

## Verbal Bullying in the Dialogues of ‘AlRawabi School for Girls’: A Perspective on Jonathan Culpeper’s Impoliteness Theory

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of verbal bullying through impoliteness strategies in the television series *AlRawabi School for Girls*, employing Jonathan Culpeper’s impoliteness theory. Using a pragmatic discourse framework that includes audiovisual cues—facial expression, tone, and cultural context—this research identifies four key impoliteness strategies: bald-on-record (36%), positive impoliteness (32%), negative impoliteness (28%), and sarcasm or mock politeness (24%). Data were drawn from purposively selected dialogues in the show’s first season. The findings reveal that these linguistic strategies are used not only for dramatic effect but also as mechanisms of social domination reinforced by patriarchal norms. The study contributes to pragmatic theory by extending its application to Arabic audiovisual media and highlighting how fictional dialogue reflects real-world power dynamics and gendered social pressures in school settings.

**Keywords:** Verbal bullying, Impoliteness, Jonathan Culpeper, AlRawabi School for Girls

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of verbal bullying among adolescents, especially in the school environment, has become a growing concern in recent years. Social interactions between students at school can reflect their success in their developmental tasks (Ezy Maulany et al., 2022). Whether in the real world or the digital realm, cases of verbal bullying often occur in a hidden and structured manner (Malik & Sutrisna, 2023), resulting in a profound psychological impact on the victim. For example, in school and media

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contexts, forms of impoliteness such as teasing or name-calling are often dismissed as a joke when they can be the start of psychologically harmful verbal bullying (Borualogo et al., 2023).

Unlike physical violence that leaves visible scars, verbal violence hurts silently through hurtful words, tone of voice, and style of speech, although it is often taken for granted (Agoes & Lewoleba, 2023). Although various prevention programs have been implemented, verbal bullying has proven to be the most difficult to tackle significantly (Kennedy, 2020). This difficulty is closely related to the nature of language itself, which is not merely a means of communication but is also considered an effective and symbolic tool in an effort to maintain power (Said et al., 2024).

A study conducted at MTs Karangmangu, Indramayu, found a significant correlation between student behavior growth and verbal bullying in the school environment, with a correlation coefficient of 0.748 (Ani & Nurhayati, 2019). In addition, verbal bullying can also lead to social anxiety, low self-confidence, and self-harming behavior (Ezy Maulany et al., 2022). Furthermore, the determinant coefficient test shows that verbal bullying affects the development of student behavior by 56%, while other factors influence the rest (Ani & Nurhayati, 2019). This indicates that verbal bullying not only causes negative interactions in the school environment but can also impact the psychological well-being of the victim in the long run (Kurniati et al., 2023). Verbal bullying, as a form of language practice, cannot be separated from the cultural and social environment where it occurs, because language and culture are like two inseparable sides of a coin (Dewi, 2021).

Cases of verbal bullying often occur among teenagers, either directly or through social media, which has a significant impact on the mental and psychological health of the victims (Pajri, 2024). This reality has been highlighted in popular media, including the drama series *AlRawabi School for Girls*. The series showcases the dynamics of teenage girls in an elite school environment full of social pressure, status competition, and bullying practices that are physical and verbal (Yasmin et al., 2024). In the dialogue between characters, there are many verbal expressions of power, veiled insults, and forms of psychological domination hidden behind sentences used in everyday life. This is often violated to conceal information that the speaker does not want to explicitly convey to the listener or even the general public, either as a stand-alone statement or as a response to a question asked by the interlocutor (Nur et al., 2024). These utterances, though often masked in casual language, carry strong emotional force and social implications, as they are often used to express anger, frustration, insults, and a range of intense emotions and attitudes, reflecting deeply embedded cultural practices (Fatmawati & Setiawan, 2020). In the case of Trump and Berlusconi, impoliteness leads to a normalization process due to the acceptance of the supporting group (Wodak et al., 2021). Impoliteness in *AlRawabi School for Girls* shows the opposite impact, namely social exclusion and psychological

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distress for victims.

Based on the various descriptions above, the study falls within the scope of pragmatic linguistic studies, especially those that analyse language impoliteness. The theory of impoliteness or language impoliteness was developed by Jonathan Culpeper as the opposite form of politeness theory, which has long been the focus of pragmatic studies. (Culpeper, 2011) defines impoliteness as behaviour that worsens face in a particular context. This differs from Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (Johnson et al., 1988), centered on threat mitigation strategies against face (Culpeper, 2011). Furthermore, language is not only a means of communication but also a medium to express social processes that are embedded within specific cultural and situational contexts (Mulyana & Qomariana, 2023).

According to Culpeper, impoliteness is when the interlocutor makes a facial attack, the recipient interprets the action as an intentional attack, or both conditions occur (Culpeper, 1996). In its development, Culpeper explains that impoliteness occurs when a speaker intentionally performs a face-threatening action or when a listener interprets an action as a threat to face (Culpeper, 2005). This theory implies that impoliteness depends on the speaker's intention, the listener's perception, and the surrounding social context. Researchers have argued that only considering the impolite behavior of communicators can help define certain communicative behaviors more accurately (Djalilova, 2023). Therefore, impoliteness is closely related to social norms and cultural expectations (Culpeper, 1996).

Jonathan Culpeper adapted Brown and Levinson's concept of politeness. He formulated five main impoliteness strategies: bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness (Culpeper, 1996).

Bald on Record is a form of action carried out explicitly by conveying threats to the face of the interlocutor or the object of speech in a straightforward, direct and unambiguous manner. This strategy is applied in contexts where the aspect of face is considered irrelevant, ignored, or not prioritized. Direct, clear, unambiguous, which threatens the face of the speech partner without paying attention to attempts to soften the threat to the face. This strategy aims to attack the positive face of the interlocutor. Signs include being unfriendly, ignoring the presence of the person being spoken to, referring to the wrong label or identity on purpose, using language that is difficult to understand or is closed, using taboo words, and mentioning insulting nicknames. This strategy aims to damage the interlocutor's negative face. Indicators include attempts to frighten (for example, by conveying threats that cause anxiety or danger), demeaning, mocking, insulting, treating the interlocutor without seriousness, and belittling their opinion or existence. This strategy involves displaying an attitude that seems polite but is actually insincere. The phrases appear friendly on the surface but are laden with insinuations or hidden, demeaning intentions. This impoliteness occurs when

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speakers intentionally do not apply the expected norms of politeness in a particular context. For example, not saying thank you after receiving a gift or not congratulating the other person's achievement.

Furthermore, impoliteness theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding how impoliteness functions in various social and cultural contexts. Impoliteness does not always arise spontaneously or randomly. However, it is often used strategically, for example, in situations of social conflict, asymmetrical interactions such as superiors and subordinates, or in media and entertainment contexts (Theresia & Nisa, 2024). In practice, impoliteness can be a tool to reinforce social dominance, assert power hierarchies, or create dramatic effects in a narrative (Wodak et al., 2021). This theory allows researchers to explain how expressions of impoliteness are formed, constructed, and interpreted in social interactions governed by cultural norms and expectations. Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards behavior considered deviant from the norm based on socio-cultural desires, beliefs, and expectations (Del Saz-Rubio, 2023). This understanding is important in analyzing audiovisual discourses representing social tensions, identity conflicts, and power relations, as depicted in the *AlRawabi School for Girls* series.

The author found several relevant previous studies. A study by Tasliati examined forms of impoliteness in online buying and selling interactions in Tanjungpinang and found that digital spaces often facilitate direct and confrontational language. However, the study only focused on the transactional context and ignored broader social dynamics (Tasliati, 2019). Kecskes explores how cultural context affects perceptions of incivility in intercultural communication but does not address how such perceptions function in fictional media (Kecskes, 2017). Later, Mansor et al. examined impoliteness in Spanish-language advertisements, but their analysis was limited to commercial discourse (Mansor et al., 2014). Meanwhile, Abu-rayyash and Shiyab discuss censorship and intimidation in the translation of the *AlRawabi School for Girls*, focusing more on the politics of translation rather than pragmatic strategies of disrespect (Abu-rayyash & Shiyab, 2023). These studies, while insightful, leave gaps in examining how incivility operates as a reflection of power and social hierarchy in fictional narratives, particularly in youth-centered series such as *AlRawabi School for Girls*.

The significance of this study is evident in its attempt to bridge literary and pragmatic studies that have not yet explored impolite speech in Middle Eastern audiovisual discourse, especially in the genre of teenage girls' drama. Previous studies have focused more on bold interactions, intercultural communication, persuasive advertisement strategies, and bullying issues in subtitling. However, no one has specifically discussed the dynamics of impoliteness in dialog films as part of a complex audiovisual discourse construction. Discourse in a movie or series conveys verbal meaning and social and ideological dimensions shaped by power relations, identity, and

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specific cultural contexts.

The absence of in-depth studies in this area suggests an important gap in understanding how impoliteness is represented and functions in popular media that is widely consumed. Impolite speech, especially in Arab female teen dramas, is rarely explained pragmatically, let alone with a comprehensive incivility theory approach. In this context, the *AlRawabi School for Girls* series is relevant because it features various forms of impolite speech that are complex and full of meaning. The series not only presents adolescent conflict narratively but also represents the dynamics of power, identity, and resistance through the language of the characters.

*AlRawabi School for Girls* was chosen as a research subject because it explicitly features relevant verbal bullying practices analyzed using Jonathan Culpeper's theory of incivility. The series raises important issues such as reputation control, sexual violence, psychological pressure, and power relations in the educational space (Al-Harashsheh et al., 2025). In addition, the conflict between teenage girls is displayed through the practice of verbal incivility that reflects psychological manipulation and a response to oppressive social structures. The series' uniqueness lies in the way it interprets verbal bullying not simply as an individual aggressive act but rather as a social symptom that is removed from cultural and psychological factors. The series also presents a different perspective from conventional bullying narratives by highlighting the long-term impact of ill-mannered speech on both perpetrators and victims. The complexity of the characters, the strategic use of language, and the conflict-laden plot make *AlRawabi School for Girls* a thematically interesting and rich object of study to be interpreted linguistically and pragmatically. Therefore, this study aims to fill the void in studies that connect the impoliteness theory with cultural representation in contemporary Arabic audiovisual discourse.

To support a contextual and complete pragmatic analysis, an understanding of the Arab culture surrounding the characters' behavior in the series is essential. Arab culture, especially in the conservative and patriarchal Middle East, has strong social norms regarding honor, family reputation, control over women's bodies, and hierarchical authority structures in public spaces (Al-Khatib, 2021). These values influence how individuals express emotions, maintain self-esteem, and respond to conflict. In this cultural context, verbal impoliteness is considered a violation of communication ethics and a form of violation of collective norms, such as damaging family reputation, insulting personal honor, or threatening social stability. In line with this, intercultural linguistic studies state that the meaning of an utterance is highly dependent on the cultural context of the speaking community (Hidayatullah, 2021). In other words, even if a word has a lexical equivalent in another language, its meaning cannot always be understood without knowledge of the cultural setting in which it occurs. Therefore, interpreting an utterance can only be done accurately if the social and cultural

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context is considered.

The series represents verbal impoliteness as a response to social pressure, marginalization, and identity conflicts experienced by adolescent girls in the school environment. By understanding these cultural constructions, the analysis of the utterances in the series can be contextualized more precisely. Each form of impoliteness carries a social setting and pragmatic meaning influenced by local values. Therefore, a strategic reading of the series' incivility cannot be separated from understanding the social structures, gender relations, and cultural expectations that shape the characters' actions and reactions. This approach allows for more incisive pragmatic analysis, examining what is said and why and how the utterance is meaningful in contemporary Arab culture.

This study departs from the assumption that the practice of verbal bullying in the dialogue of the AlRawabi School for Girls series can be systematically analyzed through the framework of impoliteness theory developed by Jonathan Culpeper. The series presents various forms of language impoliteness that act as aggressive communication strategies and reflect the structure of power relations and social domination in school life. This approach assumes that emerging forms of impoliteness, such as insults, sarcasm, and threats, have specific linguistic patterns that strengthen conflict dynamics between characters and reveal the underlying social tensions.

This study aims to identify and analyze the forms of verbal impoliteness in the AlRawabi School for Girls series using Culpeper's impoliteness framework. Specifically, this study aims to uncover the impoliteness strategies used in interactions between characters and understand how these strategies represent power relations, manipulation, and social dynamics in the school environment. Furthermore, this study also aims to explain how these impolite utterances are constructed and interpreted in audiovisual discourse. In this case, visual elements, intonation, facial expressions, and situational context become important aspects that influence the interpretation of the characters' utterances. Adding this dimension of analysis is expected to provide a more complete understanding of how movies as multimodal media convey messages through a combination of verbal and non-verbal language. This study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of verbal bullying in visual media and the role of incivility in character development and narrative conflict escalation.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with pragmatic discourse analysis. This approach was selected because the primary focus of the study is to examine the implied meanings in dialogues that contain elements of verbal bullying rather than merely counting the frequency of their occurrence.

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According to Creswell, a qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the deeper meaning of social phenomena in a specific context (Creswell, 2018), which in this study is the context of verbal bullying in the AlRawabi School for Girls series.

The primary data utilized in this study consists of dialogues from the first season of the AlRawabi School for Girls series, which is accessible through the official Netflix platform (Al-Harashseh et al., 2025). Data was selected using a purposive sampling technique, which selected dialogs that explicitly or implicitly showed verbal bullying (Creswell, 2018). This technique is based on the opinion of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, who state that purposive sampling aims to select the most rich and relevant information for in-depth study (Miles et al., 2013).

Data were analyzed using Jonathan Culpeper's theory of impoliteness, including five impoliteness strategies. Each dialogue excerpt was analyzed to identify the types of impoliteness strategies used and how these strategies contribute to shaping verbal bullying actions. The analysis stage was carried out in stages: data identification, data classification based on impoliteness strategies, interpretation of meaning, and conclusion drawing.

To enhance the validity of the findings, this study employs data triangulation techniques in several forms. First, the results of the speech analysis are compared with the visual and situational context of the scene footage to ensure that the interpretation of the meaning of the speech is not separated from its social context. Second, cross-verification between episodes featuring similar speech patterns was conducted to see the consistency of the impoliteness strategies used. Third, the researcher compared the analysis results with previous findings to avoid excessive subjectivity and ensure the interpretation is within a proven scientific framework. Finally, the researcher also asked for input from expert readers to get an external point of view so that the potential for personal bias could be significantly reduced. These steps aimed to suppress the potential for subjective bias and produce a more objective and academically accountable interpretation of the data. In addition, triangulation was conducted by double-checking the transcripts from various sources to ensure the accuracy of the quoted dialogue. (Denzin, 2012) emphasizes that triangulation is a crucial method in qualitative research for increasing validity and reliability.

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## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings related to the types and forms of language impoliteness found in the AlRawabi School for Girls series:

Table 1:  
*Types and Forms of Language Impoliteness In AlRawabi School for Girls Series*

No.	Type of Impoliteness	Frequency	Percen <sup>a</sup>	Form of Impoliteness	Total	Percen <sup>a</sup>
1.	Bald on Record Impoliteness	9	36%	Bald on Record Impoliteness	9	36%
2.	Positive Impoliteness	7	32%	Use of swearing or abusive words	2	8%
				Use of inappropriate or insulting names or nicknames	5	24%
3.	Negative Impoliteness	7	28%	Ridiculing or reproaching others	3	12%
				Treating others arbitrarily	1	4%
				Underestimating or demeaning others	1	4%
				Associating the speech partner with negative things	1	4%
				Scaring	1	4%
4.	Sacrsacm / Mock Politeness	6	24%	Sarcasm	6	24%

Some data included more than one form or strategy, so the total percentage exceeded 100% due to overlapping classifications.

Based on the results of the data analysis, four types of impoliteness strategies used in the speech were identified. The four strategies include: (1)

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direct impoliteness strategy (bald on record impoliteness), which is a strategy used without any mitigation or appeasement efforts so that speakers explicitly convey expressions that can be considered offensive or impolite; (2) positive impoliteness strategy, which is a strategy aimed at damaging the positive self-image of the interlocutor, for example by showing disrespect, belittling, or insulting; (3) negative impoliteness strategy, which is a strategy that attacks the negative self-image of the interlocutor, such as by interrupting, imposing one's will, or ignoring one's right to Privacy; and (4) withhold politeness strategy, which refers to the absence of politeness expressions in the context of speech that should require it, giving the impression of implicit impoliteness, including the use of irony or sarcasm. Further discussion on these politeness strategies will be elaborated in detail in the following sections.

The conclusion summarises the research findings, which correlate with the research objectives in the introduction. Then, state the main points of the discussion. A conclusion generally concludes with a statement about how the research work contributes to the field of study (shows progress from the latest knowledge). A common mistake in this section is to repeat the results of an experiment, abstract, or be presented with a very list. The concluding section must provide evident scientific truths. In addition, the conclusions can also offer suggestions for future experiments.

## 1. Direct and Explicit Verbal Bullying

ليان: سمّية! شاهدي! قد استح حذاءى بسببك. يا للقرف

*Sumayya! Watch out! My shoes got dirty because of you. Disgusting.*

**Context:** Layan insulted Mrs. Sumayya while walking in the school corridor and deliberately kicked the janitor's bucket.

The utterance spoken by Layan is a form of bald-on-record impoliteness because it is delivered directly, without softening, and with a clear purpose to berate the interlocutor. The use of the expression "disgusting" is not only linguistically abusive but also in the context of Arabic culture, which contains attacks on honor and self-esteem, fundamental values in maintaining one's social face. Thus, this insult is not just a spontaneous expression of emotion but a personal attack on Sumayya's dignity. Socially, this utterance becomes Layan's tool to assert his dominance as an elite student over the janitors, who are structurally in an inferior position. This is then reinforced by Layan's non-verbal action of deliberately kicking Sumayya's coal

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and the sneering facial expression and high voice intonation heard in the broadcast. Audiovisual aspects such as the setting (a crowded school corridor), Sumayya's passive reaction, and Layan's aggressive body gestures reinforce the meaning of impoliteness. This action humiliates Sumayya in a public space and shows how power relations and social hierarchies are constructed through language and visual symbols. The impoliteness in this dialogue, therefore, does not stand alone as a linguistic phenomenon but is part of a social construction of domination, control, and cultural norms in a patriarchal and hierarchical Arab society. This finding is in line with research by (Dacalanio et al., 2024), which states that the bald-on-record strategy in an educational context is often used to convey dissatisfaction and assert power over parties considered inferior explicitly.

نوف : يبدو أنك لاتعرفيني جيداً

مريم: صحيح، أنت محقة. لكن يكفي أن عرفت أنك جبانة.

*Nouf : You don't know anything about me.*

*Mariam: Yes, you're right. All I know is that you're a coward.*

The utterance between Mariam and Nouf shows a form of bald on-record impoliteness strategy, which is done directly without softening. Mariam's words insult Nouf's character by calling her a “coward.” This speech explicitly attacks Nouf's positive face, a self-image that wants to be appreciated as a strong figure. The impoliteness appears in the context of emotional conflict when Mariam feels betrayed by Nouf's silence. Audiovisually, Mariam's stern facial expressions, raised tone of voice, and close-up camera angles on the faces of the two characters reinforce the intensity of the confrontation and the shame caused. In an Arab culture that values pride and courage, the label “coward” is not just a personal insult but also a form of social delegitimization that can damage one's reputation. As such, the incivility in this scene functions as a tool to challenge the integrity of the opponent while also demonstrating the dynamics of power relations and moral control within the wider social structure.

نوف: متى استحمت آخر مرة؟ في العيد؟ هل سبق أن سمعت بالحمام؟ رائتك نتنة فعلاً.

ليان: نحن نمثل. مؤكد أن رائحتي ليست نتنة. انتبهى لأفعالك جيداً

*Noaf : You stink; when was the last time you took a shower? On Eid? Have you ever heard of bathing? You stink.*

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*Layan : I don't stink, we're pretending. You better watch out!*

The utterance "You stink, when was the last time you took a shower? During Eid?" delivered by Nouf during the bullying socialization session is a form of bald on record that is blatant and aims to humiliate Layan, even though the context is acting. Insults to personal hygiene, primarily associated with sacred moments, become attacks that are not only physical but also touch the values of honor in Arab culture, especially for women. Audiovisually, Nouf's contemptuous expression and mocking tone reinforce the meaning of the insult, while Layan's defensive response marks an attempt to maintain a positive face and self-respect. This tension suggests that impoliteness functions as a tool of social domination rather than a mere outburst of emotion. In the context of a culture that upholds honor, language in this scene becomes an instrument of social control and identity formation, especially in power relations between women.

نوف: ديني أخيرك، إن انكشف أمري فسأكشف كلّ الخطّة.

*Noaf : Just so you know, if I get caught, I'll drag all of you.*

Nouf's utterance, "Just so you know, if I get caught, I will drag you all," is a form of Bald on Record impoliteness that contains a direct and explicit threat without softening. This utterance attacks Mariam and Dina's negative face, forcing them to take risks they do not want to take. This impoliteness occurs in a tense emotional situation when Nouf feels his position is threatened. In the context of Arab culture that upholds group honor and solidarity, the threat of disclosure is not only a personal pressure but also an attack on social stability and collective reputation, especially in the women's community. From the audiovisual aspect, Nouf's tense facial expressions, high voice intonation, and aggressive gestures reinforce the threat dimension in this speech. The camera's close-ups of the characters' faces capture their tension and anxiety, showing that the incivility in this scene is verbal and reinforced by visual and sound elements as a strategy of domination and social control.

يا لغبانك! هل أصابك العمى؟

*Ruqayya : You asshole! What's wrong with you?*

Ruqayya's utterance, "You asshole! What is wrong with you?" was uttered in an emotional state when Dina spilled a drink on his shirt during

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the party. This utterance is Bald on Record impoliteness, which is uttered directly, without softening, as a form of emotional venting and public offense. Dina's positive cursing and rhetorical questioning shook her self-esteem and social image. In Arab culture, where self-esteem and self-control in the public sphere are valued, this kind of offense can cause significant social distress, especially for women whose reputations are highly guarded.

Audiovisually, Ruqayya's angry facial expressions, sharp tone of voice, and aggressive body movements reinforce the intensity of the verbal attack. The camera captures the situation in the crowd, highlighting all the other guests and amplifying the public shaming effect. This combination of verbal and nonverbal makes Ruqayya's impoliteness an effective tool of domination—conveying her social superiority over Dina in front of the audience.

متأكد أنك أجمل من دون الحجاب الذي تعتمرينه

*I'm sure you're prettier underneath all that headscarf fabric*

The utterance “I am sure you are more beautiful underneath all that headscarf cloth” is a form of disguised but still aggressive impoliteness wrapped in manipulative seduction that targets women's identity. This speech is included in the bald-on-record impoliteness strategy because speakers convey opinions directly without considering the sensitivity of the topic or the prevailing cultural norms. Although it sounds like a compliment, the statement blatantly denigrates the function of the headscarf as a religious and social symbol and objectifies the female body. It also violates the boundaries of privacy and symbolic integrity, as it implies that women's value lies in the physical attractiveness hidden beneath shar'i clothing.

In Arab culture, the headscarf is not just a body covering but a manifestation of women's honor, identity, and moral choices. By trivializing the symbol through this comment, the speaker indirectly challenges the social norms that regulate modesty, chastity, and respect for women. The remarks can be understood as a form of verbal abuse that not only attacks the positive face of the individual but also shakes the collective value structure that regulates gender relations and self-representation in society. This impoliteness shows how language can be used as an instrument of power to shake a person's dignity while revealing the tension between personal desires and binding cultural norms. From the audiovisual aspect, the speaker's tone sounds flirtatious and full, with breaking eyes tracing the interlocutor's body,

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creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. The camera uses a close-up angle to highlight the disturbed expression of the targeted character, reinforcing the dimension of understanding. There is no sudden background noise or sign of social tension, emphasizing that this utterance is a subtle form of symbolic aggression with a substantial psychological and cultural impact.

ام رقيًا: أتظنين أنه سيعجب بك ويقع في غرامك لمجرد إرسال صورة كهذه؟ أتحسبين أنه بطريقتك السخيفة هذه ستستميلينه ليتزوجك ويغرمبك؟ لا أحد يحبّ البضائع المكشوفة.

*Ruqayya's mother : Do you think she will go crazy about you just because of a picture like that? Do you believe that by doing such a silly thing, you can entice her to marry you and fall in love? No one wants damaged goods.*

Ruqayya's mother's utterance, "You think he will go crazy over you just because of a photo like that? ... No one wants damaged goods," exemplifies a *bald-on-record* form of impoliteness that is brutally direct, with no attempt at mitigation, and directly attacks the girl's dignity. As a maternal figure, this statement reflects domestic verbal abuse that reproduces patriarchal and misogynistic values, where women are judged based on their purity rather than personal autonomy. The metaphor "damaged goods" objectifies the female body and denies her existence as a subject.

In Arab culture, family honor is held in the highest regard, especially concerning women's bodies and behavior. Such utterances carry a heavy moral burden. The veil, chastity, and obedience are key indicators of a woman's social value. By equating her daughter with "damaged goods," Ruqayya's mother not only attacks her daughter's positive face as an individual but also reinforces social control in the name of familial honor.

From an audiovisual perspective, the mother's tone is firm and scornful, delivered with a sharply rising intonation, reflecting both moral superiority and suppressive anger. The camera takes a low-angle shot from the daughter's side, emphasizing her inferiority and distress, while a close-up of the mother's face captures a cold and judgmental expression. The absence of background music further accentuates the awkward silence and emotional pain. These elements intensify the affective force of hatred as a form of symbolic domination, turning language into a disciplinary tool that governs the female body and morality from within the family structure itself.

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سمعة البنت أهم مالدبيها. فهي كزجاج تمامًا. إن كسر لا يصلح، و إن أصلح لا يعود  
كما كان. و أنت الآن عبارة عن لوح زجاج مكسور.

*Ruqayya's mother is a girl with only a reputation. It's like a glass. If it breaks,  
it can't.*

The utterance, “A girl only has her reputation. It is like glass. Once it breaks, it cannot be fixed... And you are now broken glass,” exemplifies a profoundly hurtful bald-on-record act of impoliteness. Delivered without mitigation, this metaphor offers no protection; instead, it functions as a symbolic tool of judgment and exclusion. The girl is likened to a fragile object deemed unworthy of repair, reinforcing a patriarchal view that reputation is the sole determinant of a woman’s dignity.

In Arab culture, where a woman’s honor is deeply tied to the family’s reputation, such statements serve as instruments of social control and instill a sense of shame. By referring to her daughter as “broken glass,” the mother asserts that her self-worth has been lost and rendered unspeakable.

From an audiovisual perspective, the camera uses a low-angle shot from the daughter's position, emphasizing her powerlessness and subjugation. The mother’s face is captured in a stark close-up, with a cold expression and a flat tone of voice, reinforcing the decisiveness and finality of her rejection. The silence in the scene creates a suffocating emotional atmosphere. This combination amplifies the utterance’s force as a form of symbolic violence, turning language into a tool for erasing identity and extinguishing any hope of redemption.

أنت من لديك مشكلة كبيرة وينبغي أنتحليها. وبدلاً من أنتزجي الجميع في خططك القدرة تشجعي قليلاً  
وواجهيهما.

*Noaf : You should take care of your problems. You’re dragging everyone into  
it instead of having the courage to face it.*

Noaf’s utterance, “I think you should deal with your problems. You are dragging everyone into it instead of facing it,” represents a *bald-on-record* act of impoliteness, delivered directly without mitigation, containing overt criticism and accusation. From an audiovisual standpoint, Noaf’s sharp facial expression, elevated voice, and close physical proximity heighten the intensity of the confrontation and assert her verbal dominance.

In Arab culture, where personal responsibility and courage are highly

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valued, such an accusation constitutes severe reproach. Noaf's statement attacks the interlocutor's personal character and reinforces a hierarchical stance by framing the other as a coward or deceiver. As (Mourad, 2021) notes, notes, this impoliteness often reflects underlying power dynamics within fictional social relationships.

## 2. Verbal bullying through insults to self-identity

### a. Use of slurs in bullying practices

ليان: ماذا تأكلين بحق السماء؟ هل بدأت المطحنة بالجرش؟

*Layan : what are you eating? What are you, a grinding machine?*

Layan's utterance represents a form of positive impoliteness strategy as classified by Culpeper (1996), as it attacks Dina's positive face through a pejorative metaphor "meat grinder." The harsh and loaded diction reflects an explicit attempt to humiliate Dina and damage her dignity, especially in a public setting. In the context of Arab culture, where the values of honor and shame are highly esteemed, such an act is not only a manifestation of verbal impoliteness but also a symbolic form of social violence. This strategy reinforces unequal social structures and demonstrates how impoliteness is used to assert dominance, control female bodies, and impose deep psychological pressure on marginalized characters.

ليان: كيف لك أن تستمع إلى هذا النوع من الأغاني منذ الصباح؟

حازم : وما أدراك بالموسيقى؟

Layan : Why listen to this kind of music so early?

Hazem : Your taste in music sucks!

The conversation between Layan and Hazem reflects a strategy of positive impoliteness, characterized by an attack on the interlocutor's positive face. Layan initiates the exchange with a veiled remark, "Why are you listening to this kind of music so early in the morning?" implicitly criticizing Hazem's taste. Audiovisually, her sarcastic tone and scornful facial expression intensify the sense of disapproval. Hazem's response, "Your taste in music sucks!" is a direct and overt retort that aims to embarrass Layan: his raised voice and dismissive expression signal rejection of Layan's attempted dominance.

Within the Arab cultural context, mocking someone's taste—especially in mixed-gender spaces—can be seen as a breach of politeness norms. This dialogue illustrates how impoliteness operates as a tool for

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identity assertion, symbolic resistance, and the negotiation of social positioning within complex interpersonal dynamics.

### 3. Giving derogatory nicknames

ليان: أهلا يا شباب

ليان: انت! أتحدث إليك

مريم: ما مشكلة يا ليان؟

ليان: أنت مشكلتي

*Layan : Hi tomboy!*

*Layan : Hey, I'm talking to you*

*Maryam : What's your problem Layan?*

*Layan : Yourself.*

Layan's utterance, "Hey tomboy!" constitutes a form of positive impoliteness that explicitly targets Maryam's gender identity. The label "tomboy" is delivered with a mocking tone and a defiant facial expression, amplifying the verbal attack through audiovisual elements.

When Maryam responds neutrally, "What's your problem, Layan?" Layan replies sharply, "You." This terse statement, delivered with pointed intonation and a dramatic pause, underscores her intent to humiliate Maryam and reject rational dialogue. It reflects a deliberate withholding of politeness and a symbolic act of dehumanization.

In Arab culture, deviations from culturally prescribed femininity are often viewed as social issues. Labels such as "tomboy" are not merely casual insults but serve as instruments of social control over girls who do not conform to gender expectations. Through this utterance, Layan attacks Maryam personally and reasserts normative boundaries within the school's social structure.

ليان: يا للمسكينة. لا بد أنه يصعب عليك أن تعرفي ماهية الشعور بأن تكوني امرأة  
حقيقية. وكيفستعرفين بحبتي الكرز هاتين

*Layan : Poor Maryam, it must be hard not knowing what it's like to be a real woman with those small breasts.*

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In the data above, Layan employs a bald-on-record impoliteness strategy by mocking Maryam's physical appearance—specifically her lips—and, by extension, her gender identity. The utterance reinforces the stereotype that a woman's value is measured by her body. Audiovisually, Layan delivers the insult with a mocking tone and a cynical expression while the camera focuses on Maryam's face, capturing her embarrassed and pained reaction. This nonverbal response highlights the emotional impact of the insult.

In conservative Arab culture, the female body is closely guarded, as it is perceived to represent family honor. Therefore, this insult is not merely personal; it reflects the broader social pressure placed on women to conform to idealized bodily standards.

ليان: يبدو أنني خلتك مختلفة يا نوف، خلتك فتاة قوية وصلبة ولا تسمحين لأحد بأن يتعدى على شؤونك. لكن حالك حال أي فتاة أخرى، تقبلين بأن تكوني ممسحة أرض.

*Layan : I thought you were different, Noaf. I thought you'd stand up for yourself and never let yourself be pushed around. Turns out you're just like any other girl, comfortable being a doormat.*

Layan's utterance to Noaf reflects a positive impoliteness strategy that attacks Noaf's self-esteem and personal identity. The phrase "you are like other girls—comfortable being a doormat" is a metaphor accusing Noaf of being weak and submissive. Layan begins her remark with what seems like a compliment, only to follow it with a harsh insult, intensifying the verbal aggression's psychological impact.

The audiovisual elements reinforce this impoliteness: Layan speaks sharply and mockingly while glaring at Noaf. The camera focuses on Noaf's distressed and reflective facial expression, signaling her shame and sense of intimidation. The enclosed yet non-private setting amplifies the effect of public humiliation.

In Arab cultural contexts, such insults carry a deeper weight, as women are often associated with family honor and moral strength. The term "doormat" implies disgrace and a failure to uphold dignity. This utterance demonstrates how impoliteness functions as a tool of social control among women—not as a form of solidarity but as a means of enforcing gender norms and preserving conservative hierarchies.

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#### 4. Bullying through threats to privacy and security

##### a. Ridicule and mockery

ليان: كأنه أطول يوم في العالم. غفوت في الحصة وجاءت الأنسة عبير لتيقظني.  
وحاضرت بي الطبع. والأسوأ من ذلك أنها حين تنفست على مقربة مني، فاحت منها  
رائحة نتنة. وكأن فأراً ميتاً في فمها.

*Layan : I fell asleep in class and was woken by Mrs. Abeer. She lectured  
me, of course. What's worse, her breath stank when she got close to  
me! Like she had a dead rat in her mouth.*

Layan's remark comparing Ms. Abeer's breath to a "dead rat in the mouth" exemplifies a negative impoliteness strategy involving vulgar imagery that attacks Ms. Abeer's negative face—her right to privacy and respect. Instead of voicing her complaint privately, Layan publicly humiliates her teacher socially, undermining her professional image as an educational authority.

Audiovisually, Layan delivers the line with a contemptuous expression and a sarcastic tone during a relaxed moment among her peers. The sound effects, such as other students' laughter, amplify the insult's impact, while Ms. Abeer's absence further reinforces Layan's dominance over the discourse.

In Arab culture, teachers are regarded as figures deserving of respect. Publicly insulting them—particularly adult women in positions of authority—is a serious breach of social norms and decorum. Layan's utterance transcends verbal impoliteness; it deconstructs her teacher's social status and simultaneously acts as symbolic resistance to hierarchy, asserting her social dominance in front of her peers.

##### b. Arbitrary action

أنت من لديك مشكلة كبيرة وينبغي أنتحليها. وبدلاً من أنترجي الجميع في خططك  
الفكرة تشجعي قليلاً وواجهيهما.

*Noaf : You should take care of your problems. You're dragging everyone into  
it instead of having the courage to face it.*

Noaf's utterance, "You dragged everyone into this instead of facing it yourself," reflects a negative impoliteness strategy, as it attacks the interlocutor's negative face through a direct accusation and a coercive tone that offers no space for defense. She confronts her friend overbearingly

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judging without empathy and denying the other's autonomy. Audiovisually, Noaf delivers the line with a raised voice, sharp intonation, and an irritated facial expression. The camera captures the interlocutor's reaction, visibly shaken and attempting to respond, highlighting the asymmetry in power. The surrounding silence heightens the emotional intensity of the interpersonal conflict.

In Arab cultural contexts, such an utterance goes beyond violating politeness norms, breaching deeply held values of honor and respectful communication. Direct and accusatory speech, especially in front of others, disrupts decorum and social harmony. Thus, Noaf's statement illustrates strategic impoliteness and reveals a clash of cultural values and power tensions within a hierarchical and collectivist society.

### c. Verbal abuse to self-esteem

حازم: ما الذي أزعجك لهذه الدرجة؟ هل تتسترين على أمر ما؟

لا. لكنني أريد بعض الخصوصية.

خصوصية؟ عن أي خصوصية نتحدثين؟ فتاة في الـ 17 من عمرها؟ أي خصوصية تريدينها؟

*Hazem : Why are you angry? Are you hiding something?*

*Layan : No, but I need Privacy.*

*Hazem : Privacy? What does a 17-year-old girl need Privacy for?*

Hazem's utterance, "Privacy? What does a 17-year-old girl need privacy for?" represents negative impoliteness. He denies Layan's right to personal autonomy and belittles her need for private space. He frames this right dismissively, implying that the youth disqualifies her from deserving privacy. The audiovisual elements intensify this impoliteness: Hazem speaks in a raised, sarcastic tone while staring sharply at Layan. The camera highlights Layan's disturbed and defensive facial expression, and the tense atmosphere underscores the power imbalance within their interaction.

In a patriarchal Arab cultural context, such statements illustrate how women's rights to privacy are often negated, especially by male figures. Hazem's remark not only conveys verbal dominance but also reflects the broader social control imposed on young women. Thus, the utterance not only targets an individual but also embodies a power structure that normalizes surveillance over women's bodies and private spaces.

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#### d. Social stigmatization through speech

ليان: لماذا تحمل مسدسًا في السيارة؟

حازم: لا شأنك بهذا!

*Layan : Why is there a gun in your car?*

*Hazem : None of your business!*

When Layan asks about the gun in the car, Hazem responds sharply: “None of your business!” This reply demonstrates a withholding of politeness and manipulation of presupposition, implying that Layan’s question is inappropriate and that she is meddling in dangerous affairs. This reflects a strategy of impoliteness through stigmatization, as Hazem implicitly stigmatizes Layan by associating her concern with criminal or taboo matters.

In Arab culture, such a statement carries deeper social weight. Discussing weapons and private matters—especially between members of the opposite sex and in public settings—touches on norms of honor and strict social boundaries. As a man, Hazem leverages his social authority to silence Layan and assert gendered power boundaries while simultaneously implying that she has violated norms of propriety. Thus, this act of impoliteness is not merely verbal but also deeply social and symbolic.

#### e. Bullying in interaction

وف: ديني أخبرك، إن انكشف أمري فسأكشف كل الخطأ.

*Noaf : Just so you know, if I get caught, I'll drag all of you.*

Noaf’s utterance, “If I get caught, I will get all of you,” is a clear example of a scare strategy. Noaf deliberately uses threats to create psychological pressure on the interlocutor. This strategy forces cooperation or silence from the other party through fear, which directly threatens the interlocutor’s negative face, namely freedom and the right to act without pressure. Impoliteness strategies such as threats and commands in the series show the characters’ attempts to maintain dominance in social relationships.

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## 5. Covert bullying

درّسة : يا بنات، عنّني أعرفكّن على نوف. انضمت مؤخرًا لمدرستنا. ومن اليمم  
فصاعدًا ستكون زميلتكم في الصفّ

رقّيا : في منتصف العام الدراسي؟ لا بد أنها تسببت بفضيحة كبيرة. أخبرينا. ما  
قصّتك؟

*Teacher : Everyone, this is Noaf. He just moved here and will be joining our class.*

*Ruqayya : In the middle of the year? Why? Did you get into trouble? Tell us, what's your story?*

Ruqayya told Noaf, “In the middle of the year? Why, are you in trouble? Tell us, what is your story?” contains a strong element of sarcasm. Instead of warmly welcoming Noaf, Ruqayya sarcastically questions the reason for his move, implying that Noaf must have a troubled background or have been involved in a particular scandal. This is a form of impoliteness as it indirectly undermines the newly joined Noaf's positive image and conveys a negative judgment of him in public. This strategy combines irony and mockery, forming a subtle but hurtful social attack, such as sarcasm.

مدرّسة: تصرّف دون المستوى يا ليان!

ليان: على رسلكم، بالكاد لامستها الكرة. ولا أرى ما الذي ألمها بالضبط، فلا يمكن التفريق بين  
ظهرها وصدرها.

*Teacher: Not worth it, Layan!*

*Layan: Seriously, the ball barely missed. Then, his chest is too flat to hurt.*

*Layan's statement in self-defense, “Seriously, the ball barely missed.*

Then, to be honest, his chest is too flat to hurt,” is a crude form of sarcasm. Although it seems like a defense, the sentence directly insults the victim's body shape. By physically insinuating, Layan not only shows incivility but also humiliates the victim through sharp irony. This strategy attacks the victim's positive face, i.e., self-image and self-esteem, and humiliates her in front of others.

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مریم: ألم يجدي نفعا؟

دینا : جدیاً؟ أما زالت واضحة؟

مریم : بعض الشيء، إن كنت تبصرين.

*Maryam : So, it didn't work?*

*Dina : Seriously, still visible?*

*Maryam : A little, if you have eyes.*

Maryam's reply to Dina, "A little, if you have eyes," shows a form of sharp sarcasm that implies impatience or annoyance with the previous question. The utterance uses irony by stating something literally but meaning the opposite. This strategy undermines the interlocutor intelligence or vigilance interlocutor's intelligence or vigilance, making them the target of subtle, demeaning ridicule.

لیان : صباح الخير يا هادية!

هادية: صباح النور يا لیان

لیان: كم شخصاً أكلت عى الفطور

*Layan : Morning Hadia*

*Hadia : Morning Layan*

*Layan : How many people did you eat for breakfast?*

Layan's question, "How many people did you eat for breakfast?" is delivered in a joking tone and accompanied by a soft facial expression, creating a façade of friendliness. Audiovisually, the contrast between the light intonation and the underlying meaning highlights this as a form of sarcastic impoliteness, subtly targeting Hadia's body. In Arab culture, which values honor and personal dignity highly, such remarks constitute a form of body shaming that not only breaches norms of politeness but also humiliates the interlocutor in a subtle yet painful manner. This impoliteness operates through humor but still damages Hadia's positive face in front of others.

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be found that the language impoliteness strategies in the AlRawabi School for Girls series reflect a systematic, complex, and socially layered verbal bullying practice. The four main impoliteness strategies identified; bald on record, positive impoliteness,

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negative impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness show that the impolite utterances in the series not only function as emotional expressions but also as mechanisms of domination, social exclusion, and reproduction of patriarchal norms.

This finding strengthens the results of previous research conducted by (Kadhun dan Abbas, 2021), which found that sarcasm and insult strategies in the educational context are used to humiliate and subdue other individuals. This current study is also in line with the study of (Azizah et al., 2024) in the film *Wonder*, where the antagonist character utilizes verbal incivility as a form of covert psychological attack on the main character. In addition, research by Meylena (Meylena et al., 2024) shows that in entertainment contexts such as *The Simpsons Movie*, impoliteness strategies are used not only for humor effects but also to assert power and create social contrasts between characters.

However, unlike these studies that focus on fictional children's characters or humor in Western films, this study provides a new nuance by addressing the Middle Eastern cultural context laden with norms of modesty, honour, and gender pressure. As such, using impoliteness strategies in *AlRawabi School for Girls* exposes the tension between individual expression and restrictive social structures while illustrating the complexity of power relations within the girls' school environment. With its unique cultural setting and relevant social issues, this series offers an essential discursive contribution to pragmatic linguistics, especially in understanding how language impoliteness is constructed, interpreted, and functions in everyday communication practices in popular media.

## CONCLUSION

This results of this study reveal that impoliteness strategies in the *AlRawabi School for Girls* series are not merely a deviation from language ethics but reflect social constructions that normalize domination and power through speech. Impoliteness does not exist in a vacuum of meaning but rather shapes and is shaped by the complex structure of social relations, especially in the context of adolescent women in a hierarchical and identity-pressured school environment. Through the pragmatics approach and Jonathan Culpeper's impoliteness theory, the utterances in this series play an important role in building narratives of power, resistance, and oppression, both psychologically and symbolically. The practice of verbal bullying in the series is not only a reflection of interpersonal tensions but also an expression of systemic dynamics rooted in culture and social norms. The main contribution of this

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study resides in expanding the application of impoliteness theory in Arabic audiovisual discourse, which has so far been rarely touched upon in pragmatic linguistic studies. By placing fictional data as a legitimate object of scientific study, this study further enriches critical perspectives on the role of language in the reproduction of power and the formation of social identity. In the future, further studies can expand the focus on the pragmatic responses of victim characters, including defense strategies or verbal resistance that emerge as a form of negotiation of meaning. In addition, cross-cultural comparisons of impoliteness representations in other series can deepen our understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and power in popular media.

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