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**A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Responses to Impoliteness in some Selected English and Arabic Literary Texts****Mahmood A. Almuslehi**Department of English  
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[mahdialutbi@gmail.com](mailto:mahdialutbi@gmail.com)**DOI: [10.31973/aj.v2i136.1278](https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v2i136.1278)****Abstract**

A great number of studies have dealt with impoliteness within the area of pragmatics, but it seems the responses to impoliteness as a socio-pragmatic phenomenon have been somehow neglected. Therefore, by employing a model of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (2005), this paper aims at investigating of the responses to impoliteness from socio-pragmatic view in English and Arabic literary texts to examine the types of responses to impoliteness, and the ways in which the characters make use of their social power to perform impolite behaviors or utterances to respond to others so as to achieve certain social goals. It worth mentioning that this paper has tackled the responses qualitatively and quantitatively because it explains a specific socio-pragmatic phenomenon which is Impoliteness. The results of the study show that the responses to impoliteness are various in English and Arabic plays which hearers make use of context or their social power to respond to attackers.

**Key Words:** Pragmatics, Socio-Pragmatics, Impoliteness, Birthday Party (BP), Qadiat Ahil Alrabie (QAA).

**1. Introduction**

According to Culpeper (2011p. 6), so many research studies have been done on politeness. This can be seen in the classic politeness theories, Brown and Levinson (hereafter B&L) (1987 [1978]) and Leech (1983), and their focus has been on 'harmonious interactions', and therefore impoliteness does not receive any attention. Moreover, Eelen (2001, pp. 98–100) illustrates that these scholars consider impoliteness to be a kind of pragmatic failure, or anomalous behavior, and there is no value in considering it as a researchable topic.

In discussions of impoliteness under the area of pragmatics, there is a partial reaction to this view. Contrastively enough, Lakoff (1989), Kasper (1990), Beebe (1995) and Kienpointner (1997) argue and demonstrate that are strategies for impoliteness, and they are systematic and complex. Culpeper *et al* (2003) explains that

impoliteness phenomena and verbal interactions that lead to conflict cannot be considered anomalous behaviors because they are a kind of language interaction that can be experienced in a number of different discourses. Responses to impoliteness strategies vary according to the culture, context and the participants' social power. Therefore, this paper deals with responses to impoliteness strategies in selected English and Arabic plays from a socio-pragmatic perspective to show how the characters respond to the impoliteness strategies and state whether the responses are similar in Arabic and English, and demonstrate types of response which are the most prominent in these plays.

## **2. Impoliteness from A Socio-Pragmatic View**

Levinson (2001, p.6) defines "pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" whereas sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context on the way language is used (Trudgill, 2000, p.32). He also states the research within the area of im/politeness bring pragmatics and sociolinguistic closely together, so this interrelated has been given an appropriate label which is socio-pragmatics (2000, p.32).

Culpeper (2011, p.5) believes that "the main home for impoliteness studies is socio-pragmatics". This is because it regarded as a field of linguistic pragmatics which is connected to other areas of study whose major concern are interactional sociolinguistics as well as communication the studies. Because socio-pragmatics is regarded as an appropriate tool examine the majority of the works on politeness, it is also can be used to handle "apparent antithesis" the impoliteness phenomenon. More importantly, impoliteness can be considered a good fit to be studied in the area of socio-pragmatics.

Tracy (1998, p.227) has a different definition of impoliteness. She sees impoliteness as "communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by Ss) to be purposefully offensive behavioral".

Culpeper's (1996) two most recognizable definitions of impoliteness. Firstly, "as the use of strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony" (as cited in Bousfield and Locher, 2008, p. 131). In (2005), Culpeper defines in a more specific way. He believes that "impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates a face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (as cited in Ruhi and Aksan, 2015, p. 41). Secondly, Culpeper thinks that intentionality and impoliteness are connected because interlocutors perform impolite behaviors in intentional ways.

### **3. Culpeper's (1996, 2005) model of impoliteness**

It is essential to mention that the most recognizable model to tackle the impoliteness phenomenon is introduced by Culpeper in 1996. For him, impoliteness is the reason of causing social disharmony between members of a community in interaction (Walaszewska & Piskorska, 2012: 246).

Culpeper (2001, p. 246) explains that politeness is different from impoliteness when he points out “It should be noted that the key difference between politeness and impoliteness is a matter of intention: whether it is the speaker's intention to support face (politely) or to attack it (impolitely)”

Culpeper relays on the data of media in general and the data of television shows in particular in order to measure how his model of impoliteness works. Culpeper's films, documentaries and quiz programs are his favorite sources of data because there is a continual conflict between participants, and impoliteness is embodied in different manners, so it is possible to interpret the impolite behaviors from various angles (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010p. 72). Furthermore, when comparing Culpeper's model with others', his model has a real advantage because it is built on the basis of real-life data. It deals with various types of discourses such as the impolite acts in a training discourse held by an American Army and in children's discourse within Spanish/English bilingual environment. Hence, Bousfield (2008, p. 90) states that Culpeper's various types discourse gives a significant reliability to his model.

It is important to mention that Lachenicht (1980) and Culpeper (1996) have three aspects in common: first and foremost, both of them depend on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory because they consider it a cornerstone for building their own models (Bousfield, 2008: 83). Also, Lachenicht and Culpeper's primary attention is on the speaker's role, unlike Austin (1990) who concentrates on the hearer's. To elaborate, Austin deals with how the listener interprets the utterances as being impolite, and she disregards the speaker's role (Jucker, 2009, p.164). Lastly, for Lachenicht and Culpeper, impoliteness is viewed as the employment of an intentional linguistic behavior for the purpose of attacking the hearer's face and creating social disharmony (ibid).

Culpeper modifies his (1996) model in 2005 so that he can somehow shift the focus from intentional face-attack to impoliteness within a cultural context. After presenting his (2005) model, Culpeper still pays great attention to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1996, p.91). Culpeper's (1996-2005) model of impoliteness consists of five strategies that are explained below.

### 3.1 Bald on record impoliteness

Gus: “He doesn't seem to bother much about our comfort these days.”

Ben: “When **you are going to stop jabbering?**”

(I, ii, p.135).

An example of bald on record impoliteness is shown through Ben’s directly performed attack to Gus.

### 3.2 Positive impoliteness

Aston: “What happened when you got there, then?”

Davies: “**You know what that bastard monk said to me?**”

(I, ii, p.62)

Davies does not seem to accept an offensive behavior towards him, so he performs a positive impoliteness strategy by using “calling the other names” sub-strategy “bastard monk” to attack that person.

### 3.3 Negative impoliteness

Davies: “You ain't got no right to”

Mick: “**You're stinking the place out. You're an old robber.**

**You're an old skate. You don't belong in a nice place like this**”

(II, iii, p.109)

Mick employs negative impoliteness strategy when he verbally attacks Davies by implementing negative aspects, telling him that “you're old rouge, stink, an old skate”.

### 3.4 Sarcasm

Max: “**It's funny you never got married, isn't it? A man with all your gifts. Isn't it? A man like you?**”

Sam: “There's still time” (I, ii, p.61)

This is an example of sarcasm because Max’s impolite acts towards Sam are sarcastic to make him a source of laughter.

### 3.5 Withhold politeness

Molly introduces, Jim, her boyfriend to Sherlock. However, Sherlock’s response is passive because he does not say anything, so this is an example of a withhold politeness strategy.

Jim: “So you’re Sherlock Holmes. Molly’s told me all about you. You on one of your cases?”

Sherlock: *Silent* (Lucky,2005, p.52)

## 4. Responses to Impoliteness

The options open to a recipient to respond to the impolite behaviors are three which are explained thoroughly below.

### 1) Accepting the face attack

This example is from Boiling Point, and it shows how the artichokes have been overcooked and another dish has been held up for another table by Henry (H), a Chef. Therefore, Ramsay G. (RG) who is an owner of restaurant and a chef is having a conversation with him about this issue.

RG: “If you send me six fucking main courses like that again, I’ll, I’ll grab you by the fucking scruff of the neck and throw you on the street. Do you understand?”

H: “**Yes, Gordon.**”(Bousfield, 2008, p. 166)

In excerpt above, Henry knows well that he is the one who initiates Gordon’s anger in the first place, so he has chosen to show his acceptance to Gordon’s attacking attitude.

## 2) Countering the face attack

### a) Offensive Strategy

An example of offensive strategy can be seen in the following dialogue between Ben and Gus from *The Dumb Waiter* (1959)

Ben. They're playing away

Gus. Who are?

Ben. The Spurs.

Gus. Then they might be playing here.

Ben. **Don't be silly.** (scene1,31-35, p.138)

### b) Defensive Strategy

Example taken from *The Homecoming* (1965) to show the defensive strategy.

Lenny: “Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?”

Max: “**Don't talk to me like that, I'm warning you.**” (Act1, Sence1,8-11, p.7)

## 3) Non-Verbal Response

A conversation between John and Raz is taken from the T.V series Sherlock. When John interrupts Raz to Sherlock about a clue to solve a case. John has to go to the Magistrate Court because of a crime Raz has committed, thus when he tries to talk to Raz, he remains silent.

Raz: “Found something you’ll like.”

John: “Tuesday morning, all you’ve gotta do is turn up and say the bag was yours.”

Raz: **-Silent-** (Lucky, 2005, p.63)

## 5. Methodology

This study is dealt with qualitatively and quantitatively because a qualitative analysis offers studies that reflect the concern of sociolinguistic variationists whereas the quantitative one presents the outcomes that concern those who work with sociopragmatics. (Ilie and Norrick, 2018, p.15). In order to define the impolite instance(s) inside the chosen excerpt, certain techniques are followed such as the adaptation of models of analysis to investigate the impolite acts within literary texts so as to reach comprehensible results.

This research paper explains the impoliteness phenomenon from a sociopragmatic view. Therefore, it is sufficient to use invsitate the selected plays qualitatively and quantitatively. The plays *The Birthday Party* and *Qadhiatu Ahlil- Rabie* are analyzed to Address

the questions that this paper raises, such as what are the most common answers to the techniques of impoliteness in the chosen English and Arabic plays, if the practices of impolite acts in English and Arabic plays are similarly used and whether a speaker's social power has an effect on his / her impolite actions.

## 6. Data Selection

Plays are said to be the most suitable literary works because they a number of exchanges. The details of selected plays are stated below. The English play is *The Birthday Party* (BP) (1968) by Pinter and the Arabic one is *Qadhiatu Ahlil- Rabie* (QAR) [The Folks of Neighborhood's case] (1990) by Ali A. Baktheer.

Play	Characters
<i>The Birthday Party</i> (BP) (1968)	Stanley Goldberg Mccann Meg Lulu
<i>Qadhiatu Ahlil- Rabie</i> (QAR) (1990)	Abdul-Maola (عبد المولى) Iqbal (أقبال) Fathiyah (فتحية) Sadiyah (سعدية)

Table (1): Characters involved in the impoliteness strategies within BP and QAR

## 7. Data Analysis

### 7.1. Analysis of Responses to Impoliteness in *The Birthday Party*

#### 1) Offensive Strategy

##### Excerpt (1)

STANLEY: "Look. Sit down a minute."

MACANN: (*savagely, hitting his arm*). "**Don't do that!**"

(II, 22)

In this dialogue, Stanley performs a positive impoliteness strategy by ordering Mccann to sit down, but he refuses and shouts aggressively at Stanley, so this is an example of countering the face attack offensively.

##### Excerpt (2)

STANLEY: (*ignoring hand*). "Perhaps you're deaf".

GOLDBERG: "**Your skin's crabby, you need a shave, your eyes are full of muck, your mouth is like a boghouse, the palms of your hands are full of sweat...**]"(I, p.22)

While Goldberg and Stanley are dialoging, Goldberg performs a negative impoliteness strategy because he is trying to invade Stanley's space and criticize his routine of getting up late in the morning. In

other words, Goldberg insults Stanley verbally by ridiculing him, and explicitly associating him with negative aspects.

## 2) Defensive Strategy

### Excerpt (3)

STANLEY: “You’re a bad wife.”

MEG: “**I’m not. Who said I am?**”(I, p.12)

This example of a defensive strategy occurs through a conversation between Stanley and Meg. Stanley performs a bold on record impoliteness strategy when he tells Meg that she is a bad wife because she has not made a cup of tea to her husband before he leaves. However, Meg reacts by saying “I’m not” to defend her own face.

### Excerpt (4)

STANLEY: “How long has that tea been in the pot?”

MEG: “**It’s good tea. Good strong tea.**”(I, p.12)

This example is of a defensive strategy occurs through a conversation between Stanley and Meg. When Stanley performs a negative impoliteness strategy when he tells Meg the tea has been in the pot for a long time, Meg reacts by saying “it is good tea” to defend her own face.

## (3) Accepting the face attack

### Excerpt (5)

MEG: (*shyly*). “Am I really succulent?”

STANLEY: “Oh, you are. I’d rather have you than a cold in the nose any day.”

MEG: “**You’re just saying that**” (I, p.13)

Stanley uses a bold on record impoliteness to verbally offend Meg by describing her as 'succulent'. However, Meg seems to accept Stanley's attack although she does not accept his critique because she tells him 'You’re just saying that'.

### Excerpt (6)

STANLEY: (*to the table.*) “Listen. Don’t call me sir.”

MACCANN: “**I won’t, if you don’t like it.**” (II, p.21)

Stanley performs a positive impoliteness strategy and orders Maccann not to call him sir, showing him his social power as if he is the owner of the boarding house. As result, Maccann accepts Stanley’s face attack and promises him that he will not say that again.

## (4) Non-Verbal Response

### Excerpt (7)

MACCANN (rising). “That’s a dirty trick!”

GOLDBERG (rising). “No! I have stood up.”

MACCANN. “Sit down again!”

STANLEY: **Silence** (II, p.23)

When Maccann and Goldberg pretend to have more social power than Stanley, so they try to question him, and they start to provoke

him and practice multiple impoliteness strategies, but Stanley shows no reaction and remains silent.

## 7.2 Analysis of Responses to Impoliteness in Qadiay Ahl Arabie

### 1) Offensive Strategy

#### Excerpt (1)

عبد المولى: بعض الكلام المجمعى أفصح واوضح من الكلام الصريح  
أقبال: بل أنت جبان لا تجروا ان تصارحني ما في نفسك.

(I, p.8)

Through a discussion which occurs between Abdul-Maola and his wife, Iqbal. When he tells her that ambiguous language is more formal and clearer than the direct one, she responds impolitely by saying that he is 'جبان' a coward because he can never speak openly, so this is an example of a bald on record Impoliteness strategy.

#### Excerpt (2)

عبد المولى: وهل كان حقا عشيقك؟  
أقبال: لأرينك الان أنى أشجع منك، أجل كان يحبني وكنت احبه.

(I, p.9)

There is a conversation between Abdul-Maola and Iqbal. When Abdul-Maola asks her whether Mahmoud was her boyfriend, she verbally attacks him and she tells him that she can prove that he is more courageous than him. In this sense, she performs one of the output strategies of positive impoliteness which is 'not showing concern' and 'seeking disagreement' to offend him.

### 2) Defensive

#### Excerpt (3)

أقبال: لم لا تكون شجاعا ولو مرة واحدة في حياتك.  
عبد المولى: انا اعتقد انني طول عمري شجاع

(I, p. 7)

Abdul-Maola and his wife, Iqbal are having a conversation. When Iqbal performs a positive impoliteness strategy through telling him to be a brave man, he has not been offensive to her, and he has disagreed with her face attack and tells her that he is always brave.

#### Excerpt (4)

أقبال: أنما قلت هذا لتتخلص من تهمة الجبن والدياثة  
عبد المولى: بل لتعرفي الأمر على حقيقته أن كان يهملك ذلك.

(I, p.11)

Although Iqbal seems to be verbally impolite towards her husband, telling him that he should not be a coward and cuckold. However, Abdul-Maola appears to be defensive and tells her that he wants too truthful to her.

### 3) Acceptance

#### Excerpt (5)



أقبال: أجل، ان زوجي يحبني فموتي أنت بغضك.  
فتحية: الله يسامحك يا أقبال. بالعكس يسرني أن يحبك زوجك.

(I, p.22)

Also, accepting the face attack is seen obvious through Fathiyah's dialogue with Iqbal. Fathiyah accepts Iqbal's face attack as she is verbally insulted. Although Iqbal goes on verbally attacking in an abusive way, Fathiyah accepts it, and she seems to forgive her.

#### Excerpt (6)

عبد المولى: لا يوجد ديوث الا وأمراته ساقطة  
أقبال: بلى يوجد الديوث الذي امرأته فاضلة

(I, p.9)

Abdul-Maola and Iqbal are attacking each other verbally. He performs negative impoliteness when he says that a man cannot be a cuckold unless his wife is a bitch. This leads Iqbal to be offensive in her response, and asserts that there can be a cuckold man, and yet he has a good wife.

#### 4) Non-Verbal Response

#### Excerpt (7)

أقبال: ألى اين يا فتحية في هذا الصباح الباكر  
أقبال: ألى مكتب عملك؟  
فتحية: (لا تجيب) ..

(I, p.5)

The first example of non-verbal response is seen through Iqbal's question to Fathiyah about where she is heading, and then she asks her again if she is going to her work, but Fathiyah prefers to remain silent.

#### Excerpt (8)

أقبال: أين ياترى مكان الوظيفة الجديدة؟  
فتحية: (لا تجيب)

(I, p.6)

The other example of non-verbal response occurs when Iqbal asks Fathiyah about the place of her new job, but Fathiyah does not respond to her question.

### 8.1. A Quantitative Analysis of the Responses to impoliteness within BP

Strategies Employed	Frequency	Percent
Offensive Strategy	19	12.75
Defensive Strategy	65	43.62
Acceptance	05	3.35
Non-Verbal Response	60	40.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100</b>

Table (2): Impoliteness strategies employed by the characters in BP

Table (2) shows that the defensive response is the most frequently used strategy with 65 and 43.62 %. The non-verbal strategy is used less with 60 and 40.26%. The strategy that is not very frequent is the offensive strategy with only 19 and 12.75%. Acceptance is very rarely used with 05 and 3.35%.

## 8.2 A Quantitative Analysis of the Responses to impoliteness within QAR

Strategies Employed	Frequency	Percent
Offensive Strategy	38	35.84
Defensive Strategy	63	59.43
Acceptance	01	01
Non-Verbal Response	04	03.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table (3): Impoliteness strategies employed by the characters in QAR*

According to table (3), the defensive strategy is used more than any other strategy in the play with 63 and 59.43 %. Following this strategy, the offensive strategy is employed by the characters with 38 and 35.84%. The nonverbal strategy is not very frequent with only with 04 and 03.77%. The strategy that is very rarely used is the acceptance with only 01 and 01%.

## 9. Results and Discussions

The purpose of this section is to state how a socio-pragmatic investigation is followed to examine the responses to impoliteness strategies in the English play to show why the characters respond differently to impoliteness strategies and how they adopt their social power to respond to the impoliteness strategies. The Arabic play will be dealt with in the same way.

### 9.1 A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of BP

It is clearly indicated various responses to impoliteness strategies are employed by the characters in the English play. They use defensive and nonverbal strategies more frequently than the any other strategies. Pinter tries to throw the light on the responses to impoliteness to show how the characters either try to defend their face to save their face or use nonverbal responses as a way of ignoring others' impoliteness acts so that they can avoid any face attack that may occur because the speaker enjoys more social power which makes him accelerate his/her face attack whenever he/she wants to.

### 9.2 A Scio-Pragmatic Analysis of QAR

A variety of responses to the impoliteness strategies are employed in the Arabic play. The defensive strategy is used most frequently, but Acceptance and nonverbal responses are rarely used in the play because of the tense atmosphere which makes the context somehow argumentative. Also, the interlocutors use a different type of

responses according to the situations and social relationship between them. Therefore, responses are performed strategically by the characters to attack others and save their faces at the same time. In QAQ, the characters perform impolite acts to better their social image and as a reaction to silence those who accuse them of being shameful.

## 10. Conclusion

Impoliteness is considered to be a socio-pragmatic phenomenon because by analyzing responses to impoliteness behaviors, the addresser should be taken into account as well as other societal factors such as social power, language, and the degree of intimacy between the speech participants. Responses to impoliteness are seen as a socio-pragmatic trend in which participants in their language exchange employ distinctive verbal and non-verbal responses. It is clear that the frequency of the responses to impoliteness strategies vary because there are entirely different languages and cultural ethnicities in the selected plays. However, the responses performed are similar in the English and Arabic plays. An integral part of Culpeper's model (2005), responses to impoliteness, can be applied to the two plays. The most prominent strategy in the English play is the defensive one and the same applies to the Arabic play. English characters employ a nonverbal response a lot while the Arabic characters tend to use very rarely. Therefore, regardless of the language being used, responses are complex behaviors and they are crucial part of the language interaction.

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**تحليل اجتماعي - تداولي للردود على الفظاظ في النصوص الادبية الانكليزية والعربية****محمود عادل محمود التميمي****ا.د مهدي عناية كريم العتبي****جامعة بغداد/كلية اللغات****المستخلص**

ركزت الكثير من الدراسات على دراسة ظاهرة الفظاظ من دون الاخذ بنظر الاعتبار الدردود على الفظاظ بصفتها ظاهرة اجتماعية- تداولية. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تقصي الردود على الفظاظ من جانب اجتماعي تداولي لبعض المسرحيات الانكليزية والعربية باستخدام نظرية كليبير (٢٠٠٥) لبيان انواع الردود والطرق التي يستخدمها الشخصيات لاستخدام قوتهم الاجتماعية لممارسة الفظاظ عن التكلم مع الاخرين للوصول الى اهدافهم الاجتماعية. تتعامل هذه الدراسة مع الفظاظ تعاملًا كميًا ونوعيًا كونها تعد ظاهرة اجتماعية- تداولية. تشير النتائج ان ردود الشخصيات على استراتيجيات الفظاظ التي يستخدمها المستمع ضد المتكلمين بأسلوب فظ على انها تعتمد على السياق اللغوي بالإضافة الى القوة التي يتمتع بها المستمع للرد على مستخدم الاسلوب الفظ.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** علم التداولية، الاجتماعية- التداولية، الفظاظ، حفلة عيد الميلاد، قضية أهل الربع