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**“(IM)POLITENESS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR PRE-SERVICE  
TEACHERS”**

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## ABSTRACT

Impoliteness is a communicative phenomenon characterized by behaviors that deviate from established norms of politeness, potentially causing discomfort or offense. Even though it has only recently started being researched in comparison to Politeness studies, there is a crucial importance of addressing it in language instruction, as it reflects real-world linguistic encounters, fostering learners' pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative skills. Therefore, this current study aims to shed light on this theory as a tool for enhancing pedagogical learning processes. The focus here is to illustrate, based on studies from Spencer-Oatey (2005), Culpeper (2011), Culpeper & Terkourafi (2017), and Culpeper & Hardaker (2017) *et al.*, how individuals evaluate linguistic behaviors and make judgments about social appropriateness in many different situations and how exploring the social-cultural and linguistic elements that are related to the perception of Impoliteness can help students enhance their proficiency level in the English language, especially considering the difficulty foreign language learners tend to face when it comes to navigating social adequacy rules and understanding underlying meanings in different settings. To achieve such a comprehensive understanding, the Action Research Method, which ensures the active involvement of participants and promotes the development of teaching strategies that cater to learners' needs and expectations, was employed. Also, a few aims were outlined: firstly, to investigate the prior knowledge regarding (im)politeness in the English language of students participating in the workshop. Also, to identify the linguistic, discursive, and cultural knowledge that were harnessed for the development of the workshop, as well as to propose didactic activities tailored to the same purpose, aiming to equip students with the skills to identify, analyze, and respond to (im)politeness in authentic communication scenarios. Finally, to critically evaluate the effectiveness of the didactic procedures developed by the research. In conclusion, this research endeavored to bridge the gap between Impoliteness Studies and English language teaching. By exploring the details of (im)politeness, proposing effective didactic activities, and critically analyzing the workshop's outcomes, it as possible to offer a valuable contribution to pedagogical practices and highlight the vital role of impoliteness in fostering pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative skills among English language learners.

**KEYWORDS:** Impoliteness; Teaching; Learning processes; English language.

## RESUMO

A impolidez é um fenômeno comunicativo caracterizado por comportamentos que se desviam das normas estabelecidas de polidez, podendo causar desconforto ou ofensa. Apesar de ter começado a ser pesquisada apenas recentemente em comparação com os estudos sobre Polidez, há uma importância crucial em abordá-la no ensino de línguas, pois reflete encontros linguísticos do mundo real, promovendo a competência pragmática dos aprendizes e habilidades comunicativas interculturais. Portanto, este estudo atual tem como objetivo lançar luz sobre essa teoria como uma ferramenta para aprimorar os processos de aprendizado pedagógico. O foco aqui é ilustrar, com base em estudos de Spencer-Oatey (2005), Culpeper (2011), Culpeper & Terkourafi (2017) e Culpeper & Hardaker (2017) et al., como indivíduos avaliam comportamentos linguísticos e fazem julgamentos sobre a adequação social em diferentes situações, e como explorar os elementos socioculturais e linguísticos relacionados à percepção da impolidez pode ajudar os alunos a aprimorar seu nível de proficiência na língua inglesa, especialmente considerando as dificuldades que os aprendizes de línguas estrangeiras tendem a enfrentar ao navegar pelas regras de adequação social e entender significados subjacentes em diferentes contextos. Para alcançar uma compreensão abrangente, foi empregado o Método de Pesquisa-Ação, que assegura o envolvimento ativo dos participantes e promove o desenvolvimento de estratégias de ensino que atendem às necessidades e expectativas dos aprendizes. Além disso, alguns objetivos foram delineados: primeiro, investigar o conhecimento prévio sobre (im)polidez na língua inglesa dos alunos que participaram do workshop. Também identificar o conhecimento linguístico, discursivo e cultural que foi aproveitado para o desenvolvimento do workshop, bem como propor atividades didáticas adaptadas ao mesmo propósito, com o objetivo de capacitar os alunos a identificar, analisar e responder à (im)polidez em cenários autênticos de comunicação. Por fim, avaliar criticamente a eficácia dos procedimentos didáticos desenvolvidos pela pesquisa. Em conclusão, esta pesquisa se esforçou para preencher a lacuna entre os Estudos sobre Impolidez e o ensino da Língua Inglesa. Ao explorar os detalhes da (im)polidez, propor atividades didáticas eficazes e analisar criticamente os resultados do workshop, foi possível oferecer uma contribuição valiosa às práticas pedagógicas e destacar o papel vital da Impolidez no fomento à competência pragmática e habilidades comunicativas interculturais entre os aprendizes de língua inglesa.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Impolidez; Ensino; Processos de aprendizado; Língua inglesa.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies of (Im)politeness in Linguistics, used in parentheses to refer to both Politeness and Impoliteness, refer to the investigation of how interlocutors evaluate their own speeches and that of others. As Spencer-Oatey (2005) mentions, (Im)politeness is the subjective judgment that people make about the social adequacy of a linguistic behavior. People inevitably generate labels such as polite, courteous, harmonious, polite, impolite, rude, aggressive and many others to express how we evaluate these behaviors because, according to Culpeper (2011, p.38) it “is very much in the eye of the beholder, that is, the mind’s eye. It depends on how you perceive what is said and done and how that relates to the situation”.

This current work, which specifically addresses Impoliteness referring to the broad set of evaluations involving emotions of negative nature, is inspired by previous PIBIC research projects. The first project, set in 2020 and entitled “*Impolidez em Narrativas Pessoais de Aprendizizes de Língua Inglesa*”,<sup>1</sup> had the objective of studying the relationship between learning and emotions while the second project, set in 2021 and entitled “*Impolidez, emoções e construção de Identidade em Narrativas de Professores de Língua Inglesa*”<sup>2</sup>, was focused on studying the connection between teaching and emotion as, according to Vygotsky’s socio-historical-cultural perspective, “it is necessary to examine the relationship between intellect and affection, and their relationship with social signs, avoiding reductionist dichotomies” (Vygotsky, [1934] 1999, p. 121).

A student can have his or her learning result affected if, for example, as a consequence of negative situations in language-teaching environments, he or she feels embarrassed or offended by actions of others which they perceive as impolite. They may then develop a fear of communicating with other colleagues to practice the language, therefore hindering the process of learning. Also, a teacher who goes through similarly offensive situations may not have the same excellence in his or her teaching process. Taking this information into account, it is clear that it is of utmost importance to engage in discussions and studies about situations of language learning and teaching, particularly English as a foreign language, and how the emotions linked to the situations in which they occur could affect the participants. .

Nevertheless, the main objective in the present study is to see the phenomenon of Impoliteness in a different way. The purpose of the research is not to reflect on the ways in which it can be an instrument of negative influence in the learning process of students or in the teaching profession of teachers, but rather how it can become a tool for learning and

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<sup>1</sup> Impoliteness in Personal Narrative of English Language Learners

<sup>2</sup> Impoliteness, Emotions and Construction of Identity in Personal Narratives of English Language teachers.

improving the English language, through the use of learning its different socio-cultural nuances and identifying the Contextual and Co-textual elements in its usage.

When it comes to learning foreign languages, (Im)politeness is certainly an important factor, as it is not uncommon for learners to produce and interpret grammatically well-constructed texts, but face problems related to social adequacy and meaning. When developing the concept of communicative competence coined by the American anthropologist Dell Hymes, Savignon (1991, p. 264) even states that it is defined as “the ability of language learners to communicate with other speakers, making sense, to the detriment of the ability to meet tests of specific grammatical knowledge”. She also asserts that “this skill requires understanding the sociocultural context of the language in use” (Savignon, 1991, p 267). And, to achieve that understanding, one must combine the lexical and semantic knowledge to the pragmatic practice, that is, understand what parts of the text, that is, co-textual elements, along with the contextual factors, such as setting, power relation and gender, create the notion of Impoliteness.

Now, although the need to work with Impoliteness in the teaching of foreign languages is notorious, the explicit presence of this subject in didactic materials and curriculum documents is not so often seen. When this subject appears, one usually sees a dichotomous approach between what is or is not appropriate, without exploring nuances of meaning and figures of speech, such as irony and sarcasm, and other subjects equally relevant to the discussion, such as relationships of power, gender, age, etc.

Therefore, this project aimed to didactically explore how Impoliteness can be used as a tool for teaching English to pre-service teachers from the Federal University of Pernambuco. To achieve this goal, data was collected through a workshop on Impoliteness in English language interactions. It is justified due to the small amount of studies about the teaching of Impoliteness in the context of teaching English as a foreign language, because it seeks to fill the gap of how the theoretical concepts about Impoliteness can be mobilized in didactic activities and to contribute to the research area of linguistic studies, as well as with the research subjects who will be able to know more about impoliteness in English language teaching by trying to reflect on how Impoliteness can become a teaching object and what procedures can be used for that.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

There has always been an intrinsic necessity for human beings to adhere to social norms in order to keep the peace and understanding amongst each other. As Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 15) say: “politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol (for which it must

surely be the model), presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties”. Therefore, there has been much interest in understanding how one maintains good relations and avoids interpersonal conflict through the use of different linguistic forms and strategies.

### **Studies that predated Impoliteness Studies**

According to Pan and Kádár (2011) and Terkourafi (2011), writings about Politeness stretch back to Ancient civilizations, whereas the studies on Impoliteness are quite recent and scarce. Bousfield (2008) states that “[...] research on social interaction has tended to concentrate on collaborative or supportive illocutions, that is, on the linguistic expression and communication of politeness – impoliteness has been largely ignored.” (Bousfield, 2008, p. 1)

Studies in (Im)politeness are heavily influenced by classical pragmatic theories such as Grice's Conversational Maxims (1975) and Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962). They seek to develop maxims or strategies of politeness to predict which language structures can be perceived as (im)polite and to help guide people into social and linguistic appropriateness. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987):

Another recent proposal by Leech, in a quite contrary spirit, suggests that the Gricean framework of maxims should be proliferated: the field of linguistic pragmatics is the study of goal-directed linguistic behavior, and this is governed by a 'textual rhetoric' and an 'interpersonal rhetoric', each constituted by a set of maxims. (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 4)

Brown and Levinson's model (1987), for example, stands out as the most famous and widely used in the field of politeness research, as it focuses primarily on the use of language to avoid conflicts and appear cordial. These models primarily emphasize the production of speakers without necessarily considering how language is perceived or processed by listeners. They also tend to prioritize the analysis of language itself, overlooking socio-historical and discursive aspects involved in (im)politeness, as if simply following the procedures in place, like a script, the actions would be done with and the face-saving strategies accounted for. As one can infer, based on the following quote: “[...] the fact that the speaker bothers to phrase his (sic) FTA in a conventionally indirect way shows that he (sic) is aware of and honors the negative-face wants of H.” (p.71).

That is not to say, of course, that the theory developed by Brown and Levinson has no value. Two famous critics of the model, Miriam Locher and Richard Watts, advocate for its utility:

The Brown and Levinson theory [...] provides a breadth of insights into human behavior which no other theory has yet offered and it has served as a touchstone for

researchers who felt the need to go beyond it. [...] it is clearly in a class of its own in terms of its comprehensiveness, operationalizability, thoroughness and level of argumentation. (Locher and Watts, 2005, p. 9–10)

Nevertheless, according to research extracted by the database and program SCOPUS and mentioned in Culpeper, Haugh, & Kádár (2017), the frequency of politeness between 2005 and 2009 was found to have been 352 instances and between 2010 and 2015 the amount was 887 instances, whereas the frequency concerning Impoliteness is said to have been 30 and 139 instances, respectfully. There was, then, a significant increase in the amount of research on both topics: the latter doubled while the research on the former was four and a half times its own quantity. This result, also according to Culpeper, Haugh, & Kádár (2017), may have happened because of the increasing prominence and visibility of politeness:

This period of increase parallels that for impoliteness, which hints that the use of (im)politeness may be partly driven by the increasing visibility of politeness. (Culpeper, Haugh, & Kádár, 2017, p. 5)

There has been, then, a turn in the perceptions about the studies on Impoliteness, especially in 2008. At first, people tended to have “the impression that impoliteness is either some kind of pragmatic failure, a consequence of not doing something, or merely anomalous behavior, not worthy of consideration” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 6). However, as he further explains, based on Lakoff (1989), Kasper (1990), Beebe (1995) and Kienpointner (1997), “impoliteness can be strategic, systematic and sophisticated.” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 6). And, because of that, is deserving of the appropriate amount of attention and visibility that politeness studies clearly have been receiving for decades.

### **The turn in perception in Impoliteness Studies**

Spencer-Oatey (2005) suggests that (Im)politeness can be seen as “an umbrella term that covers all kinds of evaluative meanings which convey positive, negative or neutral connotations, and the judgments can impact upon people’s perceptions of their social relations and the rapport or (dis)harmony that exists between them.” (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p. 97).

The studies on this matter focus on the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviors, investigating how individuals consciously or even unconsciously mobilize language in given contexts to appear courteous, polite, rude, aggressive, and so on.

Culpeper (1996) was not the first work in Linguistics to address the subject, of course, but his work had an important part in the prominence of the field, as the amount of research on the matter had started to increase exponentially.

At first, the author was interested in demonstrating to the community of linguists the systematicity in impoliteness, as well as the fact that it is indeed worthy of scientific scrutiny, and his approach at the time was the development of a model that is very similar to Brown and Levinson's (1987) but focused on Impoliteness. While those authors supported their theory with the notion that interactants inherently protect their own faces and their interlocutors' faces, Culpeper (1996) starts from the idea that, in some situations, interactants attack their interlocutors' faces instead of preserving them.

Therefore, he investigates “[...] the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect of social disruption.” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 350). Through this work, one is able to see a paradigm shift because if the prevailing models stated that one is essentially a polite being who seeks harmony in human interactions, Culpeper's article argues that in some contexts, human beings actually seek conflict and disagreement. Therefore, Impoliteness ceases to be treated solely as a lack of Politeness, or simply the opposite side that deserves no second thoughts and starts deserving an approach compatible with its complexity and importance.

### **Discursive Perspectives on Impoliteness**

In the first decade of the 2000s, discursive perspectives on (Im)politeness studies gained prominence, as highlighted by Mills (2011). Key representatives in this approach include Watts (2003), Spencer-Oatey (2005, 2007), and the Linguistic Politeness Research Group (2011).

These studies focus on analyzing larger portions of text instead of isolated utterances and are associated with postmodern discursive theories linked to Conversation Analysis (Watts, 2003) and Interactional Sociolinguistics (Haugh, 2007), among others, as illustrated by (Haugh, 2012):

In Conversation Analysis (CA), however, the main focus is on understanding the organizational and social structure of conversation itself. The analyst thus closely examines the fine details of conversational interaction, teasing out how participants themselves understand and experience action, and manage the mechanisms through which talk is accomplished. (Haugh, 2012. ch. 13, p. 2).

These research trends have raised the inquiry for the exploration of nuances in (im)politeness in correlation to cultural phenomena such as power relations, gender, cultural differences, online language, among others.

After devoting himself to analyzing interactions in which impoliteness appears to be the norm, such as "trashy" TV programs, military training, and graffiti, Culpeper (2011)

proposes a research, analyzing cross-cultural variations on the perception of Impoliteness according to students from different nationalities and based on the aspects by Spencer-Oatey (2002) “*Quality face, Social identity face, Relational Face, Equity rights and Association rights*”, which he then uses to propose an analysis that takes into account linguistic formulae associated with impoliteness, along with co-textual and contextual elements.

### Types of Faces and Sociality Rights

In her Rapport Management Model, Spencer-Oatey (2002) suggests that the motivational force for it are two main components: the management of face and the management of sociality rights (p. 540). Within each component, there are subcategories which will be explained and followed by examples. Here is a table with brief information on each one:

**Table 1** — Spencer-Oatey’s Definitions of Face and Sociality Rights

Aspect	Definition
<b>Quality Face</b>	Related to people’s personal qualities; e.g. competences, abilities, appearance.
<b>Social Identity Face</b>	Related to social identities or roles, e.g. as group leader, valued customer, close friend.
<b>Relational Face</b>	Related to the relationship between the participants (e.g. distance – closeness, equality-inequality, perceptions of role rights and obligations) and the ways in which this relationship is managed or negotiated.
<b>Equity Right</b>	Related to the personal consideration and fair treatment from others that people believe they deserve.
<b>Association Right</b>	Related to associations which are in keeping with the type of relationship people have with each other. This includes the components of Involvement, Empathy and Respect.

Source: Spencer-Oatey (2002)

She defines Face according to Goffman (1967, p. 5) and states that it is defined as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact’ (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 504). As for Sociality Rights, the author defines them as ‘fundamental personal/social entitlements that a



person effectively claims for him/herself in his/her interactions with others’, as she further suggests that they derive “primarily from personal/social expectancies and need to be handled appropriately.” (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 504)

Both aforementioned categories carry within themselves specific interrelated aspects that must be mentioned in detail, as they will guide the hypothesis presented throughout this study. First, she defines two aspects for the definition of Face:

Quality face: We have a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities; e.g. our competence, abilities, appearance etc. Quality face is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of such personal qualities as these, and so is closely associated with our sense of personal self-esteem. (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 540)

This concept can be exemplified by the following scenario: a girl who is about to get together with friends is stopped by her mother on the way out. The mother says, in front of all of her friends: “Are you going out in that?”. The mother’s question threatens the daughter’s Quality Face, as she questions her appearance and, consequently, the value she claims for herself. Thereby, affecting her self confidence. The author also mentions the following:

Social identity face: We have a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, e.g. as group leader, valued customer, close friend. Social identity face is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles, and is closely associated with our sense of public worth. (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 540)

Social Identity Face is related to roles and to groups people are from and care about. Culpeper (2011) exemplifies this concept by mentioning teachers and the apparent popular belief that they have a “soft life” because of alleged long vacations and unnecessary benefits. So, that would be a criticism about all the members of a certain group.

Then, she provides, in extensive detail, two aspects within the concept of Sociality Rights, which involve the management of social expectancies and can be defined as:

Equity rights: We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly: that we are not unduly imposed upon or unfairly ordered about, that we are not taken advantage of or exploited, and that we receive the benefits to which we are entitled. There seem to be two components to this equity entitlement: the notion of cost–benefit (the extent to which we are exploited, disadvantaged or benefitted, and the belief that costs and benefits should be kept roughly in balance through the principle of reciprocity), and the related issue of autonomy–imposition (the extent to which people control us or impose on us). (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 540)

For this concept, imagine a young man who is behind a long line at the bank and watches as another man is cared for because he is an acquaintance of the cashier. When he

asks about it, he is ignored. This specific example illustrates an attack to the Equity Rights of the man, as he was treated unfairly and disadvantaged.

Association rights: We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that we have with them. These association rights relate partly to interactional association/dissociation (the type and extent of our involvement with others), so that we feel, for example, that we are entitled to an appropriate amount of conversational interaction and social chit-chat with others (e.g. not ignored on the one hand, but not overwhelmed on the other). (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 540).

The definition of Association Rights might be represented if one imagines an employee trying to speak to his boss, but being ignored for some days. This threatens the Association rights the employee claims for himself and the boss, and disrespects the social unspoken rules of rapport.

Furthermore, there is yet another definition provided by the author in her later publications. It is a subcategory of Face, whose addition to the broad category is mentioned by Culpeper (2011, p. 30) to be a reflection of “the three levels of representation argued for in relatively recent social psychological work”. See below Spencer-Oatey’s clarification of what she means:

[T]he relationship between the participants (e.g. distance – closeness, equality-inequality, perceptions of role rights and obligations), and the ways in which this relationship is managed or negotiated. (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 647)

Culpeper (2011) exemplifies this subcategory as follows: “[...] if a teacher says that they get offended by comments that they are not sympathetic to the needs of their own students, that would be a critical comment about a role relationship – an issue of relational face.” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 29).

Even though “[t]he extent to which we can generalize these conclusions to the whole ‘national’ cultures is questionable” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 47), the author comes to find that there are different levels of importance, given to the aspects taken from Spencer-Oatey’s framework that were used in the research, from the perspective of the undergraduate students and based on their cultures. Therefore, there is a clear need to observe not only the co-textual elements but also the context of situations.

Impoliteness is indeed, then, related to culture as cultural norms and values play a significant role in the context of people's behaviors. They encompass a set of shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors that are learned and transmitted within a particular social group as these cultural elements influence individuals' understanding of appropriate social conduct, including how politeness and impoliteness are defined and expressed.

What may be considered polite in one culture could be seen as impolite or offensive in another. For instance, some cultures emphasize the use of indirect speech acts and mitigating language to preserve social harmony and avoid causing offense, while others prioritize directness and explicitness in communication.

Further research has expanded on this framework and highlighted cultural variations in politeness norms and practices. Linguist and anthropologist Anna Wierzbicka (2003), for example, explored cultural differences in the perception of politeness, highlighting the importance of cultural scripts and linguistic conventions in shaping politeness norms, since “interpersonal interaction is governed, to a large extent, by norms which are culture-specific and which reflect cultural values cherished by a particular society” (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 5).

Another influential scholar in the field is sociolinguist Penelope Eckert, who conducted research on the interaction between language, gender, and culture (McConnell-Ginet & Eckert, 1995). Her work demonstrates how cultural norms and expectations influence expressions of politeness and impoliteness, including gendered patterns of language use and the negotiation of power dynamics within different cultural contexts. Therefore, understanding the cultural context is crucial in interpreting and navigating politeness and impoliteness in different social settings.

Nevertheless, in the field of language teaching, specialized literature attempts to reflect on how Impoliteness can become an object of instruction and how it can be effectively taught. According to Félix-Brasdefer and Mugford (2017), the question arises as to whether it can be explicitly taught or not. The authors argue, based on evidence from other research, that explicit instruction on Impoliteness is more effective than implicit instruction. They state that “instruction in pragmatics is more effective than exposure for developing pragmatic competence. [...] Evidence of the teaching of (im)politeness is generally conducted through the analysis of polite or impolite speech acts, such as refusals, requests, threats, and complaints.” (Félix-Brasdefer and Mugford, 2017, p. 494)

Based on this principle, some studies propose the analysis of didactic proposals and students' learning regarding the field of (im)politeness. For instance, Blitvich (2010) explored how the concept of genres can contribute to the analysis of (Im)politeness in TV news debates, while Brown (2013) introduces learners to interactions considered impolite in Korean, showing students' interest in these aspects and in the theoretical realm, and Schepers (2014) suggests teaching (im)politeness through television programs.

The teaching of impoliteness can serve as a valuable tool for enhancing the level of fluency in English as a second language among pre-service teachers. By focusing on the study of pragmatics, impoliteness, and discourse analysis, teachers can develop a deeper understanding of the linguistic and sociocultural nuances involved in impolite language use.

According to authors such as Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008), an explicit exploration of impoliteness can contribute to learners' pragmatic competence by providing insights into the contextual factors, power dynamics, and social implications of impolite speech acts. This knowledge equips pre-service teachers with the necessary language skills to engage in authentic and meaningful interactions, promoting their fluency and proficiency in English.

Additionally, applying discourse analysis techniques, as suggested by Mills (2011), enables teachers to analyze larger portions of text and identify patterns of impolite language use, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how impoliteness operates in various discursive contexts. Therefore, pre-service teachers can not only enhance their fluency in English but also develop critical thinking skills and cultural sensitivity necessary for effective communication in diverse language environments.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study was a systematic inquiry that investigated and aimed, through the use of the Action Research Method, to collaborate with the participants through sharing knowledge on the subject of Impoliteness. Paiva (2019) characterizes the Action Research as an intervention in search of positive changes in a given context. Therefore, the motivation comes from the scarce space that Impoliteness has had in English Language Undergraduate courses. Analyzing the syllabus of the English Language courses at the Federal University of Pernambuco, for example, Impoliteness is not addressed, not even in the Semantics and Pragmatics of the English course. Consequently, this research aimed to collaborate with the participating students in order to discuss this important topic in language teaching and hopefully change this scenario in which Impoliteness is not taken into account in the way it should, as well as investigating how it can become a pedagogical tool.

Nevertheless, as Zozzoli (2006) points out, the expectation that an Action Research can "solve problems", *per se*, is problematic.

There are considerations to be made regarding expressions like "solving problems," which, from my point of view, would point to results that are not very compatible with the process-oriented perspective within the framework of action research. I would say that the proposal is to better understand the issues at stake and reflect on the course of actions. (Zozzoli, 2006, p. 125).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translation from: "Há ponderações a fazer a respeito de expressões como "resolver problemas", que apontariam, do meu ponto de vista, para resultados pouco compatíveis com a visão de processo que se insere na perspectiva da pesquisa-ação. Eu diria que a proposta é conhecer melhor as questões em jogo e refletir sobre encaminhamentos de ações. (Zozzoli, 2006, p. 125)

Like the author, it is believed that through this present research, it will be possible to better understand the context of study and, thus, consider future possible courses of action. In this particular case, the didactic process of Impoliteness in the context of the English Language program was investigated and didactic activities that can contribute to the learning about this phenomenon in English language interactions were proposed. Therefore, the methodological procedures included in this research were as follows:

- Consolidation of the theoretical and methodological framework on the teaching of Impoliteness.
- Development of didactic activities to be implemented in a workshop event.
- Critical analysis of the didactic procedures developed by the research and the learning of the participating students.

The workshop took place in the second semester of 2023 and involved the participation of English Language undergraduate students. There were 12 participating students, and it was possible to actively observe their involvement and development.

To encourage student participation, the workshop was an extension activity of the Language and Interaction Study Group (GELI), totaling 8 hours in two sessions, with the issuance of a certificate that can be used to validate complementary activities.

It is important to describe in detail the activities that were specifically designed for the participants. Therefore, here's is a table containing the rationale behind each carefully thought out lesson plan section:

**Table 2** — Steps in the Workshop Plan

<b>WORKSHOP DAY 1</b>	
BRAINSTORMING STEP	To make participants reflect on their own perspectives of what impoliteness is and how it is perceived in different types of environments.
RAISING AWARENESS STEP	To provide participants with the appropriate information needed to understand what the concepts in focus mean and to identify an impolite situation and explain the context in which the concepts and social meanings they carry are being used and how they can be categorized within the mentioned concepts.
<b>WORKSHOP DAY 2</b>	
PRAGMATIC INPUT: IDENTIFICATION AND REFLECTION OF (IM)POLITE BEHAVIOR STEP	To encourage participants to identify contextual and co-textual characteristics, that is the visual and verbal tools that can be used to cause (and/or avoid) offense, within the video transcripts.
PRACTICING POLITE versus IMPOLITE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASS STEP	To encourage participants to come up with Impoliteness situations and reflect on possible responses to these specific conflict situations while predicting possible outcomes and reactions.

Source: Brito (2023)

Each section had a specific rationale behind it and each one consisted of minute steps that lead the participants to a common result.

On the first day of the workshop, the first step of the lesson plan was the Brainstorming Step, which was divided into 2 moments: First, the Word Cloud Moment. The students were shown a QR Code which led them to a link of the platform Mentimeter, where they thought about and briefly discussed vocabulary that came up in their minds. There were 33 responses, which led to the following final results:

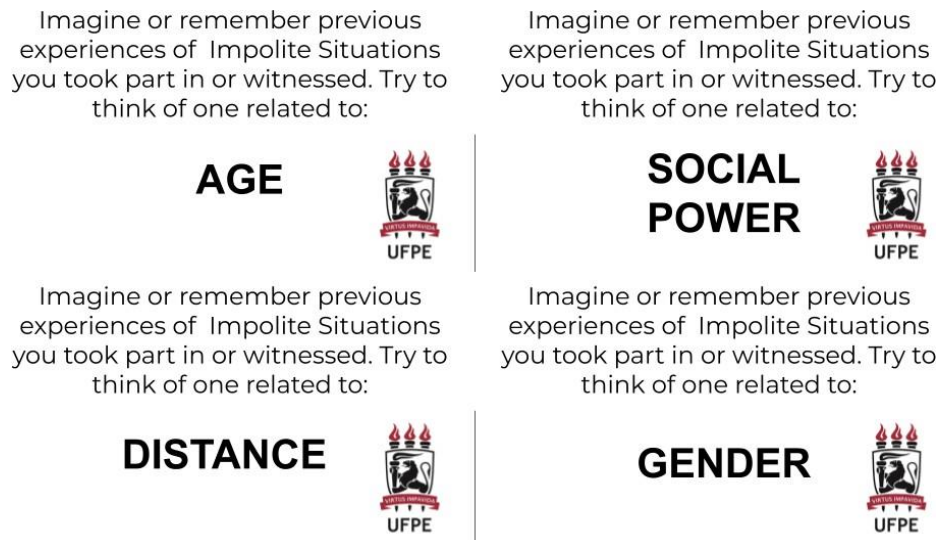
**Table 3** — Results for the Mentimeter Platform

Rudeness	Rude	Disrespect	Sem noção	Cursing	Hurtful
Inconsiderate	Harsh	Bad behavior	Uneducated	Offensive	Yelling
Discourteous	Ill-mannered	Curse Words	Empathy	Disrespectful	Arrogant
Unawareness	Harmful	Offense	Bad mannered	Misbehave	

Source: Brito (2023) .

Then, in Discussion and Sharing Moment, the participants were asked to remember or come up with situations where the concept of impoliteness had had an influence in their lives. They were given instructions and also paper slips to guide them through the topics of discussion, which consisted of paying attention to social variables such as the social power and distance/proximity between the interlocutors in the situation, as well as the gender and age of the participants, as follows:

**Figure 1** — Paper slips for the Discussion Moment



Source: Brito (2023)

Later on, in the Pre-watching Moment, they were instructed to watch three different video snippets of 3 different TV shows and discuss 4 questions, which were the following:

**Table 4** — Questions for the Pre-watching Moment

1. "What is the scene about?"
2. "Who are the characters and what is the relationship between them?"
3. "What may have made the characters feel offended? How can you tell? Do gender, age or other topics influence the impressions on the scene whatsoever?"
4. "What is the role of Intentionality in such situations? Can you identify it in any of the given situations?"

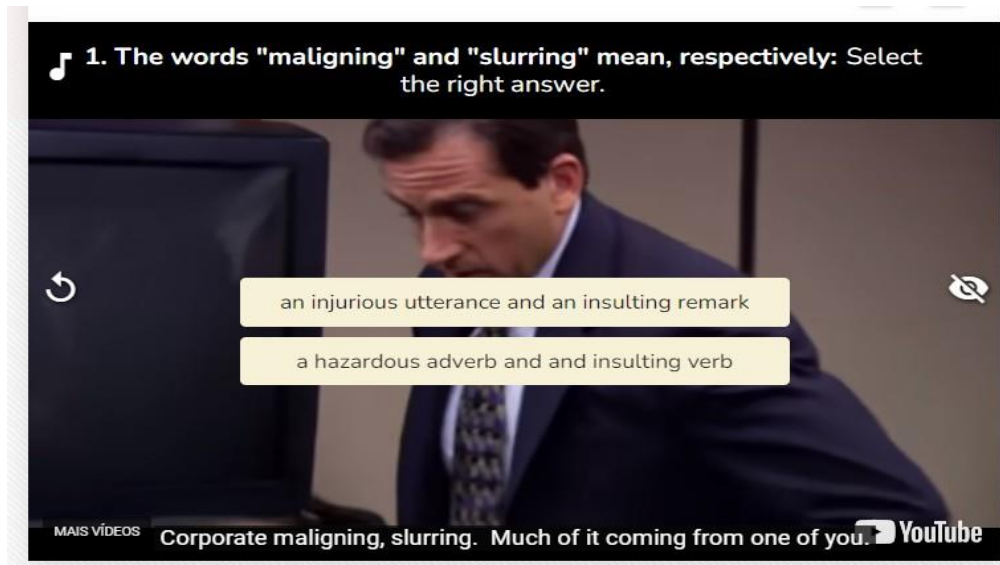
Source: Brito (2023)

With those guiding questions, participants knew exactly what type of information to look for when watching the videos, which were modified in the ISLCollective Platform in order to help them also learn new vocabulary and review grammatical structures.

This is considered the while-watching step of the methodology. The free platform offers different types of linguistic activities in order to achieve this goal in a way that both

engages and amuses students.

**Figure 2** — ISLCollective Video Lesson Activity



Source: Brito (2023)

After completing the ISLCollective video lesson and discussing the pre-watching questions, the post-watching activity was for them to do a matching activity between the chosen topics about impoliteness, which were renamed in order to help participants understand them, the conceptualization of those topics and the moments of the video with the description of exactly what happening on the scene. This was done so that they could discover by themselves what the topics stood for and exactly which parts of the scene depicted one of the specific aspects proposed:

**Figure 3** — Matching Activity: Paper Slip 1 - Topic of Impoliteness

**TOPIC ABOUT  
EXPECTATIONS  
REGARDING  
SOCIAL  
ASSOCIATIONS**



Source: Brito (2023)

**Figure 4** — Matching Activity: Paper Slip 2 - Definition of Topic



The belief that they are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of **relationship** that they have with them.

Source: Brito (2023)

**Figure 5** — Matching Activity: Paper Slip 3 - Image for Matching Moment



Source: Brito (2023)

During the Workshop sessions, a decision to change the technical nomenclature of the topics from (Spencer-Oatey, 2005) was made:

[T]he very concept of impoliteness itself and its definition are subject to discursive struggle, and that we should be focusing squarely on the articulation of that struggle in discourse; in other words, on how the lay person's (or member's own) conception of impoliteness is revealed in their discourse, and not on how the lay person's discourse fits a conception devised by academics. (Culpeper, 2011, p. 7).

Afterwards, there was a moment for the reporting amongst participants, where they shared with their peers all of the information they had gathered as a group. One person from each group was assigned to the other two groups so that there would be three groups with participants from different original groups and they reported the new topics they discovered, what their respective video was about, the categorization they performed and the elements they found out about.

On the second day of the workshop, each original group was required to work on the transcription of the specific video they were assigned. The proposed task in this activity was for them to analyze what parts of speech, tones of voice or any visual or verbal cues were used to convey or interpret the situation as impolite events and have a discussion about it.

Lastly, there was a final brainstorming activity, where each of them came up with two other situations of impoliteness and shared them in front of their peers so they could come to an agreement about what kind of impoliteness the situations represented. The objective here was to help all involved to understand all of the situations and what made them be considered impolite so they could be fully engaged to the last activity of the second day of the workshop, which consisted of the Role Playing task, where the students were asked to reenact the situations they were given by either choosing to be Impolite or to follow the Social Norms of etiquette human society is bound to.

After each task, there was an Accountability Step, which in learning processes refers to the responsibility and ownership that individuals or institutions take for their learning outcomes and progress. According to Anderson (2005), “there are three main types of accountability system” (p.1), the third being “based upon results, with results defined in terms of student learning” (p.2). It involves being answerable for the effort, actions, and results of the learning journey and it plays a crucial role in fostering effective and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, whenever the participants reached this section, they were invited to collaborate and reflect on their findings, as a way of self assessing, being accountable for their level of engagement and participation and putting in the necessary effort to understand and master the material.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

The present research was aimed, amongst other reasons, to propose and then critically analyze the effectiveness of the pedagogical activities, techniques and methods which were implemented as well as the learning of the participating research subjects.

Impoliteness is clearly connected to emotions, and when perceived in specific scenarios, it has the potential to disrupt interpersonal relationships. Both this connection and the choice of TV shows used in the workshop have been extremely useful in this research because the emotions manifested in the characters of the shows, triggered participants' recall of past experiences and engaged them in recognizing their prior knowledge on the subject, even if they're unsure about how to classify all the nuances embedded in Impoliteness.

Which leads us to mention the point that participants were not even aware of the existence of numerous concepts within the overarching concept of Impoliteness. When asked

about what she had learned from day 1, Participant S even said: “The topics about Impoliteness, actually. Some of the expressions to talk about it...I had no idea there would be such specific nominations for these things”.

Also, participant Y stated that he thought the methodology was satisfactory because it was something most of them had not “heard of before [...] and the way to conduct everything and to make it interactive working with small groups and then exchanging, integrating different groups together, is very nice”.

### **The question of previous knowledge**

Also, another goal presented in the study was to investigate the participating undergraduate students’ previous knowledge on Impoliteness firstly by having them, during the workshop, brainstorm words they considered to be related to the topic of Impoliteness and then share with their peers situations of their own, explaining their own unique perspectives on how Impoliteness can be perceived.

When asked about the reasoning for the choice of words in the Word Cloud Moment, mentioned in the Methodology Section of this study, some of the students spoke their minds and explained that the choice of the “Unawareness”, for instance, was because it is directly related to Impoliteness. Participant E said:

[...] I thought that when you are unaware of where you are and who you are dealing with, I think it makes you impolite because here, in the classroom, I can’t talk or act the way I want, I have to respect the rules of the classroom, so when I don’t have the awareness, or I choose to ignore these rules, I am being impolite.

Others argued that Impoliteness is, otherwise, indeed intentional, as said by Participant M: “I would possibly, like, not use this word because all the time I think of impoliteness. I think of like intention so if, like, someone is, like, intentionally rude, like if I know the context [...]”.

Still, the contextual elements were factored in, especially when Participant B explained that the way people might have been brought up may have an influence on their unawareness and, therefore, on their reproductions on Impoliteness. As follows:

I think sometimes people are impolite and they don't even notice [sic] because of the awareness, I don't know, maybe because they are raised in a different way and they are not familiar with that, uh, setting and so they... are impolite...

Participant B's perspective is a great indicator that even with no formal knowledge on the topics impoliteness consists of, the lay person tends to have prior knowledge of the inner workings of social adequacy rules. The face attacks, sociality rights and the role of intentionality are part of the everyday evaluations they all make when in social interpersonal relationships.

After that, in the Discussion and Sharing Moment, some of the narratives shared by the participants were very interesting. Once they were done with this step, they were invited to share their results to see how much they would discover from their peers and also if their stories were related anyhow. For this step, Participant E talked about her grandmother and argued that it was a situation related to age. As she describes it:

She came to my house and she brought canjica [...] so I had my hair tied down, it was very messy, just like, in home [sic] and she said 'oh, your hair looks so good' and I was like 'oh, thank you' and she said 'it's better when you use it like that than when you wear it loose because it makes your head big'.

The participant said that her grandmother usually made comments about her appearance and it was frustrating to not be able to answer back because of their relationship and age difference, she also added there was intentionality in her grandmother's actions. In the checking step, students expressed that they had a lot to learn and relate to in their peers' situations.

Furthermore, the other objective previously set on this research was to investigate the linguistic-discursive-cultural knowledge used for the creation of the workshop. Firstly, the choice of the video snippets used for the learning centers had to really engage the participants. They were taken from comedy TV Shows because these are known to be relatable for viewers and they also depict impolite situations in a indirect but engaging way, considering sarcasm, irony and snarky remarks are usually made and perceived in such shows and those represent a great parcel in the perception of impoliteness.

Also, the linguistic functions to be featured had to be something that matched the chosen theme of the workshop so that it would facilitate their understanding and discussion process, seeing as you can only talk about the linguistics elements you are familiar with. That is precisely the reason as to why while in the discussion of the while-listening questions, about topics such as the setting, the characters and the relationship between each of them, the influence of the social variables previously mentioned and the role of intentionality, the students also had to complete the ISLCollective Quiz about sentence structure, vocabulary choice, colloquial expressions and collocations.

## The concept of Intentionality

Before the Matching Moment, the students shared similarities they noticed between the videos they watched. They noticed how the video “The Convict”, by the American TV show, *The Office*, depicts examples of Impoliteness just as “Jim’s BBQ Invitation” does. It is evident that the participants have a common conception of the inner workings of social adequacy, as one can see in the following quote:

I think for the employees, they were not impolite because it’s their right to not invite someone they don’t like, but, hum...Michael had perceived that as Impoliteness with [sic] intention that they didn’t invite him because it was only him. So that was intentional for him. And he also was intentional [sic] when he was being impolite to the other employees, trying to force his way...

It is clear that the students have a preconceived notion of how intentionality and the perception of Impoliteness works in day-to-day environments. Also, in the Comedy Central snippet, a participant brings up the aspect of race into play when talking about the substitute teacher who is rude to the students. At this point, she says that she “thought about the fact that he’s black, in a white [sic] classroom”, meaning there might be an underlying reason for the character to be tough and even rude as soon as he walks through the door.

At this point, they were expected to understand a little more about the perception of Intentionality, seeing as the teacher in the show perceived the students as discourteous even though they did not intend to. Therefore, the understanding of the idea that the perceived intentionality from one party may not, in fact, be planned was elicited from the participants of the workshop.

## The benefits to the ISLCollective Platform

When reminiscing about the Reporting Moment, the students rated their knowledge of Impoliteness concepts between 8 and 9 and were very confident. As for the words they learned with the use of the ISLCollective material, the ones in common were: “Rap Sheet, Clink, Ransom, Pretty sure, Inner city, To be trifled with, churlish”.

This illustrates how Incorporating ISLCollective video lessons into language teaching strategies may complement traditional teaching methods, making vocabulary learning and grammar reviews more dynamic and effective for students of all ages and language levels. For example, visual cues, gestures, facial expressions, and real-life situations presented in video lessons such as the ones that were prepared for the workshop make language concepts more relatable and memorable.

In addition, since they depict authentic language usage, including natural conversations, expressions, and idiomatic phrases, it exposes learners to real-world language variations and helps them grasp how grammar and vocabulary are applied in practical contexts.

On the second day of the workshop, when the participants were asked to study the transcriptions and comment on them afterwards, some of the participants had very coherent arguments towards the scenes they watched. Participant P, who talked about the video entitled “Prison Mike”, from the TV Show ‘The Office’, mentioned some of the things the main character, Michael Scott, did and that she perceived to be impolite:

Okay, so, when he starts with his, uh, acting...Uh, acting like Prison Mike, he changes the tone of voice to mimic the stereotypes of prison so we thought that offensive term that he uses, like, when he talks to Angela and said ‘Do you really expect me not to push up against the wall, beyotch?’. He even raises his voice when talking to Angela and everybody says ‘Woah, woah, woah’. So yeah, those indicators. [...] Also when he refers to Ryan, he makes those kissing sounds to... refer to him as the ‘belle of the ball’ and to insinuate some other things so...

On top of that, participant S says there is a moment when Jim and Pam, the other main characters of the TV Show, start to talk to Michael to “indulge a bit in his fantasy” and they start being ironic. Michael does not notice, but the participant says that it would also have been seen as Impolite in Michael’s perspective, since he was trying to achieve an objective with that presentation and the attitude from both of them would jeopardize that purpose. As she says: “because he wanted them to perceive him as prison Mike and if he noticed that they were not and that they were just mocking him, he would consider it impolite.”

On the other hand, participant B talks about Michael’s impoliteness when he starts invading people’s personal space to try and convince them to admit there is a barbecue party planned, which he is not invited to. The participant says: “So the person gets so uncomfortable you can see... uh, the person is feeling very uncomfortable.”

Talking about the same video, participant E says she “noticed that he always is, uh...impolite. [...] He always asks the ladies to go with them (to their cars) or in a way that is different from the men”. She means the character is always very condescending towards women in a way he is not with the men. She also mentions that when Angela tells him she is just leaving for the day, he responds with ‘Well, duh’, therefore proving her point, considering he talks to the man as if they are his close friends.

## Participant's Contribution

After this section, when each participant was asked to come up with 2 examples of Impolite Situations, the result was very interesting.

They were able to come up with many situations while also explaining them very eloquently. See below a table with the participant's scenario and the contribution they made regarding its conceptualization:

**Table 5** — Participant's contribution to the Impolite Situations

Participant	Impolite Situation	Participant's Perspective
Y	2009's VMA Taylor Swift had just won the main award of the night and as she delivered the acceptance speech, Kanye West interrupted her, took the microphone from her hand and started saying how much Beyoncé deserved the prize.	The participant argues that this was a matter of Taylor's self confidence and self image, since she was publicly humiliated.
B	A scene from the TV Show "Everybody hates Chris" where the teacher, who is encouraging all students to bring food so they hand them out to the less fortunate, offers Chris some. And when he offers to help out, she refuses as if he was not capable to help.	The student argues that this is a clear case of threat to Chris' Public Self Image and Social Identity, as he wants to be recognized as a member of the school community who will help the poor.
M	Man interviews a congresswoman in the middle of a protest and asks her a personal question. She doesn't like that and starts responding to his further provocative questions with irony.	The student argues this is a case of Impoliteness related to gender, as the interviewer disrespects the congresswoman and keeps on questioning her even when she demonstrates discomfort. The student mentions this type of question would probably not be asked to a man.
L	A family goes to the movies to have fun together but the boy makes too much noise. The parents encourage him to calm down, but the boy answers back. So, the other spectators start shouting and getting nervous.	The student argues that this is a situation related to expectation, since the boy is expected to respect his parents and behave well. Also, it is a matter of threat to Fairness and Equality, since the other people were not patient with the parents who were already having a hard time.

J	The participant was at a friend's house when the friend's sister appears out of the blue and starts arguing and swearing in front of them. The participant had to invite her friend to come over.	The participant argues that this is a matter of public self image associated with positive social interactions, since the sister disrespected the participant's friend in front of her and did not pay attention to social etiquette.
L	The participant's sister was at a supermarket, talking to a woman in the diaper section. The sister asks when the woman's baby is due only to find out she was not pregnant.	The participant mentions the threat to the woman's Public Self-Image and self confidence.
M	The participant was at a bakery and asked for a patisserie in portuguese. She referred to it as 'sonho', but the employee interrupted her only to say that it was a 'donut'.	The participant argued that this was a case of Expectations regarding Social Associations. Considering the employee is expected to be respectful to customers.
S	At a friend's birthday party, as the guests are arriving, the birthday girl is adding the final touches to the birthday cake. by herself. One of the people who were invited by the birthday girl's friend started eating the strawberries that were topping the cake.	The participant argues it was a matter of perceptions of rights and obligations. First, the friend invited someone else without permission. Then, this person invaded the birthday girl's private space.
A	A girl wearing short shorts is running down the park when two older women start pointing at her and whispering. The girl notices and decides to leave the park.	There is a threat to the girl's Self Confidence, since the ladies talk about her body and cause her discomfort.
E	A girl and her friends usually kiss lightly on the lips or cheeks. But when they did that at a party, a male acquaintance cracked jokes and called them "lesbos". They told the man he was being "creepy", he got offended and said it was just a joke.	The participant argues there was a threat to the girls' Self Confidence, as the man caused them discomfort in front of all of the people at the party.

Source: Brito (2023)

Finally, regarding the choice of an open Role Play for either a polite or impolite bias previously mentioned in the Methodology Section: it makes sense, as it's important not only to identify the elements constituting impoliteness but also to keep in mind the actions that can avoid them, which ties in perfectly with the present study's objective to aid participants in understanding different socio-cultural cues that foreign students tend not to grasp. This context-dependent nature underscores the importance of considering cultural norms, social dynamics, and personal sensitivities when analyzing impoliteness.



## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is possible to see that teaching impoliteness can be a valuable strategy for enhancing students' English proficiency in several ways. By understanding impoliteness, students gain insights into the subtle nuances of language use, cultural context, and social dynamics. This knowledge goes beyond polite language and exposes them to a broader range of communication styles.

Incorporating impoliteness into English language teaching helps students become more well-rounded communicators, capable of understanding and using language in a way that aligns with different social settings. By expanding their linguistic toolkit to include both polite and impolite language, students are better prepared to navigate real-world interactions and enhance their overall English proficiency.

Despite the participants not being familiar with the technical jargon linked to impoliteness, it was clear that their intuitive understanding of impoliteness from a layperson's perspective was sharp. This highlights how people naturally navigate the complexities of communication, drawing from their life experiences and social awareness.

The findings of this research confirm that impoliteness isn't just an abstract idea confined to academic discussions; it's a real part of everyday interactions. The participants showed they had an implicit grasp of how impoliteness shows up, changes, and affects relationships. This stresses the importance of bridging the gap between academic terms and how people actually understand things, creating a more inclusive conversation that connects with people from different backgrounds.

When one considers the lessons learned from this study, it's clear that understanding impoliteness as a shared human experience goes beyond formal education. The participants' natural ability to recognize and interpret impoliteness reinforces the idea that language and social dynamics are deeply intertwined in human interaction. So, future research could explore more about how people's everyday understanding of impoliteness enriches academic discussions, leading to a more complete understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Ultimately, this study showcases the remarkable connection between academic exploration and everyday awareness. It prompts us to acknowledge and appreciate the profound insights that everyday people contribute to our understanding of impoliteness, fostering a deeper respect for the intricate interplay of words and emotions that shape human communication.

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