Language in conflict debates: Impoliteness strategies in the *open to debate* youtube channel *'Were Israel's actions in the Gaza war justified?*

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Abstract - This study analyses the strategies of impoliteness in the debate 'Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified?' on the Open to Debate YouTube channel. Using Jonathan Culpeper's theory of impoliteness, this research aims to identify and analyse the impoliteness strategies employed by speakers and their functions in the context of conflict debates. This qualitative study utilizes documentation techniques and data cards to collect and analyse data. The results show that there are 4 instances of bald on record, 2 instances of sarcasm or mock politeness, and 1 instance of negative impoliteness, and 1 instance of positive impoliteness. Further analysis reveals that these impoliteness strategies can be categorized into two primary functions: coercive impoliteness (pressuring the opponent) and affective impoliteness (expressing strong emotions). This study also demonstrates that impoliteness in debates about conflict does not only carry negative connotations, but also can serve as a form of strong concern for defending humanity and as an effort to voice concerns for the conflict resolution. In conclusion, this study shows that the three speakers (Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan) employ impoliteness strategies with different objectives: Eylon Levy tends to prioritize Israel's security, while Mehdi Hasan uses impoliteness to defend all victims, both in Palestine and Israel, and to support conflict resolution.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Impoliteness, Conflict, Israel-Palestine.

1. Introduction

Exploring impoliteness strategies in the context of debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is important for understanding the role that language plays in conflict situations. In this study, it is highlighted the function of impoliteness strategies in the context of debate about conflict. According to Sifianou (2019), the resolution or escalation of the conflict is closely related to the issue of politeness and impoliteness (Evans et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of language in conflict discussion by analysing impoliteness strategies in the debate between Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan on the Open to Debate YouTube channel. Specifically, in

the video entitled 'Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified?' The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is important to discuss in terms of language analysis because this conflict has been going on for decades. Until this conflict heated up again from 2023 until this research was written in 2024.

In conflict situations, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine, language plays an important role in the process of broadcasting news, conveying information, reporting and publishing about conditions in the two countries. The choice of words, narratives and phrases used has a major impact on public perception. Fisher and Sharp state that a single word or phrase can have a huge impact in a conflict situation, either helping to resolve the problem or exacerbating it (Sifianou, 2019). Therefore, language, as an integral communication tool in human life, plays a crucial role in shaping conflict dynamics. According to Suleiman (2004) in the book A War of Words, it is important to note that language is not the primary cause of conflict; rather, it is a way of expressing different aspects of conflict, be it political, economic or power.

Debate is an activity that involves discussion or argumentation on a specific topic, with several key components, namely a set of discourse, a moderator, and an audience (Supardi & Sayogie, 2022). In a debate forum, language becomes the main tool to convey opinions and ideas. Therefore, this debate between Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan is interesting to analyse from a linguistic perspective. One branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and context is pragmatics. Pragmatic analysis is important because knowing the literal meaning (or the meaning directly contained in the words) is not entirely sufficient to reflect the speaker's true intention (Huang, 2007). Pragmatics is a study of contextual meaning, related to the people who use the language (Yule, 1996). Overall, pragmatics is the study of the meaning of an utterance by considering its social and situational context.

An interesting aspect to analyse in pragmatics is impoliteness, especially when discussing conflictual and sensitive topics, the use of impoliteness language often appears. According to Culpeper, impoliteness is a communication behaviour that causes a 'loss of face' for the target (Bousfield and Locher, 2008). The use of impoliteness strategies here can be seen as a strategy to express disagreement and to defend arguments in conversation with interlocutors. When impoliteness strategies are used, it is important to pay attention to the context and situation. Not only to understand the meaning of impoliteness as a negative form, but also to understand the deeper meaning of the impoliteness strategies used. As Papacharissi (2004) points out, impoliteness is not always so bad; it implies emotions (Sifianou, 2019).

According to Culpeper in Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness and Impoliteness and Entertainment in the Television Quiz Show: The Weakest Link, there are five impoliteness strategies, namely bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness.

Table 1: Culpeper's (1996) Five Impoliteness Strategies

Impoliteness Strategy	Definition
Bald on Record	Impoliteness strategy used by someone in communication to threaten face threatening acts with direct, clear, and unambiguous speech. Speakers use straightforward and assertive language in the act of threatening someone's 'face' or self-esteem.
Positive Impoliteness	A strategy used to undermine one's positive face, that is undermining one's desire to be accepted, valued, and regarded. Sub-strategies of positive impoliteness include: **ignore; snub the other, exclude the other from an activity, disassociate from the other, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, use inappropriate identity markers, use obscure or secretive language, seek disagreement, make the other feel uncomfortable, use taboo words, call the other names.**

Negative Impoliteness	A strategy used to interfere with someone's negative face, namely interfering with someone's desire to be free from control. Sub-strategies of positive impoliteness include: **frighten, condescend; scorn or ridicule, do not treat the other seriously, invade the other's space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect, put the other's indebtedness on record, challenge, and hinder or block the other.**
Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	A strategy that aims to offend or attack another person's self-esteem by using politeness, but here, using false politeness.
Withhold Politeness	A strategy that does not use politeness where it should be expected in certain situations. For example, when someone does not say thank you when given a gift and just keeps quiet.

According to Jonathan Culpeper (2011) in "Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence", impoliteness strategy has three functions include affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness and entertaining impoliteness.

Table 2: Culpeper's (2011) The Functions of Impoliteness

Functions of Impoliteness	Definition
Affective Impoliteness	A form of impoliteness that arises as an expression of strong emotions, typically triggered by frustration or provocation.
Coercive Impoliteness	Actions aimed at forcing compliance or causing harm to others for the benefit of the perpetrator. In this context, impoliteness serves as a tool to achieve specific goals that favor the perpetrator, whether these are tangible benefits or the preservation of existing advantages.
Entertaining Impoliteness	A type of impoliteness that is used as a form of exploitative entertainment, where the entertainment comes at the expense of the target.

More specifically, this research discusses how conflict is often associated with impoliteness. According to Fisher and Sharp (2004), a single word or phrase can either diffuse or intensify a conflict; the relationship between conflict resolution and escalation is deeply connected to issues of politeness and impoliteness (Evans et al., 2019). Overall, this research analyses the impoliteness strategies employed by the speakers in the 'Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified?' debate on the Open to Debate YouTube channel and explores their functions in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

2. Method

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the impoliteness strategies deployed by speakers in the debate video "Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified? Eylon Levy vs Mehdi Hasan," published on the YouTube channel Open to Debate. The purpose of this inquiry is to systematically identify, classify, and analyse these impoliteness strategies as they emerge through the dynamic verbal exchanges between the two debaters. A qualitative approach is particularly well-suited for research questions of this nature, as it makes possible a nuanced, in-depth examination of communicative behaviour and the complex patterns that surface during contentious debates.

Qualitative research, at its core, is interpretive and inductive. It prioritizes the extraction of meaning from participant behaviour, language, and interactional patterns. As Muhammad

Farkhan (2007) articulates, qualitative studies rely on both verbal and non-verbal data streams to understand and dissect social phenomena—an especially crucial point when analysing discourse marked by potential impoliteness. Within the specific contours of this research, the primary data source comprises the spoken dialogue captured in the debate, which is densely layered with meaning and offers a window into the participants' communicative tactics, especially in their employment of strategies that can be deemed impolite.

Creswell (2018; cf. Wajdi, 2018) asserts that qualitative approaches are most often conducted in naturalistic settings, permitting researchers to observe the phenomena of interest as they genuinely unfold, rather than artificially constructed laboratory scenarios. In this case, the chosen setting is the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a subject permeated with controversy and considerable emotional intensity, and one that inevitably shapes the discourse of the debate itself. The presence of speakers—Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan—who represent opposed viewpoints on the moral justification of Israel's actions in the Gaza War, sets the stage for a genuinely high-stakes communicative encounter. This context, brimming with historical, political, and emotional resonance, provides fertile ground for examining the emergence and function of impoliteness within a real-world argumentative exchange.

For data collection, the selection process favoured the debate video on YouTube, due to its accessibility to the broader public and its clear alignment with the central research questions. The video serves as a primary artifact of discourse, directly capturing the interactional nuances between Levy and Hasan as they articulate their divergent perspectives on the Gaza conflict. To preserve authenticity and facilitate granular analysis, the debate is transcribed in full, maintaining not only the lexical content but also key paralinguistic features such as pauses, intonation, overlaps, and interruptions, all of which may correspond with or accentuate instances of impoliteness. By attending to these details within the transcription, the study ensures fidelity to the original communicative context and supports subsequent in-depth analysis.

The analytical procedure employed in this study centres on a thematic approach, with a deliberate focus on patterns and recurrent categories of impoliteness. Here, impoliteness strategies are understood, in line with established literature, as acts or utterances—whether intentional or inadvertent—that serve to undermine the interlocutor's face, dignity, or social standing within the interaction. Adhering to the widely recognized framework of Brown and Levinson (1987; cf. Wajdi, 2013; Wajdi, 2021), these strategies are dissected into types: bald-on-record impoliteness (direct, unmitigated criticism or attacks), negative impoliteness (strategies that disrupt or diminish the recipient's sense of autonomy or value), and positive impoliteness (acts that disrespect the hearer's need for approval and belonging). The study's analytical lens examines the practical deployment of these strategies: how the debaters utilize them to advance arguments, maintain personal credibility, or directly challenge the legitimacy of opposing views.

To operationalize this investigation, the research employs a systematic coding process, scrutinizing the debate transcript for overt or subtle episodes of impoliteness. Each incident—whether manifest as interruptions, overt insults, sarcasm, dismissive gestures, or other forms of communicative challenge—is annotated and classified in accordance with the relevant impoliteness strategy. Subsequently, each identified instance undergoes interpretive analysis to establish possible motivations (e.g., defensive posturing, strategic disruption, persuasive intent), contextual relevance, and the broader impact on the flow and tenor of the discourse.

In focusing on impoliteness within the context of a highly charged, public-facing debate, this study seeks to contribute to a richer understanding of how language is mobilized as a tool of power, confrontation, and influence in political dialogue. Not only does the research illuminate the mechanics and functions of impoliteness within conflict-mediated argumentation, but it also adds to the growing body of scholarship on discourse and interpersonal dynamics in international political debate. By analysing naturally occurring, high-stakes interaction, the study underscores the vital role of language as both a site of struggle and a means of shaping public opinion and authority in contexts marked by significant social and political tension.

3. Results and Discussion

The speakers participating in this debate are Mehdi Hasan and Eylon Levy. Mehdi Hasan is a journalist who recently highlights the suffering of Palestinian people. He is award-winning journalist, founder, editor-in-Chief, and CEO of Zeteo, and also host "Head to Head" on Al-Jazeera. While Eylon Levy is a former spokesperson for Israel in October 7th war, co-founder of the Israeli Citizen Spokespersons' Office, and also host of the "State of Nation" podcast. In this research, 8 data taken from debate transcripts on the YouTube channel Open to Debate, with the topic "Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified?". The analysis focuses on identifying impoliteness strategies used by speakers and examining their functions within the context of conflict. Through a detailed examination of the data, this chapter aims to provide insights that impoliteness strategies can have broad meanings and not entirely negative connotations, particularly in conflict contexts.

Bald on Record

> **Datum 1**
> **08:57**
> **Moderator:** *Eylon, I'm sorry your time is up. Eylon, you are already calling your opponent a liar, you have already crossed one of the lines of the culture that we try to establish here. I wish you hadn't you, you don't need to do that to make your case. Now, Mehdi, you are answering 'no' to the question "Were Israel's actions in the Gaza of war justified" great if you didn't feel the need to respond to the personal attack waste.*
> **Mehdi Hasan:** *Obviously, not. Of course, not. October 7th, I think we can all agree, was a crime, a war crime, right? We can all agree on that. And taking hostages is a war crime, and those hostages should be released. But to destroy an entire place and an entire people in response is never justified, never justified... Dropping a bomb, for example, on a six-story apartment building in central Gaza last October, killing more than 100 people inside, including more than 50 children, with no Hamas target in sight, according to Human Rights Watch, and with no explanation offered by the Israeli military, even till today...Was that justified, Eylon? …* ***Eylon Levy is a former spokesperson for a man who the ICC Chief prosecutor once arrested for war crimes. Eylon himself has produced a number of lies. He has a bunch of tweets still up tonight which say that babies were beheaded on October 7th, babies were baked in ovens, babies were ripped from their mother's wombs. October 7th was bad enough, but Eylon had to exaggerate it for atrocity purposes. Those tweets are still up. Why would you trust anything this man says to you tonight?***

In this quotation, the conversation is about Mehdi Hasan firmly rejects justifying Israel's actions in the conflict during his opening statement. He emphasizes that while the October 7 events were war crimes, Israel's response remains unjustifiable. He also criticizes his opponent, Eylon Levy, for spreading falsehoods and exaggerating the October 7 events, particularly regarding claims of babies being killed and burned in ovens.

Mehdi Hasan's statement highlighted above falls under **bald on record** strategy, which involve delivering criticism and attacks directly, clearly, and without using polite language. As according to Culpeper (1996), bald on record employs clear and straightforward language to express potentially face-threatening acts without hesitation or sublety. Mehdi Hasan directly challenges Eylon Levy's credibility by calling him a 'produced a number of lies.' There is no ambiguity or implied meaning—his criticisms are stated explicitly and unmistakably.

Mehdi Hasan's bald on record strategy serves as an example of **coercive impoliteness,** aiming to pressure his opponent. As according to Culpeper (2011), coercive impoliteness refers to behaviour that uses force or threats to achieve a desired outcome. However more spesifically, in this case, impoliteness is not entirely negative. Mehdi Hasan employs impoliteness to reveal the strengthen his argument with concrete evidence, such as Eylon Levy's tweets. Mehdi Hasan criticizes Eylon's actions, rather than attacking his personal space. His goal is to address the Israel-Palestine conflict, advocate for justice and peace for Palestinian civilians, and uphold human rights. As according to Papacharissi's (2004) in the book Language in Conflict (2019), impoliteness is not entirely bad because it contains emotions, it can also show compassion, which reveals the human side. Therefore, Mehdi Hasan challenges Eylon Levy's position and weakens

his argument because Eylon has exaggerated and reinforced a controversial Israeli narrative. With strong arguments, it will influence the audience's perspective to agree with Mehdi Hasan's opinion.

Datum 2
15:10
Moderator: *Eylon, I heard you in your opening statement say that the only moral response was for Israel to try to take Hamas down and to get the hostages home. I heard your opponent say that the manner in which it's happening is just enormous overreach with enormous consequences. I think a number of others would agree are innocent people, not all of them but some of them and that represents an unjustifiable response. What we're talking about it seems like is proportionality. I want you to address the issue of proportionality. There's an issue to be discussed here, there is a principle to be discussed here, and that's proportionality. What in your view justifies the proportionality that Israel has stepped up to in its response?*
Eylon Levy: *Israel's response is proportionate to the threat that we face, which is the threat of annihilation after perpetrating The Savage atrocities of October 7th. The first thing Hamas did was deny that it did them. The second thing that it did was to threaten to do it again and again, until Israel is destroyed, that is what is at stake if this war ends with Hamas free emboldened and empowered to perpetrate more October 7th massacres thinking that the world will keep saving it from the wars that it started. Now proportionality is a term in international law …*
Mehdi Hasan: *Actually, I want to agree with something Eylon said, proportionality is a difficult subject and we shouldn't talk about this… But let's be clear, last October, shortly after October 7th, Israeli forces struck a three-story Residential Building in Gaza City. They killed 15 members of the Aldos family, seven children. According to Amnesty International, the survivors say no warnings. Eylon told us there were warnings. However, no warnings were given to evacuate amnesty found, no evidence of any military targets in the area, and Israel to this day has offered no explanation for that strike, so for the dead Al-Dos family members, can you tell us why they were killed?*
Eylon Levy: Mr. Hasan, I do not need to explain every single one, no Mr Hasan, because in this war Israel is seeking to neutralize the threat of a terrorist Army that has a deliberate strategy…
Mehdi Hasan: *To be clear, 15 people killed seven children, you were the spokesperson for the Israeli government at that time. Israel has never given an explanation.* ***When you say 'i do not need to explain' you literally do. You were the spokesperson for the government that committed a war crime and you came to a debate tonight to defend war crimes.***

The context of this conversation is discussed about Israel's attacks on Gaza and the proportionality of Israel's response to Hamas threats. Eylon Levy, a former Israeli government spokesperson, argues that Israel's response is proportional to the threat it faces, namely destruction by Hamas following the October 7 attack. While Mehdi Hasan criticizes Israel's response as disproportionate and unjustifiable due to the high number of civilian casualties, citing an example of an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in Gaza City that killed 15 people, including 7 children, without prior warning.

The statement "When you say 'I do not need to explain,' you literally do. You were the spokesperson for the government that committed a war crime, and you came to a debate tonight to defend war crimes." exemplifies the **bald on record** strategy. As according to Culpeper (1996), bald on record is an impoliteness strategy that delivers criticism in a direct, strong, and explicit manner without using softened language or euphemisms. Mehdi Hasan uses strong and direct language, such as "you literally do" and "you came to a debate tonight to defend war crimes," to reinforce his argument.

The statement falls under **coercive impoliteness** because it applies pressure and coercion. As according to Culpeper (2011), coercive impoliteness involves using pressure to achieve a desired outcome. Mehdi Hasan's remark forces Eylon Levy to provide an explanation— implying that if he fails to do so, he is indeed defending war crimes. In this case, impoliteness does not carry an entirely negative connotation. Instead, Mehdi Hasan's statement serves as a push for transparency in public debate and the audience will receive a clear response. It also functions as a means to criticize unjust actions and advocate for human rights. As according to Evans, et al., (2019), impoliteness in conflict does not always have a negative connotation; but in some situations, it can express legitimate emotions and even show deep concern.

Datum 3
23:33
Eylon Levy: *… Hamas rigged the battlefield to Shield its military assets from civilians, and it left Israel with no option, no other option of getting to those leaders…*
Moderator: *When Eylon says, no other option, what is your response Mehdi?*
Mehdi Hasan: *Well, no one in the world agrees with that. That's why Israel has become a Pari in the world. Even Joe Biden, the most pro- Israel president of my lifetime, who has backed Israel with weapons and arms, has gone on the record saying too much indiscriminate bombing you've killed too many innocent people. Even the people on your own side.* **You're killing too many people, Eylon, but you do not accept.**

The conversation consisted of Eylon, who is a spokesperson for the Israeli government, stating that Hamas had used civilians as shields to protect their military assets, leaving Israel with no other option but to attack. Mehdi Hasan, who is Eylon's interlocutor, disagreed with this statement. He stated that no country in the world agrees with Israel's actions, and even US President Joe Biden, who is known as a supporter of Israel, has criticized Israel's actions which are considered too aggressive and killed many civilians.

Mehdi Hasan's phrase "you're killing too many people, Eylon, but you do not accept" includes **bald on record** strategy. As according to Culpeper (1996), using bald on record means conveying messages in direct and uncompromising manner, without softening the blow or avoiding offense. In this expression, Mehdi Hasan explicitly and directly attacks Eylon and the Israeli government by saying that they have killed too many people.

The expression belongs to the function of **coercive impoliteness**, which is according to Culpeper (2011), coercive impoliteness involves using force and pressure to specific goals. However, in this context of debate about conflict, the expression is not entirely negative. Mehdi Hasan is a journalist known for his criticism of Israel. In this expression, is one of his efforts to criticize Israel in front of large audience of this debate. As according to Evans, et al., (2019), in the context of conflict, impoliteness can be used to express disagreement and defend a particular position. Through the debate forum, Mehdi Hasan can more freely convey his criticism of Israel to behave ethically so that the conflict can end.

Datum 4
29:35
Eylon Levy: *Mr Hassan I'll yield the stage to you and ask you to eliminate the Hamas Terror regime removing it from Power a legitimate military objective yes or no?*
Mehdi Hasan: *Of course, there's a legitimate military objective for Israel and that's what I quoted the ICC Chief prosecutor saying,* **but you're doing a very bad job of it…**

The context in this conversation, Eylon asks Mehdi Hasan whether removing the Hamas terror regime from power is a legitimate military objective, and Mehdi Hasan replies that there is indeed a legitimate military objective for Israel, but the way Israel goes about it is very bad. Eylon represents a pro-Israel view and Mehdi Hasan represents a view that is more critical of Israel's actions. Mehdi Hasan's phrase "...but you're doing a very bad job of it..." includes **bald on record** strategy. Mehdi Hasan directly attacks and criticizes the way Israel (represented by Eylon) achieves military objectives. As according to Culpeper (1996), bald on record is a strategy that involves using direct and unambiguous language. The use of the words "you're doing a very bad job" is a negative word that can be considered an attack.

Mehdi Hasan's expression functions as **coercive impoliteness.** According to Culpeper (2011), coercive impoliteness involves using force and pressure to specific goals. Mehdi Hasan gives a response that criticizes and pressures Eylon Levy (and Israel), to change their way of achieving military objectives. Despite its negative connotations, Mehdi Hasan's expression has another positive meaning in this context. As a journalist, Mehdi Hasan shows his critical stance by agreeing that Hamas's destruction of power is legitimate, but Israel is wrong in doing so. He

mentioned that Israel did it very badly. As according to Evans, et al., (2019), in the context of conflict, impoliteness can be used to express disagreement.

Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

> **Datum 5**
> **35:58**
> **Mehdi Hasan:** *In fact, I interviewed Zahiro Mo, whose uncle, Abraham Munda, was horribly killed in Gaza. Zahiro Mo, by the way, was arrested today. He's been arrested and attacked by the Israeli government that Eylon served in multiple times. He said to me, Netanyahu and the government, the government that Eylon was part of, always choose the wrong way. Ever since October 8th, everything they do is directed at not getting the hostages back. That is the plain truth. That is the nephew of a hostage. They don' want you to hear about the hostages. Eylon and people like Eyon use the hostages as political pawns. The hostages' families are standing on the streets of Tel Aviv, opposing the Netanyahu government, calling for a ceasefire, and calling for a deal. They don't support him.*
> **Eylon Levy:** *Mr. Hasan, how many hostage rallies have you spoken out at? How many hostages' mothers have you embraced, hugged, and told, 'I went here for you, whatever you need'? I was at Central Park last Sunday for the rally for the hostages. You're not...* **Mr., you really care about the hostages. If you want to show them you care. show them you care! Tell "I will do whatever it takes to help you get your kids home" show them you care! and stop trying to exploit the suff.**

In this conversation, Mehdi Hasan criticizes the Israeli government under Netanyahu, claiming they aren't genuinely trying to free hostages. Hasan supports his argument with an interview from Zahiro Mo, whose family members were victimized in the conflict, and highlights that hostage families oppose the government's policies and support a ceasefire. Eylon deflects Hasan's criticism and counters by questioning Hasan's genuine concern for the hostages, challenging him to show real action. Eylon's remarks in the quotation include **sarcasm or mock politeness.** When Eylon said "You really care about the hostages? If you want to show them you care, you're welcome to… Show them you care!..." reflects mock politeness, because on the surface it sounds like genuine encouragement and praise for Hasan for strongly defending the hostages. However, it actually aims to discredit Hasan in front of the audience, because Eylon's speech contains a sentence that challenges Hasan in a sarcastic tone.

Eylon's remarks function as **affective impoliteness,** which aims to express anger in emotionally demeaning the opponent. Affective Impoliteness refers to a form of impoliteness that arises as an expression of strong emotions (Culpeper, 2011).

> **Datum 6**
> **36:39**
> **Eylon Levy:** *Mr. Hasan, how many hostage rallies have you spoken out at? How many hostages' mothers have you embraced, hugged, and told, 'I went here for you, whatever you need'? I was at Central Park last Sunday for the rally for the hostages. You're not... Mr., you really care about the hostages. If you want to show them you care, you're welcome to"*
> **Mehdi Hasan:** *All right, this is fantastic. Let's go.*

This quote highlights Mehdi Hasan's response "All right, this is fantastic. Let's go." which comes in response to Eylon Levy's verbal attack, which presses Hasan with rhetorical questions and insinuations about the extent to which he really cares about the hostages. Mehdi Hasan's response "All right, this is fantastic. Let's go." is a form of **sarcasm or mock politeness.** Sarcasm and mock politeness use polite language to convey the opposite, often to offend or hurt (Culpeper, 1996). Hasan responds in a tone that on the surface sounds positive, such as saying "fantastic". However, in the context of a tense debate, these expressions are not expressions of sincere praise, but rather imply sarcasm that trivializes Eylon's challenge.

Hasan's response is included in the **coercive impoliteness** function, which is the subtle suppression of. Hasan uses sarcasm not to express anger, but to subtly reverse Eylon's attack. Hasan does not respond with emotion, instead he belittles Eylon with a casual tone, which could

make Eylon lose momentum in the debate, or even make Eylon more emotional. Coercive impoliteness in this context, aims to force the opponent to lose the dominant position in the interaction (Culpeper, 2011). Hasan did not get emotional, but instead used sarcasm to control the debate and ignore the pressure from Eylon. With a sarcastic tone, Hasan pointed out that Eylon's challenge did not need to be taken seriously, Hasan felt that he already had a response and responsibility to answer it, so the audience was more likely to see Eylon's attack as excessive.

Negative Impoliteness

> **Datum 7**
> **24:36**
> **Eylon Levy: ...** *Hamas rigged the battlefield to Shield its military assets from civilians, and it left Israel with no option of getting to those leaders…*
> *Mehdi Hasan: First of all, as we've discussed, and I'm here all night, Eylon can take his time. They killed 15 members of the Al-Dos family and seven children…*
> *Eylon Levy: We can continue this at the reception afterwards if you want.*
> **Mehdi Hasan:** I'm happily, and ask you, ***why did the government that you served in Kill 15 innocent people in an apartment building? This is very important. Is there no evidence Hamas was there?***

The context of this conversation shows a sharp difference of opinion is evident between Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Eylon supporting Israel's actions and Mehdi criticizing them. Eylon claims Hamas uses civilians as shields to protect their military assets, leaving Israel no choice but to target Hamas leaders. Mehdi Hasan counters by highlighting the killing of 15 members of the Al-Dos family, including seven children, without evidence of Hamas presence, which he considers an unjust act by the Israeli government. Mehdi Hasan's phrase "Why did the government that you served in kill 15 innocent people in an apartment building?" includes **negative impoliteness** with the sub-strategy of **invade the other's** space. As a part of negative impoliteness, invade the other's space is violating someone's personal space, either physically or metaphorically (Culpeper, 1996). Mehdi Hasan explicitly links Eylon's work as part of the government with the controversial actions taken by the government.

Mehdi Hasan's expression is included in the function of **coercive impoliteness**, which aims to force Eylon to admit guilt or defend himself. However, in this context, the impoliteness used by Mehdi Hasan does not entirely have a negative connotation. Mehdi Hasan strongly attempts to sway Eylon's opinion that justifies Israel's actions, and reveals the real facts. As according to Evans, et al., (2019), impoliteness can express legitimate emotions and even show deep concern. In a way that makes Eylon depressed, Mehdi Hasan tries to show to the audience that Israel's actions are wrong and Eylon as a worker of Israel should also realize that and rectify the action.

Positive Impoliteness

> **Datum 8**
> **13:55**
> **Moderator:** *Now, Mehdi, you are answering 'no' to the question "were Israel's actions in the gods of war justified" great if you didn't feel the need to respond to the personal attack waste.*
> **Mehdi Hasan:** *… October 7th, I think we can all agree, was a crime, a war crime, right? We can all agree on that. And taking hostages is a war crime, and those hostages should be released. But to destroy an entire place and an entire people in response is never justified, never justified... Eylon Levy is a former spokesperson for a man who the ICC Chief prosecutor once arrested for war crimes. Eylon himself has produced a number of lies. He has a bunch of tweets still up tonight which say that babies were beheaded on October 7th, babies were baked in ovens, babies were ripped from their mother's wombs. October 7th was bad enough, but Eylon had to exaggerate it for atrocity purposes. Those tweets are still up.* ***Why would you trust anything this man says to you tonight? ... Look, he's here to Gaslight you, to defend the indefensible, to excuse the inexcusable, to justify the unjustifiable.***

The statement "Why would you trust anything this man says to you tonight?" falls under **positive impoliteness – disassociate from the other.** As a part of positive impoliteness, disassociate from the other is a strategy to separate from others, physically or relationally (Culpeper, 1996). Mehdi Hasan appears to create a sense of distance and treats his debate opponent, Eylon Levy, as if he were an unfamiliar figure. By addressing the audience as "you", Mehdi Hasan establishes a connection with them through his rhetorical question. Meanwhile, by referring to Eylon as "this man" instead of using Eylon's name directly, Mehdi Hasan creates social distance between himself and Eylon as his debate opponent.

The statement's function falls under **coercive impoliteness,** as it applies pressure and coercion on the opponent. However, in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict debate, this statement does not entirely carry a negative connotation. Instead, Mehdi Hasan encourages the audience to think critically about the information presented by Eylon Levy and urges them to scrutinize every report on the Israel-Palestine conflict. His goal is to prevent the audience from justifying unjustifiable actions, such as war crimes.

4. Conclusion

The analysis revealed that only four types of impoliteness strategies were present in the debate: bald on record, negative impoliteness, positive impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. The strategy of withholding politeness was not observed. Among these, the most frequently used strategy was bald on record, with 4 occurrences identified. Sarcasm or mock politeness appeared in two instances, while negative and positive impoliteness were the least used strategies, each occurring only 1 instance. The findings also indicate that impoliteness does not necessarily carry a purely negative connotation. Mehdi Hasan tends to seek a fair resolution to the conflict for both parties, Palestine and Israel. This is reflected in his arguments, which emphasize the importance of considering human rights and security for both sides. On the other hand, Eylon Levy's expressions tend to focus solely on Israel's security and consider Israel's actions in the conflict to be justified. Eylon Levy does not specifically address the defense of Palestine, which creates the impression that his primary priority is Israel's security. Therefore, it can be concluded that this debate presents two different perspectives on handling the Israel-Palestine conflict.

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