

Politeness, Impoliteness, Power Relations, and Ideological Hegemony in Political Discourse: Evidence from the Trump–Acosta Press Conference

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ABSTRACT

Language in political discourse is never neutral; it functions as a medium for the reproduction of power and ideological hegemony, as illustrated by the confrontation between President Donald Trump and journalist Jim Acosta at the White House press conference on November 7, 2018. This study integrates Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Leech's politeness principle, Culpeper's impoliteness theory, and theories of power and hegemony by Foucault, Bourdieu, and Gramsci within Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Unlike prior studies that separate linguistic politeness analysis from ideological hegemony, this layered framework reveals how (im)politeness strategies do not merely reflect but actively construct and perpetuate ideological dominance between state officials and media. This qualitative descriptive study employs a single case study design, with primary data drawn from C-SPAN's YouTube recordings, triangulated with CNN, Fox News, and BBC coverage. The findings show that Trump employed bald on-record and mock politeness strategies, while Acosta maintained negative politeness. Trump's impoliteness shifted from procedural control of the forum to attacks on personal identity, functioning to construct institutional, discursive, and symbolic power relations. The hegemonic anti-media narrative is reproduced through "enemy of the people" and "fake news" discourses, building collective consensus among Trump's supporters that the press is a threat to the "people's" interests. These findings contribute to political discourse studies and enrich the integrative methodology in pragmatics and critical discourse analysis.

Keywords: *linguistic politeness; linguistic impoliteness; power; ideological hegemony; political discourse; critical discourse analysis.*

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed political communication in democratic societies. Social media platforms have enabled political leaders to communicate directly with citizens, reducing their dependence on traditional mass media as information gatekeepers. This transformation has reshaped the relationship between political actors, journalists, and the public, fostering communication styles that are increasingly personalized, confrontational, and emotionally driven. Within this evolving landscape, digital populism has emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary political discourse, where political leaders strategically employ language to construct emotional solidarity with supporters while simultaneously creating a dichotomy between "the people" and perceived political adversaries, including the mainstream media (Bentivegna & Rega, 2024; Rega & Marchetti, 2021; Kristianto & Nurhaqiqi, 2021). Consequently, political communication has become not merely a process of information dissemination but also a site where ideological narratives are produced, contested, and legitimized through discourse.

From a Gramscian perspective, ideological domination is achieved not primarily through coercion but through hegemony—the ability of dominant groups to establish moral and intellectual leadership that secures public consent (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony operates by constructing "common sense," shaping what society perceives as natural, legitimate, and unquestionable. Political language therefore functions as a crucial instrument in reproducing ideological power. Repeated narratives, strategic lexical choices, and evaluative expressions do more than convey political messages; they influence how citizens interpret political reality and evaluate competing ideological positions. In this sense, political discourse becomes an arena where linguistic practices, power relations, and ideological hegemony intersect.

The strategic role of language in political communication has been widely recognized in discourse studies. Language is no longer viewed as a neutral medium of communication but as a social practice through which legitimacy is constructed, authority is negotiated, and power is exercised (Fairclough, 1995, 2015; Foucault, 1982; Bourdieu, 1991). Every linguistic choice—including lexical selection, questioning strategies, turn-taking, interruptions, and responses to criticism—reflects underlying social positions and political interests. Public political interactions therefore represent continuous negotiations of meaning in which participants attempt either to reinforce or challenge existing structures of authority.

One of the most revealing contexts for examining these dynamics is the official press conference. Ideally, press conferences function as institutional forums of democratic accountability where journalists seek clarification regarding government policies and exercise oversight over political authority. In practice, however, they frequently become sites of symbolic struggle in which political leaders and journalists compete for discursive control, credibility, and public legitimacy (Heritage & Clayman,

2010; Chilton, 2004; Jamieson & Taussig, 2017). The highly publicized exchanges between former U.S. President Donald Trump and CNN journalist Jim Acosta exemplify this phenomenon. Their interactions extend beyond interpersonal disagreement to represent broader struggles over institutional authority, media legitimacy, and ideological influence within contemporary political communication.

Recent international scholarship demonstrates a significant shift in political discourse research from traditional pragmatic analyses of politeness toward approaches emphasizing language as a vehicle of power, ideology, and social practice, particularly in response to the rise of digital populism and increasing political polarization (Fairclough, 2015; Culpeper, 2011; Bentivegna & Rega, 2024; Andersson, 2024; McNab & Mavrou, 2025). Nevertheless, existing studies largely examine politeness, impoliteness, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as separate analytical frameworks. Research on politeness generally focuses on maintaining interpersonal relationships without adequately considering asymmetrical power relations. Studies of impoliteness primarily classify linguistic strategies while paying limited attention to how these strategies contribute to ideological reproduction. Conversely, CDA research often emphasizes macro-level social structures without systematically incorporating micro-level pragmatic analysis. Consequently, the relationship between linguistic strategies, power relations, and ideological hegemony remains insufficiently integrated.

A similar tendency is evident in Indonesian scholarship on political discourse. Existing studies have examined politeness and impoliteness across political debates, institutional communication, and social media interactions. While Aziz (2021) conceptualizes politeness as a strategy for maintaining political image, Anwar et al. (2024) demonstrate that impoliteness may function as a resource for constructing political identity in digital communication. These contrasting findings suggest that pragmatic strategies cannot be fully understood without considering the broader distribution of power within political interaction. However, research integrating pragmatic strategies, power relations, and ideological hegemony remains relatively limited in the Indonesian context.

Based on this review, four major research gaps can be identified. First, previous studies generally treat politeness and impoliteness as independent phenomena rather than complementary communicative strategies operating within the same interaction. Second, pragmatic analyses rarely explain how linguistic strategies are shaped by unequal power relations in political discourse. Third, the integration of micro-level pragmatic analysis with macro-level Critical Discourse Analysis remains underdeveloped, limiting explanations of how ideology is reproduced through everyday political interaction. Fourth, studies concerning the interactions between Donald Trump and Jim Acosta predominantly focus on rhetoric, media framing, or political communication, whereas research integrating politeness, impoliteness, power relations, and ideological hegemony within a unified analytical framework remains scarce.

To address these limitations, this study integrates four complementary theoretical perspectives. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains strategies employed to maintain interpersonal face, while Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness theory accounts for deliberate face attacks used to assert dominance or undermine opponents. These pragmatic perspectives are complemented by Foucault's (1982) conception of power as relational and productive, together with Bourdieu's (1991) notion of symbolic power and authorized language, which explains how institutional authority grants legitimacy to political speech. Finally, Fairclough's (1995, 2015) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis connects linguistic choices with discursive practices and broader social structures, enabling systematic analysis of how language contributes to ideological reproduction.

Accordingly, this study proposes an integrated multi-level analytical framework linking micro-level linguistic analysis—including politeness and impoliteness strategies—with macro-level examinations of power relations and ideological hegemony. Using the political press conference interactions between Donald Trump and Jim Acosta as a case study, the research demonstrates how linguistic strategies function not merely as interpersonal communicative devices but as discursive mechanisms for constructing political legitimacy, negotiating institutional authority, and reproducing ideological hegemony. By integrating pragmatics, theories of power, and Critical Discourse Analysis within a single analytical model, this study contributes both empirically to political discourse research and methodologically to the development of an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing contemporary political communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Communication, Digital Populism, and Media Contestation

The transformation of political communication in the digital era has fundamentally altered the relationship between political leaders, journalists, and citizens. Unlike traditional media systems, digital platforms enable politicians to communicate directly with audiences, reducing journalistic mediation while strengthening personalized political branding and emotional engagement. This transformation has facilitated the rise of digital populism, characterized by anti-elite rhetoric, direct appeals to "the people," and frequent confrontation with institutional actors, particularly mainstream media (Bentivegna & Rega, 2024; Sujoko et al., 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2026).

Recent scholarship argues that digital populism should not merely be understood as a political ideology but as a communicative style strategically constructed through discourse. Political leaders increasingly employ simplified narratives, emotional language, and identity-based framing to cultivate public support while delegitimizing opposing institutions (Andersson, 2024). Within this environment, journalists become not only information intermediaries but also symbolic political opponents whose credibility is frequently challenged in public discourse (McNab & Mavrou, 2025).

Press conferences have consequently evolved beyond their conventional function of governmental accountability. Rather than serving exclusively as forums for policy clarification, they frequently become sites of ideological contestation where politicians and journalists negotiate institutional authority through linguistic interaction. Heritage and Clayman (2010) describe press conferences as institutional encounters governed by asymmetrical participation rights, yet recent studies suggest that digital media exposure intensifies these interactions by transforming them into highly visible performances for online audiences (Ekström & Johansson, 2023). Consequently, language used during political press conferences simultaneously informs, persuades, legitimizes, and mobilizes public opinion.

Collectively, these developments demonstrate that contemporary political communication should be examined not only from institutional or media perspectives but also through discourse, where linguistic choices become central mechanisms for constructing political legitimacy and ideological authority.

2.2 Pragmatic Strategies in Political Discourse: Politeness and Impoliteness

Political interaction relies heavily on pragmatic strategies that regulate interpersonal relationships while simultaneously negotiating institutional authority. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains how speakers employ linguistic strategies to protect both positive and negative face, thereby maintaining cooperative communication. In political settings, however, politeness frequently extends beyond interpersonal harmony to function as a persuasive strategy for constructing credibility, leadership, and political legitimacy.

Conversely, impoliteness has become increasingly prominent in contemporary political communication. Culpeper's (1996, 2011) framework conceptualizes impoliteness as the intentional use of language to damage an interlocutor's social identity or public image. Recent studies indicate that political impoliteness has become normalized within polarized democracies, where verbal aggression functions strategically to attract media attention, reinforce ideological identity, and demonstrate political dominance (Dyrel, 2023; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2022; Sukmawaty et al., 2022).

Despite these advances, previous studies largely examine politeness and impoliteness as separate communicative phenomena. Research commonly classifies linguistic strategies without adequately explaining why political actors alternate between cooperative and confrontational discourse depending on institutional objectives or power configurations (Mavrou & Angouri, 2023). Consequently, pragmatic analyses often overlook how face management simultaneously operates as a mechanism for negotiating authority and ideological positioning.

This limitation is particularly significant in political press conferences, where presidents and journalists continuously alternate between maintaining institutional decorum and engaging in verbal confrontation. An integrated pragmatic perspective is therefore necessary to explain how politeness and impoliteness function as

complementary communicative resources within political interaction rather than mutually exclusive categories.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis, Power Relations, and Ideological Hegemony

While pragmatic theories explain interpersonal interaction, they provide limited insight into how linguistic strategies reproduce broader social structures. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) addresses this limitation by conceptualizing language as a form of social practice through which power relations and ideological assumptions are constructed and maintained (Fairclough, 1995, 2015).

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is not possessed by individuals but circulates through networks of social practices, institutions, and discourse (Foucault, 1982). Political authority is therefore continuously negotiated through communicative interaction rather than merely exercised through formal institutional positions. Complementing this perspective, Bourdieu (1991) argues that political speech derives symbolic power from the institutional legitimacy attached to the speaker. Consequently, the effectiveness of presidential discourse depends not only on linguistic form but also on the symbolic authority associated with political office.

Recent CDA research increasingly emphasizes that contemporary political discourse constructs ideological hegemony by repeatedly reproducing narratives that normalize particular representations of reality while marginalizing competing perspectives (Wodak, 2023; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2024). Nevertheless, most CDA studies remain focused on macro-level ideological structures without systematically incorporating micro-level pragmatic analysis. As a result, the mechanisms through which individual linguistic strategies contribute to ideological reproduction remain insufficiently explained.

This study addresses that limitation by integrating pragmatic analysis with theories of power and Critical Discourse Analysis. Specifically, politeness and impoliteness strategies are first examined as micro-level linguistic practices. These strategies are subsequently interpreted through the perspectives of Foucault's relational power and Bourdieu's symbolic power before being situated within Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to explain how everyday political interaction contributes to the construction, negotiation, and reproduction of ideological hegemony. This multi-level analytical framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of political discourse than approaches relying exclusively on either pragmatics or Critical Discourse Analysis.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of politeness strategies, impoliteness strategies, power relations, and discursive constructions manifested in a particular speech event rather than to test

relationships among variables through statistical analysis. This approach enables the researcher to describe and interpret linguistic phenomena within their situational and institutional contexts, allowing the meanings of utterances to be understood comprehensively (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017).

The research adopted a single-case study design. The unit of analysis comprised the complete verbal interactions occurring during the White House press conference held on **7 November 2018**, which lasted approximately 25 minutes and consisted of seventeen question-and-answer exchanges. Particular attention was devoted to the interaction between President Donald Trump and CNN correspondent Jim Acosta, which lasted approximately eight minutes, followed by Trump's exchanges with Peter Alexander (NBC News) and Yamiche Alcindor (PBS NewsHour), each lasting approximately two to three minutes. These interactions were purposively selected because they exhibit similar patterns of confrontational communication involving journalists representing different media institutions. The case was considered a bounded system, limited in time and context, yet sufficiently rich in linguistic, paralinguistic, and socio-political data to reveal patterns of confrontational political communication between the presidency and the press.

3.2 Data and Data Sources

The data consisted of linguistic units, including words, phrases, clauses, and complete utterances that indicated politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson (1987), impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (1996, 2011), markers of power relations derived from Foucault (1982) and Bourdieu (1991), as well as recurring ideological narratives reproduced across media coverage. In addition to verbal language, the study considered paralinguistic features—including pauses, interruptions, overlapping speech, intonation, facial expressions, and gestures—as contextual elements influencing pragmatic interpretation.

The primary data source was the complete audiovisual recording of the White House press conference uploaded to the official **C-SPAN YouTube channel** (C-SPAN, 2018). This source was selected because C-SPAN provides unedited archival footage that preserves the original interaction, allowing accurate verification of both verbal and paralinguistic features.

To enhance data validity and capture diverse ideological perspectives, the primary source was triangulated with news reports and video excerpts from three media organizations representing different editorial orientations: **CNN** (liberal), **Fox News** (conservative), and **BBC** (international). These additional sources were employed to verify the accuracy of the utterances while examining variations in media framing of the same political event. All media materials were accessed through their official websites and YouTube channels.

3.3 Data Selection

The data were selected purposively according to three criteria designed to address the research questions from the micro to the macro level. First, utterances containing politeness or impoliteness strategies were selected to investigate micro-level linguistic phenomena. Second, interactional sequences involving conflict escalation or de-escalation were identified to examine the dynamics of power relations during political interaction. Third, lexical choices contributing to broader political narratives were selected to connect linguistic findings with ideological discourse construction. These criteria facilitated a hierarchical analysis extending from linguistic units to broader social practices in accordance with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework.

3.4 Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary research instrument responsible for observing, transcribing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Moleong, 2017). To minimize subjective bias, several reflexive strategies were employed: (1) maintaining a research journal documenting assumptions and interpretative developments throughout the analysis; (2) conducting regular consultations with academic supervisors to evaluate interpretative consistency; and (3) utilizing validated coding instruments to ensure that coding decisions were based on predefined analytical criteria rather than personal intuition.

A structured coding sheet was developed to guide systematic data analysis. The coding instrument consisted of four categories:

1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies (positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record), including indicators distinguishing genuine politeness from mock politeness.
2. Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness strategies (bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm/mock politeness, and withhold politeness).
3. Three dimensions of power relations (institutional, discursive, and symbolic power) adapted from Foucault (1982) and Bourdieu (1991).
4. Fairclough's (1995, 2015) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework (text, discursive practice, and social practice).

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in three sequential stages.

The first stage involved repeated observation of the audiovisual recordings to obtain a comprehensive understanding of both verbal and paralinguistic elements, including intonation, pauses, facial expressions, gestures, interruptions, and overlapping speech. This procedure follows Culpeper et al. (2003), who argue that politeness and

impoliteness cannot be identified solely through linguistic forms but must be interpreted within their interactional context.

The second stage consisted of verbatim transcription and documentation. All relevant utterances were transcribed verbatim together with annotations describing accompanying non-verbal and paralinguistic features. Each transcript was archived alongside its original source and reference link to ensure transparency and auditability.

The final stage combined note-taking with source triangulation. The C-SPAN recordings were systematically compared with reports from CNN, Fox News, and BBC to verify the accuracy of the utterances. Any differences identified across media were interpreted as evidence of alternative media framing rather than inconsistencies in the data.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a hierarchical analytical framework consisting of four interconnected stages integrated with Fairclough's (1995, 2015) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis.

The first stage focused on **linguistic unit analysis**, where words, phrases, and clauses were identified and classified according to their syntactic and semantic characteristics.

The second stage involved the **analysis of politeness and impoliteness strategies**. Each utterance was categorized according to Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies or Culpeper's impoliteness strategies. The distinction between genuine politeness and mock politeness was established by considering both linguistic indicators (e.g., lexical choice and sentence structure) and paralinguistic features (e.g., intonation, pauses, facial expressions, and gestures).

The third stage examined **interactional patterns and power relations**, focusing on turn-taking, interruptions, conflict escalation and de-escalation, and journalists' resistance strategies. These interactional patterns were interpreted using Foucault's conception of relational power and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power to explain how institutional positions influenced communicative behavior.

The fourth stage consisted of **Critical Discourse Analysis**, integrating the linguistic and interactional findings within Fairclough's three analytical dimensions: (1) textual analysis, including lexical choices, syntactic structures, and discourse organization; (2) discursive practice, encompassing discourse production, distribution, and media circulation; and (3) social practice, relating discourse to broader structures of power and ideology within the sociopolitical context of the United States. Through this stage, recurring narratives such as *enemy of the people*, *fake news*, and *invasion* were interpreted as ideological constructions contributing to the reproduction of anti-media hegemony.

The overall analytical process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving continuous cycles of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This iterative procedure enabled findings at the macro level to inform and refine coding decisions at the micro level, thereby ensuring analytical consistency throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussion

The data of this study consist of the verbal utterances produced by Donald Trump and Jim Acosta during the White House press conferences held between 2018 and 2020, with the primary event taking place on **7 November 2018**, one day after the United States midterm elections. The incident began when Trump invited Acosta to ask a question. The interaction subsequently escalated as Acosta refused to yield his speaking turn and surrender the microphone, prompting Trump to make personal evaluations publicly. Similar interactional patterns were also observed in Trump's exchanges with Peter Alexander (NBC News) and Yamiche Alcindor (PBS NewsHour) during the same press conference. Following the procedures described in Chapter III, each utterance was coded using three analytical instruments: **Table 3.1 (Politeness)**, **Table 3.2 (Impoliteness)**, and **Table 3.3 (Power Relations)**. Non-verbal data, including intonation, facial expressions, and gestures, were also considered to distinguish **genuine politeness (GP)** from **mock politeness (MP)**.

4.1 Politeness Strategies

Drawing upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, the utterances produced by both participants demonstrate contrasting distributions of politeness strategies that reflect the institutional power asymmetry between them. Trump, as the more powerful speaker with relatively little concern for face-threatening risks, predominantly employed **bald on-record** and **off-record** strategies (primarily in the form of sarcasm or mock politeness). In contrast, Acosta, who occupied a lower institutional position, consistently relied on **negative politeness** as a mitigating strategy despite the interactional pressure imposed upon him.

Table 1. Sample Analysis of Politeness Strategies

Code	Speaker	Utterance	PP	NP	BoR	OR	GP/MP	Brief Analysis
P-001	Acosta	"Thank you, Mr. President."	✓				GP	A genuine expression of respect for the President's institutional status at the beginning of his speaking turn,

						representing positive politeness.
P-002	Acosta	"Well, I—if you don't mind, Mr. President..."	✓		GP	An explicit request for permission before continuing to speak, representing negative politeness intended to minimize the threat to Trump's negative face.
P-003	Trump	"Thank you for telling me that, I appreciate it."	✓		MP	Although the utterance literally expresses gratitude (positive politeness), its flat and sarcastic intonation following criticism indicates that it pragmatically functions as ridicule, representing mock politeness. Within Gramsci's framework of hegemony, this strategy operates subtly:

					by maintaining the conventional form of politeness, Trump preserves the image of a "civilized" leader while simultaneously undermining Acosta's professional authority. Consequently, mock politeness becomes an instrument of hegemony that enables domination without appearing as overt symbolic violence.
P-004	Trump	"I think you should—honestly—let me run the country, you run CNN."	✓	MP	Framed as advice through an off-record strategy, the utterance appears polite on the surface but pragmatically functions to diminish the interlocutor's professional authority. Trump's statement constructs a

hierarchical dichotomy in which governing the country belongs exclusively to the President, whereas journalists are confined to managing their own media organizations. This extends beyond personal ridicule and represents an ideological attempt to delegitimize the press as an institution responsible for monitoring political power.

The preliminary findings reinforce the proposition that the selection of politeness strategies is influenced not merely by interpersonal norms but also by calculations of power relations and the perceived degree of imposition experienced by each participant. The occurrence of **mock politeness** in Trump's utterances (P-003 and P-004) constitutes a crucial finding that distinguishes the present study from conventional politeness research, as superficially polite expressions conceal illocutionary functions intended to belittle the interlocutor.

Contemporary studies of politeness cannot be separated from Goffman's (1967) concept of **face**, which refers to the social self-image that individuals continuously seek to maintain during interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) further developed this concept by distinguishing two dimensions of face: **negative face**, namely an individual's desire to remain free from imposition or interference by others, and **positive face**, referring to the desire for one's self-image, actions, and values to be appreciated and socially approved. Both dimensions are inherently vulnerable and may be threatened by particular speech acts, a condition described by Brown and Levinson as **face-threatening acts (FTAs)**.

To minimize the risk of FTAs, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed four principal politeness strategies arranged according to their degree of directness. **Bald on-record** refers to expressing intentions directly and explicitly without attempting to protect the interlocutor's face. This strategy is generally selected when efficiency is prioritized or when the speaker possesses substantially greater institutional power and therefore has little concern about losing face. **On-record with redressive action** consists of **positive politeness**, which satisfies the interlocutor's positive face through expressions of solidarity and appreciation, and **negative politeness**, which respects the interlocutor's autonomy through permission-seeking, apologies, hedging, and indirect expressions. Finally, **off-record** strategies communicate intentions ambiguously, requiring the interlocutor to infer the intended meaning while allowing the speaker **plausible deniability** if the utterance is interpreted as offensive.

According to Brown and Levinson, the selection among these strategies is determined by the speaker's assessment of three variables: **social distance**, **relative power**, and the **rank of imposition** associated with the speech act within a particular culture. These variables make the theory especially relevant for examining inherently asymmetrical interactions such as presidential press conferences, where institutional differences between the president and journalists directly influence each participant's assessment of face-related risks.

Leech's (1983) **Politeness Principle** complements Brown and Levinson's framework by emphasizing the orientation of speech toward the interlocutor's interests through maxims such as the **Tact Maxim** and the **Approbation Maxim**, both of which encourage speakers to minimize costs and maximize benefits for others. When combined with the **Irony Principle**, this framework provides a theoretical basis for what later became known as **mock politeness**—utterances that formally satisfy the conventions of politeness while pragmatically functioning to attack or belittle the interlocutor.

Culpeper (2011) argues that mock politeness occupies a grey area between politeness and impoliteness because its linguistic form resembles conventional expressions of gratitude or apology, whereas its contextual realization—including intonation and facial expressions—signals the opposite communicative intention. Consequently, distinguishing **genuine politeness** from **mock politeness** requires analysis extending beyond linguistic form alone to include paralinguistic cues and the situational context surrounding the utterance (Culpeper et al., 2003).

If politeness is oriented toward maintaining face, **impoliteness** is understood as a communicative strategy deliberately designed to attack face and generate social conflict (Culpeper et al., 2003). This distinction is important because it differentiates **strategic impoliteness** from **rudeness**, which, according to Terkourafi (2008), may occur without any intention to threaten the interlocutor's face. In his later work, Culpeper (2011) defines impoliteness as a negative evaluation of particular behaviour within a specific context, emerging from the interaction among linguistic expression, context,

power relations, and participants' interpretations rather than being inherently attached to specific linguistic forms. Likewise, Locher and Bousfield (2008) define impoliteness as behaviour that aggravates face threats, while Bousfield (2008) emphasizes its conflictive and deliberately aggravating nature.

4.2 Impoliteness Strategies

Based on Culpeper's (1996, 2011) typology of impoliteness, Trump's impolite behaviour toward Acosta demonstrates a gradual shift from procedural control of the press conference to direct attacks on the interlocutor's personal identity. This pattern indicates that the impoliteness observed in the data is strategic rather than merely an emotional outburst.

Table 2. Sample Analysis of Impoliteness Strategies

Code	Speaker	Utterance	BORI	PI	NI	SAR	MP	WP	Brief Analysis
I-001	Trump	"That's enough." (repeated several times)	✓						A direct directive without mitigation intended to terminate Acosta's speaking turn. This represents bald on-record impoliteness , threatening Acosta's negative face.
I-002	Trump	"Put down the mic."	✓						An explicit command demanding control over the instrument of discourse production. This constitutes bald on-record impoliteness while simultaneously reflecting institutional

				power (see Table 4.3).
I-003	Trump	"You are a rude, terrible person. You shouldn't be working for CNN."	✓	A direct attack on Acosta's personal identity and professional credibility. This represents positive impoliteness , targeting the interlocutor's positive face and public self-image.
I-004	Trump	"That's such a racist question." (addressed to Yamiche Alcindor)	✓	A negatively evaluative accusation directed at the journalist's character. This represents positive impoliteness , functioning to delegitimize the legitimacy of the question rather than responding to its substantive content.
I-005	Trump	"Well, I'm not a big fan of yours, either, honestly." (addressed to Peter Alexander)	✓	The expression "honestly" disguises a personal insult beneath a conversational tone, representing sarcasm/mock

				politeness.
I-006	Acosta	(continues holding the microphone without responding to the request to surrender it)	✓	Withhold politeness through the absence of a verbally cooperative response to the implicit request to relinquish the microphone, functioning as a form of passive resistance.

The patterns presented in **Table 2** demonstrate that **bald on-record impoliteness** (I-001 and I-002) primarily functions to reclaim procedural control over the press conference, whereas **positive impoliteness** (I-003 and I-004) is directed toward damaging the interlocutor's personal and professional credibility before the wider public. Although these strategies serve different immediate purposes, they jointly reinforce the broader objective of maintaining discursive dominance. Conversely, Acosta's use of **withhold politeness** (I-006) indicates that impoliteness within this corpus is not unidirectional but also functions as a form of resistance employed by the institutionally less powerful participant.

Culpeper (1996, 2011) proposes five principal impoliteness strategies that structurally mirror Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. The first, **bald on-record impoliteness**, involves openly attacking the interlocutor's face through direct, unmitigated expressions. This strategy commonly occurs in contexts characterized by pronounced power asymmetries, such as brief directives that unilaterally terminate another participant's speaking turn. The second, **positive impoliteness**, targets the interlocutor's positive face by ignoring, ridiculing, or undermining their personal or professional identity. The third, **negative impoliteness**, attacks the interlocutor's negative face through intimidation, invasion of personal space, or coercive behaviour that leaves little opportunity for refusal. The fourth, **sarcasm or mock politeness**, employs superficially polite forms to conceal hostile communicative intentions. Finally, **withhold politeness** refers to impoliteness realized through the absence of socially expected polite behaviour, such as failing to reciprocate expressions of gratitude or respect. These five strategies operate complementarily, allowing a single episode of verbal conflict to exhibit multiple forms of impoliteness simultaneously depending on which dimension of face is targeted during each interactional turn.

Culpeper (2011) further distinguishes between **conventionalised impoliteness**, which relies on recognizable formulaic expressions such as insults or offensive labels, and **implicational impoliteness**, which arises from contextual interpretation without explicit linguistic markers. His findings indicate that the majority of impoliteness events in naturally occurring discourse do not rely on conventionalized formulas. This observation underscores the importance of analysing situational context carefully, particularly in institutional discourse such as presidential press conferences, where face attacks are frequently embedded within expressions that appear formal or even polite on the surface.

The findings of this study support Culpeper's argument by demonstrating that Trump's impoliteness extends beyond explicit verbal aggression. Directives such as **"That's enough"** and **"Put down the mic"** simultaneously function as interactional mechanisms for terminating journalistic participation and as symbolic demonstrations of presidential authority. Likewise, evaluative expressions such as **"You are a rude, terrible person"** and **"That's such a racist question"** not only threaten the journalists' positive face but also undermine their institutional credibility before a national audience. Consequently, impoliteness in this interaction operates not merely as interpersonal conflict but as a strategic communicative resource for negotiating authority, controlling institutional interaction, and reinforcing political legitimacy.

4.4 Discursive Construction: From Linguistic Units to Grand Narratives

Based on the hierarchical analytical model proposed in Chapter III, which consists of **linguistic units** as the analytical foundation, **politeness and impoliteness strategies** as the analytical framework, **interactional patterns** as the discourse architecture, **grand narratives** as the overall discursive construction, and **reproduction and resistance** as discourse functions, it becomes evident that the use of negatively evaluative adjectives such as **rude** (I-003), **terrible** (I-003), and **racist** (I-004), together with formulaic expressions such as **enemy of the people** (RK-003), **fake news** (RK-003), and **invasion**, does not function merely as isolated lexical choices.

For example, Trump's accusation directed at Yamiche Alcindor that her question was **"such a racist question"** (I-004) functions not only as **positive impoliteness**, attacking the journalist's positive face, but also contributes to a broader discursive narrative. By labeling a question concerning immigration policy as "racist," Trump implicitly positions himself as the defender of the "American people" against accusations of racism, while simultaneously portraying journalists as representatives of foreign agendas or minority interests. When such labeling is repeatedly reproduced across multiple public appearances, it contributes to the construction of a broader narrative in which the media are no longer perceived as neutral institutions but rather as ideological actors serving interests opposed to those of "the people."

At the level of **interactional patterns**, the data reveal a recurring communicative cycle that can be described as follows:

1. **Initiation** – A journalist raises a critical question concerning a politically sensitive issue (e.g., Acosta questioning Trump's use of the term *invasion* and his immigration policy).
2. **Interruption** – Trump interrupts or prevents the journalist from completing the question (e.g., "**That's enough,**" I-001).
3. **Directive** – Trump issues a direct command instructing the journalist to stop speaking or surrender the microphone (e.g., "**Put down the mic,**" I-002).
4. **Personal Attack** – Trump shifts from discussing the issue to negatively evaluating the journalist's identity or professional credibility (e.g., "**You are a rude, terrible person,**" I-003).
5. **Resistance** – The journalist maintains his position through either verbal persistence (continuing to ask questions) or non-verbal resistance (refusing to release the microphone).
6. **Escalation or Resolution** – The interaction either escalates into open confrontation, with Trump terminating the exchange, or gradually de-escalates as the journalist's speaking turn comes to an end.

These recurring interactional patterns subsequently develop into a broader **grand narrative** characterized by the binary opposition between "**the people**" and "**the media as the enemy**" (*enemy of the people*). This binary operates hegemonically. By constructing an opposition between "the people," represented as Trump's supporters, and "the media," portrayed as dishonest and corrupt, Trump not only attacks Acosta personally but also redefines the relationship between executive authority and the press in the eyes of the public. Consequently, public attention shifts away from substantive policy issues—particularly immigration, which constituted the original topic of Acosta's question—and toward the dramatization of the personal conflict between the President and the journalist.

At the level of **discursive function**, this construction reproduces power relations that reinforce the President's dominant position among audiences already holding anti-media sentiments. At the same time, however, the same discourse also generates various forms of resistance, including institutional solidarity among news organizations—most notably the support expressed by the **White House Correspondents' Association**—and judicial intervention that ultimately restored Jim Acosta's White House press credentials. These findings indicate that the power relations emerging from the interaction are dynamic, continuously negotiated, and open to resistance rather than fixed, linear, or absolute.

Accordingly, the Trump–Acosta interaction should not be understood merely as a personal conflict between two individuals but rather as an arena of ideological contestation between two competing grand narratives: **authoritarian populism**, which

seeks to delegitimize the press, and **deliberative democracy**, which regards the press as a fundamental institution of democratic accountability.

Overall, the discursive construction observed in the Trump–Acosta interaction demonstrates that the anti-media narrative does not emerge accidentally. Instead, it is produced through the cumulative interaction of linguistic strategies, recurring interactional patterns, and media reproduction that mutually reinforce one another. Nevertheless, understanding how these elements are systematically connected from the micro-linguistic level to the macro-social level requires an analytical framework capable of integrating both dimensions dialectically. The following section therefore synthesizes the findings through **Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis**, linking textual analysis, discursive practice, and broader social practice within a unified analytical model.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that politeness and impoliteness strategies in the Trump–Acosta press conference do not operate merely as independent interpersonal communication strategies but are deeply embedded within broader relations of power and ideological hegemony. Trump employed bald on-record impoliteness to assert procedural control over the press conference, positive impoliteness to undermine journalists' credibility and professional identity, and mock politeness to disguise symbolic domination through superficially polite expressions. In contrast, Acosta relied primarily on negative politeness as a mitigating strategy while simultaneously employing withhold politeness as a form of passive resistance. These findings indicate that linguistic choices are not solely determined by interpersonal considerations but are strongly shaped by institutional power asymmetries and competing ideological interests.

At the macro level, these communicative strategies collectively contributed to the reproduction of an anti-media hegemonic narrative that reinforced Trump's ideological dominance among his supporters while simultaneously generating counter-hegemonic responses from journalistic institutions and the judicial system. The repeated construction of the media as *"the enemy of the people"* and the persistent use of the label *"fake news"* functioned not only as rhetorical devices but also as discursive mechanisms through which political legitimacy, institutional authority, and public consent were negotiated and contested. The findings therefore support Gramsci's notion that hegemony is maintained not merely through coercion but through the continuous production and normalization of ideological discourse.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of political discourse research by integrating Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Culpeper's impoliteness theory, Foucault's conception of power, Bourdieu's symbolic power, Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis within a single analytical framework. Such integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of how micro-level linguistic strategies are connected to macro-level processes of ideological reproduction and social power. Methodologically, the study proposes a multi-layered

analytical model that systematically links linguistic units, interactional strategies, power relations, discursive constructions, and broader sociopolitical structures.

Ultimately, the study confirms that language in political discourse is not a neutral reflection of reality but an active instrument through which power relations and ideological hegemony are constructed, maintained, and challenged. Future research may extend this analytical framework to other political contexts, media platforms, or contemporary forms of digital populist communication in order to further examine how linguistic strategies shape public perceptions, democratic accountability, and ideological contestation in increasingly polarized political environments.

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