



The Language of Satire: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Politeness and Impoliteness through Culpeper's Strategies in Persian Satire

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Introduction

Verbal violence, a phenomenon rooted in societal mental structures and cultural discourse, often conflicts with individuals' social and identity expectations. Linguistic impoliteness, as a manifestation of this violence, is recognized as a negative social act (Culpeper, 2011). Its examination in literary works, particularly satire, is crucial since these texts reflect underlying cultural frameworks; analyzing impoliteness within them can lead to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of social critique and the exercise of verbal violence (Ghader & Rezayi, 2025). While previous Persian studies have focused on verbal violence in limited contexts like family or educational settings (Solomon & Serres, 1999), its role in satirical works remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by employing Culpeper's (1996, 2005, 2011) impoliteness strategies to analyze five prominent Persian satirical works from different historical periods: *Resale-ye Delgosha* and *Mouse and Cat* by Obeyd Zakani; *Charand-o Parand* by Dehkhoda; *Mashallah Khan in the Court of Harun al-Rashid* by Pezeshkzad; and *Chartoopia* by Sayar Saree. The research seeks to answer two primary questions: 1) Which of Culpeper's strategies are employed in each work? and 2) Which strategies show the highest and lowest overall frequency

across the corpus? Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study qualitatively identifies and interprets strategies before quantitatively measuring their frequency and distribution to trace the evolution of verbal violence in Persian satire.

Literature Review

Culpeper's theoretical framework conceptualizes impoliteness as an interactive and context-dependent phenomenon, analyzed through the interplay of speaker intention, hearer perception, and socio-cultural context (Culpeper, 2011). His model outlines six key strategies—bald-on-record, positive, and negative impoliteness, sarcasm, withholding politeness, and indirect impoliteness—which provide a structured approach for identifying face-threatening acts. This framework is particularly valuable for analyzing satire, as it reveals how linguistic impoliteness is strategically deployed to challenge social norms, simplify complex issues, and provoke critical reflection and dialogue (Barum Chattoo, 2019; Maslo, 2019).

Numerous domestic and international studies have examined verbal violence and impoliteness across various contexts, with Iranian research documenting its prevalence in educational settings through mockery (Bazargan et al., 2003; Majlesi, 2007), studies in literary analysis have applied Culpeper's framework to dramatic texts, revealing positive impoliteness as prevalent (Mahmoudi Bakhtiari & Salimian, 2016; Namvar, 2019) and demonstrating that the power-impoliteness relationship is more pronounced in Persian than English (Khatib & Lotfi, 2015). However, despite this extensive research across everyday conversations, dramatic works, and online discourse (Naghshbandi et al., 2024), most investigations have employed diverse theoretical frameworks, leaving the systematic application of Culpeper's theory—particularly for analyzing social satire in Persian literary works—largely unexplored, a gap this study aims to address by examining how satire strategically deploys impoliteness as an instrument for social critique and exposing power dynamics.

Methodology

This study employed an integrated mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. In the qualitative phase, discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis were used to identify, classify, and interpret impoliteness strategies within

Culpeper's (2011) framework. In the quantitative phase, quantitative content analysis measured and compared the frequency and distribution of these strategies.

The corpus consisted of five purposefully selected, well-known Persian satirical works from four distinct historical periods, totaling over 663 pages. The selection was based on historical representation, stylistic diversity, analytical potential, and cultural significance.

Results

The findings demonstrated that impoliteness primarily manifested in the form of face-threatening acts (FTAs), accounting for 88.9% (1,475 out of 1,659 instances). Negative impoliteness strategies were the most dominant type of FTA, totaling 620 instances.

The most frequently used specific strategies included: ridicule and mockery (298 instances), indirect impoliteness (282 instances), bald-on-record impoliteness (169 instances), negative other-labeling (148 instances), and sarcasm (108 instances).

The least frequent instances fell within the domain of social norm-threatening acts (11.1%, 186 instances). Specifically, the strategy of "accidental or unintentional offense" demonstrated the lowest frequency, confirming that Persian satire is fundamentally based on intentionality and awareness.

A comparative historical analysis revealed a gradual increase in the proportion of face-threatening acts from the classical era to the Constitutional era. Conversely, post-Islamic Revolution satire showed a declining trend in both face-threatening and social norm-threatening acts due to political restrictions.

Discussion

The overwhelming prevalence of negative impoliteness—which targets the negative face of the audience, including formal structures, power institutions, or established norms—demonstrates that Persian satirical language has consistently functioned as a deliberate and purposeful instrument for social, political, and cultural critique across all periods. Iranian satirists have consistently utilized strategies like ridicule, disparagement, and sarcasm to challenge power structures while strategically avoiding the risks associated with direct confrontation. This pattern is institutionalized in the Persian satirical tradition as "respectful mockery," where sharp criticism is concealed through irony and linguistic distancing.

The historical data delineates an evolutionary pattern: Persian satire moved from Obeyd Zakani's allegorical language (a response to severe censorship) to Dehkhoda's more explicit tone (a product of the Constitutional era's relative freedom). Critically, the decline in direct criticism of power structures after the 1953 coup and the Islamic Revolution led to a shift toward critiquing individual behaviors and everyday issues. This increased prevalence of FTAs reflects a movement from "power-oriented political satire" toward "individual-centric social satire".

The study was subject to several limitations, including its exclusive focus on written works, the limited selection of texts from each historical period, and insufficient analysis of factors such as psycholinguistics, gender, class, and ethnicity.

Conclusion

This research confirmed that impoliteness in Persian satire primarily manifests through face-threatening acts (88.9%) and the strategic use of negative impoliteness, establishing it as a sanctioned and strategic tool for social critique within a collectivist cultural context. The findings successfully delineate the evolutionary pattern of verbal impoliteness across Persian satire history, highlighting satire's adaptability to evolving socio-cultural and political constraints. The post-revolution shift toward individualistic impoliteness strategies underscores a redefinition of satire's role from a vehicle for large-scale social reform to a means of expressing the constraints of everyday life. Future research should conduct a more comprehensive examination of diverse satirical forms (oral, visual, digital) alongside psychological and sociological variables to provide a more nuanced understanding.

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