

A Socio-Linguistic Analysis of Impoliteness in Political Tweets

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This research investigates impolite expressions used by people through the social media platform 'Twitter' and the effect of the variables (age and sex) on the use of impolite tweets on political issues. This point has never been tackled before in other research papers. This paper also shows how such variables are traceable in reflecting the ways by which male and female language users can give their stances via different strategies of impoliteness in Tweets. It establishes a clear picture about how impolite expressions are used in the language of social media by analysing 100 tweets, 89 of which are related to the goal of the study, eliminating the unrelated ones, following Culpeper's (1996) model. The findings of the study reveal that there is wide use of impolite expressions in the social media 'Twitter', especially in tweets, reacted to political posts. According to age criterion, (15-25) year old Twitter users rarely have their tweets on political posts, while middle age (25-35) year old Twitter users record the highest percentage of the analysed data, they use more impolite tweets than do older or younger users. Besides, male twitters recorded the highest frequency in using impolite expressions depending on different strategies of impoliteness, especially the negative and bold-on record impolite strategies, while withholding off-record strategies these tweets recorded the least use. These strategies are the most frequently used type in the analysed tweets. Finally, female twitters of (55-65) years old recorded the lowest frequency in using impolite expressions in their Tweets with somehow similar impolite strategies used by males. These results show the effect of age and sex on the use of impoliteness.

Key words: *Socio- Linguistic, Impoliteness, Political, Tweets.*

Introduction

The concept of impoliteness has been focused on by several scholars. The best-known is Culpeper. Culpeper et al. (2003: 1545) studied the concept of impoliteness and defined it as the strategies used in communication to attack face and result in social conflict and disharmony between the speaker and the listener. In (2005), Culpeper revised a new definition in which took the intentionality of the speaker and the perception of the hearer into account. Bousfield (2008:132) agrees that impoliteness embodies the concepts of intentionality and face-threatening acts that are performed on purpose.

Moreover, Verschueren (1999: 46) argues that the concept of impoliteness is as important and functional as the concept of politeness. Impoliteness is complex and diverse. Human-beings need it in their interaction. Some linguists such as Tracy (2008:169) indicate that impoliteness is much more commonly used by individuals than has been assumed. Tracy (2010:202-203) maintains that impoliteness is a critical emotional commentary about other's actions. Bousfield (2007:285) gives an example of the situations in which impoliteness is widely used such as in the training camps of the army, in conversations between owners of cars and those responsible for traffic incidents.

The study hypothesises that younger people are supposed to behave and demonstrate more impolite conducts than grownups verbally. In addition, male social media users are apt to show more impoliteness than females. As part of the aims, 100 tweets by English speakers according to their age and sex are analysed to determine what users follow and use in terms of the above variables.

Related Literature

The concept of impoliteness has been studied by several researchers from different perspectives. For instance, Abbas and Ismail in their researcher paper studied impoliteness in some military discourses concentrating on the functionality of impolite expressions specifically in such discourses. Also, Mohammed and Abbas (2015) studied impoliteness in their research paper showing the differences between the concepts of impoliteness and rudeness through analysing a literary text by Bernard Shaw to show such differences, concentrating on only three different kinds of impoliteness, namely: entertaining, coercive and affective impoliteness, neglecting the other types.

Aims of the Study

This study aims at:

- 1- Showing how people use impolite expressions in social media and the effect of age and sex on these uses.
- 2- Discovering if there are any differences in the use of impolite expressions between being a male or a female or between being a young or an adult.
- 3- Revealing which impolite strategy is mostly used.

Literature Review

Types of Impoliteness

Culpeper (1996:350) states that some acts are intrinsically polite, while other acts are intrinsically impolite. He distinguishes the following types of impoliteness:

The first two established types of impoliteness are the Mock and the Aggravated Impoliteness. This pair works opposite to each other. Regarding mock impoliteness, Culpeper (2005: 38) shows that it occurs when the speaker intends to attack the face of the hearer or when the hearer himself perceives or behaves in a way that reveals his intention to attack the face or uses a combination of the two.

Mock impoliteness as Culpeper (1996: 352) explains; remains in the surface of the speech and does not cause any offence. He (1983: 254) also states that it encourages to make a harmony among the members of the society, while Keinpointer (1997: 261) comments on this point by saying that speakers conceive it as a form of simulated and cooperative rudeness .

For Terkourfi (2008:68), mock impoliteness means "unmarked form of rudeness". When participants with "homologous habits" use an utterance and also when there is a conventional setting. On the other hand, Bernal (2008: 782) refers to mock impoliteness as the speech act, which is in-authentically impolite that is usually accompanied by a joke or slight laughter.

The other type of impoliteness labelled as aggravated impoliteness. It lies at the top of the scale of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2003:838). In this case, interlocutors need to pay attention to the content of the interaction, the form of the face- attack, the context in which the impolite expression occurs, in addition to the circumstances and the intentions of the participants. An ill or a malice will is the clear cut line between mock and aggravated impoliteness.

Furthermore, Culpeper (2011:56) proposes three types of impoliteness sharing functions of contradicting one's interpersonal relationships, his social norms and identities as follows:

a. Affective impoliteness: by using this type, one participant of the interaction reveals his feelings of anger towards the other. This attitude results in generating a negative and emotional atmosphere in any discourse, as demonstrated in the following sentence:

1. You made me crazy!

Here, this impolite utterance is used by the speaker to express the result of the passive effect of the hearer on the speaker. It informs the hearer that the other participant cannot stand him anymore.

b. Coercive impoliteness: This type makes a realignment between the participants in an interaction so that the speaker (the producer) wins a profit at the expense of the other one (the target). This usually happens when one of the participants has more power, because of his high social level compared to the other participant, which gives him more authority to be impolite as in the following example:

2. Shut up, or I'll smash your head! (Huang, 2014: 150)

Here, the speaker commands the hearer to end what he is saying, showing himself to be more powerful due to his higher social level. Therefore he ends the role of the other participant by warning him not to go further in his speech or otherwise he will behave in a bad way.

c. Entertaining impoliteness: This impoliteness occurs when one of the participants badly makes use of another's feelings by making fun of him in order to amuse himself and others as follows:

3. Hey idiot, come in!

Strategies of Impoliteness

Super-Strategies

Bold-on-Record

This strategy represents the least degree of threatening one's face. It is produced by the interlocutors directly, unambiguously, clearly, and concisely in the form of impositions or straight forward commands. In this case, the face- attack is minimised or regarded as irrelevant as follows:

4. Shut the door. 5. Do your job (Culpeper, 1996: 356).

Positive

It is called by Culpeper (2005:357) as the "output strategy". It includes real acts such as ignoring or excluding others from a certain activity; denying their common ground and association with others, behaving in an unsympathetic way or using unsuitable markers of identity and an obscure language to establish a disagreement. It makes others feel uncomfortable through swearing, telling jokes or keeping silent.

Negative

Culpeper (2005:358) lists some acts that could lead to hurt others' negative face. Frightening others, speaking about some personal information, asking for some personal details, or making a connection between others and some negative aspects of their personality all these acts are impolite behaviours.

Off-Record

In some situations, participants may use some ambiguous insults, give hints about a certain topic, or use irony in their speech. This strategy has some common features of politeness. It enables the insulter to injure the other person's feelings while pretending to be innocent (Lachenicht, 1980: 619). These utterances do not damage the other's face, but still constitutes a threat to their face. Indeed, they protect the face of the insulter rather than that of the injured (Steward 2008:54).

Withhold

This type of impoliteness occurs when a person receives a gift and does not show his gratitude or when others do him a favour and they do not thank them. In these situations, polite behaviour is expected but is not found; therefore, it is regarded as impolite.

Meta-Strategy

It is performed with insincere surface realisations of politeness strategies. Leech (1983:82) explains this by saying that if someone wants to offend others, he must do it at least in a way that makes others to realise the offensive behaviour indirectly.

Culpeper states that these strategies rang from the less and least face-threatening effect that they may cause to others, to the more and highest face-threatening degree.

Methods

Data and Data Collection

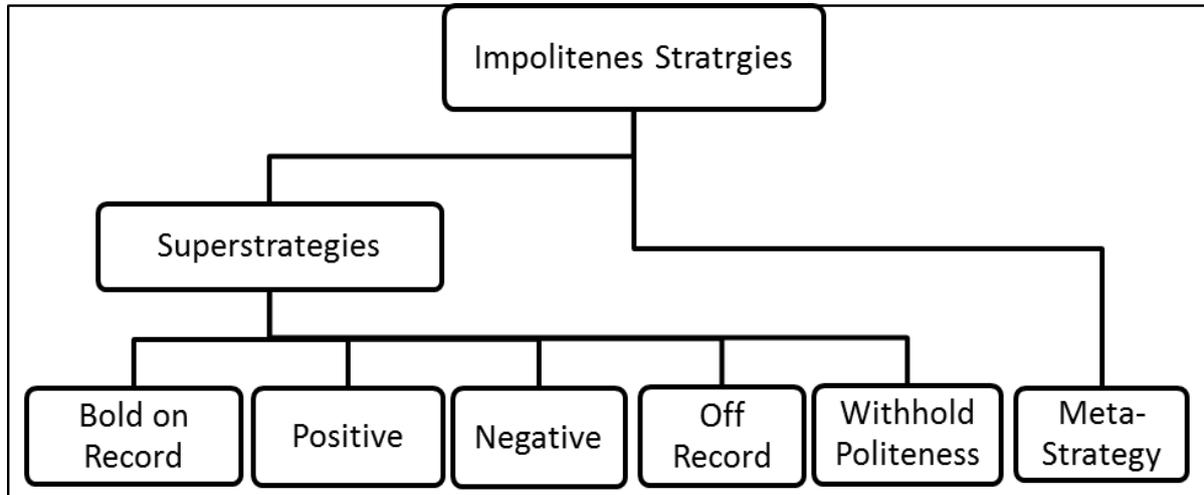
The data of this research paper is based on the selection of 100 original tweets taken from online social media, namely "Twitter". These tweets are posted by the English social media users commenting on political subjects. These commentators are distinguished according to the sex criterion as male and female and to the age criterion as 15-25, 25-35, 35-45, 55-65 years old users. The categorisation of the users allows the researchers to relate every verbal conduct to a certain age category. The data were collected depending on the age and the sex of its members as submitted in their twitter profiles. The selected data consist of the tweets that include impolite expressions, avoiding and excluding the tweets that do not show any clear sign of impoliteness. In a word, no one of the types and strategies is represented in the eleven tweets. So, they were excluded from the total number of the selected tweets. The remaining number of tweets is 89. Types and strategies of each impolite expression are analysed. Also, the age and the sex of each user is revealed and counted. Quantitative and qualitative methods are used in counting the frequency of each type of impolite expression and conduct used in the social media, Twitter, according to the variables of age and sex of the users.

Model of Analysis

The researcher follows Culpeper's (1996) model of analysis, including the strategies shown in figure (1) based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of Politeness, despite the fact that Culpeper refutes their theory of impoliteness and regards it marginal concerning everyday life interactions. He adds that in order to realise the concept of politeness, it is necessary to realise what impoliteness is.

Culpeper's model is built on written and spoken data taken from real-life interactions that he has gathered from real-life experiences, such as the conflictive and impolite expressions used by the U.S. army in their training discourses in addition to the impolite interaction found in children's discourses by the bilingual Spanish/English speakers. Bousfield (2008: 90) confirms that Culpeper's selection of data empowered his model and made it more reliable. Furthermore, Culpeper selected data taken from media such as films, documentaries and programs that present quizzes in which there is a struggle between the participants. Different forms of impoliteness can be found in those data sets and can be studied from various sources (Mullany and Stockwell, 2010:72).

Figure 1. Model of Analysis



Culpeper's (1996) model suits this study since it deals with the different types and strategies of impoliteness that could be used to reveal impoliteness.

Data Analysis

Many tweets were posted as reactions to different posts by the political figure Donald Trump. Male and female Twitter users of different ages posted tweets expressing their feelings and attitudes. Most of these tweets were impolite. The twitter users vary in their use of such impolite expressions, depending on different strategies. The following are the most frequently used impolite expressions:

- **"Mr Great Honor"**. This impolite expression is found in a tweet by a 27 -year old female user. She called Trump **"Mr.Great Honor"**. This mocking impolite expression is used to make fun of Trump, to underestimate and insult him. She is using an off-record strategy to obtain her intention.

- **"What a Disgrace!"** This is posted by a 34 –year old male user who thinks that Trump being the president of America is a disgrace for the Americans. In this way, he is cursing his luck and belittling Trump. He is using a negative impolite strategy.

-**"Fake patriot, draft-dodging, bone spurring, mocking paws"** are the impolite and affective expressions used by a 34 –year old male user to describe Trump and accuse him of being an unfaithful and a deceiving citizen of his country. He is following the positive strategy by denying Trump's patriotism and excluding him from faithful Americans.

-**'Stupid'** and **'Idiot'** are impolite words used to reflect the anger of a 50- year female twitter user; they are effective and coercive. She followed the bold- on record strategy.

-**"You Disgust Me"**. This impolite expression 'disgust' is used by a 30- year old female user who is expressing the way she feels towards her president using the negative strategy.

- **"You are so Vulgar"**. This is posted by a 35- year old female user who used direct and clear impolite expressions depending on a bold on record strategy.

- **'The Most Hated and Worse President Ever'**. A 25- year old female user is expressing her opinion about her president's personality by describing him with impolite expressions following the bold- on record strategy.

-**"Shitholes"**. This impolite expression has been frequently by more than one age category, including men and women. It is a strong and aggravated expression that is used to damage the face of the target figure following the negative strategy.

-**" How Eloquent our Leader is!"**. A 45-year female twitter user uses these expressions following the strategy of off-record impoliteness by using such an implicature which is intended to show how bad her leader is. Also, she is following the with-hold strategy because she is not using any direct impolite expression where she can do so.

-**" What an idiot!"**. A 17- year old female uses this impolite expression; it is not a matter of banter but rather a matter of causing offence. She is following the bold- on record strategy.

-**'Shitty American Politics'**. A 41- year old male user is expressing his anger towards American politics in general, but the implied meaning refers to the presented Trump. He is following the off-record strategy.

-**"You are Disgracing"**. A 38- year old female user is trying to belittle and curse her president by using a negative strategy.

- **"Ashholes"**. This impolite expression is used by a 26- year old female user who states that politicians are useless, irritating, stupid and ridiculous. She is following the negative strategy.

- **"A Vulgar Road Man"** A 38- year old female user describes her president as a vulgar roadman, of course, it is an obvious insult and a directed impolite expression. She is following the bold- on record strategy.

- **"His mouth spews such garbage, Lock him up"**. Here, a 47- year old male user is purposefully intending to humiliate Trump following a bold on record impolite strategy and a negative strategy. She scorns him by saying ' lock him up' so as not to hear him again following an off-record impolite strategy.

"Trumpty is Totally Nuts". First, calling Trump with a nickname as 'Trumpty', by a 21-year old male user, is a way of showing disrespect and a way of mocking him through the positive impolite strategy and the meta impolite strategy. Second, calling him 'nuts' is a direct description following the bold on record strategy.

Results

After analysing the data carefully looking for the different types and strategies of impoliteness and the effect of the variables age and sex on the use of impolite expressions, the recent study reached the following results:

1. Age and sex are very important in the process of using polite or impolite expressions.
2. Being a young does not mean using more impolite expressions; adults use impolite expressions more than the young.
3. Being a male does not mean using more impolite expressions; females use more impolite expressions than males.

Discussions and Findings

After applying the model of the study, the selected sample demonstrated all the strategies and types of impoliteness. Table (1) shows the types and frequency in terms of age and sex of the users.

Table 1: Impoliteness as used by the sample

Sex Age	Super-strategies						Frequency
	Positive	Bold on Record	Negative	Off Record	Withhold	Meta-strategy	Percentage %
Male 15-25 Y	2	0	0	0	0	1	3 3.37
Female 15-25 Y	0	2	0	0	1	0	3 3.37
Male 25-35 Y	2	3	5	3	3	3	19 21.34
Female 25-35 Y	2	3	3	1	1	2	12

							13.48
Male 35-45 Y	3	5	4	2	2	2	18
							20.22
Female 35-45 Y	1	2	1	1	1	0	6
							6.74
Male 45-55 Y	1	1	2	3	2	1	10
							11.23
Female 45-55 Y	1	2	0	2	0	1	6
							6.74
Male 55-65 Y	1	3	1	1	1	2	9
							10.11
Female 55-65 Y	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
							3.37
Total 100 %	11	24	16	14	10	14	89
	12.35	2.96	17.97	15.73	11.23	15.73	

Figure 2. Percentage of the Impolite Strategies

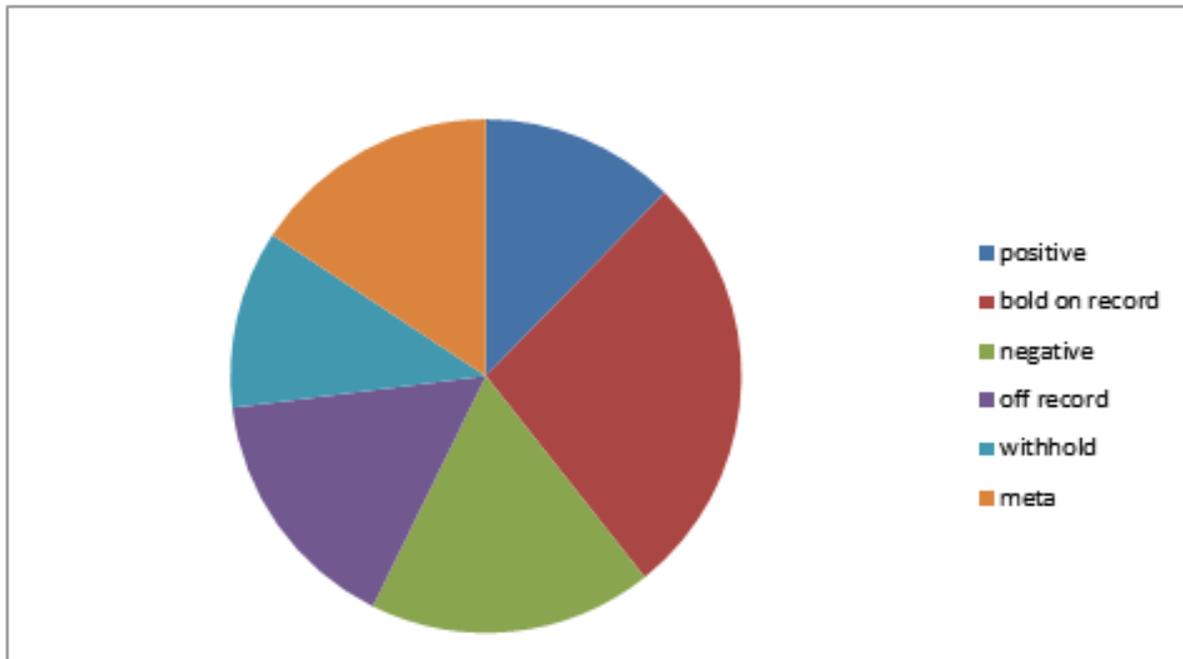


Figure 3. Percentage of the age of Twitter users

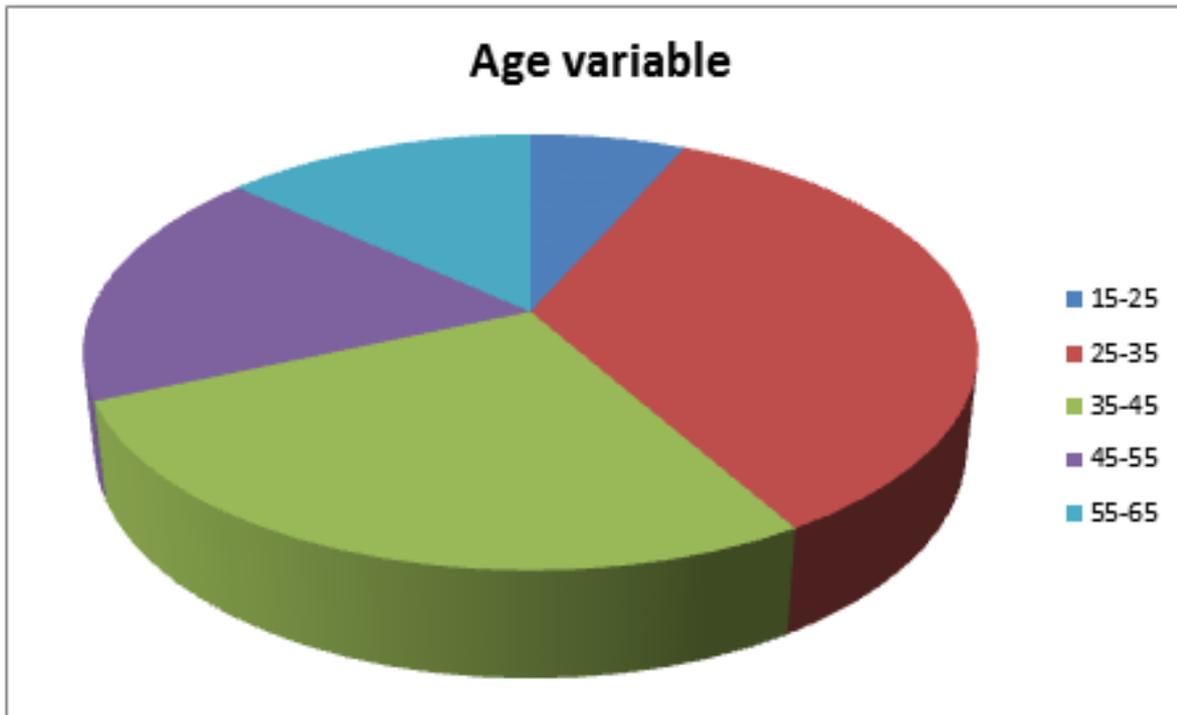
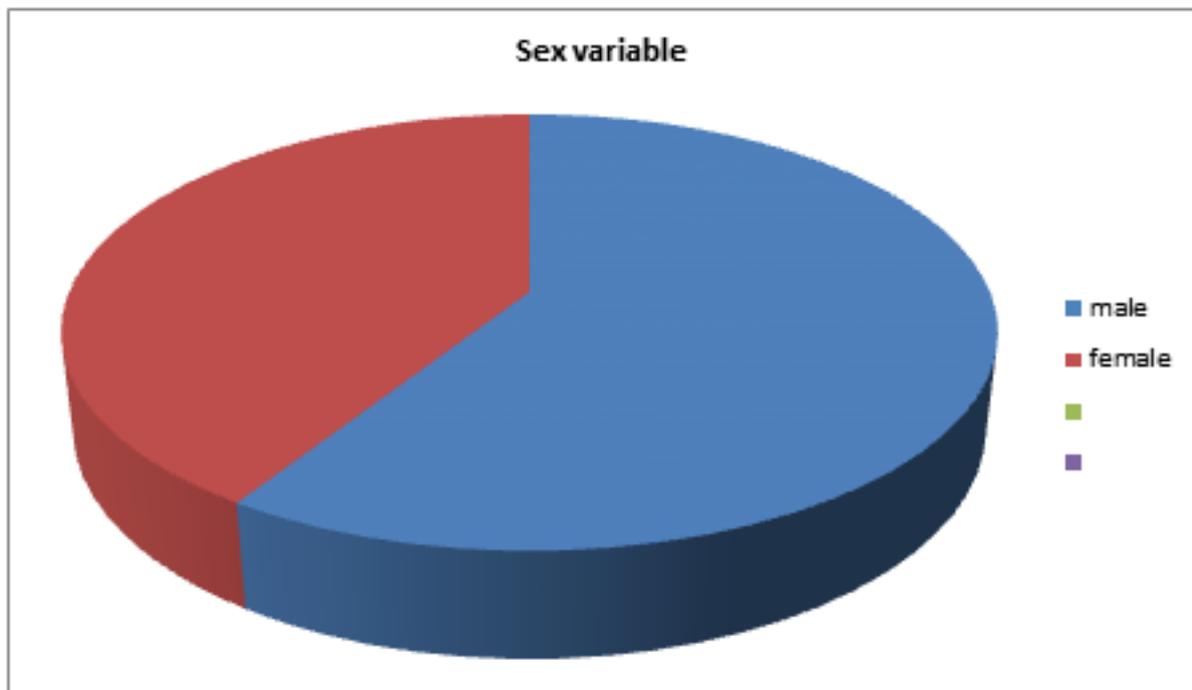


Figure 4. Percentage of the Sex of Twitter users



Most of the impolite expressions rely on words rather than full sentences, words that describe human beings as animals, largely used by females, or cursing words largely used by males. Gross and downright mean words such as ash-holes, vulgar roadman, racist, misogynist, his mouth spews such garbage are used widely by twitter users.

Table (1) shows that the first category 15-25-year-old male and female twitter users are almost equal in using impoliteness but they differ in their choices of the impolite expressions. Males depend on bold on record and meta-strategy of impoliteness, while females of the same category depend on positive and with-hold strategies. In this respect, Culpeper (1996:357) states that bold-on-record type is manipulated in a direct and concise manner as the face is not irrelevant or minimised. This reflects how twitter users of this category are immature; they think that when they talk with others in a tough or impolite manner makes them sound so cool, witty and popular. They try to imitate what they hear in the streets, movies or songs. They could also be rebellious by using an abusive and impolite language.

Regarding the second category of young male twitter users of 25-35-year-old, the frequent occurrence of impolite expressions is very high. Males mostly use the negative strategy of impoliteness while they use the bold on record much least. Females of the same category use less impolite expressions of different strategies, basically: positive and negative ones with the least range of use regarding the off record and withhold strategies. Twitter users of this category feel more free to say whatever they want by underestimating others and humiliating them in order to look more powerful and that is why their use of impolite expressions is too high. Besides, many scholars maintain, as Terkourafi (2008:73) states, that young people tend to use mock impoliteness as this type of impoliteness sustains and strengthens the relationship among the young. She persists in claiming that young male people are supposed to demonstrate a high-scale rate of impoliteness that female do.

Moving to the third category, 35-45-year-old Twitter users, strikingly males use triple number of impolite expressions compared to those of females, depending on the positive strategy most of the time while off- record, withhold and meta-strategies for few times. 35-45-year-old females also use the positive strategy more than the other types and it has been noticed that y females of this category have never used the meta-strategy. This goes in line with what Culpeper (2005:358) states that positive strategy is performed to damage other's positive face like using obscure or secretive language; seeking disagreement, or using inappropriate identity markers.

However, the most frequently used type of impoliteness among 45-55-year-old male twitter users is the off- record, while the least ones are bold on, positive and meta-strategy. On the other hand, females of the same age use positive and off-record impoliteness more frequently

than negative and withhold types because female participants are expected to show positively as withhold type is conventional and work where it is expected.

Furthermore, Tracy (2008:173) claims that not all strategies are equally recurring and well-known. Using the term “context-spanning”, Tracy goes to believe that such strategies demonstrate particular impoliteness importance across a range of contexts while others are restricted.

Males of the final category 55-65-year-old users use less impolite expressions compared to other categories, mainly the positive type of impoliteness, while the females of the same category rarely use impolite expressions except for with-hold impoliteness. Growing old does not mean having the freedom to insult others, on the contrary, older adults show respect to individuals, have etiquette in dealing with others and do not indulge themselves in the wrong behaviour.

Conclusions

After analysing the collected data according to the selected model (Culpeper's 1996), the researcher came up with the following conclusions:

1. Impolite words and expressions are just crapping up into our societies, and the young are using them widely while communicating with people no matter who they are, what their age is and what their social status is.
2. Unfortunately, impolite and rude words are considered to be humorous nowadays. They are largely used by the young generation who spend a lot of time on the net expressing themselves freely in social media.
3. There are essential differences regarding age and sex in the area of impoliteness; male users make more use of impoliteness than females do in addition to the idea that the younger ones use more impolite expressions .
4. Male twitter users of 25-35 year old recorded the highest frequency in using impolite expressions.
5. Female twitter users of 55-65 year old recorded the lowest frequency in using impolite expressions.
6. Twitter users of 15- 25 years old rarely comment on political posts. Therefore their Tweets are not widely found.
7. Negative and bold-on record impolite strategies are the most frequently used types in the analysed tweets., while withhold strategy and off- record is the least used strategy.



Recommendations

The recent study recommends that similar studies are necessary to be conducted especially the field of sociology for its importance in identifying the way people behave and treat each other in social media.

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