

Im/Politeness in Presidential Trials: A Contrastive Study

Aalaa Yaseen Hassan,^{1*} Wafaa Sahib Mehdi²,

^{1,2} English Department, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad

* Corresponding Author

Email: alaa.y@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq

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Abstract

This study examines the politeness and impoliteness strategies used by Donald Trump and Saddam Hussein during their respective trials. The judges' questions accusing the presidents were also taken into consideration. The data is drawn from the transcript of Saddam Hussein's court proceedings, reported by NBC News and MSNBC. The analysis is based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and Culpeper's framework of impoliteness. To achieve rigorous qualitative validity, this study utilizes Qualitative Descriptive Analysis to investigate face-work and linguistic aggression within the selected court transcripts. The contrast observed in the study between Trump's and Hussein's trials can be attributed to several factors, including cultural norms. Trump's politeness and cooperation reflected the cultural expectations of American society. On the other hand, Hussein's actions reflected the cultural norms of Iraqi society, where people often prefer a strong, defiant leader. Thus, the two strategies were fundamentally different: both former presidents aimed to project strength, but in opposing ways. The role of the judges also differed. The judge, al-Amiri, managed power dynamics effectively and acknowledged Hussein's former status, a crucial factor in a political trial. Alternatively, Letitia James primarily conducted an investigative role during Trump's testimony. Her strategy focused on gathering information rather than asserting authority. In conclusion, the qualitative

conclusions are bound by the micro-contextual relationship between speaker intent and participant evaluation within the selected boundaries of the text.

Keywords: *Impoliteness strategies; politeness strategies; presidential trials; judges; presidents.*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds strongly affect how people behave in communications (Shahrokhi & Bidabadi, 2013). In pragmatics, politeness is crucially defined as a device that societies use to reduce friction in personal interactions (Lakoff, 1975). Similarly, Leech (1980) describes it as a form of strategic conflict avoidance. This need to avoid conflict is exactly why courtroom language depends so heavily on "formal protocol" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Within this legal framework, judges must enforce strict etiquette to maintain control over the courtroom environment (Kurzon, 2001). For instance, judges frequently rely on avoidance devices when speaking to individuals to minimize face-threatening situations (Harris, 2011). However, oral advocacy in court requires a specialized kind of courtesy because courtroom speech is completely different from everyday, real-life conversations (Tracy, 2011). This is why impolite language used by lawyers often lies just below the surface of the discourse, intentionally using polite features to mask aggression (Johnson & Clifford, 2011).

Brown and Levinson's approach has relied on two main features: 'face' and 'rationality' (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). The first term is associated with the public self-image, in which the Model Person is assumed to satisfy social expectations; however, the second term refers to the Model Person's supposed ability to meet the listener's expectations through reasoning (Shahrokhi & Bidabadi, 2013). Following this, Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the concept of the Face-Threatening Act (FTA) to refer to the two faces. For them, the face has two sides: negative face, in which the speaker does not want to make the listener feel uncomfortable or imposed upon, and, at the same time, positive face, in

which the listener wants to be accepted, valued, and praised by others (Culpeper, 2011).

Additionally, they divided politeness theory into five strategies derived from the above concepts, which are as follows: bald on record is used when the speaker does not have time, has authority, or close relationships with the addressee; positive politeness is used when the speaker tries to build solidarity, use inclusive language, return the favour promise to do something to enhance rapport with the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2013); negative politeness is used when the speaker tries to use indirect language when making a request, apologizes when making an uneasy request, reduces the burden, uses hedge words and uses formal language when addressing the listener; off-record politeness is used when the speaker purposely uses an unclear message, gives indirect statements, inquires about something, and does not ask for answers but hints at a suggestion or disapproval to the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and withhold politeness, the interlocutor purposely neglects politeness, violates social norms, and creates social distance when expressing displeasure or anger (Watts, 2003).

In 2008, Bousfield disagreed with Brown and Levinson's classification of positive and negative faces, which was based on the record and off-record (Bousfield, 2008). Accordingly, he used these levels to analyze impolite utterances: at the beginning of the utterance (the pre-impoliteness sequence), in the middle of the utterance (the impoliteness strategy), and at the end of the utterance (post-intensifying interrogatives) (Bousfield, 2008). Haugh (2008) described it at the discourse level: discourse beginnings, discourse middles, and discourse ends. Both followed Culpeper's classification of impoliteness, but in different ways (Bousfield, 2008; Haugh, 2008). Mills and Mullany's model (2011) is based on politeness and impoliteness theory and correlates impoliteness to gender, in which the individual

employs strategies to assess their behaviour and other people's behaviour and tries to see them within the group.

To evaluate whether the behaviour is polite or impolite, first-order impoliteness was employed to shed light on this variability (Eelen, 2001). It relies on two factors, linguistic expressions and social norms, rather than the speaker's linguistic expressions. Thus, the social interaction among involved individuals is the sensible notion of impoliteness (Eelen, 2001). Second-order impoliteness, on the contrary, is the scientific perspective of impoliteness theory, which agrees on the distinction between polite and impolite expressions (Watts, 2003; Huang, 2012). Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory is a significant example of second-order impoliteness, which sees "politeness" as a fundamental and practical concept for defining related studies aimed at reducing face-threatening acts. Experts in this area debate that impoliteness is comparable to non-politeness, implying that impoliteness is unlike politeness in social exchanges (Bousfield & Locher, 2008). Ultimately, because politeness is fundamentally shaped by social interaction, first-order participant norms must take precedence over second-order scientific frameworks whenever an analytical conflict arises between a speaker's intent and a standardized coding system (Bousfield & Locher, 2008).

Culpeper (1996) introduced the concept of impoliteness as the opposite of politeness. In 2011, Culpeper emphasized that impoliteness is an interdisciplinary area of research (Culpeper, 2011). Scientific studies such as literary studies, sociology, business studies, media studies, history, and psychology are all interested in impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011). Thus, it seems like a complex subject to define, study, and analyze (Culpeper, 2011). It is rather complicated to describe what exactly 'impoliteness' means since some verbal actions are perceived as impolite or polite (Culpeper, 2011). For instance, it is unacceptable to shout or use foul language in the neighborhood, as this is considered rude, whereas it is

acceptable during a football match (Culpeper, 2011). Therefore, it is important to comprehend that impoliteness interpretation is subjective (Culpeper, 2011). Culpeper (2008) showed a significant distinction between impoliteness and rudeness. Unintentional or careless actions that do not meet social expectations are classified as rudeness, while intentional actions that cause insult or hurt to listeners are classified as impoliteness (Culpeper, 2008). Nevertheless, Terkourafi (2008) disagreed with Culpeper, who said that rudeness is intentional, whereas impoliteness is unintentional, following the dictionary (Hassan et al., 2023).

Culpeper (1996) described impoliteness as an interactional strategy used to aggress against individuals and thus cause social disturbance. Based on Brown and Levinson's model, Culpeper presented five strategies used by the speakers to attack the listener's face: bald on record, the speaker has the authority to insult clearly and directly to communicate with the listener; positive impoliteness: it is used by the speaker to damage the listener's positive face desires; negative impoliteness, it is used to damage the listener's negative face wants; mock or sarcastic politeness is used humorously by the speaker and is not meant to be taken seriously (Culpeper, 1996). It entails teasing the listener and is usually employed among friends (Culpeper, 1996). Withhold impoliteness: it happens when the listener expects politeness, but the speaker chooses not to express it (Culpeper, 1996).

Some scholars view the analysis of impoliteness as part of politeness, but in an opposite manner. However, other scholars—such as Eelen (2001), Culpeper (2007), and Bousfield (2008)—consider impoliteness theory to be a separate yet related area of study, derived from politeness theory. In this study, the presidents employed both politeness and impoliteness strategies in accordance with their respective social norms and standards. For example, Hussein used impoliteness strategies such as positive impoliteness, bald-on-record impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and withholding politeness. In contrast, Trump employed politeness

strategies including positive politeness and bald-on-record politeness. Similar manners were observed in the judges' actions.

According to Brown and Levinson's framework, the speaker attempts to soften face-threatening acts to preserve the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In contrast, impoliteness theory suggests that the speaker intentionally causes damage to the hearer's face (Culpeper, 1996). Fixed settings and prescribed rules are the main features of courtrooms, where communication style is highly expected (Archer, 2008). Since the judge is considered the court's highest authority, it is expected that the territories follow the law and behave accordingly (Kurzon, 2001). Therefore, no resistance should appear in the territory's behaviour—only obedience within the provided context (Li, 2024). The language used in this kind of place is typically formal, serious, and predictable (Kurzon, 2001). However, verbal aggression and multiple structured actions that clearly demonstrate impoliteness can also occur in the courtroom, often due to underlying power relationships (Csulich, 2022; Ayansola, 2018).

For this reason, this study focuses on two aspects: the use of polite expressions by Trump when addressing the judge, and the use of impolite expressions by Saddam Hussein, where politeness would typically be expected. Still, these theories, which are presented by Levinson and Culpeper, do not provide a specific framework to analyze speech within the courtroom, and may not fully represent the nature of legal discourse, especially in politically charged trial contexts. This is because the classification of politeness and impoliteness strategies does not cover all relations of dominance and organizational roles, which may vary from one context to another. Consequently, while the frameworks of politeness and impoliteness are practical for comparison, they may need background variables to be applicable to high-stakes litigation and political engagement. Furthermore, the courtroom discourse is highly structured and power-driven; thus, impoliteness can

be reinterpreted as strategic resistance or political positioning rather than purely face-threatening behavior (Bousfield, 2008; Archer, 2008).

Politeness and impoliteness are considered important aspects of human interaction by many researchers. Some studies have examined the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in courtroom settings. For instance, Mısır and Akin (2024) analysed impoliteness strategies in seven recorded criminal trials, each approximately 45 minutes long, and demonstrated how a defendant deviated from the court's legal regulations. Ayansola (2021) used impoliteness strategies to highlight verbal behaviour that reflects culturally sensitive impoliteness and the courtroom genre, evident in name-calling, impolite orders, contempt, and falsehood. Csulich (2021) used im/politeness tactics to shed light on the relationship between power and language across age, rank, social class, and status in historical courtrooms during the Elizabethan and Stuart periods, where two types of trials—high treason and ordinary criminal cases—were held. Another study conducted by Yibifu (2020) analyzed an American reality TV show in which participants employed these strategies in a courtroom context. Kuntsi (2012) examined the speech of lawyers in the 'Dover Trial' and how they used polite and impolite strategies in the courtroom. See also Sari, Aritini, and Kusuma (2025), Archer (2011), Carranza (2017), Archer (2017), Hu (2018), Hatab, Al-Refai, and Al-Badawi (2026), Lebedeva and Ivanova (2024), and Meizhen and Xue (2021). The study also showed that lawyers tend to use formal language most of the time when interacting with witnesses and the judge, where polite expressions are typically expected (Archer, 2011). This study examines the politeness and impoliteness techniques used by Trump and Hussein during the trial. The analysis is based on Brown and Levinson's (1978) study on politeness and Culpeper's (1996) study on impoliteness.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data for this study are drawn from two primary qualitative sources. The first dataset consists of the official transcript of Saddam Hussein's court proceedings, reported and translated by NBC News (2004, July 2). This specific portion was utilized to analyze the initial segment of the trial in relation to impoliteness theory. The second dataset was obtained from the MSNBC (2023, September 1) broadcast, focusing closely on the initial segment of Donald Trump's trial from timestamp 10:14:32 to 10:22:03. The core analysis contrasts the linguistic behaviors of Trump and Hussein during these respective trial openings, grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness and Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness. The key institutional figures involved include Saddam Hussein, the former President of Iraq (1979–2003); Judge Abdullah Al-Amiri, the initial presiding judge in the Iraqi tribunal; Donald Trump, the President of the United States (2017–2021 and 2025–); and Letitia James, the Attorney General who prosecuted the civil case against the Trump Organization.

To achieve rigorous qualitative validity, this study utilizes Qualitative Descriptive Analysis to investigate face-work and linguistic aggression within the selected court transcripts. Methodological validity is maintained by grounding the coding process in widely accepted, standardized pragmatic frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996), ensuring that the classification of utterances remains stable, consistent, and theoretically interpretable. Furthermore, descriptive validity is established because the chosen transcripts represent highly relevant, purposive samples that capture the critical, unedited initial interactions between a political executive and the judicial authority in a high-stakes courtroom setting.

To ensure reliability across the data, a systematic, multi-pass qualitative coding procedure was employed. Each utterance was contextually evaluated within

its sequence of talk to identify its pragmatic function, rather than relying on isolated words. Because this study assumes a qualitative, case-study design, the analysis does not seek to establish universal statistical frequencies across the entire trial corpora. Instead, it tracks localized linguistic trends, identifying how the two distinct presidents contrast in their strategic execution of face-threatening acts. Given that the analyzed segments are limited to these specific initial trial interactions, the threshold of evidence required to falsify the study's conclusions rests on the first-order evaluations of the participants. The conclusion that Trump primarily favored politeness while Hussein favored impoliteness would be falsified if a macro-level analysis of the broader interactive context demonstrated that: (1) Hussein's aggressive utterances were evaluated by the courtroom participants as accepted institutional legal maneuvers rather than norm-violating impoliteness, or (2) Trump's superficially polite expressions functioned implicitly as a highly offensive, off-record strategy that the presiding judge explicitly sanctioned as contemptuous. Thus, the qualitative conclusions are bound by the micro-contextual relationship between speaker intent and participant evaluation within the selected boundaries of the text.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Saddam Hussein's Trial

In this section, each statement made by the judge, Abdullah Al-Amiri, and Saddam Hussein will be categorized according to the impoliteness strategy it represents. During the court, Hussein used positive impoliteness when he insisted that he was still the president of Iraq, stating, "*No, present. Current.*" He also used insulting terms, such as "dogs." His aggressive defense challenged the judge's authority and the new government. Another strategy used here is bald-on-record. Hussein openly attacks the legitimacy and character of the Kuwaitis by referring to them as "dogs" and using explicit language like "prostitute for ten dinars." It is an

obvious case of bald-on-record impoliteness, given the language's directness, harshness, and overt confrontational nature.

Negative impoliteness was used when Saddam questioned the judge's legitimacy and associated him with occupying forces. It also weakens the judge's authority, as seen in the lines, "*What law formed this court?*" and "*The coalition forces?*" Withheld politeness appeared clear when Saddam refused to comply with the judge's request. It demonstrates a lack of expected cooperation.

As shown in the appendix 1, Hussein used rudeness strategies when dealing with the judge, Al-Amiri. He attacked the judge's authority, the court's validity, and the official procedures followed in the courtroom to undermine the justice system and prove his authority and legitimacy. These techniques are used to create an aggressive setting that undermines the judge's reliability during the trial. The most common strategies are positive and negative impoliteness, which challenge the authority and credibility of the judge. While bald-on-record and withholding politeness suggest different techniques for attacking the court's legitimacy, which are less.

The judge, on his side, tries to act professionally when he states, "Do not insult anybody, this is a legal session." He directly avoids Saddam's insults, demonstrating withheld politeness. Additionally, the judge makes an effort to assert legal procedures and rights; he is polite but firm, which exemplifies negative impoliteness. There is an equal balance between positive impoliteness and withheld politeness. This balance shows an attempt to uphold authority and enforce the law without intensifying conflicts. Al-Amiri tried to keep professionalism and legal political behaviour, replying to Hussein's statements with harsh reminders of the legal protocols. This technique revealed the language used throughout the trial and the struggles that occurred in the courtroom. Negative impoliteness and withheld impoliteness were used to maintain a respectful distance, to respect the

seriousness of the situation, and to appreciate the etiquette of the court (see Appendix 1).

Donald Trump's Trail

Accordingly, the analysis will start with Attorney Letitia James' statements and end with Donald Trump's responses to her questions. The researchers used politeness strategies to categorize each statement in this analysis.

Creating a positive, respectful setting, James began the trial before judging Trump with a warm salutation: "Good morning." Trump replied to her greeting with "Good morning," keeping the exchange courteous and affirming. Politically and officially, James asked permission to inquire about his past. This technique is an example of positive politeness, which shows the importance of and upholding of his self-government. Briefly and cooperatively, Trump and James maintained a polite attitude, without being rude or aggressive toward each other.

James verified the date and acknowledged the earlier response without challenging Trump, demonstrating respect and maintaining a cooperative tone. Trump, in turn, was cooperative and affirmative, keeping a polite tone. James's initial question employed negative politeness, and Trump's response was positive. Another question by James sought confirmation rather than asserting: "And is that a fair description...," which is an example of negative politeness. Trump then answered with a direct, clear "No," which fits the formal setting as a bald-on-record answer. James addressed Trump using the title "Mr. Trump" to maintain a formal and respectful tone, an instance of negative politeness. Trump provided a detailed explanation, showing his collaboration and readiness to clarify, which is positive politeness.

Without being firm or aggressive, James asked with negative politeness the question ("Who would that be?") to get clarification from Trump, who is, in his turn, replying with okay, expressing willingness and agreement to continue, which is an

instance of positive politeness. In another context, James used a cooperative and inclusive tone to build connection and showed concern for his attitude when he said, "We'll try," which is a positive politeness. She also asked with respect and acknowledged the change, employing negative politeness. Trump confirmed, "Yes, it has," keeping a cooperative tone.

Inquiring about the status of the assets, James asked politely and formally, which is an example of negative politeness. Trump responded cooperatively, expressing uncertainty but a readiness to agree, saying, "I believe so." Respectfully, James continued to name the trust and asked for verification, another instance of negative politeness. Trump confirmed the trust's precise name cooperatively. James then asked for confirmation with two polite questions, which were also negative politeness strategies. In an attempt to remain cooperative and kind, Trump affirmed that he is the donor. Additionally, Trump replied in depth, offering explanations, showing his willingness to share the details of his thinking and actions. With attention and respect, James appreciated Trump's long response and tried to clarify what was being said, demonstrating positive politeness. Trump respectfully affirmed the summary of his claim. All of Trump's responses were examples of positive politeness.

Respectfully, James asked for particular details about the overseer. With a cooperative attitude, Trump expressed his readiness to share what he already knew. James also inquired about the accessibility of the records, the trustees, his role, and the appointment date to be confirmed by Trump, in all questions, in a very polite manner, which they distinguished as negative politeness. Trump tried to keep his cooperative attitude, confirmed that the records were available, and affirmed his role and the date in an understanding manner. James respected his viewpoint and asked why the change was made and why he selected Mr. Weisselberg and his son as trustees. Trump, in a diplomatic manner, gave justifications for the change

and for selecting Mr. Weisselberg and his son. In response to Trump's statements, James showed respect and interest by politely requesting specific facts. Her questions in this context were examples of positive politeness. All of Trump's responses were positive politeness.

The attorney politely asked about any changes to Don's role and requested to clarify. Trump showed a readiness to provide more information when he replied in detail, offering justifications. James then asked about the referent "we," which Trump confirmed, showing respect for clear communication. Trump justified the use of the referent "we," continuing in the spirit of cooperation. James politely and formally asked who received the instructions, continuing to show respect. Trump cooperatively shared information and clarified his decisions. James's questions in this context were examples of negative politeness, while Trump's responses were examples of positive politeness (see Appendix 2).

Positive politeness was used in Trump's responses, whereas negative politeness appeared clearly in James's questions. From their respective roles and objectives, these differences were raised. Being polite and cooperative helped Trump project a positive image of himself; on the other hand, handling the delicate nature of the questions and maintaining a formal, professional manner helped James avoid any conflict throughout the testimony. For this reason, she used negative politeness, and he used positive politeness most of the time. This combination of politeness techniques helped achieve successful, respectful communication suitable for a courtroom setting.

Discussion

Donald Trump utilized cooperation and friendliness, trying to build good communication with Letitia James, the inquirer. Trump attempted to use perfect answers to show his readiness and openness to engage in the judicial process. Such behavior aligns with the concept of positive politeness, where a speaker tries to

build solidarity and enhance rapport with the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2013). Trump presented himself as a cooperative and reasonable figure by adopting a positive attitude, which served as a public relations strategy. Using a polite, cooperative manner helped Trump protect his personality and manner, which were seen as a successful strategy. In contrast to Saddam Hussein's behavior, who associated disobedience with politeness, he questioned and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the legal system. Saddam used this technique to confirm his place as the chosen leader of the Iraqi people and his status as a protector of the people's will. This reflects impoliteness as an interactional strategy used to aggress against individuals and cause social disturbance (Culpeper, 1996). He delicately challenged the court's reliability while showing respect, a form of off-record politeness or strategic ambiguity (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In legal representation, collaboration and polite behavior could yield a more desirable result; Trump followed this strategy to win over the court and the public. Using positive politeness and staying calm helped Trump build a positive image during the court proceedings. As a former president, Trump played on two parts—the people and the media—to present the good side of himself. Compared with Hussein's technique, the situation was somehow different. Hussein tried to cast doubt on the judge's and the court's power during the trial, which made the setting more challenging. He never admitted the legitimacy of the court because the judge and the temporary government at that time were set by the occupation forces, not by the Iraqi people themselves. This aligns with the notion that impoliteness can be reinterpreted as strategic resistance or political positioning rather than purely face-threatening behavior (Bousfield, 2008). Also, he wanted to show a strong image of himself as a leader to people who still support him. Thus, the two strategies differed here; both former presidents sought to show their strengths, but in contrasting ways.

To sum up, Trump cared about protecting his commercial interests and using the law to stand with him; however, Hussein cared about his strong image with his people and criticized and challenged the court. Being polite and cooperative reflects the cultural norms of American society, consistent with the view that linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds strongly affect how people behave in communications (Shahrokhi & Bidabadi, 2013). For this reason, Trump followed this technique to make the law and the people stand on his side in the court. On the other hand, Hussein's actions showed the cultural standards of Iraqi society. People preferred a strong, disobedient character and saw him as an image of a strong leader, thereby undermining the court's legitimacy. As a result, Trump accepted the attorney's orders to reflect a positive image; Hussein refused the judge's orders to reflect a strong image of himself, and he also saw the trial as a manipulative tool by the occupation forces.

The judge's commitment is to decide highly political issues. The judge in the trial of Saddam Hussein (Judge Al-Amiri) employed a negative impoliteness strategy to damage the listener's negative face wants (Culpeper, 1996). This technique helped him maintain a polite distance and protocol. Al-Amiri used careful words to avoid direct confrontation with the previous president of Iraq; he sought to keep the court dispassionate and legal. Such behavior reflects the use of negative politeness—indirect language, hedging, and formal address—to reduce the burden on the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Despite Hussein's disobedience of the judge's orders, Al-Amiri verified that Hussein received an impartial trial; this control required an experienced judge in the courtroom. Overall, the judge successfully controlled power relations in the courtroom and adopted negative impoliteness strategies by acknowledging the defendant's prior rank, which is vital in a trial. Alternatively, during the testimony, Letitia James primarily did investigative work. Her goal was to gather information concerning the case that had

to be handled. It implied that she asked Trump uneasy questions without creating unnecessary controversy. To accomplish this, the right, detailed, and sometimes provocative questions had to be asked without causing unnecessary conflicts. James wanted to ensure Trump would offer his testimony in a cooperative manner, so she used negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Her strategy was more about collecting information rather than asserting her dominance, consistent with the idea that courtroom discourse is highly structured and power-driven, but impoliteness or politeness can serve different strategic functions (Archer, 2008; Kurzon, 2001).

In Saddam's trial, the judge had to preside over a formal courtroom where upholding the court's authority and dignity was crucial. In this situation, negative politeness was necessary to maintain the delicate balance between respect and power, as judges must enforce strict etiquette to maintain control over the courtroom environment (Kurzon, 2001). Letitia James, on the other hand, had an investigative function focused on obtaining information rather than making decisions. Her goal in using negative politeness was to ensure that information was conveyed freely and to facilitate communication. The judge's negative politeness aimed to uphold the court's legitimacy while respecting Saddam's prior position. There was no denying the judge's desire to keep everything under control. But Letitia James found herself in a situation where she required Trump's assistance to obtain the necessary details. Her methods of politeness focused on avoiding conflict throughout the deposition, similar to how negative politeness reduces face-threatening situations (Harris, 2011). Since Saddam's trial might result in the death penalty and draw attention from all over the world, the stakes were much higher. The judge's strategy demonstrated the need to handle these risks cautiously. Even though there were huge stakes in Trump's testimony, it was an investigation rather than a decision. In conclusion, both Letitia James and the judge used negative

politeness strategies, but for different purposes—James for information gathering and Trump's cooperation, and the judge for maintaining court legitimacy and authority under extreme political pressure (see also Mısır & Akin, 2024; Csulich, 2022; Hatab, Al-Refai, & Al-Badawi, 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the politeness and impoliteness strategies used during the trials of Donald Trump and Saddam Hussein. Impoliteness theory was applied to Saddam Hussein's trial, where he frequently employed positive, negative, and bald-on-record impoliteness and withheld politeness when responding to the judge's questions. In contrast, politeness strategies were applied to Donald Trump's speech. He utilized positive politeness and bald-on-record politeness.

Additionally, the judges' questions accusing the presidents were taken into consideration in this study. Judge Al-Amiri used positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and withheld politeness; whereas James employed positive politeness and negative politeness. The contrast observed in the study between Trump's and Hussein's trials can be attributed to several factors, including cultural norms. Trump's politeness and cooperation reflected the cultural expectations of American society. For this reason, Trump used these strategies to gain public and legal support during the trial.

On the other hand, Hussein's actions reflected the cultural norms of Iraqi society, where people often prefer a strong, defiant leader. By undermining the court's legitimacy, he projected an image of strength. Thus, the study revealed that Trump attempted to give precise answers to demonstrate his readiness and willingness to engage with the judicial process. He presented himself as a cooperative and reasonable figure by maintaining a positive attitude, which also served as a public relations strategy.

In contrast, Saddam Hussein associated defiance with strength. He questioned and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the legal system to reaffirm his role as the chosen leader of the Iraqi people and the protector of their will. Although he subtly challenged the court's credibility, he still showed a degree of respect. Trump, meanwhile, engaged both the public and the media to portray himself in a positive light. Hussein, by contrast, tried to undermine the judge's and the court's authority during his trial, creating a more confrontational atmosphere.

Thus, the two strategies were fundamentally different: both former presidents aimed to project strength, but in opposing ways. The role of the judges also differed. In Saddam Hussein's trial, the judge employed a negative impoliteness strategy to maintain professional distance and uphold courtroom protocol, despite Hussein's defiance. Overall, the judge managed power dynamics effectively and acknowledged Hussein's former status, which is crucial in a political trial.

Alternatively, Letitia James primarily conducted an investigative role during Trump's testimony. Her goal was to ensure Trump's cooperation, so she used negative politeness. Her strategy focused on gathering information rather than asserting authority. Since she needed Trump's cooperation to obtain essential details, her use of politeness aimed to avoid confrontation during the deposition.

While Saddam's trial carried the possibility of a death sentence and global scrutiny—raising the stakes considerably—the judge's approach reflected the need to manage such risks carefully. Although Trump's testimony also had high stakes, it was an investigation, not a sentencing. In conclusion, both Letitia James and the judge used negative politeness strategies, but for different purposes.

Therefore, the study focused on two key aspects: Trump's use of polite expressions when addressing the judge, and Saddam Hussein's use of impolite expressions in situations where politeness would normally be expected—particularly when addressing the judge. This study looks at how things work in a court

like the ones in the United States and compares it to a special court in Iraq. It would be interesting to see how people from parts of the world think about being polite in a courtroom. For example, what do important people from countries do when they have to follow the rules of a court but also want to respect the customs and traditions of their own country? The Iraqi Special Tribunal is an example of this, and we could learn more about how people balance these two things. We could look at how the U.S. Civil court context and the Iraqi Special Tribunal deal with politeness in ways, and see what we can learn from the Iraqi Special Tribunal and other courts like it.

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Appendix 1:

Types of Impoliteness Used by Saddam and the Judge

The Transcript: Saddam Hussein's Statements	
Positive Impoliteness	
Self-declaration and refusal of the judge's opinion	Saddam: "I am Saddam Hussein al-Majid, the president of the Republic of Iraq." Saddam: "No, present. Current. It's the will of the people." Saddam: "And I have defended the honor of Iraq and revived the historical rights of Iraqis against these dogs."
Maintaining authority and legitimacy	Saddam: "So you should not work under the jurisdiction of the coalition forces."
Questioning the judge several times	Saddam: "Are you a judge? You are a judge? And judges, they value the law. And they rule by the law, right? Right?"
Bald-on-Record Impoliteness	
Bringing up the invasion of Kuwait and Insulting Kuwaitis	Saddam: "Is this just? ... Law? What law? Law that puts Saddam to trial because the Kuwaitis said that we would make out of every Iraqi woman a prostitute for ten dinars in the street. And I have defended the honor of Iraq and revived the historical rights of Iraqis against these dogs."

Direct confrontation	Saddam: "I'm not complicating matters. Are you a judge?"
Negative impoliteness	
challenging the authority of the judge and the legal system	<p>Saddam: "You also have to introduce yourself to me." Saddam: "So that I have to know, you are an investigative judge of the central court of Iraq? What resolution, what law formed this court? Oh, the coalition forces? So you are an Iraqi that — you are representing the occupying forces?" Saddam: "Then don't mention anything [about] occupying forces. This is not good." Saddam: "Let me understand something. Who is the defendant? Any defendant when he comes to a court, before that there should be investigation. This is not a court, this is investigation."</p>
Withhold politeness	
Refusing to follow protocols	<p>Saddam: "I will not sign except in the presence of an attorney." Saddam: "Please allow me not to sign, except in the presence of an attorney."</p>
The Transcript: Judge's Responses	
Positive Impoliteness	
Rejecting the judge's statement	Al-Amiri: "Profession? Former president of the Republic of Iraq?"
Withhold politeness	
Efforts to preserve professionalism	Al-Amiri: "Do not insult anybody, this is a legal session."
Negative impoliteness	
Clarification and reiteration of rights	Al-Amiri: "Well it is your right to sign."
challenging the authority of the judge and the legal system	Al-Amiri: "Mr. Saddam, I am the investigative judge of the central court of Iraq."

Appendix 2:

Politeness Strategies Used by Letitia James and Donald Trump

The Manuscript: Letitia James's Statements	
Positive politeness	
Initial statement	James: "So I'll say again good morning, Mr. Trump."

Changing role over time	James: "Okay. Well, I think we'll try to go through your role over time."
Explaining reference	James: "If we talk about the trust today, you'll understand that that's what I'm referring to?"
Asking about building the trust	James: "Why did you form the Trust?"
A brief overview of the reply	James: "So that was a lengthy answer. Just to understand, it was in the connection the fact that you were going to be running as President that the assets were going to be put into a trust?"
Negative politeness	
Asking the first question:	James: "I'd like to start with your role in the Trump Organization. So let me start ways in the past. Is it correct that you established the Trump Organization in 1980 as an umbrella organization for all of your real estate development and corporate affiliates?"
Date clarification	James: "Approximately, 1989?"
A description of the trump organization	James: "And is that a fair description of what the Trump Organization is, an umbrella organization?"
Inquiry regarding current role	James: "Mr. Trump, are you currently the person with ultimate decision-making authority for the Trump Organization?"
Further investigation into the matter of authority	James: "Who would that be?"
Changing role	James: "Because it has changed; is that correct?"
Making assets clear	James: "And the assets of the Trump Organization are currently held in a revocable trust; is that correct?"
Defining the trust	James: "And that would be the DIT Revocable Trust?"
Verifying the donor's status	James: "And you are the donor of all of the assets in the trust; is that correct?"
Verifying beneficiary status	James: "And you are the sole beneficiary of the Trust; is that correct?"
Question for the overseer	James: "You mentioned that you had a 'highly respected man' who was the 'overseer of the trust.' Who was that?"
Recognizing the overseer's function	James: "And when you say, 'overseer,' do you have an understanding what his role was?"

Request for records	James: "And your office would have records of who that attorney?"
Trustees' verification	James: "And at some point after the Trust was formed, Allen Weisselberg and your son Don Junior became the trustees; is that correct?"
Request for sole trustee	James: "Prior to that point, is it your understanding that you were the sole trustee?"
Timing of trustee appointment	James: "And Mr. Weisselberg and your son Don were appointed as trustees in 2017; is that right?"
Motive behind the change	James: "And that change was made because you had been elected President of the United States; is that correct?"
Selection of Mr. Weisselberg	James: "Why did you select Mr. Weisselberg to serve as the trustee?"
Selection of son as trustee	James: "Okay. And your son Don why was he selected as a trustee?"
Role of sons	James: "Since you mentioned it, could you go through for each of them, sir, what was their role in the Trump Organization? And I'm happy to break it up from before you became President and then after. So why don't we start with Don."
Role before presidency	James: "What was his role in the Trump Organization before you were elected President?"
Clarification of timing	James: "Before?"
Asking about the part Don played	James: "And did that change after you became President?"
Clarification of "We"	James: "So 'we' is the Trump Organization?"
Instructions on deals	James: "Okay. And who got those instructions from you to do not any other deals?"
The Manuscript: Trump's Statements	
Positive politeness	
First reaction	Trump: "Good morning."
Taking note of the question	Trump: "Approximately, yes."
Date confirmation	Trump: "I think so, yes."
Assignment to son	Trump: "My son Eric is much more involved with it than I am. I've been doing other things. And I guess you could say on something major, final decisions, whatever. But

	I've been much less involved in it than -- over the last five years, five or six years than ever before."
Confirming change	Trump: "Okay."
	Trump: "Yes, it has."
Verification of the status of trust:	Trump: "I believe so."
Recognition of specific trust	Trump: "I believe so, yes."
Explanation of donor status	Trump: "I believe so, yes."
Justification for building the trust	Trump: "When I was running for President or shortly thereafter, ...but I thought it would be appropriate."
Summarizing the explanation	Trump: "Primarily, yes."
Doubt regarding the overseer	Trump: "I don't know his name. He was an attorney from Washington D.C. I didn't know him. I believe I met him once very quickly and --"
Defining the overseer's position	Trump: "Maybe a trustee. I don't know exactly. I know that it was a limit placed on what even my children could do. And he was, you know, respected. He was an attorney. He was highly respected. And he was involved in the trust."
Confirmation of records	Trump: "Yes, they would have all that information, yes."
Trustees confirmation	Trump: "I believe so, yes."
Sole trustee verification	Trump: "I think I was, yes."
Timing of trustee appointment	Trump: "It sounds about right."
Selection of Mr. Weisselberg	Trump: "He was with me for a long time. He was liked. He was respected. Now, he's gone through hell and back. What's happened to him is very sad. But he was a very respected person, been with me a long time. It just -- it seemed like the right choice."
Son's appointment as trustee	Trump: "He's done a good job, well-educated. He also -- both of my sons have done actually a very good job."
Clarifying role before presidency	Trump: "Before?"

Defining role change	Trump: "There was a change a little bit."
Explanation of Don's position	Trump: "Yeah, and one thing they were both involved with with getting new deals. This is before the presidential because we didn't -- we purposely didn't do very many deals after I became President. Although I could have done more than ever When I look at what's going on now, I can't believe that I did this. But I would do it again. We purposely didn't do very many deals, almost none but, you know, unless it was an active deal that was ongoing prior to my winning. But we didn't do very many deals. We could have done a lot. We didn't do very many. That was at my instruction. I didn't want to have conflicts of interest, if they -- you were allowed to. But I didn't want to even have a perceived conflict of interest."
Confirmation of "We"	Trump: "Yeah."
Instructions on deals	Trump: "I would say that Eric and Don and Ivanka. I was not interested in doing deals. I thought it was something that while I heard it was legal for them as a family to do. I thought it wouldn't look good. I was very -- I wanted to do a great job as President. And I felt that that would look like somewhat of a conflict of interest."
Bald-on-record	
Making authority clear	Trump: "No."