

Responding to Rudeness and Gender: The Case of the Contestants of MasterChef US

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Abstract

Reactions to (non)verbal actions in conversations are expected. This study thus aimed to examine how male and female contestants responded to rudeness in an entertainment discourse. That is, it scrutinized how the contestants reacted to what it seemed like rudeness in a famous reality TV show, namely, MasterChef US (seasons 10 and 12). To this end, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Moreover, Beebe and Waring's (2005) coding scheme of responding to rudeness was used. Qualitative data were gathered through observation and note-taking technique, while quantitative data were computed via MAXQDA24. These included percentages and frequencies of strategies used in responding to rudeness. The results thus revealed that the female contestants mostly acquiesced. They also had no incidents of aggressing strategies and a single case of persisting strategies. On the other hand, the male contestants were relatively more aggressive as well as persistent, albeit they frequently acquiesced to rudeness as well. This current investigation may have valuable implications for studies in the media, as well as for those interested in SLA as cooperating reality TV shows may help in improving the pragmatic competence of second language learners.

Keywords: Responding to rudeness, Gender, Reality TV, MasterChef US

1. Introduction

This study is part of a larger study that tackled rudeness manifestations in the speech of Gordon Ramsay, Joe Bastianich, and Aarón Sánchez who together host MasterChef US. Among its other objectives, it also aimed to investigate how male and female contestants responded to rudeness which is the main focus of this research article. Rudeness was widely studied in various contexts such as in the workplace (e.g., Rabbitts et al., 2015; Bamberger et al., 2015; Cooper et al., 2021; Dolev & Itzkovich, 2019), as well as within society (e.g.,

Collins et al., 2002; King et al., 2010). However, examining rudeness in the media seems to be scarce unlike other forms of antisocial phenomena in interactions such as impoliteness (e.g., Lee, 2020) and aggression (e.g., Callister et al., 2012; Coyne et al., 2010; Glascock, 2008). Likewise, scrutinizing responses to rudeness in the media, especially in reality TV (hereafter RTV) shows, appears to be underexplored. The literature is rife with studies that probed how employees, students, and laypeople reacted to rudeness nonetheless (e.g., Abdul Sattar et al., 2014; Günsoy, 2020; Irwin et al., 2023).

The aforementioned lack of studies on rudeness and responding to rudeness in RTV shows thus provoked this current investigation; however, as has been stated earlier, this article includes information on a single question: How male and female contestants responded to rudeness? To this end, the researcher opted for a renowned cooking TV show, namely, MasterChef US. Moreover, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. It is worth highlighting that the study only covered seasons 10 and 12 which both had a total of 45 episodes. This choice was driven by its well-known reputation for hostility as MasterChef US accentuates competitiveness among its contestants and thus presents a fertile land for aggressive behaviors which is evident in its divided sense of membership, its emphasis on winning and losing rather than on the artistry of the cooks, as well as in its great demands on the contestants to succeed and not to concede the title for the sake of making friends or promoting fine dining (Appelbaum, 2016). Therefore, incidents of rudeness were expected to be encountered throughout the two seasons and so were responses to rudeness.

Investigating responding to rudeness in a context wherein English is the official language may help English learners recognize how rudeness is embodied in interactions in addition to understanding how it is reasonably managed and which reactions are socially disapproved. It may thus help nonnative speakers of English improve their pragmatic competence by highlighting the pedagogical force of RTV. Besides, it may contribute to the body of knowledge that is interested in studying the depictions of real-life actions in the media, in general, and in RTV programs, in particular. By analyzing entertainment discourse, the results can be compared against the reality of the language under study to consequently assess the accuracy and veracity of RTV shows as to their claims of being real and authentic. Finally, and to the researcher's knowledge, scrutinizing responses to rudeness in RTV shows, more precisely in MasterChef US, while taking gender into consideration, seems scarce. This study, therefore, hopes to fill in this gap in the literature.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Responding to Rudeness

Rudeness in interactions may not always pass unchecked as it can possibly be challenged. In other words, rudeness can be responded to by the addressees, albeit such responses may vary from one speaker to another depending on different factors such as age, gender, social status, and occupation, among others. Moreover, it “involves different types of strategies which reflects [*sic*] the social norms and assumptions of different communities and cultures” (Abdul Sattar et al., 2014, p. 47). In the literature, responding to rudeness in itself thus has been, even though scarcely, discussed in relation to speech act theory (e.g., Beebe & Waring, 2005).

Austin (1962) suggested the concept of speech acts, which refers to “[actions] that speakers perform by speaking,” such as giving orders, sending threats, and making promises, to name just a few (Kroeger, 2018, p. 179). They are “straightforward, almost non-technical ways of describing people’s linguistic interactions” (Griffiths, 2006, p. 148). Besides, Yule (1996) discussed a classification system of speech acts that categorizes them into five types based on their functions: (a) Declarations, which are speech acts that change the world such as those used by the judge or the jury in a law court; (b) representatives, which are speech acts that portray the speaker’s beliefs or disbeliefs; (c) expressive, which are speech acts that show how the speaker feels, e.g., thanking and apologizing; (d) directives, which are speech acts that “convey a proposition about a future act of the addressee that the speaker desires, and the point is to try to get the addressee to commit to making the proposition true;” and finally (e) commissive, which are those speech acts that, unlike directives, signal the speaker’s commitment to act upon and thus fulfill an act, say for example a promise or a threat, in the future (Griffiths, 2006, p. 152; Yule, 1996). According to Abdul Sattar et al. (2014), responding to rudeness lies within the expressive act of speech as it “states the speaker’s psychological state, attitudes or feelings” (p. 47).

Notwithstanding, speech acts are not all meant to enhance, mitigate, or facilitate a conversation since some of them may threaten or even damage either the speaker’s or the hearer’s positive or negative face. Gil (2012) argued that, roughly speaking, all speech acts essentially are face-threatening owing to the fact that just by being involved in a conversation, the hearer “*has to listen*” to the speaker which ultimately will impose a threat on their faces (p. 401, italicized in the original). However, Iskandar and Santosa (2022) explained that such acts can be either threatening or invading. Face-threatening acts (FTAs) thus are those acts that threaten “the ‘face’ or self-picture of any other humans within the communication,” while face-invading acts (FIAs) indicate a form of rude speech such as insulting which harms the face of both the speaker and the hearer (Iskandar & Santosa, 2022, p. 24). Moreover, an example of an FTA is rudeness which, according to Beebe (1995), is an act that threatens faces “or [a] feature of an FTA such as intonation which violates a socially sanctioned norm of interaction for the social context in which it occurs” (p. 159). If rudeness is considered an FTA, so is responding to rudeness, presumably, since both represent a hostile exchange that thus may threaten or damage the faces of the sender as well as the receiver. In addition, the concept of face is highly associated with politeness theory that Brown and Levinson first proposed in 1978 (Alabdali, 2019). This theory leeches off the assumption that “all individuals have, and are concerned with maintaining, face” (Erbert & Floyd, 2004, p. 255, italicized in the original). There are two types of face: (a) Positive face, which refers to humans’ basic desire to be liked, appreciated, or approved by others, and (b) negative face, which represents humans’ basic desire to be free, independent, and not to fall under any type of external impositions (Gil, 2012).

1.1.2 Language and Gender

As has been as mentioned earlier, responding to rudeness differs according to the gender of speakers, their age, social background, educational level, and most importantly, the cultural norms of the spoken language. In this study, the gender of speakers is taken into account only

on one occasion, namely, when responding to rudeness. Both men and women have distinctive language features that have been exhaustively studied throughout the years. This made certain claims to arise as to what later was called gender-exclusive language, which refers to “situations in which men and women have different ways of speaking that could be deemed different languages, or at least distinct and named dialects of a language” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 321). Therefore, women are believed to have their own way of speaking, and so are men. In their speech, women use more hedges, tag questions, and empty adjectives (e.g., divine, sweet, lovely) than men (Lakoff, 1973). Besides, they use more minimal responses than men which are usually used to “indicate the listener’s support for the current speaker” (Coates, 2016, p. 87). Minimal responses “are the nods and brief comments like *umhm* and *yes* that occur frequently in English conversation” (Freeman & McElhinny, 1996, p. 240, italicized in the original). Moreover, women initiate and receive more compliments than men, a speech act that is used to establish solidarity among them (Coates, 2016; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Women also tend to emphasize their speech by increasing their intonation for different reasons, e.g., showing hesitation or admiration (Zansabil, 2023). Lakoff (1973) also indicated that women use weaker expletives (e.g., oh dear, goodness, oh fudge), unlike men who utilize stronger ones such as hell, shit, and damn. Moreover, Fishman (1978) and Niu and Zhou (2017) found that women ask more questions than male speakers, albeit Coates (2016) mentioned that forming questions is a common feature in men’s and women’s language. Nonetheless, Daristin et al. (2020) examined the linguistic features of women in same-sex conversations in a reality TV show and found that gender did not play a role after all but the status and position of the speakers. That is, female judges, who were superior, used more powerful language, whereas female contestants, who were subordinate, showed feelings of doubt and reluctance in their speech. All in all, women are believed to be more polite, caring, supportive, tentative, cooperative, and sympathetic (Mills, 2005).

On the other hand, several studies revealed that men were more dominant in discourse than women which was achieved through interruption, topic control, asking questions, as well as by shushing women (e.g., Itakura & Tsui, 2004; Tootkaboni & Pakzadian, 2018; Zimmerman & West, 1975). In fact, interruption alone was found to be a persistent feature of men’s speech in research throughout different contexts, be it a presidential debate, natural settings, or a contrived meeting which mostly was used as a tactic to silence women (e.g., DeFrancisco, 1998; Niu & Zhou, 2017; Rohmah & Suwandi, 2021). In addition, Mills (2005) clarified that interruption overtly signals power and covertly denotes masculinity, which is why women supposedly tend to interrupt less. Nevertheless, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) explained that women do not protest as much as men when they are interrupted and that men indulge in disputes and challenges and tend to ignore others more. Coates (2016) also indicated that men are more commanding and direct in their speech. Men’s choice of swearing differs as well. That is, men use more rude and forbidden types of swear words such as fuck, shit, and damn which may function as means to express their freedom from rules and social norms in addition to establishing their masculine identity (Nursanti, 2022). Contrary to women, once again, men exchange more insults in their discourse, a speech act that is used to establish hierarchical differences in conversations (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Even though it was said earlier that women use more minimal responses, men still exploit them in their speech

but for different purposes, i.e., to undermine whoever speaks and then emphasize male dominance (Coates, 2016). Fishman's (1978) study showed that both men and women used minimal responses, but when the women wanted to show that they were following, the men used this strategy to end the conversation instead. Finally, men's and women's language features are not absolute facts and that it seems questionable to claim that women's language is intrinsically more polite than men's as Mills explained that what appears to be polite could be nothing but women's attempt to adhere to CoP or cultural norms in addition to avoiding being misjudged or misunderstood.

1.2 Previous Studies on Responding to Rudeness

Park and Park (2009) studied the pragmatic strategies used by two groups of English speakers, native and nonnative, to respond to rudeness. The nonnative group spoke Korean as their first language. Data were collected via a discourse completion test (DCT). The results indicated that the two groups had different attempts to respond to rudeness. The native speakers were more insulting, whereas the nonnative speakers tended to be challenging. Gender differences in responding to rudeness were apparent in the native group but not among the nonnative speakers. Additionally, Buchheit et al. (2010) examined American and Iranian EFL students' pragmatic competence in responding to rudeness. A comparison between the two groups, native and nonnative speakers of English, was then drawn. The sample mainly consisted of male students. Data were collected via a DCT and coded by Beebe and Waring's (2005) scheme. A significant difference between both groups was apparent. The results revealed that the American students employed more strategies in responding to rude incidents than their Iranian counterparts. The former significantly used threat, challenge, and opt-out strategies, and demonstrated more insults, while the latter argued and criticized more.

Furthermore, Abdul Sattar et al. (2014) examined how Malaysian college students respond to rudeness and explored the factors on which their responses were based. Beebe and Waring's (2005) classification of responses to rudeness was used for the analysis. Data were collected via distributing a DCT and conducting structured interviews. The researchers thus found that the students used the same strategies (e.g., threat and challenge) even though contextual variations in social status and distance existed. However, the frequency of those strategies in the dataset was different—that is, the students tended to use apology, request, and opt-out techniques more. Finally, Abdul Sattar et al. found that factors such as age, communicative means, gender, degree of rudeness, inflection, ethnicity, emotional circumstances and characteristics of the interlocutors, modes of rudeness, the situation per se and its people, social status, family influence, culture, religion, and social environments affected how the students responded to rudeness.

On the other hand, Ko (2014) investigated the strategies used by Korean EFL students in responding to rudeness while considering the possible influence of gender and proficiency level (i.e., low and high). Ko used a DCT to collect data from the students in addition to some statistical procedures for the analysis. The results thus demonstrated that, regardless of their proficiency levels, the students used approximately the same strategies to respond to rudeness. Yet, those with high proficiency levels showed a greater tendency to respond with an insult,

unlike those students with lower proficiency levels who mostly chose to apologize instead. Ko found that male students were more aggressive and thus used insulting strategies more than their female counterparts who were more apologetic. Likewise, Abboodi Ali (2020) explored how Iraqi college students respond to rudeness, taking into consideration gender influence. Data were collected via a DCT and a follow-up interview. The analysis was based on Beebe and Waring's (2005) classification of responses to rudeness. The results revealed that male and female students demonstrated prevalent usage of all strategies (i.e., aggressing, persisting, and acquiescing). However, aggressing strategies were more frequent in the dataset, acquiescing strategies came second, and persisting strategies ranked last. In terms of gender influence, females mostly used acquiescing strategies, whereas males tended to be more hostile and accordingly used aggressing strategies more.

However, Alözkan et al. (2015) conducted two studies wherein responses to honor threats, a form of rudeness, were investigated. The studies involved students from two cultures: A culture of dignity (northern US) and a culture of honor (Turkey). In their experiment, the researchers asked the participants to write a short essay on honesty, a prominent component of people's honor in society. The students were instructed to write about situations where their honesty and their family's prevailed. Feedback was then given. Some students received neutral comments, whereas others got negative ones containing a false accusation that challenged the value of their essays and thus attacked both their family's honesty as well as theirs. The results showed that Turkish students were more hostile, challenging, and retaliatory in their responses than northern US students. Nevertheless, some Turkish students who rejected honor values were less aggressive and revengeful than those who strongly approved them.

Likewise, Günsoy (2020) examined how people descending from two contrasting cultures (i.e., culture of honor and culture of dignity) perceive and respond to rude superiors relative to rude subordinates. This investigation thus involved three studies. The first two studies directed the participants to read a scenario wherein a groundless accusation fell upon a worker by another co-worker who either possessed a higher or lower position. Subsequently, they answered scales that measured their perceptions and responses to rudeness. The third study, however, requested a recollection of past experiences of rudeness from full-time employees. The studies indicated that those who came from a culture where self-worth is internally and externally evaluated and reciprocity is a norm (i.e., honor cultures) were more liable to view and respond to rude superiors negatively than to rude subordinates. They also exhibited a higher tendency to retaliate against rude superiors than rude subordinates, mediated by the feeling of anger.

On the other hand, Harrison et al. (2019) scrutinized how employees respond to rudeness in a mental health clinic. They also probed the nature of client rudeness and investigated how employees coped with rudeness exposure. Harrison et al. conducted semi-structured interviews with several employees with different job roles and varied experience levels. They found that the clients' mental health, personal backgrounds, and state of mind led rudeness to arise and was mostly expressed verbally. Rudeness thus affected the relationships the doctors had with their patients. The employees, however, coped with rudeness by seeking support

from other colleagues and supervisors. In terms of responding to rudeness, Harrison et al. noticed that the employees tended to either take the bullet, challenge rudeness, restrain their anger and keep their professionalism intact, or leave the place and end this miserable situation altogether.

Moreover, Irwin et al. (2023) explored veterinarians' and veterinary nurses' perceptions, evaluations, and responses to rudeness. Considering the (in)directiveness of rudeness, the researchers distributed an online questionnaire that included instances of fake scenarios depicting rude incidents stemming from three different initiators: Clients, co-workers, and older colleagues. Irwin et al. thus found that direct rudeness was more negatively evaluated than indirect rudeness. Regarding responses to rudeness, the results indicated that the employees would confront, avoid, exit, seek peer support, or discuss direct rudeness with their seniors. In contrast, indirect rudeness was more likely to be ignored or replied to with a friendly gesture. Nonetheless, O'Reilly and Robertson (2020) probed service employees' experience of customer rudeness and examined their responses. They conducted 64 open-ended interviews with service employees who occupied different positions. Based on the employees' (a) intention to retain social harmony and (b) realization of their agency at that moment, responses to rudeness fell into four categories. The interviewees thus expressed four types of responses: Reactive rudeness, subversive rudeness, submissive civility, and resolute civility.

However, and up to the researcher's knowledge, studies on responses to rudeness in the media while considering gender influence seem to be lacking thus far. In the literature, Milal and Pramono's (2021) study was the closest one to this current study as it examined impoliteness strategies used by Gordon Ramsay toward male and female contestants in addition to probing the contestants' responses to impolite remarks during a single episode of a prominent RTV show, namely, Kitchen Nightmares. Milal and Pramono thus found that Gordon used all types of impoliteness strategies and that there was no difference in such usage toward both genders. Nevertheless, male and female contestants exhibited different responses to impoliteness. That is, males were more hostile, assertive, and aggressive, whereas females were mostly passive, submissive, and self-protective. Males also expressed their disagreement and anger in order to subdue a face attack and thus save face. Females, however, mostly accepted and agreed to Gordon's impolite commentary with zero countering. On some occasions, female contestants actually laughed and then thanked Gordon instead of defending themselves. Be that as it may, both groups similarly accepted impoliteness performed toward them by either plainly confirming Gordon's remarks, providing explanations in certain incidents, or opting for silence in others.

In brief, EFL students either threatened, criticized, argued, challenged, apologized, requested, or acquiesced in responding to rudeness. However, males were more aggressive, whereas females were more apologetic and thus acquiescing. The proficiency levels of those students affected their responses as well. Students with high proficiency levels thus were more insulting, while lower students were more apologizing. Cultures also affected how people responded to rudeness. Those who belonged to a culture of honor (e.g., Turkish) were more aggressive in their responses, revengeful, and were more liable to negatively respond to

superior rudeness than those who descended from a culture of dignity (e.g., Americans). Direct rudeness was either confronted or avoided, while indirect rudeness was simply ignored or dealt with rationally and kindly.

With that being said, responding to rudeness in RTV seems understudied and thus blurred. In actuality, it seems that it also is underexplored in EFL contexts, as well as in relation to society or gender. Therefore, this study hopefully fills this gap by investigating how male and female contestants respond to rudeness in MasterChef US.

2. Methodology

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), a mixed-methods approach is most useful when a researcher seeks to craft a methodological interface that will help (a) achieve an in-depth investigation; (b) obtain more convincing conclusions; and (c) “compensate for weaknesses in qualitative research, and vice versa” (p. 330). This study thus adopted a mixed-methods approach to discover how male and female contestants responded to rudeness. For its qualitative side, it opted for a case study approach with the contestants as social units. Moreover, data were amassed through observation and note-taking technique. Its quantitative approach, however, included a computation of descriptive statistics via MAXQDA24, i.e., frequencies and percentages of the contestants’ usage of responding to rudeness strategies.

2.1 Data Collection

Two seasons of MasterChef US were chosen for this current study, i.e., seasons 10 and 12. Both seasons were hosted by Gordon Ramsay, Joe Bastianich, and Aarón Sánchez. The total number of contestants for both seasons is 40 (see Table 1 and 2 in Appendix A). Besides, both seasons consist of 45 episodes in total. The average time of episodes is 40.8 minutes. In season 12, the show adopted a unique idea in which those contestants who lost in previous seasons were granted a new opportunity to compete anew. Season 10, on the other hand, took a different direction since it represented the tenth anniversary of the show. Therefore, unpredictable and unprecedented events, tasks, and challenges took place.

During observation, pertinent cases that represented incidents of responding to rudeness were then noted and collected in a Word file that included multiple tables of a self-developed observational protocol (see Appendix B). Yin (2018) and Lodico et al. (2010) instructed and advised researchers in qualitative studies to design an observational protocol that (a) is related to the focus of the study; (b) contains the research questions in addition to tables that can be filled in with data; (c) specifies in precise what to be observed; and (d) offers “an organized space for writing down brief descriptions of conversations, interactions, and observed natural behaviors” (p. 116).

2.2 Data Analysis

The aim of this study was to discern how male and female contestants of MasterChef US responded to rudeness for which Beebe and Waring’s (2005) coding scheme of responding to rudeness was adopted. In their study, Beebe and Waring composed two groups of English learners who represented two different proficiency levels. The researchers sought to find out

whether or not there is a difference between the two groups in the way by which they pragmatically understand and respond to rudeness. They found no difference as to the type of strategy used but to the number of times each of which was used. Beebe and Waring thus created a coding scheme that consists of three strategies their sample claimed to use in responding to rudeness: (a) Aggressing strategies (e.g., insult, threat, challenge, compliment/greet (sarcastic), criticize); (b) persisting strategies (e.g., argue (take issue), justify, request); and (c) acquiescing strategies (e.g., apologize, thank, acquiesce, (non)verbal opt-out). This scheme was used as a main guide throughout the analysis process of the contestants' reactions to rudeness.

After data were collected, two separate files were thus uploaded and inserted in MAXQDA24. Each file included responses of male and female contestants toward what it seemed like rudeness in discourse. A list of codes and subcodes was then set (consult Appendix C). Codes for responding to rudeness were aggressing strategies, persisting strategies, and acquiescing strategies. As to subcodes, these were the examples introduced by Beebe and Warning (2005). Hence, the researcher attentively started reading the data, setting codes and subcodes, and finally computing the frequencies and percentages of codes and subcodes via MAXQDA24.

3. Results

Beebe and Waring's (2005) coding scheme was adopted in pursuit of investigating how male and female contestants responded to rudeness enacted by the judges of MasterChef US. It was thus found that the contestants differed in their responses to rudeness throughout season 10 and 12 of MasterChef US. That is, females mostly used acquiescing strategies (i.e., acquiesce, thank, and apologize) in responding to rudeness; moreover, no aggressing strategies were exhibited by the female contestants. As to persisting strategies, it only happened once during the two seasons of the show. However, males showed more usage of acquiescing strategies (i.e., acquiesce, thank, and apologize), as well as persisting strategies (i.e., justify and argue) and aggressing strategies (i.e., challenge and sarcasm). Table 3 contains the number of occurrences and percentages of the strategies for both groups of contestants.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of responding to rudeness strategies for female and male contestants

Strategies		Frequencies	%		Frequencies	%
Acquiescing strategies	Females	18	94.74%	Males	35	81.40%
Persisting strategies		1	5.26%		4	9.30%
Aggressing strategies		0	0.00%		4	9.30%
Total		19	100%		43	100%

On the one hand, females only showed one case of justifying, apologizing, and thanking, while the rest of their responses were examples of acquiescing to others in discourse.

Therefore, Bri once attempted to explain herself and justify her doings during a Vietnamese cuisine challenge. After the judges tried her dish, Joe downgraded the value of her dish for which Bri said “I think that I struggled to find the balance between a dish that was authentically me and authentically Vietnamese.” Joe was then inconsiderate to her opinions as he retorted “I think in this case you should’ve forgot about you and thought more about Vietnam.” In a wedding dinner challenge, Bri, who was the blue team captain, also apologized to Gordon who cursed in emphasis and sarcastically quipped after finding a piece of thread on a grilled steak of their sample dish which was supposed to be an exemplary of their cooking “Wow. I’m sorry. That won’t happen again,” Bri said. In the audition of season 12, Gordon tried Keturah’s dish, but he immediately spat the food out in a napkin. Keturah just smiled and let a faint sigh out. She accepted his reaction as she kept silent and did not protest. Once Gordon finished his evaluation, she also thanked him albeit he was the least to comment on her dish “Thank you very much for your feedback, chef,” and then went back to her spot.

Furthermore, acquiescing to rudeness manifestations happened when Sarah, who was trying to answer Gordon’s question, was interrupted by him. She remained silent and swallowed back her words, all while nodding and murmuring “Yes chef.” After Gordon told her that she, as a captain, had no voice, Sarah again nodded and begrudgingly accepted his comments. Kimberly also acquiesced to Gordon’s resemblance of her sauce to cold vomit as she silently nodded. Besides, in a challenge wherein the contestants were asked to prepare six of the judges’ most loved dishes in addition to another platter of their choice, Liz and Shari, who belonged to different teams, exhibited the same reaction of silently accepting what Joe and Gordon had to say about their dishes. That is, Liz did not condemn nor object against Joe’s belittlement of her and Michael’s sauce who referred to it as a crap and nor did Shari against Gordon’s curse after he checked on her and Sam’s dumpling and found it raw. When Gordon resembled Keturah’s dessert to kids’ creations on MC Junior, she again nodded and accepted albeit in surprise his comment, and so did Renee to Joe who resembled the crust of her cheesecake to dust in a baking challenge. Joe also once resembled Sarah’s dish, which was supposed to be creative and innovative, to a decomposing human corpse for which Sarah only nodded and held back her laughter, all while mumbling her agreement.

Moreover, Gordon’s manifestation of rudeness resided in his dirty jokes, for example, his joke about Keturah’s dish and its resemblance to the Hoover Dam which seemed to possess an undertone of disgust. Keturah frowned and her eyes widened. However, she remained quiet and acquiesced to his comments. Shanika was also silent when Gordon told her that her dessert was not appealing as a dessert is supposed to be. Furthermore, Bri acquiesced to Gordon who lashed out at Fred and her and used a vulgar phrasal verb of the *f-word* during a US Coast Guard Challenge. Additionally, Samantha, whose dish was called frozen and boring by Aaron during a vegan food challenge, nodded and silently accepted his comments. Bri once again acquiesced to Joe’s comment on her dish which was about how bad it was in taste and looks, all while hardly swallowing the lump in her throat, in addition to accepting his belittlement of her dish during the Vietnamese cuisine challenge. Finally, Dara, Amanda, and Brandi, whose dishes were resembled to a turtle, cough syrup, and an orange hockey puck,

respectively, chose silence and accepted Aaron's and Joe's comments without raising objections, albeit surprise and offense were shown on their faces owing to their widely opened eyes and raised eyebrows.

On the other hand, males demonstrated diverse strategies in responding to rudeness in comparison to their female counterparts. They thus showed instances of acquiescing, persisting, and aggressing strategies. For example, a display of aggression and persisting strategies happened when Evan tried to challenge and was sarcastic toward Joe and Aaron who questioned his choice of equipment in a Latino food challenge. They gave him a set of options, but he was adamant about his choice as he argued and reminded them that it was a non-stick pan that got him the MasterChef apron. Aaron thus retorted "Well, we didn't say it was that good" for which Evan mockingly answered back "If it wasn't that good, I wouldn't be here." Moreover, Evan was again sarcastic in his reply to Joe who asked him whether or not he was good at baking desserts. After Evan conceded that he was not much of an expert in that regard, Joe said "Jeez, you have to be a complete package" which caused Evan to say "I got plenty of package [forced chuckle] I actually do bake a little." He also justified his actions and decisions by mentioning that some of his family members are professional in baking. This pushed Joe to retort back "That's not going to help you tonight. You need to know..." as Evan interrupted him and said "No, I spent a little time with them [his family] learning some tips, so..." and after that the judges exchanged looks of what it seemed as subtle annoyance and mockery.

Furthermore, Fred tried to challenge Gordon who shouted at Bri and him "If you don't hold any standards, fuck off for a swim! [F: Absolutely, Chef.] Go for a swim! [F: No, I wo...won't...Heard, chef]" during the US Coast Guard challenge. He tried to fight back and retort, but he reluctantly accepted and immediately relinquished protesting. In another challenge, Fred also attempted to justify his actions of passing mash potatoes through a sieve. Once Gordon saw him, he bewilderedly asked him about what he was doing. Fred explained that he wanted to remove impurity after which he immediately apologized and acquiesced to Gordon's harsh disapproval. These two cases of Fred both showed instances of aggressing and persisting strategies which were followed by examples of acquiescing strategies. Additionally, Alejandro dropped a tray full of steaks, yet he picked it up and placed it next to the grill. As he was preparing to cook them, Gordon cried out and reprimanded him for his neglect by questioning his behavior. Alejandro attempted to justify his actions as he thus defensively said "Chef, I figured it was going to kill the bacteria."

As to acquiescing strategies, they were demonstrated through the action of thanking, apologizing, and acquiescing. For example, in a mystery box challenge wherein the contestants were asked to prepare one savory and one sweet dish out of a bread, Subha, who is an Indian, presented his dessert to the judges which provoked their surprise and disapproval due to its extreme spiciness and thus accumulating multiple reactions from the judges. That is, Joe said "I have to say, this is the worst-looking dessert I've ever seen in my life [chuckle]. It's terrible! [pointing at the dessert]" and further added "It's not only the worst-looking, it's one of the worst tasting desserts." Aaron also commented "Subha, you're killing us [groaning and wiping his sweat]" and Gordon added "How'd you do that to us?"

Have you been sent by mars on a special mission?” for which Subha apologetically responded “I’m sorry, chef. I’ll make sure that I straighten all those spices out and I’ll go two notches.” He then thanked them and slightly bowed his head once he was dismissed and just before he went back to his station. Likewise, in a challenge that encouraged the contestants to upgrade gas station products to fancy dishes, Michael thanked Gordon and Joe who commented on his dessert as being terrible and resembled its taste to chocolate scrambled eggs, all while slightly nodding his head and finally heading back to his spot.

Moreover, Subha apologized to Gordon who cursed and shouted at him after he asked him for tongs to serve the steaks, yet he was preoccupied with cleaning the dishes. Subha also acquiesced to Gordon’s warning cries and apologized for lifting up an on fire pan closer to his face as he was flustered from trying to keep up with Gordon’s pace. Besides, Jamie apologized to Joe who called his homemade sausage terrible and further added “It’s not something I want to even keep in my mouth.” Besides, Tommy apologized to the judges who were perplexed because of the fried eggs garnish for his dish and thus acquiesced to their disapproval and questioning looks. Many more examples of mere acquiescing happened during seasons 10 and 12 of MasterChef US—that is, the male contestants were reluctantly and silently accepting what the judges had to say and do. For instance, Noah allowed Gordon to interrupt his childhood story and complied with his request. Kenny also had to accept and did not protest against Joe who rebuked him for his cooking decisions as to the scallops as well as when Joe resembled the presentation of his dish to fungal infection. During a pool party challenge, Fred, Noah, and Subha who were cursed at, chastised for their failed cooking and leading skills, and insulted, respectively, opted for silence and reluctant acceptance as well.

Additionally, Subha and Sam silently accepted Gordon’s sharp remarks regarding their plating skills. Subha also did not protest against and accepted Joe’s belittlement of his cooking of the lentils. Besides, Sam and Michael, during the same challenge wherein a seventh dish of their choice was required, both acquiesced to the judges’ usage of taboos as well as their inconsideration and belittlement behaviors. Micah, on the other hand, was once told a dirty joke that included the intransitive nonsexual verb for sex ‘*make love*,’ yet he quipped and acquiesced to Gordon’s suggestive remarks (Pinker, 2007). Moreover, Joe was thoughtless as to Noah’s feelings and belittled his dish as he attacked its presentation, taste, and creativity for which Noah silently accepted, albeit he seemed to be shaken and affected by what Joe said about his dish. Gabriel also did not protest and wordlessly accepted Joe’s dismissive toss of his dough as well as Aaron’s disparagement of his dish. Besides, Stephen anxiously yet begrudgingly accepted Joe’s actions of spilling the panna cotta on the plate, as well as acquiescing to his harsh comments as Joe added “This is terrible. It’s all wrong. It’s inedible.” Fred also had to silently accept Gordon’s resemblance of his dish to kids’ creations and artificial food. Likewise, Bowen raised no objection and accepted Joe’s comment on his lamb, as well as Gordon’s actions of throwing the corn away and angrily demanding him to efficiently cook.

In addition, Fred showed more examples of acquiescing in discourse as when he accepted Aaron’s belittlement of the dish he and Dara made, as well as when Joe called his dish bad,

wrong, and malfunctioned. Willie also silently accepted Joe's revolting description of his dish which its value was thus belittled and downgraded. Besides, Derrick, who was pouting and resting his hand under his chin, silently yet agitatedly accepted Aaron's remark regarding the taste of the sauce of Amanda's and his dish. Michael and Willie also had to silently accept Gordon's harsh assessment during the Spago challenge wherein Gordon furiously shouted "Your voice is nonexistent. Your timing is way off" and "Your standards are zero," to Willie and Michael, respectively. Finally, Michael again had to silently acquiesce to Joe's blunt evaluation of his dish which directly referred to it as bad, both in taste and looks.

4. Discussion

Male and female contestants were relatively similar in their responses to rudeness enacted by the judges of the 10th and 12th season of MasterChef US. However, male contestants exhibited more instances of persisting strategies. Besides, they showed examples of aggressing strategies those that female contestants did not demonstrate throughout the two seasons of the show. They also showed more cases of acquiescing in discourse than females. Their overall number of incidents thus surpassed females' (i.e., males had a total of 43 cases while females had 19). The contestants nevertheless agreed on their usage of acquiescing strategies as those constituted most of their responses, be it a simple acceptance, an apology, or a display of begrudging gratitude. It is worth highlighting that most of those acquiescing cases involved silence and reluctant acceptance, as few showed gratitude or were apologetic. Silence was thus common among the contestants in responding to rudeness, which was also found to be mostly utilized in other studies that examined responding to rudeness in different contexts (e.g., Irwin et al., 2023; King et al., 2010; Safitri, 2021). Choosing to stay silent may be attributed to their effort to preserve social harmony in addition to their understanding of their independency at the moment, i.e., agency (O'Reilly & Robertson, 2020).

In fact, King et al.'s (2010) study wherein laypeople's past experience of and responses to everyday rudeness were investigated found that most of the participants preferred to exit and walk away instead of answering back or giving a reaction to a rude individual. This may also explain why most of the contestants opted for silence and gave no response to rude encounters, as MasterChef US claims to be a reality show and is thus expected to involve close representation of day-to-day interactions. Furthermore, King et al. speculated that what makes people exit and leave rude encounters unanswered is the fact that the cost of giving no response is merely a brief moment of embarrassment, whereas choosing to reciprocate can be dangerous as it may cause negative emotions to arise in addition to gaining an unbidden attention and preserving a futile conversation with an individual who was already considered rude. Giving no response can also be attributable to what King et al. referred to as the culture of modernity, which bestows upon its individuals a sense of presumed equality; therefore, defending honor in public spheres is deemed unnecessary. Besides, Alözkan et al. (2015) and Günsoy (2020) maintained that people descending from a culture of honor (e.g., Turkey) seem to be more hostile as well as susceptible to retaliate and respond to rudeness unlike those who come from a culture of dignity, for example, the US. Therefore, the nature of real-life interactions, consequences of reciprocating, and cultures of modernity and dignity may all account for the contestants' choice to acquiesce to rudeness.

In addition, status and power imbalance may explain why the contestants of MasterChef US mostly refrained from countering rudeness and overtly defending their positive face, as all of these contestants are considered amateur cooks in comparison with Gordon, Joe, and Aaron. Pearson and Porath (2005) noticed that power played a vital role in responding to rudeness coming from coworkers—that is, targets of rudeness, who had a lower status than instigators of rudeness, showed a tendency to covertly avenge themselves through less aggressive ways. Ladegaard (2012) also discovered that how employees responded to rude female leaders was dependent on their status, regardless of gender. Hence, the employees with a lower position reacted with either making jokes, being ironic, or staying silent. Furthermore, Daristin et al. (2020) examined women's language features in a RTV show that solely involved female judges and female contestants. The results revealed that the judges, who were superiors in this context, were confident, poised, and more powerful in their speech, unlike the contestants (i.e., subordinates) who were uncertain how to express their opinions and speak up against unfavorable evaluations.

Furthermore, the gender of the contestants itself may account for the differences in their responses to rudeness. Males were relatively more responsive than females, albeit both frequently acquiesced. They were thus more argumentative and challenging; besides, they occasionally justified their actions. Females, on the other hand, only had one case wherein a female contestant tried to defend her choices and explain her stance. This aligns with the results of other studies that examined rudeness in different contexts with different kinds of participants. For example, Pearson and Porath (2005) probed rudeness in the workplace and found that male targets were more prone to directly reciprocate and openly retaliate against the rude attacker. This retaliatory mentality caused rudeness to increase in intensity among interlocutors, especially if the initiators were males too. On the other hand, female targets were not liable to overtly retort but were more likely to evade instigators of rudeness. This is the same kind of reaction that the female contestants of the show mostly exhibited. Those difference in responding to rudeness between the male and female contestants may stem from their needs to preserve their feminine and masculine identity intact by adhering to cultural norms—that is, females are expected to be polite and cooperative, while males are believed to be challenging and aggressive in discourse (Mills, 2005; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015; Zansabil, 2023). They may thus comply with such norms to extinguish misjudgments and avoid negative evaluations (Mills, 2005; Muriithi et al., 2017).

Similarly, previous studies revealed that males were inclined to retort while females chose to refrain from reciprocating and apologized instead (e.g., Abboodi Ali, 2020; King et al., 2010; Ko, 2014). Additionally, Milal and Pramono (2021) discerned a difference in how male and female contestants reacted to Gordon's impoliteness in Kitchen Nightmares. Males were thus hostile and defensive so as to save face, whereas females were passive and accepting as well as did not counter nor defend their faces but occasionally thanked instead. This also goes hand in hand with the results of this current study. However, the contestants of MasterChef US were slightly different—that is, the male contestants frequently acquiesced to rudeness by opting for silence, thanking, and apologizing. They were also less aggressive and assertive. This can be attributed to the different nature of the shows, as Kitchen Nightmares is famous

for its intense and highly competitive atmosphere, unlike MasterChef US, albeit the atmosphere of the latter is known to be more hostile than the other versions of the same show around the world.

Additionally, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) mentioned that the context of speech is important in determining how language is used. Contexts can be either public or private. Tannen (2013) referred to public speaking as *report-talk* and private speaking was termed *rapport-talk*. The former associates itself more with males, whereas the latter is more related to females. According to Tannen, females approach public settings as private ones and thus seek to establish and strengthen relationships and connections and not endanger them. Conversely, males speak in a manner that signals their independency and capability as well as preserves their status through “exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking, or imparting information” (Tannen, 2013, p. 94). Therefore, the contrastive perceptions of males and females toward settings and speech may account for how the male and female contestants conversed with and responded to the judges of MasterChef US. That is, females refrained from retorting as much as males did due to the fact that they tend to negotiate relationships, put value in them, and strive to create connections. On the other hand, males who responded to rudeness may have been seeking to underpin their independency and maintain their status such, as when Evan mentioned his knowledge and past experience in baking the tarte tatin so as to support his actions.

Responding to rudeness can also be a reflection of self-verification processes that are enacted through the use of three different strategies. That is, people tend to seek, elicit, and finally but preferentially recall social feedback that verifies and confirms their self-conceptions which are “thoughts and feelings about the self that are derived from past experience, especially the reactions of others” (Swann & Read, 1981, p. 352). Therefore, interlocutors generally strive to get comments that will support their self-images while those remarks that may threaten their perceptions of themselves are believed to be inaccurate and hence dismissed. Besides, people can elicit reactions from their interlocutors by attentively and properly choosing words and doing actions that confirm their own thoughts regarding their selves. Responding to rudeness in discourse can thus be a means through which the contestants sought self-confirmatory feedback as well as external acknowledgement of their skills and mastery. Moreover, direct responses to rude strangers were found in around 30% of cases reported by laypeople in King et al.’s (2010) study who attributed this discovery to people’s desire to be heard, seen, and respected. They also stated that what drives individuals to answer back is their needs to defend and protect their self-esteem and integrity, as well as to prevent negative emotions such as anger and humiliation from prevailing. In responding to rude attacks, the contestants may thus have tried to defend themselves, express their opinions, define their stance, or save themselves from shame or negative emotions, as previous studies found. All in all, the contestants who responded to rudeness in MasterChef US, seasons 10 and 12, are presumably driven by either social, cultural, or personal motives.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to examine how male and female contestants responded to rudeness in two

seasons of MasterChef US. It thus found that they relatively differed in their reactions; however, males and females agreed on their usage of acquiescing strategies toward rudeness in discourse. It is worth mentioning that this study has a few limitations. First, the sample is small as it is limited to the contestants of two seasons of a single show which has 13 seasons thus far. The results cannot thus be generalized. Finally, the results were not compared to real-life events nor the evaluation of native speakers of English were sought or obtained due to the researcher's lack of time. Therefore, more studies on responding to rudeness in the media, and especially in RTV shows, as well as seeking cultural informants who are good enough to assess the amassed cases are encouraged for further understanding on how people react to hostile and aggressive behaviors, such as rudeness, in interactions.

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Appendix A

Table 1. The Contestants of Season 10

Name	Gender	Age	Profession Before They Join MasterChef	Progress
Dorian	Female	45	Creeler	Winner
Nick	Male	22	College student	Finalist
Liz	Female	53	Events consultant	Eliminated in episode 9
Keturah	Female	30	Writer	Eliminated in episode 11
Subha	Male	54	R&D director	Eliminated in episode 22
Kenny	Male	46	Carpenter	Eliminated in episode 3
Jamie	Male	42	Fisherman	Eliminated in episode 19
Sam	Male	35	Attorney	Eliminated in episode 13
Sarah	Female	31	Former army interrogator	Finalist
Micah	Male	19	Kitchen porter	Eliminated in episode 21
Noah	Male	32	Septic service technician	Eliminated in episode 23
Shari	Female	34	Stay-at-home mom	Eliminated in episode 22
Wuta	Male	30	English teacher	Eliminated in episode 15
Evan	Male	36	Sales coordinator	Eliminated in episode 7
Fred	Male	24	Revenue analyst	Eliminated in episode 17
Bri	Female	24	Cocktail server	Eliminated in episode 20
Renee	Female	33	Receptionist	Eliminated in episode 14
Kimberly	Female	31	Shoe designer	Eliminated in episode 5
Deanna	Female	45	Vocal coach	Eliminated in episode 3
Michael	Male	31	Real estate flipper	Eliminated in episode 9

Table 2. The Contestants of Season 12

Name	Gender	Age	Place and Season	Progress
Dara	Female	20	2 nd in junior season 1	Winner
Brandi	Female	33	2 nd in season 7	Eliminated in episode 14
Derrick	Male	35	2 nd in season 6	Eliminated in episode 16
Emily	Female	31	10 th in season 9	Eliminated in episode 18
Shanika	Female	38	8 th in season 9	Eliminated in episode 18
Amanda	Female	32	13 th in season 6	Eliminated in episode 16
Christian	Male	36	5 th in season 5	Finalist
Willie	Male	33	7 th in season 5	Eliminated in episode 17
Tommy	Male	59	7 th in season 6	Eliminated in episode 9
Cate	Female	30	4 th in season 8	Eliminated in episode 5
Bowen	Male	29	5 th in season 9	Eliminated in episode 15
Stephen	Male	54	3 rd in season 6	Eliminated in episode 4
Shayne	Male	18	3 rd in junior season 5	Eliminated in episode 8
Samantha	Female	23	4 th in season 9	Eliminated in episode 7
Fred	Male	26	10 th in season 10	Eliminated in episode 13
Bri	Female	27	8 th in season 10	Eliminated in episode 11
Alejandro	Male	40	4 th in season 11	Eliminated in episode 6
Gabriel	Male	24	7 th in season 8	Eliminated in episode 12
Shelly	Female	38	9 th in season 6	Eliminated in episode 10
Michael	Male	34	15 th in season 10	Finalist

Note. The contestants Emily and Shanika were eliminated in different phases of the same episode. Besides, this season did not give information as to the contestants' work life in monologue talks.

Appendix B. RQ: How Do Male and Female Contestants Respond to Rudeness?

#	Contestant	Gender	Aggressing	Persisting	Acquiescing	Descriptive Notes
Observer's Reflections:						

Season: Episode:

Appendix C. Code System

1 Responding to rudeness
1.1 Acquiescing strategies
1.1.1 (Non)verbal opt-out
1.1.2 Acquiesce
1.1.3 Thank
1.1.4 Apologize
1.2 Persisting strategies
1.2.1 Request
1.2.2 Justify
1.2.3 Argue
1.3 Aggressing strategies
1.3.1 Criticize
1.3.2 Threat
1.3.3 Insult
1.3.4 Challenge
1.3.5 Sarcasm

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