

# Face Value in Conversational Closings: Insights from *Desperate Housewives*

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## Abstract

This study investigates face value in conversational closings in American soap opera *Desperate Housewives*. Using qualitative method combined with quantitative method, we collected altogether 52 scripted conversation excerpts among the five leading characters and analyzed them within the theoretical framework of face and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Analyses of the scripted conversations showed that conversational closings in *Desperate Housewives* consist of three main patterns, closing, pre-closing (+insertion) + closing (+after-close), and leave-taking. Most pre-closing and closing strategies involve face consideration, with the most frequently used ones being “giving reasons”, “mentioning a future relationship”, “discourse markers”, and “apology for leaving”. These strategies are deployed to save either the positive face or the negative face of the other party. Some conversations end with one party’s walking away due to anger or pique, consequently threatening the other’s face, but it occurs in irregular situations for dramatic effects. The findings suggest that closing a conversation can threaten both the positive face and negative face of the other party, and that in doing so, even familiar people or friends are concerned about interlocutors’ “face” or “face-saving” by deploying some strategies. This study contributes to both the conversational closings study and face and politeness study.

**Keywords:** face, conversational closing, positive politeness, negative politeness, *Desperate Housewives*

## 1. Introduction

Conversation “must be brought to a close” (Wardhaugh, 2000:294). Closing a conversation is as significant as opening one, in that if it is performed appropriately, it will help guarantee a harmonious relationship among interlocutors and vice versa. Just as Wardhaugh (1985:156) states, ending a conversation is “just as much an art as initiating speech with another person or interrupting successfully”. Far more complicated than simply saying “goodbye” to each other, closing a conversation in social interactions is a skill or art, so to speak.

Conversational closings, as part of conversations, have been examined from the perspective of conversation sequences (Bou-Franch, 2010; Button, 1987; Laver, 1975; Mondada, 2006; Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2011; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), or the perspective of cooperative principles to make the interaction go smoothly (Wardhaugh, 1985, 2000). Hardly no study has been found to provide an investigation on face and politeness involved in closings, and it is perfectly appropriate to use scripted interactions to analyze some linguistic features of natural conversations (Quaglio, 2009). Therefore, the present research examines the conversational closings in *Desperate Housewives*, aiming to find out whether face value is taken into account among housewives in closing a conversation, and the possible strategies that can be deployed to avoid face-threat. In order to achieve this research aim, two research questions are meant to be answered in this study:

- 1) What are the strategies employed by the leading characters to close a conversation in *Desperate Housewives*?
- 2) Which strategies are meant to reduce the face threats in closing a conversation in *Desperate Housewives*?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Face and Politeness

As one of the first western writers to examine face, Goffman (1959:1971) grafted Durkheim’s (1915) religious ritual onto daily communications to illustrate people’s interactive behavior of giving face to each other. Goffman (1967:5) defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”.

Based on Goffman's works, Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of "face" is derived from the English folk term. They assume that "all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) 'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." (p.61). Face is assumed to be something that can be lost, maintained, saved and enhanced, and it should be constantly addressed by participants in interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, participants are concerned with maintaining or saving the co-participant's face in interaction.

Positive face and negative face are the dual aspects of face. By positive face, Brown and Levinson (1987: 62) mean "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others", while by negative face, they mean "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others". Social life requires participants to carry out a variety of acts that threaten face (Face Threatening Acts or FTA), for example, making requests, asking for information, criticizing. In order to keep the communication running smoothly, rational agents try to employ some politeness strategies to reduce the threat, consisting of a wide variety of ways of using language (lexical, syntactical, grammatical). Accordingly, positive politeness aims to save the positive face of the co-participants, the positive self-image they claim for themselves, and negative politeness aims to satisfy the co-participants' negative face, the basic want to maintain claims of territory and autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Brown and Levinson's theory is very influential and applicable. Their contribution to the linguistic manifestation of politeness is quite insightful to researchers who have interest in the relationship between language use and face value. Felix-Brasdefer (2006: 2158) investigated refusal strategies in terms of linguistic politeness in a Mexican community, and the politeness is primarily conducted through "formulaic and semi-formulaic expressions" to weaken the illocutionary force of a refusal. The results of this empirical study showed that social factors, such as power and distance, play a crucial role in determining appropriate degrees of politeness in Mexican society (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006). Sifianou (2012) examined the relation between face and disagreement and argued that disagreement is not necessarily related to face-threatening, impoliteness, but is a complex and multidirectional act, depending on cultural parameters. Dynel (2015) examined impolite exchanges in fictional interaction from the television drama series entitled "House" under the framework of face and politeness, and she argued that impoliteness as a component of fictional interaction is to entertain recipients. Tawilapakul (2022) examined polite particles in Thai drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) and found that both the particles *khá* and *khǎ* involve distance (D) and Power (P), but degree of imposition (R) is only involved in the former.

Since participants cooperate to maintain face in interaction and also assume the co-participants to do so (Brown & Levinson, 1987), if participants intend to keep the conversation go smoothly, they have to address face and politeness constantly (Wardhaugh, 2000). Therefore, we can assume that face theory can also be applied in studying conversational closings.

## 2.2 Previous Studies on Closings

Conversations are not simply ended arbitrarily, and how conversations end influences the participants' perception of quality of the conversations (Guydish & Tree, 2023). Previous studies of closing are mainly conducted from the perspective of conversation analysis and pragmatics.

The study of closings may trace back to the 1970s and 1980s, with Schegloff and Sacks' *Opening up Closings* (1973) being the first to describe how conversations are brought to an end. As stated by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), the closing begins with an initiation "warranting" the intention of at least one speaker to end the conversation. They divide closing into three sequencing parts as pre-closing, terminal exchange and the other possible closing sections such as future arrangements. They also suggest some methods of opening up a closing: pre-closing markers, such as "well", "ok", and other closing variations with certain information, including giving excuse, pre-topic closing offering, making arrangements and so on (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Laver (1975) identified six closing strategies in which some may be considered as a compensation for Schegloff and Sacks' findings, for example, "assessing the quality of encounter". Similarly, Button (1987) examines closings in conversation from the perspective of "moving out" and provides the sequence types regularly deployed to move out of closings, such as arrangements, back-reference, topic initial elicitors, in-conversation objects, solicitude, reasons for calls and appreciations, which to some extent compensate for the previous theories. Based on Schegloff and Sacks (1973), Coronel-Molina (1998:60) examined Spanish telephone conversation closings and identified a different closing sequence (1) preclosing, (2) introduction of a new topic, (3) recapitulation, and (4) final closing, and a closing adjacency triplet rather than a closing adjacency pair.

In addition, when a closing is suspending, some high-grade assessments, such as "lovely", "brilliant" can be used when there are such embedded actions, such as "making arrangements" to resume a suspended closing (Antaki, 2002). Park (2010) examined the use of "anyway" as a sequence-closing device in context in which the participants

face an interactional impasse, suggesting that the closure-relevant “anyway” is designed to indicate an impending break in contiguity and often produced in a dispreferred environment in which the participants are not in alignment. To supplement cultural varieties to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), by examining closings in Chinese telephone conversations, Liu (2015) found similar precedue of closing by Chinese participants, but also some sequential features exclusive to Chinese.

Closings in institutional settings also draw researchers’ attention, with some focusing on medical interaction. White, Rosson, Christensen, Hart and Levinson (1997) studied the closing moments of the medical visit and outlined two distinct organizational works of closure. The frequency of new problems in closure suggests that physicians may have the potential to improve their effectiveness. Robinson (2001) examined the interactional organizations used to negotiate the closure of the business of encounters using conversation analysis methodology and found that the arrangement sequence and the final-concern sequence are the two physician-initiated communication practices that are used to accomplish such negotiations.

Some researchers begin to pay attention to multimodal aspects of conversational closings. Mondada (2006) investigated online interaction and multimodal practice concerning the end of turn and the closing of the sequence. The research deals with participants’ multimodal online analysis by focusing on projecting the end of a turn and of an activity phase. Laurier (2008) studied the important gestures and materials in closing sequence in one of the many face-to-face conversations through the examination of talk in coffee house. Broth and Mondada (2013) argued that initiating walking away projects the activity of closing, and it is negotiable and can be aligned and misaligned. Similarly, Tuncer (2015) identified that body orientations, position in space, etc. can be resources for closing a conversation in office. Song and Licoppe (2023: 16) examined the closings in mediated interaction, namely live video streams, and found that the live video streams are oriented to a closing and a four-part closing sequence has been identified, including “Streamer’s generic closing, audience members’ closing messages, recipient-designed acknowledgment and/or closing by streamer, repetition of generic closing by streamer”.

Closings in conversation are also examined from pragmatic perspectives. Wardhaugh (1985:156) stated that when participants seek to close a conversation, they often pretend that they are reluctant to cease. They want to leave the others with the impression that they would rather continue with the conversation, but some exterior conditions or events stand in the way, for example with *well, back to work, I must be going, sorry!*. Even some gestures and eye contacts may function as a way of closing the conversation (see also Wardhaugh, 2000). Wardhaugh (1985) also suggested that closing a conversation is a cooperative activity, and both parties are required to maneuver jointly toward a closing. Wardhaugh (2000) further pointed out that pre-closing may be regarded as a sub-variety of mitigating expression, which can allow the interlocutors to preserve either the reality or the appearance of cooperation. He compares a particular conversation to one in the long stream of conversations, and if participants want to keep the steam flowing, they must constantly address issues of face and politeness, which, so to speak, touches upon the face theory and cooperative principle in pragmatics. Montgomery (1996) examined audio-taped conversation and found that the conversation initiators employ more polite expressions than other conversation speakers in closing a conversation; women are more polite than male in closing a conversation; ethnicity is also a factor influencing politeness in conversation closing; but power is not found to be an important variable.

The studies above show that closings are mainly studied from the perspective of conversation analysis and pragmatics. The studies from pragmatics perspective usually focus on politeness in closing, but few of them examined face value involved in closing a conversation, which is focused on in this study.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Data

Data of the present study were selected from the scripted conversations in *Desperate Housewives*, which was once an extremely popular American soap opera with 40 million audience in America (<https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/931086714170051099.html>) and also very high audience rate in the world. As a soap opera broadcasted in over 100 countries, it represented certain culture sweeping the whole America at that time.

Quaglio (2009) compared the scripted language of American soap opera *Friends* to natural language, and found that scripted language in *Friends* share the core linguistic features with face-to-face conversation, and the use of scripted dialogue as a “surrogate to nature conversation” to analyze certain linguistic features is perfectly appropriate” (p.149). Similarly, according to Dynel (2015), although the conversations in soap opera are prefabricated, fictional interactions in drama or film bear great resemblance to everyday talk and are “amenable to the same linguistic models and tenets as their real life counterparts” (p.157). Therefore, this study takes the scripted conversation from

*Desperate Housewives* as the data source to analyze the face value involved in it. The following will introduce *Desperate Housewives* and the criteria of data selection.

### 3.1.1 Desperate Housewives

*Desperate Housewives* consists of 8 seasons (23 episodes per season) altogether, lasting from 2004 to 2012. It centers on the stories of five leading characters --- Susan, Bree, Lynette, Gabrelle and Edie --- in suburban America. As neighbors and good friends, their relationships are quite subtle and delicate, for they are both concerned about and jealous of each other. The five leading characters are introduced as follows:

Bree is a housewife who seems perfect to others but extremely picky to her family. Although she and her husband are admired by others, their relationship is very tense.

Lynette is a superwoman who quits her job after giving birth to three children, who are her entire job as a housewife and often make her outrageous. However, as time goes on, she decides to return to work and becomes very successful again.

Susan, an artist for children's book, is dizzy but kind. After divorcing her husband, she lives with her daughter and bravely pursues true love.

Gabrelle, once a famous model in New York, is young and sexy. Her husband is a successful businessman, who often gives her luxury presents but spends little time with her. After having an affair with her gardener, Gabrelle finally realizes it is her husband who really loves her and she loves.

Edie, a sexy lady in the community, usually seduces the married men in the neighborhood, so she is sometimes isolated by others. In fact, she is a frank woman who is eager for friendship.

The first four housewives are much closer with each other; they meet each other every day and play poker together every week. However, Edie is not invited to join in their activities and feels isolated.

### 3.1.2 Data in Present Research Domain

The conversational closings are scattered among 180 episodes in 8 seasons with each episode lasting over 40 minutes, and 113 episodes in the first 5 seasons were examined for this study. The conversations among the five leading characters were selected as data for the present study for the following reasons.

- 1) As suggested by Schegloff and Sacks (1973), what this study tries to deal with is the problem of closing a conversation that ends a state of talk. Therefore, exchanges among family members at home and those among employees who share an office will not fall into our domain. That is because the family members or employees "could be said to be in a continuing state of incipient talk" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973:325), and they don't need to close a conversation with closing sections or terminal exchanges.
- 2) In *Desperate Housewives*, there are many conversations without closing sections or terminal exchanges probably for the sake of compactness, which will surely be left out of our research domain.
- 3) Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987:61) argument, face is the want of every "competent adult member", so the conversations with teenagers or children in it won't be included.
- 4) Since telephone conversations are somewhat different from face-to-face interactions in terms of greetings and closings, only face-to-face interactions in *Desperate Housewives* are studied in this study, with telephone conversations being excluded.

In a word, only the face-to-face conversations between adult interlocutors with clear closing exchanges or leaving of at least one participant will be examined in the present study, with conversations in a continuing state of talk being left out. Based on this, 52 scripted conversations from the first 5 seasons are selected for analysis, and most of these conversations take place in their neighborhood, shopping mall, etc.

### 3.2 Procedure

The conversational closings under examination are selected from the scripts of the first five seasons, which are downloaded from kekeEnglish (<http://www.kekenet.com/Soft/187.shtml>). These scripted conversations were transcribed by professionals, and their reliability is high after being compared with the actual video scenes. Also, we peruse the video scenes to check the accuracy before we do the analysis. Only those that end with explicit terminal exchanges or leave-taking of at least one party, namely the conversations that have been closed somehow, fall into the domain of present research. These scripted conversations in *Desperate Housewives* were analyzed using the qualitative method combined with quantitative method.

The procedure of this study is as follows. First, all the conversations among the five leading characters were collected out of the scripts. Second, the conversations which have been ended somehow, such as with a closing or one of the characters' leave-taking, were selected from the collection, leaving out the conversations with no ending. Thirdly, quantitative method was used to calculate the predominant pattern of closing, as the closing patterns in the target conversations were sorted out and counted according to their different patterns. To be specific, the conversations with pre-closing, only with closing, and those only with one's leaving as an end are sorted out respectively, which are the three main categories. Finally, how the pre-closing and closing strategies are related to face value, namely whether they are deployed to save positive or negative face of the co-participant, will be analyzed.

### 3.3 Analyzing Framework

First, the study draws on the closing types identified by previous researchers, such as Schegloff and Sacks (1973), to outline the closing patterns employed by the five leading characters to end conversations. Pre-closing and closing are the two most common elements in closing a conversation. Second, Brown and Levinson's (1987) face and politeness theory is used to analyze the conversational closings in the present study, and the closings are examined to see which strategies are deployed in them to save positive face or negative face of the other party according to the face and politeness theory. The politeness strategies include "providing overwhelming reasons", "begging forgiveness", "in-group address", "discourse markers", "imperatives" "giving reasons" "apologies", etc.

The following typical example will be illustrated to show how the closings in the scripted conversation are analyzed.

#### Excerpt 1-11

Gabrielle: "Tom! Lynette! What are you doing here?"

Tom: "We're buying a new water heater. Um, how 'bout you?"

Gabrielle: "Just doing a little shopping, trying to get my mind off things."

....

Lynette: "Uh-huh. A little formal for the mall."

Gabrielle: "Oh, uh, you know, I wanted to match the shoes to the dress. This is, uh, Sarah, my shopping buddy. We like to hit the boutiques together."

Lynette: "Okay. Well, you gals, um, shop your little hearts out. See you later."

Gabrielle: "Bye."

(They walk off. Sarah waves after them and Gabrielle sighs irritably.)

In this conversation, Gabrielle was doing a part-time job in the shopping mall and ran into her friend Lynette. Gabrielle did not want her friend to know the fact and told a lie that she was shopping with someone. So, Lynette intended to end the embarrassing moment and pre-closed the conversation with "Okay, well", "you gals" "shop your little hearts out" and then closed the conversation with "see you later". In pre-closing this conversation, "Okay", "well" are discourse markers to soften farewell, which is the strategy to reduce the negative face threat of closing. "You gals" is the in-group address, and "shop your little hearts out" is an imperative for the interest of the addressee, both of which are strategies to show positive politeness. "See you later" is to close the conversation, which saves the positive face of the hearer by mentioning a future relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

## 4. Results

In this section, we will first present different patterns of closing a conversation in *Desperate Housewives*. Then, these closing strategies will be analyzed to see how they are related to face value.

### 4.1 Different Patterns of Closing a Conversation

Analyses of the 52 scripted conversations collected among the five leading characters show that although the ways to close their face-to-face conversations vary, four elements are typically included: a closing expression (C for short), a pre-closing (P for short), insertions (I for short) and after-close (A for short). However, these elements appear in the closing sections unevenly in three main patterns. The first main pattern is closing, the second main pattern is the one initiated with pre-closing, and the third main pattern is leave-taking (without either closing or pre-closing), for each of which there are some subtypes. Table 4.1 below presents the closing patterns in *Desperate Housewives*.

Table 4.1. Closing patterns in *Desperate Housewives* (N = 52)

NO.	Closing patterns	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Closing [C]	<b>24</b>	<b>46.2</b>
	1) Closing without a reply	13	25
	2) Closing with a reply	11	21.2
2	Pre-closing (+insertion) + closing (+ after-close) [P (I) C (A)]	<b>14</b>	<b>26.9</b>
	1) Pre-closing + closing [PC]	8	15.4
	2) Pre-closing + closing + after close [P C A]	4	7.7
	3) Pre-closing + insertion + closing [P I C]	2	3.8
3	Leave-taking [LT]	<b>14</b>	<b>26.9</b>
	1) with anger, pique	11	21.2
	2) without anger, pique	3	5.8
	Total	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>

The reason why some symbols are put into parentheses in the second main type is that they are optional in that main pattern. In *Desperate Housewives*, the housewives sometimes finish their talk and then take leave directly, without pre-closing or closing, so the leave-taking undertakes the function of conversational closing under those circumstances.

#### 4.1.1 Closing (C)

As Table 4.1 shows, 24 out of 52 conversations end only with closing but no pre-closing, which takes up as much as 46.2%. For example:

##### Excerpt 1-3

Lynette: *You know what, it's not gonna change until you resolve your issues with that man.*

Susan: *What, you mean forgive him?*

Lynette: *Yeah.*

Susan: *You know, I've lived with this bitterness so long, I think I'd be lonely without it.*

[C] Lynette: **Honey. Get a pet.** (*Susan smiles and leaves*) **See ya.**

In conversation Excerpt 1-3 (Season1, Episode3), after Lynette offers Susan a piece of advice “Get a pet” to the trouble disclosed by Susan, she does not pre-close the conversation but ends it directly with “See ya”. This kind of ending is not rare in the collected conversations.

In addition, the closing section is not always an exchange, and the others’ response may be slot or in gestures, such as waving. In Excerpt 1-3 above, Susan just took a leaving without saying anything back, probably because the leave-taking is already a gesture of closing. According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 295), a terminal exchange can be used to lift the “transition relevance of possible utterance completions”. However, about 13 out of the 24 conversations end up without the others’ reply.

Likewise, sometimes, a speaker wants to end the conversation and ask for a leaving by saying “Would you guys excuse me?” or “Excuse me” without waiting for the answer, too. For example:

##### Excerpt 3-20

Susan: *Hell, there's some things we don't need to know about.*

(*Gabrielle looks over at Edie's place, where Edie is putting the trash out.*)

[C] Gabrielle: **Would you guys excuse me?** (*She leaves.*)

Among the 24 conversations, two of them even end by directly asking the addressee to leave so as to end the conversation, usually with some emotions, such as anger, disagreement. For instance:

### Excerpt 5-19

Susan: *Wow. You're just a giver.*

Edie: *Fine. Use all of your energy judging me, ignore the real problem. But let me tell you something. This is my area of expertise, and I saw the look in that woman's eyes. She's not in it for the free meals. She's in it for keeps.*

[C] Susan: **You should leave now.** (*Susan turns and starts to close the door*)

Edie: *You know, Susan, I'm trying to help my neighbor out. I thought it was the moral thing to do.* (*Edie leaves*)

In Excerpt 5-19, Susan is judging Edie by using an ironic tone, which Edie has identified and defended herself. This shows that Susan disagrees with Edie on what Edie has done, and she becomes angry, so she tries to end the conversation by asking Edie to leave. In a word, asking someone to leave is an unusual way of closing a conversation.

#### 4.1.2 Pre-Closing -- (Insertion) -- Close -- (After-Close) P (I) C (A)

This category P (I) C (A) is an umbrella category composed of three subcategories of PC, PIC, PCA, and they are put together because they all have the element “pre-closing”. Altogether 14 out of 52 scripted conversations fall into this domain. One example is presented to illustrate each of the three patterns.

### Excerpt 1-10

Lynette: *Really.*

Edie: *Yeah. Lesser of two evils.*

Lynette: *Huh.*

[P]+[C] Edie: **Anyway, I've got to find a key. See you later.**

[C] Lynette: **Bye.**  
(*Edie walks off.*)

In this PC example, Edie uses the expression “anyway” as a discourse marker to conclude or end, and also a reason for leaving “I've got to find a key” to pre-close the conversation. However, she doesn't wait for Lynette's agreement to end and close the conversation with “see you later”. This is different from the view that the pre-closing section of a conversation is constructed by adjacency pairs (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

As for the PIC pattern, after the pre-closing, participants may raise other unspoken topics, such as initiating a new topic, or referring to what has been discussed earlier (see Coronel-Molina, 1998; Robinson, 2001). Therefore, pre-closing does not guarantee a closing. Two out of 14 cases fall into this pattern. The following is one example.

### Excerpt 2-16

Gabrielle: *Oh, Bree, she didn't trash you. Honest.*

Bree: *Well, good. I mean, I just--I really wouldn't want you to get the wrong impression. Well, I'm--I'm going to the mall. They're having a white sale today. I think I'm gonna get a new bath mat [P]. Oh, does anyone need one[I]?*

Gabrielle: *No, I'm good.*

[C] Bree: **Okay, take care.** (*Bree walks away.*)

In this conversation, “well, I'm--I'm going to the mall. They're having a white sale today.” is used to initiate the end of the conversation as a pre-closing, but it doesn't take a “bye” in the following as expected, but a question “I think I'm gonna get a new bath mat. Oh, does anyone need one?”, which can be considered as an inserted question and is answered by Gabrielle. By the last sentence “Okay, take care.”, Bree finally closes the conversation and leaves.

Overall, 4 out of these 14 scripted conversations contain an after-close, forming the pattern PCA. The following example will help to understand.

### Excerpt 3-20

Gabrielle: *Me, too. I think it would've been so much fun.*

Susan: *Yeah.*

[P]+[C] Gabrielle: ***Well, I gotta go. I'm gonna meet Francois.***

[C]+[A] Susan: ***See ya. Oh, by the way...you know that one percent sliver of a doubt thing I told you about? Totally gone. Any question I had about Mike's been answered.***

Gabrielle: *That must feel really great.*

Susan: *Yeah. I feel really good about this.*

Gabrielle: *I do, too.*

In this conversation, “well” can be considered as a pre-closing (Haddington, 2019), and “I gotta go. I'm gonna meet Francois” as a closing. The answer from Susan “see ya” functions as the response to the closing. However, Susan then initiates a new topic using “by the way” and two exchanges occur consequently, which can be considered as an after-close. In sum, the three sub-categories all have pre-closing to initiate the end of the conversation, with different optional developments of the conversation.

#### 4.1.3 Leave-Taking (LT)

Very interestingly, a conversation can end abruptly without any terminal exchange at all. Overall, 14 out of the 52 conversations belong to this kind. It is found that all of them end with the speaker’s leave-taking as a closing (see also Broth and Mondada, 2013), but 11 out of 14 end with such emotions as anger, pique.

##### **Excerpt 3-20**

Edie: *And what if I don't?*

Gabrielle: *Then be prepared to suffer the consequences.*

Edie: *Oh, please. You are as tall as my legs. What are you gonna do?*

Gabrielle: *You're about to find out.*

***(Gabrielle leaves ) (LT)***

In this conversation, Gabrielle is very angry about Edie dating her ex-husband and tries to threaten her. After finishing her words, she just leaves angrily without closing the conversation. According to Dynel (2015), film talk is abundant in impoliteness, more frequent than real interactions, and it is a component of film and submitted to the same criteria as real-life counterparts. Therefore, the impoliteness in this situation is appropriate to the participants. One more example:

##### **Excerpt 2-15**

Lynette: *On any given day, how many glasses of wine do you put away?*

Bree: *I will not be spoken to like that. I just won't.*

***(Bree walks away into her house) (LT).***

Bree in the conversation above is judged and criticized by her friend Lynette, but she thinks it unfair. So, after Lynette asks the question, she defends herself and then leaves without any closing.

By and large, conversations among housewives in *Desperate Housewives* may end in various ways. Mostly, conversations usually end simply by “bye” or some substitutes performing the same function (see Haddington, 2019), and some end politely with a pre-closing, but some end by walking away without any terminal exchanges at all.

#### 4.2 Closing Strategies and Face Value

What is noteworthy is that ending a conversation involves face threats, as indicated by Brown and Levinson (1987). Also as mentioned above, negative face is the basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Terminating a conversation is essentially to impose it on the addressee, so the addressee’s negative face will be threatened. Therefore, the speakers often pretend that they are reluctant to leave the hearers, leaving the impression that they would like to continue with the conversation but some exterior events stand in the way (Wardhaugh, 1985). That is why some strategies are employed to end the conversation to reduce face threat.

##### 4.2.1 Pre-Closing Strategies and Face Value

As shown in Table 4.2 below, the housewives normally deploy 5 strategies to initiate the end of the conversation, and

sometimes more than one strategy is employed at a time. “Giving reasons” and “discourse markers” are the most frequently used ones, taking up 80.7% altogether. “Apology for leaving” or “in-group address” is sometimes employed in the pre-closing section of conversation. Very rarely, advice (imperative), which is to suggest the addressee to do something for their interest, is essentially an invitation to close the conversation in particular contexts.

Table 4.2. Pre-closing strategies in *Desperate Housewives*

Pre-closing Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Giving reasons	14	45.2
Discourse markers	11	35.5
Apology for leaving	3	9.7
In-group Address	2	6.5
Advice (Imperative)	1	3.2

One of the most preferred pre-closing strategies is “giving reasons”. Reasons like “I’ve got to find a key.”, “That’s Andrew back from Camp Hennessey.”, “They’re having a white sale today. I think I’m gonna get a new bath mat.”, “you guys are busy.” vary in different situations. As pointed out by Brown and Levinson (1987), one way to show negative politeness is to give overwhelming reasons to communicate participant’s want not to impinge on the co-participant. Such reason-giving strategy is widely used in closing a conversation; especially the expressions such as “got to” “gotta” are employed to show the necessity or strong reasons for the speakers to end the conversation, which consequently saves the hearer’s negative face.

The other most frequently used strategy “discourse markers” also play a significant role in reducing the face threat in ending a conversation. In the conversational closings examined, the discourse marker “well” occurs eight times, “anyway” once, “ok” once, “then” once, with “well” taking the vast majority (see Haddington, 2019). Schegloff and Sacks (1973) view “ok” or “well” as a possible pre-close, and Grieve (2010) considers particles such as “ok”, “so” as initiation markers of pre-close. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:152), “ok”, “well” can soften farewells; “then”, as a conclusory marker, can indicate a pseudo agreement, so it works as a way of achieving positive politeness. Based on this, it can be inferred that “anyway” as a conclusory marker performs the similar function, too (see also Park, 2010).

In the conversation 3-20, the occurrence of “well” is used to mitigate the face threat of leave-taking. Therefore, these linguistic devices can be considered as markers to mitigate negative face threat caused by terminating a conversation. The speakers show not only the necessity to leave but also a recognition of the interlocutor’s acknowledgement of the move (Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2010).

### Excerpt 3-20

Gabrielle: *Well, I gotta go. I'm gonna meet Francois.*

Susan: *See ya. Oh, by the way...you know that one percent sliver of a doubt thing I told you about? Totally gone. Any question I had about Mike's been answered.*

Gabrielle: *That must feel really great.*

Susan: *Yeah. I feel really good about this.*

Gabrielle: *I do, too.*

In addition to the abovementioned pre-closing strategies, another one is apology for leaving, such as “I’m sorry”. “Now if you’ll excuse me”. Beg forgiveness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is also a way to reduce face threat, and the co-participant should cancel the debt implicit in the FTA. Also “if” in “if you’ll excuse me?” can work as a negative politeness, because “if” as a possibility marker may be used to reduce the imposition of closing on the other party, as in “I take my leave, if I may.” (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Using in-group identity markers to address the hearer is a way to claim common ground with the other interlocutor, such as “buddy”, “pal”, “honey”, “dear”, “sweetheart”, “guys”, “fellas”. In the pre-closing examples, such as “you guys are busy”, “Oh, you guys, I’m sorry”, the “guys” is considered as an in-group address to show positive

politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987).

In the conversation 1-11, the advice is not an order or command, but can be considered as an initiation of a closing. Just as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) pointed out, such kind of sentence is grammatically characterized as an imperative or a command, but the hearer will surely treat it as an invitation to close the conversation. In the example below, Lynette sees that Gabrielle is doing some model work instead of shopping, so she offers advice (imperative) for the interest of Gabrielle “shop your little hearts out”, successfully initiating a closing and meanwhile saving her friend’s positive face --- the want of self-image.

#### Excerpt 1-11

Gabrielle: *"You know, with their perfectly crafted interior, and peaceful, quiet tuning."*

Lynette: *"Uh-huh. A little formal for the mall."*

Gabrielle: *"Oh, uh, you know, I wanted to match the shoes to the dress. This is, uh, Sarah, my shopping buddy. We like to hit the boutiques together."*

Lynette: *"Okay. Well, you gals, um, shop your little hearts out. See you later."*

Gabrielle: *"Bye."*

It is noteworthy again that more than one pre-closing strategy can be employed in one conversation. It is quite common that two or more strategies are combined to reduce the face threat in initiating an end to an ongoing conversation (Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2010). Excerpt 1-11 can also help to illustrate it, in which “well”, “you gals”, “shop your little hearts out” work together to mitigate both the positive and negative face threat.

#### 4.2.2 Closing Strategies and Face Value

It is noteworthy that some linguistic forms may have more than one function depending on where it occurs (Pojanapunya & Jaroenkitboworn, 2010), so some can work as closing as well as pre-closing in different closing sections. Thus, the overlapping strategies such as “giving reasons”, “apology for leave”, “in-group address” in Table 4.3 will not be illustrated again.

Table 4.3. Closing strategies in *Desperate Housewives*

Closing Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mentioning future relationship	14	28
Giving reasons	8	16
Show appreciation	6	12
Apology for leaving	5	10
Wish expression	4	8
Saying goodbye	4	8
Asking the other to leave	3	6
In-group address	3	6
Making arrangements	2	4
Advice (imperative)	1	2

As Table 4.3 shows, the most frequently used closing strategy is “mentioning future relationship”, which takes up 28%. Expressions like “see ya”, “see you later”, “see you at the show”, “I’ll be right back”, “be right back”, and “We’ll talk tomorrow” occur in the closings. If examined closely, they also have to do with face consideration. Brown and Levinson (1987:125) mentioned that promise can help demonstrate participant’s good intentions in satisfying the co-participant’s positive wants, such as in “I’ll drop by sometime next week”. It is possible that the co-participant still wants to continue the conversation, so “see ya”, “be right back” promise the co-participant that the participant wants his/her wants, too, even this promise is vague.

“Wish expressions” is also a very important way to end the conversation, such as “good luck”, “good luck on your remodel” in the following excerpts. This kind of wish may be considered as a gift to the hearer, not tangible gifts, but human relations wants, such as “the wants to be liked, admired, cared about” and so on (Brown & Levinson,

1987:129). “Good luck” is what the co-participant wants to hear in the situations below. In Excerpt 2-19, Gabrielle will be involved in a battle with her husband; in Excerpt 1-15, Gabrielle just returns to her former job being a model. Wish expression in the excerpts below is a way to show positive politeness in closing a conversation.

#### **Excerpt 2-19**

Susan: *Well, you guys are busy. We should go.*

Gabrielle: *No, it's okay. I'll win this battle later.*

Gabrielle: *Yeah, you should go.*

Bree: *Yeah. Okay, bye.*

Lynette: ***Good luck.***

#### **Excerpt 1-15**

Bree: ***"Well, then, good luck on your remodel."***

Gabrielle: ***"And please tell Rex I said hello."***

In addition, “showing appreciation” is to bring the conversation to a final close by showing thanks or appreciation to the hearer. For example:

#### **Excerpt 3-20**

Lynette: *Well, yeah, I guess I could work somethin' out.*

Edie: *Oh, I knew I could count on you! **Love ya!***

#### **Excerpt 5-1**

Lynette: *Sorry to have barged in, and **thanks for letting me get that off my chest.***

Susan: *Hey, anytime that you need to talk, you just ring my bell...and wait.*

“Love ya”, and “thanks for letting me get that off my chest” in the above two closings can be considered as an intangible gift to the hearer, admitting that the participant really appreciates what the co-participant did, and the conversation ends. In this way, the co-participant’s positive face is satisfied in ending that conversation.

Advice, as that in pre-closing strategy, is an imperative for actions directly in the co-participant’s interest, which gives rise to a host of “ cliché farewell formulae” according to Brown and Levinson (1987:98), similar to “Take care of yourself”, “Enjoy yourself”.

#### **Excerpt 2-16**

Bree: *Well, good. I mean, I just--I really wouldn't want you to get the wrong impression. Well, I'm--I'm going to the mall. They're having a white sale today. I think I'm gonna get a new bath mat. Oh, does anyone need one?*

Gabrielle: *No, I'm good.*

Bree: *Okay, **take care.***

*(Bree walks away.)*

The other two strategies “making arrangements”, “asking the other to leave” seem not to show politeness or to save the other’s face, because the conversations take place when the two interlocutors’ relationship are delicate. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as face-considered. “Saying goodbye” is a neutral way to terminate the conversation, so no face consideration is involved in.

## **5. Discussion**

The analysis in last section indicates that except for the conversations without an explicit closing, both pre-closing and closing strategies have face consideration in them, especially the most frequently-used strategies. The following Table 5.1 lists the pre-closing and closing strategies together to illustrate the relations between pre-closing and closing strategies in *Desperate Housewives* and face value.

Table 5.1. Conversation closings in *Desperate Housewives* and face value

Strategies				Saving positive face (38.4%)	Saving negative face (50.6%)
Pre-closing & closing	NO.	%			
Giving reasons	22	27.1			e.g.: I've got to find a key.
Mentioning future relationship	14	17.3		e.g.: I'll see you later	
Discourse markers	11	13.6			e.g.: Well, ok, then, anyway
Apology for leave	8	9.9			e.g.: I'm sorry.
Showing appreciation	6	7.4		e.g. Love ya	
In-group address	5	6.2		e.g. guys	
Wish expression	4	5		e.g. good luck	
Advice	2	2.5		e.g. shop your little hearts out.	
Saying goodbye	4	5		N	N
Asking the other to leave	3	3.8		N	N
Making arrangement	2	2.5		N	N

Among the 11 strategies, the first eight ones (89%) all work to reduce the face threat in the pre-closing or closing of a conversation. Although there is no “power” difference (see Brown & Levinson, 1987) among the housewives as peers, which means closing a conversation is not so face-threatening, they still deploy these strategies to reduce the face threat caused by initiating a closing. This is different from that in Mexican community (Felix-Brasdefer 2006), where social factors, such as power and distance, place a crucial role in determining the degree of politeness. Therefore, our findings may be cultural specific. The last three strategies are not considered to take face value into account after being examined, especially the irregular one “asking the other to leave”, as it occurs only in situations when the participants are quite angry with the co-participants. This is in line with Dynel (2015) which stated that impoliteness is more frequent in film conversations than real life interactions.

It is interesting that closing a conversation threatens the co-participant's negative face due to the imposition of ending the conversation on the co-participant, but the participant deploys some positive politeness strategies to save the co-participant's positive face as well as the negative politeness strategies. It may be because closing a conversation has the possible implication that the speaker may not want to continue the conversation with the other party, which may influence the positive face want of the other party, such as the want to be liked. Therefore, the positive politeness strategies, such as “in-group” address (Brown & Levinson, 1987), “mention future relationship”, are to eradicate the possible implication caused by closing the conversation to reassure their prior good relationship. The participants in conversations demonstrate their orientation to saving the face want of the co-participants in deploying both the positive and negative politeness strategies. Therefore, it can be concluded that closing a conversation threatens both the positive and negative face of the other party, and speakers can deploy both positive and negative strategies to make it polite.

Bald closing, namely ending a conversation without pre-closing, is not uncommon for American familiars or friends in *Desperate Housewives*, which seems not impolite but natural. The participants in this scripted conversation orient to this way of ending the conversation being regular, too. It can suggest that a formal closing may not always be required among familiar interlocutors and friends. This also implicates that the script writer may write the script based on real life situations. In addition, this agrees with Dynel (2015) that for familiar people impolite utterance may not threaten the co-participants' face as much as it would do among people distant from each other. Therefore, it may be necessary to make a comparison between familiar interlocutors and unfamiliar ones in terms of the closing patterns and the face value involved, so as to investigate whether familiar people are more likely to close a conversation without preclosing than unfamiliar people.

Finally, the conversations end without any closing are considered as threatening the other's face, as the speakers simply leave without saying any words due to anger or pique towards the other. It is somewhat different from previous studies, such as Haddington (2019), who identified walking away as a way of closing a conversation, in that

the walking away in our study is mostly due to anger. This is also at odds with Broth and Mondada (2013), which stated that initiating walking away as a closing is negotiable and can be aligned or misaligned, as the walking away in our research does not show this nature. The absence of any closing indicates that abrupt walking away usually occurs in an irregular situation, probably for a dramatic effect in the soap opera. This impoliteness is in line with Dynel (2015), who pointed out that drama discourse is permeant with creative impoliteness, the main function of which is to entertain recipients.

One of the limitations of this study is that the results may be culture-specific, and people in different cultures may conduct differently. The other is that this study may be gender specific, too, since it is concerned only with the housewives' conversational closings, and it is acknowledged that women are more polite than male (Montgomery, 1996).

## 6. Conclusion

The present research explored the closing patterns and strategies deployed by the main characters in *Desperate Housewives* and the face value involved in pre-closing and closing strategies. The following findings result from the study:

- 1) The main closing elements are pre-closing, insertion, closing and after-close, none of which is obligatory in face-to-face communication, though.
- 2) Various strategies are employed in closing a conversation, and most of them function to reduce the negative face-threat to the addressee or save the positive face want of the addressee, such as giving reasons, mentioning a future relationship, discourse markers, apology for leaving.
- 3) Analyses of how the five leading characters close conversations show that the American housewives may end a conversation by walking away due to anger or pique, which threatens the other's face want probably for a dramatic effect.

Closing a conversation may threaten both the positive and negative face want of the co-participants. For those who have known each other quite well and become friends, as American housewives in *Desperate Housewives*, they still orient to reducing the face-threat to the addressees in bringing a conversation to an end. In addition, the impolite way of ending a conversation occurs under irregular circumstances, and it cannot represent their usual way of closing a conversation. Since the scripted conversations can be a substitute of natural conversations to study some linguistic features (Quaglio, 2009), it can be tentatively inferred that in every interactions, in order to maintain a positive future relationship, familiar people or friends also tend to take "face" into account in terminating a conversation. Face want is the "public self-image" that all adult participants intend to claim for themselves (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and as a rational competent adult, one should cautiously end a conversation to save the other's face. Future research should focus on conversations among unfamiliar participants to make a comparison, and also on the conversational closings among male participants or in different cultures. This study will contribute to closing study and face and politeness study as well.

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