

Interlanguage impoliteness in criticism by the English learners from Javanese background over social status and distance

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyses the impoliteness of criticism over social status and distance, incorporating the concept of "levels of imposition." Criticism as a fundamental speech act is commonly used by people in the modern era, either in the digital world or the real world. It usually contains impoliteness if it embodies negative behavior, conveying criticism. This study belonged to an interlanguage pragmatics study and used forty participants from English language learners having Javanese backgrounds. It also applied the role play technique to take data to be analyzed using mixed method analysis. The data showed that the criticizer performed various impoliteness strategies in criticism, considering familiar and unfamiliar relationships in different social status levels. They mainly performed bald-on-record impoliteness and adhered to other strategies such as negative, positive, and mock politeness. Besides that, delivering criticism in high intonation was also perceived as a part of impoliteness. Therefore, it suggested conducting another research concerning paralinguistics and impoliteness in various communication contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, Microsoft, the largest computer software vendor in the world, published the digital civility index (DCI) in 2020, with Indonesia ranking 29 out of the 32 countries in the world. It was based on a survey of sixteen thousand respondents consisting of adults and teenagers from thirty-two countries from April to May 2020. Surprisingly, the result showed that Indonesia got the lowest score in Southeast Asia because it dropped 8 points with a score of 76 compared to the previous year. In other words, it could be assumed that Indonesian belonged to digitally uncivilized citizens, including spreading hoaxes, hate speech, bullying, and trolling [1] in online communities can harm individuals and society [2], creating fear, panic, and mistrust in public institutions [3]. Understanding these differences can help develop effective strategies to prevent and mitigate trolling behaviors [4].

Impoliteness is a pervasive form of incivility that can manifest in social, economic, political, and educational contexts [5]. Incivility in the form of rudeness and disrespect can negatively impact individual and team performance in organizational settings [6]. In the healthcare setting, research [7] has shown that incivility and rudeness among healthcare professionals can lead to medical errors, decreased patient satisfaction, and reduced quality of care [8]. The research found that incivility in the form of sexual harassment in the workplace can significantly affect the targeted individuals and the workplace climate. Furthermore, [9] found that workplace incivility can lead to reduced job satisfaction, lower levels of organizational commitment, and increased emotional exhaustion and job anxiety. It can not be separated between one and the others. Therefore, Watts assumed that impoliteness is the most debatable issue in pragmatics study, which is struggled over in the present and future [10].

Many scholars have applied the concept of impoliteness to theorize politeness and vice versa [11]–[13]. It is one of the popular concepts or theoretical frameworks concerning face and intentionality, as proposed by [12]. In addition, Brown and Levinson preserve positive and negative faces in interaction. Positive face refers to the desire to be honored, admired, and accepted by the interlocutor, while negative face refers to the desire for freedom from imposition. On the other hand, impoliteness also encounters intentionality as another factor that emerged in interaction. Impoliteness can occur when the locutors intentionally use offensive language to attack the interlocutor's positive or negative face, either verbal or non-verbal [14]–[16]. It is not a part of pragmatic error or mistake, but it is looked more at the process of linguistic behavior, which is systematically and strategically planned by the speakers [17]. Therefore, both terms, face attack and interlocutor's perception, are crucial to impoliteness because they have contributed to how impoliteness is viewed in every interaction [18]. In addition, Culpeper proposes five impoliteness strategies across from Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, as shown in Table 1 [19].

Table 1. Culpeper's impoliteness taxonomy

No	Strategies	Explanation
1.	Bald on record impoliteness	This strategy is designed and realized to attack the hearer's face because the speaker does not want to maintain a harmonious relationship between them.
2.	Positive impoliteness	It is formulated to attack the hearer's positive face by giving an inappropriate name, ignoring the hearer, and excommunicating the hearer.
3.	Negative impoliteness	It is a strategy to undermine the hearer's negative face, like insulting, criticizing the hearer, and disparaging the others.
4.	Mock politeness	It is the impoliteness strategy that is realized politely. However, it is politeness in pretense to mock the hearer.
5.	Withhold politeness	It happens when the speaker consciously or unconsciously does not want to realize politeness to the hearer as commonly applied.

Many studies show that Culpeper's taxonomy has many contributions to evaluating impoliteness in various areas, such as political discourse [20], social media [21], drama performance, intercultural interaction [22], [23], and education [19]. Generally, the studies show that impoliteness emerges from using language to attack the hearer's face and the hearer's perception of impoliteness in communication. The word "criticize," denoted as criticism, belongs to the performative speech act, and it is defined as a kind of speech act whose illocutionary function is to provide a negative evaluation of the interlocutor's action, choice, or words. Criticism is also discovering a mistake, which implies giving a negative assessment to certain people [24]. It could lead to a negative impact on the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Therefore, it can be assumed that criticism refers to dissatisfaction or treatment perceived by the speaker in certain situations [25]. It happens in a sequence conversation as a response to a dissatisfaction situation perceived by the interlocutor. Consequently, the speaker sometimes tries to lessen the level of criticism, which entails a higher level of politeness to make it more acceptable to the interlocutor. To mitigate unexpected social impacts dealing with criticism acts, the speaker can consider the use of direct or indirect criticism strategies in applying criticism. Direct criticism means that the speaker expresses a negative assessment of the hearer's action without reservation. Meanwhile, indirect criticism means an illocutionary act of criticism where the real intention of the speaker to give criticism is partially concealed [26].

In Javanese context, it can be seen from one of the most popular Javanese philosophies, "Ajining dhiri gumantung ono ing lathi" (Dignity depends on what the people say). The Javanese language maintains stratified languages, namely "kromo" divided into "kromo madyo" (the same level utterances), "kromo inggil" (the high-level utterances) and "ngoko" (the low-level utterances) [27]. Some factors like the level of intimacy, gender, age, and social status influence this. Therefore, the use of Javanese language reflects the relationship between the interlocutors. It also describes the characteristics of Javanese people in terms of social behavior and respect for others.

Based on the explanation above, this study intends to investigate the impoliteness in criticism performed by English learners from Javanese backgrounds. Some studies explore this area, such as the impoliteness in complaint strategies [28], [29]; perception of impoliteness [11], [30], [31]; impoliteness in classroom interaction [19]; impoliteness in gender [10]; impoliteness in online communication [32]; cross-cultural comparisons of impoliteness [15], [30]. There is a growing corpus of literature on impoliteness, but more attention needs to be given to how impoliteness appears in English learners with Javanese backgrounds. There is still a need for research that specifically addresses the impoliteness of criticism within the context of English learners from Javanese backgrounds, even though some studies have explored various aspects of impoliteness in different contexts, such as complaint strategies, perceptions of impoliteness and impoliteness in classroom interactions. Contextual, speaker- and target-related factors all impact how English as a foreign language (EFL) learners use rudeness in interlanguage complaints [33]. Javanese students studying English prefer to use direct rejection techniques comparable to English refusals [34]. Javanese students employ

apologising, hedging, and showing deference, but non-Javanese students typically utilise apologising and being gloomy in negative politeness [35]. By analyzing how these students use impoliteness tactics when receiving criticism and how their cultural and linguistic backgrounds may affect their impoliteness patterns, this study seeks to close this research gap. The research questions we design can help readers comprehend the precise goals of the study and give it a focused direction, such as: i) What tactics do English learners with Javanese backgrounds use to be impolite when giving criticism? and ii) To what extent do these students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect their impolite behavior during criticism interactions?

2. METHOD

This study's participants came from Indonesian English learners with a Javanese background at a university in Central Java. The participants consisted of 40 students coming from universities in seven semesters. As final-year students, their English proficiency was at the intermediate and upper intermediate level, and they used English mainly as a communication tool in the lecturing class. Besides that, the participants also comprised male and female students who used the Javanese language for daily communication. The following factors went into determining the choice of data collection from students in the seventh semester: i) To evaluate how English language proficiency and language use changed over time; ii) The selection of participants who speak English in lecture classes suggests that researchers are interested in how language proficiency and language use intersect with academic contexts. This extended duration helps capture the progression of language skills from intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, which may be particularly relevant for educational or linguistic studies. Data gathered from students enables a more comprehensive understanding of how English is incorporated into their academic lives; iii) The data collection strategy for students over seven semesters attempts to comprehend the impact of the participants' Javanese background on their English growth over time because the participants have a Javanese language background and use Javanese for everyday communication.

The present study constitutes pragmatics studies and uses role-play instruments to elicit the data. The present study uses role-play instruments because the data gathered is more authentic compared to discourse completion task (DCT) as commonly applied in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) studies [36]. Besides that, it is also more practical and efficient than using natural data or authentic discourse. This study compared social status differences and rudeness using statistical analysis. To pinpoint the significance of the link, the Chi-square test was utilized. At $p < 0.05$, the significance level was established. When comparing various social statuses and incivility tactics, chi-square tests can be used to evaluate whether there is a statistically significant association between the two variables. Meanwhile, using Culpeper's taxonomy of incivility strategies, rude criticism in role-play scenarios was qualitatively categorized. The researchers divided the examples of rudeness into four categories after they read the transcripts of role-playing scenarios: vague impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and mocking politeness. These groups fit into Culpeper's conceptualization of verbal impoliteness. In these investigations, inter-rater reliability is established using two or more coders. For the coding process to be accurate and consistent, this is crucial. To improve the authenticity of the results, any coding disputes should be settled by discussion and agreement among the coders. Clearly, each of the 40 participants finished all 12 of the role-playing exercises. It is crucial to explain why any participant who did not complete all scenarios did so and to account for any missing information. Participants receive specific instructions before role-playing. The methodological section includes instructions, such as whether participants were allowed to use both Javanese and English, and other pertinent recommendations to maintain consistency in the role play. Then, the present study used role play consisting of twelve different sociopragmatic variables. It provided the participants with specific social situations and settings, social status (lower, equal, and higher), social distance (familiar and unfamiliar), and the level of imposition (low and high). This was adopted from validated studies [37], as summarized in the Table 2.

Table 2. The summary of role plays scenarios

Situation	Relationship	Sociocontextual variables		
		Power	Distance	Imposition
1	Lecturer-Student	Higher	Familiar	High
2	Parking officer-Student	Higher	Unfamiliar	Low
3	Parent-Son	Higher	Familiar	Low
4	The Dean-Online driver	Higher	Unfamiliar	High
5	Lecturer-Lecturer	Equal	Familiar	High
6	Customer-Customer	Equal	Unfamiliar	Low
7	Boarding house occupant-Boarding house occupant	Equal	Familiar	Low
8	Library visitor-Library visitor	Equal	Unfamiliar	High
9	Teacher-Headmaster	Lower	Familiar	High
10	Junior dorm resident-Senior dorm resident	Lower	Unfamiliar	Low
11	Son-Parent	Lower	Familiar	Low
12	Student-IT officer	Lower	Unfamiliar	High

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This study gained 480 data of interlanguage criticism from English learners in the Javanese context. Out of the data obtained, 82 (17.08%) of criticism did not constitute impoliteness, as presented by Culpeper, and the other data, 398 (82.92%), contained impoliteness. In addition, the present study discusses the data containing impoliteness based on Culpeper's taxonomy. As the data obtained, there are four impoliteness strategies emerged in criticism, namely Bald on record impoliteness 178 (44.7%), Positive impoliteness 158 (39.7%), Negative impoliteness 197 (49.5%), and Mock politeness 138 (34.7%). Then, it is discussed concerning different social statuses and different interpersonal relationships.

3.2. Impoliteness in criticism across different social statuses

Firstly, it shows and discusses the use of impoliteness in criticism concerning the different social statuses of the interlocutors. As the socio-contextual is designed, there are three different levels, namely higher status, lower status, and equal status. It focuses on the influence of the various social levels on realizing impoliteness. Besides that, it also analyzes the type of impoliteness strategy applied and the frequency of impoliteness used in every social class. It begins with the impoliteness in criticism performed by the criticizer who is familiar with the hearer, and it is finally terminated with the impoliteness realized by the criticizer who is unfamiliar with the hearer in terms of high and low imposition. Six situations (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11) describe familiar relationships between speaker and hearer in various status levels. The data shows that the different statuses of the speakers influence how they realize impoliteness ($P < 0.05$), as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The frequency of impoliteness in a familiar relationship

Types of Impoliteness	Criticizer Social Level			Total	df	χ^2	p
	Lower	Equal	Higher				
Bald on record impoliteness	38	32	29	59	2	14.66	0.017
Positive impoliteness	27	27	29	83			
Negative impoliteness	33	30	21	120			
Mock politeness	24	26	23	77			
				359			

The data shows that the speakers use different impoliteness when criticizing the hearer, considering lower, equal, and high status. In the lower level, the speakers mostly perform bald on record impoliteness if they have a familiar relationship with the hearers. In addition, the interlocutors ignore their different status levels, as described in situation 9 (Teacher-Headmaster) and situation 11 (Son-Parent).

Data:

A/1/9 [00:21:06.16]

Headmaster : We are on a tight budget right now. So, the school and the other high roles want to cut the transportation allowance.

B/1/9 [00:21:26.25]

Teacher : Uh, But I disagree about the policy (in high intonation).

Data:

A/9/9 [00:15:03.14]

Headmaster : *Assalamualaikum*, I am announcing that all teachers' transportation is terminated starting tomorrow, considering the bad state of school economics. I hope that teachers and employees understand.

B/9/9 [00:29:30.22]

Teacher : You cannot do that, Sir (high intonation). Think of all your friends. Don't you feel pity for all your friends?

Although the teacher is subordinate to the headmaster, the teacher directly criticizes the headmaster by expressing disagreement in high intonation. This criticism contains bald on-record impoliteness in case the teacher straightly gives criticism to the headmaster in such a situation without considering maintaining the headmaster's face. So, the teacher assumes it does not trigger potential conflict between them.

Data:

A/1/11 [00:00:17.11]

Son : I do not get that much pocket money lately, and I am not a kid, and even the ())) are now two thousand rupiahs. I need more because I cannot afford anything else.

B/1/11 [00:00:38.18]

Parent : #mmh OK. [breath] I will give you much more money if you want to #uh help me clean this house. What about it?

Data:

A/2/11 [00:00:32.02]
 Son : Mom, why do I have so little pocket money? You are not fair to me. I am not a junior student anymore.
 B/1/11 [00:00:38.08]
 Parent : What is wrong, Hanif?
 A/2/11 [00:00:39.08]
 Son : This is less, and this money is just used for gasoline. I cannot buy anything on campus.
 Parent : For gasoline? How far is home to college?

Data A/1/11 [00:00:17.11] and A/2/11 [00:00:32.02] show that the son criticizes his parent because he gets little pocket money. His criticism contains bald on-record impoliteness because his utterances "*You know ...*" and "*Why do I have so little pocket money? You are not fair to me*" indicate that he/she intentionally gives negative evaluation to his parent without paying attention to his/her parent face. In the Javanese context, a son should highly appreciate his parent as the Javanese slogan says, "*Mikul shower mendhem jero*." It contains guidance that the son should put the parent in a high position and keep all weaknesses of his parent. Communication with the parent is one of the concrete appreciations to the parent. The son is forbidden to communicate directly without giving salutations and forbidden to obtrude his parent like the data displayed. The speakers mostly use criticism encompassing negative impoliteness strategy at the equal and higher levels. Some sub-strategies constitute negative impoliteness, such as frightening, scorning, ridiculing, contempt, belittling others, invading others, and associating others with negative aspects.

Data:

A/1/5 [00:14:36.14]
 Researcher A : Why do you have less contribution to our~researcher~research? If you do not contribute, I will kick you out of the team.
 B/1/5 [00:14:48.01]
 Researcher B : #uh, I am sorry. ~I do not want to have less contribution to the team. However, I cannot do it right now because I have so much work to do. So, I can only really help a little.

Data:

A/1/7 [00:18:36.05]
 Occupant A : #uh why~it is three a.m. Why do you play your music that loud? People are trying to sleep. I will tell the owner if you like this.
 B/1/7 [00:18:46.19]
 Occupant B : Oh, because I enjoy this music.

Data:

A/1/1 [00:07:30.15]
 Student : I am sorry, Sir, I am late because I woke up late this morning.
 B/1/1 [00:07:37.26]
 Lecturer : #uh That is your usual reason for being late. You~you always got late every morning in the class. Moreover, your score on this subject is bad. You should try to (make some changes. Alternatively, you fail this class. You need to be a better student. Just wake up earlier, study, and (G) keep yourself in check because I do not want you to fail.
 A/1/1 [00:08:27.26]
 Student : OK, Sir. I will be a better student.

Data A/1/5 [00:14:36.14] and A/1/7 [00:18:36.05], the speaker and the hearer are familiar and have equal positions as a research team and boarding house occupants. The speaker indirectly criticizes speaker B by asking about strategy. Meanwhile, data B/1/1 [00:07:37.26] shows that the speaker is at a higher level than the hearer, although they have a familiar relationship. As criticism is realized, it embodies negative impoliteness as it constitutes the menace of the hearer's negative face. It is frightening as the data displayed at the equal and higher levels are part of utterances that threaten someone's negative face and constitute negative impoliteness. The following section discusses impoliteness in unfamiliar relationships at various social levels. The following data Table 4 describes how the unfamiliar person of various social statuses realizes impoliteness in criticism.

From the Table 4, although the speakers use various impoliteness strategies in criticism, they dominantly perform a negative impoliteness strategy. The data shows that the different statuses of the speakers do not influence how they realize impoliteness ($P > 0.05$). It occurs at every social level: lower, equal, and higher. Negative impoliteness frequently performs 35 times at the lower level, 36 times at the equal status, and 31 times at the higher level. Even so, the speakers realize other impoliteness strategies in criticism for different social classes. This indicates a correlation between unfamiliar relationships and impoliteness strategies in various social classes. This is portrayed in the role-play situations 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

Table 4. The frequency of impoliteness in unfamiliar relationships

Types of Impoliteness	Criticizer Social Level			Total	df	χ^2	p
	Lower	Equal	Higher				
Bald on record impoliteness	27	30	22	79	2	3.246	0.197
Positive impoliteness	31	28	24	83			
Negative impoliteness	35	36	31	102			
Mock politeness	29	21	25	75			
				339			

Data:

A/3/2 [00:07:12.00]

Parking : Hello! Hi, what are you doing here? This Park is~the instruction for the parking area is not for~you as a~ student but this officer for~lecturer. Why are you parking here? Can't you read ((the sign)) over there?

B/3/2 [00:07:34.05]

Student : Oh! I am sorry! I have no idea. I do not know that this is the instruction parking area. So~because~I coming late to my class. I am so sorry, Mister!

Data:

A/1/4 [00:12:15.16]

Dean : Oh, all right. Why are you being a driver online? You are a university student. You can get a better job.

B/1/4 [00:12:20.18]

Online driver : Yes, I know because I need money for school fees. I do as ojol.

Data:

A/3/6 [00:17:16.00]

Customer : Sorry, Mister! What are you doing here? Why are you so long? Don't you see that? So many people in here~have to do with this ATM?

B/3/6 [00:17:38.10]

Customer : Oh, I am sorry, Miss! I am sorry because it took too long to~do my transaction at this ATM.

Data:

A/1/12 [00:01:55.10] Student : I need your help. I forgot my password to access the academic account. Can you help me?

B/1/12 [00:02:06.01] IT officer : Yes? What? OK. Give me your email.

A/1/12 [00:02:21.13] Student : How long will it take?

B/1/12 [00:02:25.10] IT officer : Maybe a week, boy.

A/1/12 [00:02:28.08] Student : Huh? A week?

B/1/12 [00:02:30.25] IT officer : Yes

A/1/12 [00:02:31.22] Student : Is that a short time? How come I just~need to reset my password? Nothing as a way [breath] you need to be so long like that. You should get to sleep.

B/1/12 [00:02:42.14] IT officer : Sorry, Boy. However, it takes a week.

The data above describes that the speakers indirectly criticize the hearer using the asking strategy. Besides that, it also conceives negative impoliteness since it threatens the hearer's negative face. The criticizer's utterance, "Can't you read ((the sign)) over there?" is the contemptuous form to the hearer. It is perceived that the hearer can not read the sign in the parking area while he/she is a university student. Conversely, the criticizer also underrates the hearer's job by asking, "Why are you being a driver online?" as a university student. In this case, the criticizer assumes that an online driver is not a qualified job for a university student, so he/she suggests taking the better one. This also emerges in the data (A/1/12 00:02:31.22) where the criticizer tries to invade the hearer space and insult him by utterance, "Nothing as a way [breath] you need to be so long like that. It is better you get to sleep". According to the criticizer, the time given to reset the password is too long, but he instead asks to be longer than the time allocated. Furthermore, the speaker also undertakes contemptuous acts toward the hearer by suggesting to sleep while working as an IT officer. Those items are perceived as negative impoliteness at various social levels because they undermine the interlocutor's negative face.

3.3. Discussion

This study classifies the impoliteness strategies used to examine incivility in criticism across different social classes, particularly in familiar and unfamiliar situations. This study turned up some interesting trends that are worth talking about. The prevalence of negative incivility in familiar and unfamiliar relationships is one of the important findings of our research. Critics often use negative incivility techniques such as intimidating, ridiculing, insulting, belittling, attacking, and associating others with undesirable traits. No matter how familiar two people are with each other, the predominance of negative incivility indicates that criticism often contains threats to the listener's negative face.

Negative impoliteness is used in close relationships when the speaker feels confident enough to voice his or her criticism openly. This may be due to pre-existing familiarity and the belief that such criticism is unlikely to result in serious arguments. However, negative impoliteness is often used even in new interactions, indicating that the speaker emphasizes being blunt and critical rather than keeping a good face.

The study also found no statistically significant difference in harsh criticism between relationships participants knew about and those they did not. These findings imply that negative incivility remains a primary incivility tactic, regardless of the level of familiarity. The lack of substantial differences in unknown relationships may indicate a general tendency to use unkind language when conveying criticism, regardless of the level of interpersonal familiarity. These findings may affect our understanding of incivility in criticism and politeness theory. They argue that rudeness can persist in a wide range of social circumstances and emphasize the importance of considering familiarity and important message content when analyzing rudeness. Additionally, this research contributes to the knowledge of verbal impoliteness and may help improve Culpeper's taxonomy of impoliteness methods. Although Culpeper's framework proved helpful in classifying a wide range of incivility, this research emphasizes that incivility is ubiquitous, which needs to be further investigated and perhaps expanded in future research.

4. CONCLUSION

Criticism as a part of speech acts belongs to one of the phenomenal acts because it is frequently used in modern society, either in the digital or non-digital world. Many people use it in their daily lives for various contexts of interactions. Impoliteness, as the opposite of politeness, denotes incivility, and it probably occurs in multiple contexts of society, including criticism. There are some angles to view impoliteness, but the present study employs linguistic utterances based on Culpeper's taxonomy. Besides that, this study also uses sociocultural context as social variables, social status, social distance, and rank of imposition to evaluate impoliteness in criticism. It occurs in different social statuses like lower, higher, and equal levels. Furthermore, the criticizer also used different impoliteness strategies at different social distances. This indicates a connection between social status level and social distance to realize impoliteness in criticism. Besides, this study also discovered that high intonation was perceived as impoliteness. It happened in some situations when the criticizer conveyed criticism to the hearer in high intonation. Intonation is a part of paralinguistics, and it can trigger impoliteness. This study does not systematically concern to evaluate this aspect. Therefore, it is suggested to carry out another study dealing with this aspect.

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