A Pragmatic Analysis of Impoliteness Strategies in an Iraqi T.V. Sports Show

**Abstract:** The study examined impolite acts in an Iraqi T.V. sports talk show interview to illustrate the functions and categories of impoliteness strategies using a descriptive qualitative method. The data were in the form of utterances, while the context of the data was the dialogues spoken by the host and the guest in the interview. The data source was a short 8-minute video clip of the interview on YouTube that has gone viral among Iraqi sports fans. In this research, an inductive approach was used in analyzing the data. From a theoretical perspective, this research is expected to shed light on impoliteness strategies in Iraqi T.V. sports shows. From an applied perspective, the results of this study are hoped to help people be more aware of the importance of being cautious in choosing certain politeness strategies to maintain good communication with others and gain their goals through that communication.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, pragmatic analysis, politeness, Impoliteness, T.V. show, Iraq

**INTRODUCTION**

Politeness is an important concept in pragmatics that plays an especially key role in achieving successful social interaction. Lakoff (1973) views politeness as a behavior used in societies to decrease tension in personal communication. Likewise, Leech (1983) sees politeness as behaviors employed for creating and maintaining courtesy and considerate behavior toward others. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) define politeness as using communicative strategies to maintain the hearer’s face. They see politeness as an interaction since it promotes cooperation among its participants while strengthening interpersonal bonds. Along the same lines, Mills (2003) defines politeness as the purpose of the speaker’s expressions to minimize face-threatening behaviors toward the listener.

**Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Face-Saving Theory**

Brown and Levinson introduced one of the most influential models of linguistic politeness in 1987. Two assumptions guide their politeness theory. The first assumption is based on the notion of the “model person” with their assumption that all people are rational and goal-oriented, trying to avoid face-threatening acts with respect to face need. The second assumption is associated with the notion of “face,” which is defined as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself” (Goffman, 1967). Brown and Levinson (1987) consider face the core of their study and also expand it into two dimensions: “positive face,” which refers to the need of the speaker to be appreciated by others, and “negative face,” which refers to a person’s desire to be free from any imposition. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest five strategies the speaker can use to redress face-threatening acts. They are as follows:

- **Bald on record strategy** is used directly and is employed by the speaker without any effort to reduce the face-threatening act. Brown and Levinson (1987) also reveal that this strategy is commonly used among friends and family members and is likely to occur in the case of urgency, in which the use of imperative is a clear example.

- **Positive politeness strategy** is actualized when the speaker treats the hearer as a member of an in-group in interaction, trying to reduce the distance with the hearers and establishing the feeling of solidarity. This strategy can be actualized by some relevant sub-strategies such as seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, jokes, etc.

- **Negative politeness strategy** is performed by maximizing the social distance between participants, reducing the imposition on the hearer, and respecting the hearer’s negative face. This strategy includes some relevant sub-strategies such as showing difference, apologizing, questioning, hedging, and being pessimistic.

- **Off-record strategy** is used when the risk faced is quite high. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is particularly useful when M.P.s want their utterances to have more than one attributable intention.
• **Do not do the face-threatening acts strategy** is performed when the speaker remains silent and does not do the act, which makes them avoid causing any offense. It is carried out when the speaker considers the risk of face-threatening to be great.

**Impoliteness**

According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness refers to “communicative strategies designed to attack face and thereby cause conflict and disharmony.” In their description of impoliteness, Culpeper et al. (2003) point out a relationship between politeness and impoliteness, arguing that impoliteness should be regarded as a complement to politeness theory and a revision of parts of it. Impoliteness results from the speaker’s purposeful face-attack communication and the hearer’s perception or construction of such communication as an intention to actively face-attack. Thus, Culpeper’s definition takes into consideration two factors:

1. The role of the hearer.
2. The intention of the speaker.

Impoliteness is often used to refer to both (1) and (2), i.e., when the speaker communicates face attack intentionally, and the hearer perceives it. In addition, Locher and Bousfield (2008) also emphasize that impoliteness is not the absence of politeness but the face-attack which has been suggested.

**Culpeper’s Model**

The first name that comes to mind when one mentions impoliteness is Culpeper (1996). This can be attributed to two main reasons. First, Culpeper (1996) is one of the first to take a methodical approach to dealing with impoliteness (Orthaber, 2017). Second, the Culpeper model is adaptable and may be used in various settings (Mullany & Stockwell, 2010).

Culpeper introduced his framework of impoliteness in which the idea of face was the central focus of his work in the mid-1990s. The framework adopts Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of face. In this model, impoliteness is speaker-based since it depends on the speaker’s employing impoliteness techniques to actualize it.

Influenced by Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987), Culpeper (1996) distinguishes between inherent impoliteness and mock impoliteness or banter. To him, inherent impoliteness refers to acts that innately attack the hearer’s face, such as order and threat, whereas mock impoliteness refers to acts that remain on the surface and occur in the interaction between friends because they are not real and among people who are meeting for the first time with the desire to establish an in-group relationship; (Culpeper, 1996). According to Leech (1983), these latter acts show solidarity and display intimacy; thus, the closer the relationship, the more impoliteness.

Culpeper developed an “anatomy of impoliteness” model containing the following five possible strategies:

1. **Bald on-record impoliteness** is used in situations where a significant amount of face is at risk, and the speaker aims to attack the hearer’s face. Therefore, the face-threatening act is carried out in a straightforward, clear, unequivocal, and succinct manner in settings where the importance of one’s face cannot be ignored or downplayed (Bousfield, D. 2008).
2. **Positive impoliteness** aims at undermining the positive face wish of the addressee (Cummings, L., 2005; Bousfield & Locher, 2008). Culpeper presents a list of sub-strategies that fall under positive impoliteness strategies. Some examples of these sub-strategies include ignoring, disassociating from the other, showing disinterest, seeking disagreement, using taboo words, and calling the other person offensive names.
3. **Negative impoliteness** aims at harming the addressee’s negative face needs (Cummins, 2005). For example, telling someone to stop wearing an awful outfit is an example of negative impoliteness. Culpeper recommends the following output techniques of negative impoliteness as examples of negative impoliteness: terrify, despise, ridicule, and enter the other’s space - either literally or symbolically.
4. **Sarcasm or mock politeness** surfaces in a circumstance characterized by fake employment of politeness tactics and the maintenance of a surface-level realization, sarcasm, where the speaker says pleasant things but does not believe them (Culpeper, J. 1996); for example, “Your outfit is extremely wonderful,” when in fact, it is ugly.
5. **Withhold politeness** is used when a politeness act is absent when it is required to be expressed (Cummins, 2005). It is to refrain from speaking in situations when courtesy is needed, such as failing to return a greeting or failing to offer gratitude (Culpeper, 1996).

Although patterned on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness strategies, Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness strategies were distinct in that they were used to attack rather than keep face. This is because Culpeper’s strategies were used to gain an advantage. In addition, they are the source of contention and unrest (Cummins, 2005; Toddington, 2015).
Culpeper’s (1996) model of impoliteness was chosen as an analytical framework to investigate impoliteness strategies in this study because it is based on a variety of written and spoken data taken from real life, which renders the model more applicable, reliable, and flexible to a variety of contexts. Specifically, the model was chosen because Culpeper’s model is based on data taken from real life (Bousfield, D. 2008).

**METHOD:**

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were in the form of utterances, while the context of the data was the dialogues spoken by the host and the guest in the interview. The data source was a short 8-minute video clip of the interview on YouTube that has gone viral among Iraqi sports fans. Consequently, the study report will comprise data extracts that have been translated into English to provide a concise summary of the presentation.

**Research question**

The present study intends to answer the following research question:

R.Q. What types of impoliteness strategies are used in Iraqi T.V. sports talk shows?

**Data collection procedure**

First, the researcher watched the video clip several times. Whenever an instance of impoliteness showed, the clip is paused, the time is marked, and the quotation is immediately translated and written down, along with its classification according to Culpeper’s model. Second, the researcher re-watched the clip and double-checked that all of the information that had been captured previously was accurate. Finally, the researcher organized the gathered data on a data sheet. The following shows how the data sheet should be formatted.

**ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:**

The data in this study were analyzed inductively using Culpeper’s model. The following is a rundown of the methods of data analysis that were used in this study:

- classifying the data based on three distinct categories,
- examining the data,
- summarizing and interpreting the data, and
- drawing conclusions based on the findings of the study.

**Context**

The interview occurred during an episode of the Iraqi T.V. sports talk show called “The Fourth Referee,” which is shown daily on the Al-Ahd channel. The show is one of the more popular sports shows. As with the other similar shows takes a mostly sensational style, tackling controversial topics and hosting controversial guests. The background to this interview was that in a previous episode, the host, Mr. Omar Riyadh, had attacked the would-be guest, Mr. Hussein Ali Hussein, using only his initials H.A.H. making all kinds of accusations against him and calling him the “fatso” of Iraqi media. So, Mr. Hussein contacted the channel director and asked to appear on the same show to defend his name. The YouTube clip that was used for analysis can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSHwE5MiPQs&ab_channel=ALIRAQIALI

**Analysis**

The interview, which started calmly, soon got very heated with both interlocutors, but mostly the guest, using various impoliteness strategies in a clear attempt to attack the host’s “face” and get back at him for his previous insult. As soon as the interview starts (Timestamp 0.09) and as the host starts welcoming the guest, the clip shows the guest, rather than smiling at the host, is staring, if not glaring, at the host in a clear sign of challenge and disrespect (utilizing negative impoliteness). The host then starts welcoming the guest and invites him to talk about the accusations that “in your view were directed at you.” (Timestamp 0.32) By doing this, the host is disrespecting the guest’s intelligence, implying the guest is imagining he is the target when everyone is aware that the accusations and foul language were directed at no one but the guest. The host thus uses polite words when he means the opposite (utilizing mock impoliteness).

The guest starts his talk by rejecting to talk about another issue that the host asked him to discuss (Timestamp 0.45), setting his own agenda for the interview (utilizing negative impoliteness). When expressing this, the guest addresses the host by his first name, Omar, without using a title (Timestamp 0.47) which within this charged context is a sign of positive impoliteness, especially that later in the conversation, that guest would refer to himself as “Mr.” Hussein, (Timestamp 0.45) which shows his awareness of the level of formality required in this conversation. From 0.55 onwards, the guest keeps pointing his index finger at the host several times, which is a clear sign of positive impoliteness against the host.
The guest then asks the host directly if the previous attacks were directed at him, and the host again avoids answering, with a defying smirk, saying explicitly that the guest had a problem imagining what was said was against him, saying that this imagination “is your problem” (Timestamp 2.35) which can be seen as bald on record impoliteness. The guest immediately responds (Timestamp 2.56) utilizing a positive impoliteness strategy, saying that this shows “the level of your professional courage,” clearly implying that the host was a coward for avoiding admitting that he meant the host in his accusations.

When the host says that it was his role to comment on sports news (Timestamp 3.55), the guest attacks him, saying, “all your news items are false news. [sarcastically asking] Are you under the false impression that you are a newsmaker?” using bald on record impoliteness strategy. During the same exchange, the guest does not allow the host to respond by continuously interrupting him, utilizing negative impoliteness.

The guest again uses bald on-target impoliteness by directly telling the host (who apparently is wearing a wig), “Your head is as bold as a plate of glass, so you don’t get to criticize other people’s body shapes.” The guest then continues his attack utilizing bald-on-target impoliteness (Timestamp 4.25), saying he feels dishonored to have appeared with the host on the same show, repeatedly yelling at him. Another positive impoliteness instance (Timestamp 4.57) is witnessed when the guest starts reminding the host how he had been fired from this T.V. channel in the past and then was allowed to rejoin the channel. Once again, the guest uses bald on target strategy calling his host dishonest for not showing clips of the previous accusations. The guest then starts departing the show (Timestamp 5.44) but not before threatening the host that “Anything you say after I leave, I will make you pay for it,” again a clear, bald-on-record strategy.

As the guest leaves (Timestamp 5.58), the host, utilizing bald on record strategy, shouts at the guest that “leaving the show like this is a sign of defeat.”

DISCUSSION
The data were organized into categories according to the research purpose of describing the various impoliteness strategies. As discussed, Culpeper outlines five distinct sorts of impolite behavior patterns or techniques. These include bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm, or mock politeness, and withholding politeness.

In this study, 15 instances of impoliteness strategies can be found in the data, utilizing four of Culpeper’s strategies, some more frequent than others. The most frequently used strategy was bald on record impoliteness with seven instances, with positive impoliteness coming next with four instances, negative impoliteness with three instances, and sarcasm or mock politeness with only one.

CONCLUSION
Despite the small sample, the researcher claims this clip is representative of the sports talk shows on Iraqi channels, which gives a very negative picture of the level of language used in Iraqi T.V. shows. Not only were numerous impoliteness strategies used (15 instances of impoliteness strategies utilizing four different categories) within the window of only eight minutes, but the strategies utilized were the most direct, the most unprofessional, and the most inappropriate for a T.V. show. More research needs to be done, probably within the critical paradigm, in an attempt to raise people’s awareness of this problem and help everyone come up with better and more elevated use of language on Iraqi T.V. shows.

REFERENCES