The Significance of Impoliteness Strategies in Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker" : A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

In our daily communication there are a lot of impolite utterances used. For example ,when someone speaks in a disrespectful manner, it does not mean to make an opposite effect. Some people speak casually with their friends, even a few times using harsh or tricky language, and appear comfortable with the conversation. It discusses that impoliteness is no longer a taboo in accordance with the meaning of the word, but it becomes a habit in everyday communication. The present study is a pragmatic study that concentrates on one of the key notions in the field of pragmatics which is impoliteness .It deals with Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker"(1960)as subject of analysis. The study aims at investigating impoliteness strategies by adopting Culpeper's impoliteness theory. It identifies impoliteness strategies with literary discourse of character .Also, it explains that pragmatic tool such as the impoliteness theory can be applied to literary discourse to explain different dynamics in the conversation of dramatic characters in the literary text .This study involves two parts: a theoretical background and a practical part. The theoretical background consists of a number of sections illustrating the concept of impoliteness and the Theatre of the Absurd. The practical part involves the analysis of impoliteness found in Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker" and a discussion of the data analysis.

Keywords: Impoliteness, the Theatre of the Absurd, Jonathan Culpeper.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Background

This part of the study consists of an introduction to pragmatics and impoliteness . It presents the adopted model of analysis. Next, it reviews the significance of impoliteness in drama. Finally, this section tracks the definition and history of the Theatre of the Absurd (henceforth AT).

Pragmatics and Its Definition in Linguistics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics dealing with language and the context in which it is used .The purpose of pragmatic theory is to find out the intended meaning which relies on the context . It means that the meaning can be interpreted by looking at the context or situation during an interaction. The definitions of pragmatics vary because language can be used in different situations in a number of ways (Slotta,2018:1) .

Many linguists defined the term pragmatics from different perspectives . Lyons (1981: 171) defines the main topic of pragmatics in his book "Language and Linguistics" ,as the study of actual utterances which means the study of use rather than meaning .The study of that part of meaning which is not purely truth conditional. Next,

Leech (1983:24) states that pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics when compared to other branches such as phonetics, morphology syntax and semantics . It focuses on how people comprehend and produce speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation. It distinguishes two intents or meanings in each utterance. One is the informative intent or the sentence meaning, and the other is the communicative intent or the speaker meaning.

According to Levinson (1983:53) pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate . This definition of pragmatics is viewed as parallel with semantics because semantic branch is concerned with truth conditions to well-formed formulae, so pragmatics is dealt with the appropriate conditions to the same set of sentences with their semantic interpretation.

Similarly , Yule (1996:3-4) defines the term pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning. It is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). Thus, it is concerned with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. Another definition is given by Yule(1996) is that "pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning" ,this indicates that pragmatics is concerned with interpreting what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said . Moreover, he points out that pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said.

Following this , Widdowson (1996:61) claims that spoken utterances include not just the literal meaning of words, but also an invisible meaning beyond them. The intended meaning is mostly linked to the social, physical and linguistic context of the utterance. As a result, pragmatics is concerned with what individuals mean when they use certain expressions.

Nature of Impoliteness

Since politeness theory was first proposed by Brown and Levinson , the concept of politeness and impoliteness has been one of the controversial issues and has been defined in many different ways .Watts(2003:9) claims that impoliteness is a term that is currently being debated, has been debated in the past, and will almost certainly continue to be debated in the future . Simpson and Bousfield (2017:165) argue that impoliteness has been regarded as parasitic on politeness in two ways: first, impoliteness is seen as an unmarked attitude and it is an unexpected deviation from the norm of politeness. Second, impoliteness has a parasitic theoretical tradition ,because historically the most prominent models of impoliteness are those that are drawn parasitically from Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic model of politeness.

Talib (2021:25) states that the interlocutors value the seriousness of face threatening act on the basis of three factors : the social distance between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), the power that the hearer has over the speaker, and the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture. Due to these three factors ,the weightiness of (im)politeness will be determined by these factors.

Culpeper (1996:350) states that impoliteness is a communicative strategy designed to attack face and thereby causes conflict and disharmony. Culpeper (1996, 2003, 2005, 2010 and 2011) studies the theory of impoliteness extensively, and he defines the term impoliteness a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and beliefs about social organisation, including, how one person's or group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be ,and how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have emotional

consequences for at least on one participant, since they are presumed to cause offence.Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not (Culpeper, 2010: 3233).

Therefore, impoliteness is an exercise of power which is expressed through language and cannot be explained without contextualization. Culpeper (1996:354) argues that a powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite because he/she can reduce the ability of the less powerful participant through the denial of speaking rights. Watts(2003:5) claims that paying more attention to politeness rather than impoliteness can be considered as astonishing , because it is the impolite behavior that is more likely to be commented on verbal interaction .However, Cashman(2006; as cited in Abbas, 2012:118) exhibits that impoliteness is not to be seen as failed politeness but as instrumental and even functional. Furthermore, Bousfield and Locher (2008:3) view impoliteness as a "behaviour that is face aggravating in particular context". They believe that impoliteness is caused intentionally, also this concept needs more explanation because it is probably too ambiguous .

Culpeper's (1996) Model of Impoliteness

The theory of impoliteness in terms of Jonathan Culpeper's model (1996) followed Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. Yet, it is concerned with attacking face instead of supporting it (Bousfield, 2008:90-91).

In the journal "Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness", Culpeper (1996:350) defines impoliteness as "the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect that of social disruption" . Such strategies are intended to damage someone's face rather than to support it. The importance of this model is not only an adjunct to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, but it is a counterpart construction. Culpeper (1996) introduces a list of impoliteness strategies. These are used to attack face ,and cause disruption rather than to

promote face and foster relations (Culpeper et al, 2003: 1554).Thus , Culpeper considers the social context as more than just a reference. It is action that helps to analyse the impoliteness strategies are used by the speaker or listener (Jabbar,2021:36)

Lachenicht (1980:607) and Bousfield (2008:83) define impoliteness as being "a rational attempt to hurt or damage the addressee". Culpeper (1996:356-357) develops a framework of pragmatic theory by reversing the polarity of Brown and Levinson's theory. The result was five strategies for generating impoliteness:(1)Bald on-record impoliteness ,(2)Positive impoliteness , (3) Negative impoliteness ,(4) Sarcasm or mock impoliteness and (5) Withhold politeness.

Bald on Record

Culpeper(1996:356 and 2005:41)believes that the speaker in this strategy in a directly, clearly, unambiguously and concisely implements FTA . Bald on record is used when the face is not trivial or minimised. It is the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer. The distinction between this strategy and that of Brown and Levinson is that the speaker's intention attacks the hearer's face .While in Brown and Levinson's theory, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the addressee's face. It is used with a very minor threat to the hearer's face.

Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness is designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants (Culpeper, 1996: 357). It is utilised by an individual's positive face to be liked , approved of ,and respected by others .Positive impoliteness consists of different sub-strategies such as "ignore", "exclude the other from an operation", "being unconcerned, disinterested, unsympathetic", "snub the other" , "use hidden or ambiguous language"', "use unacceptable identification markers", "use forbidden terms", " seek disagreement", etc.

Negative Impoliteness

It is designed to damage the addressee's negative face (Culpeper,1996: 358). Negative

impoliteness can be utilised in the following steps such as: " frighten or point criticisms/complaints", "condescend, scorn , insult or ridicule", " invade the other's space literally or metaphorically", "associate the other with a negative aspect, use the pronouns (I) and (you)", " put the other's indebtedness on record",etc.

Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

 Culpeper (1996: 356) notes that use of sarcasm or mock politeness can also convey impoliteness. In Culpeper's terms, sarcasm is the performance of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations. This appears to be close to Leech's conception of irony (1983:82) ,If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which does not overtly conflict with the politeness principle , but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature.

Withhold politeness

Culpeper(1996:   357)   defines   Withhold politeness as "the absence of politeness work where it would be expected" . For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness. Being silent is also understood as withholding politeness (Culpeper et al, 2003: 1555).Brown and Levinson (1987:5)give an explanation of the face damaging implication of withholding politeness by asserting that politeness has to be communicated,   and   the   absence   of communicated politeness may be taken as the absence of a polite attitude. The speaker does not do the polite act where the listener would anticipate one.

Theatre of the Absurd(AT)

This   section   shows   the   significance   of impoliteness in drama. Moreover, it reviews

the definitions of the AT.

Impoliteness in Drama

        Culpeper   (1998:86)states   that impoliteness is a kind of 'aggression', which has been used as a type of amusement in

drama. Impoliteness does not occur randomly in drama just to amuse the crowds but also to show the author's aim. Clashes in interaction can be considered as a cause of "social disharmony" (Culpeper,1998:87). In addition ,he   (1998:87-88)   argues   the   role   of impoliteness in developing the plot as well as characters in a dramatic work.

        Culpeper elaborates on the fact that a dramatic dialogue is essential to know that people's   understanding   of   (im)politeness actions in imaginary work must contradict with those in real contexts for two reasons : first , characters are made of a complete set of behaviours which is impossible in real life. Second, the character's action is not just decided by the imaginary nature that creates it, but also by the motivated choice of the writer. In the real world, impoliteness is marginal or rare because of society's restrictions and social standards.   In   drama,   impoliteness   is controversial because the author uses it to send a message to the audience in order to understand what will be done when the events of play complete and also to reveal the real motivations and intentions of the character. Consequently, Culpeper suggests an example from "Scent of a Woman film in 1992" : Charlie is a student at a prestigious private school,he responds to an advertisement asking for somebody to act as a career for their blind relative. The dialogue below is between Charlie and the Colonel.

"Charlie: Sir?
Colonel: Don't call me sir.
Charlie: I'm sorry, I mean mister, sir.
Colonel: Ooh, we've got a moron here, is that it?
Get in here, you idiot :come a little closer,
I want to get a better look at you.
How's your skin, son?
Charlie: My skin, sir?
Colonel: Ah, for Christ's sake!"
(Culpeper,1998:89)

        Charlie's contribution to this dialogue is restricted. He speaks much less than the Colonel .Moreover, the Colonel controls the dialogue, impeding Charlie's contributions and thus damaging his negative face. Charlie's

utterances are always polite. His use of "sir" as a deferential term of address backfires. The key point to note about Charlie's politeness and the Colonel's impoliteness is the interaction or rather the lack of interaction between them .Charlie is polite in spite of the Colonel's impoliteness, and the Colonel is impolite despite of Charlie's politeness. Each type of behaviour is made more salient in the context of the other.

The character can react to impolite act in many ways, for instance, one can decide to meet the challenge and at a level escalating the impolite that has been received or sought to escalate the level of offensive communication by responding in even more offensive way than was received. These matching strategies are known as offensive strategies where the attack is returned. Examples of these could be the use of false agreement, sarcasm, and use of vulgar or exploitive language or a repetition or reversal of what have been said to that person (Abed,2016:35). A clear example has been given by Culpeper et al (2003: 1563-1567) on counter attack where the pattern of offensive-offensive can lead to a conflict between the interactants where impoliteness escalates such as:

"shut up yourself you stupid cow!"
"if you don't shut up right now
I am going to shut you up myself"
"oh, go head and try,
you're going to get a black eye
if you come near me!"

According to Hydén (1995: 55–56),the concept of 'verbal aggression' has an essential role in drama. It refers to a verbal act which has the intent (or perceived intent) to symbolically hurt another. Whereas, Physical violence shows an act that has the intent (or perceived intent) of causing physical harm to another. Regarding the notion of dramatic dialogue, Bousfield(2008:75-76)emphasises that aggression is an act of beginning a quarrel ,war ,or unprovoked attack. It is used as a conflict tactic, or as a device for attaining or maintaining power in a specific situation or context .

That is to say ,the values and beliefs an individual shares with other people in his /her culture may govern his/her interpretation of what others try to convey whether face threatening or not. Thus, it is expected that what is polite in one culture may be impolite in another. Since cultures undergo changes constantly perception of impoliteness is also changing (Nasir et al.,2014:59)

Definitions of Absurd Theatre

'Absurd theatre' is a term that was originally used to portray the violation of the rules of logic. Absurdity involves the presentation of the futility of human action or behaviour, and the anguish this causes in a meaningless world (Tallur, 2005: 14).

According to Esslin (1961:5) AT shows the world as an incomprehensible place .The spectators see the happenings on the stage without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events. The confrontation of the audience to the characters and events make it impossible for them to share the aspirations and emotions depicted in the play . The absurd and fantastic goings on the AT will be found ,in the end, to reveal the irrationality of the human condition and the illusion of what we thought was its apparent logical structure . Consequently, Esslin et al. (1965) Point that the AT attacks the religious or political orthodoxy to shock its audience by facing harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, and responsibly; because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence and the meaningless world. In the last resort, AT does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation

Later ,Brooks (1966: 8) suggests a number of the major characteristics of the AT . First, the public is confronted with contradictions in both speech and actions which oppose any logical development. Second, language is destroyed as a means of communication in the sense that words cannot convey the essence of human existence. Third, time and place of

actions are ever clearly expressed. Fourth, the characters lack individuality and personality and are demonstrated as absolutes or types making identification with them impossible. As a result , the audience realise how the characters in absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe and they abandon rational thought to reveal the relativity of truth and futility of the life .

Baldick (2001: 1 as cited in Saadoon,2021:45) affirms that the term (AT) was first introduced by the critic Martin Esslin in 1961 to refer to a group of dramatists of the 1950s whose works arouse the absurd by neglecting logical form, character, and dialogue together with realistic illusion. According to Esslin (1961: xix) absurd is that which is devoid of purpose, man is lost, and all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. Therefore, the absurdists sought to convey modern feelings of humanity including confusion, anxiety, and despair .In addition , they reflect the horrors and moral corruption which are associated with the war, and they produce a widespread sense of the meaninglessness of human existence.

The Practical Part

This part presents an introduction to Pinter's "The Caretaker". It also shows the analysis and discussion of the results of the study. Finally, this part lists the final concluding remarks.

Introduction to Pinter's "The Caretaker"

Pinter's "The Caretaker" is regarded as the one of the most significant plays ever written in the entire history of AT. The play depicts the life as meaningless and useless. The language of the play is based on everyday conversation, which means that the language is colloquial, lacks continuity and is full of misunderstandings. Pinter explores themes such as unknown menace, verbal torture, power struggle for domination, family hatred, and mental disorder that are repeatedly used in his plays."The Caretaker" takes place in a house in west London during the 1950s and examines the strange relationship between Davies, and two damaged and disconnected brothers, Mick

and Aston. The play opens as Aston saves Davies from a fight, and brings him home to give him a place to stay.From the moment he leads Davies into the house, Aston shows that he is the owner of the place. Therefore , Davies seeks to form an alliance with him. Davies seems grateful, but it is soon clear that he is a perpetual liar and a selfish bigot who immediately tries to manipulate a situation to get as much out of it as he can. In the first half of act II, Aston offers Davies the job of a caretaker, he accepts it but is quick to turn his allegiance to Aston's brother Mick, when he realises that he can potentially get a better deal out of him. At the end of the play , Davies seals his fate by attempting to disrupt the disparate existence of the two brothers.

Data Analysis

Following Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness , this section displays the

frequency, percentage, and analysis of impolite expressions for each type of impoliteness strategies are found in "The Caretaker".

Excerpt (1)
"Aston: Sit down
Davies: Sit down? Huh … I haven't had a good sit down … I haven't had a proper sit down… well, I couldn't tell you.…
Aston: Here you are (Act 1, Scene 1 , p1)"

The immediate goal in this conversation , is the complaint of Davies from the noncooperation of others , and his criticism of them for wasting his time . The conversation displays a lack of communication between Davies and Aston .Each one is mind-centered on a certain task and needs to be dedicated to do it. Davies tends to use withhold politeness with fail to thanks sub-strategy to reveal his affective impoliteness function and his coercive attitude at Aston by saying "Sit down? Huh … I haven't had a good sit down … I haven't had a proper sit down… well, I couldn't tell you" . Whereas, Aston reveals his impolite attitude to Davies by using positive impoliteness strategy in his utterance "Here you are". Consequently, he employs accept fact attack response as he is disinterested, or unconcerned about Davies's own life.

Excerpt   (2)
"Davies: In the middle of the night …I couldn't find a seat, not one. All them Greeks had it, Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them,…. All them Blacks had it, Blacks, Greeks, Poles, the lot of them, that's what, doing me out of a seat, treating   me   like   dirt. Aston: Take a seat (Act 1, Scene 1 , p1)"

Davies uses two strategies :the negative impoliteness with condescend, scorn, ridicule sub-strategy to emphasise his relative power, and the positive impoliteness with an inappropriate identity marker sub-strategy. The main reason behind these impoliteness strategies and sub-strategies is to reflect the affective impoliteness function. It is implied to reveal his heightened feeling, such as indignation, which implies the duty of producing a negative emotional state. Moreover ,Davies' utterance contains impolite attitude and offensive countering response to insult and criticise those people who are mistreated him .

On the contrary , despite Aston accepting Davies' face attack, but his utterance such as "take seat" reflects that he is disinterested or careless about him. Therefore, he utilises the positive impoliteness as a reaction that he does not want to listen to his monologue .

Excerpt (3)
"Mick :I'm awfully glad. It's awfully nice to meet you. What did you say your name was?.
Davies: Jenkins
Mick: I beg your pardon?
Davies: Jenkins!
Mick: Jen……kins .You remind me of my uncle's brother. …..He Had an eye for the girls…... But I never called him uncle. As a matter of fact I called him Sid. My mother called him Sid too. It was a funny business. I hope you slept well last night (Act 1, Scene2 , p19)."

The immediate goals in this conversation are the use of derogatory nominations ,shushing and criticizing the bad behaviour of Davies.

Mick is arguably the most dominant character in "The Caretaker" , who sits on Davies and forces him to be half crouched on the floor at the beginning of the play . He uses his authority over other characters in order to reveal his domination. The act opens with Mick's questions ,asking who Davies is, keeping him on the floor ,and still stating 'I'm awfully glad. It's awfully nice to meet you' as an absurd contrast to the real situation. He obliges Davies to repeat his name 'Jen...kins' three times, for explaining the threating and sadistic aspect of his personality .Additionally , Mick reveals his authority when he keeps Davies on the floor. Then ,he starts his diatribe speech that characterises the absence of emotion, and the determination to avoid saying what ought to be said. Consequently, what leads Mick to form a speech that is associative and repetitious because of his insistence to confuse and torment Davies.

Mick uses the positive impoliteness with sub-strategy of calling the other name to insult Davies .On the other hand ,he employs sarcasm or mock politeness with the negative impoliteness strategy for the goal of employing insincere politeness sub-strategy , scorning Mick ,and imposing the authority in his utterance "I'm awfully glad. It's awfully nice to meet you".

Furthermore, the negative impoliteness strategy is utilised to associate Mick's uncle with negative aspect. Mick tends to use the offensive language to show the coercive impoliteness function. The offensive countering response is used with the escalation strategy ,because each character uses a stronger strategy than the other . Mick implies the accepting face attack response as a tool to involve the imbalance in power with Davies who chooses to answer Mick's question in order to reduce conflict .Consequently, Davies accepts the offending event to decrease the face damage .

The Total Percentage of Act One and Act Two of "The Caretaker"

Total No. of Utterances	Types of Impoliteness Strategies	No.	%	Goal of Strategies	No.	%
159	Positive Impoliteness	59	37%	Call the other name	2	3%
				Be disinterested , unconcerned	14	23%
				Snub/Ignore the other	2	3%
				Taboo words	4	2%
				Use obscure or secretive language	2	3%
				Seek disagreement	11	19%
				Make the others feel uncomfortable	14	24%
				Use inappropriate identity markers	10	17%
	Negative Impoliteness	36	23%	Associate the other with negative aspects	6	16%
				Condescend , scorn ,ridicule	13	36%
				Invade the other space literally or metaphorically	7	19%
				Put the other's indebtedness on record	1	3%
				Frighten	9	25%
	Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	4	3%	Employ insincere politeness	4	100%
	Bald on Record	17	11 %	Use direct and clear statement (FTA)	17	100%

	Withhold Politeness	3	1%	Fail to thank	3	100%

Discussion of Results in " The Caretaker"

The table above focuses on the impolite language among the characters. It is observed that the men try to reflect their power, and strength throughout the use of the offensive language in the entire play. The main aims of analysing impoliteness strategies are to examine the way males speak to each other , their social status , and their position in the society in the Post World War II period .The results prove that impoliteness is interpreted differently depending on the context of the characters in the play .The dominant type of impoliteness strategies is the positive impoliteness as it is used (59) times out of (159)utterances and it takes (37%), whereas the negative impoliteness has (23%), sarcasm or mock politeness has (3%), bald on record has (11%),and withhold politeness has (3%).Positive and negative impoliteness strategies are used frequently more than others to exhibit the life of a modern man who lives in a constant struggle between himself and others to acquire high status and gain respect . Pinter shows the impact Wars on modern man's life.

For this reason, "The Caretaker" reflects the issues such as human psychological problems, dominance one over another, power struggle and the change of power equations are true to humans and their complex lives. Pinter reveals the humans' complexities in their lives through Mick and Davies and Aston, which makes him one of the great playwrights of the time. He presents the reality through his works.

"The Caretaker" conveys the picture of jobless, hatred, racism, greed, discrimination, and interruption of relations among people through the characters . Davies symbolises as the victim of society because he is a rejected person from working-class people. He is barbaric who does not have a relation with his family, friends, even wife. Throughout Davies, Pinter represents the jobless, vagrant ,and shelterless working-class people. Also, he expresses greediness and selfishness. Davies is an old tramp who wants power in the house of Aston ,he tries to play a dividing role against two brothers. But he fails to do this and at last, he is fired from his job. Pinter represents the tendency and mentality of the contemporary modern people that seek for the authority through their selfishness.
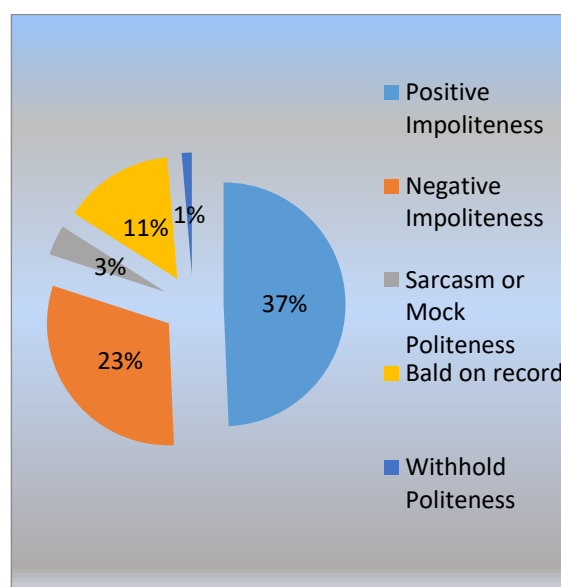

Fig 1. *The Percentages of Act One and Act Two in "The Caretaker"*

Conclusions

The results of the analysis of the play "The Caretaker" lead to following conclusions. These are mentioned below:

1. Impoliteness can be viewed as a literary paradigm in the analysis of literary works.

2. Culpeper's model (1996) of impoliteness is applicable to analyse literary texts

3. The use of impoliteness strategies in Pinter's "The Caretaker" is considered as one of the

prominent features of the play according to the findings of this study.

4. In AT, the impoliteness expressions are utilised to create a world that is featured as being illogical. Indeed, it portrays the notion of human loss of life that people experienced following WWI and WWII.

5. Absurd drama makes use of impolite expressions not only to refer to aggression, struggle , and conflict among the characters as traditional drama does, but also to confirm the theme of human loss, fragmentation and evasiveness.

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