

Sexual Harassment at Workplace: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract—Sexual harassment is a phenomenon that has been prevailing in everyday workplace. It refers to undesirable sex-oriented conduct usually carried out by a powerful male employer towards a female employee. Sexual harassment may result in humiliation, degradation and loss of reputation on the part of the target. Despite the fact that sexual harassment is pervasive in workplace interactions, it has remained relatively linguistically, particularly pragmatically, unexplored. Therefore, the present study endeavours to investigate this phenomenon at workplace from a pragmatic point of view in selected medical TV shows as represented examples of the genre investigated. It is hypothesized that harassers in medical TV shows employ some pragmatic strategies more than others to harass their victims and achieve their goals. Precisely, this study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the types, forms and elements of sexual harassment employed in the data under scrutiny? What are the pragmatic aspects of workplace sexual harassment? And what are the pragmatic strategies used to manifest the pragmatic aspects of workplace sexual harassment? The findings of the study have demonstrated that different pragmatic aspects are utilized by harassers in the TV shows analyzed. These comprise impoliteness strategies and speech acts. However, statistical analysis has revealed that impoliteness strategies occur with a higher frequency than speech act strategies.

Index Terms—harassment, sexual, pragmatics, strategies, workplace

I. INTRODUCTION

Leyman (1990) asserts that harassment can be viewed as an umbrella term for a broad spectrum of conducts of an offensive nature in pursuit of denying or damaging a person's right to self-esteem.

Failing to abide by masculine or feminine ideals, harassment grounded on sex can involve taunting and teasing targets (Berdahl & Raver, 2011).

Prior to that, Mackinnon (1979) states that sexual harassment refers to undesired imposition of sexual demands in the context of a relationship of power imbalance. Crucial to the concept is the use of power grounded on the social domain of an individual to attain benefits or enforce deprivations in another.

Sexual harassment obstructs a person's employment or work performance and produces a frightening labor atmosphere (Howard, 2007).

As for this study, sexual harassment incorporates verbal unwanted conducts of a sexual orientation carried out by a male employer with power imbalance that render a female employee uncomfortable or produce a hostile work environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to review the literature about sexual harassment and other relevant notions which bear some resemblance to it in order to assist readers to draw a line of demarcation between them.

A. Aggression, Violence, Harassment, and Bullying

According to Neuman and Baron (1998), aggression comprises an activity where a person deliberately endeavours to hurt another. Thus, all practices of deliberate harm-doing will be referred to as aggression while the word violence can be used for severe cases of bodily assaults.

However, harassment signifies undesirable conduct that upsets, degrades or scares an individual, and targets them on the base of a certain feature like gender, race or ethnicity (Brodsky, 1976).

According to Monks and Coyne (2011), the defining feature of bullying which distinguishes it from other forms of general aggression is that it is repeated and that there is an imbalance of power between the parties involved. However, some researchers argue that behaviours do not essentially have to be repeated to be termed bullying.

From the discussion above, it can be inferred that both bullying and harassment are regarded as two different versions of aggression.

B. Workplace Sexual Harassment

According to MacKinnon (1979), women employed in industries are particularly liable to being sexually abused. Sexual harassment of women in employment is obvious when male supervisors coercively start undesirable sexual advances to women employees. Absence of mutual feelings on the women's side may be conveyed via a refusal or display of reluctance.

Moreover, it is argued that sexual harassment derives its meaning and critical influence upon women from social context. The defining parameters of this social context are employer-employee relations, and the relations between the sexes in the whole society, of which sexual relations are one manifestation (MacKinnon, 1979).

It is suggested by sociologists that sexual harassment is one consequence of the imbalanced power relationship in the workplace. For sexual harassment to appear, Weinberg and Nielson (2007) claim that the structure of work environment supplemented by the configuration within work setting creates the circumstances for it.

Britz (2007) proposes that although sexual harassment is usually connected with female employees, sexual harassment of male and same sex employees cannot essentially be excluded. Besides the negative influence on the harassed person, sexual harassment may result in extra costs to a company or institution because it influences general production, morale and motivation.

According to Boland (2015), sexual harassment can be carried out by supervisors, coworkers, and non-employees. As for the former, they comprise employees with adequate authority or power that their acts are considered on the behalf of the employer. Hence, they have the authority to issue certain decisions affecting the employees.

Moreover, workplace harassment comprises a series of acts of antagonistic and unethical interaction where one or more antagonists direct against a target for unpleasant purposes over a specific period of time (Guillen-Nieto, 2022).

It can be argued that in spite of the existence of numerous and heterogeneous definitions of workplace sexual harassment, all seem to share some basic components (Britz, 2007). That is, a conduct can be viewed as sexual harassment if:

1. It is associated with implicit or explicit behaviour at workplace.
2. It is unwanted/unwelcome and not mutual.
3. It affects the terms or conditions of employment.
4. It creates a hostile work environment.

It is worth mentioning, also, that sexual harassment at workplace can be verbal, nonverbal, or physical. As for the present study, verbal sexual harassment will be the one that falls within the scope of this work.

C. Harasser and Victim

It is asserted that conversations are social creations. They are issued progressively where people carry out specific joint activities in which two or more people have to coordinate with each other to succeed (Clark, 2001). The same is true for interactional sexual harassment where participants assume two distinct roles: harasser and victim.

It is mentioned that both victim and harasser can be either a woman or a man. That is, verbal sexual harassment can be produced by a man towards a woman, or by a woman against a man. Moreover, the harasser may be a direct supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a coworker, or even a client or a customer.

D. Pragmatics

According to Yule (1996), pragmatics focuses on the investigation of meaning as conveyed by a speaker and comprehended by a listener. Therefore, it is possible to assume that pragmatic analyses investigate what people express via the use of specific utterances rather than what the words in such utterances may conventionally mean.

Pragmatics represents a varied and diverse field of study which covers many aspects of the relationship between meaning and context. It has evolved quite lately, but is now an important and thriving area that continues to expand and develop (Chapman, 2013).

Since sexual harassment is an interpersonal phenomenon which involves two or more interlocutors, it belongs to pragmatics. That is, it is present in daily interpersonal interactions and exchanges which can be approached pragmatically. Consequently, this study appeals to pragmatics to explore the pragmatic forms, aspects and strategies that harassers usually employ to attack their victims.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section will be devoted to the methodology used for data analysis. Additionally, it will shed some light on the data selected to be analysed in the next section.

The model proposed for analyzing the data is built on Searle's (1975) Speech act Theory, Culpeper's (1996, 2011) model of impoliteness strategies.

A. Elements of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Four elements create an intimidating work atmosphere (Howard, 2007). First, there should be an action, for example, the harasser putting his arms around the target. This action can be verbal, physical, or visual. Second, the action in question has to be unwelcome or unwanted by the target. Third, the action specified must be sexual or sex-oriented and grounded on the target's sex or gender. Finally, there should be a noticeable economic effect on the target or a brutally negative influence on the target's work performance or work environment.

B. Types of Workplace Sexual Harassment

For understanding the phenomenon of sexual harassment, it is necessary to shed some light on its two basic types, precisely *Quid Pro Quo* and *Hostile Work Environment*. The former occurs where a sexual advance affects the employee's terms of employment. That is, when a harasser asks or obliges an employee to do sexual acts to retain a job, get a promotion or to evade receiving negative outcomes such as demotion or dismissal. However, the latter appears when employees are compelled with an intimidating, antagonistic, or unpleasant work environment (Weinberg & Nielson, 2017).

C. Pragmatic Forms of Sexual Harassment

According to Boland (2015), among the less physically threatening sexual harassment forms are the following: Sexual jokes, intimidation, humiliation, insults, and defamation.

Ritchie (2004) suggests that a joke refers to a fairly condensed text which, associated with a particular cultural group, is perceptible as owning, as its principal aim, the bringing about a delightful reaction in its reader/hearer, and which is normally recurrent in a broad array of situations.

Abumere (2021) asserts that improbable behaviour by employees like jokes, pranks and stunts may lead to a slew of frustrations accompanied by harassment claims filed against employers. Trying to play jokes on co-workers will result in workplace conflicts and lawsuits. Hence, discipline in the workplace should be one of the primary solutions to unsuitable conducts including that of joking.

Sexual intimidation is identified as a type of oppression which appears when there exists a caution that the employee will lose job benefit unless he/she approves to participate in a sexual activity. For instance, telling a person to go to a motel to negotiate a raise (Boland, 2015).

Leask (2013) states that humiliation is a demonstrative use of power versus one or more individuals. It constantly comprises many components: stripping of status; rejection or exclusion; unpredictability or arbitrariness. Besides, humiliation also involves a personal feeling of unfairness coordinated with the absence of any treatment for the unfairness experienced.

According to Ljung (2011), insults express the speaker's feelings towards the addressee at the moment of speaking. Insults vary among themselves in the way they convey their negative message. However, they have two key features: insult is treating others with an obvious absence of respect and it causes the targets to experience feelings of shame and disgrace.

Sexual harassment is assumed to be associated with acts of verbal discrimination such as insults, verbal abuse, deformation, and tense surges whose intensity, frequency, and length are used as measures to qualify the extent of its harshness (Guillen-Nieto, 2022).

Pragmatically speaking, when uttering something defamatory the speaker intends to induce a belief in the hearer and also wants that the latter to recognize the speaker's intent. The hearer of a statement searches for discovering its illocutionary point. If that statement is formulated in a direct way, the hearer will find it quite easy to arrive at the illocutionary point, whereas if the statement is made in hidden inference or it conveys conversational implicature, it will involve more efforts on the behalf of the hearer to identify the speaker's intention (Lee, 2012).

Moreover, various ways can be utilized to produce defamatory statements and among the most common is the use of derogatory or slanderous, belittling words or expressions in an explicit fashion. Nevertheless, they can also occur in a less obvious ways like figurative speech, insinuation or innuendo (Lee, 2012).

D. Pragmatic Strategies of Sexual Harassment

As for strategies of sexual harassment, they comprise two categories: speech act strategies and impoliteness strategies. The first category comprises the speech acts of threat, teasing, and insulting. As for the second, instances of workplace sexual harassment in this study are analyzed utilizing the five impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996). These include: bold on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock impoliteness, and withhold politeness.

The model of data analysis is illustrated in Figure 1:

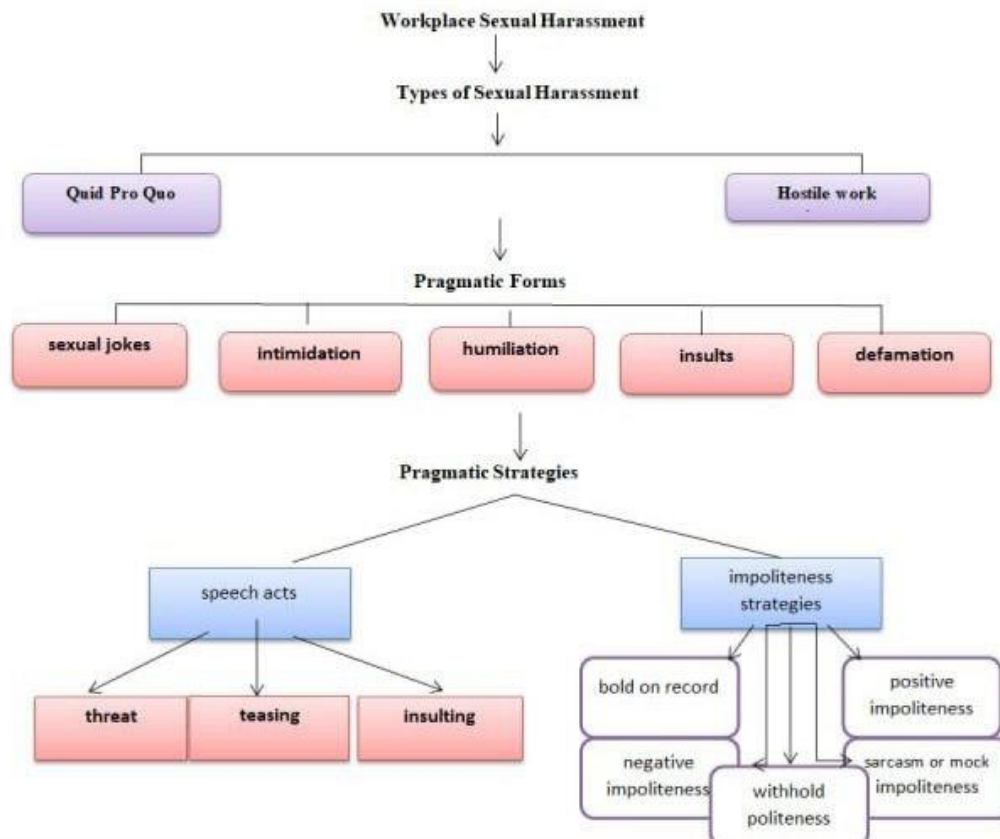


Figure 1. The Analytical Model

E. Data Description

In this work, the data are provided by the first ten episodes of the first seasons of two popular medical TV shows, *Grey's Anatomy* and *ER*. Eight different situations of sexual harassment are abstracted in order to be analyzed according to the model designed by this study. Four of them have been selected as illustrative examples to represent the analysis of the remaining situations.

The current study finds in medical TV shows a workable source of data that can achieve its aims and answer its questions. Such shows are noticeable for prevailing sexual harassment and amplifying medical scenarios including relations among medical staff and patients. Medical TV shows are known to depict situations that occur in real-life settings which can provide the context pertaining to this study.

According to Ramedan et al. (2020), a context where a significant prevailing of TV romance is inside the boundaries of an infirmary. It is encountered by diverse participants of the medical staff, yet as soon as attempts are not encouraged, it refrains from the superficially amusing maneuver of plot lines and changes into harassment.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The pragmatic analysis is done by means of the model designed by this study and which is presented in Figure 1 above.

(a). Text 1:

Richard: If you finished cleaning that wound, you can help me over here, Dr. Yang.

But Christina's distracted by something.

Richard (getting annoyed): Is the wound clean Yang?

Christina: Yes sir, but...

Richard: But what? If you plan to take up with Dr. Shepherd... if you think your job in here is to babysit me, you can think again. I have been a surgeon for longer than you have been breathing, and if I were not ready to be back in this OR, I would say so. Is that understood?

Christina: Yes, sir.

Richard: Now do we have a problem, Dr. Yang?

Christina: Yes. No! I'm thrilled to learn, sir. And grateful to be here. It's just.... his legs

Richard: What about them?

Christina: They are both left.

Richard: Find the man's leg, Yang. Find it now!

Richard: 'Bout time, Dr. Yang. I was starting to think my work here would be wasted.

Christina: I'm so sorry ... it wasn't easy to find, but I took the liberty of checking the wound and it's a very clean cut, well preserved. Sir?

Richard: Notice anything else about that leg, Yang? Anything other than that very clean cut?

Did you happen to notice, for example that it was shaved recently? Take a look at my patient, Dr. Yang. Does he look like a man who woke up and shaved one of his legs this morning?

Christina: Chief Webber, I'm so incredibly sorry, I looked everywhere but.... You found the leg?

Richard: You missed this one, Yang. But I'm sure they could use a hand down in the E. R.

([Grey's Anatomy: Season 2, Episode 6 script | Subs like Script](#))

1. Types

The instance above represents a hostile work environment which occurs as Christina is compelled with an antagonistic or unpleasant work environment due to Richard's attempt to make Christina feel inferior via reminding her that he has been a surgeon long time ago before her existence. That is, she has no right to concern about his validity for work. Besides, after her failure to find his patient's right leg, Richard dismisses her by asking her to leave the surgery room. It can be seen that he has made it difficult for her to perform her job through his persistent attempts to emphasize the idea that she is not attentive enough to find the leg of the patient.

2. Forms

This example comprises different forms of sexual harassment. The first one is intimidation when Richard frightens Christina as he asks her to find the leg quickly in order not to waste his effort and time. He deliberately insults her professional competence as he refers to her inability to recognize that the two legs belong to different patients. Another form of sexual harassment practiced by Richard is that when he humiliates Christina by making a remark about her being too late to be of assistance in the surgery room.

3. Strategies

Richard keeps practicing sexual harassment via performing a speech act of teasing to ridicule Christina for not noticing that the leg she brings belongs to a woman rather than to his patient who is a man. That is, he mocks her inability to figure that out.

A negative impoliteness strategy is utilized by Richard to mock Christina to show his relative power over her. Additionally, another strategy is employed when he associates her with a negative aspect via accusing her of determining to work with another surgeon Dr. Shepherd. He also wants to impinge on her through personalization via the use of the pronouns *I* and *you*.

(b). Text 2:

Romano: Amongst other things. How would you like to become the Chicago area Coordinator for the HemoAid OR study?

Corday: Are you joking?

Romano: The drug company's expanding to more sites, asking me to oversee them. If you join me, you 'll climb the ladder from worker bee to queen bee.

Corday: That's a generous offer. Is it contingent on me dropping my ER study?

Romano: Well, there's no way to say this except flat out... so here goes... Lizzie our relationship hasn't moved in the direction I would have liked. Partly because I have trouble communicating these types of feelings but... the fact is, I find you very attractive.

Corday: Dr. Romano.

Romano: Wait. let me finish. I don't know what your long-term plans are and I'm not foolish enough to think colleagues could have romantic involvement without entanglements. But we obviously have common interests; the same insane schedules; it makes sense. So, I'd really like you to consider... a date. Going out with me, on a date. What do you say?

Corday: Well, I'm flattered. And shocked.

Romano: Really? I thought you could right through me.

Corday: No. Not at all. However, seeing as I do work for you, I don't think it would be a good idea.

(<https://cordayandromano.tripod.com/id24.html>)

1. Types

Unlike the first example, the present instance is marked by the use of a Quid Pro Quo type of harassment. Here, Romano asks Lizzie a favour with sexual orientation in order to get a promotion. That is, he offers her a new position as the coordinator of the HemoAid OR study in Chicago area in case she agrees to date him. Romano directly harasses Lizzie by accusing her of being ambitious who desires to achieve a higher position in that hospital.

2. Forms

Romano belittles Lizzie via treating her unfairly as he asks her to choose between accepting a promotion and going out in date with him or giving up her study. This makes her feel powerless, small and inferior. Additionally, another sexual harassment assumes the form of insult can be noticed here. The harasser conveys a negative message about Lizzie by portraying her as being a working bee who desires to be the queen bee instantly. He wants to amplify the idea she has a burning ambition to occupy one of the best positions among her colleagues.

3. Strategies

The harasser performs a speech act of teasing in order to criticize and ostracizing the victim by portraying her as being a working bee who has the ambition to transform into a queen bee quickly. Moreover, a positive impoliteness strategy assumes the form of using inappropriate identity markers can be noticed. Romano addresses the hearer by using her nickname even though they are not intimate friends. Moreover, a negative impoliteness strategy is employed when Romano resorts to personalization through the use of the pronouns *you* and *I*.

(c). Text 3:

Alex: 4 B's got post-op pneumonia. Let's start antibiotics.

Nurse: Are you sure that's the right diagnosis?

Alex: I don't know. I'm only an intern. Here's an idea: why don't you go spend four years in med school and then let me know if it's the right diagnosis? She's short of breath, she's got fever, she's a post-op.... start the antibiotics!

The nurse backs off, insulted.

Alex: God, I hate nurses.

(<https://script-pdf.s3.amazonaws.com/greys-anatomy-pilot-1-tv-script-pdf.pdf>)

1. Types

Regarding sexual harassment type, this example is characterized by the occurrence of a hostile work environment. Alex who is an intern starts bullying a nurse by producing verbal aggressive behaviour which is presented in the form of taunting and expressing hatred towards nurses. He deliberately wants to cast doubt on her professional abilities and amplify the idea that he is the only one who can come up with a right diagnosis. Such aggression will have brutal negative influence on the nurse's work performance.

2. Forms

When it comes to the forms of sexual harassment, Alex employs both humiliation and insult to sexually harass his victim. He openly belittles the nurse via showing how she is inferior to him since she has not joined medicine school and spent as many years as he has in studying there. Moreover, Alex insults the nurse by stressing the idea that she is not supposed to argue with him about the soundness of the diagnosis since she lacks the skills of being an intern.

3. Strategies

Insulting and teasing are the two speech acts that are employed in the instance above. First, Alex expresses hatred towards nurses. He treats the nurse with an obvious lack of respect and that results in the nurse's experiencing the feelings of shame and disgrace. Besides, he teases her via making fun of her inability to know or figure out the right diagnosis.

A panorama of impoliteness strategies is used in the example specified. First, Alex resorts to a positive impoliteness strategy as he tries to disassociate from the other party. He denies association or a common ground with the nurse and makes it clear that they don't have the same professional competency. Another strategy is encountered when he makes the nurse feel uncomfortable by insulting her. Moreover, the speaker utilizes a negative impoliteness strategy when he belittles the nurse and causes her to feel utter inferiority. He also associates her with a negative aspect via personalization through the use of the pronouns *I* and *you*.

(d). Text 4:

Izzie: It's not fair. Two major surgeries today. Two incredible surgeries. And I am stuck doing paperwork with evil spawn.

Alex: I am not that evil. Unless you like evil.

Izzie: Oh please. Seriously, you're flirting with me? Seriously?

Alex: I have a certain charm, admit it.

Izzie: Do you ever wake up in the morning realize nobody likes you, and, oh, I don't know.... care?

Alex: Oh, I think somebody likes me.

Izzie: You are like, an insect. Or something that slithers.

Alex: You think I am an ass. That I hook up with women for sport.

Izzie: How long has he been under so far?

Alex: Thirty-three minutes. But, with you I'd be different.

Izzie: It's going too slowly.

Alex: I know..... if anything, you'd probably be using me. And I've been told I am good.....

(http://cfs4.tistory.com/upload_control/download.blog)

1. Types

Here, the harasser utilizes a Quid pro quo harassment. In this example, the act of harassment is committed by an intern (Alex) towards another intern (Izzie). Despite Izzie's effort to ignore Alex and resist his attempts to make advance towards her, he keeps on irritating her with his sexual comments regarding his ability to make love.

2. Forms

It is observed that the harasser resorts to the use of sexual anecdote. Alex keeps on telling Izzie how long it takes him to make love and how good he is at that. That is, he is directly asking for a sexual favour despite Izzie's futile attempts to stop him by insulting him through the use of words such as evil spawn and insect. Another form of harassment

appears when Alex humiliates Izzie by making her feel powerless and small. He disrespects her via treating her like any other girls with whom he usually flirts.

3. Strategies

In his drive to get Izzie to agree to date him, Alex issues a speech act of teasing. He tries to irritate her by mentioning his charm and abilities to make love. Teasing has the function of producing a sense of playfulness and creating a bond between the two.

This example includes a spectrum of impoliteness strategies. First, Alex employs a positive impoliteness strategy assumes the form of taboo words and phrases such as ass and hook up with women. Then, he makes Izzie feel uncomfortable through the use of sexual comments. Moreover, A negative impoliteness strategy occurs when Alex positions himself closer to Izzie than their relation permits. He also speaks about information that is too intimate given the relationship in question. Hence, he invades her space both literally and figuratively.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is meant to support the findings of the previous analysis quantitatively. It presents the results as shown through the following descriptive statistical tables.

TABLE 1
STATISTICS OF THE TYPES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN MEDICAL TV SHOWS

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Quid pro quo	3	37%
Hostile work environment	5	62%

The results shown on Table 1 above demonstrate that both types of sexual harassment outlined by this study are used in medical TV shows. However, the findings show that hostile work environment prevails here. This is enhanced by the percentage 62%.

TABLE 2
STATISTICS OF THE PRAGMATIC FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN MEDICAL TV SHOWS

Pragmatic Forms	Frequency	Percentage
Humiliation	7	43%
Insult	5	31%
Intimidation	2	12%
Sexual Jokes	2	12%
Deformation	0	0%

Table 2 confirms that the pragmatic forms of sexual harassment are utilized by harassers in the data under scrutiny. Nevertheless, humiliation prioritizes with percentage that amounts to 43%.

TABLE 3
STATISTICS OF THE PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN MEDICAL TV SHOWS

Pragmatic Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Impoliteness strategies	18	66%
Speech act strategies	9	33%

The results displayed in Table 3 below indicate that the pragmatic strategies of sexual harassment are frequently resorted to by harassers in medical TV shows. Nevertheless, impoliteness strategies are more frequent than speech act strategies. This is enhanced by the percentage 66%. This finding confirms the hypothesis "Harassers in medical TV shows employ some pragmatic strategies more than others to harass their victims and achieve their goals".

VI. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the qualitative and quantitative analyses conducted above, the following conclusions can be introduced:

1. The elements of sexual harassment demarcated in this study are ubiquitous in the instances under study.
2. Most instances of sexual harassment examined have demonstrated that harassers make use of hostile work environment. This can be attributed to the persistent inclination of male employers to irritate female employees. This creates an unpleasant work environment which reduces their productivity and hinders their contribution to the industrial firm.
3. Concerning forms of sexual harassment, the examples of medical TV shows under scrutiny are marked by the occurrence of various forms. These comprise humiliation, insult, intimidation, and sexual anecdotes. The most common of these in the two shows specified is that of humiliation.
4. The findings of the study have revealed that harassers employ different pragmatic aspects to harass their victims. These include speech acts and impoliteness strategies. The former are realized by threat, teasing and insulting, whereas

the latter are achieved by means of a spectrum of positive and negative impoliteness strategies. However, statistical analysis shows that impoliteness strategies occur more frequently than speech act strategies.

5. The eclectic model of sexual harassment designed by the study has proven to be successfully workable in analyzing the data of this work.

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