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Impoliteness: The Ghanaian Standpoint

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Abstract

This paper highlights the folk perception of impoliteness among Ghanaians in view of Watts' (2003) notion of first order impoliteness. The study showed that impoliteness is not just an opposite of politeness, but the manifestation of non-cooperation, disapproval, and mutual antipathy through certain communicative behaviours that signal disrespect. These communicative behaviours include 'interrupting others', the use of 'invectives' and the use of 'offensive non-verbal forms of communication (NVCs)'. The use of these impolite communicative behaviours destabilizes interpersonal relationships and shows that a speaker is communicatively incompetent. The study also proposed the *'pardonability scale of impoliteness'*. This scale showed that among Ghanaians, the use of *invectives* is the most offensive and least pardonable impolite communicative behaviour while the use of *offensive NVCs* is the least offensive and most pardonable impolite communicative behaviour. It was also noted that the degree of offensiveness or pardonability in the order of the arrangement displayed on the scale, is not strictly tied to all speech events.

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1. Introduction

Impoliteness is any type of communicative behaviour which is assessed as an intention to threaten an addressee's face or social identity, or an intention to transgress the norms and values of a particular community (Bousfield, 2008a, b). Bousfield (2008a) avers that the amount of literature concerning impoliteness is insignificant when compared to the robust literature concerning politeness. The reason for this, in Dalton's (2013) view, is that "impolite utterances may be considered atypical within everyday archetypal social situations" (p. 7). This suggests that impoliteness is usually not regarded as a standard expectancy in a communication event. In a communicative event, there are some societal norms that speech participants are expected to adhere to. A speech participant who communicates in accordance to these norms builds and maintains strong relationships with other participants and is considered polite. On the other hand, a speech participant who transgresses these norms of communication destabilizes interpersonal relationships. Culpeper (2011) notes that impoliteness depends on contextual judgments that interlocutors make in a communicative situation. These judgments can be based on the value systems of the different communities that the speech participants belong to, the personalities involved in the speech event, their social relations, and roles at the time of the interaction.

The concept of impoliteness is a universal phenomenon which occurs among all cultures but its manifestation may vary from culture to culture. Even within the same culture, the manifestation of impoliteness may differ from social context to social context. This is because no linguistic utterance is potentially impolite till judged as such or otherwise by a particular society.

Every ethnic group in Ghana has its own established norms concerning the utterances and actions of its members in their daily routines. In spite of these peculiarities, it is likely to find some similarities such that what is considered impolite among the Akans will not be entirely different from what is considered impolite among the Ewes or the Gas. However, an impolite communicative behaviour that can destabilise interpersonal relationships among the members of one ethnic group may not have that potential in another ethnic group. It is in this regard that this study looks at how impoliteness is perceived in the Greater Accra Region (Accra), Ashanti Region (Kumasi), and the Volta Region (Ho) of Ghana. The study also shows some similarities and differences in the perception of impoliteness by members of these communities.

2. Theoretical Framework

Watts (2003) notes that the studies of impoliteness can be based on two notions: first order impoliteness (Impoliteness 1) and second order impoliteness (Impoliteness 2). First order impoliteness is based on the layperson's view of what impoliteness is and second order impoliteness is based on the researcher's view of impoliteness in terms of a theory or theories (Watts, 2008). Following Locher and Watts (2005), Watts (2008) emphasizes the predominance of Impoliteness 1 over Impoliteness 2 on the assumption that, generally, no utterance is inherently face-threatening.

There are issues concerning impoliteness (and even politeness) that researchers have over the years contended with (see Bousfield, 2008a; Culpeper, 2005; Culpeper, 2011; Fraser, 1990; Ide, 1989; Watts, 2003; Watts, 2008).

One of such issues that is worthy of attention in this study is whether or not impoliteness is intentional. According to Bousfield (2008b),

> impoliteness is the opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully performed unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, with deliberate *aggression*, that is, with the face-threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted. (p. 261)

This implies that since politeness can be regarded as the speaker's intention to endorse the face of another, impoliteness should be

regarded as the speaker's intention to attack it. The speaker does not take into account the feelings of his addressee, and has no concern, though he is aware of his addressee's high social status before making an utterance. Also, the speaker, in many cases, does not assess his own status and his identity or role in relation to his addressee before he makes utterances that are unexpected, inappropriate and unaccepted in the society.

Bousfield (2007) mentions that it is necessary to study impoliteness in a way that accounts for both speaker and hearer. He further opines that in a speech event, impoliteness exists only in cases where the intended face-threat is perceived by all the participants involved. This suggests that for impoliteness to be considered successful, the intention of the speaker to 'offend', threaten, or damage another's face must be understood by the hearer.

Bousfield (2008b) explains that if a speaker intends face-damage and the hearer perceives the speaker's intention, then impoliteness has been successfully conveyed. On the other hand, if the speaker intends face-damage but the hearer fails to perceive the speaker's intent, then the attempt at impoliteness has failed.

There can be other instances where the speaker does not intend any face-damage but the hearer constructs the speaker's utterance as being intentionally face-damaging. In such instances, the face-damage can be regarded as accidental and inadvertently causing an offence when none was intended. Face-damage is thus caused by one or a combination of the following: "insensitivity on the part of the speaker; hypersensitivity on the part of the hearer; a clash of expectations; a cultural misunderstanding; and misidentification (by the speaker) of the community of practice or activity type in which they are engaged" (Bousfield, 2008b, p. 133).

We can agree with Bousfield (2008b) that there are times when impoliteness is caused intentionally because a participant in a speech event can disregard the social status of his addressee and make utterances that are face-threatening towards him/her on a public platform such as a radio discussion. However, there are instances when an utterance is judged as impolite just because it does not conform to the expected norms of a given community. In such instances, what is considered face-threatening differs from one community to the other. It will thus be unfair to judge impoliteness as intentional especially when a speaker is not well versed in the norms of a community he finds himself in, and makes utterances that breach those norms. We can therefore propose that for one to assess an impolite act as intentional or unintentional, the circumstances of occurrence must be first considered.

Bousfield (2008b) argues that whenever a person is being truly impolite, he or she is either "creating/activating/re-activating some aspect of [his/her] relative power" or "challenging someone over their (assumption of) power or even both" (p. 150). In this vein, Locher and Bousfield (2008) aver that it is important to consider the role of power relations in any impoliteness study. They add that impoliteness is linked to power relations that are asymmetrical, such that when a superior employs some impoliteness strategies, it is seen as "exercise of power" (p. 8). They further opine that power can restrict the way one can respond to a face-threatening act or impoliteness in general. This implies that usually, an addressee cannot react to an impolite utterance if the speaker is more powerful than him.

One other issue that is of concern to the study of impoliteness is whether an utterance is inherently face-threatening or the utterance is face-threatening because of context.

Culpeper (1996) opines that *swear words*, *abusive* or *profane language* are inherently face-threatening utterances. In reaction to this, researchers like Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Ickes, Park, and Robinson (2011) note that it is not enough to classify an utterance by its lexical content; hence, the context of the utterance must be considered. They further explain that even taboo language can be considered as friendly banter on some occasions.

In contrast to Culpeper's (1996) assertion that language forms like *swear words* are inherently face-threatening, Culpeper (2011) notes that impoliteness "[…] is in the eye of the beholder" (p. 22). This suggests that an

utterance in a certain context may be perceived as impolite by one member but not by another member of a conversation. The emphasis is therefore on the context of the utterance, and not on the linguistic form it actually takes.

He also states that there are other aspects that come to play when an utterance is interpreted as being impolite. Bernal (2008) mentions prosody (tenor, rising tone, laughter among others) as an important factor that plays a large role in the determination of an utterance as authentically polite or impolite.

Culpeper (2011) again disapproves of his own assertion in Culpeper (1996), and states that impoliteness depends on the contextual judgments that the interlocutors make in the communicative situation. These judgments can be of the social relation and roles and group membership. Since different groups have different value systems, an individual's perception of what is a socially acceptable behaviour in a communicative situation may differ in various regards. He adds that, it is not the case that any particular linguistic form guarantees an evaluation that it is impolite in all contexts. Moreover, people may even disagree about how impolite an utterance is (Culpeper, 2011).

Regardless of the metaphoric background of Culpeper's (2011) claim, this study would like to suggest that linguistic impoliteness is in *the ear of the beholder* rather than "in the eye". This is due to the fact that judgments of utterances are usually dependent on what a person hears rather than what he sees.

The fact that impoliteness is more determined by context cannot be denied. Nevertheless, in our opinion, a bystander (who can also be considered as a speech participant in a speech event) on hearing someone addressing another with some language forms like invectives will first judge the speaker as impolite before considering an existing relationship. This is as a result of the bystander's social orientation to such language forms.

Considering these pertinent issues surrounding the notion of politeness, this study would focus on interviewees' perception of what impoliteness is in terms of the norms and values of the community in which they find themselves. Thus, the study is principally based on Watts' (2003) notion of first order impoliteness (Impoliteness 1).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

One hundred and fifty people were contacted and selected as respondents for interview. Prominence was given to people between fifty years and seventy years. This is because the elderly in many African contexts are regarded as "the custodians of culture", "the symbol of wisdom", and "society's memory databank" (see Agyekum, 2004a, p. 137). According to Rababa'h and Malkawi (2012), "old people have more experience and broader communicative competence than young people" (p. 26).

Also, the respondents selected were people who had lived in the community for not less than twenty years. Locher and Watts (2008) assert that the notion of (im)politeness is dependent on "judgments" (p. 78). They further explain that generally, these judgments are based on and constructed through an individual's history of interactions within his or her society. This suggests that the more one has lived in a community, the better his or her history of interaction for appropriate judgment.

The formal (western) educational background of respondents was not considered because the study dwells primarily on respondents' perceptions. It has been noted that one's ability to contribute to traditional or cultural issues has very little or nothing at all to do with his or her level of formal education. It is rather how well a person is versed in the culture and tradition of a particular community in that, a person with only traditional education is more recognized and respected and rated higher than one with only formal education (see Agyekum, 2004a, for details).

3.2. Setting

The study was conducted in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho. These three towns, apart from being regional capitals in Ghana, were chosen because the inhabitants of these towns often use at least a major indigenous Ghanaian language in their daily interactions. The

indigenous language of Kumasi is Akan, which is most widely spoken both as a native language and as a lingua franca for many non-native speakers in the country. In Ho, Ewe, which has the second largest number of speakers in Ghana, is the indigenous language. Accra is a highly cosmopolitan city which attracts migrants from all corners of the country. As a result, the inhabitants speak a wide range of languages, though the dominant indigenous language is Ga and the lingua franca is Akan. Conducting the study in these towns gave us access to respondents from various social, cultural, ethnolinguistic, and educational backgrounds in Ghana.

3.3. Procedure

In order to present a thorough analysis and discussion of the folk view of impoliteness gathered from interviews conducted in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho, the data gathered was analyzed descriptively in terms of the qualitative research approach.

The respondents were selected through 'friend-of-a-friend' basis or snowball sampling (respondents recommend other potential candidates for the study) and personal networks (see Marshall, 1996). We started by asking some acquaintances in each of the communities to suggest names of people whose ages are above fifty years, who have lived in the community for at least twenty years, and have either Akan or Ewe as their first language. Some of the people they suggested accepted to be interviewed while others begged to be excused. In the course of interviewing those who accepted to partake in the study, we asked them to also suggest some other names who may be willing to share their opinions. Through this sampling technique, we was able to get fifty (50) respondents in each of the communities under investigation.

Many of the people who declined the interview were females because some claimed they feared to be recorded on tape in case of future references. Some of these women changed their mind after they were persuaded and assured that their responses will be treated confidentially, but others stood their grounds. As a result, the respondents turned out to be ninety (60%) males and sixty (40%) females. Even though there is a gender imbalance in this study, we consider the ratio of male respondents to female respondents adequate because this study has no specific attention on issues related to gender.

The respondents were basically questioned on their perception of impoliteness, and their responses were recorded and analyzed. The respondents were allowed to share their opinions in any language of their choice. Those with good formal educational background who wished to communicate in the English language as well as those with or without a good formal educational background who wished to communicate in their local language (Akan or Ewe) were granted audience.

The frequency of the preference or abhorrence of a particular impolite communicative behavior over another in all the speech communities was also investigated.

3.4. Model of Analysis

Communicative behaviours that express impoliteness in a Ghanaian speech community include the use of *invectives*, *innuendos*, *offensive non-verbal forms of communication (NVCs)*, and the act of *snubbing* and *interrupting others.* These impolite communicative behaviours are non-cooperative, and they destabilize interpersonal relations by creating an atmosphere of disrespect, which leads to mutual antipathy.

a. Using Invectives

"An invective is an abusive or insulting word or expression with a violent censure or reproach on the addressee" (Agyekum, 2004b, p. 347).The respondents made it clear that an invective is emotionally oriented hence, a speaker who employs it intends to say something that will humiliate or hurt the feelings of his addressee, in order to offend or provoke him. The use of an invective is not just a clear antagonistic and a face-threatening communicative behaviour, it is also inflammatory or conflictive.

Speech participants can employ this impolite communicative behaviour to merely indicate their hostility and hatred towards others. They can also use it to explicitly display their disapproval or displeasure of another person's

prior action or statement through words or expressions that condemn, or cause discomfort to the person. For instance, some people use public platforms such as radio discussions to recount their displeasure about certain deeds and misdeeds of political leaders, religious leaders and even some traditional leaders through the use of invectives. This practice exhibits a substrategy of the positive impoliteness strategy, '*use taboo words, abusive or profane language*' in Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness model. A speaker who is fond of using invectives towards others at the least provocation is seen as impolite because this behaviour usually leads to a breakdown of close relationships, and destroys social equilibrium.

The use of an invective signals that an addressee has exhibited some characteristics that deviate from the physical, mental, religious, political, or social norms of society (Agyekum, 2004b). The degree of offence and emotional pain created by an invective is usually influenced by the audience around and the context at the time of its use.

The use of this impolite communicative behaviour, especially during interactions in public, is generally loathed in the communities investigated because just as Agyekum (2004b) puts it; it has "negative social implications concerning the abused" (p. 348). It is highly possible that the abused will be very embarrassed, degraded, and deeply hurt emotionally.

b. Using Innuendos

Innuendo is known among the Akans, Ewes, and Gas as *ekutia/kasantwi*, *ahamasisi*, and *kasaŋtsui*, respectively. Obeng (2003) defines an innuendo as "an oblique allusion or an insinuation involving a veiled reflection on an interactant's character or reputation" (p. 15). This form of language is communicated as implicitly as possible but it is able to result in social disharmony and outright conflict among interactants. The Akan maxim, *ekutianim ne wura*, 'an innuendo knows its referent', implies that the use of an innuendo is goal oriented. As a result, anyone who is aware of the context in which the innuendo is used would be able to identify the referent.

Innuendos may be employed through the use of metaphors, witty language, sarcasm, ambiguous statements or comments, criticisms in the form of allusions (historical or biblical), riddles, folktales, songs, or drum language relating to the issue at hand between the interlocutors. In Ghana, innuendos may even be in non-verbal forms like the use of textiles and hairstyles among women to negotiate conflicts (see Agyekum, 2006, Obeng, 2003, for detailed discussions on innuendos).

During speech events, a speaker who is involved in a delicate discourse like politics or ethnicity can resort to innuendos to avoid subsequent confrontations and brawls. Agyekum (2004b) observes that politicians in Ghana usually couch invectives in the form of innuendos. Nevertheless, due to the goal oriented nature of innuendos, anyone who knows the socio-political trends of the nation can identify the referent. Admittedly, the referent of the innuendo may be easily identified based on the hearer's socio-political knowledge but, the speaker can readily deny the face-threat when confronted. This is because even if the innuendo is realized as an invective, it is not explicit. This communicative behaviour fits in Culpeper's (1996, 2005) off-record strategy of impoliteness. Anyone who successfully uses innuendos to express impoliteness makes the addressee feel uncomfortable and flustered.

A speaker who uses innuendos to convey his disapproval or displeasure about a person or a situation is regarded as more cultured and civilized than another who uses invectives directly. Nevertheless, the respondents stated that the use of innuendos is unacceptable and considered impolite when it is used against the elderly and those in authority, especially in situations where the referent can be easily deciphered.

c. Interrupting Others

Interrupting a speaker is considered as an impolite act in the communities investigated and in other Ghanaian societies. Interruption, as defined by Lyons (1995), is "to speak when the social role that one is playing does not grant authority and precedence or, alternatively, when the rules that govern turn-taking in that society do not grant one the authority to speak at that point" (p. 252). This implies that interruption occurs if a person, in

the process of speaking, is compelled to stop because another person started speaking.

This form of communicative behaviour is usually regarded as an intended infringement on another person's right to speak or to complete his turn in a speech event (see Tannen, 1990). The notion of interruption is expressed in Akan as *watwam'ano*, 'he has cut my mouth' and in Ewe as *etsonya le nunye*, 'he has cut the matter from my mouth'. These expressions depicting interruption in these cultures show that this behaviour is face-threatening, and it is often not appreciated and tolerated by speech participants.

During certain sensitive speech events, especially those centred on politics, religion, and ethnicity, some participants often interrupt others who have the floor to discredit their statements. This results in an unpleasant noisy interaction because the interrupted speaker may in turn raise his voice, asking to be allowed to make his point. In many of these instances, a third person may intervene by asking the interrupter to be quiet for the other to finish making his point.

Generally, in order to express displeasure about interruption, Akan and Ga speakers would say something like *megu sorekasa*, and *menwieɛ* respectively, meaning 'I am still speaking', and an Ewe speaker will say *na ma wunu*, 'let me finish' to the other speaker. The interrupted speaker may just be silent because he is tentative to express his displeasure about the interruption, especially in cases where there is less familiarity. Speech participants who are fond of interrupting others are generally regarded as uncultured and impolite.

Finding interruption as an impolite behaviour among Ghanaians confirms Lyons' (1995) assertion that, "it is impolite, in all societies, to speak out of turn" (p. 252).

d. Offensive Non-Verbal Forms of Communication (Offensive NVCs)

Apart from the verbal means of expressing impoliteness discussed above, there are some non-verbal communicative behaviours that are perceived in all the communities investigated as impolite. Since verbal forms of communicating impoliteness are limited in various respects, it is possible to use impolite non-verbal forms as they can complement each other in interactions. These non-verbal forms of expressing impoliteness are usually preferred when interlocutors are hesitant to verbally express their contempt (Laitenen, 2011). Salzmann (2004) defines non-verbal communication as "any transmission of signals accomplished by some means other than spoken or written words" (p. 246). This suggests that communication is possible without words. Non-verbal forms of communication are therefore crucial in the discussion of impoliteness.

One non-verbal form that is face-threatening in an interaction is a visual gesture Amuzu (2009) identifies as "cut-eye" (p. 69). It is referred to as *anikyie* among the Akans, *ŋkutetre* among the Ewes and *kpemɔ* among the Gas. 'Cut-eye' is done by gazing glaringly at the addressee for a while and blinking the eye or rolling the eye in a way to scrutinize the addressee from head to toe as a way of showing disregard, hostility or displeasure towards him or her. Eyeing a respectable person is not approved in any context because it is regarded as derogatory.

Another form of non-verbal impoliteness that is highly abhorred is 'suck teeth' or 'kiss teeth'. The act of 'sucking teeth' or 'kissing teeth' is not only an offensive behaviour, or a face-threatening act among Ghanaians, which expresses a person's contempt, disapproval, or dissatisfaction with another person or a situation. It is usually done by producing a click sound through clenching the teeth together and then making a sharp sucking motion through them. It can be done for few seconds or several seconds depending on the degree of contempt or disgust a person has towards his addressee. The harder one sucks, the louder it sounds. This non-verbal act is known as *tweew* in Akan, *tseɖuɖu* in Ewe, and *tsuu* in Ga. Anybody who sucks his teeth at someone or a situation to display his contempt in a speech event is generally regarded as uncultured and impolite.

These non-verbal behaviours of impoliteness can be dependent or independent of speech. In cases where impolite non-verbal forms are even used simultaneously with a polite verbal-form, they are still noticed. For instance, Rababa`h and Malkawi (2012) note that when someone greets another while wearing a frown, the target reserves the right to respond

because it is face-threatening and a sign of resentment. Similarly, in all the communities investigated, if a younger person lifts his left hand up while greeting an elder, it is regarded impolite though greeting in itself is a polite act. Since this act is face-threatening, the person who is being greeted may refuse to respond. This corroborates Amoako's (2006) claim that, the use of the left hand during speech events is a sign of disrespect and a taboo which is highly abhorred among the Akans and other Ghanaian societies.

Impolite non-verbal forms of communication can be employed to achieve a substrategy of negative impoliteness, *be contemptuous* in Culpeper's (1996) model. They can cause social disharmony in a speech event, and are often regarded as acts of indiscipline and communicative incompetence.

e. Snubbing Others

This impolite linguistic behaviour is realized in the strategic use of silence to show disagreement, disapproval, and scorn for another person's comment. It must be noted that, in the communities investigated, when a younger person or a less powerful person remains silent when an older or a more powerful person is angrily interrogating him, it is considered a polite behaviour. However, there are situations where the younger person or the subordinate is expected to give answers to a question, or pass a comment on an issue under discussion. In such instances, if the younger person or the subordinate does not answer or pass a comment and rather walks away; he is regarded as disrespectful. This is in consonance with Agyekum's (2002, 2007) assertion that silence has both negative and positive effects. It is thus important for one to note when it is appropriate to use silence in a particular speech event or context to avoid social disharmony or other detrimental effects, and to maintain social equilibrium.

According to Agyekum (2007), "the expression *fikyiw* is used when one refuses to speak or employ any paralinguistic or extralinguistic features to show that he/she is mindful of an ongoing interaction" (p. 166). We observed that, in a speech event, the presence of a participant indicates that s/he is willing to take part verbally. Therefore, if one addressee is silent, it shows that there is a gap between him/her and the other participants. This silence can be perceived as impolite if it is extended. In cases where an addressee snubs a speaker to show his displeasure, the silence can intensify the conflict (Agyekum, 2007). An addressee who snubs a well-wisher displays arrogance, acrimony, and hostility. For instance, lack of response to greetings is generally perceived as impolite, and it is highly intolerable in all the communities investigated.

Snubbing shows disregard for a person's face wants, hence it is not applauded in any speech event. Among the Akans, for instance, the expression used in this situation is *watwi afa ne so*, which means that a person has rudely ignored his interlocutor. Similarly, Akman's (1994) opines that, if one snubs another, it is a statement that "I will not participate in order to show people that you are a laughing stock" (p. 213). Snubbing, in this case, is an act of Culpeper's (1996) negative impoliteness substrategy, *do not treat the other seriously*.

Any time a person snubs others in a speech event, it could also be a statement that 'I do not recognize your human presence'. The Akans put it this way, *wokasa no ho a, wɔmfii wo sɛ woyɛ nipa* 'when you talk to him/her, she does not regard you as a person' (see Agyekum, 2007). This suggests that he/she degrades the others. This also manifests Culpeper's (1996) negative impoliteness substrategy, *belittle the other*. A speech participant who often snubs other interlocutors to communicate some form of contempt is seen as impolite as another who does so verbally.

4. Results

As discussed in the preceding section, impoliteness is generally conceptualized as the manifestation of disrespect through certain communicative behaviours that are detrimental to society in all the communities investigated. These impolite communicative behaviours are similar across the various communities, however, their frequency of occurrence in the responses gathered may differ. This suggests that a communicative behaviour that may be mentioned and emphasized in many responses in a particular community as a manifestation of impoliteness may be given less attention in another community.

To begin with, the frequency of the identified impolite communicative behaviours across all the communities investigated will be displayed. The percentage of occurrence of these communicative behaviours will be presented and discussed after that. This will clearly point out the most or least offensive impolite communicative behaviour identified in each of the communities investigated.

4.1. Frequencies of the Impolite Communicative Behaviours in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho

This subsection presents a table to show the frequencies (Freq) of the responses that can be classified as communicative behaviours that are vehicles of impoliteness in the various communities investigated.

Table 1
Impolite Communicative Behaviours in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho

	Accra		**Kumasi**		**Ho**		**Total**	
Constituent	Freq	Percent %	Freq	Percent %	Freq	Percent %	Freq	Percent %
Invectives	19	35	16	31	19	33	54	33
Innuendos	9	17	14	27	12	21	35	22
Offensive NVCs	7	13	4	8	9	15	20	12
Interrupting others	8	15	7	14	8	14	23	14
Snubbing	11	20	10	20	10	17	31	19
Total	54	100	51	100	58	100	163	100

The results in Table 1 show the various communicative behaviours that the people in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho perceive to be impolite. From the responses gathered in each of the communities, it is clear that 19 (35%) in Accra, 16 (31%) in Kumasi, and 19 (33%) in Ho indicate that using *invectives* towards others is an act of impoliteness. The use of *innuendos* was identified in 9 (17%), 14 (27%), and 12 (21%) of the responses gathered in Accra, Kumasi, and Ho, respectively. 7 (13%) in Accra, 4 (8%) in Kumasi and 9 (15%) in Ho make it clear that the use of some *non-verbal forms of communication*, like greeting someone with the left hand, is offensive and thus, impolite. 8 (15%) of the responses in Accra, 7 (14%) in Kumasi, and 8 (14%) in Ho make it obvious that it is deemed impolite when one speaks out of turn (*interrupt*) in a conversation, especially with a group of elders or superiors. From the remaining responses, it is realized that, 11 (20%) in Accra, 10 (20%) in Kumasi, and 10 (17%) in Ho show that when you *snub* someone (refuse to respond to someone, who expects you to do so), it is an act of impoliteness.

It is obvious from Table 1 that, in all the commuinities investigated, impoliteness can be expressed through verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviours. The use of *invectives* and *innuendos*, and the act of *interrupting others* are often achieved with words. On the other hand, *offensive non-verbal acts* and *snubbing* can be used to express impoliteness without employing words.

4.2. Percentages of Communicative Behaviours that Express Impoliteness

Figures that show the percentages of the responses in each of the communities that can be labelled as impolite communicative behaviours are presented in this section.

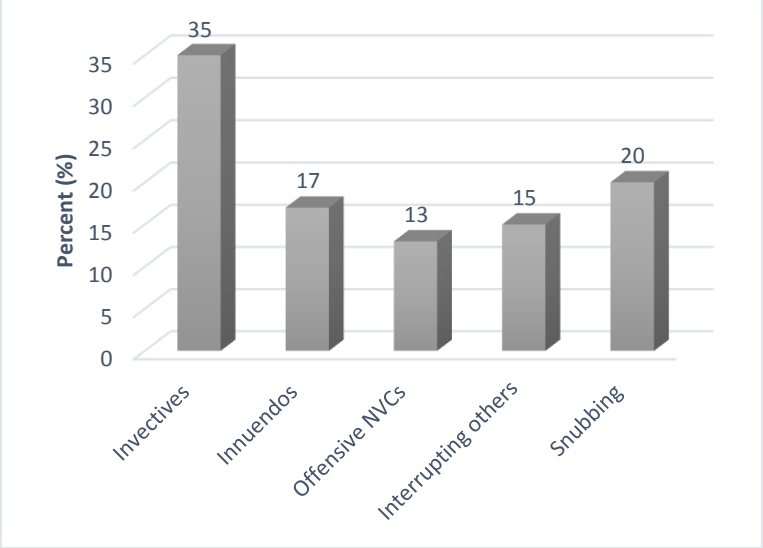


Figure 1
Impolite Communicative Behaviours in Accra

Figure 1 shows that, in Accra, the impolite communicative behaviour that was mostly mentioned is the use of *invectives*. This is followed by the act of *snubbing*. The third highest impolite communicative behaviour identified is the use of *innuendos*. The use of *offensive NVCs*, which is the communicative behaviour that has the least percentage of occurrences, is preceded by the act of *interruption.*

The distribution of the impolite communicative behaviours highlighted in the figure above indicates that the use of *invectives* is the highest recognised act of disrespect. Thus, in Accra, it may be the most offensive and unpardonable impolite act. The use of *offensive NVCs*, on the other hand, may be the least offensive and most pardonable impolite act. As shown in Figure 1, the act of *interrupting others* may also be more pardonable than the use of *innuendos.* The use of *innuendos* may in turn be more pardonable than *snubbing.*

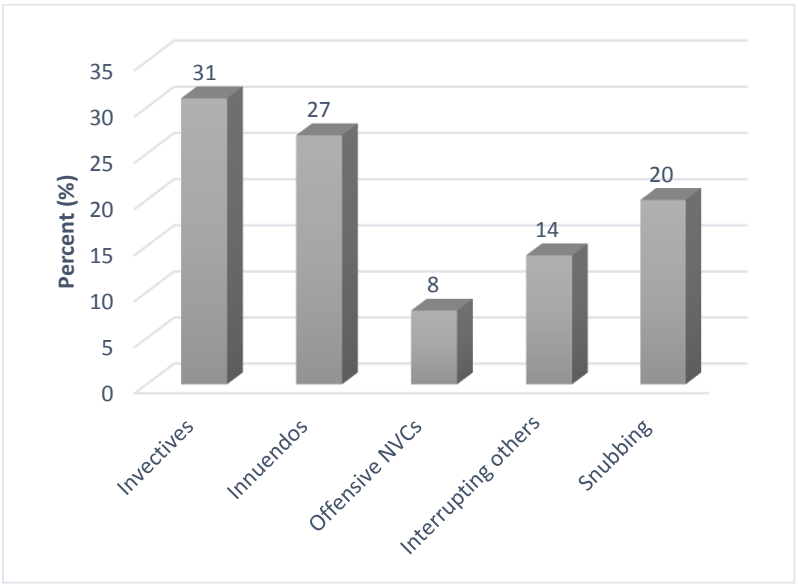


Figure 2
Impolite Communicative Behaviours in Kumasi

In Figure 2, it is shown that the use of *invectives*is the highest occurring impolite communicative behaviour in Kumasi, like in Accra. However, unlike in Accra, the second highest impolite communicative behaviour is the use of *innuendos.* This is rather followed by the act of *snubbing.* Just as the case is in Accra, *interrupting others* precedes the use of *offensive NVCs* as an identified impolite act in Kumasi.

Figure 2 suggests that, exactly as found in Accra, of all the identified impolite acts in Kumasi, the use of invectives is the most offensive and least pardonable communicative behaviour while the use of *offensive NVCs* is the least offensive and most pardonable. Sequentially, the act of *interrupting others* is more pardonable than *snubbing*, which is also more pardonable than the use of *innuendos*.

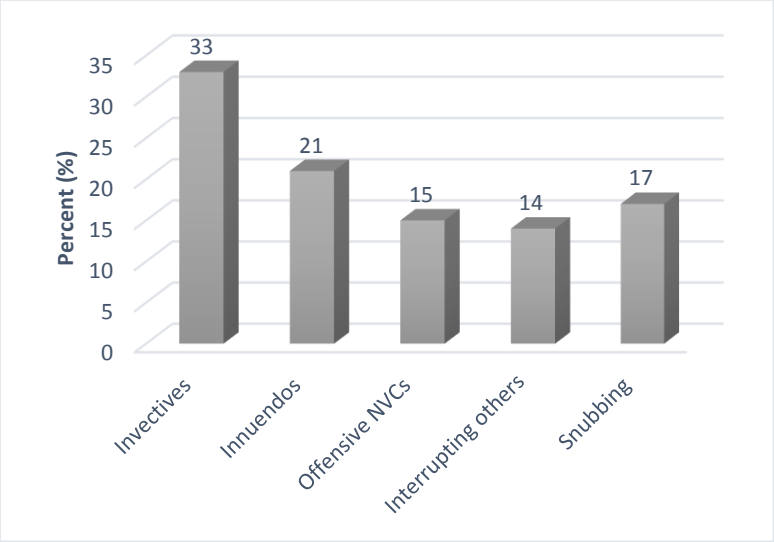


Figure 3
Impolite Communicative Behaviours in Ho

From Figure 3, it is clear that in Ho, the impolite communicative behaviour that was mentioned the most is the use of *invectives*, just as the case is in Accra and Kumasi. Like in Kumasi, in Ho, the second most mentioned impolite communicative behaviour is the use of *innuendos*. Again, as in Kumasi, the act of *snubbing* is the third most mentioned impolite communicative behaviour in Ho. The responses gathered in Ho depart from those in Accra and Kumasi. The act of *interrupting others* is the least mentioned communicative behaviour whereas *the use of offensive NVCs* is the fourth most mentioned communicative behaviour that signals disrespect.

Like Figures 1 and 2, Figure 3 hints that in Ho too, the use of *invectives* is the least unpardonable impolite communicative behaviour. However, here, the act of *interrupting others* is the least offensive and most pardonable communicative behaviour among all the others identified. As shown in the figure, this is closely followed by the use of *offensive NVCs.* It is also obvious that in Ho, the use of *innuendos* is more offensive and less pardonable than the act of *snubbing*.

Considering Figures 1, 2, and 3, the general abhorrence of the use of *invectives* by participants in a speech event including radio interactions cannot be overemphasized.

Figure 4 points out that, in all the three communities investigated, a speaker who really wants to communicate his contempt and antipathy towards others in a speech event will first opt for *invectives.* The speaker's second choice may be innuendos and he may also consider the act of snubbing over interruption. The use of *offensive NVCs* may be the speaker's last option to show his contempt. The use of *invectives* can be generally considered to be more offensive than the use of *offensive NVCs.*

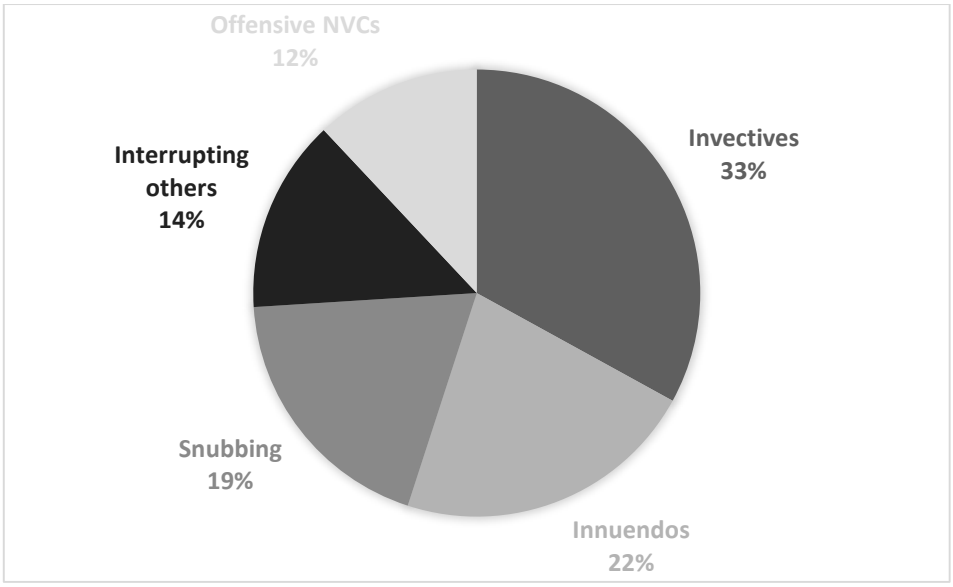


Figure 4
General Perception of Impoliteness

The deduction made from Figure 4 can be used to propose a scale I would like to call *'pardonability scale of impoliteness'*.

In this scale, the various communicative behaviours are labelled 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 starting from the communicative behaviour that may be considered as the least offensive and most pardonable to the communicative behaviour that may be considered as the most offensive/least pardonable. Figure 5 below, presents the '*pardonability scale of impoliteness'*.

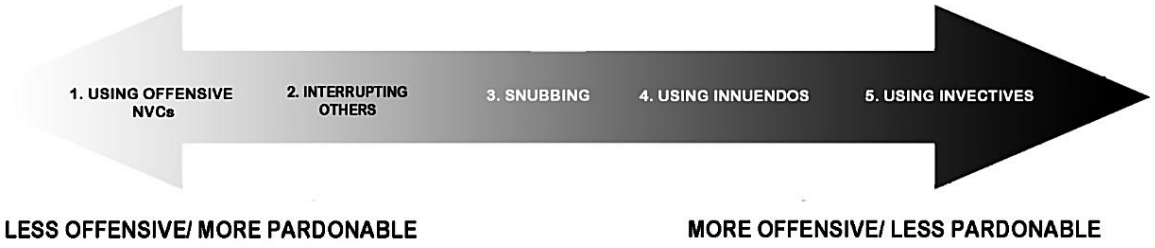


Figure 5
Pardonability Scale of Impoliteness

The degree of offensiveness or pardonability of the impolite communicative behaviours in relation to their order of arrangement as presented in the scale is not strictly tied to all interactions in a speech community. This is due to the fact that different speech participants have varying perceptions of the concept of impoliteness. Social disharmony can be caused, and interpersonal relationships can be destabilized based on how impoliteness is exploited by certain speech participants (see Watts, 2003).

Moreover, the degree of the offence caused by any of the impolite communicative behaviours shown in the scale may often be influenced by the audience around and the context at the time of its use. The degree of pardonability for any of these impolite communicative behaviours may also be determined to a large extent by the interpersonal relationship that exists

between the interlocutors at the time of the interaction.

5. Discussion

The study generally shows that among Ghanaians, impoliteness, is seen as an act of expressing *disrespect* through communicative behaviours such as the use of *invectives*, *innuendos*, *non-verbal communicative forms (NVCs)*, and the act of *interrupting*, and *snubbing*. These identified communicative behaviours highlight the fact that non-verbal communicative behaviours could be employed in addition to speech to express impoliteness. The use of any of these communicative behaviours that express impoliteness destabilizes interpersonal relationships and shows that a speech participant is uncouth and communicatively incompetent.

The study also reveals that among Ghanaians, the communicative behaviours that constitute impoliteness are similar. Nevertheless, the degree of offence a particular communicative behaviour relays as a vehicle of impoliteness may vary from community to community. This means that an impolite communicative behaviour that is regarded as highly offensive and unpardonable by members of one speech community may be regarded as less offensive and pardonableby members of another speech community.

The study further introduces the *'pardonability scale of impoliteness'* to indicate the least offensive and most pardonable impolite communicative behaviour on one hand, and the most offensive and least pardonable impolite communicative behaviour on the other hand, as gathered from the study. The degree of offensiveness or pardonability, according to the order of arrangement shown in the scale, is not strictly tied to all speech events.

The results of the foregoing discussion can help us conclude that, among Ghanaians, impoliteness is not simply an opposite of politeness. It is rather the manifestation of non-cooperation, disagreement, disapproval, and mutual antipathy through certain communicative behaviours that signal disrespect. The communicative behaviours which include the use of invectives, the act of snubbing and the use of offensive non-verbal forms of communication (NVCs) usually threaten the faces of one's interlocutors, most especially, those who are higher in terms of age or status. In a speech event, the elders and people in authority are deemed more respectable than one's coequals, as a result, speakers who express impoliteness towards them in any way rarely go unchastised.

Last but not least, the data for this study was gathered from Accra, Kumasi, and Ho. These settings represent a major section of Southern Ghana, and this implies that Northern Ghana has been excluded from this research. Future research on impoliteness can be conducted in any or all of the three regions in Northern Ghana.

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