

IMPOLITENESS IN TV SERIES *EUPHORIA*: A GENDER-BASED SOCIOPRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Impoliteness in language reflects complex social dynamics, especially in audiovisual media where characters perform identity, power, and gender roles through dialogue. However, few studies have explored how gender-based impoliteness unfolds in fictional narratives, creating a gap between theory and media representations. This study investigates impoliteness strategies and gendered linguistic features in Season 1 of the TV series Euphoria. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study analyzes 50 impolite utterances through Culpeper's (2011) framework of impoliteness and gender theories from Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013). Findings show that both male and female characters most frequently use the Bald on Record strategy, but female characters employ impoliteness more often. Taboo words emerge as the dominant linguistic feature across genders, with higher intensity among females. These results challenge conventional views of women as more polite or indirect speakers. In Euphoria, female characters use language typically associated with masculine speech, aggressive, explicit, and confrontational, indicating a shift in gendered communication patterns. This research highlights the urgency of viewing fictional media as a sociopragmatic lens to understand how language, gender, and power interact. It offers new insight into how media narratives can subvert traditional gender norms and reflect evolving linguistic behaviors.

Keywords: *Impoliteness strategies, Gender and language, Sociopragmatics analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Politeness and impoliteness are two essential poles in pragmatic studies that reflect the dynamics of social relationships in communication. Politeness strategies are typically employed to maintain harmony, show respect, and uphold the interlocutor's face, while impoliteness plays a more complex role in discourse. Impoliteness does not merely mean being rude or disrespectful in the literal sense, but rather encompasses a range of linguistic strategies that can be deliberately employed to attack the interlocutor's face, assert dominance, or challenge social norms. In certain contexts, impoliteness can serve as a tool for negotiating identity, resisting authority, or even as a form of intimacy within peer groups. This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex when

understood within the context of everyday social interactions that are shaped by differences in gender, age, and social status. Gender, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping how politeness and impoliteness are performed and interpreted. While traditional views often associate women with indirectness, politeness, and emotional restraint, contemporary studies have shown that these assumptions are not universally applicable and may vary across contexts, especially in mediated environments like film or television. As Nasution (in Rianto, 2020) emphasizes, as inherently social beings, humans are bound to engage in interaction, and within those interactions, language becomes a powerful tool not only for connection but also for negotiation, resistance, and boundary-marking.

In this context, the intersection of linguistics, media studies, and gender theory has gained attention increasingly, particularly in analyzing how language constructs identity, power, and social dynamics in audiovisual narratives. Television series offer fertile ground for this exploration, as scripted dialogue often mirrors, amplifies, or critiques real-world linguistic behavior, making them powerful sites for examining sociocultural ideologies. As Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) argue, the performativity of gender in language is often shaped through discursive practices that emerge in media representations. Therefore, analyzing language in fictional media such as television series is essential to understanding how gender roles are constructed through character speech.

One of the most linguistically provocative television series of the past decade, HBO's *Euphoria* (2019) offers a compelling case study with its unfiltered portrayal of adolescent life, marked by explicit dialogue, verbal aggression, and sociopragmatically rich interactions. The series is notable for its frequent use of emotionally charged language, identity struggles, and complex power negotiations between characters of varying genders, backgrounds, and psychological states. Each character's language choices reveal their social positioning, internal conflicts, and resistance to normative expectations, making language not just a communicative tool but a driving force in both character development and narrative progression.

On the other hand, particularly in maintaining (or altering) the sociopragmatic force of politeness and impoliteness strategies. Given that impoliteness is culturally and gender-conditioned Culpeper (2011), in everyday interactions, politeness and impoliteness serve as markers of how individuals negotiate their position in the social hierarchy (Brown et al., 1987). Sociopragmatic studies-which combine pragmatic and sociological approaches, have long explored how factors such as gender, age, and status influence language use (Holmes, 2013). However, the majority of research has focused on real conversations, while linguistic representations in fictional media, particularly contemporary television series, remain relatively neglected.

The phenomenon of impolite language in the drama is often expressed by characters who are teenagers, a group that is still unstable in terms of communication, language, and psychology. According to Hurlock (1997) during adolescence, teenagers experience various changes, both emotionally and physically, in terms of interests and behavioral patterns, and face multiple challenges. The cultural differences between Indonesia and the United States in the *Euphoria* series also prompted researchers to investigate the translation of the inappropriate language in the series' subtitles. Additionally, by showcasing the diverse communication styles of its characters, *Euphoria* offers a deeper insight into how gender norms can influence social interactions and trigger profound conflicts in communication. *Euphoria* is a teen drama and psychological drama series directed by Sam Levinson in 2019, which won an Emmy Award in 2022. The series follows the ups and downs of high school students at East Highland High School.

This study focuses on gender-based impolite speech uttered by the characters in the series. The selection of gender-based characters aims to identify and compare the distinctive linguistic features employed by male and female characters when engaging in impolite exchanges.

Frequent conflicts between characters ensure sufficient data availability for this study. The interactions portrayed in the series often highlight verbal exchanges that reflect power dynamics, social roles, and gender norms. A recurring issue observed in the dialogue is the presence of disrespectful language, particularly in conversations between male and female characters, which offers insight into how gender influences the use of impolite speech. By analyzing these interactions, the study seeks to uncover deeper patterns in gendered communication and contribute to a broader understanding of how impoliteness functions in mediated, fictional contexts as both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon.

Various studies on language and gender have revealed important sociolinguistic dynamics, yet several gaps remain open for further exploration. Adnyani (2014), for instance, highlights the use of vocabulary and grammatical structures that are traditionally associated with women, offering insight into how language reflects social values and gender norms. However, her study focuses primarily on women's language features without comparing them to those of men, and it does not explore impoliteness strategies or confrontational speech styles that may also reveal gendered linguistic behavior. This gap is similarly evident in Hanif's (2021) work, which explores how language reflects gender identity through social and cultural structures, but offers a limited analysis of specific linguistic features, such as word choice and intonation, that differentiate male and female speech styles. Similarly, Nugraha (2022) identify gender-based language features in a podcast episode featuring Ali Wong, using Mulac et al. (2001) framework. However, they overlook the dimension of impoliteness, even though informal media platforms like podcasts frequently exhibit spontaneous verbal aggression that reflects gendered power relations.

In the context of digital communication, Ambarita et al. (2023) examine impolite language in political social media comments, focusing on surface-level linguistic and non-linguistic cues like punctuation, rebus writing, and emoticons. Yet, they do not explore deeper language elements such as swear words or gender-based speech features. Likewise, Ginarti et al. (2022) analyzes language use in political hashtags across Twitter and Instagram, yet falls short of unpacking gendered impoliteness, despite its relevance to the platform's confrontational tone. These limitations persist in Ghayedi's (2022) research, which examines EFL learners' impolite complaint strategies across social power contexts but lacks attention to gender-based variation in strategy use and linguistic style.

The absence of gendered analysis also appears in fictional and visual media. Helnisza et al. (2024), for instance, categorizes types of impoliteness in webtoon dialogues using a psychopragmatic approach, but does not differentiate linguistic strategies between male and female characters, leaving unexplored how gender dynamics shape verbal aggression in fictional narratives. Similarly, Hardiasari et al. (2024) analyzes sexualized comments on Twitter to reveal gender and stigma discourse, but fails to delve into the explicit linguistic forms of impoliteness, such as insults or harassment, and limits the generalizability of findings by focusing on a single account.

In light of these limitations, this study offers a novel contribution by bridging the analytical gap between impoliteness strategies and gender-based linguistic features within an audiovisual context. By using *Euphoria*, a linguistically provocative teen drama, this research captures how fictional dialogue can mirror and magnify real-life gendered communication, especially in the use of aggressive, explicit and offensive language. This integrated approach not only enriches sociopragmatic understanding but also challenges traditional assumptions about women's language being more polite or passive, offering new insights into how media texts construct gender, identity, and power through language.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative descriptive research methods, focusing on impolite speech acts spoken by characters in the TV Series *Euphoria* Season 1. According to Moleong (2018), descriptive qualitative research is employed to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behaviour, actions, and motivations, through descriptions in the form of words and language. The purpose of using this descriptive qualitative research is to describe and categorize the types of impolite speech acts that appear with gender differences and their linguistic features in the language variety used in the TV series *Euphoria* season 1.

The data of this study were in the form of sentences and dialogues in the TV series scripts. The data were collected through several steps; The data collection was conducted by watching the television series *Euphoria* Season 1 and identifying utterances that contained elements of impoliteness. These utterances then classified according to the types of impoliteness using Culpeper's (2011) framework. After collecting the data, the researcher categorized the data based on gender using the theories of Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013) to analyse the gender-based features and the language features. The researcher then provided an in-depth explanation of the findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the results of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, a total of 50 impolite utterances were identified. For male speakers, the dominant impoliteness strategy observed was bald on record, appearing 12 times. The most frequent linguistic feature for male speakers was the elaborate use of taboo words, which occurred 10 times.

Similarly, for female speakers, bald on record impoliteness also dominated with 12 occurrences. The predominant linguistic feature for female speakers was likewise the elaborate use of taboo words, appearing 10 times.

Table 1. Analysis Results of Impoliteness and Gender-Based Language Features in the Series *Euphoria* Season 1

In the Series <i>Euphoria</i> Season 1						
No	Male			Female		
	Impoliteness	Language Feature	Total	Impoliteness	Language Feature	Total
1	Positive Impoliteness	Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	3	Positive Impoliteness	Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	3
		Stereotypically Masculine Topics	2		Stereotypically Masculine Topics	2
2	Negative Impoliteness	Stereotypically Masculine Topics	2	Negative Impoliteness	Men Only	1
					Intensifier	1
					Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	1
					Great Attention on Details	1
3	Bald on Record	Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	10	Bald on Record	Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	10
		Stereotypically Masculine Topics	2		Stereotypically Masculine Topics	1
					Lexical Hedges	1

4	Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	Stereotypically Masculine Topics	1	Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	Stereotypically Masculine Topics	5
					Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	1
					Super Polite Form	1
5	Withhold Politeness	-	-	Withhold Politeness	Avoidance of Strong Swear Words	1
					Elaborate Used of Taboo Words	1
Total			20	Total 30		

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that male characters in this TV series use impoliteness strategies 20 times, with the dominant type of Bald on Record, appearing 12 times, and the dominant linguistic feature of elaborate use of taboo words, also occurring 12 times. Meanwhile, female characters use impoliteness strategies 30 times, with the dominant type of Bald on Record (12 occurrences), and the dominant male linguistic feature of elaborate use of taboo words, appearing 16 times.

1. Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness is a type of impoliteness that threatens the hearer's positive face wants, meaning the desire to be liked, appreciated, and included in a group. Positive impoliteness aims to offend, alienate, or exclude the listener by ignoring their need for acceptance and social approval.

Example 1:

Context: Maddy insults Kat and brings up Kat's habit of chatting online with strangers on the internet.

Maddy: "Please, Kat, remind me again how many guys you've fucked? And, oh, yeah, cat-fishing, that doesn't count."

Maddy ridicules Kat's sexual history in a sarcastic and judgmental way, undermining Kat's self-image. The phrase "*remind me again how many guys you've fucked?*" is mocking and implies promiscuity, which socially damages Kat's reputation.

Maddy's language feature is the elaborate use of taboo words. Maddy use strong, explicit language by saying "*how many guys you've fucked?*". She publicly exposed Kat's private life in a way that put Kat on the defensive and diminished her social standing. This aligns with Culpeper's (2011) idea that impoliteness can be used to damage the target's face (reputation or self-image).

Example 2:

Context: Nate sees Maddy making out with another guy (Tyler) by the swimming pool.

Nate: "Yeah, that's real classy, you fucking whore."

Nate uses positive impoliteness because it is a powerful way to attack Maddy's social identity and self-esteem, expressing his anger and disappointment while asserting dominance. This strategy effectively damages her positive face-need to be liked and respected-making the insult particularly impactful.

Nate's language feature was the elaborate use of taboo words. Taboo words carry strong emotional weight. By using explicit and offensive language, Nate amplifies his anger, frustration, and contempt toward Maddy. The intensifier "fucking" heightens the severity of the insult, making his feelings unmistakably clear. The word "whore" is a harsh label aimed at shaming Maddy's

sexual behaviour. Nate's choice of taboo terms is intended to publicly humiliate her, attacking her reputation and self-worth.

2. Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness is a type of impoliteness that directly threatens the negative face wants of the hearer—that is, the desire to be unimpeded, autonomous, and free from imposition. Negative impoliteness aims to offend, exclude, or distance the listener by showing a lack of consideration for their need for freedom and personal space.

Example 1:

Context: Nate is talking about Cassie with McKay because Cassie's nude photos have spread on social media.

Nate: "Yo, so, Cassie's a whore. Fact."

Nate's utterance exemplifies negative impoliteness by calling Cassie a "whore" in front of McKay because he is trying to frame her as less valuable or respectable person and to shape the social narrative about her, even in her absence.

Nate's language features is stereotypically masculine topics by focusing on Cassie's sexuality, Nate taps into a masculine discourse that objectifies and polices women's behaviour, reinforcing traditional gender roles. This helps Nate to affirm his identity as a "real man" by participating in conversations about sexual control and reputation and aligning himself with hegemonic masculinity, which often involves talking about women in sexualized, controlling terms.

Example 2:

Context: Rue speaks rudely to Rick (her mother's boyfriend).

Rue: "You know what, Rick? Why don't you go fuck yourself?"

Rick is her mother's boyfriend, so Rue may see him as an intruder in a space she considers personal or family-only. The attack on Rick's negative face is meant to make him feel unwelcome and unwanted. She is signaling that she does not recognize or accept any relational closeness with him.

Rue's language feature is the elaborate used of taboo words because she intensifies the emotional force of her message to signals that she's not just mildly annoyed or upset; she's deeply angry, rejecting, or hurt. It also used to elaborate use of such words helps her externalize and communicate complex feelings that might be difficult to express otherwise.

3. Bald on Record

Bald on record is delivering a message directly and explicitly without any minimization of the face-threatening act (FTA). In other words, the speaker is straightforward and blunt, often ignoring social niceties or softening language.

Example 1:

Context: Nate is drunk and threatens Jules in front of many people.

Nate: "So, what do you want? You want some, some fucking attention? Cause I'll give you some fucking attention. Yo, is anybody here friends with Jules? Anyone? Does anybody know who the fuck this bitch is? Somebody better speak up, or this bitch is gonna get fucked up."

Nate used bald on record impoliteness because it is a direct, forceful, and unmitigated face-threatening act that uses offensive language and explicit threats without any politeness strategies. This approach maximizes the impact of his aggression and intimidation.

Nate's language feature is elaborate used of taboo words to maximize emotional impact, assert dominance, humiliate the target, convey sincerity, and align with social identity, making his verbal attack more powerful and effective. Taboo words often carry strong stigmatizing and degrading meanings. Nate's use of such words aims to publicly shame and humiliate Jules, attacking her reputation and social standing within the group.

Example 2:

Context: Lexi is worried about Rue's condition, but Rue is annoyed with Lexi.

Rue: "Give me a fucking break. 'Cause we went to fucking pre-school together? That does not make us best fucking friends."

Rue use bald on record impoliteness because she wanted to express her frustration and reject Lexi's assumptions very directly and explicitly without any attempt to soften or mask her message. Rue does not use any politeness strategies such as hedging, indirectness, or mitigating language to lessen the impact of her words. Also, the repeated use of the taboo word "*fucking*" intensifies the harshness and bluntness of her message.

Rue's language feature is elaborate used of taboo words because she use words like "*fucking*" repeatedly to intensify her feelings of annoyance, anger, and rejection, making her emotional state very clear. The frequent use of taboo words also strengthens the impact of her statements, making the rejection feel more powerful and undeniable.

4. Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

Sarcasm or Mock Politeness is a form of impoliteness where the speaker uses polite language, but with an underlying meaning that is the opposite—usually to mock, insult, or convey contempt. Instead of genuinely showing respect or kindness, the speaker's tone or context signals that the politeness is insincere.

Example 1:

Context: Ethan approaches Kat to introduce himself for the first time, and Kat mocks Ethan by comparing his appearance to that of a "mass shooter."

Kat: "Please don't be a mass shooter."

Kat use sarcasm or mock politeness because she use sarcasm to mock or ridicule Ethan in a way that's indirect but still biting. The polite word "*please*" contrasts sharply with the serious and offensive content, creating an ironic effect that highlights her judgment of Ethan's appearance.

Kat's language feature is elaborate used of taboo words because the term "*mass shooter*" refers to an extremely sensitive and violent topic, often avoided in polite or casual conversation. Although Kat uses the word "*please*" (a polite form), the actual intent is sarcastic and face-threatening.

Example 2:

Context: Troy spreads a private video of Kat. Kat threatens to report Troy to the police because it involves distributing explicit material involving minors. Troy denies that it counts as illegal since the participants are also minors. Kat tells Troy to look it up online, but Troy responds sarcastically, acting like there's no problem.

Troy: "I'm not googling child pornography"

Troy use sarcasm or mock politeness by refusing to Google the term, but the sarcastic tone suggests he is mocking Kat's warning and the seriousness of the issue. He implies, "*Why should I bother? It's obviously not illegal or wrong, so your threat is ridiculous.*" This undermines Kat's accusation and dismisses her concerns with irony.

Troy's language feature was stereotypically masculine topics because Troy's sarcastic refusal to "Google child pornography" reflects this rebellious attitude, showing he's not afraid to challenge social or legal norms, which culturally can be seen as a masculine trait.

5. Withhold Politeness

Withhold Politeness is an impoliteness strategy identified by Jonathan Culpeper where the speaker deliberately fails to show expected politeness, such as not offering greetings, thanks, or compliments when social norms would require them. This absence of politeness acts as a form of social rejection or disrespect.

Example 1:

Context: Rue expresses her frustration toward Fezco because he no longer wants to sell drugs to her.

Rue: "Fez! You're full of shit, man. You know you make your living off of selling drugs to teenagers. And now all of a sudden, you want to have a fucking moral high ground? Are you doing this because you care about me? If you gave a shit about me, you wouldn't have sold me the fucking drugs in the first place! But you did! You fucking did! So, open the goddamned door!"

Rue use withhold politeness because she is expressing anger and frustration very directly and harshly, deliberately ignoring polite language norms by calling Fez "full of shit" and accuses him of hypocrisy using profanity like "fucking moral high ground." This is blunt and rude, showing she withholds polite softening. She questions whether Fez truly cares for her, implying he's being dishonest or selfish.

Rue's language feature is elaboration of taboo words because the repeated use of words like "fucking", "shit", and "goddamned" helps convey the raw intensity of her frustration and emotional pain. Rue feels betrayed and uses taboo words to undermine Fezco's moral stance. By calling him out with "You're full of shit" and "moral high ground", Rue is challenging his credibility and character.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Bald on Record is an impoliteness response that emerges as a dominant linguistic phenomenon in the TV series *Euphoria* Season 1 and is used strategically by both male and female characters to express emotional tension, assert power, and challenge social relationships. The findings show that female characters employed impoliteness strategies more frequently than male characters, with both genders most commonly using the Bald on Record strategy. The most frequent linguistic feature found in both male and female impolite speech was the elaborate use of taboo words, though females used it more intensively. This challenges traditional assumptions about gendered language use, which often suggest that women speak more politely or indirectly. In contrast, the female characters in *Euphoria* exhibit linguistic behaviours commonly associated with masculine speech, including the use of aggression, sarcasm, and explicit language.

These findings contribute significantly to the sociopragmatic field by demonstrating how gender-based communication is fluid, context-dependent, and performative, especially within mediated discourse. Rather than adhering to conventional gender norms, the characters—particularly females—navigate social roles through confrontational and assertive speech, indicating a shift in how linguistic power and gender are co-constructed. This study emphasizes the importance of audiovisual media as a critical site for analyzing the interplay between language, gender, and power, and it calls for further research into how fictional dialogues both reflect and reshape real-world ideologies surrounding gendered communication.

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