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## 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 analyzes 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 analyze 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 analyze data. The results show that there are four (4) instances of bald on record, two (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:** speech act theory, discourse analysis, political debate, interpersonal communication, emotional expression in communication

### 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 Maria Sifianou, 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

18 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.

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57 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 and 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.

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45 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 & 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).

49 One notable study delves into the concept of code-crossing in Javanese, exploring how hierarchical politeness is embedded within the language's structure. This research contributes to understanding the intersection of language and social hierarchy, highlighting how politeness strategies are not merely linguistic but also deeply tied to societal norms and power structures (Wajdi et al., 2013).

48 An exploration of "sticky voices" in digital feedback raises an important discussion on affective and critical digital literacies in the context of multimodal academic feedback. This work provides a timely analysis of how emotions and critical thinking intersect in digital communication, which is crucial in our increasingly online educational environments (de Groot, 2025).

Applying a Foucauldian discourse analysis, another study examines how primary care providers communicate risk for type 2 diabetes. It provides valuable insight into the power dynamics inherent in medical communication, illustrating how language can shape patient perceptions of risk and influence healthcare behaviours (Blunt et al., 2025). A critical discourse analysis of identity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* offers a profound reading of how the protagonist's crisis reflects broader themes of alienation and existential struggle. This work highlights the utility of discourse analysis in literature, connecting psychological and philosophical concepts with linguistic strategies (Elbah, 2025).

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20 Another study investigates resilience, creativity, crisis, and innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic through art-making in an international summer collaboration for art therapy students. This research demonstrates the role of creativity and collective healing during a global crisis, focusing on the transnational context of the participants (Metzl et al., 2024). The conceptual evolution of culture within language pedagogy is examined, specifically in the context of Chinese language teaching. This work emphasizes the need for dynamic approaches to teaching culture, acknowledging the fluid and evolving nature of cultural understanding in educational settings (Liu & Blachford, 2024).

In another contribution, the concept of "culture machines" is introduced in an analysis of language and culture. This study offers a novel perspective on how culture operates as a mechanism that influences communication practices, particularly in globalized contexts (Jones, 2024). The theoretical and practical implications of politeness in communication are discussed in the context of linguistic discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. This research highlights how

61 politeness strategies function as tools of social negotiation, offering insights into the broader societal implications of language use (Agovino et al., 2024).

A study on the politeness strategies used in the *America-to-Korea (A2K) survival show* underscores the importance of media in shaping intercultural communication. It illustrates how strategic use of politeness can influence audience perceptions and interpersonal dynamics in reality TV (Putri & Fitriyah, 2024).

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32 The collection *Driving and Embracing Change: Learning and Teaching Languages and Communication in Higher Education* offers a comprehensive exploration of language teaching and communication in the context of higher education. It is an essential resource for educators looking to adapt to the evolving demands of academic discourse and teaching strategies (JYU Studies, 2024).

1 Lastly, a study analysing the use of compliments in YouTube comments draws on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. It contributes to our understanding of how politeness strategies are enacted in digital spaces, particularly in the interaction between public figures and online audiences (Pramujiono et al., 2024).

These references collectively offer a diverse range of perspectives on language, culture, and communication. From exploring the sociolinguistic implications of politeness strategies in everyday interactions to examining the role of language in more formal contexts like healthcare and education, these studies underscore the power of discourse in shaping our social realities (Wajdi et al., 2013; de Groot, 2025; Blunt et al., 2025; Elbah, 2025; Metzl et al., 2024; Liu & Blachford, 2024; Jones, 2024; Agovino et al., 2024; (Putri & Fitriyah, 2024); JYU Studies, 2024; Pramujiono et al., 2024).

31 This compilation of research investigates politeness strategies across diverse contexts, from classroom settings to media and interpersonal communication. It provides a nuanced understanding of how politeness is conceptualized and employed in different cultures and languages. The studies offer valuable insights into how social power, kinship relationships, and cultural norms shape the ways individuals use politeness strategies in both formal and informal situations. For example, the analysis of politeness strategies in films like *Little Women* and *Catwoman* showcases how fictional characters navigate social expectations and maintain face in their interactions (Fridolini et al., 2021; Yuniarti et al., 2020). The research also highlights how educators and students use politeness strategies in classroom interactions, with a focus on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Mahmud, 2019; Pangabea et al., 2022). Additionally, the exploration of politeness in digital communication, such as YouTube podcasts and speeches by prominent figures like Jordan B. Peterson, further illuminates how language is used to maintain or challenge social harmony (Islami et al., 2024; Pirdehghan, 2024). These studies emphasize the importance of understanding politeness not just as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a cultural practice that plays a crucial role in maintaining social relationships and navigating power dynamics (Fisher & Sharp, 2004; Sifianou, 2019).

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46 This collection of research explores various facets of language, culture, and communication, focusing on themes such as politeness, discourse analysis, and intercultural competence. The studies offer insight into the evolving conceptualizations of culture and politeness strategies in both traditional and modern contexts, ranging from digital communication to face-to-face interactions. The application of linguistic theories in diverse settings, such as marriage proposals in Iraq and Malaysia or politeness strategies in reality TV shows, demonstrates the impact of cultural backgrounds on communication styles (Tabarek et al., 2023). Additionally, research into the use of language in artistic and therapeutic settings, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlights the role of creativity and resilience in communication (Metzl et al., 2024). Other studies delve into the intersection of politeness with social issues, including linguistic discrimination in the context of LGBTQ+ communities and the teaching of cultural awareness (Agovino et al., 2024; Fedicheva & Krysalov, 2024). Overall, these studies emphasize the importance of understanding the socio-cultural dynamics at play in communication, offering valuable contributions to both theoretical and practical linguistic research (Putri & Fitriyah, 2024; Liu & Blachford, 2024).

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59 The research collectively examines intercultural communication, the nuances of language translation, and educational discourse. One study focuses on the development and application of the Chinese Intercultural Competence Scale, shedding light on the external factors influencing

foreign language acquisition, particularly Spanish (Chen, 2023). Another study explores the application of text-linguistic theory in translating classical Chinese poetry, providing insights into the challenges and strategies involved in rendering poetic meanings across languages (Tian, 2023). Additionally, the examination of Russian educational discourse in Israeli classrooms offers a critical analysis of how cultural and educational backgrounds shape communication practices and influence classroom interactions (Zbenovich, 2023). Together, these studies emphasize the importance of cultural context in shaping both language learning and academic communication.

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.
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More specifically, this research discusses how conflict is often associated with impoliteness. According to Fisher and Sharp (2004, p.74), 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 analyzes 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 approach to identify and analyze the impoliteness strategies employed by the speakers during a debate on the YouTube channel *Open to Debate*. The specific debate video titled "Were Israel's Actions in the Gaza War Justified? Eylon Levy vs Mehdi Hasan" serves as the primary source for data collection. The qualitative method is particularly effective for this kind of study, as it emphasizes in-depth analysis and interpretation, focusing on understanding the intricacies of communication, language, and social behaviour in a natural setting.

Qualitative research is characterized by its reliance on verbal and non-numerical data, which allows researchers to explore the underlying meanings, context, and nuances of human communication. As noted by Muhammad Farkhan (2011), qualitative research is based on the analysis of verbal data and other non-quantifiable elements to address and solve the research problem. The emphasis in qualitative research is on capturing the complexities of social phenomena, as opposed to focusing on numerical data or statistical analysis. This approach is ideal for studying discourse in debates, where the meanings behind words and strategies cannot be quantified but must be interpreted in relation to the speakers' intentions and the social context.

The debate, conducted between Eylon Levy and Mehdi Hasan, revolves around the highly charged issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict, specifically focusing on the justification of Israel's actions in the Gaza War. By analysing the communication strategies used by both speakers, the study aims to identify the types of impoliteness strategies present in the debate and understand how these strategies contribute to the larger discourse surrounding the conflict.

In qualitative research, the setting is often a natural environment where the phenomena under study occur, as opposed to a controlled laboratory setting. This characteristic is crucial because it ensures that the analysis is grounded in real-world contexts, enhancing the study's authenticity and relevance. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, which are defined by real-world occurrences and the experiences of the individuals involved. The setting for this study—the debate forum—provides a natural and authentic backdrop for the participants' interactions, as the debate was held in the public domain of a YouTube video, a platform that allows for direct engagement with the topic by people from various backgrounds and perspectives.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as discussed in the debate, serves as the natural setting for this research. This real-world issue is at the heart of international politics, diplomacy, and human rights discussions, making it a significant context for analysing language use and rhetorical strategies. By choosing this particular debate, the study addresses not only the linguistic strategies employed by the speakers but also the socio-political and ideological underpinnings that influence their communication. The debate reflects the ongoing global discourse surrounding the conflict, providing a rich source of data for examining how impoliteness strategies—such as sarcasm, bald on record, and other forms of direct or indirect disrespect—are employed to argue political and moral positions.

The data collection process involves transcribing the debate and analysing the speakers' language use, focusing specifically on instances where impoliteness strategies are present. These strategies are examined in relation to their function within the debate, their potential to advance the speakers' arguments, and their role in constructing the ideological divide between the two participants. The analysis is interpretive, drawing on the participants' verbal and non-verbal cues, and is informed by theories of discourse analysis and politeness, including frameworks like Brown and Levinson's politeness theory.

This qualitative method allows for a deep exploration of the social and communicative dynamics at play in the debate, providing insights into how impoliteness functions not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a tool for shaping the narrative of a contentious and emotionally charged political conflict. Through this approach, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of how language can be used to advance political agendas, influence public opinion, and negotiate complex issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

The results of the analysis revealed several key findings regarding the use of impoliteness strategies by the two speakers, Mehdi Hasan and Eylon Levy, in the debate about the justification of Israel's actions in the Gaza War. The findings highlight the frequency and nature of different impoliteness strategies, the context in which they were used, and the overall impact on the discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

##### *Frequency and Types of Impoliteness Strategies*

The study identified four distinct impoliteness strategies employed during the debate: **bald on record**, **negative impoliteness**, **positive impoliteness**, and **sarcasm/mock politeness**. Of these, **bald on record** was the most frequently used strategy. This strategy appeared four times, primarily in the form of direct, unambiguous statements that left little room for interpretation. Bald on record typically manifested when one of the debaters made forceful claims about the legitimacy of their position, often without attempting to soften the impact of their words. For instance, Mehdi Hasan openly criticized Israel's military actions, emphasizing their disregard for Palestinian lives and rights.

**Sarcasm or mock politeness** emerged as the second most used strategy, occurring twice during the debate. Sarcasm was employed to underscore contradictions in the opposing speaker's position, often undercutting the sincerity of their arguments. For example, Levy occasionally used sarcastic remarks to question the fairness of international criticism directed at Israel, presenting it in a way that was less than polite yet still rhetorically powerful.

The strategies of **negative impoliteness** and **positive impoliteness** were employed less frequently, with only one occurrence of each. Negative impoliteness typically served to challenge or belittle the opponent's stance, while positive impoliteness aimed to undermine the opponent's credibility by attacking their perceived moral or ethical position. For instance, when Levy described certain criticisms of Israel as "misguided," he implicitly attacked the legitimacy of opposing viewpoints, using positive impoliteness to cast doubt on their moral grounding.

##### *Context and Purpose of Impoliteness Strategies*

The use of impoliteness strategies in this debate was context-dependent. The speakers' choice of strategies aligned with their respective ideological positions and the high-stakes nature of the conflict. For Mehdi Hasan, the use of bald on record and sarcasm often functioned as a means of stressing the humanitarian aspect of the Israel-Palestine conflict. By making direct, forceful statements about the injustices faced by Palestinians, he sought to provoke a strong emotional response from the audience, urging them to reconsider their stance on the issue.

On the other hand, Eylon Levy's use of sarcasm and negative impoliteness primarily served to defend Israel's actions and assert the country's right to self-defense. His strategy aimed at presenting Israel as justified in its military actions, often framing opposing views as unreasonable or uninformed. Levy's use of positive impoliteness, such as dismissing Palestinian grievances or international condemnation, reinforced his belief that Israel's security needs were paramount.

##### *Implications for the Discourse*

The results suggest that impoliteness in this debate was not solely a means of disrespect, but rather a tool to emphasize ideological divides and enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of each speaker. While impoliteness can often be associated with negativity or hostility, in this debate it functioned as a means of advancing a larger argument about justice, security, and human rights. Both speakers utilized impolite strategies to highlight the moral stakes of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with each seeking to frame their argument as the more legitimate and morally sound position.

The debate thus exemplifies how impoliteness can be strategically used to reinforce one's political and ethical views, particularly in contentious, high-stakes discourse. By employing direct language, sarcasm, and other forms of impoliteness, both Hasan and Levy engaged in a form of rhetorical combat that served to further entrench their respective positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

#### 3.2 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

#### Data 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 subtlety. 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. Coercive impoliteness refers to behavior that uses force or threats to achieve a desired outcome. However more spesifically, in this case, impoliteness is not entirely negative (Culpeper (2011). 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.

#### Data 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.

### Data 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.

5 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.

#### Data 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...*

10 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.

2  
3 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

#### Data 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't want you to hear about the hostages. Eylon and people like Eylon 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 Zahir 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).

**Data 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**

**Data 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

Data 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 of impoliteness strategies in the debate between Mehdi Hasan and Eylon Levy revealed important insights into how language shapes and reflects differing ideological positions, particularly within the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The study specifically examined four impoliteness strategies: bald on record, negative impoliteness, positive impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. While the withholding of politeness was not present in the debate, these four strategies were used in varying frequencies, providing a deeper understanding of the participants' communication styles and their underlying intentions.

Bald on record was the most frequently used strategy, with four occurrences identified in the debate. This strategy involves the direct expression of ideas without any attempt to soften or mitigate the impact of the message. In the context of this debate, bald on record was likely employed to assert strong, unambiguous positions on sensitive issues such as security, human rights, and territorial claims. This straightforward approach is particularly relevant when dealing with contentious topics like the Israel-Palestine conflict, where there is often a sense of urgency and a desire for clarity in communication. For example, Mehdi Hasan's use of bald on record might have been aimed at clearly articulating the moral and ethical stakes of the conflict, particularly in terms of human rights for Palestinians. Similarly, Eylon Levy's bald statements may have been designed to reinforce Israel's security needs, leaving little room for ambiguity or negotiation.

The second most common impoliteness strategy was sarcasm or mock politeness, which appeared twice during the debate. Sarcasm in political discourse can serve to undermine the opposing party's arguments, often by presenting them in a manner that appears overly polite or insincere. In this debate, sarcasm may have been used by both participants to question the credibility or motives of the other. This tactic allows speakers to indirectly attack their opponents while maintaining a façade of civility. For instance, when discussing the actions of the Israeli government, both debaters might have resorted to sarcasm to point out perceived inconsistencies or contradictions in the other side's narrative. The use of sarcasm here likely reflects the tense and polarized nature of the debate, where each speaker sought to subtly discredit the other's position without openly attacking them.

The strategies of negative impoliteness and positive impoliteness were the least frequently employed, with only one instance of each being identified. Negative impoliteness involves strategies that are meant to be disrespectful or to distance oneself from the other party. Positive impoliteness, on the other hand, seeks to attack or undermine the other's positive face or self-esteem. In the context of this debate, these strategies may have been used sparingly because the participants likely wanted to maintain a level of credibility and composure, particularly given the high-profile nature of the debate and the sensitivity of the topic. Negative and positive impoliteness may have been reserved for moments when the debaters felt it was essential to challenge the other's position or ideology directly, particularly when discussing deeply entrenched issues like the justification for military actions or the legitimacy of political claims.

One of the most significant findings of the analysis was the fact that impoliteness does not necessarily carry a purely negative connotation. In fact, the use of these strategies can reflect underlying motives that go beyond mere disrespect. For instance, Mehdi Hasan's tendency to focus on human rights and the need for a fair resolution to the conflict can be seen as an attempt to highlight the moral implications of the debate. While his language might appear direct and sometimes impolite, it is ultimately driven by a desire to bring attention to the humanitarian concerns of the Palestinian people. Similarly, Eylon Levy's use of impoliteness strategies could be interpreted as a reflection of his unwavering stance on Israel's security, a matter that he likely believes justifies his strong rhetoric.

In conclusion, the debate between Mehdi Hasan and Eylon Levy highlights two distinct perspectives on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Hasan emphasizes the importance of balancing the needs of both sides, focusing on human rights, security, and a resolution that benefits both Israelis

and Palestinians. Levy, on the other hand, prioritizes Israel's security, viewing the country's actions as justified within the context of its defense. The impoliteness strategies employed in the debate not only reveal the rhetorical techniques used by the participants but also shed light on the underlying ideological divides that characterize the discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. The varying use of bald on record, sarcasm, and other impoliteness strategies underscores the polarized nature of this issue, with each side presenting its own vision of justice, security, and peace.

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