

Huseynova Kh. F.<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9813-4478>

Baku Eurasian University

FROM HEADLINES TO HASHTAGS: IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES IN TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA

This article analyzes the pragmatic functions of impoliteness strategies used in headlines and hashtags in English-language media discourse. Drawing on Culpepper's (2011) theoretical model of impoliteness, Lachenicht's (1980) foundational ideas on impoliteness, and contemporary approaches to its study proposed by Bousfield (2008), the authors analyze how impoliteness strategies contribute to the transformation of norms and standards of public discourse in both traditional and new media. The goal of the study is to develop a clear understanding of how impoliteness markers, from a pragmatic perspective, construct journalistic professionalism, influence audience interpretation, and shape public opinion.

Qualitative data is collected illustrating various types of impoliteness strategies in new media and their strategic coding in traditional media. Headlines have been shown to serve not only as attention-grabbing tools but also as tools for challenging authority, expressing judgment and criticism, enhancing emotional impact, increasing readership, and shaping ideological positions. In contrast, hashtags in media discourse function as multifunctional means of categorizing content, setting the agenda, mobilizing audiences, and channeling public commentary, often ensuring the rapid dissemination of evaluative or confrontational positions. The study's findings reveal a clear distinction between the two media forms: incivility in traditional media headlines tends to be more implicit, indirect, and institutionally constrained, reflecting professional norms and editorial oversight. In new media, particularly through hashtags, incivility is more explicit, direct, and confrontational. This shift has been shown to highlight the evolution of media discourse, in which digital platforms allow for greater linguistic freedom and immediacy, ultimately contributing to the normalization of impolite expressions as strategic communicative resources in contemporary public discourse.

Keywords: *impoliteness, traditional media discourse, new media discourse, headlines, hashtags.*

Introduction. Impoliteness strategies have been extensively studied within the context of media discourse over the past two decades. These strategies have become significant in shaping public discourse and engaging audiences, and enhancing journalistic identity and professionalism in media platforms. With the advancement of technology, new mode of media discourse: digital platform has transformed the ways how individuals express themselves in this sphere. A pragmatic analysis of headlines and hashtags selected from social media outlets reveals a contrasting approach to intercourse in digital contexts, where media users tend to employ personalized form of utterance. Recent studies show that traditional media employs more constructed and regulated forms of language, whereas social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook tend to use unfiltered and less controlled styles of communication which result in aggressive and sarcastic and implicit

use of language. (Mammadov&Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2022).

Analysis of recent research and publications. Impoliteness in pragmatics has been in the center of discussions for a long time. In linguistics it was first considered as 'rude', 'non-polite', 'inappropriate linguistic behavior'. Compared to politeness theory that has been studied for over three decades, impoliteness has explored as a separated phenomenon quite recently. Lachenicht was the first linguist who analyzed impoliteness model He didn't use even 'impoliteness' or 'rude' terms, instead he chose the term 'aggravation language' in his study. Lachenicht proposed four kinds of strategies on impoliteness which can be compared to Brown and Levinson's model. The strategies he presented was put listed as follows: *Off-record or indirect, Direct Bald on Record, Positive aggravation, Negative aggravation.* [9, p.619].



Researches on linguistic politeness demonstrate that politeness models proposed by Lakoff, Brown and Levinson, Watts, Leech has been significantly contributed to development of impoliteness research. Lakoff who firstly presented politeness model, reviewed this concept by classifying behavior as *polite, non-polite and rude*. The author describes polite behavior that obeys certain rules without relying on context; non-polite behavior considers these rules in unexpected situations; and rudeness that doesn't follow rules when it is required [10].

Culpeper treated impoliteness model as a mechanism in intercourse, viewing the linguistic impoliteness as a means of promoting social disharmony and unbalance in cooperative communication. Culpeper claims that impoliteness is used to damage the listener's social image [3, p.350]. In his book, Culpeper introduced impoliteness five strategies such as *Bald-on record impoliteness, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Off-record impoliteness, Sarcasm and mock politeness* [3, pp.356–357]. The first three strategies are the reiteration division that were suggested by Brown and Levinson's politeness model. The last strategy *sarcasm* is based on Leech's 'irony'. In this sense, Culpeper's classification corresponds to Lachenicht's division, however, Culpeper's model is more detailed and descriptively nuanced. When outlining key aspects of impoliteness, Culpeper identified several factors. According to him, *context, social norms, and cultural expectations* serve as foundations for impoliteness; *face aggravating acts* are key to impoliteness; *audience feedback* is also central factor that determines whether the speech act is perceived as impolite.

The distinctive aspect of Culpeper's approach to impoliteness is that he favors Spencer Oatey's (2002) face considerations and provides a new framework grounded on the concept of 'rapport management'. [15].

Rapport Management demonstrates that politeness and impoliteness are not only concerned with preserving an individual's self-image (their positive or negative face, as described by Brown and Levinson, 1987), but also includes how communicators relate to others and the roles they take within their community. In his study, the author employs the concepts of *Quality Face, Social Identity, Relational Face, Equity rights, and Association rights* drawing on Spencer-Oatey's model [15, pp.540–542]. Each of these components functions to clarify how communicators maintain, negotiate, challenge social harmony and respect in intercourse.

Based on Culpeper's and Lachenicht's theoretical frameworks on impoliteness, D. Bousfield refines the existing concept and proposes new aspects to it. He

argues that both types of face attacks coincide in real interactions and considers positive/negative face distinction unnecessary. Drawing on Goffman's notion of face, Bousfield states that face is unstable and flexible depending on social interaction. Whenever the reality fails to meet our expectations, tensions arise that requires reconsideration of one's social position in society, leading to impoliteness and verbal aggression. [1, p.94–143]. Bousfield emphasizes the necessity of refining the definition of impoliteness and suggests to conceptualize it as a phenomenon that combines intentionality with face threatening acts. These acts must be unmitigated and aggressive, clearly comprehended as an impoliteness by communicators. Reconsidering the complex nature of intentionality, Bousfield argues that impoliteness arises from "Offending Event" which consists of behavior, language, damage and shaped by social norms, expectations, and contextual factors relevant to the participants [1, p.142]. The remarkable distinction of Bousfield study on the impoliteness concept lies in his new classification of impoliteness strategies that is based on Culpeper's taxonomy but extends and renames certain terms and categories due to its complexity [1, p.118–123]. He views sarcasm as a 'mock-politeness' and context-dependent that serves to enhance, rather than attack participants' face. In this sense, it should be introduced as "double ostentatiousness"

The theoretical framework of impoliteness strategies and their various classifications, as presented in my study, will contribute to the analysis of media texts to identify their pragmatic functions and the mechanisms through which impoliteness operates in media discourse.

Task statement. The objective of the study is to examine the intersections between media discourse analysis and the impoliteness theory and reveal how impoliteness is structured and interpreted by media users. By analyzing pragmatic aspects of headlines and hashtags selected from traditional and social media outlets, the study aims to tackle how it contributes to changing standards and norms within public and media discourse.

Methodology and Data. Various impoliteness strategies in news headlines selected from UK and US television networks, newspapers and magazines and hashtags selected from social media platforms have been studied based on the traditional method of discourse analysis, as well as on the method of critical discourse analysis. A comparative-analytic method has also been used to analyze forms, pragmatic aspects and inferences of impoliteness strategies on both traditional and social media discourse.

Outline of the main material of the study

1. Impoliteness strategies in headlines and hashtags in traditional media

The use of impoliteness strategies in media discourse encompasses specific pragmatic aspects and different formats. Impoliteness in this context is not fully apparent and directed toward celebrities and public figures. The media typically tends to employ covert and indirect strategies that follows ethic rules, legal standards and good manners, particularly in traditional media. In traditional media platforms, impoliteness is explicitly employed in tabloid journalism and political discourse. Impoliteness strategies such as *sarcasm and mockery, negative labeling, direct criticism, interruptions and overlapping talks, accusations, hostile questioning* are employed to attract audience's reaction in tabloids, accentuate tension to grab viewers' or readers' attention, impose authoritative power.

Impoliteness strategies shown in the following headlines selected from various television and tabloid newspapers serve definite functions:

(1) *Headline: 'Bye bye!': Donald Trump 'throws temper tantrum' as Democrats reject wall funding* (Sky News-British Television channel – 9 January 2019)

https://news.sky.com/story/stop-playing-chicken-with-our-lives-workers-warn-trump-over-shutdown-11602976?utm_source

In the given headline *mockery* is used as an impoliteness strategy. The phrase *'throws temper tantrum'* is typically is used for children which means 'unpleasant, disruptive emotional outburst. The phrase is used to describe President Trump as a childish and unstable person, undermining his status and power. The phrase 'Bye bye!' is directive expression that adds mocking tone to the headline's meaning.

(2) *Headline: 'A new nadir' for Britain: How Europe's press reacted to 'shameless clown' Boris Johnson taking control* (Independent TV channel – July 24, 2019)

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/boris-johnson-prime-minister-europe-press-newspaper-reaction-brexit-a9018221.html?utm_source

In the given example, calling UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson 'clown' is *bold on record negative impoliteness*, as the expression is directly insults PM without any mitigation.

(3) *Headline: Hypocrite newspaper ran race row Tory's columns* (Press Gazette Future of Media- March 1, 2019) https://pressgazette.co.uk/news/morning-star-calls-yorkshire-post-a-hypocrite-newspaper-in-front-page-attack/?utm_source

In the given front page headline, Morning Star (British daily newspaper) presents Yorkshire Post as 'hypocrite newspaper'. It blames another newspaper in hypocrisy and criticizes it in media double standards. Here, this phrase encompasses two strategies of impoliteness: 1. *bold on record impoliteness*- there is a direct attack without any mitigation and the 'hypocrite newspaper' is rude and referred to the newspaper. 2. *Sarcasm/ Mock impoliteness*- there is irony in the phrase *'double standard'* which serves to shame publicly and undermine the rival newspaper.

As hashtags are the tools of social media and predominantly employed in social media rather than institutionally regulated traditional media, it is very hard to encounter them in traditional media outlets. A few online newspapers use hashtags in their websites to highlight urgent topics and to attract the audience to the related topic.

An analysis made on approximately 50 headlines from UK television and print newspapers reveals that mockery, bold on record, and negative politeness are mainly employed. These impoliteness strategies function primarily as accusations, insults aimed at damaging the addressee's negative face. As such headlines tend to draw more audience engagement, news producers significantly use them within traditional media context.

2. Impoliteness strategies in headlines and hashtags in new media

Social media has transformed public communication by enabling freer and more overt self-expression with minimal regulation, which has contributed to the increased spread of impoliteness. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms frequently employ more direct and aggressive impoliteness strategies—such as bald-on-record attacks, sarcasm, and mock politeness—particularly in headlines and hashtags, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of these communicative practices. Due to social, communicative and cultural factors, social media carries unique properties: lack of simultaneous feedback, use of emojis, multiple conversations at once.

To analyze the pragmatic functions of impoliteness in headlines, media posts from social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, spanning different time periods, were examined. The following examples were selected from various social media platforms for analysis:

(1) *Headline: Judge notices officer isn't wearing pants* (Instagram-CNN, October 30, 2025)

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQc2S1iFdc0/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

In the selected news headline from CNN's Instagram account, an embarrassing situation is described and presented in a sensational way to the public. The headline employs *mockery* as an implicit impoliteness strategy, threatening publicly the officer's positive face by turning the officer's private incident into public entertainment.

(2) Headline: Strictly's Balvinder Sopal revealed she has had a 'meltdown' after dance-off shock (Instagram- The Sun, October 27, 2025)

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQOokrkaQAh/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA

In the given news headline from The Sun's Instagram account, Balvinder Sopal (English well-known actress from BBC soap opera) expresses her emotional reaction with the word 'meltdown' which expresses dramatic and emotive state of the actress. The given headline employs slightly *bold on record* as an impoliteness strategy. This could damage Balvinder's positive face by describing her as a sensible, highly emotive woman.

Hashtags are keywords marked by the # symbol and used across social media platforms to organize discussions, guide user attention, and convey implicit meanings. Due to their pragmatic functions, hashtags may incorporate impoliteness markers that intensify face-threatening acts and aggressive behavior in social media discourse.

(1) #DeleteFacebook, #DeleteMeta

https://www.instagram.com/p/DNCL_CuOot7/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA

The hashtag *#DeleteFacebook*, *#DeleteMeta* appeared as a call for people to delete their accounts after Cambridge Analytical Data Leak. This was trendy in Twitter and Instagram media platforms.

The hashtag uses *negative impoliteness* and *bold on record impoliteness* strategies aiming to damage the autonomy and public reputation of the company. As it is seen, there is no mitigation in the call.

(2) #SurveillanceCapitalism/#SocialMediaSucks

https://www.instagram.com/p/DNCL_CuOot7/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA

The hashtag *#SurveillanceCapitalism* employs how big companies benefit from user data and online surveillance and violate user privacy. There is *mockery/sarcasm impoliteness* strategy in the hashtag. It criticizes and mocks capitalism business experiences of new media companies. The hashtag *#SocialMediaSucks* criticizes social media, showing how these platforms can be harmful and frustrated for users. The word 'suck' is used as a rude insult and overtly expresses impoliteness, introducing social media platforms negatively. A *bold on record* impoliteness strategy is used here due to its direct and unsoften criticism.

Conclusions. By analyzing headlines and hashtags across media outlets, several conclusions emerge. Both traditional and new media employ impoliteness strategies—such as bald-on-record attacks, mockery, and sarcasm—explicitly and implicitly in headlines, while hashtags are rarely used in traditional media and predominantly occur on social media platforms. These strategies encourage emotional engagement, provoke strong opinions, and stimulate active debate; however, compared to traditional media, social media headlines and hashtags tend to be more direct, aggressive, and offensive. Overall, traditional media largely maintain institutional norms and professional standards, whereas social media discourse is more informal, sensational, and shaped by users' personal perspectives.

Bibliography:

1. Bousfield D. Impoliteness in interaction. Philadelphia & Amsterdam. 2008. John Benjamins. pp.281
2. Culpeper J. Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 1996. 25(3), pp.349–367.
3. Culpeper J. Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The Weakest Link. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*. 2005. 1(1), pp. 35–72.
4. Culpeper J. *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge. 2011. Cambridge University Press.
5. Dor, D. On Newspaper Headlines as Relevance Optimizers. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 2003. 35, pp.695–721
6. Fowler R. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the press*. London. 1991. Routledge.
7. Lachenicht L. G. *Aggravating language: A study of abusive and insulting language*. 1980. *Papers in Linguistics*. 13, pp.607–687.
8. Lakoff, R. T. *The limits of politeness: Therapeutic and courtroom discourse*. 1989. *Multilingua*, 8 (2–3), pp. 101–129.
9. Muhammed M. M. *A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected English Political Newspaper Headlines*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis University of Baghdad.2005. Iraq.
10. Nieves Hernández-Flores N. *Politeness and other types of facework: Communicative and social meaning in a television panel discussion*. 2008. *Pragmatics*, 18(4), pp. 681–706.

11. Scott K. The pragmatics of hashtags: Inference and conversational style on Twitter. 2015. Journal of Pragmatics, 81(1), pp. 8–20.
12. Spencer-Oatey, H. D. Managing rapport in talk: Using rapport sensitive incidents to explore the motivational concerns underlying the management of relations. 2002. Journal of Pragmatics, 34(5), pp. 529–545.

Гусейнова Х. Ф. ВІД ЗАГОЛОВКІВ ДО ХЕШТЕГІВ: СТРАТЕГІЇ НЕВІЧЛИВОСТІ У ТРАДИЦІЙНИХ І НОВИХ МЕДІА

Стаття присвячена аналізу прагматичних функцій стратегій невічливості, що використовуються в заголовках та хештегах у рамках англомовного медіадискурсу. Спираючись на теоретичну модель невічливості Калпепера (2011), основоположні ідеї Лахеніхта (1980) про невічливість та сучасні підходи до її вивчення, запропоновані Бусфілдом (2008), автори аналізують, яким чином стратегії невічливості сприяють трансформації норм та стандартів. Мета дослідження полягає у формуванні чіткого розуміння того, як маркери невічливості з прагматичної точки зору конструюють журналістський професіоналізм, впливають на інтерпретацію аудиторії та формують громадську думку. Встановлено якісні дані, що ілюструють різні типи стратегій невічливості у нових медіа та їх стратегічне кодування у традиційних засобах масової інформації. Визначено, що заголовки виконують не лише функцію привернення уваги, а й служать інструментами постановки під сумнів авторитету, висловлювання оцінки та критики, посилення емоційного впливу, збільшення читацької аудиторії та формування ідеологічних позицій. На відміну від них, хештеги в медіадискурсі функціонують як багатофункціональні засоби категоризації контенту, формування порядку денного, мобілізації аудиторії та спрямування громадського коментаря, часто забезпечуючи швидке поширення оціночних чи конфронтаційних позицій. Результати дослідження виявляють чітку різницю між двома формами медіа: невічливість у заголовках традиційних ЗМІ, як правило, носить більш імпліцитний, непрямий та інституційно обмежений характер, що відображає професійні норми та редакторський контроль, тоді як у нових медіа, особливо за допомогою хештегів, невічливість проявляється більш. Доведено, що цей зсув підкреслює еволюцію медіадискурсу, в рамках якої цифрові платформи забезпечують більшу мовну свободу та оперативність, зрештою сприяючи нормалізації невічливих виразів як стратегічних комунікативних ресурсів у сучасному публічному дискурсі.

Ключові слова: невічливість, дискурс традиційних медіа, дискурс нових медіа, заголовки, хештеги.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 16.01.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 16.02.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 24.04.2026