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IMPOLITENESS IN ONLINE DISCOURSE: ANALYSIS OF READER COMMENTS ON SERBIAN NEWS SITES

Online discourse represents an important part of human communication. When expressing their opinions in an online environment, people are empowered to be more direct, often without considering other people's face. In certain situations, they may even be offensive or impolite. The focus of this study is the manifestation of impoliteness in reader comments on Serbian news sites. The study adopts Bousfield's (2008) extended framework of Culpeper's model of impoliteness strategies (1996, 2005) in order to examine and classify different manifestations of impoliteness. It relies on the analysis of a small specialized corpus which consists of the data collected from reader comments on Serbian online news articles related to Novak Đoković being denied entry into Australia in January 2022 due to the men's number one tennis player not being vaccinated, which was one of the most vigorously debated topics in both mass media and social media in Serbia amid the coronavirus pandemic. The data were analyzed qualitatively. This study reflects how Serbian language users engage in impolite communicative behavior by identifying the most common impoliteness strategies, as well as their functions, and indicating distinctive features of Serbian impolite online discourse.

Keywords: impoliteness strategies, impoliteness functions, face, reader comments, Serbian news sites

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid expansion of the internet has transformed the way people communicate and access information, giving rise to various forms of online discourse. When communicating online, using digital media, people can often behave differently when compared to face-to-face communication for several reasons, an obvious one, for instance, being anonymous settings. In such an environment, people tend to express their opinions more directly and emotionally. Occasionally, they may even choose to be rude or offensive. This impolite and aggressive behavior of anonymous users appears to be an important feature of various online contexts including social media comments (OZ et al. 2017; REGA et al. 2023), YouTube comments (ANDERSSON 2021; HATZIDAKI 2020; LORENZO-DUS et al. 2011), and reader comment sections of news sites (LIU 2017; NEURAUTER-KESSELS 2011; RABAB'AH and ALALI 2020; ŠARIĆ 2022).

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In reader comment sections “people make their voices heard in public, engage and interact with news source or readers, and react to articles and/or comments by others” (ŠARIĆ 2022: 2). Understanding the impoliteness strategies employed in such an environment is crucial to shed light on how readers express their opinions in online communication. In the context of reader comments on Serbian news sites, exploring impoliteness strategies can provide valuable insights into the dynamics of online discourse within a specific cultural and linguistic context.

This study aims to investigate impoliteness strategies prevalent in reader comments on Serbian online news sites. By analyzing the linguistic expressions utilized by readers, the study seeks to uncover various impoliteness strategies and functions present in this online domain. The results presented here will not only contribute to the growing body of research on impoliteness in online contexts but also offer a unique perspective on how Serbian readers navigate and engage in discussions on news sites.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Impoliteness

Following other studies dealing with impoliteness in reader comment sections (BADARNEH and MIGDADI 2018; RABAB’AH and ALALI 2020), this study relies on Bousfield’s definition of intention-based impoliteness, according to which impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally conflictive verbal face-threatening acts which are purposefully performed “unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required,” with the face “maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted” (BOUSFIELD 2008: 72). The central concept in the study of (im)politeness is *face*, which Brown and Levinson define as “the public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself” (1987: 61). There are two aspects of face which are claimed to be universal: positive and negative. Positive face represents the interlocutor’s desire to be appreciated or approved of by using the strategies of solidarity and agreement, while negative face represents freedom of action and freedom from imposition realized by being indirect, apologetic and showing deference. Politeness involves using “face-work strategies, such as maintaining each other’s face” (LIU 2017: 63). However, face can also be at risk of being threatened by face-threatening acts. Impoliteness can, therefore, be viewed as attacking the hearer’s positive or negative face (CULPEPER 1996: 356). In online settings, such as reader comment sections, the sense of anonymity and invisibility allows people to act in a more unrestrained way, without taking into consideration other people’s face. It makes readers experience a sense of minimized authority and power, and it might encourage them to feel less accountable for their impolite behavior.

The classification of impoliteness strategies in this study was derived from Bousfield’s (2008) extended framework of Culpeper’s model of impoliteness strategies (1996, 2005) as “Bousfield’s model proves adaptable to the specific situation of reader responses” (NEURAUTER-KESSELS 2013: 190). Bousfield makes a distinction between two overarching super-strategies: *on-record* and *off-record impoliteness*. *On-record impoliteness* at-

tacks the hearer's face or denies the expected face wants, needs, or rights of the hearer (BOUSFIELD 2008: 95). The attack is made in an unambiguous way given the context in which it occurs. When it comes to *off-record impoliteness*, the threat or damage to the hearer's face is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature (GRICE 1975 [1989]) and can be canceled (BOUSFIELD 2008: 95). While *off-record impoliteness* is not explicit, it does not necessarily mean that it is always less threatening. In order to facilitate the identification and classification of impoliteness in discourse, Bousfield (2008) further proposes an extensive list of individual impoliteness strategies (see the Appendix for a list of impoliteness strategies identified in the present study based on Bousfield's taxonomy). He notes, though, that some individual strategies have "relatively fuzzy edges" and "tend to co-occur, with others, as combined strategies in various ways and in various forms for various effects" (BOUSFIELD 2008: 99-100).

Additionally, the present study relies on Culpeper's categorization of the functions of impoliteness. Culpeper (2011) distinguishes between three categories of functions: *affective impoliteness*, *coercive impoliteness* and *entertaining impoliteness*. *Affective impoliteness* is defined as "the targeted display of heightened emotion, typically anger, with the implication that the target is to blame for producing that negative emotional state" (CULPEPER 2011: 223). It is typically achieved through insults, name calling and the use of intensifiers. *Coercive impoliteness* is meant to exercise power on the interlocutor. It involves "coercive action that is not in the interest of the target, and hence involves both the restriction of a person's action-environment and a clash of interests" (CULPEPER 2011: 226). For instance, this function can involve attacking the target's negative face by restricting their freedom from imposition. The final function, *entertaining impoliteness*, involves "entertainment at the expense of the target of the impoliteness" (CULPEPER 2011: 233). The purpose of this function is not to attack the target's face, but to entertain an audience. Culpeper observes that an important feature of this function is creativity (2011: 234).

2.2. Impoliteness in reader comments

Reader comment sections represent an especially suitable corpus for the study of impoliteness as it appears that impolite behavior is their important feature (NEURAUTER-KESSELS 2011: 191). Commenting in response to online news provides an opportunity for readers to express their agreement or disagreement with the author or content of the article, as well as to interact with other readers. Even when the perlocutionary effect of impolite comments on the target individual (e.g., other readers, public figures, etc.) is unavailable, they can generally be viewed as instances of offensive linguistic behavior as they constitute "blatant face attacks in which socially accepted norms of behavior are violated" (UPADHYAY 2010: 108).

The study of impoliteness in reader comments has gained traction in recent years. Neurauter-Kessels (2011) investigated how readers of British online news sites used impoliteness to attack the author of an article. She found that impoliteness in such cases frequently involved face threats that attacked the author's authority, credibility and trustworthiness. While investigations of impoliteness in reader comments have been mainly

“Anglo-centric” (NEURAUTER-KESSELS 2013: 309), there are several studies dealing with this issue in other languages. Liu (2017) investigated impoliteness in reader comments on Japanese online news articles and found that social identity and group face are among the most important factors triggering impoliteness in such contexts. The study further revealed that males tended to post more impolite comments than females. Rabab’ah and Alali (2020) analyzed the most frequent face attacks targeting writers in comment sections of the Al-Jazeera Arabic news site and revealed these included the lack of balance, wholeness, fairness, and objectivity. When it comes to investigating impoliteness in reader comments on Serbian news sites, only one study could be found. Šarić (2022) examined perceptions of impoliteness in reader comments on a Serbian news site, *Večernje Novosti*, and Facebook comments on a Croatian news site, *Jutarnji list*. Apart from comparing impoliteness in comments on the two platforms, she identified frequent impoliteness formulae (CULPEPER 2011) and language means that were judged to be impolite by four participants, such as conventionalized impoliteness formulae, cursing, words evoking animal metaphors, taboo and derogatory terms.

As shown by the literature review above, while impoliteness in reader comment sections has attracted increasing linguistics attention, little research has examined manifestations of impoliteness in Serbian. This study, therefore, aims to investigate how impoliteness is realized in comment sections of Serbian news sites by answering the following research questions:

1. What are the main impoliteness strategies found in comment sections on Serbian news sites?
2. What are the functions of impoliteness in comment sections on Serbian news sites?

One contribution of this study is reflected in its application of a well-established framework (BOUSFIELD 2008) to analyze impoliteness strategies in a language other than English. Furthermore, the study provides insight into distinctive features which shape Serbian impolite online discourse, thus contributing to the knowledge of the complexities of impoliteness across different linguistic and cultural settings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

The study utilized a small-scale, specialized corpus, compiled by the researcher. It consisted of reader comments collected from four Serbian news sites. A major advantage of using this type of corpus is that the data can be collected easily. The naturalness of the material is another advantage. As Neurauter-Kessels notes, the researcher is just one member of a large anonymous crowd and does not influence genuine impoliteness production (2013: 170).

In order to capture an array of different impoliteness strategies, the corpus included reader comments from four different news sites. It was decided against including reader comments from Serbian news sites with a major influence, as their comment sections may not always reflect opinions of actual readers since a significant number of bots

are employed by the government to post comments on a daily basis (ĐORĐEVIĆ 2020: 3). This is also problematic because their comments are often similar, so in this case, they might not reflect a variety of impoliteness strategies. Therefore, only one website with a relatively high number of average daily users was chosen: *b92.net*². *Politika.rs* was chosen as another source as it represents the oldest newspaper in Serbia. The last two sites included in this research were *mozzartsport.com* and *sportklub.rs*, which only report sport-related news and can be perceived as neutral with respect to the mentioned issue.

The corpus included reader comments on four articles published on the selected news sites. The articles reported the same news – that Novak Đoković, a Serbian professional tennis player, was not going to participate in the Australian Open in 2022 because his visa was canceled due to not being vaccinated against COVID 19. These articles were chosen because they attracted a lot of reader comments and, therefore, were potentially controversial and suitable for collecting impoliteness-rich data. All of them were published on January 16, 2022.

The corpus consisted of 813 comments in total (Table 1). On average, the comments were 29 words long. 216 comments were found to contain impoliteness. Further analysis showed that many comments included more than one impoliteness strategy. Depending on the offending situation / event that triggered impoliteness, there were 87 impoliteness strategies targeting Novak Đoković, 95 targeting Australia, Australian court, people, etc., and 70 targeting other readers. Thus, there were 252 impoliteness strategies in total.

Table 1. Overview of the corpus

News site	Number of comments	Number of impoliteness strategies
<i>b92.net</i>	249	79
<i>Politika.rs</i>	175	51
<i>mozzartsport.com</i>	187	57
<i>sportklub.rs</i>	202	65
Total	813	252

3.2. Data analysis and codification

Following Bousfield's (2008) extended framework of Culpeper's model of impoliteness strategies (1996, 2005), the identified impoliteness instances were coded manually into *on-record* and *off-record impoliteness*. The next step involved classifying individual impoliteness strategies. This classification, together with some examples from the corpus, is presented in the Appendix. It is based on the taxonomy developed by Bousfield (2008). Several strategies found in the data did not fall under any of the categories in the given taxonomy, so it was adapted by adding a couple of new categories: *Accuse of lying* and *Ill-wish / Curse*. This classification, however, does not represent the full linguistic spectrum of the investigated phenomenon. These are just the strategies identified in this corpus.

² According to *Gemius Audience* (<https://rating.gemius.com/rs/tree/32>), in January 2022, the news site's readership counted 394,641 average daily real users. As for the other three sites included in the study, *Politika.rs* had 40,476, *mozzartsport.com* had 59,467, and *sportklub.rs* counted 63,006 average daily real users.

There are some strategies that were not captured in this corpus, but were listed by other researchers, e.g., *withholding politeness*, *hindering / blocking*, *being uninterested*, etc. Clearly, these were not found because of the nature of the corpus and online communication. Finally, it should be noted that impoliteness strategies tend to co-occur (CULPEPER and HARDAKER 2017: 220) and that there are situations where categorization is not always clear-cut, which was an issue the researcher faced in this study.

The software package of WordSmith 6.0 (SCOTT 2014) was used to provide information for a quantitative analysis. The keyword lists and concordance line tools in this software package helped to indicate the contexts where particular impoliteness strategies occurred. In this way, specific comments were selected as illustrations for a qualitative analysis. So far, WordSmith has been used in several (im)politeness studies (for instance, DIANI 2017; HARDAKER 2010; O'DONNELL 2013; TAYLOR 2011; TRAN 2014).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Impoliteness strategies

Table 2 and Table 3 present an overview of the impoliteness super-strategies and individual impoliteness strategies identified in the data. They are listed by frequency. Table 1 shows that *on-record impoliteness* was used more frequently than *off-record impoliteness* ($z = 3.080$, $p = .002^3$). This can be attributed to the fact that readers do not care for face work when commenting on articles online due to anonymous settings. This anonymity allows them to feel less inhibited, so they can act in a more unrestrained way.

Table 2. *Impoliteness super-strategies in the dataset*

Super-strategies	Frequency	Percentage
On-record	150	59.5%
Off-record	102	40.5%
Total	252	100.0%

Table 3. *Individual impoliteness strategies in the dataset*

Impoliteness strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Criticize	56	22.2%
Name-calling	38	15.1%
Sarcasm	35	13.9%
Challenge	25	9.9%
Condescend / Ridicule	21	8.3%
Exclude / Disassociate from the other	21	8.3%
Command (Bold on-record)	16	6.3%
Associate with a negative aspect	12	4.8%
Threaten / Frighten	10	4.0%

³ Statistical significance is achieved for $p < .05$.

Ill-wish / Curse	8	3.2%
Use taboo words	5	2.0%
Accuse of lying	5	2.0%
Total	252	100.0%

The remainder of this section discusses some individual impoliteness strategies from the corpus in more detail. All extracts are original in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The translations follow the informal style of the extracts.

The most frequent impoliteness strategy identified in the corpus was *criticism*. This is a powerful impoliteness strategy which is based on dispraising the target or their action (BOUSFIELD 2008: 126). Identifying and classifying this strategy in the data, however, was often problematic, as criticism can underlie other strategies, or can be their component part (BOUSFIELD 2008: 127). Criticism targeting Novak Đoković was often expressed as putting the blame on him and his actions for the given situation. This is shown in the examples below.

- (1) P#39: *Mnogo je grešaka napravio Novak. Nije ni on nevin u svemu ovome.*
'Novak made a lot of mistakes. He is not entirely innocent in all of this.'
- (2) P#137: *Niko mu nije kriv, sam je kriv. Pravio se pametan. [...]*
'He shouldn't blame anyone, it's his own fault. He was trying to be clever. [...]'
- (3) P#183: *Sam je kriv. Tacka.*
'It's his own fault. Period.'

Criticism was further aimed at Australia, their people, the court, and the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. Readers often felt the need to reprimand them and their actions, as in the examples below. The use of multiple exclamation marks in examples (4) and (5) was meant to compensate for the lack of non-verbal gestures that accompanies face-to-face conversations. In example (5), furthermore, capitalization was used to imitate loud voice quality or stress in order to make emphasis.

- (4) P#17: *Sram vas bilo, politicka odluka 1/1, stidite se sudije!!!*
'Shame on you, an entirely political decision, you judges should be ashamed!!!'
- (5) P#130: *CPAMOTA!!!!*
'DISGRACE!!!'

The second most frequently used strategy (and the most frequent on-record strategy) identified in the corpus was *name-calling and using derogatory nominations*. This is not surprising, given that name-calling is a common phenomenon in online interaction (HASSAN 2019: 529). Name-calling here included types of nominal terms and phrases like the ones in the examples below to refer to individuals in a negative way (NEURAUTER-KESSELS 2013: 280). Name-calling in the corpus occurred in a direct address (example 6) or as a descriptive reference to somebody (example 7). Using the adjective *teška* in example (7) maximized the impoliteness strategy and heighten the face damage inflicted. Name-calling in the corpus sometimes occurred in combination with other strategies, as will be shown in the upcoming examples.

- (6) P#99: *Budalo.* (addressing a reader)
'You fool.'
- (7) P#64: *Ispali su teska olos.* (referring to Australian people)

‘They turned out to be major scumbags.’

A frequent off-record strategy used by readers was *sarcasm* or *mock politeness*. Here the face-threatening acts are performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere (CULPEPER 1996: 356). In fact, in the examples below, the readers express the opposite of what they say via an implicature. On the surface they use positive politeness in conveying the approval of Australia’s judicial system (8), congratulating Australia on its democracy (9), or praising Đoković (10) and calling him *moralna gromada* (11), which usually represents a favorable judgment. All of these are clearly false. The comments, in fact, implicate extreme disapproval.

(8) P#121: *Nezavisno sudstvo.*

‘An independent judiciary.’

(9) P#123: *Australiji svaka cast, pokazala nam je kako izgleda zapadna demokratija kojoj se i mi slepo stremimo.*

‘Hats off to Australia, it showed us what western democracy which we blindly aspire to looks like.’

(10) P#74: [...] *a da,ziveo nas velikomucenik Nole nevakcinisani od Monaka,da ga svi zajedno docekamo kao heroja na aerodromu [...]*

‘[...] oh yeah,long live our great unvaccinated martyr Nole of Monaco,may we all welcome him together as a hero at the airport [...]

(11) P#75: *moralna gromada nolo [...]*

‘a paragon of virtue nolo [...]

Another off-record strategy frequently found in the data, especially in comments aimed at other readers, is *challenge*. Challenges were issued in the form of a question. Readers used this strategy to question the recipient’s position, beliefs, assumed power, rights, ethics, etc. They were usually asked in the form of rhetorical questions. The rhetorical aspects of this strategy can cause “negative face damage as they are equivalent to strong assertions that attempt to force the intended recipient to respond in a highly restricted and self-damaging way” (BOUSFIELD 2008: 132). The second question in example (12) implicates an impolite belief that the readers showing disapproval of Đoković have not done much for Serbia, unlike him. Therefore, they have no right to comment on his actions. In example (13), there is this discourse marker *bre*, which is used to express emphasis and for the purposes of intensification (MIŠKOVIĆ LUKOVIĆ et al. 2015: 26).

(12) P#149: [...] *Čovek je rekao da je Srbin, mogao je da igra i za Britaniju. Valjda ga zato i mrze? Pitanje je samo šta ste vi uradili bilo šta u životu, za Srbiju, vi koji ga mrzite? [...]* (addressing other readers)

‘[...] The man said he was a Serb, he could have also played for Britain. I guess that’s why they hate him? The only question is what you have done for Serbia in your lifetime, you who hate him? [...]

(13) P#14: *Како су пљували Србе не смемо да заборавимо. На шта бре ово личи?*

‘We must never forget how they trashed the Serbs. What the hell is this?’

Challenge was sometimes used repeatedly to form parallelism, as in examples (14) and (15). The repetition here serves as a rhetorical device to increase the force of the repeated face-threatening act and boost the challenge.

(14) P#51: Muka mi od vas nesrećnika što uvek podržavate Zapad. Uređeni? Zakon isti za sve? Demokratija? Slobode? Samo u vašoj jednoj glavi.

'I'm sick of you miserable creatures always supporting the West. Well-governed? Equality before the law? Democracy? Freedom? Only in your poor head.'

(15) P#35: Ovo je najveća glupost jednog sportiste u istoriji. *Sta je ovim isterao? Koji princip?* [...]

'This is the greatest act of stupidity of an athlete in history. What did he achieve with this? What principle did he uphold?'

Another strategy frequently identified in the corpus was *condescend, scorn or ridicule*. By using this strategy, readers emphasized their own power, which was not necessarily authoritative but might be moral. The following comments suggest a way of talking that reminds us of the way in which adults talk to young children.

(16) P#88: *Nema boc-boc nema ni ulaska*, tako funkcioniše pravna država, [...]

'No ouchie no entry, that's how the rule of law works, [...]

(17) P#188: *Kmeeee*

'Boohoo'

In examples (18) and (19), the readers performed impoliteness strategies by trying to minimize the status and power of the recipients and belittling them, thus damaging their face. In example (19), within the same utterance, this strategy is combined with another strategy, which is discussed further below – *associating the recipient with a negative aspect*.

(18) P#27: Samoproglašeni Isus [...] *sa osnovnim obrazovanjem a koji je umislio da je intelektualni kapacitet Nikole Tesle* [...] *Decko je neobrazovani superegoista* [...]

'Self-proclaimed Jesus [...] with elementary education who thinks he has the intellectual capacity of Nikola Tesla [...] The guy is an uneducated egotist [...]

(19) P#125: Не српска тврдоглавост већ тврдоглавост и злоба аустралијских *трећеразредних, провинцијских, интелектуално непрефињених политичара са израженим фашистичким склоностима*.

'Not Serbian stubbornness, but the stubbornness and malice of third-rate, provincial, intellectually unrefined Australian politicians with pronounced fascist tendencies.'

A strategy often used to attack a person's positive face was *to exclude the other from the activity or disassociate them from a group*. This strategy was most frequently used in comments referring to Australian people, judges, etc. The following examples, however, could also be considered as reflecting another strategy – *threaten / frighten*. In other words, one utterance can perform two different impoliteness strategies simultaneously.

(20) P#4: *Svet bi bio mnogo lepse mesto bez anglosaksonaca*.

'The world would be a much better place without the anglo-saxons.'

(21) P#12: *Drzava Srbija, danas treba da protera iz Srbije sve drzavljane Australije, na celu sa ambasadorom....*

'Serbia should expel all citizens of Australia from Serbia today, starting with the ambassador....'

On-record impoliteness strategies are typically employed where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer. That is, the utterance is deployed in a direct, clear and unambiguous manner. In the corpus, these were often in the form of *commands*:

(22) P#133: *Igraj tenis Novace mani se gluposti.*

‘Play tennis Novak enough with the nonsense.’

(23) P#45: *Ne blamiraj se više.* (addressing Đoković)

‘Stop humiliating yourself.’

(24) P#148: [...] *Gledaj svoja posla, tebe niko ne sprecava da se vakcinises i hiljadu puta ako zelis, ali ne mozes drugima da nameces svoja shvatanja.* [...] (addressing another reader)

‘[...] Mind your own business, no one is stopping you from getting vaccinated a thousand times if you want, but you can’t impose your ideas on others. [...]’

Commands were mainly directed at Đoković and other readers, as in the given examples. In example (22), there is also this presupposition that Đoković has been embarrassing himself up until now and the assertion is that he should stop. Commands like these threaten the intended recipient’s negative face, as they restrict their freedom of action. Naturally, whether a command is impolite depends on the context. For instance, commands uttered in a military context might not be as face-threatening as the ones in the given examples.

Other instances of impoliteness strategies which, primarily, attack the addressee’s face relating to freedom of action were found in the data. In the following examples, the readers *threaten the recipient or frighten them* and try to instill a belief that action detrimental to them will occur. This strategy was mainly used in comments referring to Australians.

(25) P#21: *Kostace ih ovo.*

‘They’ll pay for this.’

(26) P#14: *Osvetuћemo se za ovu sramotu kenгурима кад тад!*

‘We’ll take revenge on the kangaroos for this disgrace sooner or later!’

The data further included examples of *associating the interlocutor with some negative aspects*. The following examples show off-record strategies by which the readers associate Australians with Hitler, which is, clearly, an attempt to communicate that they do not approve of their actions when it comes to deporting Đoković. In example (28), capitalization is again used to grab attention and indicate loudness.

(27) P#21: *Australija je danas dokazala da je Hitler jos uvek ziv medju nama.*

‘Australia has proven today that Hitler is still alive among us.’

(28) P#120: *1936. godine u Berlinu Hitler DOZVOLJAVA Dzesi Owensu da se takmici, da pobedi i da uzme medalju (ne jednu). Nije mu cestitao. 2022. godine u Melburnu NE DOZVOLJAVAJU najboljem da se takmici da ne bi pobedio i uzeo pehar.* [...]

‘In 1936 in Berlin Hitler ALLOWED Jesse Owens to compete, win, and take home a medal (not just one). He didn’t congratulate him. In 2022 in Melbourne they DID NOT ALLOW the best to compete so he wouldn’t win and take the

trophy. [...]’

Several readers opted to use *curses and ill-wishes* to attack the target’s face, as seen in the examples below. These curses can be taken to represent distinctive features of Serbian impoliteness discourse. In example (29), name-calling – referring to Australians as *beskičmenjaci* was used to reinforce the negative impact of the previous attack. This is how multiple strategies were sometimes combined within one comment or even one utterance. The ways in which various strategies can be combined is something that needs to be taken into consideration when developing a proper model of impoliteness strategies that can account for a variety of discourses, including online discourse.

(29) P#18: [...] *dabogda živelu pod ovim merama do kraja života, beskičmenjaci.*

‘[...] may you live with these measures for the rest of your lives, spineless creatures.’

(30) P#10: *Zelim vam dugo, susno i pakleno leto sa mnogo pozara!!!*

‘I wish you a long, dry and hellish summer with lots of fires!!!’

(31) P#14: *Дабогда вас снег и мећава завејали у тој нуштињи!*

‘May snow and blizzards bury you in that desert!’

The two least frequently used strategies identified in the corpus were using *taboo words, swear words or profane language* and *accusing the interlocutor of lying*. The analysis showed that taboo words were not frequently deployed in the dataset. In fact, only several examples were captured. At the time of data collection, in January 2022, the selected sites featured similar commenting guidelines, according to which comments containing insults, threats, hate speech or discrimination were not allowed and would not be published.⁴ It could be the case that because of these guidelines, the most extreme forms of impolite communicative behavior of readers (such as profanity, vulgar language, taboo words, etc.) were rarely captured in this study – and even the ones that were, might be considered only mildly taboo.

Finally, there were several comments where readers accused Đoković of lying or falsifying his PCR test results. While it is arguable whether accusing someone of lying can be counted as impolite, it does suggest that the recipient does not have sincere intentions, so it was decided to include these comments as representing a separate impoliteness strategy.

4.2. Functions of impoliteness

Table 4 presents an overview of the functions of impoliteness recorded in the corpus. They are listed by frequency. It should be noted, however, that the identification of these functions was not always so clear-cut. As Culpeper notes, these functions are not mutually exclusive; in fact, it is possible to find all of them simultaneously in a single statement (2011: 211).

⁴ In April 2024, the following sites still featured similar commenting guidelines:

Politika.rs: <https://www.politika.rs/scc/stranica/6/Pravila-koriscenja>

mozzartsport.com: <https://www.mozzartsport.com/uslovi-koriscenja>

sportklub.rs: <https://sportklub.n1info.rs/uslovi-koriscenja/>

b92.net, however, does not feature any commenting guidelines anymore.

Table 4. *Functions of impoliteness in the dataset*

Function of impoliteness	Frequency	Percentage
Affective	114	45.3%
Coercive	86	34.1%
Entertaining	62	24.6%
Total	252	100.0%

The most frequent function of impoliteness identified in the dataset was *affective impoliteness* – 45.3%. This is not surprising, given that the topic of the selected articles caused a lot of controversy and heightened emotions in Serbia. Furthermore, as affective impoliteness involves the expression of strong emotion, it often “leaks into the other categories” (CULPEPER 2011: 211).

Affective impoliteness in the corpus mostly included strategies such as *criticizing* and *name-calling*. Examples (32) and (33) make it clear that the readers’ anger is directed at Đoković for the things he has or has not done. They express their emotional state – they feel embarrassed by Novak’s actions. Affective impoliteness was also found in comments addressing other readers, as in examples (34) and (35). The repetition of the intensifier *stvarno* in example (34) serves to reinforce the insult targeting other readers.

(32) P#31: *Obrukao nas samo tako, umesto da je dostojanstveno odbio da igra na turniru on je otišao tamo sa lažiranjem papira. [...]*

‘He embarrassed us terribly, instead of refusing to play at the tournament with dignity he went there with falsified documents. [...]

(33) P#33: *Teraj ga! Osramoti nas za 100 godina!* (referring to Đoković)

‘Kick him out! He embarrassed us for the next 100 years!’

(34) P#50: *Vi ljudi ste stvarno, ali stvarno, ozbiljni psihijatrijski slučajeви.* (addressing other readers)

‘You guys are really, really serious nutjobs.’

(35) P#99: *Budalo.* (addressing another reader)

‘You fool.’

Coercive impoliteness was captured in 34.1% of the comments. It typically involved exercising power over other readers or Australian people, so it mostly included impoliteness strategies such as *exclude / disassociate from the other* (example 36) and *command, threaten / frighten* (examples 37 and 38).

(36) P#12: *Drzava Srbija, danas treba da protera iz Srbije sve drzavljane Australije, na celu sa ambasadorom....*

‘Serbia should expel all citizens of Australia from Serbia today, starting with the ambassador...’

(37) P#124: [...] *Njihova civilizacija peva labudovu pesmu, doci ce im to na nplatu..*

‘[...] It’s their civilization’s swan song, they will pay for it.’

(38) P#27: *U Srbiji ga treba kazniti sto je krsio mere samoizolacije. Staviti ga na mesto.*

‘In Serbia he should be punished for breaking the self-isolation measures. Take

him down a peg.'

The final function, *entertaining impoliteness*, was found in 24.6% of the cases. It was mostly represented by sarcastic statements and condescension in the corpus. In the following examples, the readers not only attack Đoković, but they also target a third-party audience to trigger a humorous effect.

(39) P#26: *Samo je lažirao pogrešan papir* (referring to Đoković)

'He just falsified a wrong document'

(40) P#37: *Uvek može da igra piramida open.* (referring to Đoković)

'He can always play in the pyramid open.'

(41) P#79: *Hoće li biti dan žalosti? Zna li se šta?*

'Are they going to declare a day of mourning? What's the word?'

5. Conclusion

This study examined the manifestation of impoliteness in reader comment sections. In particular, the study focused on the comment sections of four Serbian news sites. The findings showed that *on-record impoliteness strategies* were used more frequently than *off-record impoliteness strategies*, which is attributed to the anonymity of the given online environment. Readers feel detached from face-to-face interactions, which encourages them to adopt more direct and confrontational approaches in their communication and allows them to express their opinions without hesitation.

The analysis revealed that not all impoliteness strategies proposed by Bousfield (2008) were identified in the data, which can be related to different communicative settings investigated in this study. Among the individual impoliteness strategies, *criticism* emerged as the most frequently employed tactic in the dataset. Readers turned to this strategy to voice their disagreement, discontent, or disapproval, often targeting specific aspects of the news articles or other readers. The second most frequently used impoliteness strategy, and the most common on-record tactic, was *name-calling and the use of derogatory nominations*. This finding suggests that readers resorted to personal attacks and offensive language to demean and discredit their target. While off-record impoliteness strategies were less frequently observed in the corpus, *sarcasm* or *mock politeness* stood out as the most frequent off-record strategy used. This strategy enabled readers to criticize targets indirectly, making their impoliteness less overt but still discernible.

The study further showed that impoliteness strategies can be combined in numerous ways for the purposes of enhancing or boosting the face damage inflicted. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about the realization of individual strategies without reference to other impoliteness strategies and ways of combining them, which is what an appropriate model of impoliteness strategies needs to take into consideration. What remains to be studied is whether certain strategies are more likely to be combined and what the effects of such combinations are.

While the study did look at impoliteness strategies targeting other readers, it did not look at their effect. In other words, it did not focus on patterns of impoliteness and reactions to impoliteness in reader exchanges across threads, i.e., what the recipient of a face threat does. This is something further research can also focus on.

When it comes to impoliteness functions, the most prominent one identified in the dataset was affective impoliteness. This finding aligns with the emotionally charged nature of the selected news topic, reflecting readers' passionate engagement with the content and the issues at hand.

The presented results contribute to the growing body of research on impoliteness in online discourse, particularly in the context of Serbian news site comment sections. By uncovering the main impoliteness strategies and their functions, the research sheds light on the intricacies of communication in the digital age. As online discourse continues to shape public opinion and influence social dynamics, further research in this domain will be essential to understand and address impolite behaviors in this environment.

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Appendix

Below is presented the classification of impoliteness strategies used in the study, based on the taxonomy developed by Bousfield (2008).

Impoliteness strategy	Example
Criticize	CPAMOTA!!!! / ‘DISGRACE!!!!’
Name-calling	<i>Baš si se usrećio dvogramcu</i> / ‘You really lucked out knucklehead’
Sarcasm	<i>Pitam jer nisam toliko pismen kao ti, pa te molim da mi objasnis.</i> / ‘I’m asking because I’m not as literate as you, so please explain.’
Challenge	<i>Sta drugo ocekivati od potomaka engleskih robijaša?</i> / ‘What else can you expect from the descendants of English prisoners?’
Condescend / Ridicule	<i>Nema boc-boc nema ni ulaska, tako funkcioniše pravna država,</i> / ‘No ouchie no entry, that’s how the rule of law works.’
Exclude / Disassociate from the other	<i>Ambasadora Australije, deportovati za Francusku!</i> / ‘The ambassador of Australia to be deported to France!’
Command (Bold on-record)	<i>Ne mlati.</i> / ‘Stop yammering.’
Associate with a negative aspect	<i>Australija je danas dokazala da je Hitler jos uvek ziv medju nama.</i> / ‘Australia has proven today that Hitler is still alive among us.’
Threaten / Frighten	<i>Kostace ih ovo.</i> / ‘They’ll pay for this.’
Ill-wish / Curse	<i>Sve najgore im zelim. Duboko iz srca i duse, ono najiskrenije.</i> / ‘I wish them all the worst. From the depths of my heart and soul, most sincerely.’

Use taboo words

Ma bre ko ih j... Nole. / 'E.k 'em Nole.'

Accuse of lying

Lagao je, naivno misleći da može da prevari državu. / 'He lied, naively thinking he could deceive the state.'

Ema N. Živković Nikolić

NEUČTIVOST U ONLAJN DISKURSU: ANALIZA KOMENTARA ČITALACA NA PORTALIMA SRPSKIH ELEKTRONSKIH MEDIJA

Rezime

Rad se bavi analizom neučtivosti čitalaca u odeljku za komentare na onlajn portalima srpskih elektronskih medija. Analiza se bazira na Busfieldovom (2008) proširinom okviru Kalperovog modela strategija neučtivosti (1996, 2005), koji omogućava klasifikaciju različitih tipova neučtivosti. U radu je korišćen mali specijalizovani korpus koji se sastoji od podataka prikupljenih iz odeljka za komentare čitalaca koji se odnose na članke o vesti da je Novaku Đokoviću, najboljem srpskom teniseru, januara 2022. godine odbijena viza za ulazak u Australiju i da mora da napusti zemlju jer nije bio vakcinisan. U vreme pandemije bolesti koju izaziva virus korona, ova vest predstavljala je jednu od najkontroverznijih tema u srpskim medijima i na društvenim mrežama. Kvalitativna analiza podataka pokazala je koje su to strategije neučtivosti koje srpski čitaoci najčešće koriste, kao i koja je njihova funkcija, a u radu se takođe ukazuje i na specifičnosti onlajn diskursa kada je u pitanju neučtivost srpskih govornika.

Ključne reči: strategije neučtivosti, funkcije neučtivosti, obraz, komentari čitalaca, portali srpskih elektronskih medija

