

A Pragmatic Study of Impoliteness Strategies in Iraqi Actors' Discourse:

Eyad Radi as a Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores how Iraqi actors utilize impoliteness strategies, concentrating on Eyad Radi as a representative figure in television interviews and talk shows. Employing Culpeper's (1996,2011) approach, the analysis studies naturally occurring discourse to identify linguistic structures that threaten face and their social interpretation. Through content analysis, the study highlights regular use of bald-on-record, positive, negative, sarcasm/mock politeness, and off-record\withholding politeness strategies. These strategies serve as techniques for self-assertion, social critique, and audience engagement, illustrating that impoliteness functions strategically rather than accidentally.

Keywords: Impoliteness, Culpeper (1996,2011), Iraqi TV discourse, pragmatics, Eyad Radi

دراسة عملية لاستراتيجيات عدم اللباقة في خطاب الممثلين العراقيين: عياد راضي بوصفه حالة دراسية

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الخلاصة

تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيفية توظيف الممثلين العراقيين لاستراتيجيات عدم اللباقة، مع التركيز على إياد راضي بوصفه شخصية ممثلة في المقابلات التلفزيونية والبرامج الحوارية. وبلاستناد إلى منهج كالبر (1996, 2011)، يحلل البحث الخطاب الطبيعي المتداول بهدف تحديد البنى اللغوية التي تهدد «الوجه» وتفسرها الاجتماعي. ومن خلال تحليل المحتوى، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الاستخدام المنتظم لاستراتيجيات عدم اللباقة المباشرة، وعدم اللباقة الإيجابي، وعدم اللباقة السلبي، والسخرية/ اللباقة الزائف، وحجب اللباقة. وتوظف هذه الاستراتيجيات بوصفها تقنيات لتأكيد الذات، والنقد الاجتماعي، وإشراك الجمهور، مما يبين أن عدم اللباقة يؤدي وظائف استراتيجية مقصودة وليس سلوكاً عفويًا عرضيًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عدم اللباقة، كالبر (1996, 2011)، المقابلات التلفزيونية والبرامج الحوارية العراقية، التداولية، إياد راضي

1. Introduction

The study of impoliteness as a unique field within pragmatics acquires conceptual clearness through the work of Jonathan Culpeper, especially in his 1996-2011 reconceptualization of the phenomenon. Rather than considering

impoliteness as simply the absence of politeness, Culpeper approaches it as a socially valuable and communicatively constructed method by which speakers attack, challenge, or negatively affect the social identity of others (Culpeper, 2005:36).

In this perspective, impoliteness is interpreted as communicative action that is measured as face-threatening enhancement within the given context. Fundamentally, the approach does not restrict impoliteness to speaker objective alone. Instead, it acknowledges that offence appears through clarification. A communicative act may function as impolite either because it is purposefully formed to cause damage or because it is observed by the hearer as violating anticipated norms of communication. The double emphasis on intention and perception creates the Culpeper's framework especially sensitive to context-dependent variation (Culpeper, 2011: 31-35).

Iraqi television talk demonstrates offer a dynamic base where social standards, identities, and power relations are clearly discussed. Informal and confrontational programs allow actors to employ language that may violate conventional politeness norms. Examining these interactions through a pragmatic perspective draws attention to intentional impoliteness as a communicative strategy. This study deals with Eyad Radi's discourse to comprehend the implementation of impoliteness strategies and their pragmatic functions in Iraqi TV contexts.

1.1 Problem of the Study

Aired interviews in Iraq, especially those featuring actors like Eyad Radi, often include confrontational questions, humor, and evaluation of artistic and institutional matters. In such contexts, speakers do not always prioritize politeness; instead, they may respond with direct criticism, irony, laughter, or silence. Although these techniques are visible to viewers, little academic studies have dealt with how impoliteness functions pragmatically in Iraqi TV communication. Specifically, it remains unclear how actors purposefully use language and non-verbal reactions to manage reputation, assert authority, or engage the audience. This study addresses the gap by analyzing Eyad Radi's aired discussion, exploring how impoliteness strategies operate in real media interactions and what communicative purposes they serve beyond mere rudeness. Therefore, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What impoliteness strategies does Eyad Radi use in selected TV interviews?
2. How do these strategies conform with Culpeper's (1996,2011) model?
3. What communicative purposes do these strategies serve in aired interaction?
4. How does impoliteness affect the construction of professional identity and authority?
5. How do non-verbal reactions like laughter and silence operate as pragmatic approaches?

6. How does audience perception influence the evaluation of impoliteness in this context?

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study concentrates on Eyad Radi's discourse and aims to:

1. Identify the selected data of impoliteness in his interviews.
2. Categorizing the selected data according to Culpeper's (1996,2011) model.
3. Evaluating the pragmatic functions of each strategy in context.
4. Interpreting how impoliteness contributes to identity construction and authority.
5. Emphasizing the role of non-verbal responses, such as laughter and silence, in communicating implicit impoliteness.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The study assumes that:

1. Eyad Radi uses impoliteness intentionally to defend his reputation or respond to criticism.
2. Bald-on-record and sarcasm strategies appear more frequently than others.
3. Non-verbal reactions, such as laughter and silence, function as implicit face-threatening acts.
4. Audience interpretation significantly determines whether an utterance is perceived as offensive, humorous, or socially acceptable.
5. Impoliteness contributes to strengthening the speaker's authority and public identity rather than harming it.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The study focuses merely on selected aired interviews with Eyad Radi. It applies Culpeper's (1996,2011) impoliteness framework as the theoretical perspectives. Moreover, it adopts qualitative pragmatic analysis and limits to the Iraqi media context; findings cannot be generalized to other cultures or media settings.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is impactful because it associates pragmatic theory to actual-world media discourse. By analyzing Eyad Radi's language and non-verbal reactions, the research demonstrates how impoliteness operates strategically, serving to:

1. Preserve professional identity and assert authority.
2. Review institutions and highlight social issues.
3. Engage the audience by creating shared understanding through irony, humor, or silence.
4. Furthermore, this research adopts Culpeper's (1996,2011) model to Arabic broadcasted discourse, providing empirical evidence from a cultural and media setting that has been largely underexplored.

The findings offer insights for scholars interested in discourse analysis, pragmatics, media studies, and identity negotiation in public contexts.

2. Literature Review

While classical politeness theories (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) concentrate on face-saving strategies, Culpeper (1996,2011) emphasizes intentional face

attacks. Impoliteness is seen as a strategic choice rather than accidental rudeness, taking into account the speaker's intentions and the audience's interpretation. Omar and Wahid (2010: 194) claim that within the domain of pragmatics, impoliteness involves a new and fascinating area of study next to and complementing politeness studies. Impoliteness is a widespread phenomenon across all cultures; however, its manifestation differs from one culture to another. Even within the same cultural context, expressions of impoliteness may vary according to individuals' social backgrounds. This variation stems from the fact that no utterance is inherently impolite unless it is evaluated and interpreted as such by a particular society. Impoliteness may become evident when an individual disrupts social norms, such as by breaking a queue or failing to adhere to the expected patterns of interaction within a given social activity. (Watts, 2003:130).

In 1996, Culpeper established the foundation for the systematic study of linguistic impoliteness. His research conducted between 1996 and 2011 significantly contributed to the definition and conceptualization of impoliteness in language. He initially defined impoliteness as "the use of strategies intended to produce the opposite effect, namely social disruption" (ibid.: 350). Such strategies aim to threaten the interlocutor's face, which represents an emotionally sensitive aspect of an individual's self-concept. Through this framework, impoliteness was analyzed as a set of communicative strategies employed to damage face and generate discord among participants in interaction (Culpeper et al., 2003: 1546). Furthermore, Locher and Bousfield (2008: 3) describe impoliteness as "behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context" (as cited in Ghazi & Ali, 2022: 105).

Culpeper (1996: 355) argues that the concept of impoliteness has evolved in close relation to politeness, describing it metaphorically as a "parasite" of politeness. Similarly, Leech (2014: 219) suggests that the most effective approach to theorizing impoliteness is to build upon existing theories of politeness, as the two phenomena represent opposing ends of the same spectrum. In this regard, impoliteness is frequently characterized as the reverse side of the politeness coin (Mills, 2011: 40). Consequently, theories of impoliteness are grounded in the established theoretical framework of politeness. Impoliteness can be viewed as a continuum of speech acts that impose social and emotional costs on the hearer, whereas politeness functions to benefit the hearer. As Leech (2005: 18, cited in Ghazi & Ali, 2022: 104) asserts, any theory of politeness inherently encompasses a theory of impoliteness, since impoliteness involves the neglect or violation of politeness norms and constraints.

2.1 The Concept of Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011:1) defines impoliteness as "using language to cause offence" (Ghazi & Ali, 2022:44). He emphasizes that defining impoliteness presents a considerable challenge. A key reason for this difficulty is that verbal behaviors

commonly perceived as impolite do not consistently function as such across all contexts; rather, their interpretation is highly dependent on situational factors. For instance, shouting or using potentially offensive language toward an elderly person in a quiet residential setting would likely be judged as highly impolite, whereas the same behavior within a crowded football stadium may not be regarded as impolite at all. This variation underscores the role of individual perception and contextual interpretation in evaluating communicative behavior (Culpeper, 2011: 22). As Culpeper (2011: 22) notes, "impoliteness is very much in the eye of the beholder, that is, the mind's eye." Accordingly, the assessment of an utterance as impolite is not determined solely by its linguistic form, but rather by how the behavior is interpreted within a specific social interaction (Watts, 2003: 8).

Watts (2003) employs the term (im)politeness to emphasize that any analysis of linguistic politeness inherently involves consideration of impoliteness. He further argues (ibid.: 9) that (im)politeness is a contested concept—one that has been debated in the past, continues to be debated in the present, and is likely to remain a subject of ongoing scholarly discussion in the future.

Impoliteness is a phenomenon that deals with how offense is communicated and takes place in the absence of politeness (Culpeper, 2005:36). Culpeper (2011:23) recently broadens the concept of impoliteness in his book, *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, as follows:

Impoliteness can be understood as a negative evaluative stance toward particular behaviors occurring within specific contexts. This evaluation is shaped by social expectations, desires, and beliefs concerning social organization, especially regarding how individual or group identities are constructed and negotiated through interaction. Contextualized behaviors are perceived as impolite when they diverge from what is anticipated, desired, or considered socially appropriate. Such behaviors invariably produce, or are assumed to produce, emotional effects on at least one participant, typically in the form of offense. Moreover, several factors may intensify the degree of perceived offensiveness, including, for instance, the extent to which the behavior is interpreted as intentional.

This somehow lengthy definition incorporates a comprehensive interpretation of the term, including verbal behavior, aggression, face-attack and intentionality.

3. Impoliteness strategies in Iraqi Television Discourse

It is crucial to note that these strategies are not collectively exclusive. Frequently, a single statement may simultaneously attack approval (positive face) and autonomy (negative face), or integrate direct offence with sarcasm. Culpeper's (2011: 189) model, hence, promotes analysts to explore how strategies interact within more extensive relational dynamics rather than treating

them as isolated pragmatic forms. The framework theorizes impoliteness as a strategic means through which speakers negotiate power, construct identities, and address conflict. The categorization of strategies provides an organized yet flexible approach for analyzing how offence is linguistically and pragmatically achieved in discourse.

Culpeper's (2005:42-45) approach supplies a pragmatic perspective for examining the interactions of broadcasted interactions in the Iraqi media context. Talk shows, political debates, and interview programs often feature confrontational communications where impoliteness is systematically applied. For example, bald-on-record impoliteness is measurable when presenters concern unambiguous criticisms or commands concerning guests, ensuring clarity about the face-threatening act .

In a similar manner, positive impoliteness can be identified in instances where participants undermine the social authority of others through omission, or identity-based ridicule, effectively signaling disapproval and social disengagement. Negative impoliteness appears when independence is challenged, such as through condescending observations or direct threats, often revealing power asymmetries between presenters and participants.

Furthermore, sarcasm or mock politeness is regularly used to convey criticism while maintaining a superficial appearance of civility, a strategy that can also involve the audience by inviting them to interpret the implied insult. Finally, off-record \ withholding politeness, such as ignoring a guest's contributions or failing to acknowledge interventions, indirectly communicates disregard without explicit confrontation (Culpeper, 1996:355-356) .

Adopting these strategies to Iraqi television discourse highlights the ways in which media interactions are not only sites of information exchange but also domains where social power, identity, and audience agreement are actively negotiated. By analyzing these forms, researchers can uncover the pragmatic mechanisms through which offence, authority, and ideological positioning are constructed on air. Iraqi talk shows often combine critique, humor, and emotional expression. Audience expectations frequently tolerate or even encourage impoliteness, particularly when it reinforces authenticity or entertainment value. Eyad Radi's public identity demonstrates these dynamics, making him a contextual case study.

4. Methodology

The model of analysis that is adopted in this study is Culpeper (1996,2011). Within his 1996-2011 reconceptualization of impoliteness, Jonathan Culpeper (1996:355-356) proposes a set of broad strategic orientations through which face attack may be realized in interaction. These strategies do not function as rigid categories; rather, they serve as analytical lenses for examining how

offence is constructed and interpreted in discourse. In real interaction, more than one strategy may operate simultaneously.

1. Bald-on-Record Impoliteness

Bald-on-record impoliteness refers to explicit and unmitigated face attack. The speaker performs the offensive act directly, without any attempt to soften, disguise, or attenuate its force. The intention to damage the hearer's social image is made interactionally transparent. This strategy is typically found in highly conflictual exchanges where relational harmony is not prioritized. Because there is no redressive action, the utterance leaves little room for alternative interpretation. Direct insults, blunt criticisms, and aggressive commands often fall into this category. The strategic value of bald-on-record impoliteness lies in its clarity: it maximizes confrontation and foregrounds dominance or anger.

2. Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness targets the hearer's need for approval, inclusion, and social recognition. In other words, it damages what is traditionally referred to as positive face. Rather than attacking autonomy, it undermines the hearer's sense of belonging or worth within a social group. This may be realized through exclusion, disassociation, expressions of disinterest, use of inappropriate identity markers, name-calling, or deliberate disagreement. What characterizes positive impoliteness is the symbolic distancing of the hearer from a valued identity. It often communicates rejection, contempt, or lack of respect. In many institutional or media contexts, positive impoliteness functions as a way of delegitimizing the opponent's credibility rather than merely criticizing a specific argument.

3. Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness attacks the hearer's desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. It involves communicative behavior that restricts, pressures, intimidates, or invades personal or psychological space. Such strategies may include threats, condescension, ridicule, explicit association with negative attributes, or public reminders of obligations. The force of negative impoliteness often derives from power asymmetry. By constraining the hearer's options or positioning them as inferior, the speaker asserts control within the interaction. Unlike positive impoliteness, which challenges social approval, negative impoliteness challenges independence and personal territory.

4. Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

Sarcasm, or mock politeness, occurs when apparently polite forms are used in a context that renders them clearly insincere. The surface linguistic structure may appear respectful or complimentary, yet contextual indicators signal that the underlying intention is critical or contemptuous. The impoliteness arises from the tension between literal meaning and inferred meaning. Interpretation

depends heavily on shared contextual knowledge, tone, and interactional history. Because it operates indirectly, sarcasm often allows speakers to maintain plausible deniability while still performing a face-threatening act. In public discourse, mock politeness can be particularly effective because it invites the audience to participate in the interpretation of the insult.

5. Off-record\Withholding Politeness

Withholding politeness refers to the absence of expected polite behavior in situations where it is normatively required. Unlike the other strategies, this form of impoliteness is realized through omission rather than explicit attack (Culpeper,1996: 357). In 2011, Culpeper adds off-record to involve indirect communication where the intended meaning is not stated explicitly. Although, he mentions that withholding politeness can be shifted to off-record, so withholding politeness can appear on-record(explicit) or off-record (indirect), depending on how it is presented; and the shift depends on the level of directness and ambiguity.

5. Data Analysis.

It is worth noting that the selected data is analyzed according to the impoliteness strategies of Culpeper (1996). Each strategy varies in severity and social function, shaped by context and social evaluation. The analysis considers linguistic form, social context, and pragmatic function, focusing on both verbal and non-verbal prompts.

Bald-on-Record Impoliteness

«كل هذا الحجي كذب، كذب، وما بيه أي شي صحيح.»

“All of this talk is lies... lies, lies, nothing but lies”.

The pragmatic purpose of this text implies the defendant's reputation, asserts authority, and discredits the opponent. The repetition of *lies* intensifies the attack: direct, absolute face attack utilized explicitly to refute others. It conveys decisiveness and strength, signals refusal to tolerate falsities.

. «اللي يحجي هالشغلات ما يعرف عن الفن شي.»

“Those who talk about these things know nothing about art”.

The pragmatic function of the above speech undermines ability, confirms speaker credibility. It directly attacks interlocutor's competence, threatening positive face and improves audience consistency with interlocutor.

Positive Impoliteness

«أكو ناس تحجي عن التمثيل وهي ما تعرف أصلاً شنو معنى تمثيل.»

“Some people talk about acting, but they don't even understand what real acting means”.

Pragmatically, the functional role here protects speaker's interpersonal identity, coordinates with audience and weakens the challenger. It seeks to support the positive face of others by emphasizing the ignorance, Strengthens in-group solidarity and speaker credibility.

«يعتقدون أنهم فاهمين الفن، وهم بعيدين عن الواقع.»

“They think they understand art, but they are far from reality”.

The pragmatic role in this speech discredits others, conforms audience with speaker. It generates social distance between targets and knowledgeable audience; indirectly develops speaker's authority.

Negative Impoliteness

«القنوات تربح والفنان يطلع صفر، وهذا مو شغل مهني.»

“The channels make money, and the actor gets nothing. This is not professionalism”.

Functionally, in this respond, the actor challenges institutions, threatens negative face, expresses moral judgment. He explicitly attacks institutional practices; imposes evaluation on authority; signals social evaluation and moral orientation.

«هكذا التعامل مع الفنانين غير مقبول أبداً.»

“This kind of treatment of artists is completely unacceptable”.

This discourse effectively threatens negative face, applies social norms. It highlights the strong negation to present condemnation; positions speaker as socially responsible evaluator and invites audience judgment.

Sarcasm / Mock Politeness

«إي طبعاً، دعم الفن كلش عالي... باين من النتائج.»

“Yes, of course, art support is ‘excellent’... as you can see from the results”.

The actor practically uses indirect criticism, engages audience, conveys irony. Positive literal wording masks critical intent; audience interprets discrepancy; generating humor and shared understanding, softens attack while maintaining communicative effect.

«أكيد، كل شيء تمام في الفن... والله الوضع ممتاز!»

“Sure, everything is fine in art... honestly, the situation is ‘perfect’!”

This reply realistically mocks compliment, highlights failure, entertains audience. It shows the exaggeration signals ironic criticism; audience recognizes discrepancy; strengthens solidarity and engagement.

Off record/Withholding Politeness

«ليش تعتقد إن الفن اليوم فقد قيمته؟»

“Why do you think art has lost its value today?”

(ضحك بدون رد على سؤال ناقد)

(Laughing without responding to a critical question)

The pragmatic part here shows the Subtle disapproval of the speaker, avoids direct confrontation, maintains control. Non-verbal refusal acts as indirect criticism face attack; laughter communicates disagreement without verbal conflict; projects authority. The audience interprets implicit meaning.

«شنو رأيك بالدعم المالي للفنانين وهل يكفي لتطوير العمل الفني؟»

“What is your opinion about financial support for artists, and is it sufficient to improve artistic work?”

(صمت مطول بعد سؤال حساس حول الدعم المالي للفنانين)

(Prolonged silence after a sensitive question about artists' financial support)

The communicative purpose in the speaker's extended pause expresses refusal, maintains authority, signals disapproval. Prolonged silence avoids verbal response; preserves face; forces audience inference; demonstrates strategic management of sensitive topics.

6. Discussion

The analysis of Eyad Radi's transmitted interviews provides concrete evidence that the issues identified in the first chapter are indeed reflected in real discourse. The problem states—namely the lack of understanding of how impoliteness functions pragmatically in Iraqi media—is addressed through the observed strategies and their pragmatic interpretation.

RQ1: Types of Impoliteness Strategies

The study identifies all five of Culpeper's (1996, 2011) strategies in the data: bald-on-record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm/mock politeness, and off-record\withholding politeness. Among these, bald-on-record and sarcasm are most frequently employed. For example, Eyad Radi directly calls out incompetence in interviews, which conforms with the aim of identifying structures of face-threatening language. These examples demonstrate that impoliteness is not random; it is carefully chosen to affirm authority and credibility in a public setting.

RQ2: Classification of Strategies

Each instance of impoliteness can be clearly mapped to Culpeper's model. Direct criticism corresponds to bald-on-record, ironic praise to sarcasm, and silence or laughter to off-record\withholding politeness. This supports the hypothesis that Culpeper's framework is applicable in Iraqi television discourse, demonstrating that it is flexible and culturally adaptable. The study also confirms the significance of non-verbal responses in reinforcing impoliteness, as indicated in the aims.

RQ3: Pragmatic Functions

The practical analysis of Eyad Radi's discourse confirms that impoliteness serves multiple pragmatic purposes:

- Defending reputation: When directly challenged, he uses bald-on-record statements to assert professional authority.
- Critiquing institutions: Negative impoliteness highlights perceived unfairness in funding or media practices.
- Audience engagement: Sarcasm and mock politeness create humor, reinforcing solidarity with viewers.
- Managing sensitive topics: Withholding politeness, through silence or laughter, allows subtle resistance without explicit confrontation.

These functions show a direct link to the study's aim of exploring how impoliteness contributes to identity construction and authority.

RQ4: Impoliteness and Identity Construction

Eyad Radi's use of impoliteness strengthens his public persona as confident, knowledgeable, and authoritative. Direct verbal attacks signal expertise, while

sarcasm or laughter communicates subtle social critique. The observed strategies validate the hypothesis that impoliteness contributes positively to the speaker's authority and public identity, integrating with the significance of the study.

RQ5: Role of Non-verbal responses

Non-verbal responses are particularly important. Laughter following a critical question signals disbelief or dismissal, while prolonged silence indicated refusal to engage with sensitive issues. These behaviors correspond to the research aim of highlighting non-verbal forms of impoliteness and demonstrate that face-threatening acts extend beyond spoken words, functioning pragmatically to control interaction and influence audience perception.

RQ6: Audience Interpretation

Audience perception plays a central role in determining the social acceptability of impoliteness. In Iraqi media culture, directness and assertive responses are often interpreted as authenticity rather than rudeness. This confirms the hypothesis that audience interpretation shapes the impact of impoliteness, and links back to the problem statement about understanding the pragmatic dimension of these strategies.

The discussion demonstrates that the research questions, hypotheses, and aims of the study are directly addressed through the analysis of Eyad Radi's discourse. Impoliteness is strategically used rather than accidental, serving practical functions in defending reputation, asserting authority, critiquing institutions, and engaging the audience. The practical data supports the theoretical claims made in Chapter One and shows that Culpeper's model provides a robust tool for analyzing Arabic broadcasted discourse.

7. Conclusion

The analysis reveals that impoliteness in Iraqi television is intentionally and socially purposeful. Eyad Radi's discourse illustrates the following:

Bald-on-record affirms authority and disproves inaccurate assertions.

Positive impoliteness threatens the positive face of others while strengthening speaker-audience correspondence.

Negative impoliteness challenges authority and institutions.

Sarcasm / mock politeness presents indirect criticism with humor.

Withholding politeness strategically uses silence or non-verbal indicators to communicate criticism.

These strategies show pragmatic intentionality, audience interpretation, and social negotiation of face in media discourse. Therefore, Eyad Radi intentionally employs impoliteness strategies as deliberate means of communication. They enable himself to assert identity, criticize institutions, entertain, and keep the audience engaged. The study finds that impoliteness in the discourse of Iraqi media is an effective pragmatic tool rather than an accidental rudeness.

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