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Impoliteness in Javanese: Beyond breaching honorifics

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Abstract
Despite extensive studies on the correlation between breaches of Javanese linguistic etiquette and perceived impoliteness, scant scholarly attention has been given to understanding impoliteness resulting from violations of *tata krama* ('proper social conduct'). The objective of this research was to identify the perspectives on impoliteness held by Javanese individuals, with a particular emphasis on the transgression of *tata krama*. Narrative inquiry was employed to collect the data of impoliteness events experienced by 158 native speakers of Javanese in Central Java, Indonesia. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to examine impoliteness incidents they encountered in their daily lives. Thematic analysis, adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006), was utilised to analyse the collected data. The study found several overarching characteristics of impoliteness: breaches of honorifics, conduct against *andhap asor* ('self-deprecation'), conduct against *lembah manah* ('emotional restraint'), conduct against *empan papan* ('decorum'), conduct of *ora grapyak* ('unfriendliness'), conduct attacking self-worth and emotional well-being which formed the basis of Javanese impoliteness. This study reveals that impoliteness, as perceived by native Javanese, is characterised by a critical assessment of co-participants' linguistic behaviour resulting from violations of linguistic etiquette and a lack of understanding. It manifests in two categories: unintentional and intentional. The study contributes to the understanding of Javanese impoliteness by exploring aspects beyond honorific language violations. It demonstrates how breaches in social behaviours and language etiquette can affect emotional well-being and social standing, leading to impolite communication.
Keywords: *linguistic etiquette, linguistic etiquette violations, impoliteness, understanding of impoliteness, honorific transgressions, Javanese*

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Невежливость в яванском языке: за пределами непочтительного обращения

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Аннотация
Несмотря на существующие исследования, посвященные взаимосвязи между нарушениями яванского речевого этикета и невежливостью, пониманию невежливости, возникающей в результате нарушения *tata krama* (‘надлежащего социального поведения’), уделяется недостаточно внимания. Цель данного исследования – выявить представления яванцев о невежливости с особым акцентом на нарушении *tata krama*. Для сбора данных о случаях проявления невежливости, с которыми столкнулись 158 носителей яванского языка в повседневной жизни, был использован нарративный опрос и полуструктурированные интервью. Собранные данные изучались с применением тематического анализа, заимствованного из (Braun & Clarke 2006). Исследование выявило несколько характеристик яванской невежливости, которые составляют ее основу: несоблюдение почтительного обращения; поведение, противоречащее *andhap asor* (‘самоуничижение’); поведение, противоречащее *lembah manah* (‘эмоциональная сдержанность’); поведение, нарушающее *empan papan* (‘приличия’); поведение *ora grapyak* (‘недружелюбие’); поведение, наносящее ущерб самооценке и эмоциональному состоянию. Результаты показывают, что в восприятии носителей яванского языка невежливость характеризуется критической оценкой речевого поведения собеседников в результате нарушения речевого этикета и отсутствия понимания. Она бывает двух типов: преднамеренная и непреднамеренная. Данное исследование расширяет понимание яванской невежливости, так как не ограничивается нарушением почтительного обращения, и демонстрирует, как нарушения социального поведения и языкового этикета могут влиять на эмоциональное состояние и социальное взаимодействие.
Ключевые слова: *речевой этикет, нарушение речевого этикета, невежливость, понимание невежливости, непочтительное обращение, яванский язык*

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1. Introduction

Reflecting social hierarchy, the Javanese language possesses three general distinct levels: *Krama, Madya,* and *Ngoko.* Each level functions as a social compass that directs speakers through social communication, which is informed by the shifting of respect, familiarity, and hierarchical relationships. *Krama* is at the top of this system, which is characterised by honorifics that consider the age, relative social status, and familiarity of the interlocutors. It is used in situations that demand the highest degree of deference, such as addressing elders or senior residents, religious figures, and high-status individuals. *Madya* conveys a gentle respect to those of lower social standing and it serves as a bridge between strangers who are not familiar with each other’s social status. It is also employed to acknowledge the

standing of superiors while, at the same time, the speakers maintain a degree of ease in semi-formal conversations. Finally, *Ngoko* is the language of intimacy and informality, which is used in the interactions between peers, family members and close friends. This linguistic hierarchy is dynamic, with Javanese speakers skilfully switching between different levels. Their choices are influenced by various social factors, including age, status, relationship, and familiarity, as well as contextual settings, ranging from intimate home environments to formal public ceremonies.

The declining use of *Krama* among younger generations has raised concerns about their perceived impoliteness. Atmawati (2021) reported that young Javanese speakers often struggle with selecting and using *Krama* verbs correctly. This trend extends to the inappropriate use of *Ngoko* when addressing teachers, who are figures traditionally deserving respect (Setyawan 2018). Sujono et al. (2019) attributed the increasing use of mixed Javanese-Indonesian communication to limited *Krama* resources. Surprisingly, even Javanese language students struggle with *Krama alus* ('refined high level') (Wibawa 2005). These trends suggest a decline in the mastery of polite Javanese, which could affect its cultural and social significance. This is particularly concerning in light of Romelah's (2016) findings of incorrect speech level usage among adults. While scholars view these trends as potential signs of language shift (e.g., Subroto et al. 2008, Vander Klok 2019), they may reflect the evolving nature of societal norms, particularly among younger Javanese.

Despite extensive studies on the relationship between breaches of Javanese linguistic etiquette and perceived impoliteness, little is known about impoliteness stemming from a lack of mastery of proper social conduct, often referred to as *ora ngerti tata krama*. This study investigates impoliteness in Javanese, focusing on violations of both linguistic etiquette and social conduct. It also examines how impoliteness can harm *rasa* ('feelings') and *aji* ('self-worth'). Three research questions guide this investigation:

1. What communication strategies are perceived as transgressions of *unggah-ungguhing basa* ('linguistic etiquette')?
2. How do specific conducts violate *tata krama* ('proper social conduct')?
3. Which acts or behaviours inflict harm upon *rasa* and *aji*, the core emotional and self-respectful elements of Javanese social interaction?

The data of the present study was elicited from interviews with native Javanese in Surakarta, Indonesia, who were asked to recount impolite incidents they experienced in their daily lives. The collected data served as the foundation upon which the findings were constructed. Based on the interviews, this study found that impoliteness could manifest unintentionally and intentionally.

2. Literature review

2.1. Impoliteness: first-order and second-order

Within pragmatics, impoliteness plays a central role in representing acts that undermine an individual's face. It is defined in two ways: 'first-order' and 'second-

order' applications. First-order impoliteness refers to how it is perceived and understood within speech communities, or the lay understanding of impoliteness. Second-order impoliteness, on the other hand, pertains to the theoretical frameworks researchers use to interpret impoliteness phenomena (Locher & Watts 2008, Watts 2003). Understanding the concept of impoliteness is complex, as it involves both social perceptions and academic approaches to its analysis.

In the study of second-order impoliteness, researchers determine what qualifies as impolite behaviour by interpreting both linguistic and non-linguistic data. A crucial aspect of second-order impoliteness is that face attacks must be deliberate, either in the speaker's intention or in the listener's perception of the intention (Culpeper 2005). Bousfield (2008: 132) emphasises that impoliteness is a calculated move. However, even though research has explored speakers' intentions, there needs to be more focus on the reasons and motivations behind their impolite behaviour. This could be due to the challenges of directly accessing intentions (Culpeper 2005: 39), as intentions are not always clear-cut. They are dynamically constructed throughout interpersonal interaction (Haugh 2010: 10). Therefore, what is perceived as an intention to attack another's face might be just an interpretation based on the understanding of the context or situation. However, in their subsequent publications, Culpeper (2011) and Bousfield (2010) present a different perspective that aligns more closely with first-order impoliteness. Culpeper (2011: 23) defines impoliteness as the consequence of negative evaluative judgments concerning behaviours and linguistic expressions by interlocutors based on their alignment with sociocultural contexts or societal norms. Bousfield (2010: 115) asserts that understanding impoliteness requires integrating theoretical approaches with the lay user's perception of impoliteness.

First-order impoliteness, central to the present study, refers to how impoliteness is understood and judged by members of a speech community in everyday interactions, without formal theoretical frameworks. Locher and Watts (2005) argue that judgments of im/politeness are shaped by the flow of conversation, context, and accumulated social norms. Watts (2003) adds that im/politeness is evaluated discursively by laypeople. These judgments evolve within a community and are reshaped by individual experiences, social norms, and prior observations. People's assessments of what is im/polite are influenced by mental blueprints of appropriate behaviour formed through social interactions (Locher & Watts 2008). Various frameworks are used as a foundation to evaluate first-order impoliteness, including norms of appropriateness (Locher 2006), benchmarks for acceptable behaviour (Allan 2016), social expectations (Culpeper 2011), group norms (Kádár & Haugh 2013), cultural schemata (Sharifian 2008), established cultural norms (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár 2016), and in this study, I aim to demonstrate *unggah-ungguhing basa* ('language etiquette') and *tata krama* ('social conduct').

Regarding intentionality, Locher and Watts (2008) argue that in the first-order approach, impoliteness is determined by how interactants perceive intentions, rather

than the actual intentions themselves. Therefore, the interactants' perception plays a crucial role in assessing the politeness or impoliteness of an utterance. This highlights the role of expectations, desires, and social norms in shaping judgments of politeness or impoliteness. As Culpeper (2010) asserts, behaviour that deviates from what we expect or believe to be appropriate can lead to perceptions of impoliteness, underscoring the importance of perceived violations of social norms.

Impoliteness has received considerable scholarly attention across various discourse domains, including courtroom interactions (Mitchell 2022), mass media (de Marlangeon 2018), social networking site (SNS) communication (Rhee 2023), political debates (Kienpointner 2008), academic discourse (Larina & Ponton 2022), online communication (Tzanne & Sifianou 2019), and foreign language classrooms (Wijayanto 2019). In addition, its strategies, functions, and consequences have been examined across different cultures (e.g., Al Zidjaly 2019, Gao & Liu 2023, Larina & Ponton 2022, Van Olmen, Andersson & Culpeper 2023, Tzanne & Sifianou 2019). Continued research on im/politeness across different language and cultural contexts is necessary to further advance the theoretical and methodological understanding of im/politeness (Locher & Larina 2019).

2.2. Politeness and impoliteness in Javanese

Before discussing the complexities of impoliteness in Javanese, it is important to address its counterpart: politeness. Javanese politeness results from positive evaluative judgments about co-participant' behaviour, focusing on the manifestation of the three governing rules of social interaction, known as *Tri Panata*. These include managing speech (*panata basa*), managing feelings (*panata rasa*), and managing behaviour (*panata krama*), all of which are taught within families and communities.

Panata basa involves adherence to syntactic, morphological, and sociolinguistic norms, collectively known as *unggah-ungguhing basa* ('linguistic etiquette'), which plays a crucial role in polite communication (Atmawati 2021). It governs the use of speech levels: *Krama* ('high'), *Madya* ('intermediate'), and *Ngoko* ('low'), each suited to specific social contexts. This study extends the concept of *unggah-ungguhing basa* beyond speech level usage, arguing that proper pitch, intonation, and physical gestures also contribute to im/politeness. Mastery of *unggah-ungguhing basa* thus involves not only proficiency in *undha-usuk* ('speech levels') but also a comprehensive understanding of word variations, grammar rules, paralinguistic aspects, and their contextual applications.

Panata rasa focuses on ensuring the emotional well-being of others, known as *ngemong rasa*, and understanding their perspective and feelings or *tepa slira*. Emotional equilibrium is highly valued in Javanese society, with inflicting emotional pain seen as a serious offence (Geertz 1976). To protect others' feelings, speakers choose appropriate language levels and topics, avoiding anything that may cause harm to their emotional well-being. Consequently, anything that might trigger negative emotions tends to be concealed or repressed (Magnis-Suseno 1997) and

indirect communication is highly valued (Lestari & Prayitno 2016, Prayitno 2010). When difficult or hurtful communication is unavoidable, Javanese speakers minimize the impact through *angon rasa* which involves carefully learning the feelings and psychological states of their interlocutors.

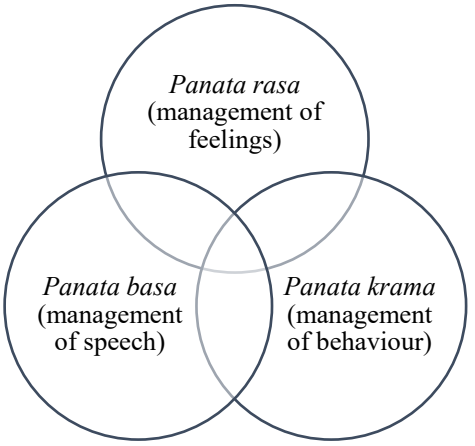

Diagram 1. Javanese politeness structure

Panata krama or *tata krama* constitutes a Javanese system of proper social conduct that governs individuals' social interaction. This includes humbleness or self-deprecation (*andhap asor*), modesty and emotionally restrained (*lembah manah*), respect (*ngajeni*), decorum or fitting in with social norms and expectations of a particular setting, situation and time (*empan papan*), and friendliness (*grapyak*). The embodiment of these elements in linguistic action produces politeness (Poedjosoedarmo 2017, Widiana et al. 2020).

Laypersons commonly define impoliteness in Javanese as *ora ngerti tata krama* ('unable to behave in a good manner'). Considering the data of the present study, I characterise impoliteness in Javanese as a critical assessment of co-participants' inappropriate linguistic behaviour, stemming from a lack of proficiency in adhering to linguistic etiquette (*ora ngerti unggah ungguhing basa*) and/or lack of awareness regarding proper social conduct (*ora ngerti tata krama*).

Drawing from the emerging data of the present study, impoliteness in Javanese manifests in two primary categories: unintentional and intentional. Unintentional impoliteness is categorised into one of the following sub-categories.

(1) Mismatch of speech level
Communication is marked by a mismatch between the speaker's chosen speech level and the addressee's social standing, potentially leading to the perception of disrespect, discomfort, or even offence.

(2) Misapplication of speech levels
The utilisation of proper social conduct within a conversation while simultaneously employing an inappropriate speech level relative to the addressee's social status can create a discordant communication dynamic, undermining the intended politeness.

(3) The dissonance between linguistic etiquette and delivery
Instances where an appropriate speech level is utilised, yet the speaker's tone of voice, body language, or other nonverbal cues contradict the intended courteousness. This incongruence can negate the intended politeness.

(4) Inappropriate topic selection
The discussion of sensitive, offensive, or taboo topics in contexts considered inappropriate by social norms or situational expectations can have negative consequences. In such instances, the selection of an inappropriate topic can override even the most refined speech level.

(5) Converging impoliteness
The unfortunate combination of both an inappropriate speech level and improper conduct results in the most severe form of disrespectful communication. This confluence of linguistic and non-linguistic transgressions can create an unfavourable communication environment.

Intentional impoliteness is often observed in open conflicts or heated quarrels (*padu*) and it is used as a tool for emotional manipulation and social subversion to deliberately hurt others. Unlike unintentional impoliteness which typically arises from unawareness of appropriate social norms and/or linguistic etiquette, intentional impoliteness seeks to purposefully undermine an opponent's *rasa* ('feelings') and *aji* ('self-worth'). Given the fundamental importance of emotional equilibrium and self-worth in Javanese social life, these two aspects become particularly vulnerable to attacks. Violating *unggah-ungguhing basa* and *tata krama* creates a confrontational space for emotional sparring.

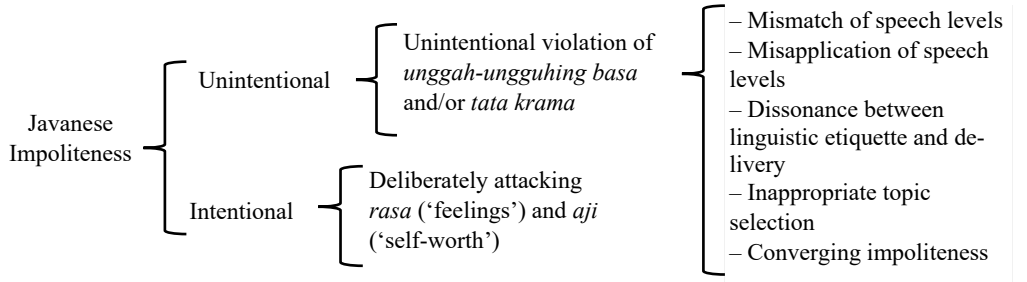

Diagram 2. Javanese impoliteness framework

3. Data and methods

3.1. Research participants

The study was conducted in Surakarta, Indonesia. This city was chosen as the setting of the study as, in addition to Yogyakarta, it is the hub of Javanese culture and traditions (Magnis-Suseno 1997: 23). The residents of the city mostly speak Javanese and they still maintain Javanese social structures and norms that can influence social interactions and perceptions of Javanese im/politeness. Purposive sampling was employed to select research participants for the study. Specifically,

158 Javanese residents who had lived in Surakarta for more than 15 years were chosen as respondents. They represented a diverse range of professions and social backgrounds.

3.2. Data compilation and analysis

The study collected data through semi-structured interviews with 158 native Javanese participants. In their responses, they were free to use either Javanese or Bahasa Indonesia to recount the impoliteness incidents they had experienced. Each interview session lasted between 20 to 25 minutes. The dataset comprised 42,532 words, focusing primarily on the main question: "Did you experience incidents of impoliteness?" and a follow-up question: "If so, could you describe them?" Additional probing questions were used to explore reported incidents in more depth, such as: "What did the other participant(s) say and do?" and "Why did you perceive it as impolite?" "How did you feel about it?". Among the respondents, one person reported experiencing a heated quarrel or *padu*, while three others reported witnessing *padu* among their neighbours.

The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involved identifying recurring patterns, themes, and commonalities across the data. In phase 1, the data obtained from the interview was transcribed. Based on these transcripts, each piece of data was carefully considered. Only cases where co-participants' behaviours and language use were evaluated as impolite were included in the corpus. In phase 2, descriptive codes were created for each data segment to facilitate systematic analysis. Codes such as "using profanity" and "incorrect language level" were used. Additionally, the respondents' perceptions about co-participants' behaviour in communication, such as "arrogantly speaking" and "inconsiderate", were coded. In phase 3, similar coded segments were grouped into themes, resulting in 28 themes. For example, segments coded as *lancang* ('acting carelessly') and *sembrana* ('to act recklessly') were grouped under the theme "lacking self-control". In phase 4, the themes were regrouped, and some themes with similar contents were merged, resulting in 15 themes out of the initial 28. In phase 5, the 15 themes were classified into 7 overarching themes, which served as the materials on which the research was reported.

Table 1. **Themes of impoliteness**

Theme	Frequency	Description
Breaching honorifics	142	Violating linguistic etiquette encompasses breaching the complexities of speech levels relative to social standing, the use of proper social conduct alongside inappropriate speech levels, contradictions between courteous speech and nonverbal cues, discussions of sensitive topics in inappropriate contexts, and instances combining inappropriate speech levels with improper conduct.

Theme	Frequency	Description
Conducts against *andhap asor* ('self-deprecation')	21	Behaviours marked by an exaggerated sense of one's importance, abilities, or value, lacking humility and empathy towards others' perspectives. These also involve emphasising personal achievements, qualities, or status in ways perceived as excessive, self-centred, or arrogant, often seeking superiority or validation from others.
Conducts against *lembah manah* ('emotional restraint'):	31	Behaviours are characterised by difficulties in regulating impulses, emotions, or actions, impacting interpersonal relationships, decision-making, and overall well-being. Individuals may find it challenging to control impulses, manage emotional volatility, and maintain emotional equilibrium in different situations.
Conducts of *ora ngerti empan papan* ('not showing decorum')	42	The communication and behavioural tendencies are characterised by a disregard for social norms, expectations, and the comfort of others in various settings. These individuals overlook the impact of their actions on others' comfort or expectations, potentially causing disruption, discomfort, or offence in interpersonal interactions and social settings. Such behaviours extend beyond communication to include actions that do not adhere to accepted social norms, or expectations in various contexts, resulting in social discomfort, offence, or disruption of harmony in social interactions and public settings.
Conducts of *ora grapyak* ('unfriendliness')	18	Behaviours are characterised by exclusionary actions, abrasive communication styles, indirect expressions of hostility or resentment, and overt or covert displays of hostility or competition in social interactions.
Conducts attacking self-worth	17	Conducts attacking self-worth involve behaviours that directly target and undermine a person's self-image, self-worth, or dignity, causing lasting emotional and psychological effects. These behaviours include actions or speech that diminish the perceived competence, autonomy, or authority of others, leading to self-doubt and disempowerment. Additionally, they diminish individuals' value by undermining their efforts, abilities, opinions, or contributions, fostering feelings of inadequacy and reduced confidence. Such behaviours also aim to exert control or dominance over others by attacking their sense of self, creating an environment of fear, insecurity, and vulnerability that significantly impacts their well-being.
Conducts attacking feelings	23	The behaviours can hurt others' feelings as they target vulnerabilities, instil fear, undermine self-esteem, provoke defensiveness, escalate conflicts, and damage relationships. They can lead to lasting psychological harm like depression and trauma, creating a hurtful environment and diminishing individuals' dignity within social dynamics.

4. Results

4.1. Breaking unggah-ungguhing basa ('linguistic etiquette')

The following excerpt highlights impolite communication marked by a mismatch between the speaker's chosen *Ngoko* ('low level') and the addressee's relative social standing. The interviewee, a senior citizen, recounted an experience where a stranger approached him while he was gardening, using solely *Ngoko* to ask for directions. This, he explained, caused irritation as he felt it disrespectful, especially considering he was not a labourer as the stranger's language implied.

(1) *Pernah ada orang mendekati saya, dia tanya alamat, benar-benar nggak sopan, dia langsung tanya nggak, nggak pakai nuwun sewu, apalagi dia Ngoko ke saya. Saya mbatin, apa dia nggak tahu kalo saya ini udah tua atau mungkin pakaian saya yang kotor, kan waktu itu lagi berkebun, nganggep saya kayak buruh gitu mungkin mas, ya..paling tidak kan permisi dulu atau menggunakan bahasa yang baik, lha mosok sama orang tua kok Ngoko. Kalo saya lihat dia ya orang Jawa, karena dia dengan temannya juga ngomong pakai bahasa Jawa lancar. Tapi ya anehnya ya itu tadi, nggak ngerti unggah-ungguh. Ya gitulah mas orang sekarang, bertingkah aneh-aneh.* ('Once a person approached me and asked for directions. He was really impolite. He didn't say *nuwun sewu* ('a polite Javanese phrase for "excuse me") and even he used *Ngoko* (low level Javanese) to me. I thought to myself, 'Doesn't he know I'm old? Or maybe it is because my clothes were dirty. I was gardening at the time, so maybe he thought I was a labourer. At least he could have asked for permission or used polite language. How can he use *Ngoko* to an old person? From what I saw, he was Javanese because he spoke Javanese fluently with his friend. But the strange thing was, as I said before, he did not have any polite manners. That's how people are these days, behaving strangely').

The following excerpt highlights the misapplication of speech level, where the speaker adhered to proper social conduct during a conversation, but simultaneously employed an inappropriate speech level relative to the addressee's social status. The respondent explained that a fruit seller's attempt to be humble by rejecting her compliment, which is polite in Javanese, clashed with the informal *Ngoko* he used. This inconsistency has caused the buyer (the respondent) to feel uncomfortable.

(2) Interviewee: *Saya pernah membeli buah di dekat rumah, karena saya lihat toko buah itu ramai pengunjung, maka untuk basa-basi, saya puji "wah lumayan rame sanget nggih mas", kira-kira begitu. Penjualnya tersenyum dan menjawab pujian saya, sayangnya kok Ngoko, masak dengan pembeli kok sok akrab, rasanya bagaimana gitu. Lalu saya berubah pikiran, karena agak anyel, saya pergi dan tidak jadi beli.* ('Once I went to a fruit shop near my house. I saw the fruit shop was crowded with buyers, so I made small talk and praised the seller, "Wow, it is quite busy, isn't it, brother? The seller smiled and replied to my compliment. Unfortunately, he used *Ngoko* to me. I felt uncomfortable

because it seemed like he was trying to be too familiar with me. Feeling irritated, I changed my mind and left without buying anything').
Interviewer: *Memangnya apa yang dikatan bu, yang katanya Ngoko tadi?* ('what did the fruit seller say to you? you mentioned the fruit seller addressed you using *Ngoko*')
Interviewee: *Kurang lebih begini 'ora kok, biasa ae'* ('It is something like, 'no it is not, just as usual')

The excerpt below underscores that impoliteness extends beyond the use of inappropriate words. The respondent shared an experience in which she asked a student to help clean up scattered plastic bottles. Although the student used *Krama* language, the high tone of the student's response contradicted the intended politeness. The discord between words and delivery highlights how nonverbal cues can undermine polite speech.

(3) *Saya mengajar di kelas 8. Pernah saya minta tolong siswa membuang sampah botol plastik ke tempat sampah, dia cuma menjawab tapi tidak melakukannya. Ada juga yang mengiyakan tapi dengan nada tinggi. Meskipun menjawab 'nggih', tapi kalo suaranya tinggi kan seperti setengah hati. Saya kira seperti itu juga kurang santun karena berbicara dengan gurunya.* ('I teach 8th grade. Once, I asked a student to throw a plastic bottle into the trash can, but he only responded without taking action. Another student said 'yes' but in a high tone of voice. Although he said *nggih* (*Krama*: 'yes'), the high voice made it sound insincere. I think this was also impolite because he was speaking to his teacher').

The following excerpt demonstrates that impoliteness can arise from a synergistic combination of inappropriate speech level and non-linguistic transgressions, such as tone of delivery. Such transgression can create an unfavourable communication environment for the respondent.

(4) *Saya waktu itu di stasiun, ada orang yang tidak saya kenal dan dia Ngoko seperti.., apa ya istilahnya? Sulit mengatakannya. Begini, dia itu Ngoko dan sikapnya tidak seperti orang Jawa. Kan bisa kelihatan ya kalo orang Jawa dari cara membawakan diri, cara berbicaranya, cara menghormati lawan bicaranya. Pokoknya tidak ada hal-hal yang seperti itu. Dia seperti mengucapkan apa yang ia dengar sebelumnya, sehingga terasa tidak sopan sama sekali. Ora njawani, mungkin dia itu bukan orang Jawa, dan saya maklumi saja*. ('I was in a railway station. A stranger approached me, and he used *Ngoko*, and it was like..., what is the right term? It is hard to explain. It is like this, he used *Ngoko* and his demeanour was not like that of a Javanese. You can tell if someone is Javanese from the way they carry themselves, the way they speak, and the respect they show in conversations. But none of that was present. It felt like he was just mimicking what he had heard, and it did not sound polite at all. Maybe he was not Javanese, so I just let it go').

4.2. Transgressions of tata kram ('proper social conducts')

Violation of *tata krama*, known as *ora ngerti tata krama*, refers to a negative evaluation of a co-participant's behaviour that disregards the principles of *andhap asor* ('humility'), *lembah manah* ('emotional restraint'), *empan papan* ('decorum'), and *grapyak* ('friendliness').

The concept of Javanese *andhap asor* emphasizes humility and self-deprecation. However, some behaviours, as reported by respondents in this study (see Table 2), deviate from this principle. These behaviours, marked by arrogance, boastfulness, and lack of humility, contrast sharply with the essence of *andhap asor*. The following excerpt illustrates impoliteness arising from arrogance, where a senior lecturer criticized a junior colleague for displaying *sombong* ('arrogance') and *kemaki* ('overbearing confidence').

(5) Interviewee: *Contone ya kuwi pak, ana dosen peh okeh publikasiné lagake sombong. Sithik-sithik takon sudah berapa publikasinya? Yang terindek Scopus berapa?* ('For example, there is this lecturer who behaves arrogantly towards me because he has many publications. He boasts and repeatedly asks me questions, such as, 'how many publications do you have?' 'how many of your articles are indexed in Scopus?')
Interviewer: *Kok sombong?* ('Why do you think he is arrogant?')
Interviewee: *Dia bilang 'punya saya lolos terus. Kalo yang itu-itu saja yang dibahas ya mana ada yang mau, jan kemaki tenan koyo yok yo'o aé. Tiap ketemu sing diomongké kuwi-kuwi waé. Aku yo kadang jengkel. Tak pikir ngono kuwi suwé-suwé yo ora sopan.* ('He said 'my papers always get published. If you only discuss such common topics, they will never publish your work'. He acts so arrogantly as if he knows everything and is more superior than anyone else in publishing articles. Every time we meet, he brings up the same things. I often feel annoyed. To me, that behaviour is just impolite').

Table 2. **Conducts against *andhap asor ('humility')***

Inflated Self-worth traits	1. *Angkuh,* ('Snobbishness, conceit, haughty') 2. *Sombong* ('Excessively proud displaying an attitude of superiority') 3. *Keminter* ('Assuming that one's knowledge and skills are superior') 4. *Beneré dhéwé* **('**Being narrow-minded and unwilling to consider other viewpoints') 5. *Menangé dhéwé* ('Lack of willingness to accept constructive feedback and acting as though s/he is always right')
Boasting and arrogant displays	1. *Nggleleng, kumenthus* or *kemethak* ('To show off haughtily') 2. *Gumedhé* ('Boastful') 3. *Nggolek wah* ('Engaging in actions solely to attract attention and compliments') 4. *Kemlinthi, kemaki* ('Swagger, or showing overbearing confidence') 5. *Seneng pamer* ('Constantly showing off personal details, emotions, and activities')

Javanese speakers commonly emphasize *lembah manah* (‘emotional restraint’). Table 3 presents data showing behaviours that deviate from this ideal. These actions, characterized by a lack of self-control and inappropriate emotional expression, can lead to impolite communication.

The following excerpt illustrates that quick anger, known as *gampil duka* or *muntap*, is perceived as impolite. As the respondent noted, such behaviour can make others feel uncomfortable.

(6) *Wonten rencang kulo ingkang mboten sabaran. Piyambakipun gampil duka. Pun pokoke klentu ngendikan sekedhik kewawon langsung muntap, langsung ngegas. Nuwun sewu, tumindak kados menika, miturut kulo lo mas, nggih mboten saé, amargi saged ndamel tiyang sanes mboten sekeca*. (‘I know a friend of mine who is always impatient. He often gets angry easily. If someone speaks to him in the wrong language, he quickly becomes very angry. In my opinion, such behaviour is inappropriate as it can make others uncomfortable’).

Table 3. **Conducts against *lembah manah (‘emotional restraint’)***

Lacking behavioural control	1. *Ora sabaran* (‘Impatient’) 2. *Grusa-grusu* (‘Easily rushing into decisions or actions’) 3. *Sembrana* (‘To act recklessly or carelessly’) 4. *Karepé dhéwé* (‘Acting without considering consequences’) 5. *Seneng nyalahaké* (‘Constant complaining on the negative aspects of a situation’) 6. *Meksa* (‘Pushy and demanding’) 7. *Lancang* (‘Acting carelessly without consent’) 8. *Nyusu-nyusu* (‘Rushing other people without considering their needs or abilities’) 9. *Seneng ngeyel* (‘Stubborn and uncompromising’)
Inability to manage emotions appropriately	1. *Crewet* (‘Fussy or pernickety’) 2. *Ngomel* (‘Nagging’) 3. *Nggrundel* (‘Grumbling’) 4. *Nesunan/gampang nesu* (‘Temperamental, short-tempered’) 5. *Ngamukan* (‘Difficult to control anger’) 6. *Cugetan* (‘Easily getting angry and frustrated’) 7. *Gampang muntap* (‘Responding quickly and emotionally to situations’)

The Javanese concept of *empan papan*, which refers to decorum, is essential for fostering respectful interactions. In communication, *empan papan* means adjusting one’s behaviour according to the setting and situation (Poedjosoedarmo 2017: 4). Conversely, *ora ngerti empan papan* describes individuals who fail to consider their actions or social cues and behave inappropriately without contextual awareness. Table 4 outlines the behaviours of individuals lacking *empan papan*, as identified by the respondents in this study.

The following excerpt shows perceptions of impoliteness linked to disruptive behaviour during a community meeting, where a participant made a phone call. This

act was perceived as inconsiderate and described as *kirang mangertos empan papan,* meaning behaving without an understanding of the appropriate setting and situation.

(7) *Rumiyin nalika rapat RW wonten piyantun ingkang nampi telpon, ngendikan kaliyan swanten ingkang radi sero. Tumindak mengaten menika nggih mboten sopan saestu mas. Wonten panggenan rapat malah nelpon meniko kados pundi, nggih kirang prayogi, piyambakipun kirang mangertos empan papan. Nggih to mas? Mewani nelpon prayoginipun nggih kedah medal rumiyin supados mboten nggangu.* ('I remember an incident that happened a long time ago. During a neighbourhood association (*Rukun Warga* or *RW*) meeting, someone made a loud phone call. Such behaviour is very impolite, brother. How could someone make a call during a meeting like that? In my opinion, it was quite inappropriate; the person did not seem to consider the surroundings. Don't you agree, brother? If someone needs to make a call, they should step outside first so as not to disturb others who are in the meeting').

Table 4. **Conducts of *ora ngerti empan papan ('failing to show decorum')***

Inappropriate communication based on settings or situations.	1. *Bengak-bengok* ('Speaking loudly in places where people typically expect quietness') 2. *Ramé dhéwé* ('Having loud conversations during performances, presentations, or lectures, etc.') 3. *Ngomong sero ing papan panggonan umum* ('Speaking loudly in public places') 4. *Misuh sembarangan* ('Swearing indiscriminately') 5. *Waton ngomong* ('Speaking carelessly') 6. *Ngomong saru ing papan panggonan umum* ('Talking about obscenity or taboo, talking with vulgar language in public places') 7. *Nyeneni ing ngarepé wong liya* ('Scolding someone in front of others') 8. *Ngritik ing ngarepé wong liya* ('Criticising someone in front of others') 9. *Ngganggu wong liya nalika dheweké lagi ngomong* ('Interrupting others while they are talking') 10. *Nelpon ora ngerti wayah* ('Making calls at inappropriate times/situation')
Inappropriate behaviours based on settings and situations.	1. *Nagih utang ing ngarepé wong liya* ('Collecting debts in front of others') 2. *Gojegan ing papan sripahan* ('Joking at a funeral ceremony') 3. *Ngguyu sero ing papan sripahan* ('Laughing loudly at funeral ceremony') 4. *Ngonekké musik sero tengah wengi* ('Playing loud music at night') 5. *Ngguyu sero ing papan panggonan umum* ('Laughing loudly in public places') 6. *Mertamu ora ngeri wayah* ('Paying a visit at an inconvenient time') 7. *Motong antrian* ('Cutting the line') 8. *Nganggo klambi sing ora pantes* ('Wearing inappropriate clothes') 9. *Ndusal-ndusel nggawé wong liya ora kepénak* ('Invading someone's personal space without regard for their comfort')

The concept of Javanese *grapyak*, commonly referring to friendliness, embodies openness of hearts, welcoming smiles, and a genuine desire to connect with others. This inherent friendliness manifests in various ways, including offering warm greetings, acknowledging others' successes or prosperity, and engaging in friendly conversations (Widiana et al. 2020: 42–52). However, this valued trait can be unintentionally breached due to various factors. Intentional displays of unfriendliness can result in impolite communication. Drawing on the respondents' insights (as presented in Table 5), various acts that can breach *grapyak* are identified. The following interview data shows a perception of impoliteness, particularly regarding the act of disregarding others. One participant explained that failing to greet others is perceived as a sign of disrespect toward interlocutors.

(8) *Wong sing ora sopan sak iki ya akeh mas, aku ngalami dhewé, contoné wong sing ora gelem aruh-aruh, biasané wong kaya ngono iki ora duwé kanca. Conto liyané, wong sing ora ngajeni wong liya, lagi dijak ngomong malah ndelok HP, jan nganyelké.* ('Bro, rude folks are everywhere these days. I have experienced it myself, like, some folks just won't say hi, you know? And usually, those types don't have many buddies. And then there are the ones who won't put down their mobile phones when they are talking to you. So annoying, right?).

Table 5. **Conducts of *ora grapyak* ('Unfriendly')**

Exclusionary behaviours	1. *Ora gelem srawung* ('Unwilling to socialise with others') 2. *Nyinkiraké* ('Actively excluding someone from social activities or conversations') 3. *Ora gelem cedhak* ('Aloof')
Verbal aggression	1. *Cekak lan ketus* ('Curt') 2. *Nylekit* ('A tendency towards harshness and severity in speech') 3. *Kasar* ('Gruff')
Passively aggressive behaviours	1. *Ngenengké* ('Giving the silent treatment') 2. *Ora nyapa* ('Walking past someone without acknowledging their presence'). 3. *Ora njawab salam* ('Failing to respond to greetings') 4. *Ora ngreken* ('Disregarding someone's presence, opinions, or feelings'). 5. *Ora nganggep* ('Ignoring someone or treating someone as invisible') 6. *Mbesengut, mrengut* ('Using a frown to show dislike')
Competitiveness	1. *Musuhi* ('Showing hostility') 2. *Satru, nyatru* ('Silent rivalry')

Ngajeni, meaning to respect others' self-worth, is a central value in Javanese culture. Its opposite, *ora ngajeni*, refers to behaviours that undermine this principle. This includes inappropriate speech levels (e.g., omitting *Krama*), neglecting honorifics, disregarding respectful gestures, and attacking another's *aji* ('self-worth'), targeting the core of their identity. Table 6 outlines such behaviours identified by the respondents. The following excerpt exemplifies this, as a respondent recounted feeling disrespected by a new colleague's *mentang-mentang* ('patronizing') and *ngécé* ('scornful behaviour').

(9) Interviewee: *Bukuku dipindah ora taren, paling ora kan diomogké dhisik, lah iki ora. Ora bener ngéné iki. Tur omongané yo kasar karo bocah-bocah iki, peh njabat ora ngajeni wong liya. Wong iki mentang-mentang, omongané kadang-kadang kaya ngécé, ora sopan blas.* ('My books were removed from my office without any prior notification. What he did is not right. Moreover, he spoke rudely to the staff members. Just because he holds a position, he does not respect others. This person also speaks patronisingly and often scornfully, not polite at all').
Interviewer: *Kok ngécé, memang apa yang dia katakan pak?* ('Why do you think he is scornful? What did he say?')
Interviewee: *Sekarang jaman digital, paling tidak ya ebooks lah.* ('He said, 'Nowadays it is the digital era, at least you have to use e-books'').

Table 6. **Conducts attacking *aji* ('self-worth')**

Attack the core of one's self-image	1. *Ngenyek* ('Humiliate, express contempt, or disdain towards someone'). 2. *Ngécé* ('Scorn') 3. *Ngina* ('Insult') 4. *Mledhingi* ('Moon or exhibit one's buttocks') 5. *Ngiwi-iwi* ('Mock playfully') 6. *Ngisin-isin* ('Shaming')
Undermine confidence and agency	1. *Nantang* ('Challenge') 2. *Mentang-mentang* ('Speak condescendingly or patronisingly')
Diminish the individual's value	1. *Ngasoraké* ('Put others down, make disparaging comments, or intentionally undermine the efforts and abilities of others') 2. *Nyepelekaké, ngemingké* ('Belittle, denigrate, overlook'). 3. *Nggeguyu* ('Belittle playfully and dismiss the opinions and contributions of others') 4. *Misuhi* ('Swearing at others') 5. *Nyentak* ('Yelling at others')
Dismantle the individual's sense of self	1. *Maneni* ('Taunt') 2. *Ngancam* ('Threat')

Javanese culture emphasizes maintaining *rasa* ('emotional well-being') and avoiding actions that could hurt someone's feelings (*nglarani ati*) in daily interactions (Geertz 1976: 242). However, open conflicts are an exception where norms shift, and intentionally upsetting feelings becomes a strategy. This often targets the emotional core, directly inflicting pain and disrupting the opponent's emotional equilibrium. Behaviours such as *nyinggung* ('offend'), *misuhi* ('swear at others'), and *nyentak* ('yell') can target the emotional core, causing pain and destabilizing the opponent. Other acts, such as *maneni* ('taunt'), *ngancam* ('threaten'), *nantang* ('challenge'), *ngécé* ('mock'), and *ngenyek* ('humiliate'), further inflict emotional harm (see Table 6).

In a heated quarrel or *padu*, people often use derogatory language and gestures, and they use informal *Ngoko* to attack each other irrespective of their status. The use of *Ngoko* can place both parties on an equal footing, enabling them to engage

in rough (*kasar*) communication. Pejorative words and animalistic insults such as *asu* or *kirik* ('dog'), *babi* ('pig'), *kethek* or *munyuk* ('monkey') and many others become commonplace, directly attacking the recipient's self-worth and emotional state. In the following excerpt, a respondent narrated that his neighbour had a heated quarrel.

(10) Interviewee: *Kalo sekarang udah jarang, mungkin orang sekarang pada sibuk jadi tak punya waktu untuk ngrasani ataupun bentrok dengan orang lain. Dulu pernah ada tetangga yang bertengkar ramai sekali, tapi sudah lama*. ('It is rare these days, maybe because people are too busy, and they do not have time to gossip or quarrel with others. There used to be neighbours who quarrelled very loudly, but that was a long time ago').
Interviewer: *Kalo padu begitu, apa yang mereka dikatakan?* ('What did they say to each other?').
Interviewee: *Ya kalo orang sini biasanya saling membentak, misuhi dengan kata-kata kotor, bawa-bawa nama hewan, seperti, asu.* ('Well, people here usually yell and curse at each other, and call each other using animal names like dog').

5. Discussion

The study investigated communication strategies that violate *unggah-ungguhing basa* ('linguistic etiquette') and examined specific behaviours that breach *tata krama* ('proper social conduct'), potentially harming *rasa* and *aji*, the core emotional and self-respectful elements of Javanese social interaction.

The present study indicates that impoliteness arises not only from breaching linguistic etiquette but also from violating Javanese proper social conduct. Five specific strategies encompass these transgressions: (1) Speech level mismatch: Communication characterized by a discrepancy between the speaker's chosen speech level (e.g., *Ngoko, Madya, Krama*) and the addressee's social status. This dissonance is reflected in verbal communication (word choice, grammar) and nonverbal cues. (2) Misapplication of speech levels: Using proper linguistic etiquette in a conversation, but employing an inappropriate speech level relative to the addressee's social status. (3) Dissonance between linguistic etiquette and delivery: Speakers use appropriate speech levels, but their tone of voice, body language, or other nonverbal cues contradict the intended courteousness. (4) Inappropriate topics: Discussing sensitive, offensive, or taboo topics in contexts that violate social norms or situational expectations. In such cases, the inappropriate topic choice can supersede even the most refined speech or linguistic etiquette, making communication ineffective or harmful. (5) Combined transgressions: The most severe form of disrespectful communication occurs when both inappropriate speech levels and improper social conduct are present. This convergence of linguistic and non-linguistic violations can damage interpersonal relationships and create a hostile communication environment.

The present study affirms that *tata krama* and *unggah-ungguhing basa* are norms of appropriateness that serve as benchmarks for polite communication in Javanese. Violating *tata krama* and *unggah-ungguhing basa* leads to judgements of impoliteness. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g., Locher & Watts 2008, Watts 2003), indicating that judgements of politeness or impoliteness are not solely determined by the words used, but are also influenced by adherence to social norms and expectations. Culpeper (2008: 29–30) contends that the evaluation of impoliteness considers not only individual experiential norms but also broader social norms that dictate accepted behaviours or conduct within a community. However, according to Locher and Watts (2008: 81), the norms governing interpersonal interaction are flexible and subject to change across diverse social contexts and practices. Meanwhile, in Javanese, at least according to the emerging data of this study, the evaluation of im/politeness is predominantly guided by *tata krama* and *unggah-ungguhing basa*.

Excerpt (6) provides evidence for the concept of self-emotion mismanagement (Işık-Güler & Ruhi 2010) and emotional insensitivity (emotive impoliteness) as outlined by Larina and Ponton (2022), showing how an inability to control emotions can lead to the perception of impoliteness in the speaker. The excerpt demonstrates how impoliteness is assessed based on individuals' difficulty in managing emotions appropriately, with additional behaviours summarised in Table 3, under the category of 'Inability to manage emotions appropriately'. These behaviours are deemed impolite due to their tendency to disregard the feelings of others. This finding also aligns with Wijayanto, Hikmat, and Prasetyarini's (2018) study, which reported that impoliteness can arise from negative emotions such as anger and annoyance.

Several behavioural patterns observed among the Javanese closely resemble Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies, suggesting that certain aspects of Javanese impoliteness align with his framework. For instance, several behaviours summarised in Table 6 essentially correspond to Culpeper's (1996) concept of negative impoliteness. However, the Javanese demonstrate variability in expressing Culpeper's *condescension, scorn*, or *ridicule.* Additionally, Culpeper's (1996) positive impoliteness strategies, such as being *disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic* and *ignoring* are largely reflected in Javanese passively aggressive behaviours, as summarised in Table 5. These behaviours include *ngenengké* ('giving the silent treatment'), *ora nyapa* ('walking past someone without acknowledging their presence'), *ora njawab salam* ('ignoring greetings'), *ora ngreken* ('displaying a lack of interest in someone's presence or opinions'), and *ora nganggep* ('ignoring someone or making them feel invisible'). Culpeper's (1996) strategy of *snubbing the other*, which implies deliberate rejection, is reflected in behaviours such as *ora gelem srawung* ('unwillingness to socialise with others'), *nyinkiraké* ('actively excluding someone from social activities or conversations'), *ora gelem cedhak* ('deliberately showing aloofness') and *satru* ('silent rivalry'). The practice of *satru* or silent rivalry in Javanese can endure for extended periods,

varying from a few days among children to many years among adults. While this conduct is evaluated as impolite by the research participants, this practice serves as a valuable mechanism for discouraging hostility. By maintaining a silent rivalry, individuals can indirectly address their feelings while avoiding direct and potentially harmful confrontations (Geertz 1961: 117–118).

Another finding, as shown in excerpt (3), shows that prosodic features, such as high intonation can contribute to the perception of impoliteness, as reported by previous research (e.g., Culpeper et al. 2003). The respondent stated that the student's use of high-pitched intonation while addressing a teacher was perceived as impolite. A similar finding was reported by several previous studies reporting impoliteness among young Javanese (e.g., Atmawati 2021, Setyawan 2018, Sujono et al. 2019). Although this might indicate shifts in communication standards among the younger Javanese, it is important to interpret the findings with caution. Understanding the Javanese language etiquette takes effort, and young Javanese individuals who conduct unintentional impoliteness are often forgiven, as they are considered *durung (n)jawa*, meaning they have not yet fully embraced the Javanese way of life (Magnis-Suseno 1997).

The perception of unintentional impoliteness differs for *dudu jawa* ('non-Javanese individuals'). Their transgressions are often met with more understanding, as seen in excerpt (4) where the respondent reacted with leniency towards the impolite behaviour. Even native Javanese speakers can be forgiven, as shown in excerpt (1). This reflects the Javanese value of maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict, which contributes to the cultural goal of social tranquillity. While such impoliteness can cause *anyel* ('irritation'), those who behave impolitely are more likely to be considered *aneh-aneh* ('strange') (see excerpt 1) or *ora njawani* ('not acting like a Javanese') (see excerpt 4).

Javanese intentional impoliteness commonly emerges in heated quarrels in which people attack each other by using bad language or pejoratives. However, unlike other cultures where *face* is the primary target (e.g., Bousfield 2007, Culpeper 1996, Dynel 2012), Javanese attacks focus on deeper aspects: *aji*, the individual's sense of self-worth, and *rasa*, their emotional well-being. These vulnerabilities are particularly susceptible to the sting of verbal aggression, making Javanese conflict resolution a unique and impactful experience. Unlike Brown and Levinson's (1987: 2) concept of self-esteem, which is more about how a person feels about themselves in relation to others or the social world that is constructed through interpersonal interaction, the Javanese *aji* ('self-worth') refers to an inherent sense of dignity and value as a human being, independent of external validation or societal standards.

While behaviours listed in the tables above may exhibit cultural specificity in the Javanese context, many align with universal understandings of rudeness or impoliteness. For instance, speaking loudly in places where people typically expect quietness is generally considered rude in most cultures, as it disrupts the peace expected in such settings. Having loud conversations during meetings,

presentations, or lectures, where others are trying to listen or focus, is generally considered impolite. Additionally, making phone calls at inappropriate times (as seen in excerpt 7) is widely regarded as rude or disrespectful across many cultures. Therefore, the behaviours listed in the tables above may reflect tendencies to breach social norms or linguistic etiquette, which can vary across cultures. However, they generally align in terms of what is considered rude behaviour.

It is important to note that this research was conducted with a limited number of Javanese participants, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this paper is not an analysis of real-time data but rather a result of interviews focusing on the perception and construction of impoliteness within the Javanese context, as reported by the respondents of this research. Despite these constraints, the insights gained from the research participants offer valuable perspectives on the dynamics of impoliteness within the Javanese context. Moving forward, future studies could explore alternative methodologies or broader sampling strategies to further investigate impoliteness in Javanese contexts, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of impoliteness phenomena beyond the specific limitations encountered in this study. Additionally, the perception of impoliteness among different genders and age groups was not thoroughly examined in this study. Therefore, exploring and comparing perceptions of impoliteness based on gender and age would be essential for future research.

6. Conclusion

The present study examines impoliteness in Javanese through the interpretations or perceptions of laypeople and reveals a complex interplay between language, societal norms, and individual perspectives. The narratives provided by the Javanese respondents reveal the multifaceted nature of impoliteness, encompassing not only linguistic etiquette violations but also breaches of social conduct, all of which contribute to impolite communication experiences.

Impoliteness in Javanese can be either unintentional or intentional. Unintentional impoliteness, often referred to as rudeness in literature, occurs when linguistic etiquette is violated. This study identifies various manifestations of this phenomenon, including speech level mismatch, misapplication of speech levels, dissonance between linguistic etiquette and delivery, the discussion of inappropriate topics, and combined transgressions of *tata krama* and *unggah-ungguhing basa*. By contrast, intentional impoliteness occurs when speakers intentionally attack others' self-worth and feelings or emotional well-being through derogatory language and insults. However, due to the limited availability of data on intentional impoliteness in heated quarrels or *padu*, further research is needed to explore behaviours that specifically target self-worth and emotional states. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the complex factors shaping laypersons' judgments of impolite communication in Javanese.

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