

Impoliteness Strategies Used by White Males and Females toward the Black Staff in the *Hidden Figures* Movie

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research was done to find the types of impoliteness strategies used by the white characters in the *Hidden Figures* movie (Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth), and how the recipient of impoliteness, Katherine Johnson (a black character), responded to it. The main theory used is Culpeper's (1996, 2003) impoliteness strategy and Bousfield's (2008) responses to impoliteness. The findings revealed that not every impoliteness strategy was produced by the characters. The one strategy that was not produced is withhold politeness—because there were no such silent scenes in the movie. Besides withholding politeness, every type of impoliteness strategy was produced in the *Hidden Figures* movie. In addition, Katherine Johnson produced two types of responses to Al Harisson and Paul Stafford: accepting face attack and countering face attack. While responding to Vivian Mitchell and Ruth, Katherine Johnson only produced one type of response: accepting face attack. In conclusion, in this research impoliteness strategies and the responses were used in the *Hidden Figures* movie. In addition, impoliteness could occur due to job status and race factor.

Keywords: impoliteness, impoliteness strategies, race, responses, utterances

INTRODUCTION

Communication in our life is very important. In communication, people want to reach a goal to the addressee. Some people try to speak politely; therefore, they are very conscious of the words they use. They make an effort to speak courteously because they want to be taken seriously by other people. When people want to be respected, they must also act in a respectful manner (Gunawan, 2017). Sometimes people intentionally try to be rude to others especially when they are unaware that they have offended the addressee by saying or doing the wrong thing (Lucky, 2015). Being aware of what might be considered impolite in daily life is crucial because understanding impoliteness, and particularly its tactics, will help society as a whole.

Politeness and impoliteness research is linked to face. According to Birner (2013, p.201) “a person's face is an aspect of their self-image, particularly as they relate to other people.” People have a desire to be treated with respect when they engage with others. Understanding the concept of the face enables people to choose the appropriate words when speaking to others and avoid hurting others by choosing the incorrect term, regardless of whether it is appropriate to do so. People will be regarded by others if they speak politely (Gunawan, 2017). In communication, there are two types of face: positive and negative faces.

Impoliteness frequently occurs in our daily communications and interactions. According to Culpeper (2005, as cited in Culpeper, 2011) impoliteness develops when: “(1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)” (p.19). In this study, the writer wants to investigate impoliteness, which is crucial to the study of social interaction, since impoliteness links elements of social situations and linguistic forms. Culpeper (1996, as cited in Culpeper et al, 2003) and (2005) states that there are six types of impoliteness strategies, that is, bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock

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politeness, withhold politeness, and off record impoliteness. Besides impoliteness strategies, the writer also investigates its responses after receiving impolite utterances. There are two types of responses to impoliteness strategies, that is, accepting face attack and countering face attack. In addition, countering face attacks consist of offensive and defensive strategies (Bousfield, 2008).

In this study, the writer is interested in analyzing the impoliteness strategies in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The *Hidden Figures* movie itself tells the story which is based on a true story, depicts the American and Russian competition to launch the first man into orbit. The movie, which is set in a time of racial and gender injustice, depicts the forgotten tale of the accomplishments of the three women who helped rebuild national confidence in the 1960s (Haar, 2017).

The writer chose the four characters as the subject. The four characters in the movie that the writer wants to analyze are Al Harrison (a white male), Paul Stafford (a white male), Vivian Mitchell (a white female), and Ruth (a white female). In addition, the writer chose Katherine Johnson (a black staff) as the object because she is the main character in the *Hidden Figures* movie and Katherine Johnson also faces the main challenges in her workplace which is segregation and discrimination.

METHODS

To work on this study, the writer used a qualitative approach. The data were taken from the utterances of Katherine Johnson, Al Harisson, Paul Stafford (white males), Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth (white females) in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The first step of data collection was the writer watches a *Hidden Figures* movie on Disney + Hotstar. Then, the writer found the script of the movie on the internet. The writer wrote the number of scenes in the transcript.

In collecting the data, the writer made two data collections. The first table was to answer the first research question that analyzed the impoliteness strategies used by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford (white males), Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth (white females) toward Katherine Johnson (a black staff). Then, the second table was to answer the second research question that analyzed Katherine Johnson's utterances as her responses. For the first research question, the writer used a numbering system. The numbering system represented three parts: the number of scenes, the speaker, and the number of utterances. For the speaker, the writer used number one for Al Harisson, number two for Paul Stafford, number three for Vivian Mitchell, and number four for Ruth. For example, if the writer put 1.2.4, it means that the data was in scene one, the speaker was Paul Stafford, and that was his fourth utterance in scene one. For the second research question, the writer also used a three-digit numbering system. The first digit represents the number of the scene. The second digit represents Katherine Johnson's utterance to other characters. 5 represents Katherine Johnson's responses to Al Harisson, 6 represents Katherine Johnson's responses to Paul Stafford, 7 represents Katherine Johnson's responses to Vivian Mitchell, and 8 represents Katherine Johnson's responses to Ruth. The last digit represents the sequence number of Katherine Johnson's response to the characters in that scene. For example, when the writer put 1.5.6, it means that it was in the first scene and Katherine Johnson's responses to Al Harisson, and Katherine Johnson's sixth response in that scene.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study. It is divided into two sections: (1) impoliteness strategies used by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth to Katherine Johnson, (2) Katherine Johnson's responses to Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth.

Impoliteness Strategies Used by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth to Katherine Johnson

Table 4.1:
Summary of Impoliteness Strategies toward Katherine Johnson

Impoliteness Strategy Speaker	Bald on Record	Positive Impoliteness	Negative Impoliteness	Mock Politeness	Withhold Politeness	Off Record Impoliteness
Al Harisson	5	5	1	-	-	1
Paul Stafford	5	4	3	1	-	2
Vivian Mitchell	1	-	-	-	-	1
Ruth	3	-	2	-	-	2

Table 4.1 shows that Paul Stafford uses all types of impoliteness strategies except Withhold Politeness. Al Harisson uses four types of impoliteness strategies except Mock Politeness and Withhold Politeness. Vivian Mitchell uses only two types of impoliteness strategies: Bald on Record Impoliteness and Off Record Impoliteness. Ruth uses only three types of impoliteness strategies: Bald on Record Impoliteness, Negative Impoliteness and Off Record Impoliteness.

Bald On Record Impoliteness Done by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth

In the data, some of Al Harisson's, Paul Stafford's, Vivian Mitchell's, and Ruth's utterances to Katherine Johnson are considered as bald on record impoliteness. Below is one example of bald on record impoliteness from Al Harisson:

- **Utterance 7.1.2**
Al Harrison: Yeah... go. Yeah... go. Yes, you can go.

The context of Al Harisson's utterances to Katherine Johnson here is when Katherine Johnson, Ruth, Al Harrison, and Paul Stafford are in the Space Task Group Office. They hold a meeting. Al Harisson gives direction to Katherine Johnson about her job. It can be categorized as bald on record impoliteness because here, when Katherine asks "Can I go sir?", Al agrees directly and tells Katherine to go out. Al Harisson here attacks Katherine's face by intentionally telling her to go out. He also uses the gesture of his hands showing that he does not want to see Katherine Johnson anymore in that room. In addition, Al Harisson says his utterance twice "Yeah... go" indicates that he wants Katherine Johnson to get out of the room. Al Harisson is not happy at all with Katherine Johnson's presence in that room. This shows Al Harisson's Bald on Record impoliteness to Katherine Johnson since Al Harisson directly orders Katherine Johnson to get out of the room.

Positive Impoliteness Done by Al Harisson and Paul Stafford

In the data, some of Al Harisson's and Paul Stafford's utterances to Katherine Johnson are considered as positive impoliteness. Below is one example of positive impoliteness from Paul Stafford:

- **Utterance 13.2.2**
Paul Stafford : How did you know that? How did you know the redstone could not support orbital night? That's classified information. It's top secret.

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The context of Paul Stafford's utterances to Katherine Johnson here is when Paul Stafford, Katherine Johnson, and Al Harisson are in the office. Paul Stafford drops some paper at Katherine Johnson's desk. Paul Stafford debates Katherine Johnson's job. Paul Stafford's utterances here are considered as positive impoliteness because here, Paul Stafford makes Katherine Johnson feel uncomfortable because the data is classified information. Paul Stafford makes Katherine Johnson feel awful because from his words, it seems that Paul Stafford suspects her for bad things. The way he says that the data is a secret, looks like Paul Stafford put a distrust in her. Therefore, Paul Stafford does not believe that Katherine Johnson can do the calculation. Thus, Paul Stafford's words here as positive impoliteness because he shows his seeking disagreement to Katherine Johnson's work.

Negative Impoliteness Done by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford and Ruth

In the data, some of Al Harisson's, Paul Stafford's, and Ruth's utterances to Katherine Johnson is considered as negative impoliteness. Below is one example of negative impoliteness from Ruth:

- **Utterance 7.4.4**

Ruth : Sorry, I have no idea where your bathroom is.

The context of Ruth's utterances to Katherine Johnson here is when Katherine Johnson, Ruth, Al Harrison, and Paul Stafford are in the Space Task Group Office. They hold a meeting. In the meeting, Katherine Johnson asks Ruth about the bathroom. Ruth's utterances here to Katherine Johnson are classified as negative impoliteness because here, Ruth associates Katherine with a negative aspect. It can be seen that Ruth uses personal pronouns to Katherine, the use of 'your' here shows that Katherine has a different bathroom from the whites and Ruth does not care about it at all.

Sarcasm and Mock Politeness Done by Paul Stafford

In the data below, one of Paul Stafford's utterances to Katherine Johnson is classified as mock politeness.

- **Utterance 13.2.1**

Paul Stafford : Those numbers have already been confirmed by two engineers in this department and myself. This is more or less a dummy check.

The context of Paul Stafford's utterances to Katherine Johnson here is when Paul Stafford, Katherine Johnson, and Al Harisson are in the office. Paul Stafford drops some paper at Katherine Johnson's desk. Paul Stafford asks Katherine Johnson to do some job. Paul Stafford's utterances here are considered as mock politeness because his words here are quite opposite from reality. Here, the intention of Paul Stafford to Katherine Johnson is to make her do the job. Here, Paul Stafford claims that the calculation conducted by Katherine Johnson turns up nothing. This is confirmed by his statement regarding accurate calculations by two engineers and himself. He says that Katherine Johnson's data check does not help at all because Paul Stafford and two other engineers can also check the data. However, the data that Katherine Johnson should check is not simple or it is not a dummy check at all.

Withhold Politeness not Done by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth

Withholding politeness is not done by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth to Katherine Johnson in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The writer cannot find withhold politeness in the *Hidden Figures* movie because instead of being sarcastic they often attack Katherine Johnson directly with impolite utterances. Besides, it is because Katherine Johnson is an African-American woman and a new black employee in the office. So, as superiors they feel they have more power and deserve to obviously humiliate Katherine Johnson.

Off Record Impoliteness Done by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth

In the data, some of Al Harisson's, Paul Stafford's, Vivian Mitchell's, and Ruth's utterances to Katherine Johnson are considered as off record impoliteness. Below is one example of off record impoliteness from Vivian Mitchell:

- **Utterance 6.3.1**

Vivian Mitchell : Skirts must be worn past the knee. Sweaters are preferred to blouses. No jewelry. A simple pearl necklace is the exception. Your supervisor is Mr. Al Harisson, Director of the Space Task Group. You'll write research, proof calculations, so forth. Do not talk to Mr. Harrison unless he talks to you. Not many computers last more than a few days. He's been through a dozen in as many months. Come on, keep up. Things move fast around here. Your clearance. They've never had a color in here before, Katherine. Don't embarrass me.

The context of Vivian Mitchell's utterances to Katherine Johnson here is when several pilots are present in the aircraft engine test room together with Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, Vivian Mitchell, and Dorothy Vaughan. Vivian Mitchell's utterances to Katherine Johnson here are classified as off record impoliteness because Vivian Mitchell does not say directly that Katherine Johnson is unworthy to work there. Vivian Mitchell previously says that "They've never had a color in here before, Katherine". It means that they never have black colored employees there. So, Vivian Mitchell implies that actually Katherine Johnson is not feasible to be there.

Katherine Johnson's Responses to Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth

Table 4.2:
Summary of Katherine's Responses

Responses to Impoliteness Speaker	Accepting Face Attack	Countering Face Attack	
		Offensive Strategy	Defensive Strategy
Al Harisson	2	3	8
Paul Stafford	3	1	12
Vivian	1	-	-
Ruth	2	-	-

Table 4.2 shows that Al Harisson and Paul Stafford use all types of responses to impoliteness: Accepting Face Attack and Countering Face Attack (Offensive and Defensive Strategies). Meanwhile, Vivian Mitchell and Ruth use only one type of response to impoliteness: Accepting Face Attack.

Accepting Face Attack Done by Katherine Johnson to Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth

In the data, some of Katherine Johnson's responses to impoliteness from Al Harisson, Paul Stafford, Vivian Mitchell, and Ruth are classified as accepting face attack. Below is one example of Katherine Johnson's responses to Al Harisson:

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- **Utterance 7.5.7**
Katherine Johnson : Yes, Sir.

The context of Katherine Johnson's utterances here to Al Harisson is when Katherine Johnson, Ruth, Al Harrison, and Paul Stafford are in the Space Task Group Office. They hold a meeting. Al Harisson gives direction to Katherine Johnson about her job. Here, Katherine Johnson's utterances are classified as accepting face attack because Katherine Johnson takes responsibility for the impolite act. In this case, Katherine Johnson takes responsibility through the task that Al Harisson gives to her. Since Katherine Johnson is new to the team at that time, she does not have any encouragement to refuse Al Harisson's request even though it is hard as well for her. Therefore, she just accepts what Al Harisson requests her.

Countering Face Attack

The second type that is used by Al Harisson and Paul Staffordis is countering face attack. In addition, there are two types of countering face attack: offensive and defensive strategies in the context of Katherine Johnson's utterances to Al Harisson and Paul Stafford.

Offensive Strategy Done by Katherine Johnson to Al Harisson and Paul Stafford

In the data, some of Katherine Johnson's responses to impoliteness from Al Harisson and Paul Stafford are classified as offensive strategy. Below is one example of Katherine Johnson's responses to Paul Stafford:

- **Utterance 24.6.1**
Katherine Johnson : So the capsule will spin around the Earth forever because there's nothing to slow it down?

The context of Katherine Johnson's utterances to Paul Stafford here is when Paul Stafford is talking to some people on the NASA ground. Not long after that, Katherine Johnson comes there. Here, Katherine Johnson's utterances are classified as offensive strategy because she is trying to make sure about what Paul Stafford just says to her. In this context, Katherine Johnson attacks Paul Stafford's face back with her question. From her words, it indicates that she is asking Paul Stafford's question about the capsule. Katherine Johnson is asking for clarification to Paul Stafford because she thinks that it does not make sense to let the capsule keep spinning around.

Defensive Strategy Done by Katherine Johnson to Al Harisson and Paul Stafford

In the data below, some of Katherine Johnson's responses to impoliteness from Al Harisson and Paul Stafford are classified as defensive strategy. Below is one example of Katherine Johnson's responses to Al Harisson:

- **Utterance 7.5.3**
Katherine Johnson : Both. Geometry and speaking.

The context of Katherine Johnson's utterances to Al Harisson here is when Katherine Johnson, Ruth, Al Harrison, and Paul Stafford are in the Space Task Group Office. They hold a meeting. Ruth says to Al Harisson about Katherine. In this context, Katherine Johnson previously answers Al Harisson's question. However, his question is not categorized as impolite. Here, Katherine Johnson's utterances are classified as defensive strategy because Katherine Johnson counters face attack by defending her own face to avoid the face attack that Al Harisson does to her. Katherine Johnson in this case, is opposing Al Harisson's face by answering that the ability she has is that she can do both geometry and speaking. Even though Al Harisson is asking Ruth, Katherine Johnson is the one who answers because the question is about her. Al Harisson is asking whether Katherine Johnson can speak or not. Katherine

Johnson cuts Al Harisson's question and does not let Ruth answer Al Harisson's question. This is because the question that Al Harisson gave to Ruth is about Katherine Johnson, so the one who should answer it is Katherine Johnson, not Ruth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the writer found six types of impoliteness strategies used by Al Harisson, Paul Stafford (white males), Vivian Mitchell and Ruth (white females) toward Katherine Johnson (a black staff) in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The six types of impoliteness strategies are: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, withhold politeness, and off record impoliteness. When they communicated with Katherine Johnson, the writer found that not all types of impoliteness strategies were used. From all the types of impoliteness strategies, withhold politeness was not used by the characters in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The most produced impoliteness strategy by the characters in the *Hidden Figures* was bald on record impoliteness and off record impoliteness. Besides the impoliteness strategies used by the characters to Katherine Johnson in the *Hidden Figures* movie, the writer also found that Katherine Johnson, as the recipient of the impoliteness, gave some responses by using all types of responses: accepting face attack and countering face attack. Katherine Johnson used two types of countering the face attack: offensive and defensive strategies. In addition, physical responses such as gestures, body movement, facial expressions, and silence were also included.

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