

## IMPOLITENESS AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN MOVIE

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### Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the impoliteness strategies performed by the main female character (Nadine) and her male interlocutors in the *Edge of Seventeen* movie. Taking Nadine's impolite utterances and her male interlocutors as the data, this study found a thought-provoking fact that women who have been stereotyped as "powerless" language users also have the potential to use impoliteness strategies as a way of negotiating and constructing their identity. While both genders could use impoliteness strategies to negotiate and construct their power and identity in interactions, there were differences in the use of the strategies. Women prefer to use positive impoliteness while men use negative impoliteness strategies. The use of positive impoliteness among women is influenced by their empathetic nature to social relations. Any sensitive topic to social relations is considered effective as a face-threatening act. On the other hand, men use negative impoliteness to force their interlocutors to submit to their will, a trait of male dominance. By suppressing the freedom of choice of the interlocutor, the negative face is threatened. From these findings, it can be concluded that impoliteness can be used, by men and women, as a tool to exercise their power and construct their gender identity.

## INTRODUCTION

As a means of communication, language serves as a medium for a person to express his thoughts and desires to others. Through language also, a person can build and maintain social relationships and cooperate with each other (Ramelan, 1984, p. 36). Still, often through language, one's relationship with others loosens and even becomes worse. Therefore, for harmonious relations with others, everyone must have a polite attitude and language towards others. Politeness in language is the key to reducing friction in personal interactions and showing self-awareness of the dignity of others in the language. However, this language politeness rule is often violated, either intentionally or unintentionally, it potentially causes conflict with other people. In linguistic studies, this phenomenon is discussed in the study of impoliteness.

Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards certain behaviors that occur in certain contexts. According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness is a strategy deliberately carried out by the speaker to damage or threaten the interlocutor's face or make the other person feel that way. This argument shows that the act of language impoliteness depends on the speaker's intention and the listener's understanding of the speaker's intention. Culpeper (1996) divides impoliteness strategies into bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness.

Since its establishment, impoliteness theory has invited many researchers to examine it in various conversation settings and media, such as movies (see Benabdellah, 2018; Dhorifah, 2016; Pratama, 2020; Sani & Suhandoko, 2020). Dhorifah (2016), analyzing the impoliteness strategy in the *Boyhood* film, and Sani and Suhandoko (2020), analyzing the impoliteness strategy in the *Hancock* film, found a pattern of interaction between power and the use of impoliteness strategies used by the characters. They discovered that impoliteness is one of the means to show one's power over the interlocutors, and interestingly, the choice of impoliteness strategy may damage the interlocutor's face in different ways. While Dhorifah (2016) and Sani and Suhandoko (2020) focused on how impoliteness strategy is used to exercise power, Benabdellah (2018), Pratama (2020), and Aydınoglu (2013) examined how impoliteness strategies interplay with gender differences. Benabdellah (2018) analyzed the impoliteness strategies used by female protagonists in Disney films. Although the study shows that male characters dominate the use of language impoliteness compared to female characters, female protagonists also use certain impoliteness strategies to show their defensive position over their inferiority by showing strength, challenge, and disapproval. Pratama (2020) analyzed the conversation of the *Big Wedding* movie characters to investigate

the impoliteness strategies and how the strategies interplay with gender differences. Aydınoğlu (2013) examined the impolite speeches employed by the men and women characters in Geralyn L. Horton's plays. Slightly different from Benabdellah (2018) and Aydınoğlu (2013), who found language impoliteness to be dominated by men, Pratama (2020) argues otherwise. Women were reported to dominate the use of impolite language in their interactions. This is similar to what Mills (2005) expressed that in today's professional world, women are encouraged to display language masculinity because of the demands of workplace and professionalism.

The last two studies discussed above show that language impoliteness is also related to gender differences because, in some cultures and social realities, men and women are separated by the division of work and responsibility. Gender in language has a different meaning from sex. Gender is not part of one's essence, what one is, but an achievement, what one does. Gender is a set of practices through which people construct and claim identities, not simply a system for categorizing people. Gender practices are about establishing identities and managing social relations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013, p. 305). Gender also allows us to distinguish and talk about people as a feminist or masculinist in their everyday interactions (Coates, 2015).

Even though numerous studies have been conducted to shed light on impoliteness and gender, little attention has been paid to investigating preferred impoliteness strategies by different genders. This study aims to examine the gender preferences on the impoliteness strategies used in their interactions. Using *The Edge of Seventeen* movie, an American comedy-drama released in 2016, the study compared how two genders use the impoliteness strategy. Thus, this research will add to the treasures and important additional contributions related to the study of impoliteness and its relation to gender differences.

*The Edge of Seventeen* movie tells about Nadine as the main character who is talkative and rebellious. Nadine was very close to her father, but her father died when she was thirteen. After her father's death, who always supported her, Nadine's relationship with her mother and brother, Darian, deteriorated. Often, he had to get into arguments with his classmates, his school teacher, and even with his mother and siblings. Many of her conversations show impolite speech with older people and other characters in this film. Based on the background of the research above, this study aims to answer two research problems formulated as follows: (i) What is the impoliteness strategy used by the female main character and her male interlocutor in the film *Edges of Seventeen*? (ii) How are gender differences related to the use of impolite strategies in *Edge of Seventeen*?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Impoliteness

Culpeper, Bousfield, and Wichmaan (2003, p. 1546) define impoliteness as the “communicative strategies designed to attack the face, and cause social quarreling and disharmony.” Speech or language that is not polite can trigger a bad situation or even a conflict. When someone uses language that is not polite, then he triggers a dispute between others. People who choose to use offensive language have goals that can damage good relations with others. According to Culpeper (1996), there are five types of impoliteness strategies: bald on record (BOR), positive impoliteness (PI), negative impoliteness (NI), sarcasm, or mock politeness (SMP), and withhold politeness (WP). Bald on record occurs when someone threatens another person’s face directly by not minimizing the facial attack. This type of strategy is usually found in imperative sentences that are straightforward and unambiguous. Positive impoliteness is when a speaker attacks the other person’s face to gain respect, dominates or imposes his will on the other person, such as by ignoring the other person, using bad identity markers, using taboo words, or making others feel uncomfortable. Negative impoliteness occurs when someone uses words that are “deliberately designed to damage the wishes of the recipient’s negative face.” In this strategy, the speaker tries to alienate the interlocutor in his social relationship by intimidating, demeaning, mocking, and hindering others physically and verbally. Sarcasm is the intentional act of someone trying to act polite but not genuine or forced politeness that is not sincere. Withhold impoliteness is when a person intentionally demonstrates a failure to be polite in language.

### Gender and Impoliteness

Linguistics research that focused on the relationship between language and gender was pioneered by Lakoff (2004). In his book *Language and Status of Women* (1975), he put forward a theory about female language features. Lakoff points out that there are many reasons for language differences between men and women. Described as more confident, men like to speak in public with correct vocabulary. However, the language used by women is not confident, not open (preference for symbolic language), and they must be careful when expressing certain content and often use more complicated words or signs.

A popular assumption implies that language use, including language politeness and impoliteness, is influenced by gender differences (Coulmas, 2005, p. 36). Language impoliteness, according to Mills (2005), can only be understood if it relates to the

understanding of groups or communities, whether in the form of class, racial or ethnic stereotypes, and even gender. Wardhaugh (2009) specifically studied the language differences between men and women. The language difference does not mean that the languages of the two genders are completely distinct and separate. However, they are still one but have different characteristics in use by men and women speakers. Women are more likely to retain the language while men are innovative and up-to-date. From the description above, it is clear that the phenomenon of language is closely related to gender differences. Linguistic phenomena such as impoliteness are very concerned about what causes speakers to be rude.

One of the reasons for disrespect among speakers is gender differences. In terms of language use, compared to men, women are known to be more polite due to their language marginalization and powerlessness. Lakoff (2004) argues that women's language marginalization and powerlessness are reflected in the way women are expected to speak and be discussed following sociocultural expectations. Furthermore, he said that the politeness of language by women was due to their social status, which still received discriminatory treatment in society. Women are also known to prefer to avoid conflict, as evidenced by an awareness of faces characterized by indecision or uncertainty (Mills, 2005). Therefore, negative (im)politeness to save or attack interlocutors' negative face of the other person is preferred by women in their interactions (Hobbs, 2003).

However, amid women's emancipation in recent decades, women have been extensively involved in professional work. Professional, educated, or middle-class women who work in a business environment feel called to be linguistically masculine because certain situations require them to show their power and identity (Mills, 2005). It suggests that impoliteness is no longer perceived as a linguistic feature socio-culturally attributed to a particular gender. Instead, it is a series of judgments made by the actors of the interaction on the appropriateness of the language use.

## **METHOD**

This research employed a qualitative method. According to Dörnyei (2007, p. 38), qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, and a researcher can develop research problems more broadly by using this qualitative method. Employing content analysis, this study aims to draw conclusions about language impoliteness and the use of different gender impoliteness strategy choices from the transcription of recorded material (Krippendorff, 2004).

The data were in words, phrases, and sentences produced by the main female character named Nadine and her male interlocutors. The data source would be the transcript of the *Edge of Seventeen* movie downloaded from [https://www.scripts.com/script/the\\_edge\\_of\\_seventeen\\_20132](https://www.scripts.com/script/the_edge_of_seventeen_20132).

After the data were collected, the researchers re-examined the data to avoid unnecessary and erroneous data. After the data was confirmed, the researchers compiled the code for the next stage of analysis. Coding was done by highlighting the utterances that show Culpeper's impoliteness strategies (Culpeper et al., 2003). These codes include BR (bald-on record), PI (positive impoliteness), NI (negative impoliteness), SM (sarcasm/ mock politeness), and WP (withhold impoliteness). After that, the researchers analyzed the differences in the choice of impoliteness strategies of the two genders (Nadine and her male interlocutors). To triangulate the results of data analysis, in the fourth stage, the researchers conducted a focus group discussion involving the researchers and two senior lecturers in the English department at an Islamic university in East Java, Indonesia. Focus group discussion was intended to obtain feedback and correction and confirmation of the results of the analysis so that the data that has been analyzed and interpreted is valid and free from errors. Fifth, the researchers present their findings in the form of a narrative, and the last step is to interpret the data to answer the research questions formulated.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Impoliteness Strategies Used by Nadine and Her Male Interlocutors in the *Edge of Seventeen* Movie**

This section answers the first research question on how the impoliteness strategy is used by the female main character named Nadine and her male interlocutors in the *Edges of Seventeen* movie. This study found 38 conversations containing impoliteness strategies. The most dominant type of impoliteness strategy is negative politeness with 13 utterances. Then, bald on record with 11 utterances, positive politeness with six utterances, sarcasm or mock politeness with six utterances, and the last withhold politeness with two utterances.

#### ***Bald on Record***

Culpeper's bald on record impoliteness strategy refers to the use of intentionally attacking hearers' face in a concise way (1996). In the data, the researcher found 11 conversations categorized as bald on record impoliteness.

#### Excerpt 1

Nadine: “**I didn’t want to raise my hand and be all**, ‘Excuse me. These kids are pretty confusable.’ **Just thought maybe you’d want to know.**”

Excerpt 1 above shows how Nadine instructed Mr. Bruner to understand the confusion of his students in class. Instead of using polite language such as "Sorry sir, I want to let you know that we are struggling to understand your lesson." Nadine prefers to use direct and clear speech such as "I don't want to raise my hand and be everything, Just thinking maybe you want to know." The use of clear and ambiguous language is a sub-strategy of bald-on record impoliteness.

Excerpt 2

Mr. Bruner: “**Maybe, nobody likes you.**”

In excerpt 2, Mr. Bruner used straightforward language to attack Nadine's face. The context of this conversation is when Nadine was having lunch with Mr. Bruner in the school cafeteria and told him that she has no friends and is not interested in making friends. She said that neither she nor the people around her would ever reach an agreement. Hearing this, Mr. Bruner straightforwardly said, "Maybe, nobody likes you."

### *Positive Impoliteness*

Positive impoliteness refers to actions that are intentionally performed to attack the interlocutor's positive face (Culpeper, 1996). A positive face refers to a person's desire to be accepted, sympathized, supported, noticed, and appreciated by others. Attacking other's positive means doing the opposite ways, such as intentionally ignoring the presence of others, excluding a person from activities and communities, being unsympathetic, the use of taboo words and identity markers, and so on. In the data, the researchers found seven conversations categorized as positive impoliteness. The following data present them in more detail.

Excerpt 3

Nadine: “Mom’s **boobs** are jangling around a dentist’s face. See it, Darian. See Mom’s **titties** all up in that dentist’s face.”

In the excerpt, Nadine used inappropriate words to describe her mother when she phoned her brother, Darian. Nadine tells Darian that her mother was dating a dentist and was leaving the house in the next few days. The use of taboo words itself is considered impolite, let alone making mother an object of ridicule.

### *Negative Impoliteness*

Negative impoliteness refers to language use performed to attack the interlocutor's negative face wants (Culpeper, 1996). A negative face refers to the desire to be independent

and free from imposition or domination by others. The linguistic output strategies include frightening, ridiculing, invading others' space, interruption, and so on. In the data, the researchers found 13 conversations categorized as performing negative impoliteness. The following data present them in more detail.

Excerpt 4

Nadine: "If you do that, I will do something equally terrible to you. **I will tell everyone on Facebook that you pluck your nipples.**"

In the excerpt above, Nadine threatened her mother by spreading her mother's secret to social media. Threatening the other person, especially a mother, is an impolite act that aims to damage a person's negative face. By threatening others, the speaker instills confidence that actions detrimental to the interlocutor will occur and make the interlocutor submit to her will.

Excerpt 5

Mr. Bruner: "Now, I know that it was a long lecture, and you probably don't recall, but, uh, **was there any point during it where you thought to yourself, 'Gosh, I wonder what it's like to actually have a life?'**"

In the dialogue above, Mr. Bruner bantered at Nadine for her disrespect in the class. The sentence of Mr. Bruner to Nadine, "Gosh, I wonder what it's like to actually have a life," meant to insinuate that Nadine was not the person people around her were expected to be because of her foul language and behavior and being rebellious. Mr. Bruner's statement was an intentional impoliteness to make Nadine feel condescended. The actions of frightening, demeaning, invading the space, underestimating, and making others feel indebted may intentionally threaten the negative face wants of others.

### ***Sarcasm or Mock Politeness***

Here the face-threatening act is carried out using an insincere politeness strategy. In the data, the researchers found six conversations that included sarcasm or mock politeness.

Excerpt 6

Nadine: "Oh, face it. **You can't wait to take me home so you can be Mom's little hero.**"

In the excerpt above, Nadine mocked Darian in clear, high-pitched words. Her mother asked Darian to pick her up at Mr. Bruner's house. Darian's obedience to their mother encouraged Nadine to insinuate that he would be their mother's hero if he managed to bring Nadine home.

## Excerpt 7

Mr. Bruner: **“Have a nice life without me. fuckers.”**

In the excerpt above, Mr. Bruner teased Nadine with sarcasm that he wished her a happy life without him. This statement was clearly insincere because no one in this world wanted to think of himself as a nuisance so that his absence would make anyone else happy. The expressions like, "Have a nice dream. Have a nice day. Have a good study." are good expressions, but if taboo words follow it, it is considered insincere and classified as fake or sarcasm/mock politeness.

***Withhold Politeness***

Withhold politeness refers to the absence of politeness where it is expected. Keeping silent when politeness would work is the appropriate example of withhold politeness. In the data, the researchers found two conversations categorized as withhold politeness. The following data present them in more detail.

## Excerpt 8

Nadine’s mother: “You promised. Now, get out of the car.”

Nadine: **(SIGHS)**

While in the car, Nadine’s mother was angry with her and asked her to get out of the car. Nadine responded with silence, looked at her mother, and then left to make her feel guilty for asking her to leave. So, what Nadine does is considered as sub-strategies of withhold politeness.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the most frequently used impoliteness strategy by both men and women is negative impoliteness. Culpeper (1996, p. 358) argues that negative politeness strategies undermine the interlocutors’ negative face wants. As individual beings, humans always want to have the freedom of action without feeling impeded by others. The act of frightening, demeaning, invading space, belittling, and making others feel indebted can intentionally threaten the wants of other’ negative faces.

The second impoliteness strategy used by Nadine and her male interlocutors is the bald-on record strategy to attack the interlocutor’s face directly without any effort to minimize the face attacks. Bald on record generally occurs in situations where there is a clear power hierarchy, where a superordinate can subordinate others (Sani & Suhandoko, 2020). However, the use of bald on record impoliteness by people with higher positions to people with lower positions is commonplace. It will be different if subordinates disclose the bald-on record impoliteness to their superiors. The face damage will be much more significant. An

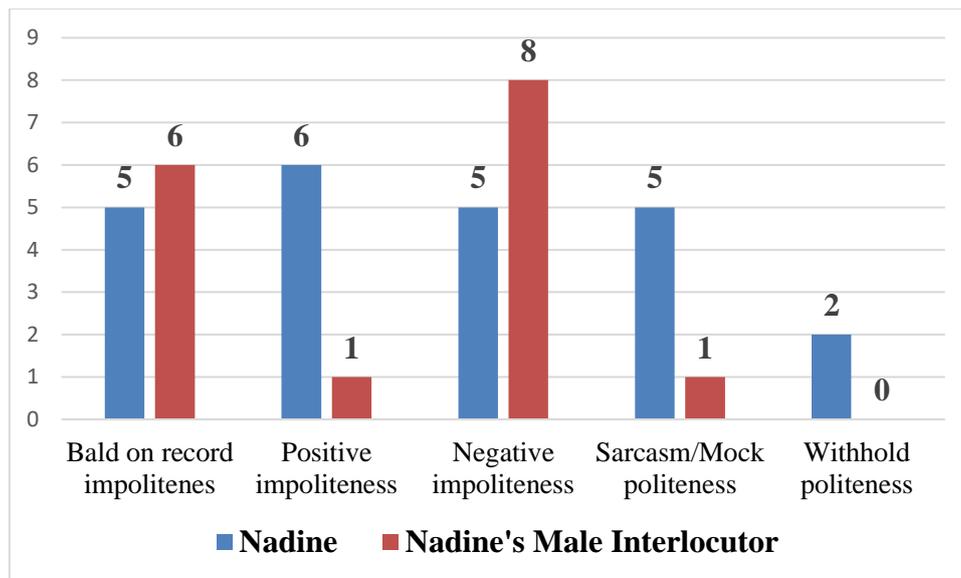
example of this is what Nadine said to her teacher, Mr. Bruner, “I didn’t want to raise my hand and be all. Just thought maybe you’d want to know.” Not only did she physically show her refusal, Nadine openly said that she did not want to answer the questions her teacher asked.

The third most frequently used impoliteness strategy found in the data is the positive impoliteness strategy. As social beings, humans want themselves to belong to or be considered by the surrounding community. Therefore, intentionally ostracizing someone in social relationships is an impoliteness act that can damage the positive face of others (Culpeper, 1996). Nadine was noted six times to use positive impoliteness strategies, including insulting and using taboo words. Although her male interlocutors used a number of taboo words, Nadine just laughed at and considered it a joke instead of an impoliteness act.

Furthermore, another impoliteness strategy found in the movie is sarcasm or fake politeness. A deliberately fake or insincere strategy is sarcastic. In this study, the female main character (Nadine) used sarcasm more often than her male interlocutors. Following Drucker et al.'s (2014) statement, women prefer to use sarcasm when speaking impolitely to male interlocutors. The use of female sarcasm to men is a form of mocking attitude towards men as a manifestation of their social struggle for equality. The strategy of impoliteness that is rarely found is withhold politeness. Similar to the research results of Pratama (2020) and Sani and Suhandoko (2020), withhold politeness is seldom used as it is an unlikely effective impoliteness strategy to threaten the face of others.

### **Gender Differences and Impoliteness Strategies**

Stereotyped beliefs about gender-appropriate behavior may give us information about how an utterance is judged to be offensive or impolite (Mills, 2005). In this section, the researcher compares the choice of impoliteness strategies used by the main female character (Nadine) and her male interlocutor. Of the 38 conversations containing inappropriate language, 23 of them were spoken by Nadine and 15 by her male interlocutor. From this proportion alone, we can conclude that there are slight differences in the use of impoliteness strategies from the two genders. This comparison can be seen in the following figure.



**Figure1. Impoliteness Strategies Used by Main Female Character (Nadine) and her Male Interlocutors**

From figure 1, we can see that there are quite prominent differences regarding the choice of impoliteness strategies between the two genders, particularly in the positive and negative impoliteness strategies employed. It was noted that women used more positive impoliteness strategies, while men used negative impoliteness strategies.

This study found that women used more positive impoliteness strategies to attack the hearers' faces. Positive impoliteness is the act of intentionally attacking other persons' positive faces by making them feel unwanted, dissociated from the community, and unsympathetic. A positive face reflects conversational interaction among intimates. Women were identified to put more effort into good social relationships with their interlocutors; therefore, enthusiasm, affection, and openness are common characteristics of women's language in interaction (Coates, 2015). This, in turn, has implications for the impoliteness strategies women employed. The use of positive impoliteness strategies among women seems to be mainly motivated by their desire to membership in communities. Making other people feel comfortable, accepted, sympathized, cared for, approved, and associated is important for maintaining harmonious social relationships. Hence, echoing Alonso-Almeida and José Álvarez-Gil (2021) and Aydınoglu (2013), women's acts of making interlocutors feel dissociated, ignored, unsympathetic is considered an effective way of face-threatening acts.

Women are socio-culturally expected to use 'feminine' language, for example, hesitation, deference, tag questions, modality, and so on (Lakoff, 2004). However, in certain situations, they are driven to use more direct language, signaling their professionalism and independence. Women being assertive are no longer judged as aggressive and unfeminine.

Instead, it is seen as “a reflection of pragmatic competence” aiming to achieve powers and vent negative feelings (Beebe, 1995, p. 154). Women's preference to be more cooperative in their speech than men should not lead us to naively assume that women are intrinsically more "polite" and less "impolite" than men.

While women tend to capitalize on social intimacy in their impolite speech, men were found to exploit the negative face attacks when making the impolite speech. A negative face refers to the desire to be independent and free from imposition or domination by others. The study found that the negative impoliteness strategy was used more by men, although the difference was not significant compared to women. Men are traditionally shaped as dominant, independent, autonomous, and individual beings. Therefore, men often have to encounter situations where they must maintain their position (Kimmel, Hearn, & Connel, 2005). Stereotypically masculine speech is viewed as more assertive and forceful, aiming to build a position in the hierarchy. It has implications for the way men treat their interlocutors in showing their dominance and independence by invading the interlocutor's space and making others feel belittled, powerless, diminutive, imposed, and dependent.

The study, to some extent, seems to further strengthen Tannen's (1990) argument that men's view of the world as a "battlefield" determines their use of impolite speech in negotiating their superiority over the interlocutors (p. 9). On the other hand, women's view that the world is a "relationship network" makes excluding intimacy and closeness in interactions effective to damage their interlocutors' faces. The study, however, is not to suggest the assumption that women are not assertive in their speech, let alone lead to the early conclusion that assertiveness in speech is male-domain. Women and men were found to be assertive in different ways. While men tend to capitalize on their independence and dominance, women exploit social networks in their impolite speeches.

Studies have shown that, in certain situations, women have been exposed to the need to use stereotypically masculine speech strategies, especially in the workplace, to enact their power (Mullany, 2008). Therefore, gender should not be considered the sole reason that makes us believe that men and women speak differently. Beyond that, our assessment of stereotyped gender behavioral norms in certain communities of practice should also determine the impolite speech used (Mills, 2005). Although “impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts which are purposefully delivered” (Bousfield, 2008, p. 72) and therefore “cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper et al., 2003, p. 1546), impoliteness would highly depend on the

context and the judgment the interactant made concerning the behavioral norms working in the community of practices.

## CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the impoliteness strategies performed by the main female character (Nadine) and her male interlocutors of the *Edge of Seventeen* movie and how the choice of impoliteness strategies used interplays with gender differences. This study has demonstrated that women who have been deleteriously stereotyped as “powerless” language users also can use impoliteness strategies as a way of negotiating and constructing their identity in today’s changing world. While both genders could potentially use impoliteness strategies to negotiate and construct their power and identity in interactions, there were slightly notable differences in the use of the strategies. Women prefer to use positive impoliteness while men use negative impoliteness strategies. The use of positive impoliteness among women is influenced by their very sensitive nature to social relations. Any sensitive topic to social relations is considered effective as a face-threatening act.

On the other hand, men use negative impoliteness to force their interlocutors to submit to their will, a trait of male dominance. By suppressing the freedom of choice of the interlocutor, the negative face is threatened. From these findings, it can be concluded that impoliteness can be used, not only by men but also by women, as a tool to exercise their power and construct their gender identity. This finding is, of course, open to debate especially dealing with the choice of impoliteness strategies used by men and women. Therefore, the present researchers suggest future investigations on which types of impoliteness strategies men and women preferred in multiple settings involving both broader and smaller communities or practices to examine whether such behavioral norms on the appropriateness of the language use are relatively fixed and static or dynamics and fluid.

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