



Impoliteness Strategies Used by Netizens in Benny Blanco's Comment Section on Instagram

Malva Prime Leveler Sylvestrisa¹, Lucy Suraiya^{*2}

^{1,2}Universitas Andalas, Padang, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFORMATION

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.25077/lingolitera.v1.i1.2025.67-73>
Correspondence :
lucysuraiya@hum.unand.ac.id

SUBMISSION TRACK

Submission : August 15, 2025
Final Review : September 25, 2025
Accepted : October 21, 2025
Available online : November 10, 2025

KEYWORDS

Impoliteness, Impoliteness Strategies, Context

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the types and functions of impoliteness strategies used by netizens in the comment section on Instagram of Benny Blanco, a celebrity who posted about his girlfriend, Selena Gomez. Fifty English comments in response to Benny Blanco's Instagram post on July 22, 2024 were collected. Qualitative descriptive method and Culpeper's impoliteness theory were used to analyze the data. The research results indicate that the bald on record is the dominant type of impoliteness that netizen used to respond Benny Blanco's post with 24 data (48%). It is followed by positive impoliteness with 16 data (32%), negative impoliteness with 6 data (12%), and sarcasm with 4 data (8%). Additionally, the most dominant function of impoliteness that netizens used is affective impoliteness with 29 data (58%). It is followed coercive impoliteness with 11 data (22%), and entertaining impoliteness with 10 data (20%). These results indicate that impoliteness in social media does not only indicate rudeness but also as a way to attack someone. Specifically, this research shows that netizens use impoliteness in Instagram to express disagreement with Benny and Selena's relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have revolutionized communication by enabling us to share ideas, feelings, and experiences with a vast audience. Despite these benefits, they also have challenges, such as managing digital identities, navigating online etiquette, and preserving meaningful interpersonal relationships in virtual environment. One of challenges in social media communication is that politeness is not always maintained. When someone's behavior deviates from social expectations or norms, it is often seen negatively and labeled as "impolite". Particularly in online conversation, people commonly express themselves freely, including the possibility of impoliteness, which is less common in written form. Many users cannot control what they want to express, sometimes saying hurtful or offensive expressions, either intentionally or unintentionally, to other people. Such offensive words, whether expressed orally or in written form, have become increasingly common in public communication.

Social media has now become the dominant medium of interaction, with the three most popular platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as they provide a convenient and instant connection with others, regardless of physical distance. Instagram, in particular, is one of the most widely used

platforms for sharing daily activities and personal experiences. There are currently over 2 billion active users on Instagram every month. According to data recorded in 2024, Instagram's monthly active users were 2.4 billion (Shewale, 2024, as cited in Benaoun, 2025). On Instagram, users can post a variety of content, including photos and videos, while others can respond by leaving comments, thereby fostering both positive and negative interactions.

Everyone can post everything on social media. They can upload photos or videos to their feed or just to Instagram stories. Similarly, artists can also upload something that they want. Some people might make mistakes when posting something. However, why public figures become targets of online hostility while they have done nothing wrong online? One notable example is Benny Blanco, an American record producer, songwriter, and author. Despite his professional success and debut as an emerging actor, Blanco has been targeted by negative comments regarding his appearance and his relationship with Selena Gomez. Many netizens think that Selena does not deserve him because of Blanco's looks. Meanwhile, he is one of the good actors in his debut. For instance, one comment on Blanco's Instagram post (@itsbennyblanco) with his Girlfriend, Selena Gomez from @isthis_vogue: "Why is Selena dating that thing?" Such language is deeply impolite, as referring to a person as a "thing" constitutes a demeaning and dehumanizing expression.

Impoliteness, as a linguistic phenomenon, is context-dependent and studied in the field of Pragmatics. Culpeper (2011, p.19) defines impoliteness as "a communicative action that aims to harm and disappoint the conversation partner by attacking their face." This definition implies that impoliteness varies depending on the context, understanding, the speaker's intentions, and the listeners' interpretation. In other words, if the listener perceives that the speaker is attacking him/her directly, causing them to feel wounded and let down, the speaker may be viewed as unfriendly. However, if the listener perceives the impoliteness of the joke, he/she may view it as maintaining social harmony.

This study focuses on impoliteness strategies. Impoliteness strategies are defined by Culpeper (2011) as a phenomenon that occurs in specific contexts, characterized by certain behaviors that evoke negative attitudes and emotions. Impoliteness comes in various ways, such as imbalance in power, misinterpretations of intention, and sometimes, a high level of stress can make somebody be impolite. Culpeper also defined strategies as ways of achieving particular goals in interaction that are conventional for a particular community. Impoliteness strategies is a way of interpreting disrespectful speech within a particular context. There are types of impoliteness, they are bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm, and withhold politeness. In addition, there are functions of impoliteness, they are affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness, and entertaining impoliteness.

Several studies examined impoliteness strategies in social media, using Culpeper's theory. Siahaan et al. (2023) found four types of impoliteness strategies in comments on Nadim Makarim's Instagram, with positive impoliteness being the most common. Ambarita et al. (2023) identified 10 strategies in political comments, with positive impoliteness also being prominent. Sinaga et al. (2024) found sarcasm to be the most common strategy in comments on Najwa Shihab's YouTube channel. Nubli (2024) found negative impoliteness to be the most common strategy in comments on Sam Smith's tweet. Rahma (2022) and Kharisma (2022) also found various impoliteness strategies in YouTube comments and tweets, respectively. Upon reviewing these related previous studies, the present study is distinctly different as it focuses on Instagram comments about a celebrity by employing impoliteness theory in a new context. This study also extends the gap in the exploration of functions that motivate netizens to use impoliteness.

Benny Blanco's Instagram provides an appropriate case of investigation as the source of data, as his posts attract large number of hateful comments. Interestingly, a feed in Benny Blanco's Instagram on July 22nd, 2024, has 1.3M likes. It means that the significant numbers of these likes indicates that this feed is influential for netizens.

By examining impoliteness strategies in Benny Blanco's Instagram comment sections, this research aims to contribute to ethical communication in social media. Beyond theoretical significance, this research can foster mindful communication, mitigating harmful online interactions. Having done extensive searches, no prior studies on this specific topic have been found, as most existing research on Benny Blanco consists primarily of news coverage. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impoliteness strategies present in his Instagram comment section based on Culpeper impoliteness theory.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The data presented portray the events and experiences of a celebrity. This research examined the impoliteness strategies employed by netizens when commenting on social media. This qualitative descriptive method aimed to provide comprehensive and accurate descriptions of the impoliteness strategies employed by netizens, particularly on the negative comments found on Benny Blanco's Instagram post. The data were taken from a post that focuses on Benny Blanco's relationship with his girlfriend, Selena Gomez, which was published on July 22, 2024.

The process of data collection employed several steps, categorizing 50 comments into five distinct strategies of impoliteness, there were:

1. The first step in the data collection process was to log in to Instagram and search for Benny Blanco's official account. This initial action was crucial for accessing the relevant content. Following this, Benny Blanco's feed was navigated to identify posts that elicited significant public interaction.

2. Next, the comments made by netizens on these posts were identified, specifically on those that expressed negative sentiments towards Benny Blanco. This identification was essential for identifying patterns of impoliteness and understanding the social dynamics at play.

3. After identifying the relevant comments, the screenshots of Benny Blanco's posts were taken to preserve the context of the comments. This step was important for maintaining a visual record of the interactions, which would aid in the analysis.

4. Subsequently, the comments were sorted to isolate those that contained strategies of impoliteness. This process was crucial to ensure that the analysis focused on relevant data that aligned with the research objectives. From all the remarks examined in the chosen Instagram posts, the writer pinpointed 50 prevailing impolite comments to serve as the conclusive data collection. These remarks were picked according to how distinctly they displayed the tactics of rudeness based on Culpeper's framework. The figure 50 was not selected randomly, but was established through the concept of data saturation - meaning, after assessing the majority of the comments, no fresh trends or classifications appeared.

5. The next step was re-typing the comments and responses into a digital file. This consolidation of data was crucial for maintaining an organized dataset, allowing for easier access and analysis in subsequent stages.

6. Finally, the data were classified based on the identified impoliteness strategies, utilizing the five main principles outlined by Culpeper (1996). This classification was essential for breaking down the content into manageable parts for detailed analysis.

7. Although the collected data includes 50 comments, a subset of data presented in this paper was selected and thoroughly discussed on typical examples demonstrating each strategy-function pairs to prevent repetition and maintain analytical precision. The complete frequency distribution of each category is presented in a summary table. This approach maintains analytical transparency while following qualitative research guidelines.

Culpeper's theory of impoliteness was applied to find the types of impoliteness strategies and the functions of impoliteness in the comment section on Benny Blanco's Instagram. The collected data were reviewed several times to gain a deeper understanding of the context behind the impolite utterances. This process is crucial for uncovering the nuances and subtleties that may inform the interpretation of impolite language. Following this detailed review, the salient words or phrases containing impolite meanings were reviewed. Once the salient words containing impoliteness were identified, the meaning of these words was aligned with the types of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper. This alignment is essential for categorizing the impolite utterances and understanding the specific strategies.

Following this, the functions of impoliteness strategies were interpreted by considering the situational context, the tone of interactions, and the possible intentions of the netizens. For instance, the use of impolite language stems from feelings of frustration, disagreement, humor, or a desire to gain attention was explored. Additionally, the study explored how social and cultural factors influence the way netizens expressed impoliteness in online spaces. Through this comprehensive analysis, this study is aimed to provide a clearer understanding of why individuals choose to use impolite language in Benny Blanco's Instagram comment section. By analyzing this, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the complex nature of online communication, and the role of impoliteness within it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research presents the analysis results of the types of impoliteness strategies and their functions used by netizens in Blanco's Instagram comment sections. They can be observed in the following data.

TYPES OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES

There found 4 impoliteness strategies used by netizen in Blanco's Instagram comment sections, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Impoliteness Strategies

No	Types of Impoliteness Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bald on Record	24	48%
2	Positive Impoliteness	16	32%
3	Negative Impoliteness	6	12%
4	Sarcasm or Mock Politeness	4	8%
5	Withhold Politeness	0	0
	Total	50	100%

Bald on Record

The most common strategy in the dataset is Bald on Record, appearing in 24 out of 50 comments (48% of total instances). This method involves openly threatening the recipient's face without using any redressive action. It often shows through explicit insults, straightforward critiques, or objectifying remarks that remove any possible ambiguity.

Datum 7 — @chineetz: THIS GUY LOOKS LIKE VOMIT

This comment shows us that the netizen says that Benny looks like vomit. The context of this comment was that the word "vomit" refers to Benny. The use of the word "vomit" is particularly offensive, equating Benny with something dirty and unpleasant. Such a comparison is highly disrespectful and dehumanizing.

This comment is relevant to the impoliteness strategy of bald on record. This comment conveys a potentially impolite message by commenting rudely on his appearance, likening it to vomit. The comment indicates that the netizen directly attacks Benny's face and expresses disappointment. Culpeper stated that attacking someone's face directly and unambiguously is bald on record impoliteness.

The netizen uses a strong and offensive metaphor by comparing Benny to vomit, which is both insulting and dehumanizing. This is an explicit verbal attack intended to shame and evoke strong revulsion. This illustrates Culpeper's concept of bald on record impoliteness, representing a direct, unrestrained insult that breaks traditional standards of civil discourse.

Positive Impoliteness

The second most common strategy identified was positive impoliteness, appearing in 16 comments (32% of all data). This type of impoliteness aims at the recipient's positive face needs - their essential desire for approval, esteem, and social connection.

Datum 17 — @shevchenko.anutka: She deserves better

The remark implies that Benny falls short of the standards expected of Selena's partner. Although indirect, the criticism effectively conveys Benny's perceived deficiencies. The impoliteness analytical framework demonstrates how this challenges Benny's positive face—especially his social identity as a suitable partner—thereby exemplifying positive impoliteness.

The netizen @shevchenko.anutka stated, "She deserves better". The underlying meaning of this comment suggests that Selena merits a superior alternative. The commentator's underlying purpose is to position Benny as unworthy of being Selena's romantic partner. @shevchenko.anutka's comment

employs a positive impoliteness approach. Her expression seeks to subtly undermine Benny Blanco. The declaration “She deserves better” indicates that the online participant challenges Benny’s favorable representation by implying that Selena Gomez warrants a different partner. This perspective demonstrates positive impoliteness.

Negative Impoliteness

Negative Impoliteness appears in 6 instances, accounting for 12% of the total dataset.

Datum 13 — @maftunaxon_akmalovna: “Why did she choose you 😞”

In the comment above, the user @maftunaxon_akmalovna commented, “Why did she choose you 😞” The context of this comment indirectly confuses the netizen as to why Selena chose Benny as her boyfriend. The inclusion of the pained emoji (😞) reinforces the idea that the commenter views the relationship as disappointing.

The remark interrogates Selena’s romantic selection and suggests Benny constitutes an inferior option, thereby challenging his personal agency and the validity of their relationship. This shows as a definitive manifestation of negative impoliteness, since it demonstrates disregard for Benny’s role in a personal partnership, it blurs the lines between private and public spheres.

Sarcasm or Mock Politeness

While less prevalent, Sarcasm or Mock Politeness appears in 4 instances (8% of cases).

Datum 16 — @jackielucasxo: “How is she attracted to you 🤔😞”

In the comment above, the netizen @jackielucasxo commented, “How is she attracted to you 🤔😞”. This comment reflects the netizen’s disbelief and confusion about why Selena is attracted to Benny. The use of the word “how” indicates doubt and criticism, suggesting that Benny lacks qualities that could attract someone like Selena.

User @jackielucasxo attacked Benny’s face using the sentence “How is she attracted to you 🤔😞”. This comment is sarcasm. The netizen uses sarcasm and mockery to mock Benny by asking how Selena is attracted to Benny. According to Culpeper (1996), sarcasm and mock politeness are when the utterances are opposite to the truth.

Despite its question-based form, the use of emojis and rhetorical tone transforms this into a mocking insult. The analysis shows that it is playful rudeness disguised as fake politeness, aiming to mock Benny while entertaining viewers. In cases of feigned politeness, the line between meanness and humor blurs, and the public platform of Instagram makes these actions especially performative.

FUNCTIONS OF IMPOLITENESS

Referring to the theory proposed by Culpeper (2011), there are three functions of impoliteness. All of them were found in Blanco’s Instagram comment sections. They are recapitulated in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Functions of Impoliteness

No	Functions of Impoliteness	Frequency	Percentage
1	Affective Impoliteness	29	58%
2	Coercive Impoliteness	11	22%
3	Entertaining Impoliteness	10	20%
	Total	50	100%

Affective Impoliteness

Affective impoliteness was the most common type in the dataset. It happens when people

express strong negative emotions like revulsion, hostility, envy, or dissatisfaction. These comments often stem from feelings of indignation or frustration, especially related to Benny's romantic relationship with Selena Gomez.

Datum 5 – @bealondra “Can we all agree that he looks like a depressed alpaca”

The functions of impoliteness used by the netizen is affective impoliteness. This is evident when @bealondra said, “can we all agree...” which may influence readers to share the same opinion. The statement prompted another netizen to attack Benny even more. According to Culpeper, triggering negative emotions of the speaker through the interlocutor's comments constitutes affective impoliteness.

In this remark, the netizen compares Benny to a “depressed alpaca.” This analogy is not meant to be humorous but serves as a derogatory remark intended to humiliate or shame Benny. The main goal of this comment is to express disgust and cause emotional pain to Benny.

Coercive Impoliteness

Coercive impoliteness was found in 11 of the 50 comments analysed. This communicative function occurs when individuals use discourteous language to assert control or superiority over the recipient. Such remarks often include directives, condemnations, or attempts to humiliate, with the commentator aiming to highlight Benny's deficiencies or inadequacies.

Datum 1 – @thamires_albuquerq: go take a bath 😂😂😂

In the context of impoliteness function, the utterance above is classified as coercive impoliteness. The netizen targeted Benny Blanco with the phrase “go take a bath,” it suggests that the netizen attacked him by stating that Benny had not taken a bath yet and asked Benny to do it. The function of this comment is to convey the clownishness of Benny Blanco through his appearance.

The remark issues a directive to Benny while implying he is unclean or repulsive. Although the emojis create a facade of humor, the primary intent remains to humiliate and offend him. The study's analytical framework classifies this as coercive impoliteness, as it employs an imperative formulation to deliberately diminish Benny's social standing.

Entertaining Impoliteness

The third function, entertaining impoliteness, manifested in 10 instances. These remarks employ discourteous language primarily intended to amuse rather than directly inflict emotional harm. Characteristically, they utilize irony, humorous remarks, or cultural references to ridicule Benny while seeking audience engagement.

Datum 10 – This is Beauty and the Beast 😭

@chiquises statement is categorized as entertaining impoliteness. This can be proven with the phrase, “I hate to see people saying CUTE couple. This is Beauty and the Beast 😭.” Along with the crying emoji, it indicates that the speaker is using humor and exaggeration to mock Benny for entertainment purposes. As claimed by Culpeper (1996), it produces negative emotions and triggers the speaker, which is referred to as affective impoliteness.

The remark alters the title of the Disney film Beauty and the Beast into a derisive comparison targeting Benny. It suggests Selena embodies the attractive character while positioning Benny as the unappealing counterpart. The inclusion of the crying emoji enhances the jesting quality. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that this still damages Benny's public perception and positions him as a subject of mockery, despite its primary aim being to entertain the audience.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the types of impoliteness strategies and the functions of impoliteness in Benny

Blanco's Instagram comment section. The researchers use the theory of impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996) and the functions of impoliteness by Culpeper (2011). This study found 50 comments containing impolite comments on Benny Blanco's Instagram. The types of impoliteness found were: bald on record with 24 occurrences, positive impoliteness with 16 occurrences, negative impoliteness with 6 occurrences, sarcasm with 4 occurrences. There was no data on withhold politeness. Furthermore, the functions of impoliteness used by netizens in Benny Blanco's Instagram comment section were affective impoliteness with 29 occurrences (58%), 11 occurrences (22%) of coercive impoliteness, and 10 occurrences (20%) of entertaining impoliteness.

The most occurrence of politeness strategy type was bald on record impoliteness which means to show an explicit verbal attack intended to shame and deny Benny's relationship with Selena Gomez. Similarly, affective impoliteness was mostly found that functions to incite other people to provoke an emotional reaction to Benny Blanco's relationship with Selena Gomez. Both bald on record impoliteness strategy and affective function correlate each other, leading to serious consequences, conflicts, and damaging others relationships. The implication of this research is that studying impoliteness in social media contexts reveals how online platforms can facilitate or mitigate conflict and aggression. Furthermore, studying impoliteness in social media contributes to the fields of pragmatics, shedding light on how language is used in context not to cooperate among interlocutors and achieve the social goals of particular netizens. Further research is suggested to examine numerous Instagram posts featuring diverse public figures, encompassing individuals from various backgrounds and professional fields. Multilingual datasets and cross-cultural analyses could potentially generate the manifestation and interpretation of impoliteness across distinct sociocultural environments. Furthermore, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches or audience perception studies—such as questionnaires or in-depth interviews—may contribute to verifying the assessment of impolite expressions and strengthening the reliability of the results.

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