

# Disney's Politeness for Profit

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**ABSTRACT:** Politeness may sometimes be manipulated in order to become a key strategy for the success of given companies, especially of those companies where a high quality service and a friendly environment constitute a fundamental part of the product sold. This is the case of the Disney theme parks, whose helpful and polite employees are often seen as one of the most appreciated aspects of the park experience. The present work analyzes some of the most significant verbal tactics adopted by the Disney staff during interactions with visitors, concluding that the nature, function and potential social effects of «Disney politeness» exemplifies a linguistic creation of reality aimed at preserving and reinforcing the corporate image of the Disney trademark.

*Keywords:* politeness, theme parks, society, consumer culture, language, idelect, ideology, social control.

**RESUMEN :** El fenómeno de la cortesía puede en ocasiones ser manipulado para convertirse en una estrategia fundamental al servicio del éxito comercial de algunas compañías multinacionales, especialmente de aquellas para las que la cordialidad del entorno, así como la alta calidad de servicio, constituyen características primordiales del producto ofertado. Este es el caso de los parques temáticos Disney, en los que la cortesía y amabilidad de los empleados se consideran una parte integral y muy apreciada de la experiencia del parque. El presente artículo analiza las tácticas de cortesía lingüística más relevantes adoptadas por los empleados de los parques temáticos Disney en sus interacciones con los visitantes, para concluir que la naturaleza, función y potenciales efectos sociales de la «cortesía Disney» constituyen un ejemplo de creación lingüística de la realidad orientada hacia el reforzamiento de la imagen corporativa de la compañía.

*Palabras clave:* cortesía, parques temáticos, sociedad, cultura de consumo, lenguaje, idiolecto, ideología, control social.

In the last decades Disney theme parks have been the focus of much research in a wide variety of disciplines, and have been frequently put at the center of discussions regarding their aesthetic, cultural, social and political impact on contemporary society. It is generally accepted by the academic community that the Disney company and especially its theme parks are actually becoming one of the defining features of our times in terms of marketing strategies and of consumer culture. As a matter of fact, some of the strategies adopted by the Disney theme parks to draw visitors in are now being implemented by major multinational corporations to appeal to customers, consequently influencing «[...] more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world» (Bryman, 1999: 26).

Most of these strategies have already been analyzed in detail,<sup>1</sup> whereas others, such as those involving the verbal behavior of the Disney theme park employees, their use of certain «verbal tools», still remain unexplored. The present paper is therefore aimed at filling at least part of this gap by observing and evaluating more in depth the language of the Disney staff and particularly the politeness tactics they adopt during interactions with visitors. A deeper understanding of their nature and *raison d'être* is deemed necessary in order to allow a more comprehensive interpretation both of the world of Disney and of consumer culture in contemporary society.

I will first briefly describe some of the most typical aspects of the Disney theme parks, which include the central role played by the employees' verbal behavior. This will provide some general information which will subsequently serve as the background for the critical analysis of the special politeness strategies used by the Disney park employees. The theories of Lakoff (1973, 1990), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson (1987) will be the framework by means of which the present work will then consider the several examples of verbal politeness reported. The last section will investigate the general principles residing at the basis of the Disney politeness tactics and will suggest a possible interpretation as far as their actual meaning and function both from the visitors' and the employees' perspective. A reflection of the influence that the Disney politeness strategy might potentially exert on the nature of politeness in society at large will be touched upon at the end of the article.

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1. Marling (1997), focusing on the parks' architectural features; Koenig (2002), describing Disney's «hidden» policies inside the parks; and Hiaasen (1998), an analysis of the «clean» image projected by the Disney company in contemporary society.

## 1. The Disney Theme Parks: Theming, Cinematic Approach and Control

The present study only refers to the Disney parks located in the US. This section will therefore provide an overview of Disneyland and Walt Disney World, which will subsequently be examined from three key perspectives: theming, cinematic approach and control.

Walt Disney's project was to create a park that both adults and children would enjoy (Bryman, 1995), a special place that could offer its visitors an escape from everyday life by means of interesting and amusing activities and attractions. Disneyland, built in 1955 in Anaheim (California), was the first attempt to realize this idea. Disneyland itself, known as the Magic Kingdom, is divided into six distinct regions, each one built and structured according to the following themes: America's typical town of the 1930s; exotic adventures; the frontier life of the nineteenth century American West; future world; childhood fairy tales; and Disney cartoon characters. Such themes are recreated by means of architecture, landscaping, costuming, music, live entertainment, attractions, Audio-Animatronic<sup>2</sup> figures, merchandise, and food and beverage.

Walt Disney World, opened in 1971 a few miles outside Orlando (Florida), represents a certain evolution from Walt Disney's original project. Currently, it consists of four main theme parks (the Magic Kingdom, EPCOT Center, Disney MGM Studios, and Disney Animal Kingdom), two water theme parks, and two minor theme parks (Pleasure Island and Disney's Boardwalk). The Magic Kingdom features much of the same structure and attractions as those in Disneyland, whereas EPCOT Center (an acronym standing for Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow) is invested with a more explicit educational purpose. It includes attractions and exhibits which depict the evolution of human history and the application of electronics and virtual reality, also containing eleven country pavilions which are themed according to each country's characteristic features.

The theming of Disney MGM Studios basically refers to the motion pictures, movie stars and television industries at the time of Hollywood's golden age, while the Disney Animal Kingdom, themed according to savannah and jungle motifs, consists of an open zoo which includes numerous wild animals, and offers various attractions and exhibits.

The landscaping and attractions of the two water parks are meant to evoke tropical places. Pleasure Island, in turn, is an area for night-time entertainment.

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2. The company has created its own version of robotics, called Audio-Animatronics, enabling lifelike robots to speak, move, sing and dance in the Disney attractions (Wasko, 2001).

Lastly, Disney's Boardwalk is a sort of amusement park in the style of Coney Island parks, with game arcades, rides, music, food and, of course, numerous shops.

The wide variety of themes, attractions and atmospheres that these parks recreate, together with numerous other factors which characterize them as one of the most popular travelling destinations in the world, are the result of a complex system of strategies and policies which have been at the center of many researchers' attention for years. For the purpose of the present work it is now necessary to consider some of those strategies more in detail in order to better define the role of the park employees' language within this context.

Most writers agree that the strategy of theming plays a fundamental role as far as the originality and success of the Disney products are concerned.<sup>3</sup> For Walt Disney and his successors, theming, and also the preservation of its integrity, was and still is a key mechanism to achieve two main goals: appealing to adults as much as children and distinguishing the Disney parks from all other traditional amusement parks. Theming gives in fact coherence to the various attractions and the environment in which they are located; it enriches the attractions' appeal by means of detailed design; it encompasses visitors with narratives by making them feel immersed in a special atmosphere, recreated thanks to the combination of landscaping, architecture, sounds, restaurants, costumes, and the Disney hosts' and hostesses' attitude; and lastly, it generally contributes to elevating the sense of fun thereby camouflaging the park's real nature, i.e., that it is a business enterprise (Bryman, 1995).

Some commentators have drawn attention to another aspect, namely the way in which cinematic techniques are employed to emphasize the narrative elements and the visitor's experience of them. Finch (1973), for instance, suggests that the Disney parks are devised in the manner of a film set. Both film sets and theme parks require similar presentational skills, such as would be the creation of a narrative flow in which the viewers / guests are to be immersed, and the construction of coherence that will link the various constituent parts and conceal the backstage labour. As far as the last aspect is concerned, the different park areas are meticulously designed to conceal all possible elements which may in some way or other remind visitors of a «behind-the-scenes» world. To this purpose, Disney employees are instructed to use cinematic metaphors such as *cast member*, *costume* or *on stage / backstage*,<sup>4</sup> when dealing with visitors.

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3. Thomas and Johnston (1981) and Bryman (1999).

4. These terms are used in the Disney parlance to refer to, respectively, park employees, uniforms, areas inside the park visible to visitors, and park areas out of visitors' sight.

A further key strategy employed in the Disney parks is, in most commentators' view, the exertion of control. Bryman (1995) and Watts (1997) explain how this element is manifest in a variety of ways and at different levels. Highly controlled are, for instance, the several forms of the park's theming by means of specific measures aimed at eliminating from the «on stage» side of the park all undesirable or unattractive elements (e.g. power lines, pipes or dirt) which may remind guests of the real world. What is more controversial, though, is the application of control strategies to Disney employees who, according to the accounts of *The Project on Disney* (1995) and Wasko (2001), are periodically monitored by means of supervisors: often dressed as tourists, these supervisors test the staff's conformity with the Disney politeness precepts, and they punish their transgression.

## **2. Working at a Disney Theme Park**

The friendliness and politeness of Disney theme park employees is renowned, becoming one of the most appreciated aspects commented upon by visitors (Wasko, 2001). The employees' attitude, as suggested above, constitutes a key factor in improving the visitors' «magic» experience at the park, as well as contributing to offering a high-quality service, an essential condition this to ensure the customers' satisfaction and return. For that reason, the company created its own training program, based on instruction manuals that cover a variety of themes, and called it «The Disney University» (Wasko, 2001). This training program has to be followed by every newly recruited Disney employee before he/she starts working in the park. In essence, as Blocklyn (1988) and Wasko (2001) explain, the training program for future park employees («cast members» in the Disney parlance) is a general introduction to the history and to the system of values, myths and symbols that the Disney company wants its employees to assimilate as part of their cultural background. This is followed by a set of lessons, aimed at teaching the Disney service quality standards and at preserving the integrity of the show, which contains instructions on how to cope with emergency situations, guidelines regarding correct appearance, rules concerning proper non-verbal and verbal behavior, and other information that employees must respect whenever they are «on stage». Details about the first two aspects are thoroughly discussed, for instance, in Bryman (1995: 109-110), *Project on Disney* (1995: 137-146) and Wasko (2001: 94), as well as in numerous unofficial Disney web sites. The present article will now focus on the verbal side of the so-called «Disney Way».

### 3. Disney Politeness: Methodology

The data collected<sup>5</sup> show how the Disney company is well aware of what linguists such as Lakoff (1990) have called the powerful potential of language to be used as a tool to achieve success. Disney theme parks communicate with their guests through their cast members, and the positive result of such communication largely depends on the way language is used, i.e. on the verbal tactics employed.<sup>6</sup> This means, in a general sense, that a smooth and friendly interaction generally tends to contribute to the success of the Disney company, because it avoids potential conflicts and helps keep the quality of customer service at a high level, which consequently enhances guest satisfaction. Furthermore, in a place like a Disney theme park, where the magic atmosphere needs to be preserved in order to maintain the themes, words must be coherent with the whole show in order to control the visitors' imagination. Language can in fact be regarded as «[...] the maker of a mood [...]» (Lakoff, 1990: 13), as a sort of tool which, if skillfully used, can affect reality. This implies that well-chosen words or expressions uttered by a cast member may create «magic» experiences, whereas badly chosen words or expressions may destroy the fantastic fictional environment, which represents one of the most important peculiarities of a Disney theme park.

In the light of such observations, and on the basis of the guidelines and instructions presented in the following pages, it is then possible to argue that at the very heart of all Disney verbal tactics lie the principles of politeness, employed as a means to avoid conflict, and to achieve smooth communication in order to accomplish certain goals.

The complex phenomenon of politeness, inscribed in the multi-faceted world of Disney, may undoubtedly be explored from a number of perspectives, according to different theoretical models. The present study is aimed at suggesting one possible approach based on the politeness theories developed by Lakoff (1973, 1990), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson (1987), which will provide the framework for the analysis of the varying strategies and tactics reported.

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5. This analysis is based on several types of sources: those parts of the Disney handbooks and guidelines for newly recruited park employees that have already been published in the works of Bryman (1995: 107), Project on Disney (1995: 110), Connellan (1997: 83) and Wasko (2001: 93); the comments and interviews involving ex or current Disney cast members reported in the Project on Disney (1995: 113); and a number of interviews and mail exchanges carried out by this author with former European participants in the Disney International Program, a special work-and-study experience in the Disney theme parks in Florida. This has allowed me to collect cohesive and uniform information concerning the specific instructions for the verbal behavior of Disney park personnel, and to obtain a deeper insight into the complex system of policies which govern the «magic» world of Disney.

6. The Disney Company is well known for the secrecy of its internal policies and for its litigious legal department (stories of Disney filing suits over copyright infringements are numerous). All quotations reported in the present work are therefore based either on the above mentioned studies or on personal interviews conducted over the phone and e-mail, without revealing the interviewee's identity.

Lakoff's (1973, 1990) principles on politeness and on politeness modes will help in defining some general features of the Disney verbal politeness system, and in understanding Disney's main purposes concerning the cast member / park visitor interaction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Leech's (1983) theories will provide the framework for the analysis of the several politeness strategies to be learned by Disney trainees. Brown and Levinson's concepts of face and of positive / negative politeness will account for such strategies in terms of a more socially-focused point of view, whereas Leech's approach, based on its maxims and principles, will render the more strictly linguistic perspective.

#### 4. The Disney Precepts

The starting point of this analysis will be the investigation and interpretation of those guidelines concerning polite language which appear in the training material distributed to new park employees, on the basis of the interviews conducted with former European participants in the Disney International Program. They are contained in the handbook section entitled *Guidelines for Guest Service Fanatic*,<sup>7</sup> and are formulated as follows:

1. Greet and welcome each and every guest
2. Exceed guest expectations and seek out guest contact
3. Provide immediate service recovery
4. Solve guest problems before they become dissatisfied
5. Demonstrate patience and honesty in handling complaints
6. Preserve the «magical» guest experience
7. Say «Thank You» to each and every guest

(Wasko, 2001: 93)

The form and content of these guidelines already reveal a general aspect characterizing politeness norms taught to trainees, namely, their prescriptive nature. The interviews conducted confirm the view that the Disney company considers cast members' polite behavior a compulsory attitude that must be adopted in every verbal exchange involving customers, by emphasizing also the significant impact of the controlling practices mentioned above. Thus, politeness seems to represent here not just a preferable option, as it happens in everyday interaction (Eelen, 2001), but a fundamental component of Disney employees' job in theme parks.

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7. Connellan (1997: 87) and Wasko (2001: 93) provide a detailed presentation of the general Disney behavioral basics reported in the training material.



The first and the last guidelines show how much value is attributed to the beginning and the end of the encounter between cast member and guest. Former Disney cast members point out that they were given precise instructions on how to greet park visitors in an appropriate or even themed way,<sup>8</sup> and how to end every transaction with expressions of thankfulness or appreciation. According to Lakoff's theory (1990), participants at the beginning of a verbal exchange need to be reassured that the other party is interested and glad to engage in talk with them, while at the end of the encounter it is crucial that at least one of the interactants communicates that the conversation was pleasurable. It becomes then clear that, by means of polite greetings and/or expressions of caring, Disney employees are supposed to «pave the way» for a smooth and pleasant verbal exchange in which the park visitor is made to feel welcome and valued. The constant use of *thank you* or other expressions of appreciation in the encounter's final part, such as «It's been our pleasure to serve you» (The Project on Disney, 1995: 153), is instead aimed at explicitly communicating the Disney staff's pleasure to serve its guests and consequently reassuring them of the positive value attributed to the conversation. Seen from Brown and Levinson's (1987) perspective, both guidelines may be included among the positive politeness strategies, since they are meant to convey the cast member's interest in satisfying the wants and needs of the park visitors.

The second guideline (*Exceed guest expectations and seek out guest contact*) may be interpreted, on the basis of the interviewees' explanations, as follows: the Disney staff is required to be helpful at all times, to listen and to possibly satisfy the guests' needs. Specifically, this guideline aims at instructing trainees to always «make the first move» when guests seem to be in need of assistance, i.e., to voluntarily offer help before guests themselves ask for it. On the basis of Brown and Levinson's theory, this behavior may be considered as the realization of several positive politeness strategies: Strategy 1, «Notice, attend to H» (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 103), which states that speakers should notice and attend to certain aspects concerning addressees, such as their wants, needs or goods; Strategy 10, «Offer, promise» (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 125), which is intended to indicate the speaker's commitment to satisfying the hearers' positive-face wants by offering cooperation; and Strategy 15, «Give gifts to H» (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129), by means of which speakers show that they are aware of their hearers' desires (whether concerned with tangible goods or human relations) and are willing to take some action in order to fulfil them.

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8. By saying, for instance, «Good morning princess!» to young girls visiting the Magic Kingdom park, or «Jambo!» in the Animal Kingdom park.



*Exceed guest expectations and seek out guest contact* can also be perceived as a norm directed at encouraging an overpolite attitude. As a matter of fact, the Disney handbook insists on the explicit and even «pre-emptive» display of a polite demeanor: this strategy seems to take into consideration the fact that conventional politeness, as Eelen (2001) points out, is often associated with the idea of unmarked behavior, which usually passes unnoticed because it is taken for granted. As already mentioned, the Disney company, instead, wants its customers to notice and remember the polite cast members working in the parks, therefore, it emphasizes the importance of extra-courteous manners.

Guidelines 3, 4 and 5 (*Provide immediate service recovery; Solve guest problems before they become dissatisfied; Demonstrate patience and honesty in handling complaints*) refer to problem-solving strategies. Cast members are required to be knowledgeable and to be able to find the right answer for park visitors, or at least to find another cast member who can help them out before guests become dissatisfied. Cast members are not supposed to guess or say «I don't know», an idea further reinforced by numerous examples reported in several works and web sites focusing on Disney park employees. Such principles may be regarded as examples of the «Tact Maxim»'s positive side, namely, «Maximize the benefit to other» (Leech, 1983: 132), in that the speaker is proposing an action beneficial to the hearer. Moreover, avoiding uncooperative expressions such as «I don't know» and taking instead some action in order to help a guest maximizes the cost to the speaker because such behavior implies efforts on his/her side. Thus, these strategies can be also related to the positive side of the «Generosity Maxim», «Maximize cost to self» (Leech, 1983: 132). In a more inclusive manner, the key principle at the basis of this group of guidelines mirrors Brown and Levinson's (1987) Strategy 10 of positive politeness, since it is geared towards the offering of cooperation and the accomplishment of the hearer's wants.

Guideline 6 can be considered the final purpose of all the Disney verbal strategies taught to trainees. As previously noted, Disney employees have to continuously bear in mind that, while they are working, they are being part of the show, that is to say, that they become a certain kind of actor playing a role within an artificial world of fantasy where the negative aspects of everyday life do not exist. In order to maintain the coherence in such a scenario, from a linguistic point of view, it is therefore essential for the Disney theme park's success that utterances are adapted to this type of philosophy. Focusing on the positive side of things rather than on the regulations, and avoiding talking about personal or job-related problems in front of guests might constitute two possible applications of this guideline, as may be inferred from examples reported in *The Project on Disney* (1995), or Wasko (2001). As a result, this guideline might be considered as a re-elaboration of Leech's (1983: 147) «Pollyanna Principle», for two main

reasons: firstly, it is aimed at instructing cast members to give more emphasis to the favourable than to the unfavourable aspects of the information communicated to the customers;<sup>9</sup> and secondly, it also suggests that cast members have to avoid unpleasant topics of conversation when dealing with park visitors, since these might be the cause of unfavourable associations. Talking about real life issues would bring guests back to their everyday world and this would inevitably disrupt the magic of the Disney atmosphere.

A further guideline on verbal behavior is reported in *The Project on Disney* (1995: 126): «[...] a page from Disney's training manual [...] instructs employees to call guests by their first names if the name appears anywhere in sight – on clothing, jewelry, etc.». In addition to this, the page in question also reports that all workers at Walt Disney World, from garbage collectors to top managers, are generally used to calling each other by their first names. This is also attested by the information provided by former cast members commenting on the fact that they had to wear a name tag, so that first-naming was encouraged both between cast members themselves and between cast members and guests. Drawing on Lakoff (1990), the strategy based on first-naming is a typical feature of the politeness mode called «camaraderie», which results from the application of Lakoff's third principle of the politeness rule, «Make A feel good, be friendly» (Lakoff, 1973: 298). «Camaraderie»'s key tactics are basically aimed at achieving courtesy by means of verbal behavior communicating openness, niceness, good fellowship and deep caring. These features seem to coincide with the ideas associated with the whole Disney behavioral policy, intended to convey the impression that the Disney parks are a sort of family-like type of community where its members care about each other and about their guests. It should not therefore be inappropriate to conclude that promoting first-naming, along with all the previously mentioned guidelines, is part of a more general strategy whose final goal consists in establishing an emotional connection between park staff and guests, and in suggesting interest and concern to the addressees of such verbal tactics.

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9. Some former cast members have pointed out that when visitors ask about park closing times, Disney employees are supposed to avoid expressions such as «The park closes at...», since the verb *to close* conveys the negatively connoted idea that, after all, the magic of Disney parks has also rules and that sooner or later guests will have to leave the world of fantasy to go back to their everyday routine. They are instructed, therefore, to use the more appropriate «The park is open until...», as the verb *to open* implies a more favorable interpretation, focused on the opportunity of staying in the park rather than on the necessity to leave.

## 5. Recommended and «Forbidden» Expressions and Words

In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines, the Disney training program has also developed a special «vocabulary policy» for the park employees to respect in every conversation involving guests. This aspect clearly emerges from various examples reported in the different sources consulted and it can therefore be considered as a further key strategy deserving closer analysis. Drawing on the works by Bryman (1995), The Project on Disney (1995), Wasko (2001), and on the interviews conducted, the present study has collected and analyzed a number of taboo and appropriate Disney terms which might be listed according to two main groups. The first group comprises terms which frequently occur in conversations between guests and park employees:

TABOO TERMS	DISNEY TERMS
Crowd	Audience
Customer	Guest
Employee	Cast member
Out of order	Experiencing technical difficulties
Queue/line	Pre-entertainment area
(The attraction is) closed	(The attraction is) currently being refurbished
To be in a restricted area	To be backstage
To work in the park	To be on stage
Uniform	Costume

It can be easily noticed that all the words or expressions in the first column evoke associations with everyday life (e.g., *customer*, *work*, *uniform*, etc.) or with negative aspects connected to it (e.g., *out of order*, *queue / line*, etc.). The use of such terms in a Disney theme park would certainly run counter to Disney philosophy in that it would disrupt the fairy-tale atmosphere which visitors are supposed to be experiencing, by suddenly reminding them that reality is still there, not simply waiting *outside* the park, but seeping *into* the park itself. This is the reason why potentially dangerous bits and pieces of the real world need to be concealed or converted into more pleasant or at least harmless concepts by means of euphemisms or circumlocutions, so that the «magic» Disney atmosphere is preserved.

According to Lakoff (1990), euphemisms and circumlocutions are in fact to be regarded as a sort of hedging device aimed at «disguising» a given message, i.e., at communicating its content unaltered from the cognitive point of view while avoiding the direct mention of possible offensive or negatively connoted concepts connected to it. Thus, following Lakoff, it can be argued that saying

that something in the park is *experiencing technical difficulties*, instead of using the term *out of order*, mitigates the disappointing fact that even in the magic world of Disney things can break down. The circumlocution makes the message more indirect and consequently weakens its effect. Similarly, replacing the term *employee* with the cinematic-theatrical metaphor *cast member* disguises the idea that the Disney staff is working in terms of everyday life activity (i.e., in order to earn a living), and conveys the impression that workers are simply playing a role within the show, thus possible connections to negatively evaluated aspects of the external world are neutralized.

Applying Brown and Levinson's notion of face, this type of indirectness may be classified within Strategy 1 of negative politeness, «Be conventionally indirect» (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 132), for, by means of hedging tactics, the aim is to communicate the speaker's desire and effort to be polite and also to avoid possible damage to the hearer's negative face.

The Disney theme parks are well-known for keeping emergencies under control, not allowing panic to spread among their visitors. The role played by cast members in such situations is crucial, which is why the training handbooks include a special set of safety guidelines seeking to instruct employees on which words to use in order not to upset or frighten guests, as well as to control the potentially damaging publicity that may follow. These would comprise the second group of terms previously mentioned, consisting then of a list of specific words and codes aimed at avoiding the use of «panic words»:

TABOO TERMS	DISNEY TERMS
Accident	incident
Evacuation	Exiting
Ambulance	Alpha Unit
Car accident	Signal 24
Fire	Signal 25

Emergency messages are in this way mitigated or even made indecipherable to park visitors, so that unpleasant ideas are kept far from the visitors' imagination. From a pragmatic perspective, Leech's «Pollyanna Principle» seems to offer, once again, a suitable classification of the rules governing this last set of terms.

## 6. Conclusions

Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that the type of politeness strategies adopted by a given society may be a revealing index of the principles underlying

that society's culture. A similar line of reasoning may be applied to the study of the world of Disney thematic parks. Thus, drawing on the considerations which have emerged from the previous analysis, it is now possible to offer an interpretation of the values that the Disney company promotes or purports to promote.

It can be noted, in general terms, that the Disney verbal politeness system has some elements in common with Lakoff's camaraderie politeness mode. Hypothetically, camaraderie's basic principle, «Make A feel good, be friendly» (Lakoff, 1973: 298) might well be considered the very first guideline to inspire the whole Disney politeness system, adopting the form of the possible postulate «Make park visitors feel welcome and valued, be friendly and helpful». Moreover, the key values pertaining to «camaraderie», with the exception of some aspects which would be perceived as too informal within the context of a theme park, can be considered as quite similar to those characterizing Disney politeness, which is conceived as a tool to make the company appear as a happy and loving community, promoting social harmony and equality, where cast members make people happy due to their niceness, care and courtesy.

From Leech's (1983) perspective, most norms of verbal behavior described in the training handbook seem to pursue the objective of giving positive support to the hearer while focusing on the favourable aspects of reality. The Pollyanna Principle (geared towards optimistic overstatement and euphemistic understatement) in particular, can be considered the «driving force» behind a good number of the politeness strategies, thus creating a smooth conversational environment where the hearer is «pampered» and protected from experiencing negatively connoted thoughts or feelings.

The analysis of the Disney verbal behavior applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework reveals that the training instructions are especially focused on tactics that may be referred to positive politeness strategies, which are basically geared towards the satisfaction of the customers' wants and needs. This finding clearly testifies to the «customer-centered» philosophy of the park, which assigns a high strategic value to the act of continuously giving moral gifts to visitors.

Whereas the use of these tactics makes customers feel valued and appreciated, and also preserves the magical atmosphere of the park, the prescriptive character of the Disney politeness system, which, as previously observed, involves controlling practices on the park employees, does have a «dark side». The nice and friendly demeanor of the personnel may actually be seen in a different light and be considered, for instance, as an imposed attitude that employees are being coerced into using. From the several norms analyzed, it can be inferred that the Disney employees have, in fact, little room for the expression of their personal opinions or comments, and that their individual freedom and decision powers are reduced; moreover, any violation of the rules might subject them to punishment. Thus, it may be possible to go a step further and conclude that the image of the

cheerful Disney employee is a sort of mask that all workers are forced to wear, while the politeness conveyed by such an «artificially constructed» behavior is inevitably characterized by a certain degree of falsity.

What finally emerges is that Disney politeness seems to be characterized by its contradictory nature, since its function of communicating a dream to the park guests is actually the product of the personnel's daily routine made of rigid rules, control, and limitation. In the light of such findings, is it then appropriate to define Disney cast members' verbal behaviour as politeness? The present work, drawing also on the notion of «emotional labor»<sup>10</sup> developed by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 89), would rather call it «profit politeness», in that, despite the politeness-like façade, it reveals that the very nature of the concept has been manipulated and exploited for commercial purposes. The Disney employees' verbal behaviour seems indeed directed towards the same concept of «genuine» politeness, but it is actually based on decidedly different principles:

- a. Instead of being a choice, politeness for Disney cast members is a compulsory behavior.
- b. It is not spontaneous, for it is taught through a special training and it is scripted.
- c. The Disney politeness' executor is not the beneficiary of the addressee's possible positive reaction. The Disney company is, especially in terms of money revenue.
- d. It is part of a more general strategy of theming and is therefore assigned the status of «accessory» that is included in the experience that visitors buy at the park's entrance.

The present study, therefore, regards Disney politeness as the result of a complex operation of co-optation<sup>11</sup> at the expense of the concept of politeness itself, which has been emptied of its «human» content and has become an artificial device implemented for lucrative purposes.

The present work has tried to illustrate the potentialities for interpretation offered by the proposed model in further examining the Disney universe and its influential role on consumer and popular culture, given that many writers define Disney's marketing strategy of politeness as the model for work which will dominate in the new world order (Bryman, 1999). Research on politeness and on

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10. The notion of emotional labor is defined as the «act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions» (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993: 88-89).

11. The idea of co-optation of the politeness principles derives from the notion of «co-optation of utopia» developed in Baccolini and Moylan (2003) in relation to the Disney parks and their marketing policies, which abuse, devalue and manipulate the main principles of social dreaming with the purpose of selling goods or services.

its linguistic manifestations in today's society acquires an extremely important role in connection with the work that is still needed in order to monitor the possible evolution of this phenomenon, and to better understand the changes that will take place in the near future.

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