

## 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 the impolite utterances of Nadine and her male interlocutors as the data, this study found a thought-provoking fact that women who have been deleteriously stereotyped as “powerless” language users also have the potential to 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 as a way 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 so that any topic that is sensitive 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, which is 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.

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## 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), but often through language, one's relationship with others loosens and even becomes worse. Therefore, for the sake of 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 language. However, often this language politeness rule is 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, p.8) 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* Banabdellah, 2018, Dhorifah, 2016; Pratama, 2020; Sani & Suhandoko, 2020). Dhorifah (2016), analyzing the impoliteness strategy in the Boyhood film, and Sani et al. (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 found 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 et al. (2020) focused on how impoliteness strategy is used to exercise power, Benabdellah (2018) and Pratama (2020) 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. Slightly different from Benabdellah (2018), who found language impoliteness to be dominated by men, Pratama (2020) argues otherwise. The female character in The Big Wedding is the one who dominates the use of impolite language. 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 work 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 2003, p. 305). Gender also allows us to distinguish and talk about people as a feminist (Coates, 2013). Wardhaugh (1988) examined the differences in language use between men and women. These differences are found from several cases that often occur every day, especially differences in the use of impoliteness strategies.

The Edge of Seventeen is an American comedy-drama released in 2016. This film tells about Nadine as the main character who is talkative and rebellious. Nadine was very close to her father, but his father died when he was 13 years old. After the death of her father, 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 language with older people and other characters in this

film. This is what motivates the authors to analyze the impoliteness strategies used by Nadine and her male interlocutor. It aims to compare how the two different 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.

Based on the background of the research above, this study aims to answer two research problems which are 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 Wichmann (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 means that people 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 Robin 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 a more confident man, 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.

There is a popular assumption implying that language use, including language politeness and impoliteness, is influenced by gender differences (Coulmas, 2005, p. 36). Language impoliteness, according to Mills (2003), 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 (1988) 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, but they are still one, but have different characteristics in the 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.

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative method. According to Dornyei (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 the form of 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%20edge%20of%20seventeen%2020132).

After the data was 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 as well as 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 that have been formulated.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

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

This section presents the answer to 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***

In the *Edge of Seventeen* movie, 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*

In the Edge of Seventeen movie, the researcher found seven conversation data 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*

In the Edge of Seventeen movie, the researcher found 13 conversation data categorized as 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 threatens her mother by spreading her mother's secret to social media. Threatening the other person, especially a mother, is an impoliteness 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 was expected to be because of her bad 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***

In the Edge of Seventeen movie, the researcher found six conversations included as 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. A statement that 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***

In the *Edge of Seventeen* movie, the researcher 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 aim to 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 face.

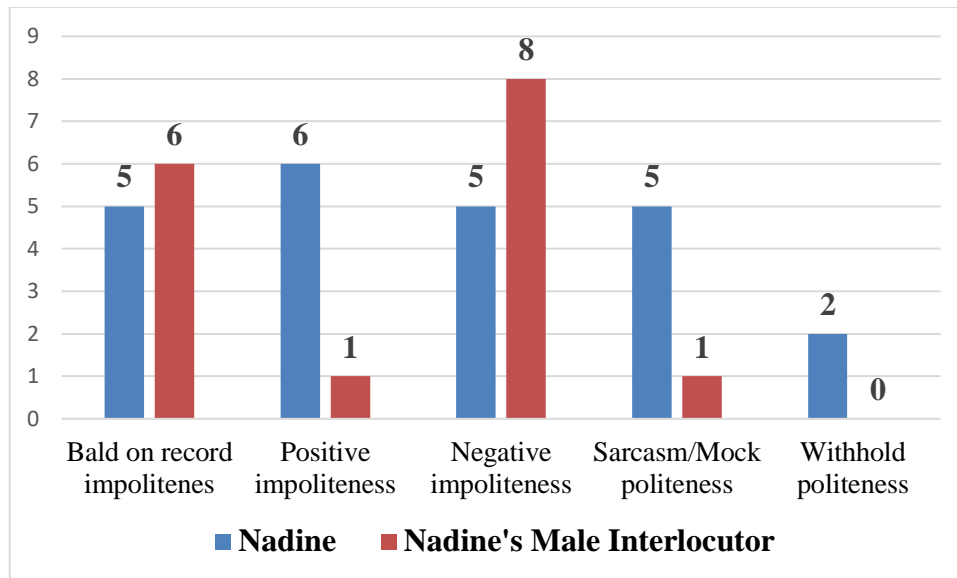
The second impoliteness strategy used by Nadine and her male interlocutors is the bald-on record strategy to attack the interlocutor's face directly without any effort to minimize the face attacks. Bald on record generally occurs in situations where there is a clear power hierarchy, where a superordinate can subordinate others (Sani et al., 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 greater. 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 *Edge of Seventeen* movie is the positive impoliteness strategy. As social beings, humans want themselves to be considered by the surrounding community. Therefore, intentionally ostracizing someone in social relationships is an impoliteness 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. This is in accordance with Drucker et al.'s (2014) statement that 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 the withhold politeness. Similar to the research results of Pratama (2020) and Sani et al. (2020), withhold politeness is rarely used as it is an unlikely effective impoliteness strategy to threaten the face of others.

### **Gender Difference in the Use of Impoliteness Strategies**

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 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 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, namely in the positive and negative impoliteness strategies. 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. Positive impoliteness is the act of intentionally making another person feel unwanted, dissociated from the community, and unsympathetic. Women 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, 2013). This, in turn, has implications for the impoliteness strategies used by women. Since women feel that making other people feel comfortable, accepted, sympathized, cared for, approved, and associated is important for maintaining harmonious social relationships, showing the opposite behavior is considered impolite. Making other people feel dissociated, ignored, unsympathetic is considered an effective impoliteness strategy by women.

On the other hand, the negative impoliteness strategy was used more by men. Men are traditionally shaped as dominant, independent, autonomous, and individual beings. Therefore, men often have to encounter situations where they have to maintain

their position (Kimmel, Hearn & Connel, 2009). This 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, and dependent.

## 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 have the potential to 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 as a way 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 so that any topic that is sensitive 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 which is 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.

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