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Linguistic Impoliteness Research 1995-2023: Bibliometric and PAGER Scoping Review

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital communication and increasingly polarized social interactions have heightened the occurrence and complexity of linguistic impoliteness, necessitating a systematic evaluation of its scholarly evolution. This study presents a comprehensive scoping review and bibliometric analysis of global linguistic impoliteness research published between 1995 and 2023. Using the Scopus database as the primary source, a total of 278 peer-reviewed publications were retrieved and systematically analyzed. To ensure metadata accuracy, bibliographic data were cleaned and standardized using OpenRefine, while performance metrics and science mapping visualizations were generated using BiblioMagika and VOSviewer software. The performance results indicate a steady upward trend in scholarly publications, accumulating 7,148 total citations with an average of 25.71 citations per paper and an h-index of 42. Keyword co-occurrence network analysis successfully mapped the intellectual structure of the field into five distinct thematic clusters: (1) normative and interactional impoliteness represented by red nodes, (2) digital, aggressive, and identity-oriented impoliteness represented by green nodes, (3) pragmatic, face, and discourse foundations represented by blue nodes, (4) social media, conflict, and political impoliteness represented by yellow nodes, and (5) humorous, intercultural, and metapragmatic impoliteness represented by purple nodes. In conclusion, research in this domain has undergone a major epistemological shift from micro-level form-based analysis to context-dependent, socially situated, and metapragmatically negotiated evaluations, heavily driven by the affordances of digital communication. It is recommended that future studies investigate recipient-oriented evaluations, moral-ideological positioning, and multimodal expressions across diverse digital platforms to address existing research gaps.

Keywords: *Linguistic Impoliteness, Bibliometric Analysis, Research Trends, Bibliomagika, Vosviewer*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic impoliteness has emerged as a central and vibrant domain of inquiry within interpersonal pragmatics and sociolinguistics over the past three decades. Traditionally, early pragmatic research was heavily dominated by politeness frameworks, conceptualizing face-threatening acts (FTAs) as communicative aberrations to be mitigated through redressive strategies (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, subsequent pioneering studies challenged this asymmetrical focus, proving that impoliteness is not merely a failure of politeness or a

random deviation from cooperative norms, but a distinct, highly systematic, and strategically patterned linguistic phenomenon designed to cause cognitive or emotional offense (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996; Culpeper et al., 2003). This epistemological shift catalyzed a rapid expansion of scholarly literature, transitioning the field from early "first-generation" micro-level, form-based categorizations to "second-generation" discursive and relational work approaches that emphasize context-dependent and socially situated negotiations (Locher & Watts, 2008; Mills, 2011).

The rapid proliferation of digital communication platforms has further transformed the sociopragmatic landscape of linguistic impoliteness. The unique affordances of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media networks such as anonymity, asynchronous messaging, and rapid, viral dissemination have created fertile grounds for aggressive, hostile, and uncivil linguistic practices (Groshek & Cutino, 2016; Oz et al., 2018). Consequently, linguistic impoliteness is no longer confined to private interpersonal interactions; it has rapidly manifested in large-scale, public digital arenas, including contentious political campaigns on Twitter (Bou-Franch, 2021) and online discussion boards (Nishimura, 2010). In these digitally mediated environments, impoliteness serves as a powerful, creative, and highly strategic resource for identity construction, group boundary maintenance, moral positioning, and ideological out-group attack (Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2018; Zidjaly, 2019). Concurrently, contemporary research has undergone a significant multimodal and metapragmatic turn, exploring how face-attacking behaviors are complexly integrated with prosodic variation, bodily gestures (McKinnon & Prieto, 2014), visual-rhetorical cartoons (Abdel-Raheem, 2022), and playful "mock impoliteness" in comment streams (Liu, 2023).

Despite the rich and rapid expansion of this scholarly landscape, the accumulated body of research remains highly fragmented across disjointed sub-disciplines, including interlanguage pragmatics, clinical discourse analysis, political science, and media communication. Most existing literature reviews in this field are narrative, critical, or restricted to narrow domains, such as classroom discourses (Beschieru, 2021) or gender-based media studies (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2018). Consequently, there is a prominent lack of a comprehensive, systematic, and quantitative synthesis that maps the global evolution, intellectual structure, and emerging research fronts of linguistic impoliteness. Without an objective, large-scale mapping of this domain, the rapidly growing literature risks becoming a disjointed collection of isolated studies, hindering theoretical integration and masking latent conceptual developments (Donthu et al., 2021; Öztürk et al., 2024).

To address these critical limitations, this study utilizes an integrated scoping review and bibliometric analysis (ScoRBA) framework (Aminah et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2023), systematically enhanced by the application of the Patterns, Advances, Gaps, Evidence for Practice, and Research Recommendations (PAGER) framework (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2022). By examining a curated, cleaned dataset of 278 high-relevance peer-reviewed publications retrieved from the Scopus database spanning from 1995 to 2023, this study aims to systematically evaluate the annual publication trends, growth trajectories, and citation performance metrics of global linguistic impoliteness research. Furthermore, this research maps the intellectual and thematic structure of the field by identifying core publication venues, prominent contributors, and network keyword co-occurrences. Ultimately, by utilizing the PAGER framework, this study synthesizes major theoretical breakthroughs and critical methodological gaps to formulate a strategic, evidence-based roadmap and actionable recommendations for future linguistic impoliteness inquiries.

METHOD

STUDY DESIGN AND SEARCH PROTOCOL

This study adopts an integrated Scoping Review and Bibliometric Analysis (ScoRBA) design (Aminah et al., 2025; Wijaya et al., 2023) to map the global landscape of linguistic impoliteness research from 1995 to 2023. The scoping review component is operationalized based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework, adhering to the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the bibliometric component utilizes quantitative performance analysis and science mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

Bibliographic metadata were retrieved on August 4, 2023, from the Scopus database, which provides comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed linguistic literature (Baas et al., 2020). To maintain strict conceptual focus, the search query was restricted to the title field using the keyword "impoliteness" (TITLE("impoliteness")). The temporal boundary was set from 1995 to 2023. Publications were screened against explicit eligibility criteria, resulting in a final eligible dataset of 278 peer-reviewed English documents, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Review and Search Protocol for Linguistic Impoliteness Research

Criteria	Inclusion Parameters
Database & Query	Scopus; TITLE ("impoliteness")
Timeframe	1995 – 2023 (Final publication stage)
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference papers
Language	English only
Final Sample	278 core publications

DATA CLEANING AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS

To ensure metadata integrity, raw bibliographic records were cleaned and standardized using OpenRefine (version 3.6.1) to resolve synonym variations, spelling inconsistencies, and text casing discrepancies (Ahmi, 2023a). First, spelling variations of author names (e.g., merging "Garcés-Conejos Blitvich P." and "Blitvich P.G.-C.") were consolidated to ensure accurate citation metrics (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Second, synonymous author keywords were harmonized (e.g., merging "im/politeness" and "impoliteness"). Third, institutional affiliations and journal source titles were checked for consistency.

Following the cleaning phase, BiblioMagika (Ahmi, 2023b) was utilized to calculate baseline performance metrics, including annual publication growth, author productivity, and leading publication venues (Huynh, 2022). Quantitative science mapping was executed through keyword co-occurrence network analysis using VOSviewer (version 1.6.18) with a "full counting" method applied to author keywords (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This co-word analysis successfully grouped the intellectual structure of the field into five thematic clusters, visually differentiated by node colors: Red (Cluster 1), Green (Cluster 2), Blue (Cluster 3), Yellow (Cluster 4), and Purple (Cluster 5).

Finally, the qualitative scoping synthesis of selected key papers within each cluster was guided by the five dimensions of the PAGER framework (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2022): Patterns (thematic and methodological trends), Advances (theoretical and platform-mediated breakthroughs), Gaps (neglected areas), Evidence for Practice (practical translation of findings), and Research Recommendations (actionable pathways for future inquiries).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

BIBLIOMETRIC PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

PUBLICATION OUTPUT AND GROWTH TRAJECTORY

A systematic performance analysis of the curated and cleaned dataset of 278 core publications published between 1995 and 2023 reveals a robust and highly interconnected research domain. The field has accumulated a total of 7,148 citations over a 30-year citable period, yielding an impressive average of 25.71 citations per paper (34.53 citations per cited paper) and an average of 255.29 citations per year. The scholarly impact of the discipline is further underscored by a high h-index of 42 and a g-index of 81. Out of the 278 publications, 74.46% (207 papers) are citable and cited, involving 430 contributing authors with an average collaboration rate of 1.55 authors per paper. Chronologically, the annual publication trajectory demonstrates three distinct developmental phases: early foundational exploration (1995–2007) averaging fewer than two papers annually, theoretical expansion and contextual diversification (2008–2018) catalyzed by the emergence of relational work frameworks, and rapid acceleration and digital-multimodal maturity (2019–2023) which accounts for over 45% of the entire dataset.

The first phase, early exploration and foundational formulation (1995–2007), is characterized by a very low and sporadic publication volume, averaging fewer than two papers per year. The temporal boundary of this study begins with the Swahili greetings analysis by Yahya-Othman (1995), which represents the first formal publication explicitly carrying the term “impoliteness” in its title in the Scopus database. This was immediately followed by Culpeper’s (1996) seminal paper, “Towards an anatomy of impoliteness” published in the Journal of Pragmatics, which laid the structural groundwork for understanding impoliteness as a patterned, intentional pragmatic strategy rather than a mere failure of politeness.

The second phase, theoretical expansion and contextual diversification (2008–2018), represents a significant turning point in the field. A major spike occurred in 2008 with 19 publications, which was directly catalyzed by two milestone events: the publication of the special issue “Impoliteness: Eclecticism and diaspora” in the Journal of Politeness Research (Bousfield & Culpeper, 2008) and the release of the highly influential edited volume “Impoliteness in Language” (Bousfield & Locher, 2008). This decade witnessed the consolidation of “second-generation” discursive approaches and relational work frameworks, expanding the focus from micro-level utterances to institutional, workplace, and early online communities of practice (Locher & Watts, 2008; Mills, 2009).

The third phase, rapid acceleration and digital-multimodal maturity (2019–2023), exhibits an intense concentration of scholarly output, accounting for over 45% of the entire dataset (126 out of 278 papers) in just five years, peaking at 31 publications in 2022. This rapid surge reflects the profound academic urgency to investigate how the unique technological affordances of contemporary digital platforms (e.g., social media comment sections, Danmaku streams, and mobile messaging) shape, amplify, and negotiate hostile, aggressive, and polarized public discourses (Groshek & Cutino, 2016; Oz et al., 2018).

MOST PRODUCTIVE AND INFLUENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

The intellectual boundaries and conceptual directions of linguistic impoliteness research have been heavily shaped by a small group of highly prolific scholars. To ensure an accurate and unbiased representation of author productivity and citation impact, a rigorous data cleaning protocol was executed to consolidate spelling variations and merge author name variants. Specifically, during the OpenRefine preprocessing phase, publications under "Garcés-Conejos Blitvich P." and "Blitvich P.G.-C." were systematically harmonized under a single standardized entry. The top 10 most productive and influential authors in this scientific domain are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Top 10 Most Productive and Influential Authors

Rank	Author Name	TP	TC	C/P	Year of First Publication
1	Culpeper, Jonathan	17	2,985	175.59	1996
2	Bousfield, Derek	9	1,016	112.89	2003
3	Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar	9	472	52.44	2009
4	Locher, Miriam A.	5	621	124.20	2008
5	Haugh, Michael	5	340	68.00	2010
6	Lorenzo-Dus, Nuria	5	269	53.80	2009
7	Bou-Franch, Patricia	5	215	43.00	2010
8	Mugford, Gerrard	5	46	9.20	2008
9	Mills, Sara	4	316	79.00	2005
10	Sifianou, Maria	4	113	28.25	2010

Note: TP = Total Publications, TC = Total Citations, C/P = Citations per Publication.

As shown in Table 2, Jonathan Culpeper of Lancaster University is the undisputed pioneer and most influential scholar in this field, leading both in productivity (17 papers) and citation impact (2,985 citations, averaging an exceptional 175.59 citations per paper). His continuous contributions from 1996 to the present day have consistently defined the theoretical paradigms of the discipline. Derek Bousfield ranks second with 9 publications and 1,016 citations, establishing critical frameworks for understanding impoliteness as an interactive, sequential process (Bousfield, 2008). Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich ranks third with 9 standardized publications and 472 citations, heavily focusing on the intersection of impoliteness, identity construction, and online public genres. Other prominent figures like Miriam A. Locher (5 TP, 621 TC), Michael Haugh (5 TP, 340 TC), and Sara Mills (4 TP, 316 TC) have been instrumental in introducing discursive, relational, and cultural perspectives, successfully shifting the field toward evaluative and recipient-oriented pragmatics (Haugh, 2015; Locher & Watts, 2008).

LEADING PUBLICATION VENUES

The dissemination of linguistic impoliteness research is concentrated within a select group of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals in the fields of linguistics, pragmatics, and communication studies. The top leading publication venues are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Core Publication Venues for Linguistic Impoliteness Research

Rank	Source Title	Publications	Percent (%)
1	Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture	34	12.23%
2	Journal of Pragmatics	32	11.51%
3	Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict	13	4.68%
4	Impoliteness in Language: Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice	12	4.32%
5	Intercultural Pragmatics	8	2.88%
6	Impoliteness in Media Discourse	8	2.88%
7	Russian Journal of Linguistics	8	2.88%
8	Pragmatics	5	1.80%

The *Journal of Politeness Research* (34 papers, 12.23%) and the *Journal of Pragmatics* (32 papers, 11.51%) emerge as the two primary, highly authoritative outlets for impoliteness studies. Together, these two journals host nearly a quarter of all global publications in this domain. This concentration is theoretically consistent: while the *Journal of Politeness Research* provides a specialized, niche forum dedicated entirely to relational work, face negotiation, and linguistic aggression, the *Journal of Pragmatics* serves as a broader, top-tier venue embedding impoliteness within general pragmatic theory, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis. Additionally, the emergence of specialized outlets like the *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* (13 papers, 4.68%) reflects the growing institutionalization of the field, highlighting a dedicated academic interest in linguistic conflict, hate speech, and verbal abuse across public and institutional spheres.

FOUNDATIONAL CLASSICS AND HIGHLY CITED WORKS

To identify the intellectual pillars and foundational classics of linguistic impoliteness, Table 4 lists the top 10 most highly cited documents in the dataset.

Table 4. Top 10 Highly Cited Documents in Linguistic Impoliteness

Rank	Author(s) & Year	Title	TC	C/Y
1	Culpeper (2011)	Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence	758	50.53
2	Culpeper (1996)	Towards an anatomy of impoliteness	718	23.93
3	Culpeper (2005)	Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: *The Weakest Link*	441	20.95
4	Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann (2003)	Impoliteness revisited: With special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects	401	17.43
5	Locher & Watts (2008)	Relational work and impoliteness: Negotiating norms of linguistic behaviour	241	13.39
6	Bousfield & Locher (2008)	*Impoliteness in language: Studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*	174	9.67
7	Culpeper (2008)	Reflections on impoliteness, relational work and power	158	8.78
8	Terkourafi (2008)	Toward a unified theory of politeness, impoliteness, and rudeness	157	8.72
9	Haugh & Bousfield (2012)	Mock impoliteness, jocular mockery and jocular abuse in Australian and British English	150	10.71
10	Culpeper (2010)	Conventionalised impoliteness formulae	132	8.25

Note: TC = Total Citations, C/Y = Citations per Year.

The citation ranking in Table 4 underlines the massive theoretical authority of Jonathan Culpeper, who author/co-authors six out of the ten most cited documents. His monograph, "Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence" (758 citations), stands as the definitive theoretical compendium of the field. His 1996 paper (718 citations) remains the premier classical reference introducing the five core impoliteness strategies (bald on-record, positive, negative, mock politeness/sarcasm, and withhold politeness).

Crucially, the presence of Locher and Watts (2008) with 241 citations reflects the broad acceptance of the discursive "relational work" framework, which dismantled the rigid dichotomy of politeness versus impoliteness by viewing all interpersonal linguistic choices along a complex, continuous spectrum of socially negotiated behaviors (including impolite, over-polite, appropriate, and polite behaviors). Furthermore, Haugh and Bousfield (2012) with 150 citations highlights the strong theoretical shift toward non-aggressive, playful manifestations of conflictual language, establishing "mock impoliteness" as a highly productive conceptual sub-domain.

SCIENCE MAPPING AND THEMATIC CLUSTERING

KEYWORD CO-OCCURRENCE NETWORK ANALYSIS

While performance analysis provides a retrospective metric of productivity and citation impacts, science mapping via keyword co-occurrence analysis uncovers the conceptual, cognitive, and thematic architecture of a scientific discipline (Donthu et al., 2021; Öztürk et al., 2024). In VOSviewer, the co-word network constructed from the cleaned dataset of 278 publications mapped the intellectual front of linguistic impoliteness research into five distinct, highly stable thematic clusters. The global co-occurrence network is visualized in Figure 1.

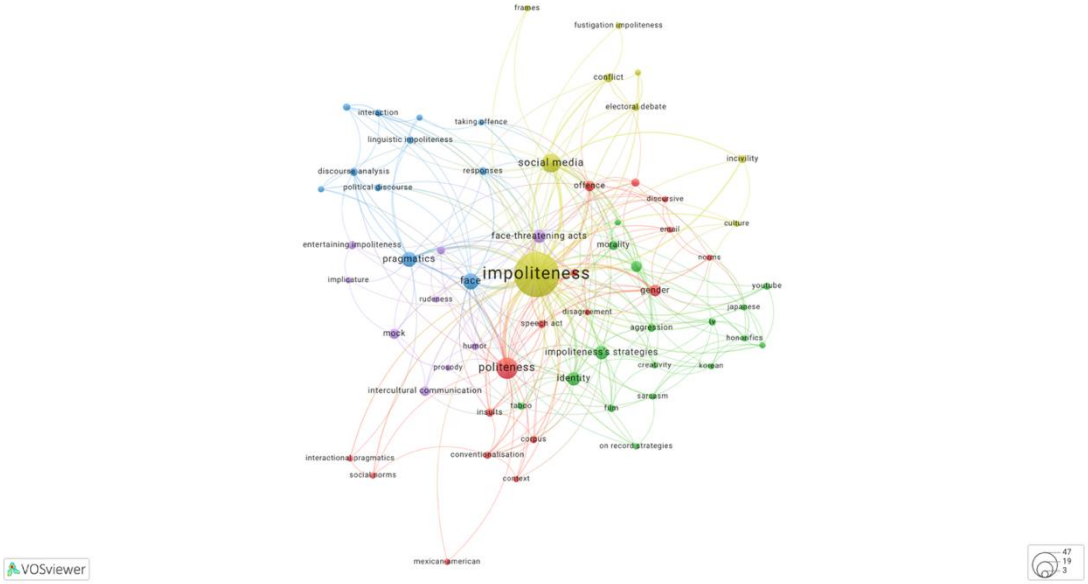


Figure 1. Global Keyword Co-occurrence Network Map of Linguistic Impoliteness Research

Note: Readers can interactively explore this multidimensional network online at https://tinyurl.com/226x4egy. To examine individual thematic clusters, trace specific keyword linkages, or locate low-frequency nodes, open the interactive link, show the control panel on the left sidebar, click the Find tab, and input the desired search term.

As shown in Figure 1, the word "impoliteness" operates as the absolute terminological hub of the network. However, to avoid the representation problem and ensure deep conceptual sensemaking, this study distinguishes between frequency-dominant keywords (high occurrence counts) and network-central keywords (high total link strength), as the latter serves as a more reliable indicator of network connectivity and conceptual brokerage (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Excluding the generic term "impoliteness" the network bifurcated into five clusters representing distinct epistemological orientations.

CLUSTER 1: NORMATIVE AND INTERACTIONAL IMPOLITENESS

Cluster 1, represented by the Red nodes in the global network (Figure 1), establishes the foundational sociopragmatic boundaries of interpersonal relational work. Anchored primarily by *politeness* and *norms*, this cluster marks a crucial theoretical transition from investigating static linguistic forms to analyzing situated, evaluative processes within specific communities of practice (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010; Locher & Watts, 2008). Scholarly inquiry in this domain addresses how interactants perceive and negotiate the boundaries of taking offence, positioning it as a dynamic, morally-situated moral evaluation rather than a simple reaction to rude language (Haugh, 2015). By deconstructing essentialist social variables, research within this cluster illustrates that categories such as gender are not static predictors of impoliteness, but are actively performed and contested through interactional and relational norms (Mills, 2005).

CLUSTER 2: DIGITAL, AGGRESSIVE, AND IDENTITY-ORIENTED IMPOLITENESS (GREEN NODES)

Cluster 2, highlighted by the Green nodes (Figure 1), maps the strategic deployment of linguistic conflict across early and emerging digital environments. Characterized by keywords such as *identity*, *computer mediated communication*, and *aggression*, this domain explores how the unique technological affordances of online spaces such as anonymity and asynchronous communication reshape face-threatening acts. Far from being random outbursts of hostility, digital impoliteness is strategically mobilized as a powerful resource for online identity construction and ideological out-group differentiation (Nishimura, 2010; Upadhyay, 2010). This digital negotiation often subverts standard expectations of respect, where polite linguistic devices like honorifics are contextually mobilized to produce sharp, sarcastic, and highly offensive evaluations (L. Brown, 2013). Furthermore, linguistic aggression in this cluster is closely linked to the defense of a community's perceived moral order, acting as a collaborative vehicle for moral policing (Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2018).

CLUSTER 3: PRAGMATIC, FACE, AND DISCOURSE FOUNDATIONS (BLUE NODES)

Cluster 3, represented by the Blue nodes (Figure 1), serves as the conceptual engine room of the co-occurrence network, providing the essential pragmatic machinery utilized to deconstruct the mechanics of face-attacking behaviors. Constructed around the core constructs of *face* and *pragmatics*, this cluster emphasizes the sequential, interactive, and power-sensitive nature of linguistic conflict (Limberg, 2009). Research here demonstrates that impoliteness cannot be analyzed in isolation; it must be investigated as an interactional sequence where the recipient's responses actively shape the trajectory of the encounter. This interactive focus is heavily constrained by social distance and power differentials, particularly in institutional settings and foreign language learner interactions (Wijayanto et al., 2017). On a macro-discursive level, this

cluster highlights how political actors strategically deploy face attacks as deliberate discursive instruments to challenge authority and sway public audiences (Schubert, 2022).

CLUSTER 4: SOCIAL-MEDIA, CONFLICT, AND POLITICAL IMPOLITENESS (YELLOW NODES)

Cluster 4, marked by the Yellow nodes (Figure 1), represents the broad convergence of linguistic impoliteness with large-scale public, institutional, and political communication. Anchored by the critical keyword *social media*, this domain highlights the escalation of linguistic conflict from private interpersonal spaces into highly persistent, public, and algorithmically amplified arenas. Research in this cluster reveals that platform affordances such as Twitter's character limits and rapid posting cycles directly co-constitute the patterns and intensity of online incivility and impoliteness compared to more deliberative networks like Facebook (Oz et al., 2018). This platform-mediated reality challenges traditional, micro-level interpersonal models, forcing a theoretical transition toward critical discourse analysis to untangle how national, cultural, and ideological conflicts are negotiated globally (Groshek & Cutino, 2016; Mills, 2009).

CLUSTER 5: HUMOROUS, INTERCULTURAL, AND METAPRAGMATIC IMPOLITENESS (PURPLE NODES)

Cluster 5, represented by the Purple nodes (Figure 1), captures the contemporary evaluative and metapragmatic turn in interpersonal pragmatics. Anchored by *face-threatening acts*, *mock*, and *humor*, this cluster shatters the traditional assumption that conflictual language is always destructive or hostile. Instead, it deconstructs the highly complex, ambiguous boundaries of mock impoliteness such as jocular mockery and banter revealing that the perception of playful intent depends heavily on non-verbal resources, including prosody and bodily gestures (McKinnon & Prieto, 2014). This multimodal creativity is further expanded in visual-rhetorical genres, where cartoonists combine verbal and visual elements to execute complex, indirect face attacks (Abdel-Raheem, 2022). On contemporary participatory platforms, this manifests as entertaining impoliteness, where third-party viewers actively negotiate the delicate metapragmatic balance between humor and genuine hostility (Liu, 2023).

THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

THE THREE-TIERED ARCHITECTURE OF IMPOLITENESS RESEARCH

Rather than viewing the five mapped keyword co-occurrence clusters as isolated thematic domains, a holistic synthesis of the dataset reveals a highly integrated, three-tiered conceptual architecture that has characterized the evolution of linguistic impoliteness research over the past three decades. This multi-layered structure comprising the foundational bedrock, the interactive manifestation, and the emerging contextual domains explains how the discipline has systematically expanded its analytical scope from micro-linguistic forms to macro-social and platform-mediated discourses.

THE FOUNDATION LAYER (THE BEIDROCK EXPECTATIONS)

The first tier, the Foundation Layer, represents the theoretical engine and normative baseline of the discipline. This layer is conceptually anchored by the structural and discursive keywords from Cluster 3 (*face* and *pragmatics*) and Cluster 1 (*politeness* and *context*), such as *face*, *pragmatics*, *politeness*, *norms*, and *context* (Culpeper, 1996; Locher & Watts, 2008). It addresses the fundamental, pre-existing sociopragmatic structures that individuals bring to any communicative encounter. Historically, early foundational classics positioned impoliteness as a direct, structural violation of politeness maxim formulations or as intentional face-threatening acts (FTAs) targeting the positive or negative face needs of the interactants (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996).

However, as the literature matured, relational work frameworks successfully expanded this foundation by demonstrating that face is not a static, individual possession but an intersubjectively negotiated social expectation (Locher & Watts, 2008). In this tier, norms (empirical, moral, and historical) and context act as the primary filters through which any linguistic behavior is projected. Interactants continually evaluate verbal actions against a baseline of "appropriate" or "politic" behavior established within specific communities of practice (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010; Graham, 2008). Without this foundational tier, impoliteness cannot be systematically diagnosed, as there can be no perception of offense without a prior violation of a socially shared, normative expectation.

THE MANIFESTATION LAYER (THE INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT)

The second tier, the Manifestation Layer, captures the active realization, interactive sequences, and direct consequences of face-attacking behaviors. This layer is composed of keywords representing active conflict, including *impoliteness's strategies*, *aggression*, *conflict*, *offence*, *disagreement*, and *identity* (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2005). Here, the abstract expectations of the Foundation Layer are operationalized into dynamic social practices.

Research in this layer demonstrates that impoliteness is rarely a one-way, isolated utterance; instead, it unfolds as a highly structured interactional sequence where the recipient's response is just as influential as the speaker's intent in shaping the trajectory of the conflict (Bousfield, 2008; Limberg, 2009). Furthermore, this tier highlights that face attacks are heavily driven by power asymmetries. In unequal institutional or professional encounters, the strategic mobilization of impoliteness serves to assert dominance, police boundaries, or challenge established hierarchies (Bousfield & Locher, 2008).

Crucially, as shown by Mills (2005) and Upadhyay (2010), linguistic aggression in this layer is not merely a destructive force; it is a highly productive resource utilized for identity work. By executing patterned face attacks, speakers discursively construct their own gendered, professional, or ideological positions while simultaneously "othering" their interactional opponents.

THE CONTEXTUAL AND EMERGING DOMAINS (THE MODERN FRONTIER)

The third tier, the Contextual and Emerging Domains, represents the contemporary frontier where linguistic conflict meets technological mediation and interpretive complexity. This layer is populated by keywords from Cluster 2, Cluster 4, and Cluster 5, such as *social media*, *computer mediated communication*, *electoral debate*, *mock*, *humor*, *metapragmatics*, and *intercultural communication* (Abdel-Raheem, 2022; Liu, 2023; Oz et al., 2018). It explores

how the affordances of contemporary communication platforms reshape the realization and evaluation of impoliteness.

The digitalization of conflict has effectively transformed impoliteness from fleeting, private interpersonal encounters into persistent, scalable, and networked public discourses (Groshek & Cutino, 2016; Oz et al., 2018). On social media platforms, verbal conflicts are algorithmically curated and broadcasted to massive virtual audiences, giving rise to unique phenomena such as collective moral policing (Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2018) and divine impoliteness in religious struggles (Zidjaly, 2019).

Concurrently, this tier captures a profound shift toward metapragmatic evaluation and multimodal complexity (Haugh, 2015). Research here dismantles the traditional genuine-versus-playful dichotomy by exploring how interactants utilize prosodic variations, visual-rhetorical metaphors, and platform-specific designs (such as Danmaku comment streams) to negotiate the delicate boundaries of mock impoliteness and entertaining impoliteness (Abdel-Raheem, 2022; Liu, 2023; McKinnon & Prieto, 2014).

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SHIFTS OF LINGUISTIC IMPOLITENESS

Beyond mapping the structural layers of the literature, the comprehensive scoping review of key papers across the five thematic clusters uncovers a profound, multi-dimensional epistemological evolution. Over the past thirty years, the academic understanding of linguistic impoliteness has undergone six major conceptual shifts, fundamentally redefining the research questions, methodologies, and boundaries of the discipline.

FROM LINGUISTIC FORM TO SITUATED EVALUATION

The first major shift represents a transition from linguistic form to situated evaluation. Early classical frameworks were heavily form-biased, operating on the assumption that specific lexical items (e.g., swear words, slurs) or syntactic structures possessed inherent, stable impolite meanings (Culpeper, 1996).

However, contemporary research has firmly established that no linguistic form is inherently impolite. As illustrated by Angouri and Tseliga (2010), spelling variations, typographic cues, and blunt disagreements only acquire a face-attacking value when they violate the historically negotiated expectations of a specific community of practice. This shift is conceptually completed by Brown's (L. Brown, 2013) study on sarcastic honorifics, proving that structurally polite forms can contextually produce highly offensive evaluations. Thus, the analytical focus has permanently shifted from asking "what forms are impolite?" to "how and why is a specific form evaluated as impolite in this context?"

FROM SPEAKER-ORIENTATION TO INTERACTIONAL SEQUENCE

The second shift involves a movement from speaker-orientation to interactional sequence. Traditional politeness and early impoliteness models were heavily speaker-centric, relying on the speaker's communicative intent to diagnose face attacks.

Contemporary interpersonal pragmatics has deconstructed this bias by emphasizing that impoliteness is an interactional achievement (Bousfield, 2008). First, as Haugh (2015) argued, causing offence is conceptually distinct from taking offence, as the latter is an active, agentive social action executed by the recipient rather than a passive reaction to a speaker's utterance. Second, as Limberg (2009) demonstrated, the meaning and gravity of a face attack are

continually negotiated, escalated, or mitigated through subsequent response sequences. Consequently, impoliteness is now analyzed as a dynamic, co-constructed interactional dialogue rather than a static, one-way speaker utterance.

FROM INDIVIDUAL FACE TO SOCIAL IDENTITY WORK

The third shift marks a transition from individual face to social identity work. Early models viewed impoliteness through a narrow, clinical lens as a direct threat to an individual's personal face desires (the desire to be approved of or unimposed upon) (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Modern sociopragmatics has broadened this scope, positioning impoliteness as a powerful discursive resource utilized for macro-social identity construction and group membership negotiation. Mills (2005) deconstructed the essentialist variables of gender, showing how masculine and feminine personas are actively performed and evaluated through relational work. Concurrently, Upadhyay (2010) and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2018) demonstrated how public conflicts on participatory platforms function as sites of selective dissociation, where individuals strategically deploy aggressive language to align with ideological in-groups and disaffiliate from top-down, superimposed representations. Impoliteness has thus evolved from a simple interpersonal violation to a strategic instrument of social and cultural positioning.

FROM INTERPERSONAL SPACES TO NETWORKED PUBLIC ARENAS

The fourth shift represents a dramatic geographical and contextual expansion from interpersonal spaces to networked public arenas. For decades, the empirical data of impoliteness research were restricted to private, face-to-face conversational exchanges, telephone directories, or literary and dramatic scripts (Culpeper, 1996; Culpeper et al., 2003).

The rapid proliferation of digital communication platforms has catalyzed a major shift toward large-scale public discourse. In these networked spaces, conflict ceases to be private; it is archived, highly visible, and algorithmically amplified to massive, anonymous third-party audiences. Oz, Zheng, and Chen (2018) proved that the patterns and deliberative qualities of these public conflicts are actively shaped by platform affordances, with Twitter's design producing significantly more uncivil and impolite comments compared to Facebook. Impoliteness is no longer just a matter of interpersonal rapport; it has become a central variable in democratic discourse, online polarization, and public communication governance.

FROM VERBAL AGGRESSION TO MORAL AND IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING

The fifth shift involves a conceptual transition from verbal aggression to moral and ideological positioning. Early narrative reviews often treated impoliteness as synonymous with irrational, destructive, or "anti-social" behavior.

Contemporary empirical studies have dismantled this pathologizing view, revealing that impoliteness is frequently a rational, morally motivated practice. Parvaresh and Tayebi (2018) showed that aggressive comments on social media are often executed as a form of collective moral policing, where the aggressors believe they are defending the shared moral order of their society. Similarly, Zidjaly (2019) demonstrated how Twitter users mobilize divine impoliteness to negotiate religious face and contest Islamic reform. In these public struggles, the executor of impoliteness does not perceive themselves as uncivil; instead, they

position their face attacks as a legitimate, justified defense of moral, cultural, or religious values.

FROM GENUINE HOSTILITY TO METAPRAGMATIC COMPLEXITY

The sixth and final shift represents a transition from genuine hostility to metapragmatic complexity. Early research operated on a binary assumption where a speaker was either genuinely polite or genuinely rude.

Cluster 5 successfully shatters this binary by exploring the highly complex, ambiguous boundaries of mock impoliteness and playfulness (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). McKinnon and Prieto (2014) showed that evaluating mock impoliteness is cognitively complex and relies heavily on multimodal resources, such as prosody and bodily gestures, which are absent in pure textual forms. This complexity is further heightened on digital platforms, where third-party viewers actively negotiate entertaining impoliteness such as Chinese Roast TV show comments (Liu, 2023) where the success of the genre relies entirely on a delicate, metapragmatically managed balance between sharp face attacks (impoliteness) and humor (funniness). The focus has thus evolved from categorizing speech acts to deconstructing the complex metapragmatic evaluations that allow interactants to distinguish playful banter from genuine hostility.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully mapped the academic evolution and intellectual landscape of global linguistic impoliteness research from 1995 to 2023 through a rigorous scoping review and bibliometric analysis (ScoRBA) of 278 core publications extracted from the Scopus database. The chronological trajectory demonstrates a clear transition from sporadic foundational explorations (1995–2007) and theoretical diversification (2008–2018) to rapid digital and multimodal acceleration (2019–2023), reflecting an escalating scholarly response to interpersonal conflicts in contemporary society. By utilizing VOSviewer and OpenRefine, the conceptual architecture of the domain was systematically mapped into five distinct thematic clusters: (1) normative and interactional impoliteness represented by red nodes, (2) digital, aggressive, and identity-oriented impoliteness represented by green nodes, (3) pragmatic, face, and discourse foundations represented by blue nodes, (4) social media, conflict, and political impoliteness represented by yellow nodes, and (5) humorous, intercultural, and metapragmatic impoliteness represented by purple nodes. Together, these clusters illustrate how linguistic impoliteness has matured into a robust, highly institutionalized, and multi-disciplinary field of inquiry.

The theoretical synthesis reveals a profound, multi-dimensional epistemological shift from "first-generation" micro-level, form-based categorizations to "second-generation" context-dependent, socially situated, and metapragmatically negotiated evaluations of relational work. Linguistic impoliteness is no longer conceptualized as a static, individual face-threatening act or a mere failure of cooperative politeness; rather, it is recognized as a dynamic interactional achievement, a creative multimodal resource, and a powerful instrument for social identity work, moral policing, and ideological positioning in networked public arenas. The rapid proliferation of digital platform affordances has permanently decentralized face attacks from private interpersonal exchanges to highly scalable, algorithmically curated, and persistent virtual forums, shifting the core analytical focus of interpersonal pragmatics toward recipient-oriented evaluations, taking offense, and complex metapragmatic negotiations.

Based on the systematic gaps identified through the PAGER framework, future research in linguistic impoliteness must prioritize three strategic pathways. First, there is an urgent need for methodological diversification, transitioning from dominant manual qualitative discourse analyses to mixed-method designs that integrate eye-tracking experimental pragmatics, psychological measures of taking offense, and natural language processing (NLP) for computational linguistics on big data. Second, empirical inquiry should expand to underrepresented geopolitical regions and emerging short-video digital platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts) to unpack how non-Western cultural norms, moral codes, and algorithmic affordances shape contemporary face-negotiation processes. Third, scholars should construct robust, unified theoretical frameworks that systematically map multimodal impoliteness, examining the simultaneous interaction of verbal text, visual-rhetorical imagery, prosody, and bodily gestures in public and political conflicts.

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