Sant)

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(10) (20:00)

HARVEY: King Lear.

JESSICA: I happen to like King Lear. And unlike some people I know, Louis's references don't begin and end with Top Gun.

HARVEY: Hey, I love Louis, and I don't care what you say, I am not leaving my wingman. See, that's funny, because that's from Top Gun.

JESSICA: "He's a wild card. Flies by the seat of his pants." Think I can't quote Top Gun? Get the hell out of here.

HARVEY: Oh, that was good.

- **Characterisation and Social Relations – In-group marker**
  - **Off record** (characterisation) and **On record with positive politeness** (Social relations – In-group marker)
  - Intertextual item: *King Lear*, *Top Gun*, "I am not leaving my wingman", "He's a wild card. Flies by the seat of his pants".
  - Source text: *King Lear* (c. 1605, written by William Shakespeare) and *Top Gun* (1986, directed by Tony Scott).
- 

(11) (17:55)

MIKE: That was amazing. It was like he was Mr. T and you were Rocky, but like, not Rocky at the beginning when he's all scared of Mr. T, but at the end, when he was all like, "Oooh, give us your best shot." You know? "Adrian!" Yes!

HARVEY: That's funny, but you might want to wipe that grin off your face.

MIKE: What? Why?

HARVEY: Because without those trades, we don't have shit, and your little girlfriend's gonna rot in jail. And by the way, you got to work on your Stallone. You need a lower register.

MIKE: That was an incredible Stallone. I've been doing that since I was a kid. You can't touch it.

HARVEY: "Ooooh"

MIKE: Not with food in your mouth.

HARVEY: No, I swallowed it. "Ooooh"

MIKE: There's food in your mouth.

HARVEY: "Adrian."

MIKE: That's disgusting.

- **Characterisation and Social relations – In-group marker**
  - **Off record**
  - Intertextual items: Mr. T, Rocky, "Give us your best shot", Adrian.
  - Source text: *Rocky III* (1982, directed by Sylvester Stallone)
- 

(12) (36:23)

MIKE: Oh, I meant to ask you, that big guy that you got in a fight with, Mr. T, was he in on this whole thing?

HARVEY: No, he was just a dick.

- **Social relations – In-group marker**
- **No FTA**

- Intertextual item: Mr. T.
  - Source text: *Rocky III* (1982, directed by Sylvester Stallone)
- 

**(13)** (37:46)

LOUIS: You know, next week there's a revival of *Cats*.

JESSICA: No.

- **Social relations – Hierarchy**
  - **Off record**
  - Intertextual item: *Cats*.
  - Source text: *Cats* (1981, written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, based on poems by T.S Eliott)
- 

**(14)** (37:57)

HARVEY: Nice touch. Tickets to the Yankee game. Found 'em on my desk. Can't wait.

JESSICA: You're welcome.

HARVEY: Nachos are on you this time.

JESSICA: Oh, those tickets aren't for you and me. They're for you and Louis.

HARVEY: Sunday the 20th...Did I mention that I'm busy that night?

JESSICA: I know you are. You're busy going to the Yankee game with Louis. "Son, your ego's writing checks that your body can't cash." Oh, see, that's funny, because now I'm quoting *Top Gun* and get out of my office.

HARVEY: Very funny. Very funny. Very funny.

- **Characterisation, Social relations – In-group marker and Social relations – Hierarchy**
- **On record with positive politeness**
- Intertextual item: "Son, you ego's writing checks that your body can't cash", *Top Gun*.
- Source text: *Top Gun* (1986, directed by Tony Scott)

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