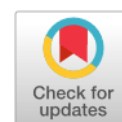


Abuse of Power as The Cause of Language Impoliteness in The Text Drama *Majlisu Al-Adli* by Taufiq Al-Hakim

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to identify the forms and analyze the causes of linguistic impoliteness in Taufiq al-Hakim's drama *Majlisu al-Adli* by applying Jonathan Culpeper's theory of linguistic impoliteness. It addresses the lack of research on impoliteness in Arabic drama texts, particularly regarding its causes, and demonstrates how linguistic impoliteness reflects power abuse in Arabic literary works. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method, collecting data through a reading and note-taking technique on dialogues that contain impolite expressions. The findings show that The Judge's impoliteness manifests in face attacks, intentional strategies, hearer perceptions, and communicative tactics such as sarcasm and legal manipulation. The primary cause of this impoliteness lies in the abuse of power, as The Judge exploits his authority to defend certain parties and dismiss justice. This study also suggests that further research is needed on the relationship between linguistic impoliteness and humor in dramatic texts as a form of social critique.

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of impoliteness in language within society reflects changes in social norms and the evolving dynamics of communication over time (Zidjaly, 2019). In the digital era, for instance, impoliteness has become increasingly visible in social media interactions, where anonymity and the absence of immediate consequences enable the sharper expression of opinions, often accompanied by harsh language or insults (Hamzah et al., 2022). In public spaces, impoliteness can also emerge as a form of protest, an expression of power, or a rhetorical strategy in political and social debates (Simanjuntak & Simatupang, 2024). Furthermore, in literary works, particularly prose that involves dialogues between speakers and interlocutors, the phenomenon of linguistic impoliteness can be found, triggered by various situations, levels of familiarity, or positions within the social structure (Cahyani & Munalisa, 2020).

The study of linguistic impoliteness remains highly relevant in understanding the dynamics

of communication, power, and social interaction. While extensive research has explored impoliteness in digital communication, politics, or everyday conversation, little attention has been given to its presence in Arabic drama. Drama, as a performative literary form, offers rich dialogue that mirrors real-life social hierarchies, power struggles, and moral conflicts. Analyzing impoliteness in this context not only enriches the field of Arabic literary studies but also deepens our understanding of how language reflects social injustice and abuse of authority in Arabic-speaking societies.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to bridge pragmatic theory and literary criticism by applying Jonathan Culpeper's framework of linguistic impoliteness to the Arabic play *Majlisu al-Adli*. Unlike previous research that focused merely on speech acts or socio-political context, this study investigates the pragmatic cause of impoliteness as a reflection of power abuse. In doing so, it introduces a critical-pragmatic approach to Arabic literary texts, positioning linguistic impoliteness as a mirror of authoritarian discourse within dramatic representation.

Building upon this theoretical background, it is essential to note that impoliteness is not absolute but context-dependent. Therefore, although certain verbal behaviors such as insults or interruptions are typically considered impolite, they do not always apply in every context (Rahardi, 2019). Situational factors, such as the relationship between speaker and listener, the communicative goal, and the prevailing social norms within a given environment, influence whether an act is truly considered impolite. For example, in a political debate, an aggressive speaking style might be regarded as part of an argumentative strategy, rather than as impoliteness (Muji, 2013). However, if the same speaking style is used in casual conversation with close friends, it may be seen as inappropriate. For this reason, the understanding of impoliteness must take into account the flexibility and social dynamics that accompany it (Prakoso, 2020). Thus, examining communication practices requires further exploration into the causes of impoliteness that occur between speakers and their interlocutors (Mayaningtyas et al., 2020). One way to deepen this exploration is by using literary works as material objects of analysis, considering that literature often reflects social realities and the dynamics of human interaction.

In various literary texts, both in prose and drama, linguistic impoliteness can appear as a character's strategy to assert power, build conflict, or portray certain social relationships (Al-Badawi et al., 2024; Keshavarz, 2022). For example, in social realist novels, impoliteness can serve as a critical tool against class inequality. At the same time, in postmodern literature, it might be used to dismantle authority and challenge prevailing norms. From this perspective, pragmatic analysis can enhance our understanding of how impoliteness operates not only as a communicative phenomenon, but also as an aesthetic and ideological element within literary works (Culpeper, 2007).

Through literature, particularly drama, various social dynamics such as conflict, shifting values, and interactions between individuals and groups can be explored in a profound and thought-provoking manner (Refanzah & Yoyo, 2024). As a form of performing art, drama offers a vivid representation of social phenomena through dialogue, characterization, and narrative structure (Musliandi & Harjono, 2024). In the context of Arab drama, its appeal lies in its ability to portray issues that are relevant to Arab culture and traditions, such as family norms, gender roles, and tensions between characters. Studying Arab drama not only broadens insights into Arab history and culture but also offers a fresh perspective on how language is employed to construct social narratives within that society. In this context, one notable figure in Arab literature, recognized as the Father of Arab Drama, is Tawfiq al-Hakim.

Tawfiq al-Hakim is one of Egypt's significant literary figures, widely acknowledged as a pioneer in the development of modern Arab drama (Long, 1969). His works often reflect deep philosophical contemplation on social, cultural, and moral issues in Arab society (Latifi & Muslih, 2023). One of his notable plays, *Majlisu al-'Adli (The Council of Justice)*, first published in 1972 by Maktabat Misr in Cairo, serves as a strong representation of themes such as justice and social tension. In this drama, al-Hakim depicts complex human interactions, both in terms of language use and the power dynamics between characters. *Majlisu al-'Adli* not only offers an engaging storyline but also raises universal issues that remain relevant today, such as the conflict between individual ethics and societal regulations. With its rich dialogue and distinctive symbolism, this drama stands as a significant work worthy of deeper examination, particularly from linguistic and cultural perspectives.

In the play *Majlisu al-'Adli*, a character of the baker is portrayed committing a series of crimes that harm members of his community. The narrative recounts the baker's misdeeds, beginning with stealing a goose, causing a woman's miscarriage, blinding a man, leaping from a tower, and injuring a young man who was in prostration, and even offering bribes to the Judge. However, when the victims bring their complaints to court, the Judge responds with neglect and injustice, and engages in verbal disputes within the council. This misconduct occurred because the Judge had previously accepted a bribe in the form of goose meat from the Baker. This is reflected in the following dialogue:

الفاضي : على فكرة... كانت لذيدة الطعم شهية المنظر بدنها الوردي ورائحة لحمها التي يسيل

لها اللعاب الفران : صاحبها جاء يطالب بها (Al Hakim, 1972).

Translation by author:

The Judge: By the way... It tastes so delicious, with a pink body and a mouthwatering smell of meat.

The Baker: The owner came to demand it.

In the dialogue above, the problem begins when the Baker reminds The Judge of the goose meat that he once shared with him. As the conflict escalates due to The Baker's actions toward other characters, causing them to bring their cases to court, The Judge begins manipulating the law through his authority. In this drama, numerous utterances can be found that violate social norms, breach the principles of politeness, and express emotions conveyed through the speech of one of the characters, The Judge.

Furthermore, studies related to *Majlisu al- 'Adli* remain quite limited. Unlike Wibowo's study, which focused solely on identifying types of speech acts in *Majlisu al-'Adli* (Wibowo, 2016), and Abdullah's research, which examined elements of hegemony and depicted the socio-political conditions of 1970s Egypt in the same play (Abdullah, 2017), other recent studies have applied Jonathan Culpeper's framework of impoliteness to various contexts, revealing the broad applicability of this theory (Culpeper, 2011). Junaidi, Januarini, and Pasaribu, for instance, investigated linguistic impoliteness on Instagram information accounts and found that both positive and negative impoliteness strategies frequently occur in online interactions (Junaidi et al., 2024). Similarly, Ambarita explored the triggers of impoliteness in political comments on social media, identifying its primary functions as tools for criticism, sarcasm, and the expression of anger or disappointment (Ambarita, 2024). Meanwhile, Hassan et al analyzed Putin's speech at the annexation ceremony, showing how impoliteness operates as a deliberate political strategy to assert dominance and influence public perception (Hassan et al., 2023).

While these studies demonstrate the theoretical richness and flexibility of Culpeper's framework across digital and political discourse, the application of impoliteness theory within Arabic literary texts remains underexplored (Culpeper, 2007). Thus, this study offers a new contribution by examining *Majlisu al- 'Adli* through the lens of linguistic impoliteness and identifying how abuse of power becomes the underlying cause of face-threatening acts. This approach not only extends the scope of impolite research beyond contemporary media and politics but also provides a critical-pragmatic interpretation of social power relations within Arabic drama.

Jonathan Culpeper, in his book *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, notes that there is no universal agreement on defining impoliteness, as interpretations vary across theories and contexts (Culpeper, 2011). This means that the concept of impoliteness remains a subject of debate and can have different interpretations depending on the perspective, theory, or context applied. It indicates that impoliteness is not a fixed concept, but one that can shift based on the approach and framework of study (Culpeper, 2010). Moreover, cultural and social factors also influence how impoliteness is perceived; what may be considered offensive in one community

might be accepted or even expected in another (Culpeper, 2016). This phenomenon demonstrates that impoliteness is not merely a violation of communication ethics but also a reflection of social dynamics, power relations, and shifting norms within society.

However, a commonly understood definition of impoliteness is needed. Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2) (Culpeper, 2005). Through such a definition, it can be understood that impoliteness may occur for several reasons. First, when someone consciously uses language that damages the image or dignity of the interlocutor. This can take the form of direct insults, sharp sarcasm, or verbal harassment. Second, even if the speaker has no intention of attacking, impoliteness may still arise if the listener feels attacked or perceives the function as a threat to their dignity. Third, impoliteness occurs through the interaction between the speaker's intention and the listener's perception. For instance, a comment might be intended as a joke, but if the listener interprets it as offensive, impoliteness still takes place.

By highlighting the role of power abuse in shaping impolite interactions, this article provides a critical-pragmatic perspective on the social dynamics embedded in classical Arabic drama. Moreover, while most existing studies on impoliteness in Arabic contexts concentrate on digital communication, media discourse, or casual speech, the application of impoliteness theory to Arabic literary texts remains notably underdeveloped (Muid et al., 2025). Considering these considerations, this study applies Culpeper's impoliteness framework to Taufiq al-Hakim's *Majlisu al-Adli* to identify the forms and causes of linguistic impoliteness as reflections of power abuse. By doing so, it not only fills an important scholarly gap but also introduces a critical-pragmatic perspective into Arabic literary criticism.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach (Yusuf, 2023) to analyze the causes of linguistic impoliteness in Taufiq al-Hakim's drama *Majlisu al-Adli*. The primary data consist of dialogues from the play, particularly those involving The Judge as the speaker and other characters as the hearers. Data was collected using the reading and note-taking method by identifying utterances that exhibit impolite expressions. The classified data were then analyzed using Jonathan Culpeper's impoliteness framework, focusing on face attacks, intentionality, and speech context. Through this analysis, the study examines how the abuse of power underlies impoliteness in dramatic interactions (Voinov, 2012).

In analyzing the data, this study applies Jonathan Culpeper's framework of linguistic impoliteness, which focuses on several key analytical aspects (Culpeper, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2016). First, a face attack occurs when a speaker intentionally or unintentionally threatens the

interlocutor's self-esteem through insults, mockery, or harsh criticism. Second, intentionality plays a crucial role, as impoliteness often arises from a deliberate act used to assert dominance, express anger, or even create humor. Third, hearer perception is equally essential because impoliteness does not depend solely on the speaker's intention; it also emerges when the hearer perceives an utterance as offensive, even if no harm was intended. Fourth, the interpretation of impoliteness is strongly influenced by social norms and context. Lastly, Culpeper identifies various communication strategies that realize impoliteness, such as direct insults, sarcasm, and the use of degrading or dismissive language.

Through the drama *Majlisu al- 'Adli*, this study is expected to contribute to the manifestation of linguistic impoliteness found in Arabic drama texts. However, cultural differences can also influence the scale of politeness that occurs within society. The results of this study are hoped to provide new insights into the relationship between language use and social dynamics within Arabic literary works.

3. Results and Discussion

Research findings reveal various forms of impoliteness employed by characters in the drama *Majlisu al- 'Adli*, reflecting the social and cultural dynamics within Arab society. This impoliteness is influenced not only by individual factors, such as the speaker's character and social position, but also by the situational context surrounding the interaction. The following discussion will elaborate in detail on the forms of impoliteness that appear in the dialogues and the primary factors that cause such impoliteness, based on a pragmatic approach.

3.1. Factors Causing Impoliteness by the Judge in the Drama Text *Majlisu al-'Adli*

In this section, the researcher focuses on The Judge as the speaker who performs impoliteness in his dialogues with the hearers or interlocutors. The following are the data, along with the analysis that reveal the occurrence of this phenomenon:

3.1.1. Face Attack

Impoliteness arises when someone intentionally or unintentionally attacks the interlocutor's face, either in the form of insults, mockery, or harsh criticism. This conversation takes place when The Judge questions The Goose Owner about his belief in fate or divine will in determining events. The context of this dialogue is that The Baker had taken one of his geese, and The Goose Owner witnessed The Baker roasting it. However, when the Goose Owner asked for it back, the Baker denied it by claiming the goose had flown away. In Court, The Goose Owner complained to The Judge that The Baker's statement was untrue. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

القاضي : الا يستطيع الله أن يحي العظام وهي رميم ؟؟

صاحب الأوزة: يستطيع..ولكن

القاضي : كفى، لا يوجد لكن .. اما أنت مؤمن بالله وقدرته واما أنك كافر زنديق حلت عليك

لعنته (Al Hakim, 1972).

Translation by author:

The Judge: "Is Allah not capable of reviving decayed bones?"

The Goose Owner: "He is capable... but..."

The Judge: "Enough, no 'but'! Are you a believer in Allah and His power or are you a heretic infidel cursed by God?"

In the dialogue above, The Judge carries out a dogmatic justification against The Goose Owner by committing a face attack based on belief in divine power, which he connects to the unreasonable statement made by the defendant, the baker. The Judge's utterance in the phrase "وإما أنك كافر زنديق" constitutes an accusation without evidence directed at The Goose Owner. This form of impoliteness manifests through sharp criticism delivered by The Judge towards The Goose Owner. Following Culpeper's classification of positive and negative face attacks, The Judge engages in a direct affront to The Goose Owner by undermining his religious identity through accusations of heresy (*kāfir zindīq*) (Culpeper, 2005). This utterance constitutes a deliberate act to discredit The Goose Owner's credibility in court and intimidate him, exploiting the hierarchical power relation.

3.1.2. Intentionality

Intentionality, Culpeper emphasizes that impoliteness is often intentional and used as a tool to express power, aggression, or even humor. The conversation occurs when The Judge continues to defend the baker by turning The Goose Owner into the defendant for accusing baker of being a thief. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

القاضي : إذن ما دام الله هو الذى أطار أوزتك ، فكيف تسأل وتطالب الفران

صاحب الأوزة: (في ارتباك) لا أدرى

القاضي : اسمع يا رجل !... المحكمة ستخفف عنك الحكم ، مراعاة لظروفك النفسية

صاحب الأوزة: الحكم ؟

القاضي : ألم تسب الفران قائلًا له يا لص ؟

صاحب الأوزة: إنه يا سيدي القاضي

القاضي : حكمت عليك المحكمة بجنيه غرامة (Al Hakim, 1972).

Translation by author:

The Judge: "So, if it was Allah who caused your goose to disappear, why do you question and demand the baker?"

The Goose Owner: (confused) "I don't know..."

The Judge: "Listen, O man! The court will lighten your punishment, taking into account your psychological condition..."

The Goose Owner: "Punishment?"

The Judge: "Did you not insult the baker by calling him a thief?!"

The Goose Owner: "But he, O master Judge..."

The Judge: "The court sentences you to a fine of one pound!"

In the dialogue above, The Judge violates justice by sentencing The Goose Owner to a fine, exploiting the authority he possesses. Through the utterance "المحكمة ستخفف عنك الحكم", The Judge already indicates an intention to penalize The Goose Owner, leaving him astonished and confused. The Judge concludes the verdict with "حكمت عليك المحكمة بجنيه غرامة", imposing a fine upon The Goose Owner. According to Culpeper, impoliteness can be viewed through the lens of intentionality experienced by the speaker.

In this case, The Judge deliberately sides with The Baker by punishing The Goose Owner. Viewed in terms of the situational context, The Judge shifts public attention away from the primary focus of the lawsuit. Initially, The Goose Owner merely sought justice for the loss of his goose, but The Judge diverted the topic towards religious belief through statements such as "إذن ما دام الله", leaving The Goose Owner speechless and responding only with "لا أدري" in a state of confusion. Here, The Judge performed legal manipulation to protect The Baker, as the latter had bribed The Judge with the stolen roasted goose. Culpeper (Culpeper, 2005, 2011) emphasizes that impoliteness is often strategic and intentional. The Judge's decision to punish the Goose Owner instead of the Baker represents a calculated move to maintain his personal interest and protect the guilty. The utterance "The court will lighten your punishment..." is, though seemingly empathetic, loaded with authority abuse and functions as a façade for injustice.

3.1.3. Hearer's Perception

Hearer's Perception, impoliteness is not solely dependent on the speaker's intentions but also on how the hearer perceives the utterance. If the hearer feels attacked, then impoliteness occurs, even if the speaker had no such intention. This conversation occurs when The Judge receives a complaint from a married couple who claim that the wife's unborn child was lost due to a kick from The Baker during a fight with some local youths. However, The Judge's decision suggests that the unborn child can be replaced with a new one, provided by the Baker. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

القاضي : يعنى حكمت المحكمة على الفران أن يملأ ما أفرغه ... والآن اذهبي معه أيتها المرأة

ليضع لك حملاً بدل الذي أسقطه

الزوج : (صائحاً) تذهب مع الفران ؟

الزوجة : هذا مستحيل ... مستحيل (Al Hakim, 1972).

Translation by author:

The Judge: "Meaning, the court decides that the baker must replace what he has caused to be lost... Now go with him (the baker), O woman, so that he may give you a new burden to replace the one he made you lose..."

The Husband: (shouting) "Go with the baker?!"

The Wife: "This is impossible... impossible!"

In the dialogue above, the husband and wife's reactions reflect shock at The Judge's suggestion, which violates societal norms. By shouting, the husband expresses his shock and disapproval at The Judge's statement, demonstrating a hearer's perception that contributes to the occurrence of impoliteness. Impoliteness does not rely solely on speaker intent but also on how the interlocutor perceives utterances (Culpeper, 2011). In the scene where The Judge commands the female complainant to go with the baker, both the wife and husband perceive the decision as offensive, which triggers immediate protest. This highlights the role of contextual norms in defining impoliteness.

3.1.4. Communication Strategies

Communication Strategies, Culpeper identifies various impolite strategies, such as direct insults, sarcasm, and the use of derogatory language. This conversation occurs when The Judge asks a sheikh about what happened to his brother. After hearing the chronology presented by the sheikh, The Judge concludes that the incident was not entirely the baker's fault because praying under the minaret was not an appropriate place for prayer. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

القاضي : وما دخل شقيقك؟! ...

الشيخ : ان يصلى في صحن المسجد المكشوف تحت المئذنة ... وكان ساجداً ... وإذا الفران بكل

ثقله يقع من أعلى المئذنة على عنق شقيقي فيدقه ... دقا

القاضي : وشقيقك هذا لماذا اختار هذا الموضع بالذات ليصلى فيه؟! ...

الشيخ : قسمته!

القاضي : إذن هو ذنبه ... وسوء تصرفه واختياره و من يضع نفسه موضع التهلكة ، فلا يلومن

إلا نفسه (Al Hakim, 1972).

Translation by author:

The Judge: "What does this have to do with your brother?!"

Sheikh: "He was praying in the mosque courtyard beneath the minaret... In a state of prostration... Then the baker, with his heavy body, fell from the top of the minaret directly onto my brother's neck and broke it..."

The Judge: "Why did your brother choose that place to pray?!"

Sheikh: "You are cursing him!"

The Judge: "Then it was his own fault... his poor choice and action. Whoever places himself in danger should blame no one but himself."

In the above dialogue, The Judge delivers a form of sarcasm against the Sheikh's brother who had chosen to pray outside the mosque, particularly beneath the minaret. The statement "Whoever places himself in danger should blame no one but himself" illustrates a specific communication strategy in which The Judge cunningly positions his reasoning to be seemingly acceptable to the listeners. Sarcasm and victim-blaming are identified by Culpeper as impoliteness strategies used to provoke and humiliate (Culpeper, 2005). The Judge's remark about the Sheikh's brother's choice of praying place subtly shifts blame to the victim. By doing so, The Judge evades responsibility while maintaining a pretense of logical reasoning.

3.1.5. Social Norms and Context

Social Norms and Context, from the four data presented as causes of impoliteness based on Culpeper's perspective in the drama text *Majlisu al- 'Adli*, Taufiq al-Hakim implicitly depicts a social reality of injustice. The favored party (the Baker) represents a phenomenon of direct gratuity toward The Judge to protect him from punishment, when in fact the baker should have received appropriate punishment for what he had done to the victims. At the same time, the law

appears to support the victim’s pursuit of justice with high hopes. Instead of gaining justice, they are fined and blamed based on The Judge’s subjective judgment. The injustice experienced by the complainants leads the researcher to conclude that there is a social reality where social norms are neglected.

These findings confirm Culpeper’s claim that impoliteness is often a strategic tool to assert dominance. This finding is consistent with Budiarta in the context of digital gaming interaction (Budiarta et al., 2024), but is uniquely observed in classical Arabic drama, where it reinforces legal manipulation. Theoretically, this study extends the application of impoliteness theory to classical dramaturgical texts while providing practical insights for language education and cross-cultural communication in Arab societies. Table 1 above summarizes the main findings of linguistic impoliteness strategies used by The Judge, which reflect power abuse.

Table 1. Forms and Causes of Impoliteness in *Majlisu al- ‘Adli*

Type of Impoliteness	Example Dialogue	Culpeper’s Strategy	Causes
Face attack	<i>“Are you a believer in Allah and His power, or are you a heretic infidel cursed by God?”</i>	Negative face attacks	Abuse of power to intimidate
Intentionality	<i>“The court will lighten your punishment.”</i>	Intentional impoliteness as power assertion	Legal manipulation
Hearer’s Perception	<i>“Now go with him (the baker), O woman, so that he may give you a new burden to replace the one he made you lose”</i>	Offense perceived by hearer (context-based)	Insensitive decision-making
Communication Strategy	<i>“Why did your brother choose that place to pray?”</i>	Sarcasm and victim blaming	Deflection of responsibility

4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of linguistic impoliteness committed by The Judge in *Majlisu al-‘Adli* displays several forms of structured communicative violations, including Face Attack: The Judge uses religious justification to blame The Goose Owner, thereby undermining The Goose Owner’s dignity as a speech partner. Intentionality: Impoliteness is deliberately enacted to assert power or protect the guilty party (the Baker), such as through explicit legal manipulation that is unjust. Hearer’s Perception: Impoliteness occurs not only due to the speaker’s intentions but also because of the hearer’s reactions, such as the husband and wife’s shock at The Judge’s suggestion that violates social norms. This impoliteness arises from differences in norms and social context; in certain cultures, assertive speech may be acceptable, but in the context of this dialogue, it is perceived as impolite. Communicative Strategy: The Judge utilizes sarcasm and rhetorical cunning to blame certain parties, as seen in the case of the man praying beneath the minaret, indicating a misuse of justice and legal reasoning.

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