

Impoliteness Formulas, Triggers, and Purposes to Refusal as Employed by Iraqi English Learners

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Abstract

The present study aims at scrutinizing the impoliteness types, causes, and purposes utilized by Iraqi English language learners when refusing marriage proposals. Thus, it attempts to answer the questions: (1) what are the impoliteness formulas used by the Iraqi learners of English in refusing marriage proposals?, and (2) What are their impoliteness triggers/causes and the purposes? The study is significant in bridging the gap that few linguistic types of research concentrate on studying intentionality and emotions allied with impoliteness. Data were collected from 35 Iraqi learners of English responding to 6 situations of marriage. The data were analyzed using Culpeper's (2011) formulas of impoliteness and Bousfield's (2007) impoliteness triggers and intentions. The findings revealed that the most regular impoliteness formulas were insults and pointed criticisms/complaints. Regarding impoliteness triggers, the Iraqi learners' responses reflected anger and disapproval as the most common triggers of impoliteness. Lastly, impoliteness was utilized as an instrument of insulting, quipping, and showing grudge when refusing the marriage situations; however, some impoliteness occurred as a counseling technique. The study concludes with some recommendations for future works.

Keywords: Impoliteness, impoliteness formulas, impoliteness purposes, impoliteness triggers, Iraqi English learners, marriage proposals

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Introduction

Culpeper (2010) defines impoliteness as “a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts” (p.3233). The perceived behaviors or utterances beheld negatively, i.e., impolite, when they clash with the way an individual expects them to be, the way they desire them to be, and, or the way they are supposed to be. Consequently, such conducts constantly have emotional repercussions for one party of the interaction since they regard them as offensive behaviors. Culpeper et al. (2003) argue that impoliteness should not be seen as failing politeness (Kadhun & Abbas, 2021). Watts (2003) declares that any conduct attacking the hearer’s face is impolite, whether intentional or not. Therefore, impoliteness is associated with producing many speech acts, mainly acts threatening to the interlocutors’ face.

One of the sensitive speech acts is that of ‘refusal’ which is regarded as a dispreferred response to a request, offer, suggestion, invitation, etc. (Gass & Houck, 1999). It is an inherently face-threatening act; hence interlocutors need to perform it carefully by availing the politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Yet, this is not always the case seeing that impoliteness strategies can intentionally be used to make refusal sound attacking and insulting. Some situations are assessed to be offensive based on the individuals’ cultural perception of the context. It is applicable to all kinds of contexts, including marriage proposals.

Marriage situations are specific speech events defined as “activities governed by rules or norms for speech” (Hymes, 1974, p. 52). They are typically made by a male speaker who asks a female to tie the knot; the answer on the part of the female can be either agreement or refusal. Refusal should be carried out guardedly considering that it is face-threatening, and it is produced by females in that case. The females’ speech is constrained by the society which expects them to speak politely (Lakoff, 1973). However, behaviors, in general, depend on several factors that determine the type of response elicited.

Linguists found that impoliteness is a phenomenon that researchers should study thoroughly on its terms rather than being associated with politeness (Mohammed & Abbas, 2016). According to Culpeper and Hardaker (2017), many impoliteness approaches have not scrutinized intentionality in any way due to those studies of linguistics and pragmatics that treated intentions as steady and intelligible. They proclaimed that there are few pieces of research that concentrate on studying the emotions allied with impoliteness; which is where the present study’s significance lies. Besides, there is a need for pragmatic analyses of new forms of data. On the ground that different studies focused on impoliteness with several speech acts such as complaints, requests, etc., in various contexts; to the researchers’ knowledge, no study tackled impoliteness with regard to refusing marriage situations. Therefore, the recent research attempts to examine the impoliteness formulas as used by the Iraqi learners of English to refuse marriage situations. Also, it focuses on investigating the triggers and purposes of using impoliteness.

Research questions

The study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the impoliteness formulas used by the Iraqi learners of English in refusing marriage proposals?

2. What are the impoliteness triggers/causes and the purposes of employing impoliteness in refusing these situations?

Literature Review

Impoliteness

Leech (1983) states that the “maintenance of social equilibrium” (p. 82) is the core of politeness, however, it does not always seem that harmony wins out (Abbas, 2012). Culpeper et al. (2003) define impoliteness as strategies of communication designed to attack face and cause social conflict. The latest definitions of impoliteness focus on intentionality alongside the notion of ‘face’. Bousfield (2008) states that “impoliteness constitutes a communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts which are purposefully delivered” (p. 72). Holmes et al. (2008) add the dimension of social norms and the hearers’ perception to the concept. They state that impoliteness refers to a linguistic behavior assessed by the receiver as threatening their social identity. Besides, it violates, whether intentionally or not, the norms of proper behavior in specific contexts and among particular interlocutors. In a similar vein, Mills (2003) portrays impoliteness in terms of community practice that “can only be understood and analyzed pragmatically based on group/community understanding of utterances” (p. 139).

Culpeper (2005) avers that impoliteness is conditioned by the speaker’s intent to attack the hearers’ face. The hearer perceived the conduct as an intentional face-attack and, or a composite of the two points mentioned. Bousfield (2010) proposes four prototypical features of impoliteness. These are speaker intention, the impact of the speaker’s utterance on the potential face damage, and the perception of the hearer of the speaker’s words hurtfulness, which leads to the hearer’s face damage. Bousfield (2008) argues that impoliteness does not emerge in pure and strict isolation; rather some antecedent events trigger the impoliteness onset. Bousfield (2003) also displays what happens after performing impoliteness. There are many impoliteness options that the addressee possesses. These are illustrated in Figure 1 below:

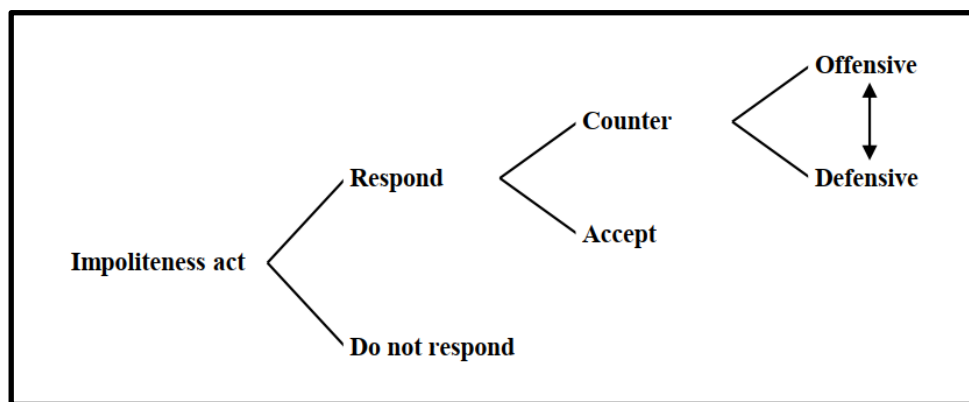


Figure 1. Impoliteness options, as suggested by Bousfield (2003) (cited in Culpeper & Hardaker, 2017)

Bousfield (2008) presupposes that impolite responses can be a power display, anger, a face threat, a dispute, disappointment, great sorrow, panic, bewilderment, feeling of helplessness, jealousy, desire to provoke, intensive disapproval, entertaining wish, etc. Culpeper (2011) assumes that the hearer senses various emotions when experiencing face-related and rights-related

impoliteness. Therefore, it is not laborious to visualize the emotions, such as anger, annoyance, upsetness, etc., associated with impoliteness. It is not accurate to assume that there are no cultural restraints conditioning emotions, rather the latter is cognitively connected to the cultural context. Such emotions and factors denote ‘triggers/ causes’ of impoliteness.

According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness can be used as “a means to an end rather than an end itself” (p. 146); hence, there are purposes of using impoliteness as teaching, equipping, grudge showing, power showing, counseling, warning, imposing, threatening, upholding to disciplines, developing a personality, to inrush, self-defending, gaining one’s rights which Spencer-Oatey’s (2002) called ‘sociality rights,’ etc. (Wijayanto et al., 2018).

Culpeper (2011) proposed a framework for the conventionalized types of impoliteness formulas, which is particularly advantageous in empirical studies. Table 1 illustrates these formulas.

Table 1. *Formulas of impoliteness with examples (Culpeper, 2011)*

Impoliteness main types	Impoliteness formulae type	Example
Inherent impoliteness	Insult	you f**king moron.
	Pointed criticisms/complaints	that is total crap.
	Unpalatable questions and, or presuppositions	why do you make my life impossible.
	Condescension	that's being babyish.
	Message enforcers	listen here.
	Dismissals	f**k off.
	Silencers	shut the f**k up.
	Negative expressions	I'm going to bust your f**king head off if you touch my car.
	Curses and ill-wishes	f**k you.
Implicational impoliteness	Form-driven	
	Convention-driven (sarcasm, teasing)	
	Context-driven	

Culpeper's (2011) framework does not involve the non-verbal forms of impoliteness, for example, one finger gesture, spitting, etc., a fact that he acknowledges. Besides, such formulas are typical in British English; whether or not they can occur in other languages and cultures is still an unanswered question. Hence, the current study attempts to apply such a framework to the analysis of impoliteness as used by the Iraqi learners of English in the context of marriage.

Refusal

It signifies the linguistic act of saying 'no' (Wierzbicka, 1987). It expresses the hearer's rejection, disagreeing, or turning down a request, a suggestion, an invitation, an offer, etc. A refusal is non-compliant, dispreferred (Levinson, 1983), and face-threatening, indeed, dual face-threatening acts in which both the hearers' and the speakers' face are at risk (Brown & Levinson, 1987). There exists contradiction to the expectations of the interlocutors when encountering refusal, and thereby, their interpersonal relationships will be endangered (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Refusal expression is affected by the individual assessment of a particular situation (Nureddeen, 2008). Al-Shalawi (1997) elucidates that refusal may offer a source of information on the socio-cultural values and an insight into the social norms embedded in a specific culture (Al-Shboul et al., 2012).

Refusal follows automated combos in the conversational construction, known as "adjacency pairs" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). It outlines the presence of a first part and a second part raised by two sequential interlocutors insomuch that the last utterance is recognized about the former by anticipated tracking. Producing the first part, the speaker instantly presumes their interlocutor to provide a second part of the given pair (Richard, 1980). When emitting an adjacent second part, it is an indication that the speakers comprehend the intent behind the first part and show that they can comply with that. Besides, interlocutors can affirm their downfall to grasp a point or disagree with a matter. A refusal is a post-event act produced in response to an already existing pre-event act (Phuong, 2006). Therefore, in the current study, the first part is presented as the situation of marriage and its contextual features; the second part is a refusal response provided by the study participants.

Marriage Proposals

Marriage is defined, according to Ersanli and Kalkan (2008), as "the coupling of two people possessing different interests, desires and needs, [it] is a special association given shape by social rules" (as cited in Özyiğit, 2017, p. 680). Making marriage proposals is intended by a male speaker asking for a female's hand for marriage; the answer to this proposal is either agreement or refusal. However, there are some factors, as reported by Canel (2012), that determine the answer, including "meeting the need for love and being loved, meeting both individuals' social and psychological needs, the feelings of being safe and protected, the sense of cooperation, being confident about the future, feeling proud of each other" (as cited in Özyiğit, 2017, p. 680).

As marriage contexts are typically oriented toward females, the latter has to formulate their agreement or refusal to a proposal in a socially acceptable manner. Lakoff (1973) asserts that females tend to act polite more than males due to their "marginality and powerlessness" (p. 45). Despite the subsidiary status of females in societies, they have views of communication that influence the nature of their speech, i.e., polite or impolite.

Previous Studies

There are many pieces of research that analyzed impoliteness in many contexts. Culpeper (1996), for instance, investigated this concept in “army recruit training” (Wijayanto et al., 2018). He analyzed the intentions of impoliteness used by male officers toward female recruits. The findings revealed that male officers formulated their impolite utterances by assaulting the physical and mental capacity of female recruiters. The former also utilized profane language to attack the social role of females as citizens, mothers, wives, and soldiers. Male impoliteness is expressed through non-verbal cues, for example, their sitting positions.

Culpeper et al. (2003) examined the triggers of impoliteness. Data were collected from a TV series entitled “The Clampers.” In a follow-up study (2003), they also gathered data using recordings from law courts. They concluded that some linguistic and iambic aspects, including “intonation, loudness, and speed of utterances,” provoke impoliteness, for example, high tones and the pace of speaking. Bousfield (2007) conducted a study to examine impoliteness regarding utterance conductance and establishment. Data were collected from three TV shows, namely “The Clampers,” “The Soldiers to be,” and “Boiling Point” (Wijayanto et al., 2018). He concluded that speakers are apt to deliberately use some strategies to ensnare their addressee to respond impolitely. For instance, they utilize rhetorical or unpalatable questions to oblige their interlocutor to take the blame. Moreover, there occurs a verbal strategy to provoke face violations and impoliteness called “response-seeking challenge” (Wijayanto et al., 2018).

On the other hand, several studies examined impoliteness in different speech acts such as complaints, threats, requests, etc. Aydınoğlu (2013) studied the gender difference in using impolite forms as occurred in six plays written by Geralyn Horton. Extracts of the plays were analyzed according to conventionalized impoliteness and its responses as proposed by Culpeper (2011) and Bousfield (2007). The findings uncovered that males deploy impolite utterances more than females, and the frequency of the strategy types displayed significant differences. The implicational impoliteness emerged less than conventionalized impoliteness; males employed the latter more regularly. However, females tend to operate more pointed criticism, whereas males are apt to utilize negative expressions and insults more often. Besides, the primary impoliteness triggers were disputes, disagreements, disapproval, sorrow, helplessness, disappointment, and anger.

Wijayanto et al. (2018) scrutinized the intentions and factors that motivate the employees of impoliteness when complaining in English. Data were collected from 42 Indonesian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners elicited through a discourse completion task (DCT), followed by a post-structured interview. The findings revealed that there are three factors that trigger impolite utterances, namely factors related to the speaker, the hearer, and the context. Also, there are several intentions behind the use of impoliteness, suggesting that “impoliteness is a means to an end rather than an end itself.”

Ali (2021) investigated the strategies and mitigators of impoliteness as employed by Iraqi-Kurdish learners of English when responding to threats. The study involved 50 respondents to an open-ended questionnaire followed by an interview, and data were analyzed using Limberg’s (2009) model of impoliteness and Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) taxonomy of mitigators. The findings

revealed that the learners favored preference responses over dispreference ones. They utilized face-saving acts when complying with the request of the threatener and face-threatening acts when directly rejecting a request. In addition, learners used mitigators to lessen the force of their illocutionary acts.

Abdul Ghani (2018) inspected the impoliteness strategies and triggers in the customers' complaints about a particular company. Data were gathered from a Facebook page of a service provider company in Brunei, and the data were analyzed according to Culpeper's (1996) and (2011) impoliteness concept. The study's findings demonstrated that the strategies and triggers of impoliteness, the main and the sub ones, were not all present in the hostile online comments. Also, most of the customers preferred to complain in a straight manner, and the males' comments were more aggressive than the females'.

Methodology

The current study presents a descriptive qualitative analysis of the data collected. The analysis is supported by the frequencies of the impoliteness formulas and triggers to serve the study's objectives.

Participants

The current study involved 35 Iraqi learners of English who were all females. They were between 22-30 years old. They were students at the department of English, College of Education for Women, the University of Baghdad, Iraq.

Instrument and Procedure of Collecting Data

Data were collected using a DCT in the form of a questionnaire. It is designed using Google form that contained two sections. The first section included some information about the participants such as their emails and ages. The other section presented the six marriage situations (see the Appendix). The study's researchers designed the marriage situations, and the latter were checked for their validity by two professors at the College of Education for Women at the University of Baghdad. In addition, the researchers conducted a pilot study on ten students who could respond to the questionnaire properly. The questionnaire was sent to the study participants via a link shared with the students' group on Telegram, labeled "Fourth Grade." The period of collecting the data was from November to December 2020.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness formulas that occur most commonly in the refusal of the Iraqi participants to the marriage situations. Also, data were analyzed based on Bousfield's (2007) specifications of triggers/causes and purposes of utilizing impoliteness.

Findings

This section presents the study's results by summarising the occurrences of the type/formulae of impoliteness, the triggers/causes of impoliteness, and its purpose as utilized by the Iraqi participants in response to the six situations. The frequency of impoliteness formulae is illustrated in Figure 2.

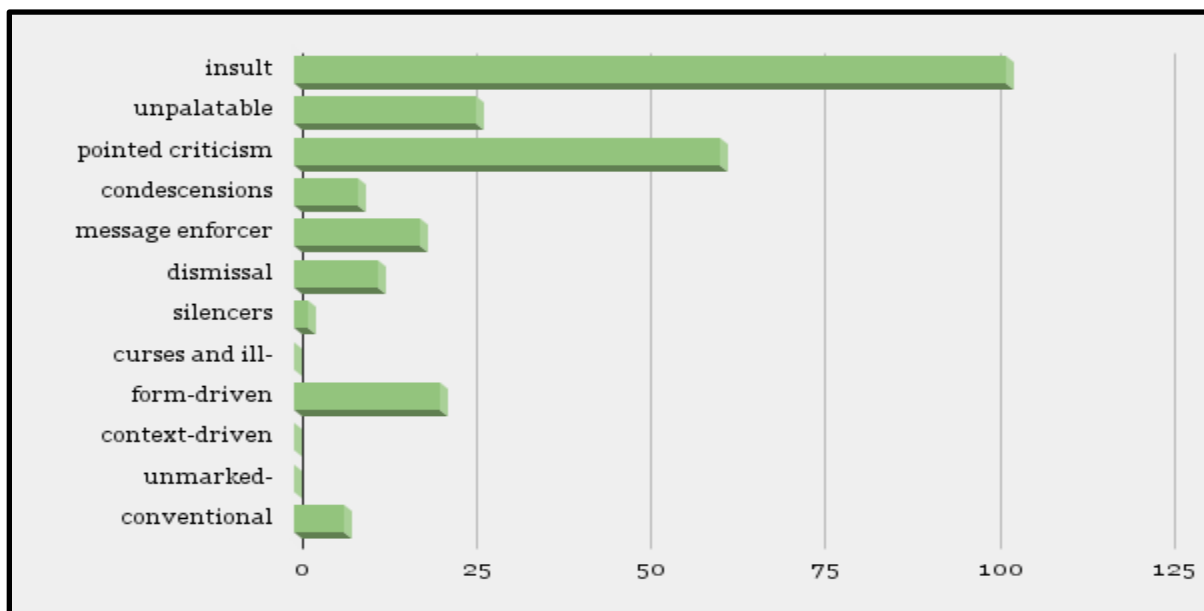


Figure 2. Frequency of the impoliteness formulas

As clearly displayed in the figure above, the insult was the formula that most frequently occurred in all the situations of marriage (n=102). It was followed by the pointed criticism formula (n=61). The third most common impoliteness formula was unpalatable question/ presupposition (n=26). Other formulas were used to a lesser extent, including form-driven impoliteness (n=21), message enforcer (n=18), dismissal (n=12), condescension (n=9), conventional impoliteness (n=7), silencers (n=2), curses and ill-wishes, context-driven, pointed criticism impoliteness and unmarked behavior (n=0).

However, these formulas differed based on the nature of each marriage situation. The most frequent formulas were insult that occurred (n=21) in situation 1, (n=20) in situation 2, in situation 3 (n=25), in situation 5 (n=18), and in situation 6 (n=11). The second most frequent impoliteness formulas used by the Iraqi participants were pointed criticism, that emerged in situation 1 (n=7), in situation 2 (n=10), in situation 4 (n=11), in situation 5 (n=17), and in situation 6 (n=7), in situation 3 (n=11), insult in situation 4 (n=7), and unpalatable questions and presuppositions in situation 6 (n= 7). The other formulas diverged in the marriage situations; their frequencies are illustrated in Table 2.

Table2. Frequency of the formula type as they emerged in the six situations

Formula type	Formulas	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	Situation 4	Situation 5	Situation 6
Inherent impoliteness	insult	21	20	25	7	18	11
	unpalatable question/ presupposition	2	8	4	1	4	7
	pointed criticism	7	10	11	9	17	7

	condescension	0	0	2	0	4	3
	message enforcer	4	0	8	2	4	0
	dismissal	0	10	2	0	0	0
	silencers	0	0	2	0	0	0
	curses and ill-wishes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Implicational impoliteness	form-driven impoliteness	0	0	3	0	6	0
	context-driven impoliteness	0	0	0	0	0	0
	unmarked-behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0
	conventional impoliteness	1	1	0	8	0	2

As for the triggers and causes of impoliteness, the frequencies of these triggers as noticed by the Iraqi participants are calculated and illustrated in Figure 3 below.

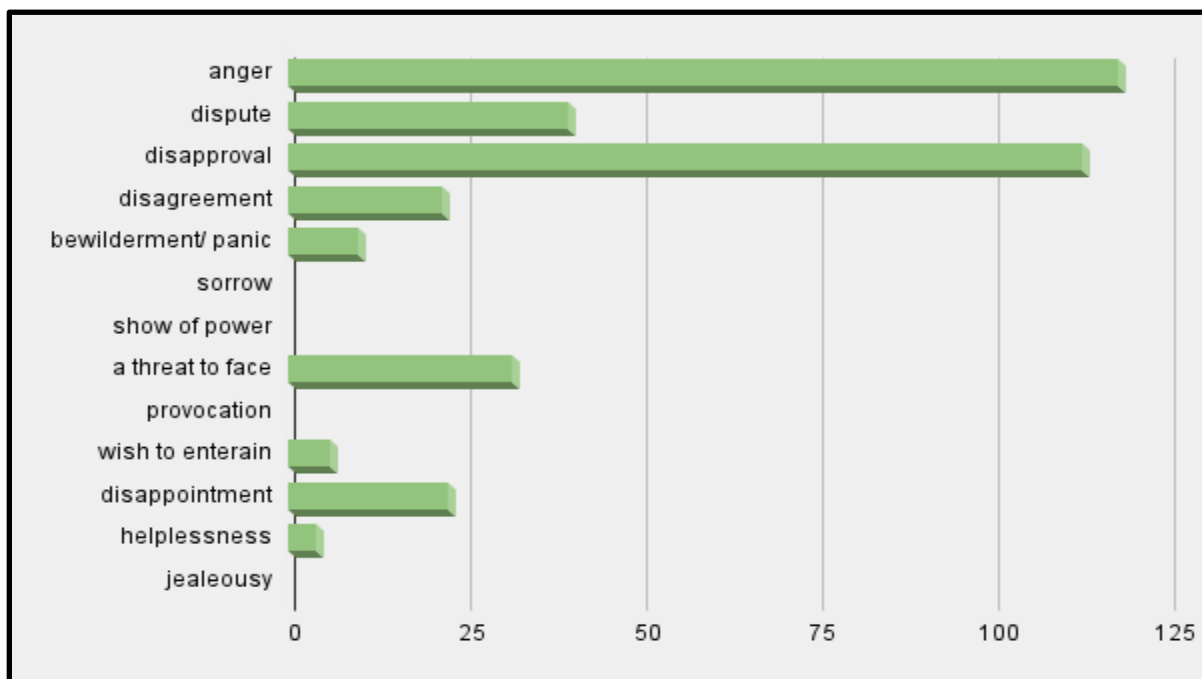


Figure 3. Triggers/ causes of impoliteness

As obviously shown in the figure above, anger was the most common trigger (n=118), followed by disapproval which is slightly less common than the first (n=113). Next, the dispute trigger (n=40), followed by a threat to face (n=32), then disappointment (n=23) and disagreement (n=22). Other triggers were less frequently utilized such as bewilderment (n=10), wish to entertain

(n=4), and helplessness (n=4). Other triggers and causes never occurred in the marriage situations. Nonetheless, such triggers and causes were different from one situation to the other, a variation shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Frequencies of impoliteness triggers/ causes*

Triggers/ causes	Situation 1	Situation 2	Situation 3	Situation 4	Situation 5	Situation 6
Anger	0	50	38	0	26	4
Dispute	2	6	6	2	18	6
Disapproval	27	14	7	21	21	23
disagreement	5	6	1	3	2	3
bewilderment/ panic	0	4	4	0	2	0
Sorrow	0	0	0	0	0	0
show of power	0	0	0	0	0	0
a threat to face	2	2	16	2	8	3
provocation	0	0	0	0	0	0
wish to entertain	0	0	2	2	2	0
disappointment	0	10	13	0	0	0
helplessness	0	0	4	0	0	0
Jealousy	0	0	0	0	0	0

The most frequent triggers were disapproval that occurred in situation 1 (n=27), situation 4 (n=21), and situation 6 (n=23), and anger that emerged in situation 2 (n=50), situation 3 (n=38), situation 5 (n=26). The second most common trigger varied as disapproval (n=14) and disappointment (n=10) in situation 2, a threat to face (n=16) and disappointment (n=13) in situation 3, and disapproval (n=21) and dispute (n=18) in situation 5. The other triggers occurred to a lesser extent than the ones mentioned as displayed in the table above.

Discussion

The results showed that the Iraqi learners usually employ various impoliteness formulas when encountering an unpleasant marriage situation. They are apt to utilize inherent impoliteness formulae than the implicational ones. Such findings go in contrast to Aydınoğlu's (2013) study which found that females typically prefer to imply their impoliteness. The findings also revealed that the Iraqi learners tend most commonly to attack their interlocutors with insult formulas. They employ criticism that is pointed to the negative behavior of their interactant. Besides, they formulate unpalatable questions/ presuppositions to violate their addresses' face. Once again, the study's findings are dissimilar to those shown by Aydınoğlu (2013) which reported that insult is an impolite utterance most regularly exploited by males. Yet, the findings align with the results of

Aydinoğlu (2013) which indicated that females most commonly use pointed criticism. Iraqi female learners used a good deal of pointed criticism in different situations, particularly, in the situation where the person making the proposal is the husband of a best friend, the Ex-husband, a person working with attractive co-stars, and a playboy. In the Arabic world, women are viewed with a low social standing image (Kamal, 1996). The current results displayed that females challenge their societal image through acting in a reversed manner to what is expected. A matter attributed to the impact of media on the Arabs (Allam, 2008).

However, the type of formulae varies according to the nature of the situation. The Iraqi learners consider the first part of the pair as unpleasant, therefore, in the second part of the pair, they employ a variety of insulting expressions such as “I hate you....,” “you’re super disgusting....,” “that makes me feel sick,” and “you are so rude....” This formula was used all across the six situations of marriage, indicating that the Iraqi female learners prefer to treat awkward instances with insults. Another favored strategy was criticism, involving expressions such as “you don’t seem to realize that marriage....,” “you’re not able to change....,” and “since you made it once, and you will do it over and over again.” They also exploit a good deal of message enforcers, such as “let me make it clear....,” “let me tell you something....,” “look....,” and “absolutely/ certainly no...” Other formulas used in a fair amount like dismissals, for example, “get lost,” “f**k off,” and “go to hell.”

Such negative impolite utterances were employed because these marriage situations were considered offensive in terms of a combination of contextual and speaker-related factors. The contextual factors were related to the assessment of the situations as being offensive and inappropriate for marriage based on the Arabic context, for example, in the situations “a person who is jobless,” “a person working with attractive co-stars,” and “a person who is too older than you.” On the other hand, some factors were related to the speaker, such as a flaw in his character, a mistake that he has made, particularly in the situation of “playboy,” “your Ex-husband who cheated on you,” and “the husband of your best friend.” Therefore, these were the triggers/ causes that lead to producing impoliteness. The most common of which was anger that emerged in the marriage situations where the factors were related to the speaker and disapproval in the situation where the factors were related to the context. Other triggers were associated with the hearer-related factors such as disappointment, a threat to face, and dispute. Such findings align with Wijayanto et al. (2018) which found that impoliteness is triggered by a combination of factors rather than separate ones.

Lastly, the study’s findings showed many purposes of using impoliteness, for instance, grudge, gaining one’s rights “sociality rights,” quipping, upholding discipline, and counseling purposes. Abdul Ghani (2018) and Ali (2021) concluded that some impolite utterances were less intense and mitigated. Such findings conform with the present study results in which the Iraqi learners, particularly in situation 6, used impolite expressions to a lesser extent. They tend to utilize their impoliteness as a means of counseling, suggesting that “impoliteness is a means to an end rather than an end itself.”

Conclusion

Through answering the research questions, the present study concluded that Iraqi female learners of English prefer to use inherent impolite utterances more than the implied ones when refusing unpleasant marriage proposals. Such utterances take the form of insults, pointed criticisms/complaints, and unpalatable questions/presuppositions in the different situations of marriage. After assessing the marriage situations as being offensive and inappropriate based on their Arabic culture, the Iraqi learners' responses reflect triggers/causes of impoliteness. The most common of such causes is anger and disapproval, on account of a combination of context and speaker-related factors. Impoliteness is utilized as an instrument of insulting, quipping, and showing grudge when refusing the marriage situations; however, some impoliteness occurred as a counseling technique. Lastly, the study recommends that more studies be conducted to investigate impoliteness in terms of formulae, triggers, and purposes. Also, marriage, as a context of linguistic interaction, needs more examination in addition to novel topics.

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Appendix

MP questionnaire

Dear participant,

This study aims to pragmatically analyze the speech act of refusal, i.e., analyzing what you would exactly say in the proposed situations. It is not about whether the marriage proposal suitable or not, nor whether you would accept or not. It is all about the way you express your refusal to the other person's proposal.

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MP questionnaire

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MP Questionnaire

You are kindly requested to consider the following marriage proposals. Respond to them by refusing as naturally as possible, as if you were in the actual situations:

A person who is jobless.

Your answer

The husband of your best friend.

Your answer

Your Ex-husband who cheated on you.

Your answer

A person who works with attractive co-stars.

Your answer _____

A playboy.

Your answer _____

A person who is too older than you.

Your answer _____

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