UNDERSTANDING IMPOLITE UTTERANCES ON FACEBOOK IN KENYA: A CYBERPRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the different pragmatic strategies that Kenyans use to understand impolite utterances on Facebook. Research shows that impoliteness is common in today's society. For example, in the political arena, Kenyan politicians use both positive and negative Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) to convey their agendas. This highlights the significance of language choices in communication. Additionally, parliamentarians utilize both positive and negative politeness strategies to ensure effective communication within the National Assembly. This approach helps mitigate threats to face and emphasizes the importance of linguistic politeness in promoting harmonious interactions. Research shows that individuals who communicate online tend to display more aggressive and antagonistic behaviors. Online platforms often provide users the opportunity to behave unpleasantly. In the context of cyberbullying among university students, strategies such as blocking offenders, pursuing legal action, and enhancing online security are employed to combat this issue. These proactive measures aim to address the impoliteness commonly found in digital interactions, highlighting that online communication typically exhibits higher levels of impoliteness compared to face-to-face communication. Using the inferential cognitive and social cognitive systems in Escandell-Vidal's (2004) theory of impoliteness, the study qualitatively analyzed data. Findings indicate that both the inferential cognitive and social cognitive systems work simultaneously in the interpretation of impoliteness on Facebook.

1. Introduction

The growth in the number of internet users has necessitated a rise in research on internet language. Yus (2011: 1) claims that this surge in internet research has been observed because the internet, as a medium of communication, has prompted studies on human behavior by social scientists, educators, and marketers. One area of study that emerged due to the surge in internet studies is Cyberpragmatics. Cyberpragmatics is a term coined by Francisco Yus in 2001 to refer to the cognitive study or evaluation of computer-mediated communication (CMC), also known as internet-mediated communication. Francisco Yus has applied this brand of pragmatics to conduct research in various contexts (2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). These studies primarily analyze the challenges faced by interactants when attempting to compensate for a "lack of orality" (Yus, 2021:77) in various contexts. Pragmatics refers to the study of language in use, encompassing the appreciation of literary works and digital spaces (Bernabéu and Ortega, 2024; Martello, 2023).

Cyberpragmatics is grounded in relevance theory, where context plays a crucial role in the production and interpretation of information. According to Sperber and Wilson (1987: 40), context is shaped by a person's assumptions about the world and is utilized in the interpretation process of communicative acts or stimuli. Context can be categorized into various sources of information that a person uses to derive meaning and interpret the intended message of another participant in a conversation. For example, an interlocutor can gather information from their general knowledge, the physical environment, previous remarks made during the same interaction, and from what they remember clearly from the conversation. Consequently, each participant in the dialogue has a preliminary context made up of prior utterances or statements spoken earlier in that exchange (Sperber and Wilson, 1987: 593).

In addition, Sperber and Wilson (1987) postulate that the relevance of a proposition may be minimized or maximized by variations in contextual information. Of more interest to relevance theory is how interactants cognitively combine new information and contextual information to generate contextual implications (593). Regarding the internet, Yus (2011: 15) asserts that interactants have limited access to contextual information, which is attributed to the characteristics of various media of communication. This limited access to contextual information on the internet is constrained or limited by the features of the different channels of communication. This is in accord with Kelsey and Amant's (2008: 426) views of CMC as a medium that de-personalizes. The features of the internet media reduce contextual information available to both interactants, resulting in social anonymity.

In the same vein, Metz (1994: 39) postulates that CMC lacks regulating cues, such as recognizing when an interactant understands the message before moving on to the next topic and speaking when spoken to. Moreover, Sproull and Kiesler (1986: 1494) argue that there is a complete absence of expressive (nonverbal) behavior cues such as nods, eye contact, tone of voice, and distance, which cause a lot of misunderstanding as a consequence of perceived meaning derived from the tone and context left to human imagination. Since substantial pragmatic consequences are associated

with variations in accessibility to context, there are also consequences related to the amount and quality of information produced and interpreted within it.

Just as in face-to-face conversations, context is crucial in the production and interpretation of online information (Lai, 2024: 2633-2634). Interactants adjust the target, verbal content, and tone of their utterances in response to their interpretation of the situation (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986: 1494). On the internet, the conversational tasks of the "addresser user" (speaker) and the "addressee user" (hearer) are no different from those that characterize face-to-face conversations. The "sender user" (speaker) predicts that his [her] interlocutor will arrive at relevant conclusions by accessing contextual information that is necessary for the interpretation process. Similarly, "addressee users" (hearers) are expected to search for relevance in texts, pictures, videos, or any form of utterance and process it (Yus, 2011: 14).

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Kesley and Amant (2008: 934) share the same assumptions that, contrary to face-to-face conversation, computer-mediated communication is characterized by conversational constraints due to a lack of contextual cues that are readily available in face-to-face communication. They even go further to claim that CMC lacks paralinguistic features that facilitate the efficiency of encoding and decoding messages among interactants. Prosodic features, which fall under paralinguistic features, such as intonation, pitch, accent, tone of voice and pause, enable interactants to communicate a variety of emotional as well as socio-cognitive meanings. Typing on a keyboard also does not facilitate the deliverance of non-verbal signals such as facial expressions and gestures that convey affective and interpersonal stances.

Besides, typed texts on the keyboard are cues-filtered, and may require, in some instances, extra mental effort hence making it difficult for the internet users to identify their interlocutor's hidden intentions, feelings, emotions and attitudes (Yus, 2011: 18). Eventually, they affect the relevance of communication that is text-based. One thing that cuts across all cyber media is the existence of an information gap that needs to be filled through the inference process despite the fact that these internet media offer limited choices for contextualization. Information gaps that need to be filled inferentially exist between what an interactant intends to convey and what he [she] actually utters, and between what the speaker utters and what his [her] interlocutor picks up.

To summarize, context is crucial in the production and interpretation of utterances in internet-mediated communication, just as it is in face-to-face interaction. The interpretation process that characterizes face-to-face interaction is no different from the one that characterizes internet-mediated communication. However, accessibility to contextual information in internet-mediated communication is limited compared to other, more context-saturated forms of communication. If this is the case, is the interpretation of impoliteness on the internet affected in any way since the latter heavily relies on contextual information? This study, therefore, sought to determine the pragmatic strategies Kenyans employ in the interpretation of impolite utterances on Facebook.

The study was therefore guided by the following research question: which pragmatic strategies do Kenyans employ in the interpretation of impolite utterances on Facebook? This paper has various sections. The second section of the paper gives an overview of impoliteness in Computer- Mediated Communication while section three discusses Escandell Vidal's (2004) Theory of Impoliteness. The methods used in the study will be detailed in section four. Section five is dedicated to findings followed by the concluding remarks.

2. An Overview of Impoliteness in Computer-Mediated Communication

According to Yus (2011: 269), no sentence structure or phrase is inherently polite or impolite; therefore, context plays a crucial role in the study of (im)politeness. (Im)politeness is a dynamic process, meaning that linguistic structures themselves do not dictate (im)politeness. Instead, it is the interpretation of these structures by interactants during communication that determines whether something is perceived as polite or impolite (Watts, 2003:8). Impoliteness theory also takes into consideration the context of interaction (O'Keefes, Clancy and Adolphs, 2011: 73). Much of the work on impoliteness tends to move away from paying attention to an individual's grammatical or lexical strategies; hence, impoliteness theorists are most interested in the hearer's response to an impolite utterance and how interactants resolve a particular confrontational encounter since more often than not, impoliteness triggers a reaction from the hearer (O'Keefes, Clancy and Adolphs, 2011: 71). Chapman (2011: 140) affirms this by postulating that impoliteness theory takes into consideration the context of interaction since there are some instances where the combination of context and the communicative act amount to impoliteness.

Hardaker (2012: 71) opines that interactants are more predisposed to aggressive behavior or conflict while communicating online. This is facilitated by several factors, such as the anonymity that characterizes CMC, which may encourage aggression, manipulation, and deception (Hardaker, 2012: i). Hardaker (2015) examined the trolling and flaming that characterize CMC. While both are considered antagonizing behaviors, 'trolling' is basically intentional and carried out for amusement's sake (Hardaker, 2015: 202), and 'flaming' is aggressive and hostile and can be termed as an extreme overreaction by an interactant to a post (Graham and Hardaker, 2017: 804). Graham (2007: 743) also shares the assumption that flaming characterizes

CMC and that it manifests in a similar way to offline impoliteness, particularly in terms of the degree of hostility. Yus (2011: 265) supports this notion by claiming that impoliteness manifests on the internet in the form of flaming, attributing this to the absence of physical co-presence on the internet.

Metz (1994: 39) attributes online impoliteness to a lack of or limited regulating feedback that governs behavior, such as recognizing when an interlocutor understands the message before moving on to the next topic and speaking when spoken to. These findings are analogous to those of Sproull and Kiesler (1986:1495). The latter postulates that when there are strong social context cues in an interaction, behavior tends to be relatively differentiated, other-focused, and controlled; however, when these cues are weak, interactants' feelings of anonymity lead them to be relatively self-centered and uncontrolled. According to the Social Presence theory, which deals with bandwidth and social presence in relation to more traditional media, nonverbal cues play a crucial role in any form of communication, as they make the communicator's presence more salient and enhance the friendliness and warmth of the interaction. Online communication lacks nonverbal cues. Moreover, text-based systems have low bandwidth, which translates to a limited social presence (Walther, 2002: 531). In support of this, Kiesler (1986: 48) claims that computer-mediated communication lacks the nonverbal cues that typically characterize face-to-face interaction, especially those used to express setting, purpose, roles, decorum, effect, and relative status. Without these cues, interactants would become engrossed in themselves and the task and end up disinhibited and hostile.

In addition, the cues-filtered model posits that the functions played by nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication are unmet in computer-mediated communication. This is mainly because non-verbal cues are lacking; thus, computer-mediated communication (CMC) must be impersonal if no other cues can fulfill the social functions that co-presence, physical appearance, and dynamic non-verbal behavior can (Walther, 2002: 532). These findings are analogous to those of Kesley, Sigrid, and Kirk (2008: 935). They opine that the absence of contextual cues leads to linguistic ambiguity and miscommunication, unlike face-to-face communication. Kraut et al. (1992: 375) support this notion by arguing that CMC media not only damages existing offline social ties but also impedes the formation of new ones.

Social media platforms are an indispensable fragment of human life (Gitu, Atoh and Basweti, 2024: 3). These platforms have become means of interaction for the wider community (Purwat et al., 2022: 35). They have also surfaced as a predominant source of information especially for news readers (Kharisma, 2023: 44). In Social Networking Sites (SNS), participants are usually allowed to listen, watch, read, create, comment and share any form of available content. With just a few clicks on the search bar, any imaginable subject can immediately appear on the screen. Due to this ease of access to information, online communication has been almost limitless hitherto. Unfortunately, such expediency on social media platforms often leads to harassment (Nurul, 2018: 71).

Social media platforms have gained immense popularity today, and politicians have embraced this trend. Many of them use these platforms to share their ideas while also capturing public attention (Elaf and Hussein, 2020: 66). Studies indicate that specific journalistic settings on social media encourage particular online behaviors, such as clicking on news items, commenting on them, and sharing them with others. The comment section allows participants to express their opinions, which often leads to a space filled with hatred and extremism. Verbal attacks, hate speech, and other toxic expressions have become commonplace on social media platforms (Kharisma, 2023: 44).

The extent of antagonism and disagreement on the internet is baffling, especially in the interactions that characterize social media platforms. These platforms are characterized by violations of social standards, aggression, incivility, and attacks on interlocutors' social identity and social image (Marta, 2023: 1). This is the case because interlocutors can now interact freely without the constraints of time and space. This causes people to unconsciously evoke things that violate the concept of politeness in language, resulting in impoliteness (Purwat et al., 2022: 35). Additionally, communicators have varied styles and ways of using language when interacting with one another. They are normally aware of their choice of words and would mostly select words wisely, using polite language to ensure that the communication process runs smoothly. However, there are some who do not pay attention to their choice of words, and this necessitates impoliteness (Vini and Delvil, 2018: 225).

In summary, politeness is important for satisfactory relations on the internet, something that is particularly fragile in a multi-geographical communicative environment. Of course, interlocutors are typically placed in very dissimilar speech communities and within different physical locations, which often employ particular politeness strategies that cannot be easily exported to other communities (Yus, 2011: 285). Since it has already been established that computer-mediated communication is characterized by impoliteness, how is it interpreted despite limited contextual information?

3. Escandell-Vidal's Theory of Impoliteness

In a recent study, Escandell-Vidal (2004) proposes that human cognition can process, almost simultaneously, specific pieces of information conveyed in utterances and the social information derived from the processing of inputs. Essentially, there are two cognitive skills of the human mind, which are undertaken by specialized cognitive modules. One of the modules is responsible for processing utterances by filling information gaps, a process referred to as the inferential cognitive system. The other module is known as the social cognitive system, which compares the information gained from interpreting utterances or texts with the social information already stored in our minds. Within this stored information, there is a sub-group that focuses on (im)politeness strategies. Indeed, these cognitive functions are undertaken independently of the origin or source of the utterances, which may vary, for instance, from face-to-face oral interactions to oral communications via mobile devices, typed email messages, and so on. According to this model, repeated communicative inter-

actions produce an increasingly precise picture of the rules, common goals, interests, etc., which characterize interactive behavior within a particular community, including behavior in both physical and virtual environments (Yus, 2011: 283)

The inferential system is geared towards maximizing relevance, to extract the most relevant details from utterances that are normally inferred from the schemata of words uttered by interlocutors. On the other hand, the social system is oriented towards attaining and stabilizing social information from everyday communicative interactions and characteristics, which include the employment of (im)politeness strategies. Typically, the actions of the social cognitive system generate a repository of information regarding (im)politeness strategies that are, with varying degrees of disparity, shared within a community. The two cognitive systems are characterized by the same universal status; that is, they exist in all human beings, and the latter systematically gravitates towards optimizing the information that the systems process (Yus, 2011: 283). This theory proved useful in interpreting impolite utterances on Facebook in Kenya.

4. Methodology
4.1 Research Design
This study was qualitative in nature since the researchers were interested in linguistic behaviour occurring in a natural setting (Friedman, 2012:185). Instrumental in understanding people's behaviour, attitudes, and interactions, the qualitative method was helpful in studying impoliteness in interactions. The research used two qualitative approaches: observational studies and textual analysis of posts and comments. Regarding observational studies, the researchers examined interactions on Facebook as people went about their daily lives online, without participating or interfering. According to Bryant (n.d.: 5), the observation method allows researchers to capture and understand the context of interactions, which is crucial for this study. This method is essential for collecting data about people's behaviors (Kawulich, 2012: 2). In this research, the researchers employed a covert observation method, where the participants being observed are unaware of their observation. This approach is particularly suitable in situations where participants' knowledge of being observed might alter their behavior (Kawulich, 2012: 3). Therefore, the researchers closely monitored impolite linguistic patterns on Facebook, produced by users either consciously or unconsciously, to achieve more reliable results. The primary objective of this approach was to identify patterns in the discourse that might escape the attention of a casual observer or even the participants themselves. This advantage of the observation method is also noted by Bryant (n.d.: 5). The study focused on interactants' linguistic choices on Facebook regarding impoliteness. These choices were not only conditioned exclusively by linguistic considerations but also by context.

The researchers conducted a textual and content analysis of posts and comments on Facebook, focusing on impolite utterances. They examined how words were used within their specific contexts to infer the nature of impoliteness in the texts. Textual analysis entails choosing the types of texts, acquiring appropriate ones and

determining the approach to use to analyze them (Botan et al., 1999: 5). Specifically, content analysis was crucial in this study since it was used to identify and analyze occurrences of particular messages and characteristics of messages embedded in texts (Botan et al., 1999: 3). This method allowed the researchers to analyze data inductively and establish links between the objectives and summary findings generated from the raw data.

4.2 Data Collection

The researchers employed purposive sampling to seek information-rich cases of impoliteness, guided by the model. The corpus of data was sourced from utterances coded in words rather than numbers. Kenya being a multilingual country, the researchers were fully aware that posts and comments would be encoded in English, Kiswahili, and Gikuyu, among others. Kenya is a multilingual country in Africa. It is a home to about 61 existing indigenous languages and one is now extinct. Swahili is one of the indigenous languages, which is used as an official language. Moreover, seven existing non-indigenous languages have already taken root within the country. Among them is English which is used as an official language alongside Swahili (Ethnologue, 2025). The researchers were fully aware that posts and comments would be encoded in English, Swahili, and Gikuyu, among others.

Table 1. gives a breakdown of the indigenous languages spoken in Kenya. *Figure 1.*, the map of Kenya shows the distribution of languages spoken in the country.

The concept of saturation served as a guiding principle in collecting data for this study, as outlined in the qualitative approach. The saturation point refers to a situation where fewer surprises arise as a researcher collects data, and no further emerging issues or patterns within the data are identified (Saunders et al., 2017, 1893). Thus, the saturation point marked the final point of data collection for the researcher. This is why the study considered six strings of conversations, which would help provide a clear picture of the impoliteness situation on Facebook in Kenya.

Ateso	Ekegusii	Kipsigis	Nyala	Rendille
Aweer	El Molo	Kitharaka	Okiek	Sabaot
Borana	Garre	Kuria	Olukhayo	Sagalla
Bukusu	Gichuka	Luidakho-	Olumarachi	Samburu
Chichinyi-	Gikuyu	Luisukha-	Olumarama	Singa
Chidzihana-	Kamba	Lutirichi	Olunyole	Somali
Chikauma	Keiyo	Lukabaras	Olusumia	Suba
Chidigo	Kenyan Sign	Lulogooli	Olushisa	Swahili
Chiduruma	Language	Lutachoni	Olutsotso	Taveta
Daasanach	Kiembu	Maasai	Oluwanga	Terik
Dahalo	Kigiryama	Markweeta	Omotik	Tugen
Dawida	Kimiiru	Mwimbi-	Orma	Turkana
Dholuo	Kipfokomu	Muthambi	Pokoot	Waata
		Nandi		Yaaku

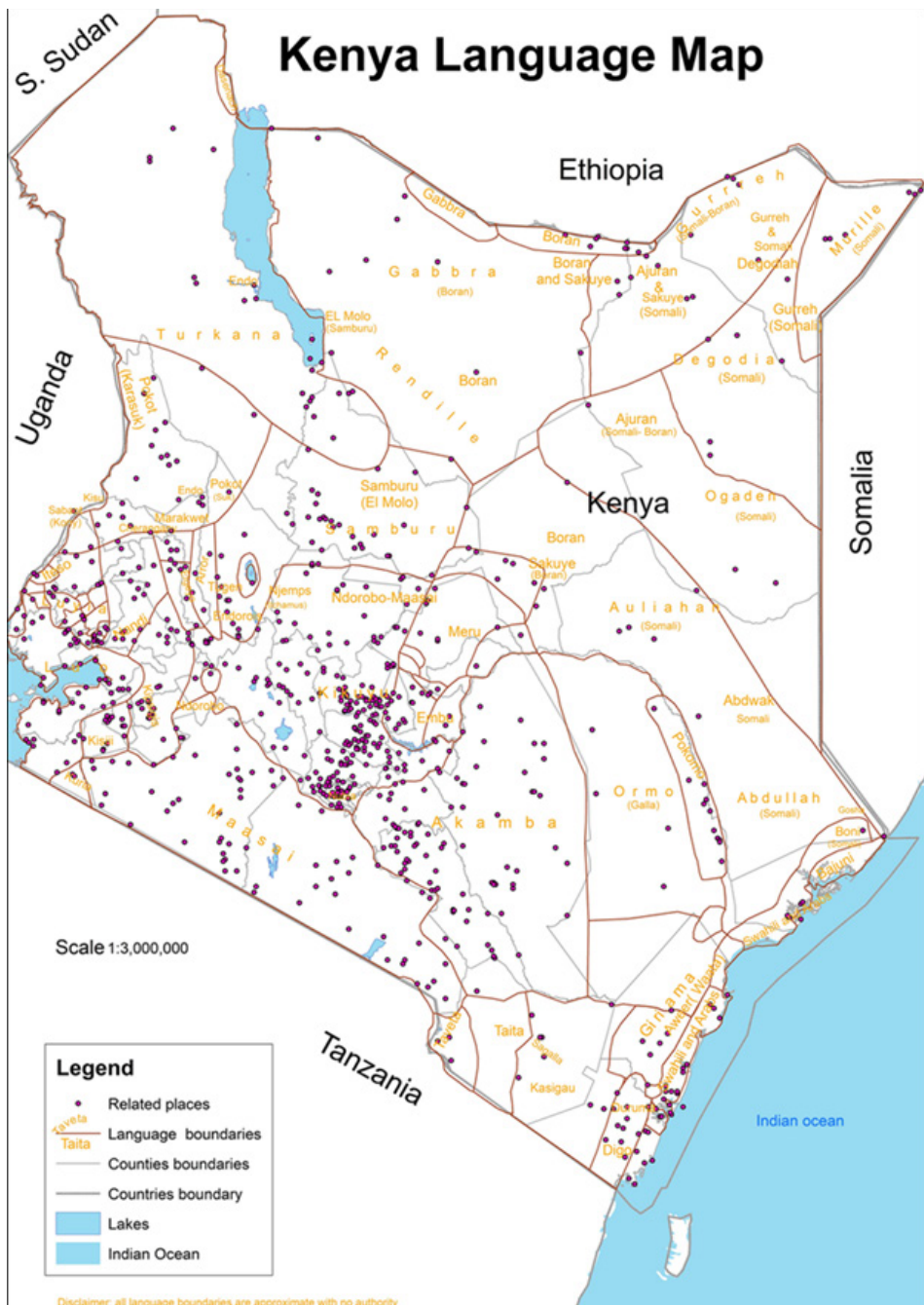Table 1: A table highlighting indigenous languages in Kenya. Source: Ethnologue (2025)

Figure 1: The Map of Kenya showing the distribution of the languages spoken in the country. Source: Nyangweso and Gede (2022:777)

The researchers, who are frequent users of Facebook, identified impolite posts and comments on the platform and recorded them in their original languages. For posts written in Kiswahili and Gikuyu, they made translations into English. When it came to languages the researchers were not familiar with, they sought assistance from competent speakers who could help with the interpretation. The data sampling was not conducted randomly, as random selection would compromise the context—a critical element in interpreting and analyzing the data for this study. The researchers specifically focused on impolite conversations initiated by their friends' posts and certain Facebook pages. These utterances were naturally occurring between participants; thus, the primary data was collected with the participants oblivious to the fact that their comments were under scrutiny. Data was collected just before the 2022 general elections, a period which saw many Kenyans taking to social media to campaign for their favourite politicians. Some of the politicians featured in some of the conversations in this paper managed to clinch prominent seats though they are now facing a backlash from the Kenyan Gen Zs.

Since impoliteness studies analyze larger chunks of language, researchers did not focus on smaller units, such as words or phrases, but rather on entire conversations, as the richest possible context is needed for the analysis of impoliteness. According to Chapman (2011: 140), impoliteness theory considers the context of interaction, as there are instances where the combination of context and the communicative act results in impoliteness. Impoliteness theory focuses on arguments and other forms of conflict, examining how they are initiated, how they develop, and how they might be resolved. As a result, the data used in this theory often encompasses more than just a single turn of conversation; it typically covers longer sequences of naturally occurring dialogues. Additionally, researchers have gathered secondary data on impoliteness from both online literature and library resources.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data were classified and analyzed using Escandell-Vidal's (2004) theoretical model of impoliteness. The inferential cognitive system was employed to fill information gaps, while the social cognitive system was utilized to identify impoliteness in utterances. The two systems played a crucial role in the interpretation process of impolite utterances on Facebook.

5. Findings

The following conversations are characterized by impoliteness. In the first interaction, Speaker A talked about a politician who was popularly known as Father, knowing very well that it infuriated some of his followers. The politician had gone underground after July 7th, 2020, and the speaker was calling upon people to advise the politician. The latter attributed the silence of the politician to stress. The act of mentioning the politician in this post was enough to drive Speaker A's interlocutor to the wall, and this explains why insults ensued afterward.

Post 1: Speaker A: *After 7/7 ni stress tu. Yawa...please advise Baba* (It is just stress after July 7th. Please advise Father)

(a)Speaker B: *Utapatwa hapo tu. Ghasia* (They will find you there. Trash!)

In the above example, Speaker B referred to Speaker A as trash in response to his post. The full proposition was [you are trash]; thus, Speaker A would use inference to fill the information gap with the words [you are], implying that he had just been called trash. In other words, Speaker A would use his inferential cognitive system to reach the assumption that Speaker B had just called him trash. Simultaneously, the social cognitive system would detect a problem in the use of politeness rules adhered to in the Kenyan community. For instance, in Kenya, calling someone 'trash' constitutes an insult; hence, Speaker A would likely assume that Speaker B was not observing politeness rules, which would amount to impoliteness.

Regarding sarcastic comments, situations are usually interpreted ironically rather than literally. For instance, Speaker A posts and comments on his Facebook wall in praise of a very prominent Kenyan politician, who popularly goes by the name 'Baba' or 'Father.' In response, Speaker C calls him 'Mr. Personal Assistant.'

Post 2: Speaker A: *Baba Podpek (RAOnd 1)* (Father is still heavy (popular) -Round 1)

(b) Speaker B: *Wee ngihinguria maitho ngkore arego. You are more gatua-ostrich. Kwa Baba ucio waku uragufudithia kijaka* (When I open my eyes, I want you to be in Alego. You are more of an Ostrich. Off to your Father who is teaching you how to speak Luo language)

Speaker C: *Baba alipona bwana PA?* (Did Father recover Mr. Personal Assistant?)

The full proposition is [You are his personal assistant, for you know a lot about him]. Inference has been used to fill the inferential gap with the words {You are his… for you know a lot about him}. Personal Assistants often have extensive knowledge about their employers or bosses; thus, Speaker C is implying that Speaker A is the politician's Personal Assistant simply because he appears to have a lot of information regarding the politician, including details about his health, which is not accurate. Speaker A is just a Kenyan citizen who is very vocal in matters of politics. He does not even know the politician on a personal level. He is just on a campaign trail, campaigning for his favorite politician. In this circumstance, Speaker C has an intention of communicating an attitude of ridicule or scorn towards Speaker A's post because he is aware that his interlocutor has no personal relationship with the politician. In

short, Speaker A would use his inferential cognitive system to arrive at the conclusion that Speaker C has called him Mr. Personal Assistant, the politician's personal Assistant, a position he does not hold. This can only mean that his interlocutor is being sarcastic or ridiculing him. He would simultaneously use his social cognitive system to detect an anomaly in the utilization of politeness rules recognized by the Kenyan community, specifically regarding the use of ridicule or sarcasm, which are considered forms of impoliteness, and conclude that he is being ridiculed, thereby amounting to impoliteness.

In the same conversation, Speaker A praises the same politician, suggesting in his post that the politician remains popular and will win elections by a landslide. Speaker C, in his response, inquires about the politician's health, asking, "Did Father recover, Mr. Personal Assistant?" The full proposition would be [Did Father recover Mr. Personal Assistant now that you know so much about him?]. In his interpretation, Speaker A would use inference to fill the information gap with the words: now that you know so much about him; hence, arrive at the conclusion that Speaker C is ridiculing him, and is being sarcastic, first, by calling him the politician's personal assistant and then asking him about the politician's well-being knowing very well that Speaker A is just an innocent Kenyan campaigning for his favourite politician. Speaker A is simply an innocent Kenyan who has stepped up by campaigning for his favorite politician. He knows very little about the politician's health or personal matters. There has been speculation in the country for some time that the politician's health is not good, but information about his condition is not publicly available. Therefore, no one knows his health status except for those who are very close to him, and Speaker A is not part of his inner circle. In a nutshell, Speaker C is ridiculing Speaker A's campaigning effort by attempting to show that the latter knows nothing about the politician; he is merely pretending to do so. In this regard, Speaker A would use his inferential system to arrive at the conclusion that Speaker C is being sarcastic. Simultaneously, he would use his social cognitive system to detect an anomaly in the use of politeness strategies recognized in Kenya, specifically regarding the use of ridicule, which is considered impolite, thus concluding that he has been ridiculed, which amounts to impoliteness.

In another conversation, Speaker A would use his inferential cognitive system to arrive at the conclusion that Speaker B was implying he was not mentally okay. The former posted a dialogue between a man and a "slay queen" (gold digger). In Kenya, a slay queen refers to a woman who relies solely on men for financial support. They tend to be very extravagant, but every penny they spend on themselves comes from dating men. In other words, they are seen as leeches—generally broke, entirely dependent on men, yet extremely lavish in their lifestyles. The term "slay queen" is sometimes used derogatorily in Kenya to describe young women. A man who has been hurt by his girlfriend or fiancée may use this term to refer to her if he feels that she has financially exploited him. Speaker A appeared to have issues with

such women, which is why the dialogue seemed like an outright attack on them. Speaker B felt that the post was made out of spite, perhaps suggesting that someone had hurt Speaker A, prompting him to target slay queens and young women. In response, Speaker A bragged that he had not been hurt; rather, he was the one who had caused much of the hurt. This response was greeted by Speaker B's comment: *I am concerned about your mental health*, knowing very well it was just a post, having nothing to do with his mental health.

Post 3: Speaker A: Man: Can you date yourself?
      Slay queen: I don't date broke people.
      (c)Speaker B: Who hurt you man?

Speaker A: I tend to do most of the hurting around here.

Speaker B: I am concerned about your mental health

The full proposition would be [I am concerned about your mental health for attacking young women]. In this situation, Speaker A would use his inferential cognitive system to arrive at the conclusion that Speaker B suggested that he had mental issues for him to attack the slay queens/ young women. In other words, he was not mentally well for writing such a post. Simultaneously, the social cognitive system would detect a problem in the use of politeness strategies accepted by the Kenyan community. For instance, in Kenya, telling someone "I am concerned about your mental health" in such a situation is tantamount to telling him there is something wrong in his head e.g. he is mentally ill, thick, etc.; hence, Speaker A would conclude that Speaker B was not concerned about his welfare but was just being impolite.

This can also be seen in the next post where the addresser declares his unflinching support for one of the prominent Kenyan politicians but this attracts some impolite comments, especially from one interlocutor who asks him, "How is your wallet," knowing very well that Speaker A is not as rich as the politician in question; hence, implying that the former is poor despite the fact that he is supporting a wealthy politician. In other words, he is impolitely telling the addresser that nothing has changed economically about him; he is poor despite the fact that he is supporting the politician.

Post 4: Speaker A: I remain symptomatic to Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta

(d) Speaker B: Slavery at its best

Speaker C: *Utapona tu* (You will recover)

Speaker D: *Wallet nayo?* (How is your wallet?)

Speaker E: In this one, you don't have a competitor

The full proposition is [How is your wallet considering you support a wealthy politician?] In other words, do you benefit in any way for supporting him? Speaker A would use the inference model to fill the information gap with the words "despite supporting a wealthy politician." In a nutshell, Speaker A would use his inferential system to conclude that he has been labeled as poor, despite working extra hard to support a wealthy politician. In other words, he does not benefit in any way by supporting the politician; therefore, his support for the wealthy politician has no impact on him. He is still a butcher. He would simultaneously utilize his social cognitive system to identify an anomaly in the application of politeness rules commonly accepted in Kenya. For instance, being told that he is poor, despite supporting a wealthy politician, amounts to ridicule, which is considered impolite; thus, arriving at the conclusion that he is being ridiculed, amounting to impoliteness.

In the next post, Speaker A is jovial since his campaign for the named politician is bearing fruit, and he swears he will not relent but continue campaigning for the politician, hoping for more converts. Speaker A is a newspaper vendor but is very vocal when it comes to national politics. Speakers B and C are making fun of him by saying that he never gets tired now that he is on the job selling newspapers, thereby attacking his career as a newspaper vendor. In fact, Speaker E sarcastically tells the others to let Speaker A enjoy the money he earns from selling newspapers while he rests.

Post 5: Speaker A: Hahaa. The pro Uhuru gospel is bearing fruit. We shall leave no stone unturned. We are determined to have as many converts as possible

(e)Speaker B: *Hauchoki?* (Can't you get tired?)
      Speaker C: *Ako job* (He is on the job)
      Speaker B: *I know...hawezi choka* (I know. He can't get tired)

Speaker D: *Lift off your veil and say Raila converted. Uhuru is retiring in two years. Tiga gutukua wana* (Lift off your veil and say Raila converted and Uhuru is retiring in two years. Do not treat us like children)
      Speaker E: *Niarie mbia cia gatheti ahorerete* (Let him enjoy the money from selling newspapers while resting)

Speaker F: *Sanity is coming back in Mt. Kenya. Few fools remaining* (Sanity is coming back to Mt. Kenya; few fools remaining)

Speaker G: *This nigga is a big disappointment especially in Central Kenya* (This black slave is a big disappointment, especially in Central Kenya)

Speaker A's interlocutors are making fun of him. For instance, Speaker E responds to his comment by saying, "Let him enjoy the money from selling newspapers while resting." The full proposition would be [Let him enjoy the little money he makes from selling newspapers while resting]. Speaker A would use inference to fill the information gap with the words {little… he makes}. In this regard, Speaker A would use his inferential cognitive system to arrive at the conclusion that Speaker E is actually making fun of him or mocking him. The money from newspaper vending is very little in Kenya; hence, the speakers are just making fun of him for that kind of money cannot be enjoyed. Simultaneously, he would utilize his social cognitive system to identify an anomaly in the application of politeness rules acceptable in Kenya. For instance, mockery amounts to impoliteness, and thus, he would arrive at the conclusion that his interlocutors are being impolite.

In the following post, Speaker A declares that he is a Gikuyu. This angers some of his followers because the former is supporting a Gikuyu politician who seems no longer popular among his tribesmen for endorsing a politician from another tribe to run for president. The act of declaring his tribe attracts impolite responses from his interlocutors, who feel betrayed. For instance, Speaker B tells him to his face that he is a Gikuyu who is a maniac. Speaker E goes on to tell him that Gikuyus don't speak stupidly like him.

Post 6: Speaker A: I am unapologetically Kikuyu

(f)Speaker B: A Kikuyu who is a maniac

Speaker C: So what?

Speaker D: *Kwa hivyo?* (So what?)

Speaker E: You are a shameless Kamba. Kikuyus don't think stupidly like you
    Speaker A: What a silly comment!
    Speaker E: *Peleka ujinga Machakos* (Take your stupidity to Machakos)
    Speaker A: *Hebu demonstrate venye mtu hupeleka* (Please demonstrate how that is done)
    Speaker E: By carrying your silly thick lips to that semi-arid place
    Speaker A: Thought you said Kikuyu's don't think the way you do
    Speaker E: *Sometimes I try to fit in a group of one digit IQ Simpletons. At least we can sail on the same boat* (Sometimes I try to fit in a group of one digit IQ Simpletons so that we can sail on the same boat)

Speaker A: *Hehehe. Sawa, suit yourself* (Hehehe. That's fine. Suit yourself

Speaker B: *Ndukiambie wendie nyama fooder* (Start selling meat, you donkey)

Speaker C: *Domo kaya wewe* (Slanderer)

Speaker D: *Wee wakomire ta Joram* (You slept like Joram)

Speaker E: *Huyu kiherere mdomo kaya. Vitina ilitoka wapi? Wewe unasifu Uhuru kama Mungu Muumba. Wajinga ni wengi Kenya lakini wengine wazidi. Tukome. Oh Tanga Tanga hii oh Tanga Tanga mara ingine* (This person is nosy and a slanderer. Where did slander come from? You are praising Uhuru like God the creator. There are so many foolish people in this Kenya but you are an extreme case. Spare us. Oh Tanga Tanga this, oh Tanga Tanga that).

With regard to Speaker B's response, a Gikuyu who is a maniac, the full proposition would be: You are a Gikuyu who is a maniac for supporting an unpopular Gikuyu politician. Speaker A would use inference to fill the information gap (you are … for supporting an unpopular Gikuyu politician). In relation to this, Speaker A would use his inferential system to arrive at the conclusion that he has been called a maniac. He would also utilize his social cognitive system to identify an anomaly in the application of politeness rules acceptable in Kenya. For instance, calling someone a maniac or stupid is tantamount to insulting, which is an act of impoliteness.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate the interpretation of impoliteness on social media despite the limited contextual information available. It purposely sought to determine the pragmatic strategies Kenyans employ in the interpretation of impolite utterances on Facebook. It is apparent that computer-mediated communication is often characterized by impoliteness, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook. In the foregoing discussion, it is clear that pragmatic strategies are employed simultaneously in the interpretation of impoliteness on social media.

Both the inferential cognitive system and the social cognitive system are used in the interpretation of impoliteness. The inferential system is used to fill the inferential gaps in utterances to formulate full propositions, while the social cognitive system is used to detect an anomaly in the use of politeness strategies recognized in Kenya to arrive at the conclusion that an utterance is impolite. Thus, there is no difference between the interpretation of impoliteness in computer-mediated communication and face-to-face conversation, though in the former, one relies heavily on previous utterances and encyclopedic knowledge as sources of contextual information.

Further studies on interpretation of impoliteness can be conducted on other social media platforms such as instagram, YouTube, Whatsapp, among others to

determine whether the same pragmatic strategies are employed in the interpretation of impoliteness. Moreover, different contexts can also come into play. The current study focused on how Kenyans interpret impoliteness on Facebook but one can also concentrate on a specific community or nationality because impoliteness is interpreted variously world over. ☀

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