

## **The Pragmatic Strategies of Impoliteness Within Instagram Comment Sections (On The Discourse Surrounding Prabowo Subianto's Speeches During The 2024 Political Cycle)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the pragmatic strategies of impoliteness within Instagram comment sections, focusing on the discourse surrounding Prabowo Subianto's speeches during the 2024 political cycle. As digital interaction reshapes communication, this research moves beyond simple categorisations of hostility to explore the "cyberpragmatics" of political interaction. Analysing interactions on official posts and foreign media reportages, specifically The Straits Times, this research identifies a divergence in linguistic behaviour rooted in "cultural blindness" and "ambient affiliation." At the same time, domestic discourse utilises sarcasm and meme-based humour; interactions with international media trigger distinct impoliteness strategies to enforce national face-saving mechanisms. Utilising Culpeper's impoliteness framework and supporting studies on online animosity, the study reveals that Indonesian netizens employ bald-on-record impoliteness and weaponised irony to insulate political figures from external critique. The findings suggest that digital impoliteness is not merely a lack of etiquette but a structured identity-building strategy, or "homophily," in which aggression serves to bond the in-group against perceived out-groups.*

**Keywords:** *Impoliteness strategies; Instagram; political discourse; social media; pragmatics.*

### **How to Cite:**

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection between language and digital media has become a central concern in pragmatic and sociolinguistic research. The emergence of social media has reshaped the nature of political communication in the digital public sphere. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok now provide direct channels for users to engage with political figures and media outlets, salving traditional boundaries between personal opinion and public discourse (Eslami et al., 2023; Zappavigna, 2022). This participatory environment encourages open interaction but also fosters linguistic conflict, where impolite behaviours such as hostility, sarcasm, and verbal attacks frequently occur, particularly in discussions involving controversial political figures (Andersson, 2021; Colaco et al., 2021). This indicates that digital spaces do not merely facilitate participation but also serve as arenas where social and political tensions are expressed through language. In other words, hostile and aggressive comments often emerge as forms of identity performance and emotional reaction, especially when users engage with highly polarising public figures or issues.

Take Indonesia, for instance. Online talks about Prabowo Subianto often turn into super-divided opinions and even hate speech. These aren't just random outbursts; they're ways people use words to show who they are, push back against things, and grab power in online groups. (Ambarita et al., n.d.; Widya Murti et al., 2024). So, social media is not just for joining in on politics; it's a kind of symbolic battleground where folks challenge the status quo, stick to their beliefs, and show off their social sides through what they say (Anwar et al., 2024). This phenomenon shows that online spaces have gradually transformed from places of open discussion into arenas where power and influence are contested. The presence of offensive language and hate speech suggests that users tend to seek attention and validation from their groups rather than engage in meaningful and logical conversation. Therefore, political communication on social media serves not only as a medium for expressing opinions but also as a means to shape identity and demonstrate dominance in an increasingly divided environment.

Looking at it from a pragmatic angle, impoliteness is when someone deliberately breaks the usual rules of respect to show they disapprove, boss someone around, or stir up feelings. It's not the same as just being rude without thinking. It's a calculated move that depends on the situation, revealing who has power, which identities are at play, and the underlying beliefs in the conversation. Online, this kind of rudeness often serves as a bold statement of rebellion, helping people build a sense of belonging or opposition within split-up digital crowds.

This idea fits with the view that impoliteness isn't just politeness flipped upside down. It's a targeted effort to mess with someone's social image or "face." It shows how words can be weapons to push back, take charge, or shut others out of the talk (Abbas & Mohammed, 2015; Culpeper, 2011). And it has bigger effects, too. It makes aggressive talk seem normal, kills off empathy, and can spill over into real-world nastiness (Akmal & Ghani, 2018). This highlights that the normalisation of hostile language online can gradually erode users' sensitivity to others and reduce their capacity for empathetic engagement. As Akmal and Ghani (2018) suggest, such patterns of digital aggression may extend beyond virtual spaces, influencing how individuals communicate and behave in offline social and political contexts

While much work has examined impoliteness in digital spaces, little has zoomed in on how Indonesians use it to build political identities and fight back ideologically. Most studies have stuck to Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok (Ambarita et al., n.d.; Widya Murti et al., 2024), leaving Instagram, with

its focus on visuals but packed with language, pretty much untouched for political talk analysis.

That's where this study comes in. It digs into the impoliteness tactics in Instagram comments reacting to Prabowo Subianto's political speech, as covered by The Straits Times. The goal is to identify the kinds of rude strategies used, break down what they do pragmatically, and examine how these word choices shape political identities and stances in Indonesia's online political scene.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyse the data. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth interpretation and understanding of linguistic phenomena of impoliteness in their natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This means that the study prioritises a detailed examination of the comments as they naturally occurred, allowing the researchers to capture the nuances, intentions, and contextual factors behind the impolite expressions. Such an approach provides a richer understanding of how users construct meaning, perform identity, and engage in conflict within fundamental digital interactions.

The data source for this study was the comments section of a specific Instagram post published by The Straits Times' official account (@straits\_times). The post featured a video clip and a caption summarising a recent speech by Prabowo Subianto. This post was selected for its high engagement and numerous comments expressing strong opinions. Data collection was conducted using purposive sampling. The researchers manually scrolled through all comments posted within the first 72 hours of publication to capture the most immediate reactions. A total of 102 comments were collected, from which 85 were identified as containing impolite language and selected for analysis. The collected comments were documented in a spreadsheet and anonymised to protect user privacy.

The data analysis followed Culpeper's (2011) Theoretical framework of impoliteness, classifying comments into superstrategies: Bald on Record Impoliteness (direct, unambiguous face-threatening acts), Positive Impoliteness (attacking the hearer's positive face), Negative Impoliteness (attacking the hearer's negative face), and Sarcasm/Mock Politeness (using politeness conventions insincerely). Comments were also classified by their primary functions (affective, coercive, or entertaining).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of 85 impolite comments revealed four distinct impoliteness strategies. The most frequently employed strategy was bald-on-record impoliteness, with 38 instances (44.7%), indicating a strong preference for confrontation. This was followed by sarcasm or mock politeness, which appeared in 25 comments (29.4%). Positive impoliteness was used in 15 comments (17.6%), while negative impoliteness was the least common, found in only seven comments (8.2%).

**Table 1. Frequency of Impoliteness Strategies**

Impoliteness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Bald on Record Impoliteness	38	44.7%
Positive Impoliteness	15	17.6%
Negative Impoliteness	7	8.2%
Sarcasm/Mock Politeness	25	29.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 1) Bald on Record Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011) Explains that bald on record impoliteness occurs when a speaker produces a face-threatening act in the bluntest possible way. The utterance contains no softening devices, no attempts to minimise offence, and no indirectness. The hostility is delivered openly so that the target immediately recognises the attack. The intention is to maximise confrontation and make the insult completely transparent. Supporting this view in the context of online media, Kharisma (2023) notes that the anonymity provided by e-news comment sections often encourages this type of direct aggression, as speakers feel less social pressure to adhere to traditional politeness norms.

Datum 1

“You're too weak to take decisive action.”

This comment attacks Prabowo by directly labelling him “too weak,” thereby undermining his image as a strong leader. There is no effort to cushion the criticism; instead, the speaker expresses it plainly. According to Culpeper’s framework, such directness makes the utterance a clear example of bald-on-record impoliteness. Within the context of an Instagram post by The Straits Times, the speaker seems to respond to Prabowo’s public appearance or political stance with evident frustration. The insult implies that he lacks the firmness expected from a national leader, and the commenter deliberately makes this judgment visible to both local and international audiences. This reflects the findings of Widya Murti et al. (2024), who observed that in Indonesian political discourse on platforms like TikTok, netizens frequently resort to direct attacks to challenge the competence of political figures, prioritising emotional expression over constructive critique.

Datum 2: “Not good enough to be president.”

This statement dismisses Prabowo’s suitability for the presidency in a straightforward, uncompromising manner. The speaker does not offer reasons, soften the language, or frame it as a personal opinion. Instead, the comment functions as a direct evaluation that denies Prabowo’s worthiness of the position. In Culpeper’s terms, this is a clear case of bald on record impoliteness because the speaker

highlights the face-threat without any attempt to disguise it. Given the international nature of the audience, the comment also serves as a public rejection of Prabowo's legitimacy, presenting him as unqualified to readers from different countries. The direct attack suggests that the speaker intends to diminish his public image and weaken perceptions of his leadership abilities. Colaco et al. (2021) argue that such strategies in election-related feedback serve to publicly invalidate the candidate, presenting them as unqualified to an external audience to diminish their political capital.

Datum 3: "This is how you do it, Philippines! Learn from Indonesia."

Here, the speaker directly insults another nation by suggesting that the Philippines is inferior and must "learn" from Indonesia. The imperative form ("Learn from Indonesia") makes the utterance sound commanding and condescending. There is no politeness strategy to soften the instruction, which aligns with Culpeper's description of bald-on-record impoliteness. As Abbas & Mohammed (2015) Regarding the pragmatics of rudeness, such direct imperatives are often used to assert dominance rather than to offer genuine advice. The speaker's intention appears to be asserting Indonesian superiority while degrading the Philippines in front of an international audience. This type of comment not only attacks the target nation's collective face but also reinforces a competitive national identity. By presenting Indonesia as superior, the speaker publicly humiliates the Philippines in a direct and confrontational way.

Based on the analysis of Datums 1, 2, and 3, it can be concluded that Bald on Record Impoliteness is employed when speakers wish to maximise the efficiency and visibility of their attack. By explicitly labelling the target as "weak" or "not good enough" and issuing direct commands like "Learn from Indonesia," the speakers deliberately bypass all face-saving strategies. This strategy functions to publicly delegitimise Prabowo Subianto's leadership and assert national dominance without ambiguity. The primary goal here is not negotiation or debate, but the immediate, transparent destruction of the target's image before an international audience. This aligns with Kharisma's (2023) observation that in digital environments, direct impoliteness is often favoured to ensure the message is unambiguous amidst the noise of online comment sections.

## 2) Positive Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011) defines positive impoliteness as strategies that damage the addressee's need for approval, belonging, and group identity. By excluding, mocking, or dismissing others, speakers reinforce in-group solidarity while denying validation to the target. Andersson (2021) highlights how labelling fosters homophily, strengthening bonds among supporters. Anwar (2019) adds that cultural blindness often drives dismissive remarks, prioritising group cohesion over respectful engagement. Furthermore, Khairun Nisa et al. (2024) emphasize that hate comments often target specific attributes of the victim to strip them of their social value within a community.

Datum 4: "Brother of Donald Trump from another mother."

This comment ridicules Prabowo by comparing him to Donald Trump, a highly controversial figure. By implying that Prabowo resembles Trump, the speaker attributes negative traits often associated with Trump, such as arrogance, unpredictability, or extreme populism. Although phrased humorously, the comparison still functions as an insult, aiming to undermine Prabowo's positive face. This mirrors the phenomena described by Anwar et al. (2024) Regarding the 2024 Indonesian elections, memes and comparative labels were heavily used to contest candidates' identities. There is no explicit praise; instead, the comment disguises criticism in a playful structure, which only strengthens its mocking tone. In the political context of the post, the speaker uses this comparison to question Prabowo's credibility and portray him as someone unfit or problematic.

Datum 5: "3rd world country."

This remark targets Indonesia as a whole by labelling it with a degrading and outdated term. Referring to a nation as a "third world country" suggests a lack of progress, inferiority, or backwardness. This directly threatens the positive face of the Indonesian group identity. Eslami et al. (2023) note that identity and discursive practices are crucial in a changing world; by using such a reductionist label, the speaker actively rejects the complexities of the nation's identity. The speaker's goal seems to be to belittle the country in the discussion, diminishing its status relative to others. The comment expresses clear disapproval and functions to politically and socially downgrade Indonesia in the eyes of international readers.

The analysis of Datums 4 and 5 demonstrates that Positive Impoliteness is utilised to attack the target's need for social approval and group belonging. By using dissociative strategies, such as equating the leader with a controversial figure like Donald Trump or labelling the nation with the derogatory term "3rd world", speakers actively reject the target's desire to be respected or valued. This supports the view of Kalya Kaulika et al. (2024), who found that haters often use specific labels to create a psychological distance between the "in-group" (the commenters) and the "out-group" (the target), thereby legitimising their hostility. This strategy serves to foster exclusion, aiming to shame the target (or the national identity he represents) and distance the speaker from the perceived negative traits of the in-group.

### 3) Negative Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011) explains that negative impoliteness attacks the addressee's desire for autonomy and freedom of action. It restricts the interlocutor's rights, imposes constraints, or patronises them. Ambarita et al. (n.d.) observe that political discourse often involves condescension and labelling, functioning as a gatekeeping mechanism to protect national narratives. Similarly, Akmal & Ghani (2018) Identify that specific triggers in online environments often lead to this type of hostility, where users feel entitled to dictate the behaviour of public figures.

Datum 6: "He needs to resign!"

This utterance imposes a demand on Prabowo, stating that he "needs" to resign. The speaker removes Prabowo's autonomy by presenting resignation not as an option, but as an obligation. Such



language reflects negative impoliteness because it controls and limits the target's freedom of action. Situmorang et al. (2024), in their study of hate comments on Twitter, found that such coercive language is a common strategy to exert power over a target who is physically distant. The comment strongly disapproves of Prabowo's performance and seeks to delegitimise his role by insisting he step down from his position. The forceful tone indicates that the speaker intends to pressure and criticise rather than engage in reasoned discussion.

Datum 7: "U can sleep now!!!"

Although the wording appears casual, the message conveys a dismissive and controlling tone. The speaker implies that Prabowo no longer needs to act or participate because his role is insignificant or over. The phrase "sleep now" suggests he should stop functioning as a leader, thereby restricting his autonomy. This aligns with findings by Acheampong & Kwarteng (2021), who note that in social interactions involving power dynamics, dismissive directives are used to silence the interlocutor. The exaggerated punctuation intensifies the rudeness and adds an element of mockery. This aligns with negative impoliteness because the comment tries to dictate the target's behaviour while simultaneously diminishing his importance.

The findings from Datums 6 and 7 reveal that Negative Impoliteness is strategically used to infringe upon the target's autonomy and freedom of action. Through the use of coercive language ("needs to resign") and dismissive directives ("sleep now"), the speakers attempt to impose their will upon the leader. This category concludes that netizens use these strategies to symbolically strip the leader of his power, framing him not as an authority figure to be obeyed, but as a subordinate who must comply with the public's demand for his removal or silence. As suggested by Situmorang et al. (2024), these strategies symbolically strip the leader of his power, framing him not as an authority figure, but as a subordinate who must comply with the public's demands.

#### 4. Sarcasm / Mock Politeness

Leech (1983) and Culpeper (2011) note that sarcasm, or mock politeness, occurs when politeness markers are used ironically to convey the opposite meaning. Zappavigna (2022) expands this by describing "weaponised ironic quotation," where politeness forms are strategically deployed to ridicule. Abbas & Mohammed (2015) further elaborate that this pragmatic mismatch is often more damaging than direct insults because it attacks the target's intelligence and competence simultaneously.

Datum 8: "Rice allowance.. can the govt be any more discreet?"

The comment appears to be phrased as a polite question, but it is actually a sarcastic criticism. The speaker uses a question format to highlight what they perceive as the government's lack of subtlety or competence. The rhetorical nature of the question signals that the speaker does not expect or want an answer. This fits Culpeper's category of mock politeness. As Aryani Rosli & Ab Rahman (2025) might suggest regarding digital communication, the use of such indirect strategies allows the speaker to convey deep dissatisfaction while maintaining a veneer of civility.

Datum 9: "This is how you do it, Philippines! Learn from Indonesia."

Although this comment was also categorised as bald on record, it can simultaneously function as sarcasm depending on tone. On the surface, the phrase appears instructional, as though the speaker is giving friendly advice. However, the underlying meaning is insulting, suggesting that the Philippines is incapable or inferior. The surface politeness ("this is how you do it") hides an ironic intention to mock the Philippines' perceived inadequacy. This dual-layer structure is characteristic of mock politeness, which, according to Yuniarti et al. (2020), requires the audience to decipher the "implicature" to understand the true hostile intent.

Finally, the analysis of Datums 8 and 9 illustrates that Sarcasm (Mock Politeness) is employed as a sophisticated tool for ridicule. By utilising superficially polite structures, such as a rhetorical question about discretion or feigned instructional advice, speakers create a deliberate mismatch between the polite form and the hostile intent. This strategy allows speakers to mock the government's competence and the Philippines' status more sharply than direct insults would allow, effectively weaponising civility to highlight the absurdity of the target's actions.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of all nine datums using Culpeper's (2011) framework and supported by recent studies on digital discourse (Anwar et al., 2024; Widya Murti et al., 2024). It is evident that netizens employ a multifaceted system of impoliteness on The Straits Times to challenge Prabowo Subianto. Specifically, Bald on Record strategies are used to question capability openly, a common trait in Indonesian political comments (Widya Murti et al., 2024). Positive and Negative Impoliteness aim to attack social value and restrict political autonomy, while sarcasm is deployed to express disdain for government competence. Ultimately, these strategies function collectively to construct a "delegitimising discourse," wherein speakers move beyond mere disagreement to dismantle the face of the leader and the nation actively, with the distinct intent of influencing the perception of an international audience.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the types and functions of impoliteness strategies in comments on The Straits Times' Instagram post about a speech by Prabowo Subianto. The findings indicate that users predominantly employed bald-on-record impoliteness and sarcasm/mock politeness. These strategies primarily served an affective function, allowing users to express strong negative emotions, and an entertaining function, in which humour and wit were used to attack the political figure. The dominance of these strategies highlights the nature of social media as a space where direct, unmitigated expression and performative cynicism are common forms of political participation. This research contributes to understanding digital discourse by demonstrating how Culpeper's theory of impoliteness can be effectively applied to analyse contemporary online political commentary. A limitation of this study is its focus on a single Instagram post. Future research could expand this analysis by comparing comments across different social media platforms or different political figures.



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