



Impoliteness Strategies in Amy Poehler's Moxie (2021): A Pragmatic Analysis (*Strategi Ketidaksantunan dalam Film Moxie (2021) Karya Amy Poehler: Analisis Pragmatik*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 26 Mei 2026 Revised: 10 Agustus 2026 Accepted: 17 Agustus 2026 Keywords: Impoliteness Strategies Pragmatics Moxie Face – Threatening Act Kata Kunci: Strategi Ketidaksantunan Pragmatik Moxie Tindak Pengancam Muka	This study aims to identify the types of impoliteness strategies and determine the most dominant strategy employed by the characters in the movie Moxie (2021). Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, this research applied Jonathan Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory to systematically analyze the cinematic dialogues. Data were collected through movie observation, note-taking, and transcription. The findings reveal a total of 31 instances of impoliteness, comprising five strategies: bald on record (9 data), positive impoliteness (15 data), negative impoliteness (4 data), sarcasm or mock politeness (2 data), and withhold politeness (1 datum). Positive impoliteness emerged as the most dominant strategy. The frequent use of positive impoliteness indicates that characters primarily attack the interlocutors' social identity and need for approval, utilizing relational aggression and social exclusion. In conclusion, impoliteness in Moxie functions beyond mere offensive language; it acts as a strategic communicative tool for characters to negotiate power, construct social hierarchies, and express resistance within a complex adolescent environment. Abstrak Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi berbagai tipe strategi ketidaksantunan serta menentukan strategi yang paling dominan digunakan oleh para karakter dalam film Moxie (2021). Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan kerangka teori ketidaksantunan Jonathan Culpeper (1996) untuk menganalisis dialog sinematik secara mendalam. Data penelitian dikumpulkan secara sistematis melalui observasi film, teknik pencatatan, dan transkripsi. Hasil temuan penelitian mengungkapkan adanya 31 tuturan ketidaksantunan yang mencakup kelima strategi: bald on record (9 data), ketidaksantunan positif (15 data), ketidaksantunan negatif (4 data), sarkasme atau kesantunan semu (2 data), dan menahan kesantunan (1 data). Ketidaksantunan positif muncul sebagai strategi yang paling dominan. Tingginya frekuensi penggunaan ketidaksantunan positif menunjukkan bahwa para karakter secara aktif menyerang identitas sosial dan kebutuhan pengakuan lawan tutur melalui eksklusi sosial. Kesimpulannya, fenomena ketidaksantunan dalam film Moxie berfungsi lebih dari sekadar bahasa kasar; ia bertindak sebagai instrumen komunikasi strategis untuk menegosiasikan kekuasaan, mempertahankan hierarki sosial, dan mengekspresikan perlawanan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a system of grammatical structures but a vital social instrument used to negotiate meaning, construct identity, and exercise power in daily interaction (Fairclough, 1989). Within the field of pragmatics, meaning is heavily dependent on context, speaker intention, and social norms rather than just the literal interpretation of words (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). While social interactions often rely on politeness strategies to maintain harmony and protect an individual's public self-image or "face," communication frequently involves deliberate linguistic attacks (Donohue & Druckman, 2025; Hasyim, 2025). Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize this "face" into positive face, which is the fundamental desire to be appreciated, approved of, and socially accepted, and negative face, which pertains to the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. When an utterance threatens these socio-psychological aspects, it is termed a Face-Threatening Act (FTA). Departing from the traditional pragmatic focus on mitigating FTAs, contemporary linguistics also rigorously examines instances where speakers intentionally exacerbate these threats. This deliberate face-threatening act is defined as impoliteness—communicative behavior strategically designed to cause social conflict and explicitly damage the hearer's identity (Culpeper, 1996).

According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness can be classified into five super strategies: bald on record impoliteness (direct attacks without mitigation), positive impoliteness (attacks on social belonging and self-worth), negative impoliteness (impositions on freedom of action), sarcasm or mock politeness (the use of insincere polite forms to convey mockery), and withhold politeness (the deliberate absence of expected polite behavior). Impoliteness serves crucial communicative functions in human interaction, such as expressing anger, asserting institutional or physical dominance, and humiliating others, which fundamentally reveals underlying power asymmetries (Culpeper, 2011). Therefore, examining impoliteness is profoundly urgent for understanding how language constructs conflict, systemic marginalization, and power relations within society (Fan, 2025; Krisnawati et al., 2026).

Cinematic discourse provides a rich, highly contextualized, and dynamic medium for analyzing these pragmatic phenomena, as movie dialogues represent dramatized yet realistic social interactions. In cinematic narratives, conflict is often driven not merely by physical altercations but predominantly through linguistic exchanges. The unit of analysis in this study is the verbal utterances produced by the characters in the movie *Moxie* (2021), directed by Amy Poehler. Set in a contemporary high school environment, the film illustrates complex adolescent dynamics, including peer pressure, social status competition, systemic sexism, and institutional power relations. The story follows a feminist awakening triggered by a toxic school culture, where characters frequently engage in intense verbal confrontations. These characters utilize direct insults, sarcastic remarks, dismissive comments, and public ridicule to threaten both the positive and negative face of their interlocutors. For instance, the use of explicit taboo words to attack a peer's positive face, or absolute commands from authority figures to restrict a student's negative face, are prevalent throughout the narrative. Because the core conflicts and narrative tensions in *Moxie* are built primarily upon these sharp verbal interactions rather than explicit physical actions, the film offers a highly relevant and complex context to analyze how impolite language operates strategically as an instrument of both oppression and resistance in a youth-centric setting.

Several recent studies over the last decade have rigorously applied Culpeper's impoliteness framework across different media formats, proving its robust analytical capacity. Fauziyyah (2025) analyzed the action-comedy film *The Fall Guy*, finding that bald on record strategies dominated high-tension, physical, and hierarchical interactions where characters abandoned all linguistic mitigation to assert immediate authority. In a different narrative structure, Djohan and Simatupang (2022) identified the presence of all five impoliteness strategies in the villain-centric narrative of *Cruella*, demonstrating how a protagonist's descent into villainy is linguistically marked by increasing and calculated face-attacks. Similarly, Simanjuntak and Ambalegin (2022) explored adolescent dynamics in the teen comedy *Easy A*, highlighting the prevalence of positive and negative impoliteness as mechanisms for spreading rumors and navigating high school ostracization. Furthermore, Dunggio et al. (2024) investigated the teen drama *Do Revenge*, noting that impoliteness strategies are frequently employed as undesirable communicative actions to exact vengeance and inflict social harm upon peers. Expanding into non-fictional communicative contexts, Hafisa and Hanidar

(2020) examined Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy performance, revealing negative impoliteness as an effective rhetorical tool for generating humor, engaging the audience, and delivering biting social criticism.

Despite these extensive pragmatic applications across various genres, a noticeable gap exists regarding the specific pragmatic landscape of the movie *Moxie* (2021). Existing literature and critical reviews on this film predominantly focus on its overarching sociological and ideological themes—such as feminist perspectives, social activism, mother-daughter dynamics, and structural resistance to gender inequality. Consequently, there is an absolute absence of systematic pragmatic analysis identifying exactly how impoliteness strategies are linguistically realized to reflect the film's nuanced social conflicts. The existing studies primarily examine impoliteness in the contexts of action, general comedy, or typical teen drama, leaving a critical gap in understanding how face-threatening acts operate in a narrative explicitly centered on systemic institutional bias and grassroots student rebellion.

To fill this research gap, this study aims to identify the specific types of impoliteness strategies employed by the characters in *Moxie* (2021) based on Culpeper's (1996) taxonomy, and to determine which strategy occurs most dominantly throughout the dialogues. The research problem revolves around understanding how linguistic choices mirror the power struggles between the oppressive school hierarchy and the rebellious student body. By addressing these objectives, the research provides a novel linguistic perspective on how face-threatening acts operate within contemporary cinematic discourse. To present this analysis systematically, this article is structured into several sections. The introduction establishes the research background, literature review, gap analysis, and objectives. The research method section describes the qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher's role as the primary instrument, and the data collection techniques utilized to examine the unit of analysis. The findings and discussion section classifies the empirical utterances using Culpeper's framework, integrates the findings with established theories, and interprets their deeper social functions. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the primary findings and provides theoretical implications and recommendations for future pragmatic inquiries.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a qualitative descriptive method to investigate and understand the phenomenon of impoliteness strategies in depth, focusing on interpreting linguistic phenomena within their contextual use rather than relying on statistical measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). In this qualitative design, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, whose presence and active engagement were essential in observing, extracting, and interpreting the pragmatic meanings behind the characters' interactions. The population and specific target of this study were the cinematic discourse found in the movie *Moxie* (2021), directed by Amy Poehler. The unit of analysis or the primary data comprised verbal utterances—including words, phrases, sentences, and complete dialogues—produced by the characters that contained face-threatening acts such as criticism, mockery, insults, and disagreement.

The data collection procedure was conducted systematically through three parallel techniques: movie observation, note-taking, and transcription. First, the researcher repeatedly observed the movie to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character relationships, and the situational contexts underlying each interaction. Second, a note-taking technique was employed to record utterances that potentially contained impoliteness strategies based on Jonathan Culpeper's (1996) theoretical framework. During this step, crucial contextual information, such as the characters involved and the setting of the scene, was thoroughly documented. Third, the data were transcribed using the official subtitles of the movie to ensure absolute accuracy of the spoken dialogues. The researcher also noted contextual elements like tone of voice and relevant non-verbal cues that supported the interpretation of the utterances.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, the researcher maintained prolonged engagement with the data source through repeated viewings and rigorous documentation. The technique of data analysis was executed through several systematic steps based on Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness theory. Initially, the researcher identified the impolite utterances from the transcribed data. Subsequently, these utterances were classified into five distinct categories: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness. The researcher then analyzed the pragmatic function of each utterance to determine its communicative purpose, such as to ridicule, challenge, or threaten the hearer. Following this, the utterances were interpreted comprehensively by considering the interactional context, power relations, and speaker intentions. Finally, conclusions were drawn by calculating the frequency of each strategy to determine the most dominant type and synthesizing how these strategies functioned within the movie's overall social dynamics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pragmatic analysis of the cinematic discourse in *Moxie* (2021) reveals the active and systematic employment of all five impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996). Through the transcription and

classification of the characters' dialogues, a total of 31 distinct instances of face-threatening acts (FTAs) were identified. These findings demonstrate that impoliteness within the narrative is not merely an incidental display of bad manners, but a calculated communicative resource utilized by the characters to express conflict, negotiate power asymmetries, and enact resistance within the highly stratified high school ecosystem. The data distribution across the five super strategies consists of bald on record impoliteness (9 instances), positive impoliteness (15 instances), negative impoliteness (4 instances), sarcasm or mock politeness (2 instances), and withhold politeness (1 instance).

The linguistic realization of these strategies varies significantly depending on the communicative goals, emotional states, and power dynamics of the characters involved in the interaction. Bald on record impoliteness, representing 9 instances, is predominantly used to deliver direct, unambiguous attacks, explicit prohibitions, or absolute commands without any redressive action or mitigation. In the context of *Moxie*, this strategy is frequently deployed in two diametrically opposed situations: authoritarian control and urgent self-defense. For instance, institutional figures like Principal Shelly utilize this strategy to enforce immediate compliance. When Lucy attempts to report a harassment incident, Shelly abruptly dismisses her by stating, "Go and sit down". This imperative utterance functions as a severe FTA that attacks Lucy's negative face by forcibly restricting her freedom of action and silencing her grievance to maintain the school's status quo. Conversely, marginalized characters employ this exact strategy for self-preservation. When Mitchell continuously invades Lucy's personal space, she delivers a harsh, unmitigated prohibition: "Don't touch me". Bereft of any politeness markers (such as "please"), this bald on record strategy successfully establishes a rigid physical boundary and challenges Mitchell's perceived dominance.

Negative impoliteness, identified in 4 instances, operates by explicitly imposing control, instilling fear, or restricting the interlocutor's autonomy and freedom from imposition. This strategy is predominantly utilized by characters possessing hierarchical authority. A prominent example occurs when Mr. Davis threatens a tardy student, Mitchell, by stating, "you will be [dead] if you're late to class again". Although delivered with a hyperbolic tone, the pragmatic force of this utterance is a stern warning that directly intervenes in Mitchell's autonomy, utilizing fear as a mechanism of classroom management. More insidiously, negative impoliteness is utilized by Principal Shelly to gaslight students and restrict their institutional rights. When Lucy uses the word "harassment," Shelly invalidates the claim by patronizingly stating, "It's your first week of school in a new school. That can be emotional". By reducing a legitimate report of harassment to mere teenage "emotion," Shelly attacks Lucy's negative face, effectively stripping away her right to be taken seriously and systematically denying her institutional protection.

Furthermore, the data illustrate the strategic use of indirect face attacks through sarcasm (mock politeness) and withhold politeness, though less frequent. Sarcasm, found in 2 instances, exploits the pragmatic mismatch between literal politeness and intended mockery. This is evident when a student is sarcastically praised for blocking a public hallway: "No, please, block the sidewalk to admire her nails". On the surface, the utterance employs a negative politeness strategy by granting permission ("please"), but its illocutionary force is a veiled command and a biting critique of the interlocutors' vanity and selfishness. Withhold politeness, identified in 1 instance, operates entirely through omission. This occurs when Mitchell deliberately refuses to apologize after abruptly interrupting Lucy's argument in class. In pragmatic norms, an interruption requires a restorative apology; by withholding this expected conversational etiquette, Mitchell sends a clear message that Lucy's social standing is insignificant, thereby undermining her positive face without uttering a single explicit insult.

Addressing the second research objective, the findings establish that positive impoliteness is overwhelmingly the most dominant strategy, representing nearly half of the total data (15 out of 31 instances). According to Culpeper (1996), positive impoliteness specifically targets the interlocutor's desire to be appreciated, approved of, and socially accepted. The linguistic realizations in the movie are heavily characterized by the use of derogatory labels, the withdrawal of solidarity, making the interlocutor feel uncomfortable, and explicit social exclusion. For example, Mitchell degrades Lucy's activism and independence by labeling her a "whiner" and "difficult," weaponizing inappropriate identity markers to damage her self-esteem. In a deeply emotional conflict, Claudia attacks Vivian's moral integrity by stating, "Because I'm not a coward, unlike you," effectively withdrawing best-friend solidarity and destroying Vivian's self-image as a brave leader. Even in familial interactions, this strategy is dominant; Vivian attacks her mother's supportive advice by calling it "bullshit mom talk," a direct violation of both positive face and familial hierarchy. The high frequency of this strategy underscores that the central conflicts in *Moxie* are not driven by physical confrontation, but primarily by relational aggression, ideological invalidation, and targeted attacks on personal and social identity.

The empirical identification of positive impoliteness as the most dominant strategy provides a highly critical interpretation of adolescent interaction dynamics and the specific socio-cultural setting of the narrative. To answer the formulated research questions comprehensively, it is crucial to interpret why

positive face attacks outnumber direct commands (bald on record) or threats (negative impoliteness) in this specific cinematic discourse. In the high school environment depicted in *Moxie*, peer acceptance, social hierarchy, and group belonging are the primary currencies of identity formation. Therefore, targeting an individual's positive face—their need to be validated and included—becomes the most effective, pervasive, and psychologically damaging mechanism to assert social dominance. Characters continuously manipulate social approval to marginalize their peers, proving that relational aggression is the preferred weapon in adolescent power struggles.

This finding offers a compelling contrasting perspective when systematically compared to previous pragmatic studies situated in different media discourses, thereby situating this research within the established structure of linguistic knowledge. For instance, Fauziyyah (2025) found that bald on record impoliteness was overwhelmingly dominant in the high-tension, action-oriented narrative of *The Fall Guy*. In such environments, physical survival and immediate hierarchical compliance require characters to abandon all linguistic mitigation, resulting in highly direct face attacks. Similarly, Hafisa and Hanidar (2020) identified negative impoliteness (specifically condescending and scolding) as the primary tool in Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy, where restricting the target's autonomy serves as a mechanism for generating humor and engaging the audience. Djohan and Simatupang (2022) found all five strategies in *Cruella*, but noted that the protagonist's villainous transformation relied heavily on direct, bald on record commands to establish fear.

In contrast, the current study aligns much closer with the findings of Simanjuntak and Ambalegin (2022), who explored the teen movie *Easy A* and noted a high prevalence of positive impoliteness. Both *Easy A* and *Moxie* are adolescent-centric films where rumors, social ostracization, and identity politics drive the plot. However, this study extends the established knowledge structure by highlighting a crucial theoretical divergence: while *Easy A* utilizes impoliteness primarily for interpersonal drama, *Moxie* elevates impoliteness to a tool of systemic, ideological warfare. The specific sociopolitical context of a narrative—in this case, a feminist awakening against toxic masculinity and institutional apathy—strictly dictates the choice, frequency, and pragmatic function of the impoliteness strategies utilized by its characters.

Through a deeper empirical interpretation of the findings, this study necessitates a modification in how Culpeper's (1996; 2011) impoliteness theory is traditionally applied to feminist or resistance-based narratives. Conventionally, impoliteness is viewed merely as an undesirable communicative behavior that causes social conflict and interpersonal offense. However, in *Moxie*, the application of impoliteness is explicitly bifurcated along the lines of power, transforming it from mere rudeness into a highly politicized linguistic weapon.

On one side of this bifurcation, privileged characters utilize impoliteness as an instrument of oppression to maintain the patriarchal status quo, marginalize victims, and silence dissent. Mitchell, representing toxic masculinity, frequently employs positive impoliteness to gaslight female students. When Lucy defends her personal space, Mitchell responds with, "Why do you always have to be so difficult?". This rhetorical question is not a genuine inquiry but a sharp criticism that exploits gender expectations—implying that women should be compliant—thereby weaponizing positive impoliteness to make Lucy feel guilty for setting boundaries. Similarly, Principal Shelly uses negative impoliteness to dismiss student protests as mere "big emotions," systematically utilizing language to protect the institution's reputation at the expense of student safety.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, marginalized characters reappropriate these exact impoliteness strategies as subversive tools for systemic resistance and empowerment. In situations where institutional politeness norms are designed to keep victims silent, breaking these norms becomes the only viable method to demand accountability. This is powerfully illustrated when Kaitlynn, a student, publicly confronts her male teacher, Mr. Davis, regarding his passive, "neutral" stance on the school's sexist dress code. Breaking the strict institutional hierarchy that dictates a student must respect a teacher, Kaitlynn employs positive impoliteness by stating, "If you're doing nothing, you're part of the problem". By equating the teacher's silence with complicity, Kaitlynn effectively destroys the teacher's positive self-image as a "good guy" and forces him to confront his own hypocrisy. The perlocutionary effect of this impolite utterance is immense: it dismantles the teacher's authority and validates the students' collective anger.

Similarly, the protagonist, Vivian, utilizes highly explicit positive and bald on record impoliteness to reclaim her agency. When confronted by Mitchell's arrogance as he proudly calls himself the "winning asshole," Vivian immediately strips away his perceived victory by validating the profanity: "You are an asshole, and you don't get to touch these, okay?". In this context, the use of taboo words and absolute prohibition is not merely an emotional outburst; it is a calculated pragmatic strategy to reclaim conversational dominance, reject patriarchal entitlement, and protect her physical space.

Consequently, this study introduces a vital theoretical nuance and novelty to the study of pragmatics: within environments characterized by systemic inequality, impoliteness strategies transcend their conventional function of merely causing social offense. Instead, they function as vital linguistic instruments

for empowerment. By deliberately performing face-threatening acts, disenfranchised individuals are able to challenge institutional authority, reject sexist normalization, dismantle toxic power dynamics, and negotiate their gender identity on their own terms. This perspective firmly confirms that language in media discourse is not a passive reflection of society's manners, but an active, dynamic arena where ideological battles are fought, and social justice is fiercely negotiated through the strategic suspension of politeness.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study establishes two main conclusions that answer the formulated research questions. First, all five types of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996) are actively employed by the characters in the movie *Moxie* (2021). Out of the 31 identified instances of face-threatening acts, the data consist of bald on record impoliteness (9 data), positive impoliteness (15 data), negative impoliteness (4 data), sarcasm or mock politeness (2 data), and withhold politeness (1 datum). These strategies function as calculated communicative resources to express emotions, negotiate interpersonal relationships, and navigate social hierarchies within the high school setting.

Second, positive impoliteness is conclusively the most dominant strategy utilized throughout the cinematic dialogues. This dominance reflects the specific nature of adolescent social interaction, where maintaining or challenging group membership, social acceptance, and peer validation is paramount. Consequently, the characters predominantly rely on relational aggression-such as excluding, ignoring, and degrading others-proving that indirect attacks on social identity are utilized more frequently than direct confrontation. Ultimately, impoliteness in *Moxie* is deeply embedded in gender and power dynamics, functioning both as a mechanism of domination by the privileged and a tool of resistance for the marginalized to challenge inequality.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for future academic exploration. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate impoliteness strategies across different and unscripted media platforms, such as social media interactions or reality television, to compare how pragmatic strategies vary across contexts and audiences. Furthermore, integrating Culpeper's framework with multimodal approaches-by analyzing non-verbal cues like intonation and body language-or combining it with critical discourse analysis and gender studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic hostility. Practically, this study recommends that students and readers develop a stronger pragmatic awareness of how language is strategically weaponized not just to communicate, but to empower, marginalize, or exclude individuals in everyday social interactions.

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