

# “Impoliteness Strategies In Joe Biden’s Speech”

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## Abstract

Based on Jonathan Culpeper's (1996) concept of impoliteness, this study examined one of the pragmatic forms of impoliteness that occurred in President Biden's speeches during the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The purpose of the study is to determine the various impoliteness tactics that Biden employs, as well as the most frequently used strategies of impoliteness. The study was based on three press conferences of President Biden. These conferences took place on August 16, 20, and 22 of 2021. The data was collected from impolite utterances in Biden's speech, which were heard and seen in videos on YouTube and read from a written transcript on the White House's official website. In this study, a descriptive qualitative approach was used for deep clarification of the data. The topic of investigation was the phenomena of impoliteness strategies in verbal communication or spoken language. The results revealed that there were five strategies of impoliteness that occurred in Biden's speeches, and the most common one was positive impoliteness. In addition, the investigation shows that Biden exaggerated his power to attack the hearer.

**Keywords:** positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, face, power, withdrawal from Afghanistan.

## INTRODUCTION

Language, which enables interlocutors to communicate in a dynamic manner, is a fundamental aspect of human activity. Speakers express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions through language. People's adherence to cultural standards in communication shows their proficiency as speakers. Lakoff (1989, p.116) proposed two fundamental guidelines for pragmatic competence: be clear and polite. Preferably, the speakers must satisfy both conditions, but sometimes the rules are incompatible. Regarding politeness, it is impossible to isolate it from the culture involved. Whether an utterance is utilized (im)politely depends on how it is used. All cultures have norms for appropriate communication strategies, outlining which behaviors should, may, and

should not occur in a specific circumstance. Politeness is the manner of speech that expresses regard for others. Even though politeness is an essential component of social interactions, the opposite phenomena known as "impoliteness" is unavoidable and highly prominent in public life. Additionally, impoliteness is just as essential to pragmatic writing as politeness is. Verschueren (1999) asserts that politeness must not be considered as the core of social interaction; however, impolite behavior may serve the same purpose as polite behavior in the context of conversation. Yet, there are times when individuals attack rather than encourage others, and these attacks are sometimes viewed as impolite in social communication. Recently, Jonathan Culpeper and Derek Bousfield, pioneers in the field of

impoliteness studies, have begun to gradually increase the number of specific investigations into impoliteness. Therefore, impoliteness has become a significant language entity worthy of study (Fauziati, 2014, p.10).

This study exemplifies the application of Culpeper's model of impoliteness super-strategies to President Biden's speech about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. Therefore, it will examine the phenomenon of impoliteness used by President Biden on this occasion to reveal the types of impoliteness that the president employed and the common strategies that the speaker utilized.

## Theoretical Framework

### Face

Face is key to a number of classical and modern approaches of politeness and impoliteness. Consequently, the conceptualization of the face is seen as a crucial issue in the discussion of methods for human interaction. According to the Politeness Theory, one's face expresses the public self-image he or she wishes to maintain. This is compatible with Goffman's (1967) interpretation of the face. According to him, face is a favorable public image that aims to develop in social interactions (cited in Redmond, 2015). This definition emphasises the social setting. Goffman emphasises the significance of self-presentation or introduction positively in a social setting. Concentrating on the social environment, he defines face as the positive social value that a person claims for himself based on the line that others think he took during a certain contact (Goffman, 1955). Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 62) identify two types of face: negative and positive. According to them (1987, p. 61), FTA is a speaking act that may harm the positive or negative face of the hearer. Negative face signifies the urge to be free of imposition and activity for individuals. Positive face means wanting to be loyal and part of a group so that you will be liked and accepted.

Power Negotiating power in interaction, according to Locher (2004), is indeed part of

how interactants form and convey their identity (as cited in Mullary, 2008, p. 246). It is possible to draw parallels between power and impoliteness, both of which are not inherent in the language but are created via the process of conversation. Culpeper (1996, p.354) observes that when there is a power disparity between participants, the much more powerful speaker or writer has more freedom to be disrespectful. This means that if a less powerful participant is being unpleasant, the powerful speaker or writer has the authority to make it harder for that person to continue being disrespectful.

According to Garci-Pastor (2008), political power is represented by the power of persuasion, and that politicians utilise impoliteness as a type of power in order to embarrass their competitors. Furthermore, Culpeper (1996) explores the relationship between impoliteness and power, describing the nature of the relationship between them. He uses the relationship between an army recruit and a soldier as an example to show that a person's level of authority will determine how impolite they act.

### Impoliteness

As a consequence of Brown and Levinson's study (1978, 1987), researchers in the field of politeness have conducted more research and chosen to broaden the framework of impoliteness. In fact, speaking hurtful words can harm and offend the listeners. The study of impoliteness can be tackled from a variety of disciplines. However, despite the fact that these fields all deal with language, each discipline tends to gravitate toward a unique label. For illustration, impoliteness is labelled as (verbal aggression) in social psychology, (verbal abuse) in sociology, and (irony / sarcasm) in literary studies (Culpeper, 2011, p. 3). Various academics have defined impoliteness, but there is no consensus among these definitions; hence, there is no universally recognised definition. Yet, there is an element shared by essentially all of such classifications, which is the notion of "face" (Culpeper, 2008). Impoliteness, according to Culpeper, encompasses both the speaker's intention and the recipient's interpretation.

Therefore, purpose is a vital factor in establishing the amount of (im)politeness. Impoliteness may be seen when Grice's conversational maxims, including those related to negative and positive politeness, are violated. This is one way that impoliteness can be demonstrated.

As defined by Locher and Bousfield (2008), impoliteness is behaving in an aggressive way to someone in a certain situation. As a result, impoliteness may be better understood when taken in connection with context. According to Culpeper et al. (2003), communicative methods aimed at a target face, and hence induce social conflict and discord, To Bousfield, (2008), impoliteness is a negative attitude toward particular acts happening in particular settings. It is maintained through expectations, aspirations, and/or ideas regarding social order, in particular how the identities of an individual or group are mediated by others in communication. (Culpeper, 2010, p. 3233). Through this study, the impoliteness strategies provided by Culpeper in 1996, 2003, and 2005 will be reviewed in order to determine which strategies President Biden employs in his statements during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

### **Culpeper's (1996, 2005) Impoliteness Model**

This study will follow the model of Jonathan Culpeper, which is regarded as the most influential model of impoliteness offered to date, in order to expose the impoliteness communicated from the speaker to the listener. He classifies the strategies of as follows:

1. **Positive impoliteness:** it refers to damaging the positive face of the addressee by employing strategies such as "ignore", "exclude the other from an activity", "make the other feel uncomfortable", "be unconcerned", "uninterested, unsympathetic", "snub the other", "use mysterious or obscure language", "use inappropriate identity markers", "call the other name", "use taboo or offensive words", etc. Culpeper (2005) expressly connects this super strategy to sociality

face and quality face elements that presented by Spencer-Oatey's (2002), (Leech, 2014). Spencer-Oatey's ideas about face came after the concept of Rapport Management, which says that people should focus on the importance of personal relationships and ignore how society affects face.

2. **Bald on-record impoliteness:** This super strategy comprises direct face attack, when the speaker intends to attack the hearer or listener who is incapable of (safely) uttering an impolite statement. Thus, the expression is applied in a direct, clear, and unambiguous manner (Leech, 2014). Because the speaker intends to harm the other's face, the face is at great risk.
3. **Sarcasm or mock politeness:** it can be achieved by employing insincere politeness methods while carrying out the FTA. The output tactics for sarcasm or mock politeness are metaphorical language, ironic language, and hyperbole. Later, Culpeper (2005) substitutes this super strategy with off-the-record impoliteness, where the offence is accomplished indirectly through the use of implicatures that can be denied or retracted (Leech, 2014).
4. **Negative impoliteness:** it entails an assault on your freedom of action, which Culpeper relates to Spencer-Oatey's Equity Rights. Moreover, he proposes that the negative face intersections with Association Rights to a certain extent, such as "ridicule, , condescend or scorn," "put the other's obligation on record," "frightened," etc. (Leech, 2014). This tactic is intended to harm the other's negative face, which means the desire for freedom in actions and thoughts.
5. **Withhold politeness:** it means a polite act that should be done in a certain situation but isn't. This approach involves remaining silent or being unable to act where politeness acts are anticipated, such as avoiding to express gratitude for a nice

activity, which may be regarded as deliberate impoliteness. (Leech, 2014)

## Methodology

### Data Source

The speeches of President Biden about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan are collected from YouTube. The study chose three press conferences to answer the question of the study, including the press conference of August 16, 2021 (NowThis News, August 16). Also, the press conference of August 20, 2021 (CNN, 2021, August 20). The last one is the conference of August 22, 2021 (Post, 2021, August 22). For a better understanding of Biden's speeches, the written transcription of his speeches is collected from the official website of the White House ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)). The first written transcription of the first conference is taken from House (2021, August 16). The second one is collected from House (2021b, August 20), and the last one from House (2021c, August 23).

### Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

A qualitative method was selected in this study. The qualitative method requires the collection of data, particularly textual data, and its verification through interpretive analysis (Heigham and Croker 2009). This kind of study is conducted to provide a description and illustrate the analysis of the study based on the frequency of the impoliteness strategies.

### The analysis of the data

1- "And our true strategic competitors — China and Russia — would love nothing more than the United States to continue to funnel billions of dollars in resources and attention into stabilizing Afghanistan indefinitely".

In his press conference on August 16, 2021, President Biden highlighted the operation of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. At this conference, he tries to persuade those who don't agree with the withdrawal by stating, "China and Russia would love nothing more

than the United States to continue to funnel billions..." According to him, China and Russia love the continuity of this war since it is not beneficial to the USA. This means, he associates these two countries with a negative aspect. To Culpeper (1996), such a technique is one output of negative impoliteness. As an outcome, the negative face of these countries will be affected.

2- "This is one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history. And the only country in the world capable of projecting this much power on the far side of the world with this degree of precision is the United States of America".

In another press conference on August 20, 2021, President Biden's address from the White House, he talked about how hard it would be to plan a mass evacuation while being surrounded by Taliban forces who had just taken over the Afghani capital. After evacuating more than 18,000 people since July and about 13,000 since August 14, 2021, when the military airlift started, President Biden praised the US troops. He describes the airlift from Kabul to the USA as the longest in history and the USA is the only country capable of that.

In his utterance "... the only country in the world capable of projecting this much power .....is the United States of America", President Biden ignores the existence of other powerful countries such as Russia, China, and the UK that may be capable of carrying out such an operation. This indicates that the speaker disassociates from the others or ignores the presence of the other capable countries, and as a result, their positive self-image will be hurt. According to Culpeper (1996), this kind of activity is one strategy of impoliteness that is called "positive impoliteness." Moreover, Locher and Bousfield (2008) state that power can be seen as impoliteness in the discourse. This concludes that the power of the USA is utilized throughout the impoliteness in this utterance.

3- “We’ve been able — we’ve made — look, we’ve made clear to the Taliban that any attack — any attack on our forces or disruption of our operations at the airport will be met with a swift and forceful response”.

On the same occasion, President Biden speaks about the operation of the withdrawal. In this utterance, Biden shows the power of the USA by threatening the Taliban, and he doesn’t hesitate to threaten them. According to Locher (2004), negotiating power in interactions is part of how people shape and show their identity. In this case, Biden shows his power as president of the USA by threatening and frightening the Taliban. He also considers making hate speech that could affect enmity. Therefore, this utterance is classified as negative impoliteness because it frightened and threatened the Taliban. This sub strategy is distinguished by supplying influence or conviction that negative behavior will occur, so that it might make some listeners scared.

4- “And we’re going to retain an over-the-horizon capability that if they were to come back — to be able to take them out, surgically move.

So, this is — this is where we should be. This is about America leading the world, and all our allies have agreed with that”.

At the same press conference on August 20, 2021, the president speaks about the ability of the USA to use drones to target any terrorist activity over the horizon. Moreover, to him, the USA can use such an ability if al-Qaeda comes back to Afghanistan and there is no need for real troops to be on the ground in Afghanistan. Biden links such an ability with the power of the USA and the ability to lead the world. In his utterance, “this is about America leading the world...” Biden invades other countries’ freedom to lead themselves. In this case, the influence of power on impoliteness is clear. To Culpeper (1996), invading

others’ space is one example of negative impoliteness. Because of this kind of impoliteness, the negative faces of other powerful countries will be affected in terms of being free in their thoughts and actions.

5- “I think you’re comparing apples and oranges. One question was whether or not the Afghan forces we trained up would stay and fight in their own civil war they had going on”.

“No one — I shouldn’t say “no one” — the consensus was that it was highly unlikely that in 11 days they’d collapse and fall, and the leader of Afghanistan would flee the country”.

At a press conference on August 20, 2021, President Biden was asked by a journalist if he had failed to anticipate the fall of the Afghani government in such a short period. He might also have failed to anticipate the ability of over-horizon power and the possibility of using Afghanistan to launch an attack on the United States. Biden uses idioms in his reply to the journalist’s question. In order to explain that the latter is comparing two different things, “I think you’re comparing apples and oranges”. To Raximova, et al. (2021), idioms can often assist in explaining a large or abstract subject in a clear and understandable manner. In this case, Biden argues that these two situations can’t be compared since they have different characteristics or meanings. Meanwhile, Biden uses figurative language to criticize the journalist for making such a comparison. According to Culpeper (1996), such impoliteness techniques are called sarcastic politeness.

In another utterance, “No one — I shouldn’t say no one ...” Biden tries to explain that no one anticipated the quick fall of the Afghani government in 11 days. According to the Wall Street Journal, Miley was among the top generals that asked Biden to keep approximately 2,500 troops in

Afghanistan. This indicates that someone has anticipated the collapse of the Afghani government. Meanwhile, Biden excluded those who anticipated such things from the activity. To Culpeper (1996), excluding others from the activity is an example of positive impoliteness.

6- Our first priority in Kabul is getting American citizens out of the country as quickly and as safely as possible.

In his press conference on August 22, 2021, about the evacuation from Afghanistan, President Biden spook about the danger and difficulty of such a withdrawal. In this utterance, Biden focuses on the safety of American citizens. He considers them the most important citizens who need to be evacuated. On the other hand, Afghani allies promised to be evacuated with the US withdrawal. So, Biden regards the Afghani allies who worked with the US troops. As a result, Biden isolates American citizens from the Afghanis. Because of this isolation, some Afghanis' (those who worked with the USA) positive faces will be affected. According to Culpeper (1996), isolating others from some activity is a strategy of positive impoliteness.

7- ... Why isn't the U.S. doing more to allow Afghans into the airport — to ensure access to the airport? And are you still opposed to setting up an extended perimeter around the airport to help ease that access?

- THE PRESIDENT: Number one, I think you're going to see they're going to get out.

At the same press conference on August 22, 2021, President Biden was asked why the US is not making more effort to let Afghan citizens leave the country. In response to this question, Biden challenges the journalist that the latter will see them leave the country. The accepted response is supposed to be

explaining the procedures of interring the airport. According to Culpeper (2005), impoliteness is manifested by a violation of Grice's conversational maxims. In this case, Biden violates the maxim of relevance since he doesn't answer the question directly. Such a violation leads to withhold impoliteness, as Culpeper 1996 stated. As a result, the journalist's positive image will be harmed.

8- Q Thanks, Mr. President.

- THE PRESIDENT: I don't want you jumping over that (inaudible).

In the same situation, Biden orders the journalist to stay calm and to jump over the set and asks for the microphone. Locher (2004) suggests that conveying power in interactions is portion of how people form and express their identities. In Biden's utterance, the presence of his power is clear. He doesn't use expected polite words to change his actions from order to request, such as (please don't jump, would you please... etc).

Such a kind of impoliteness strategy is identified by the Culpeper (1996) model as withhold politeness. As a result of such impoliteness, the victim's negative face will be affected. In their theory of face, Broun and Levinson (1987, p.52) mention that "face" does not refer to a person's physical facial features, but rather to his or her public image or self-respect. This indicates that the journalist's self-respect will be damaged in front of his colleagues.

9- - THE PRESIDENT: I haven't seen that poll.

- Q It's out there, from CBS this morning.

- THEPRESIDENT: (Laughs.)

In the same situation, the journalist asks Biden about his opinion after the new poll released by CBS TV, which stated that most American people don't like the way of the withdrawal. President Biden's response to such a question was with laughter. According to the context, this laughter is not a response to a jock or

a funny situation. According to Kotthoff (as cited in Partington, 2006, p. 203), such laughter is called ironic laughter. He demonstrates how frequently ironic remarks are followed by laughter, both in conversation and in more structured television debates. This sort of irony is used when addressing verbal irony; it is also implicit in the sense that only one of the narratives (the dictum) is offered in the text, while the other (the implicatum) is left unsaid and must be rebuilt by the listener. In this case, Biden regards what is said by the journalist as ironic according to the discrepancy between what is said by and what is implied by Biden. To Biden, such a pool is not authentic or a biased one, so we should not depend on it.

According to Culpeper (1996), such ironic laughter comes from mock or sarcastic impoliteness. Bernal, (2008), also, states that mock impolite statements are accompanied by laughter or a joke, whereas genuine impolite statements provoke protests and confrontation. This indicates that the social face of journalism will be affected.

10- Q – “On the question of the Taliban though, do you have a — do you

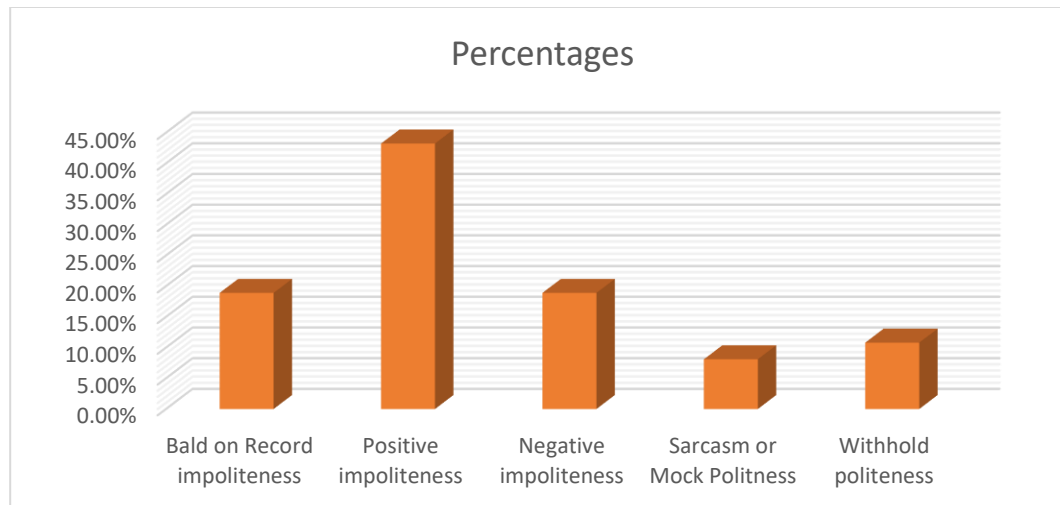
trust them now? Do you have (inaudible)?”

- THE PRESIDENT: “I don’t trust anybody, including you. I love you, but, you know, there’s not a lot of people I trust to”

At the same conference on August 22, 2021, a journalist asks Biden whether or not he trusts the Taliban after depending on them to allow American citizens to get through the checkpoints. Instead of directly answering the question, Biden said, "I don’t trust anybody, including you" to imply that he doesn’t like them. In this utterance, the speaker is direct and clear that he doesn’t trust the victim (the journalist). In this case, it was obvious that the speaker used a bold on record strategy of impoliteness in order to attack the negative face of the victim (the need to be committed and belong to a group). Also, such impoliteness is used when the speaker aims to target the other's face, posing a significant risk to the face.

### Experimental results

Types of impoliteness	Occurrence	Percentages
Bald on Record impoliteness	7	18.91%
Positive impoliteness	16	43.24%
Negative impoliteness	7	18.91%
Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	3	8.10%
Withhold politeness	4	10.81%



### Conclusion.

According to Leech (1983), disagreement in human interaction must not be considered as a secondary linguistic activity; rather, it should be viewed as fundamental in particular contexts. Communicators may purposefully target each other's faces instead of using polite approaches to show that they are aware of the social or personal face of the addressee. In this study, a significant effort has been made to illustrate President Biden's employment of impoliteness methods in his remarks during the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The analysis reveals that President Biden employed all impoliteness techniques (bold on record, negative impoliteness, positive impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withheld politeness). Moreover, this investigation shows that the least common strategy of impoliteness utilized by President Biden is sarcasm or mock politeness, and the most common one is positive impoliteness. The reason behind these findings is that the positive impoliteness comes with more output strategies. Also, the speaker's desire to harm the positive image of the target (the need to be approved by a particular group) Moreover, the position of the speaker as a leader encourages President Biden to be disassociated from the other, ignores,

snubs, and excludes the other from the activity.

By employing impolite techniques, it is possible to affect other individuals. The listener has a variety of options available for how to react to the speaker who used impolite language. The reactions that took place will vary depending on the circumstances in which the impolite behaviour took place. As the president of a powerful country, Biden has more authority and a greater advantage than the others in employing impoliteness without evoking a significant response from the audience. Meanwhile, the importance of power and gender in the understanding of impolite language behaviour cannot be ignored. As noted in the "power" section, differences in power between speakers may influence the employment of the strategies of impoliteness. In this respect, imbalanced power can be observed in the communicators' discourse. In fact, power provides people with the choice to feel that they are higher than others. In addition, it is concluded that roughness is influenced by many linguistic factors, but is not inherent to linguistic expression. If an expression is polite in one context, it may be impolite in another.

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