

IMPOLITENESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF OFFENDING SITUATIONS IN FACEBOOK INTERACTIONS IN KENYA

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Abstract

Research demonstrates that impoliteness does not just happen in normal circumstances. What triggers the onset of an impolite utterance is any perceived aggressive antecedent occurrence which provokes, threatens or damages the face of the addressee. These perceived aggressive antecedent occurrences are referred to as offending situations, and, according to Jay (1992, 2000), they have salient features. This study, therefore, sought to determine the offending situations evident in Facebook interactions and their salient features. The study was qualitative in nature. It used two qualitative approaches: observational studies and textual analysis. The study employed purposive sampling to select eleven Facebook posts for analysis. Bousfield's (2007) model of impoliteness was used to determine the salient features of the offending situations. Our findings indicate that offending situations on Facebook include childish remarks, gender-biased remarks, anonymity-motivated derogatory remarks, body-shaming remarks, ethnic-laced remarks, presumptuous remarks, inflammatory remarks, aggravating remarks, self-reproachful remarks, vulgar language and unsolicited posts/comments. Our study also found support for Bousfield's (2007) proposed salient features of offending situations, namely age, sex, status, behaviour, social-physical setting, language, ethnic group, damage, physical appearance, intentionality and self as the wrongdoer.

Keywords: impoliteness, salient features, face, attack, offending situation, self-image, social identity

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines offensive situations on Facebook in Kenya. In the context of impoliteness studies, an offending situation is a comment (linguistic) or behaviour (non-linguistic) that evokes anger in an addressee, prompting him to react impolitely or aggressively (Bousfield 2007: 2191). For instance, an aggravating comment can make one angry, forcing them to respond rudely; thus, it constitutes an offensive situation. In this study, a Facebook post or comment can serve as an offending situation. Example (1) constitutes an offending situation on Facebook.

- (1) (i) Speaker A: *I see illiteracy in you. DP [Deputy President] is not an MP [Member of Parliament]. He is representing Kenyans, not a constituency, county or ward.*
(ii) Speaker B: *Sometimes when you comment and blog, you comment like a mad person.*

In Utterance (i), Speaker A implies that his addressee is illiterate because he perceives that the latter does not know the difference between a Deputy President and a Member of Parliament. This is an attack on his addressee's competence, amounting to impoliteness. Thus, the statement *I see illiteracy in you* is meant to offend the addressee or evoke anger in him, thereby constituting an offensive situation. In Utterance (ii), Speaker B tells his addressee that he comments like a stupid person. This is an attack on the latter's personality amounting to impoliteness. The statement *You comment like a stupid person* is meant to offend the interlocutor, thereby creating an offensive situation.

Behaviour (non-linguistic) can also evoke anger, but this paper only focuses on linguistic offending situations. Offending situations are completely context-dependent. Further, they attract impolite responses from interlocutors; thus, they are phenomena of interest to pragmatic scholars and accounts of aggression and conflict (Bousfield 2007: 2191). Culpeper et al. (2003: 1547) postulate that impoliteness does not just occur in normal circumstances; it is characterised by a context that must have been kindled in the previous utterances. Bousfield and Culpeper (2008: 162) demonstrate that impoliteness characterises all forms of interaction and, as Locher (2010: 3) puts it, online interaction is not an exception. Culpeper et al. (2003: 1547) noted that episodes in which impoliteness occurs revolve around an initial confrontation or dispute. Impoliteness is precipitated by what is apprehended to be a threat to the impolite interlocutor's face (Corsaro & Rizzo 1990: 26).

Jay (1992) set out to determine the characteristics of these offending situations and termed them as salient features of offending events. For instance, a childish comment (offending situation) is age-related; thus, age is a salient feature of this offending situation. According to Jay (1992: 98), salient features are categorised into two main groups: those that are related to the offender (age, sex, social physical setting, status, ethnic group, physical appearance, intentionality, damage, self as the wrongdoer, non-human wrongdoer) and those that are related to the event (behaviour, language). These features are regarded as salient because they are the most noticeable.

Bousfield's (2007) model of impoliteness was used to determine the salient features of offending situations on Facebook. According to Bousfield (2007: 2185), the impoliteness procedure has three stages: The initial stage (the pre-impoliteness stage) establishes the abasement event by encouraging the expression of impolite beliefs. The second one (the impoliteness stage) encompasses any reaction to that particular abasement event, and the third stage (the post-politeness stage) marks the end of the impoliteness process.

The development of each stage of impoliteness is realised by the use of certain strategies to accomplish the impoliteness process. The pre-impoliteness stage is characterised by a phenomenon perceived as triggering impoliteness. The impolite interlocutor must have felt adequately provoked at a particular point before delivering the impoliteness. This trigger is what is referred to as an offending

situation. According to Bousfield (2007: 2190), offending situations are characterised by salient features such as language, age, sex, status, behaviour, intentionality, damage, self as the wrongdoer, non-human wrongdoer, social and physical status, ethnic group and physical appearance.

At the impoliteness stage, the utterance of impoliteness occurs as a result of what transpires in the pre-impoliteness stage. Culpeper's (1996) model was used to develop this stage. The strategies that characterise the impoliteness stage include bald-on-record impoliteness strategies, actualised when the addressee's face is attacked directly, briefly and in an unambiguous way; and positive impoliteness strategies, realised when the addressee's positive face desire is damaged. This positive face want refers to the addressee's desire to be accepted or appreciated. Negative impoliteness strategies are intended to damage the addressee's negative face wants. This refers to their desire to be free from imposition. An off-record impoliteness strategy, the face-threatening act, is realised as an implicature, the withholding of politeness strategies, or the failure of an individual to be polite when politeness is expected or hoped for. This can be realised when an individual maintains silence or fails to thank the other (Bousfield 2007: 2195).

The post-impoliteness stage marks the end of the impoliteness process or the conflict. It uses Vuchinic's (1990) conflict termination model. According to the author, there are five types of conflict termination strategies: submission to opponent, referring to a situation where one of the participants gives up and takes the opponents side or position; dominant third party intervention whereby the impolite exchange is brought to an end by a third party; compromise, when interactants discuss each other's position; stand-off, when the participants change the topic of discussion; or withdrawal, when one of the participants departs or stands down (Bousfield 2007: 2202).

2. IMPOLITENESS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Culpeper (1996) is a proponent of impoliteness theory, which is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. According to Culpeper (1996), little scholarly work has been done on communicative approaches that are inclined to attack one's addressee and to bring about disharmony. These approaches are inclined to attack the face, which is regarded as an emotionally sensitive notion of self (349-350). Impoliteness is not a marginal phenomenon but a prevalent one in so many discourses. In this regard, Bousfield (2008: 1) comments thus:

We must recognise that there are discourses in which conflictive illocutions are not marginal human phenomena. As non-marginal human phenomena within certain types of discourse, the concepts of conflictive illocutions (in general) and impoliteness (in particular) within interaction are therefore worthy of study, critical considerations and research.

If impoliteness is considered more broadly, it has been approached from different disciplines. In communication studies, we come across hostile interpersonal communication; in sociology, the term verbal abuse has been used; in social psychology, we encounter verbal aggression; in history, the term rudeness is synonymous with impoliteness; and, lastly, in conflict studies, we find verbal conflict (Culpeper & Hardaker 2017: 200). Impoliteness has also been investigated alongside incivility in online political discussions on the Washington Post Facebook page albeit from a political science perspective (Rowe 2015: 131).

Locher (2010: 3) postulates that impoliteness is part and parcel of any interaction. As a new field of study, and a fast-growing one, impoliteness has not yet attained the stability that comes with consensus on key issues. Despite this lack of consensus, interesting new approaches are emerging, for example, forensic pragmatics and cyberpragmatics (Culpeper & Hardaker 2017: 220). The internet, as a medium of communication, has afforded its users a high degree of anonymity, which has occasioned uninhibited, uncivil communicative behaviour (Rowe 2015: 131).

Research on impoliteness has gained momentum in recent times. According to Sinkeviciute (2015: 317), impoliteness “has now become one of the most researched topics in the 21st Century”. Culpeper & Hardaker (2017: 199) also comment that “The field of linguistic impoliteness developed first in a rather fitful fashion, then gathered pace in the mid-1990s, but only really took off around 2008”. It has indeed been noted that little has been done on impoliteness issues on the internet (Locher 2010: 3). Since impoliteness is a human linguistic phenomenon that is non-marginal, characterising particular kinds of discourse, it is worth critical consideration (Bousfield 2008: 1). In relation to researching impoliteness on reality television discourse Sinkeviciute (2017: 200) reiterated the need to explore reasons behind impoliteness in other contexts and discourses.

In light of (im)politeness issues in online interaction, Locher (2010: 3) postulates that studies have brought to light the fact that more recent developments that characterise politeness research have seldom been transferred to the study and analysis of online communication. Thus, the author advocates further research on online interaction, opining that aspects of negotiation of face and identity construction have been linked to politeness considerations and warrant further inquiry.

Locher (2010: 3-4) discusses three reasons why it is timely to focus on (im)politeness in online communication. First, new research trends address what appropriateness entails and norms regarding (im)politeness. As a result, online communication is considered an interesting field of study, as linguists can access written records of the negotiation of norms by interactants and witness public discussions of violations of expectations. Studies on these negotiations will go a long way toward furthering our understanding of what (im)politeness is all about in a particular practice and which aspects might be useful for examining it. Second, perceptions of (im)politeness are no longer limited to the scholarly work on

mitigation strategies; the scope of interpersonal negotiation is ripe for linguistic examination. It is significant to examine how interactants negotiate interpersonal issues regarding (im)politeness in virtual communication and how it relates to the negotiation of face and identity construction. Third, taking into account the medium and social factors, it is relevant to determine how online interaction differs from face-to-face interaction with respect to the restrictions imposed by the medium on face work and the effects of these restrictions on interactants' linguistic choices. Moreover, it will be of interest to study how, and to what extent, people exploit these medium restrictions to achieve their goals.

Following Locher's (2010: 3) observation that recent studies in computer-mediated communication have brought to light the fact that more recent developments which characterise (im)politeness research have seldom been transferred to the study and analysis of online communication, this study sought to apply Bousfield's (2007) model of impoliteness, which is the latest development in (im)politeness research. This will add to the nascent literature on online interactions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Nature of the data

A corpus of data was compiled from utterances coded in words. Kenya being a multilingual country, Facebook posts and comments were expected to be in English, Kiswahili, Kikuyu, and other languages. These utterances occurred naturally among participants and served as the primary data for the present study. Since impoliteness studies analyse chunks of language larger than words, they ignore single words and phrases and focus on entire conversations. According to Chapman (2011: 140), impoliteness theory considers the context of interaction, since there are instances in which the combination of context and the communicative act amounts to impoliteness. This aligns with the impoliteness theory, which focuses on arguments and other forms of conflict: how they are initiated, how they progress, and, potentially, how they are resolved. Thus, the data used in impoliteness studies must go beyond a single turn of conversation to cover longer stretches of naturally occurring conversation. The present study analyses extracts from 11 posts. The number of posts was determined by the number of salient features as posited by Bousfield (2007).

3.2 Research design

This study is qualitative in nature, as it is interested in linguistic behaviour in a natural setting. Our research used three qualitative strategies: observational studies, textual analysis of posts, and comments. Concerning observational studies, we studied interactions on Facebook as people went about their daily lives online, without us participating or interfering. According to Bryant (2015: 5), the observation method enables a researcher to capture and understand the context of

interaction, and, since this is crucial in this study, the method proved useful. Kawulich (2012: 2) says that the observation method is instrumental in collecting data about people. It is a primary tool used to document what is happening in a particular setting with respect to individual behaviours. This approach provided us with a set of lenses and a methodological toolkit that were useful for making observations and for enabling empirical interpretation of the results. Specifically, we employed the covert observation method, in which the people being observed are unaware they are being observed. This toolkit is the most appropriate since participants' knowledge of being observed would encourage them to act differently or change their actions (Kawulich 2012: 3). Thus, we keenly observed impolite linguistic patterns on Facebook, produced by interactants consciously or unconsciously, to come up with reliable results. The main goal of this approach was to identify patterns demonstrably present in a discourse that may elude a casual observer or the discourse participants themselves. Another advantage of the observation method, according to Bryant (2015: 5), is that it enables a researcher to see things that regularly escape the participants' awareness. The study investigated interactants' linguistic choices on Facebook regarding impoliteness. These choices were not only conditioned by linguistic considerations but also by context.

Concerning textual or content analysis of posts and comments, we interpreted and analysed impolite utterances that constituted impolite texts on Facebook in terms of how words were used in the context in which they were used. Textual analysis entails choosing the types of texts, acquiring appropriate ones and determining the approach to use to analyse them (Botan et al. 1999: 5). Specifically, content analysis was crucial in this study since it was used to identify and analyse occurrences of particular messages and characteristics of messages embedded in texts (Botan et al. 1999: 3). This method allowed us to analyse data inductively and establish links between the objectives and summary findings generated from the raw data.

3.3 Data collection procedure

We employed purposive sampling to seek information-rich cases of impoliteness guided by Bousfield's (2007) model. As frequent Facebook users, we identified impolite posts and comments and noted them down in their original languages. Those encoded in Kiswahili and various mother tongues were noted down and later translated into English. The posts in languages we were not conversant in were translated by colleagues who were. The sampling of data was not done randomly since random selection of data sacrifices context, a crucial element in the interpretation and analysis of the data in this study. We only sampled impolite conversations initiated by our friends' posts and three Facebook pages. Data were classified and analysed using Bousfield's (2007) theoretical model of impoliteness. This model was used to identify the salient features evident in offending situations on Facebook in Kenya.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section discusses cases of impolite language use observed by the researchers from offending situations drawn from 11 Facebook posts. The impolite language use revolves around Facebook interactants' remarks that are childish, gender-biased, anonymity-motivated, presumptuous, ethnic-laced, body-shaming, inflammatory, aggravating, self-reproaching, vulgar, or unsolicited.

4.1 Childish remarks

A childish remark seems to evoke anger in addressees. It is a statement or comment that lacks thoughtfulness, maturity or emotional restraint. Age is the predominant salient feature in this remark. Age refers to a child, teenager, adult or an elder. For instance, an adult who behaves like a child can offend people, thereby prompting an impolite response (Bousfield 2007: 2191). This feature is clearly evident in Extract 1 below.

Extract 1 (from Post 1):

- (2) (i) Speaker A: *Tanga Tanga burnt Gikomba market so that they can sustain their fake narrative against Uhuru. Gikomba is a Kikuyu stronghold. [They] set up Uhuru by hitting where it hurts most. We know these tricks.*
- (ii) Speaker J: *Jinga hii Munge mwana wa ngati. Wasted sperms.* (You are stupid Munge son of Ngati. You are wasted sperm)
- (iii) Speaker A: *Can you be creative for once [?]. Just a little bit*
- (iv) Speaker J: *With your nonsense. Do you know how people are feeling alafu unapost ujinga?* (With all this nonsense, do you know how people feel and you are still posting nonsense?)
- (v) Speaker A: *That's better. Keep practising draining the septic from your head. You will actually improve your quality of life; otherwise, matusi nimeshazoea* (That's better. Keep practising draining the septic from your head. You will actually improve your quality of life; otherwise, I am used to insults)
- (vi) Speaker J: *Idiot. Nuguu. Enda kabisa na Uhuru wako. Continue behaving that way...utajua hujui* (You are an idiot. Monkey! Go away with your Uhuru. Continue behaving that way. You'll know you don't know)
- (vii) Speaker A: *Have a lovely night*
- (viii) Speaker J: *Utige waana wakiongo* (Mature up)

In this extract, Speaker J regards Speaker A's post as childish. He is therefore offended by Speaker A's childishness, prompting him to react by insulting him and advising him to mature. We, the researchers, follow Speaker A on Facebook, and we know he is an adult, a father and a husband. He is fond of posting childish posts to infuriate his political opponents.

4.2 Gender-biased remarks

A gender-biased remark refers to a joke, statement or everyday comment that treats people differently, makes presumptions about their abilities or reinforces stereotypes regarding gender. The main salient feature here is sex. This refers to the sex of the addresser or addressee (male or female), especially in relation to insulting and swearing behaviours (Bousfield 2007: 2191). This is evident in the next post.

Extract 2 (from Post 2):

- (3) (i) Speaker A: *If she admits she's wrong, apologizes and agrees to change her ways. Dump her cause that might be a man. Women don't do that.* (If she admits she's wrong, apologises and agrees to change her ways, dump her because that might be a man. Women don't do that.)
(ii) Speaker B: *Nkt*
(iii) Speaker A: Are you busy here disputing [refuting]?
(iv) Speaker B: But of course,

Speaker A seems to be having a problem with women. In his post, he suggests that women can never apologise, and if one does, she ceases to be a woman. This gets him in trouble with one of his female interlocutors, Speaker B. The latter expresses her anger through the expression *nkt*- an expression used to express anger on social media. This signifies that she is offended by Speaker A's (a man) comments about women.

4.3 Anonymity-motivated derogatory remarks

A derogatory remark is a disrespectful, insulting or demeaning statement that expresses a low opinion or lower reputation of a thing, person or group. Some derogatory remarks are motivated by a particular environment. The main salient feature is the social physical setting. It refers to relatives/strangers, private/public, relaxed/business, and homogenous/mixed groupings. In a situation where people are closely related, impoliteness can be highly sanctioned, and the converse is also true (Bousfield 2007: 2191). This explains why a lot of impoliteness characterises social media, as people are not related or close, either socially or physically. This claim is supported by Hardaker (2012: 71), who argues that interactants are more predisposed to aggressive behaviour or conflict when communicating online. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is primarily designed and managed with aggression and conflict in mind. CMC allows users to behave unpleasantly without facing the consequences. She claims that computer-mediated communication is characterised by higher levels of aggression or impoliteness than other forms of communication, such as face-to-face interaction. This situation is facilitated by several factors, such as the anonymity that characterises CMC, combined with socially, psychologically, and linguistically distancing effects. She further claims that CMC offers a degree of anonymity that may encourage aggression, manipulation, and deception due to loss of empathy

with the absent recipient and a sense of impunity. People from all walks of life use Facebook, and one can have several followers, or “friends”, without meeting them in person. The so-called “friends” are not real friends, but the term is used to refer to anyone who has decided to follow one's Facebook page. Total strangers can be ‘friends’ on Facebook, which is why so much impoliteness characterises this platform. Most interactants do not know each other in person, and thus one can say anything just to hurt the other. In a nutshell, the Facebook environment facilitates impoliteness.

Extract 3 (from Post 3):

- (4) (i) Speaker A: *Ati next time DP atakuwa anapeana pads. Good morning* (I hear the DP will be dishing out pads next time. Good morning)
 (ii) Speaker E: *Your wife will benefit. Seems you can afford nothing, ur bricking brains* (Your wife will benefit. It seems you can afford nothing but brick-size brain)
 (iii) Speaker H: *And the women in your family will be the biggest beneficiaries*
 (iv) Speaker A: *No. We don't want poisoned pads in our family*

Speaker A (a man) posted this message intending to malign the Deputy President—a male politician. The post was aimed at demeaning him because it is very rare in Kenya for a male politician to campaign for a political seat by dishing out sanitary towels, something associated with female politicians, to woo female voters. The researchers in this study are followers of Speaker A and, hence, know that the people who responded to this post were his Facebook or online ‘friends’. Speakers E and H had the guts to insult the women in Speaker A’s life, since they are not socially or physically close to him, which offended him and forced him to respond. This is the case since the Facebook environment allows them to go to that extent. Speaker E responded to the post with an offensive statement: *Your wife will benefit. It seems you can afford nothing but a brick-sized brain*. And Speaker H told Speaker A: *And the women in your family will be the biggest beneficiaries*. The two utterances are impolite because they attack the women in Speaker A's life, implying that they benefit only from free things. These impolite utterances prompted Speaker A to respond.

4.4 Presumptuous remarks

A presumptuous remark is a comment that makes an unwarranted assumption, oversteps social boundaries or takes liberties without the authority or right to do so. For instance, an interlocutor may feel qualified to make assumptions about matters with which he is not conversant, e.g., the judiciary, the constitution, etc. Status is the salient feature predominant in this offending situation. Status refers to a perceived economic or social status such as being poor or rich, being highly educated, being an employee or an employer, etc. These statuses also influence the way one responds to an impolite utterance (Bousfield, 2007: 2191).

Extract 4 (from Post 4):

- (5) (i) Speaker A: Radical surgery of the judiciary is the only way out#sanitize judiciary
 (ii) Speaker B: *Good morning? Si kwanza ukunywe chai jamaa ama ni thufu? Wambe uhurane na hangovers cia keg?* (Good morning? Young man, why don't you take tea first, or is it soup? Drink soup or tea to deal with the alcoholic hangover)
 (iii) Speaker A: *Kwanza nimewekelea chaps na gafirifiri kwa umbali nikingoja kaive niweze ku deal na huyu Ruto wenyu vizuri* (In fact, I have chapati and pepper on standby as I wait for it to cook so that I can deal with your Ruto very well)
 (iv) Speaker B: *Tuma video niamini* (Send a video so that I can believe your claims)

Speaker A is a newspaper vendor who wakes up very early to post controversial items. On this particular day, he suggested in his post that the judiciary needed reforms and that some people had to go home to bring sanity to the arm of government. At the time, the Chief Justice (CJ) had fallen out with the president and seemed to support his political opponent. This post was an attack on the CJ, as the Speaker blamed him for failing to curb corruption in the judiciary and called for his ouster. However, Speaker B was not impressed at all. He greeted Speaker A first and then asked a sarcastic question: *Young man, why don't you take tea first, or is it soup? Drink soup or tea to deal with the alcoholic hangover*. This indicates that he was offended by Speaker A's post. This is a cutting remark, since Speaker A is a butcher, and it seems Speaker B is reminding him of that by asking whether butchers take tea or soup for breakfast. He seems to suggest that politics is beyond Speaker A's pay grade. The latter goes on to advise him to take tea or soup, whichever suits him. Speaker A is forced to respond sarcastically, a good indicator that he was offended by Speaker B's comments. In short, Speaker B gets offended by the fact that a newspaper vendor, a person considered illiterate in the Kenyan context, comments negatively on the judiciary, and that is why he is reminding him of his status, insinuating that he is not qualified to make such comments. The latter seems to be doing well in life, as evidenced by his Facebook photos, a fact that might have influenced him to make such derisive remarks.

4.5 Ethnic-laced remarks

An ethnic-laced remark refers to a derogatory term, a negative statement or a stereotype that targets an individual or a group based on their ethnicity, race or nationality. The salient feature in this offending situation is the ethnic group. This refers to minority/race or assumed origin as an element that is used to choose an expression when the offender provokes the Speaker (Bousfield, 2007: 2191). Kenya is characterised by ethnic divisions, which are heightened especially during the electioneering period.

Extract 5 (from Post 5):

- (6) (i) Speaker A: *When we tell you Rasputin is a warlord, you better believe it. Just listen to that Muigai Wa Njoroge's song. He is treading on very dangerous ground. That is a matter of national security #2007neveragain* (When we tell you Rasputin is a warlord, you better believe it. Listen to the latest song by Muigai Wa Njoroge. He is treading on very dangerous grounds. That is a matter of national security#2007neveragain)
- (ii) Speaker E: *Wee ndo uko na akili chafu. The song hits the reality* (You are the one who has a dirty mind. The song drives the message home)
- (iii) Speaker A: *Kumbuka wewe ni mkale uki comment* (Remember you are a Kalenjin as you comment)
- (iv) Speaker E: *Ghasia. Kichwa ndogo. Thinking about tribe only* (Trash. Small head. You are only thinking along tribal lines)
- (v) Speaker A: *Kunywa mursik kwanza* (Take fermented milk first)
- (vi) Speaker E: *Hehehe. Nakusambazia* (Hehehe. I will send you some)

Speaker A posted a comment on a very controversial song released just before heated national campaigns kicked off. The song was released to malign the president; a reprieve to his political opponents. Speaker A, who supported the president, was criticising the musician and claimed that the president's political rivals sponsored the song. Critical comments from his friends met this post; for instance, Speaker E. Speaker A (a Kikuyu) responded to his comment, telling him to remember he was a Kalenjin while commenting. This offended Speaker E, who retaliated by calling him "trash". Speaker A was discriminating against him based on his ethnic background. It was as if Speaker E was not supposed to comment on a Kikuyu song.

4.6 Body-shaming remarks

A body-shaming remark is a critical or negative statement that points out a person's size, weight or physical appearance. The salient feature in this offending situation is physical appearance. This refers to any perceptible deviation from what is considered normal. This is about characteristics including body size, weight, facial features, locomotion (body movement), and deformities. These evoke angry insults pointing out physical differences, among others. (Bousfield 2007: 2191).

Extract 6 (from Post 6):

- (7) (i) Speaker A: I am unapologetically Kikuyu
- (ii) Speaker E: You are a shameless Kamba. Kikuyus don't think stupidly like you
- (iii) Speaker A: What a silly comment!
- (iv) Speaker E: *Peleka ujinga Machakos* (Take your stupidity to Machakos)
- (v) Speaker A: *Hebu demonstrate venye mtu hupeleka* (Please demonstrate how that is done)

- (vi) Speaker E: By carrying your silly thick lips to that semi-arid place
- (vii) Speaker A: Though you said Kikuyus don't think the way you do
- (viii) Speaker E: *Sometimes I try to fit in a group of one-digit IQ Simpletons. At least we can sail on the same boat* (Sometimes I try to fit in a group of one-digit IQ Simpletons. So that we can sail on the same boat)
- (ix) Speaker A: *Hehehe. Sawa, suit yourself* (Hehehe. That's fine. Suit yourself).

Speaker E tells Speaker A: *By carrying your silly thick lips to that semi-arid place*. The former is commenting on the latter's physical appearance, and he is probably referring to Speaker A's profile photo, since it shows thick lips. Speaker E's utterance provokes Speaker A; hence, it is impolite since it attacks Speaker A's self-image, that is, how he looks. The insult offends Speaker A, and that explains his impolite response, which implies that the Kambas (Speaker E's ethnic group) think stupidly, just like Kikuyus (Speaker A's ethnic group). The former had insinuated that the Kikuyus think stupidly.

4.7 Inflammatory remarks

An inflammatory remark is a comment or statement intended to provoke hatred, hostility, anger or a violent emotional reaction. The salient feature in this offending situation is intentionality; whether the event occurred by accident or was caused. It affects the perception of an unwarranted act. The more deliberate the action appears to be, the greater the justification for an impolite response (Bousfield 2007: 2192). Intentionality has been widely discussed in relation to impoliteness (Culpeper & Hardaker 2017: 203).

Extract 7 (from Post 7):

- (8) (i) (Speaker A posts an image of a skeleton and a caption denigrating a politician)
- (ii) Speaker B: The skeleton looks exactly like you
- (iii) Speaker C: *Aki mzea uko na shida. Inaitwa ushagi wa new Facebook incomers. I pity your partners. Fools are born* (Man, you have a problem. It is called the backwardness of the new Facebook incomers; I pity your partners. Fools are born)
- (iv) Speaker D: *My friend, this journey is too long for any fools. Some of us are legends on social media. We discuss facts and propaganda that people can use to change their political stance. Ile ujinga uko nayo can only convince drunkard barmaids.* (My friend, this journey is too long for any fools. Some of us are legends on social media. We discuss facts and propaganda that people can consider, and that may eventually influence their political stance. Your stupidity can only convince drunken barmaids)
- (v) Speaker D: *You are a curse of reason. The state's lapdogs are so useless. Tutachagua Ruto mpende msipende. What about a toddler like you...endelea kupuupuu. Hizo ni kura zenu 2022. Cow dung* (You are a curse of reason. The

state lap dogs are useless as such. We will elect Ruto whether you like it or not. What about a toddler like you? Continue defecating. Those are your votes in 2022. Cow dung)

(vi) Speaker D: *You qualify to be a wife material, a fucking lot. Keep up, cockroach.*

(vii) Speaker A: *See your life. Nyonga ninii na ulale* (Look at your pathetic life! Wear a noose and sleep)

(viii) Speaker D: *You are more than a fool! Grow up to help your village develop. Otherwise, your people folk will remain poorer than your head.*

(viii) Speaker A: *Wewe unafaa kuwekwa under 24hrs surveillance. U r a suicidal case* (You need to be put under 24 hours' surveillance. You are a suicidal case)

In the above post, Speaker A intended to provoke the supporters of a politician by posting a skeleton and a caption that denigrated him. He went so far as to name him. He knew his post would elicit so much anger from the politician's supporters, yet he still posted it. He intended to antagonise his interlocutors, and he achieved his objective. Thus, Speaker A's intention to antagonise his political opponents offended his interlocutors, prompting venomous comments.

4.8 Aggravating remarks

An aggravating remark is a statement deliberately made or phrased in a way that deeply irritates an addressee, increases frustration or worsens a conflict. The salient feature evident is damage. This refers to a situation in which an offence can be weighed in terms of, among others, its duration, the intensity of physical or emotional pain, or the waste of energy or time (Bousfield 2007: 2192). A very irritating comment can provoke anger, thereby attracting an impolite response. An interlocutor may find themselves responding impolitely to the most damaging comment, overlooking the rest.

Extract 8 (from Post 8):

(9) (i) Speaker A: *Ifikie DP. He is spending millions of shillings in Mt. Kenya churches, yet the ones in Eldoret are in dire need* (Let this information reach the Deputy President. He is spending millions of shillings in Mt. Kenya churches yet the ones in Eldoret are in dire need).

(ii) Speaker B: *DP is for all Kenyans ama unadhani kazi yake ni kuuza nyama kwa kibanda?* (The Deputy President is for all Kenyans or you think his job is to sell meat in a makeshift butchery?)

(iii) Speaker C: *Wewe angalia kama umejivaa vizuri ama hapo nyuma kuna mwanya* (Check whether you are attired well or bared at the back)

(iv) Speaker D: I see illiteracy in you. DP is not an MP. He is representing Kenyans, not a constituency, county or ward.

(v) Speaker A: *Vaa specs basi* (Bespectacle yourself then)

- (vi) Speaker D: *See your response and your posting. In fact, you should go back to school and learn about systems of government; uwache kupiga mdomo hapa ni kama unajua kitu na hujui* (Look at your response and posting. In fact, you should go back to school and learn anew about the systems of government so that you can stop babbling as if you know anything and you don't)
- (vii) Speaker A: *Ushasema* (You've said it)
- (viii) Speaker D: *Yaaaa, kaa ukijua. Staki huhaibike hapa tena* (Yes, be in the know. I don't want you to be embarrassed here again)
- (ix) Speaker A: *Huhaibike ndio nini sasa? Embarrassed now means what?*
- (x) Speaker D: *Wee shinda hapo tu* (You dwell on that issue)
- (xi) Speaker A: *There's no honour in thieves.*

Speaker A is not amused at all by the fund drives officiated by a politician in Central Kenya. He is advising the politician to use the money to help the people in his backyard. This is met with a critical comment from Speaker D, who advises him to return to school and learn anew about the systems of government so he can stop babbling as if he knows everything. He goes on to tell Speaker A that he is advising him so, since he does not want him to get embarrassed, in Kiswahili's *staki uaibike* - a term that Speaker D misspells by typing *huhaibike*. Speaker A takes advantage of the situation to embarrass him about the typo by asking him: *Huhaibike ndio nini sasa?* ('Now that means what?'). This is a complete put-down, and, out of embarrassment, Speaker D tells him to continue dwelling on the matter. Speaker A does not respond to Speaker B and C's comments because they are less damaging than Speaker D's.

4.9 Self-reproachful remarks

The next offending situation is a self-reproachful remark, and the main feature here is the self as the wrongdoer. It was discovered that self-as-the-wrongdoer is a rare feature of an offending event, but it does indeed occur. This can be seen when a speaker comments on a mistake they made. It may not elicit a negative response from his/her interlocutors, but it is, in any case, impolite (Bousfield 2007: 2192). This is clearly illustrated in Extract 9, which involves only the speaker herself.

Extract 9 (from Post 9):

- (10) Speaker A: *I bumped into my ex. Nkt. How silly I looked!!!!*

The Speaker is angry at herself for bumping into her ex-boyfriend. *Nkt* is an expression used on Facebook to express anger. Her comment on her action, namely bumping into her ex, attracts the impolite expression *nkt* and the comment *How silly I looked*.

4.10 Vulgar language

This refers to communication or speech that goes against the established norms and can be the source of impoliteness. The salient feature is language. It can be vulgar, sensuous, unwarranted, etc.

Extract 10 (from Post 10):

- (11) (i) Speaker A: *Hehehe...when I am Uhuru-inspired*
 (ii) Speaker B: *We elected Uhuru to do the work he is doing. How often do you sing praises to your ATM?*
 (iii) Speaker A: *There's no sweeter sound than that krrrrr in an ATM when withdrawing cash. It is orgasmic. I praise it every time it does that.*
 (iv) Speaker B: *OMG! You are incorrigible and beyond redemption.*

In this post, Speaker A is ecstatic about his favourite politician, as he feels that he has delivered on his promises to Kenyans. Speaker B sees nothing to praise the politician for, since they elected him to do just that. She, however, makes a blunder by asking Speaker A the question: *How often do you sing praises to your ATM?* This is met with an answer meant to humiliate Speaker B, who is a lady. Speaker A says there's no sweeter sound than the krrrrr of an ATM when withdrawing cash. According to him, it is orgasmic, and he praises it every time it does that. This response sends Speaker B up the wall. She says in response that Speaker A is incorrigible and beyond redemption. The sensuous language he uses offends her, so she resorts to insults. Very intimate interlocutors typically use sensuous language; thus, Speaker A was breaking norms by using it to communicate with a stranger on Facebook.

4.11 Unsolicited comments

An unsolicited comment is an uninvited criticism, opinion or statement given without being asked for. Some interlocutors post anything for the sake of it; thus, ending up infuriating their interlocutors. The salient feature of this offending situation is behaviour. It could be deviant, unexpected, aggressive, ill-mannered, and vulgar or crude (Bousfield, 2007: 2191). The act of posting anything, for instance, a meaningless image or a vulgar comment, just to communicate, can evoke anger in interlocutors.

Extract 11 (from Post 11):

- (12) (i) *Muigai Wa Njoroge.... kwisha wewe* (Muigai Wa Njoroge. It is all up with you)
 (An explicit photo)
 (ii) Speaker B: You don't need to share everything, Timothy. Seriously now?
 (iii) Speaker A: *I was taking a walk in these streets of Zuckerberg, kuna mambo sana* (I was taking a walk on Zuckerberg's streets. There is a lot of stuff going on)

- (iv) Speaker B: *Must you share? Some things pass and make yourself busy* (Must you share? Overlook some things and make yourself busy)
- (v) Speaker A: *Itabidi uzoeeee* (You'll have to get used to it)
- (vi) Speaker B: *Nugu* (Monkey)
- (vii) Speaker C: *Did you call mkubwa idle?* (Did you say the boss is idle?)
- (viii) Speaker B: *Lol. Anaanza kuni bore na sitaki kumblock. Usikimbilie kushare kijana* (Laughing out loud. He has started to bore me and I don't want to block him. Don't be in a rush to share, young man)
- (ix) Speaker E: *You don't have to get involved in the distribution of such. It is not a matter of life and death.*
- (x) Speaker A: *Ni kugutha* (It is ageing)
- (xi) Speaker B: *Ni muhaka tukuire* (we have to tell you)
- (xii) Speaker A: Refiness [refinement] galore (sarcasm). What's the big deal here? Everyone has a log

Speaker A posted an explicit photo of a Kenyan musician to scandalise him. The musician had just released a very controversial song citing atrocities that had been allegedly committed by 'the untouchables' in Kenya. This song linked Speaker A's favourite politician's family to those atrocities, which is why Speaker A chose to post the image vindictively. Speaker B was the first to castigate him for posting nonsense: *You don't need to share everything, Timothy. Seriously now? I told you not to be sharing anything. Look at how you've degraded yourself in full view of your fellow men.* Speaker E responded by telling him: *You don't have to get involved in the distribution of such. It is not a matter of life and death.* After a harangue, Speaker C asked the other interlocutors whether their comments suggested that Speaker A was idle. After a barrage of insults, Speaker I came to Speaker A's defence by castigating others for their sanctimony. They were hurling insults at Speaker A in the name of condemning him for posting such a photo. Speaker A's act of posting the photo thus offended his interlocutors, hence attracting the impolite utterances from them.

5. CONCLUSION

The study set out to determine which offending situations characterise impolite utterances on Facebook in Kenya. Bousfield's (2007) model of impoliteness guided the study. It used three qualitative approaches: observational studies and textual and content analysis. The researchers employed purposive sampling. According to Bousfield (2007), there must be a trigger that provokes an interlocutor to be impolite. This trigger is what is referred to as an offending situation, and offending situations on Facebook include childish remarks, gender-biased remarks, body-shaming remarks, anonymity-motivated derogatory remarks, ethnic-laced remarks, presumptuous remarks, inflammatory remarks, aggravating remarks, self-reproachful remarks, vulgar language and unsolicited posts/comments. The salient

features of offending situations on Facebook discussed in this study are age, sex, social physical setting, status, ethnic group, physical appearance, language, behaviour, intentionality, damage and self as the wrongdoer. Future studies should focus on offending situations that characterise impolite utterances in other contexts such as workplaces, classrooms, among others.

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