



RESEARCH ON IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN *A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS*



Tian Dong¹
 Lu Qiu²⁺

¹Professor in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China.

Email: yuyanxue110@163.com Tel: 17325352596

²Graduate Student in School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China.

Email: 2296543398@qq.com Tel: 18830250372



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 5 August 2019

Revised: 10 September 2019

Accepted: 15 October 2019

Published: 29 November 2019

Keywords

Impoliteness

Strategy

Identity construction

A dream of red mansions

Culture

Conflicting discourse

Pragmatic function.

In daily interactions between people, conflicting discourse is inevitable due to differences in values, education level, and life experience. Because these conflicting discourses are deliberate, contradictory and negative, it is impolite for the listener. Intentional impoliteness is a special pragmatic strategy based on specific communicative intentions. The dialectical relationship between impoliteness and identity construction has become one of the hot issues of research. The dialectical relationship between impoliteness and identity construction has become a hot issue in current linguistic research. Guided by J. Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory, this paper explores how impoliteness is performed and worked in Chinese context from two aspects: impoliteness strategy and identity construction. The impoliteness strategy consists of Bold on record impoliteness, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Sarcasm/Mock Politeness and Withhold Politeness. It is revealed that impoliteness is widely used in characters' communication through multiple speech acts from the example analysis of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, achieving the specific purpose of the speaker and realizing the construction of powerful identity, prominent identity and affective identity.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have examined the intentional impoliteness in Chinese context within the framework of J. Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory. It helps to better understand why the speakers choose impoliteness on some occasions and what specific functions it can realize. It expands the scope of politeness research and promotes intercultural communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness and impoliteness are quite common in human communication. Compared to the rise and rise of politeness research led by Brown and Levinson's Face-saving Theory and Leech's Politeness Principle, impoliteness has long been in the marginalization of study. However, since 2000 (Culpeper *et al.*, 2017) with the changed weathervane and continuous breakthrough of politeness research, new topics such as impoliteness and identity have aroused the great interest of social linguists (Xiao, 2017; Zhou and Zhang, 2018). The related research on impoliteness has expanded rapidly in breadth and depth. To investigate identity construction in dynamic impolite context is a rarely involved new perspective. Identity is the center of social activity both in verbal and non-verbal ways (De Fina and Schiffrin, 2006). Impoliteness is a way to attack the hearer's identity or maintain the speaker's

own identity by dint of conflict talk in an identity game. The relation between impoliteness and identity is reflected in communication (Haugh, 2007). Impolite discourse can characterize a particular identity, which vice versa may trigger impolite speech acts.

One of the classic books in Chinese history *A Dream of Red Mansions* has shown the world a pretty comprehensive and typical Chinese language art. In the research field of Chinese ancient novel in the United States, *A Dream of Red Mansions* has always reaped the richest achievements, which can best represent the research level and trend. But most related studies still focus on politeness and few on impoliteness. Fortunately, in recent years, American scholars have advocated a more open and diversified New School of Studies on *A Dream of Red Mansions*, one concern of which is identity and subjectivity (Zou, 2019). Two most frequently used theories in impoliteness study are Rapport Management Theory and Impoliteness Theory. The former is appropriate to describe equal relationships, such as couples. While the latter is applicable to unequal relationships and general conflict discourse (Ran and Yang, 2011) which more fits the hierarchical and unequal identities in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Therefore, within the framework of J. Culpeper's impoliteness theory proposed in 1996, five applied impoliteness strategies are analyzed and three identities are constructed by the characters through impolite speech to realize certain communicative intentions in a specific context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Research on Impoliteness

Impoliteness is comprised by unintentional and intentional impoliteness. The former, also called failed politeness, is caused by the negligence or ignorance of the speaker. And the latter refers to the impolite speech act consciously adopted by the speaker for a specific communicative purpose. Impoliteness research orients around the latter. Impoliteness has been an interdisciplinary topic encompassing many areas, like social psychology, sociology, and pragmatics. The core issue of early scattered impoliteness research was the concept. Labov and Fanshel (1977) came up with the notion of "aggravation" as well as "mitigation" representing impoliteness and politeness. Lakoff (1989) called impoliteness "rude behaviors" which was interpreted as intentionally and negatively confrontational. Culpeper *et al.* (2003) presented the first authoritative definition: "Impoliteness is the use of strategies designed to attack people's face, and thereby it would cause social conflicts and disharmony". But later Culpeper corrected it in 2005: "The phenomenon of impoliteness comes about when (1) the speaker communicates a face-attacking behavior intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs the behavior as an intentionally face-attacking behavior, or a combination of (1) and (2)" and introduced "context" into impolite research in 2010. Bousfield (2008) defined impoliteness as unprovoked and conflicting face-threatening utterances in a purposeful communication. From the controversial definitions of impoliteness till now, we can conclude two core elements of impoliteness: the intention of the speaker and the recognition of the hearer.

Western scholars' research on impoliteness roughly goes through three stages: before 1996, 1996-2008 and 2008 to present. In the first stage, scholars led by Lachenicht L. merely regarded impoliteness as a language phenomenon, covering aggravating language, non-cooperative communication, and rudeness. In the second stage, Culpeper explicitly defined impoliteness for the first time and established its independent research status in 1996, and summed up five pragmatic strategies of impoliteness based on Face-saving Theory. They were bold on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm/mock politeness and withhold politeness, which would be illustrated in details in the analysis part. From then on, impoliteness was attached importance to by academic circles as an independent research subject. The year 2008 was a milestone for impoliteness since the famous *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture* published a special issue for the study of impoliteness. And plenty of scholars investigated impoliteness from various angles, such as methodologies, interpersonal functions in political, court, and police contexts. Impoliteness research now develops towards the

direction of freeing from the classic politeness paradigm, focusing on interpersonal relationship construction, and broadening discourse analysis perspective (Zhou and Zhang, 2015).

"Do not look at what is contrary to propriety; do not listen to what is contrary to propriety; do not speak what is contrary to propriety; do not do what is contrary to propriety." this well-known Confucius quote shows the importance of politeness to Chinese daily interaction since ancient times. Consequently, impoliteness had long been ignored as the accessory or dark shadow of politeness. Chinese research on the phenomenon of impoliteness began relatively late, mainly on the introduction of foreign achievements, and the research perspectives were limited to Verschueren's Adaptation Theory, such as Yang and Yu (2007) and Song (2014). Song (2014) discussed politeness and impoliteness in dialogues of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, pointing out that "impoliteness is an adaptation to the communicative context and psychological context, through which communicative effect is achieved." Domestic impoliteness study has gradually shifted from early static to present dynamic research. However, only a small number of scholars have conducted in-depth analysis on the context in which impoliteness is implemented. Therefore, there is a huge research space of impoliteness in Chinese social and cultural context.

2.2. Research on Impoliteness and Identity Construction

Identity construction has been a hot issue of sociolinguistics and pragmatics in the past 20 years. Before elucidating identity construction, it is necessary to grasp the concept of identity. The norm of identity was firstly introduced by Erik Erikson in the psychological field, defined as "a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image" (Erikson, 1970).

Later more and more scholars found that identity can't be separated from the sociality, culture and context. Brewer and Gardner (1996) divided self-identity into three levels: individual one, relational one and interpersonal one. Simon (2004) held the view that identity has both statically cognitive and dynamically social nature, performed in personal abilities, physical characteristics, ideologies, social roles, affiliations and group memberships. De Fina and Schiffrin (2006) emphasized the social constructivization of identity and clearly stated that identity comes from specific communicative situations through discourse construction and negotiation. In the process of communication, both the expression of the speaker and the understanding of the listener play a role in identity construction. The dialectical relationship between impoliteness and identity construction has become a frontier issue in current linguistic research. In the study of daily conversation, Goffman (1967) proposed when the speaker meets or exceeds the hearer's self-cognition and identity positioning, the hearer may be unaware or feel good; but when the speaker challenges or derogates that, the hearer's negative emotions will be generated. Such discourses are often evaluated as impoliteness. If identity negotiation is negative or even confrontational, the communicator will violate the principle of interpersonal politeness of "taking more consideration of the other than the self" and construct new identity by using intentional impoliteness. It can be seen that impoliteness and identity interact in communication: impolite utterances can achieve the objective of pragmatic identity; on the other hand, the designated identity can trigger impolite utterances (Haugh, 2007).

The increasing domestic research on impoliteness and identity construction has been conducted recently from diversified perspectives. On the basis of data collected from TV series, Chen and Ran (2013) stated that the speaker built powerful identity, prominent identity and affective identity in an intentional impolite context. Impoliteness strategies were chosen when constructing the above identities, which may also threaten the face and equal social rights of the hearer. Zhang and Xie made an attempted effort to examine impoliteness and identity construction in Cyber-context in 2015. In 2016, they further studied conventionalized impoliteness formulae and identity construction in confrontational discourse from driver training conversations, paying special attention to the rapport orientation reflected in the construction processes. Zhou and Cao (2017) and Hong (2018) both discussed the construction mechanism of soldiers' identity in the context of military training.

3. ANALYSIS OF IMPOLITENESS STRATEGIES IN *A DREAM OF RED MANSIONS*

Based on the Brown and Levinson (1987) model of politeness, Culpeper put forward impoliteness theory with an attempt to explore the possibility of a parallel structure of this model. The five impoliteness strategies of Culpeper (1996) are summarized in the following chart:

Table-1. Culpeper's impoliteness strategies.

Modal	Definition	Output strategies
(1) Bold on record impoliteness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A direct, clear, unambiguous, concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swear words • Warning • Order
(2) Positive impoliteness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage H's positive face wants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore, snub • Exclude H from activity • Disassociate from H • Be disinterested • Inappropriate identity markers • Obscure/secretive language • Seek disagreement • Make H feel uncomfortable • Use taboo words • Call the other names
(3) Negative impoliteness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage H's negative face needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frighten • Condescend, scorn or ridicule • Invade H's space literally or metaphorically • Associate H with negative aspect • Put H's indebtedness on record • Hinder/ block
(4) Sarcasm/Mock politeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obviously insincere politeness performed as face threatening acts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irony
(5) Withhold politeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of politeness where it would be expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't express thank to somebody for a gift

Note: H stands for the hearer Culpeper (1996).

According to Culpeper's division shown in Table 1, the five impoliteness strategies are namely Bold on record impoliteness, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Sarcasm/Mock politeness and Withhold politeness. The first type is Bold on record impoliteness, which is acted in a direct, clear, unambiguous, concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized, such as swear words, warning and order. The second type, Positive impoliteness damages the hearer's positive face wants. There are several ways and some typical are listed here: ignore, snub, exclude him/her from activity, disassociate from him, be disinterested in him, inappropriate identity markers, obscure/secretive language, seek disagreement, make him feel uncomfortable, use taboo words, call the other names, etc. The third impoliteness strategy, Negative impoliteness, is to damage the hearer's negative face needs through the ways: frighten, condescend, scorn or ridicule, invade the hearer's space literally or metaphorically, associate the hearer with negative aspect, put his indebtedness on record, hinder or block. Sarcasm Politeness, also called Mock Politeness, is a kind of obviously insincere politeness performed as face threatening acts, such as irony. Withhold Politeness is the absence of politeness where it would be expected, for example, the speaker doesn't express thank to somebody for a gift.

3.1. Bold on Record Impoliteness

Tan-chun was in a towering rage. 'Who do you think you are? How dare you touch me? It seems that the respect that I and the others show you, even though it is only for Her Ladyship's sake and out of consideration for your age, merely encourages you to make mischief for us and abuse your borrowed powers. That, in all conscience, is hard enough to bear. But now, to lay hands on me - that is really too much! If you have reckoned on my being a poor, timid creature like your Miss Ying whom you can bully and impose upon at your pleasure, you have made a very big mistake. You may search my things if you wish and I shall not complain; but I will not be made a laughing-stock. Here!' - with one hand she began feverishly undoing her buttons, while with the other she pulled Xi-feng's hand towards her and placed it beneath her jacket 'Search me! I would rather be searched by you than submit to being paraded over by a slave!'

— Chapter 74 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

The third-Master, Bao-yu's younger sister, Tan-chun was called "The Rose". She was smart with strong determination. The housekeeper Xi-feng and the authority Lady Wang had to show her a certain measure of deference. Due to something important lost, Lady Wang ordered Xi-feng to carry out secret investigation on girls, maids and nannies in the new garden under the guise of gambling control. After their arrival to the place of Tan-chun, she said coldly to the search party that they could only search her but none of her maids. On the one hand, Tan-chun was extremely dissatisfied and angry about the investigation; on the other hand, she strived to maintain her Master prestige and dignity in front of the servants. However, Wang Shanbao's wife, a very stupid woman lack of judgement, refused to believe that an unmarried girl of her years could be as formidable as said. So she had the audacity to take hold of a corner of Tan-chun's jacket and turned it back, arrogating the identity of master and servant with a great disrespect. Indisputably Tan-chun slapped her in the public and used the most offensive impoliteness strategy, bold on record impoliteness to bite her head off. The impoliteness was performed by swear words (*timid creature, slave*), warning (*How dare you touch me?*) and criticism (*merely encourages you to make mischief for us and abuse your borrowed powers*), fully expressing Tan-chun's contempt and rudeness. In addition, the domination of conversation turns leaving no space to interject and tempting momentum reinforced the whole impolite effect.

3.2. Positive Impoliteness

'You've chosen a good day to come, Uncle Bao,' said little Qin-shi. 'Last time you were here you wanted to see my brother. Well, today he's here. He's sitting in the study at this very moment. Why don't you go in and see him?' Bao-yu was for rushing off straight away. You-shi hurriedly ordered some servants to go after him in discreet attendance. 'Well now, just a minute I' said Xi-feng. 'Why not ask him in here so that I can see him too?' 'Oh dear, I don't think that would do at all!' said You-shi. 'Some people's children aren't used to ratchet ways like ours. Some people's children are quiet and refined. If they were to meet a termagant like you, they might die of laughing.' 'He'll be lucky if I don't laugh at him,' said Xi-feng cheerfully. 'He'd better not try laughing at me!'

— Chapter 7 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Qin-zhong was born with fine features, whose painful bashfulness created a somewhat girlish impression. Because his sister Qin-shi married into the Ning-guo House, Qin-zhong also joined this noble family. He was congenial to Jia Baoyu when they first met in the above scene. Xi-feng and Bao-yu visited Ning-guo House together, and You-shi let Bao-yu to see Qin-zhong. Out of curiosity about Qin-zhong, Xi-feng asked You-shi and Jia Rong to bring him in but was discouraged by them. Due to the large womenfolk of their family, the male servants and able-bodied men were forbidden to enter the mansion on ordinary days. As a guest, it breached the feudal etiquette that Xi-feng took the initiative to see a strange man in other's house. Therefore, You-shi attempted to exclude her from the meeting activity by threatening her positive face with the inappropriate identity marker "*termagant*". As You-shi was Xi-feng's sister-in-law, this appellation was not completely derogatory but with a taste of banter. By comparing Qin-zhong's grace and Xi-feng's fierce, You-shi implied that the meeting of two totally different persons would make embarrassment and jokes (*they might die of laughing*). Positive impoliteness is

evidentially applied here by You-shi to seek disagreement and dispel Xi-feng's idea of seeing Qin-zhong. Of course You-shi's evasive words did not meet Xi-feng's needs, so she immediately tried to maintain her face by saying "*He'll be lucky if I don't laugh at him*".

3.3. Negative Impoliteness

Seeing that he had gone off into one of his trances, Bao-chai threw down the chaplet in embarrassment and turned to go. But Dai-yu was standing on the threshold, biting a corner of her handkerchief, convulsed with silent laughter. 'I thought you were so delicate,' said Bao-chai. 'What are you standing there in the draught for?' 'I've been in the room all the time,' said Dai-yu. 'I just this moment went to have a look outside because I heard the sound of something in the sky. It was a gawping goose.' 'Where?' said Bao-chai. 'Let me have a look.' 'Oh,' said Dai-yu, 'as soon as I went outside he flew away with a whir-r-r-' She flicked her long handkerchief as she said this in the direction of Bao-yu's face. 'Ow!' he exclaimed—She had flicked him in the eye.

—Chapter 28 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Bao-chai was beautiful in appearance, refined in manner and versatile in matters. Bao-yu wanted to take a look at Bao-chai's medicine-beads. When she took off the chaplet, Bao-yu can't help but stared at her on account of her smooth snow-white skin, plump charming body and exquisite features. Seeing Bao-yu, Dai-yu's sweetheart, so obsessed in other girl's beauty, her jealousy arose spontaneously at once. Instead of showing her envy directly, clever Dai-yu first drew the attention of Bao-chai through a series of behaviors not in conformity with her daily style (*biting a corner of her handkerchief, convulsed with silent laughter*), thus explaining the reason was *a gawping goose*. When innocent Baochai asked "*Where*", Daiyu naturally flicked her handkerchief to Bao-yu and stop his infatuation. Associating Bao-yu with negative aspect, a *gawping goose*, threatened his negative face, which no doubt belonged to negative impoliteness. This impoliteness strategy was applied again by Dai-yu in the form of invading into Bao-yu's space directly with her acts: pulling him back to reality from intoxication and hindering his freedom to daze ('*Ow!*' *he exclaimed*). The dual use of negative impoliteness strategy helps Dai-yu to realize her intention to stop Bao-yu's fascination as well as save his face to some extent.

3.4. Sarcasm/Mock Politeness

Xiang-lian stamped impatiently. 'And everyone else's, no doubt.' Bao-yu's execrable pun had not amused him. 'It won't do. This is a thoroughly bad business. The only clean things about that Ning-guo House are the stone lions that stand outside the gate. The very cats and dogs there are corrupted!' Bao-yu reddened, and Xiang-lian, realizing that he had gone too far, began pumping his hands apologetically. 'I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. - But surely you can tell me something about her character?'

—Chapter 66 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

As a good friend of Bao-yu, Xiang-lian had a forthright temperament and a good looking. You San-jie designated to marry him. In ancient China, one's marriage is just arranged and determined by parents and matchmakers. After arriving at Ping-an, Jia Lian, brother-in-law of You San-jie, ran into Xiang-lian and insisted him to get married with You San-jie for several times. Out of respect and politeness, Xiang-lian agreed and leaved the Duck and Drake swords as betrothal presents. Knowing that You San-jie and You Er-jie were sisters brought together in Rong-guo House, Xiang-lian mistook You San-jie for someone of the impurity due to the bad family tradition of the Rong-guo mansion. Regretting the haste of this marriage, Xiang-lian blurted out "*The only clean things about that Ning-guo House are the stone lions that stand outside the gate. The very cats and dogs there are corrupted!*" suggesting that all the people in Rong-guo House were not above-board. Although Bao-yu was not targeted, his positive face was still undoubtedly threatened as being a member of them. Seeing Bao-yu's blushing face, Xiang-lian hurried to admit his fault by saying "*I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that*" hoping to revoke the previous impolite words.

3.5. Withhold Politeness

Dai-yu, who up to this moment had been listening open-mouthed, turned scarlet at the mention of her own name and with a cry of rage threw herself again on Bao-chai. . . . Already Nightingale had darted forward: 'If that's what you think, Mrs Xue, why don't you talk to Her Old Ladyship about it?' 'Goodness, child, you are impatient!' said Aunt Xue, laughing, 'I suppose if you are in such a hurry to get your mistress married, you must be thinking of a little husband for yourself!' 'Mrs Xue!' said Nightingale, crimson-faced. 'You ought to know better at your age!' She turned and fled.

—Chapter 57 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

It is not in accordance with etiquette for the unmarried women to talk about marriage in public in ancient China. The love between Dai-yu and Bao-yu was tacit in the whole Rong-guo mansion. After Dai-yu identified Bao-Chai's mother, Aunt Xue, as a godmother, Aunt Xue joked to betroth Bao-yu to Dai-yu as a matchmaker. Hearing this, Nightingale, one shackle of Dai-yu, implied Aunt Xue to talk it to the final decision-maker Grandmother Jia. However, Aunt Xue had no intention of practical action at the bottom of her heart. In order to transfer the conversation topic, Aunt Xue forged the fact that the hurry of Nightingale came from her selfishness (*'I suppose if you are in such a hurry to get your mistress married, you must be thinking of a little husband for yourself!'*) and thus brought everyone's attention from Dai-yu to Nightingale. As a young girl, Nightingale naturally became so shy that she dare not continue to ask after Aunt Xue said that she wanted to marry before so many people. By virtue of positive impoliteness, Aunt Xue successfully got rid of Nightingale's urge. Before running away, ashamed Nightingale chose withhold politeness to counterattack Aunt Xue by *'You ought to know better at your age!'*

4. IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN AN IMPOLITE CONTEXT

Self, identity and subjectivity are the core issues in the study of American studies of Chinese novels in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (Zou, 2019). Identity embodies self-definition and self-expression in power constraints and social relations. It is the product of social interaction and social relations, and is constructed by various specific negotiation processes including discourse practice. Garcés-Conejos (2013) also said: "Identity construction is the center of discourse activity." The characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions* are of complex relationship and unequal power and status. Impolite discourse is the embodiment of power distance. It is also through the impolite strategies that the characters form their ideal identities.

Since Chen and Ran (2013) explicitly pointed out three identities built in the intentional impolite context, most researchers adopted this classification when studying identity construction from impoliteness. The three identities are powerful identity, prominent identity and affective identity in dialogues. Powerful identity means a relatively stable, pre-existing and dominant position given by the social culture. Prominent identity refers to the temporary identity constructed by the communicator in a specific context. It can be either the powerful or weak identity. Affective identity refers to the identity characteristics shown by the speaker in the process of intentionally approaching or alienating the hearer through their words, based on emotional experience in the specific communicative activity.

4.1. Powerful Identity Construction

Methias (2011) believes that when the unequal power exists between communicative subjects, impoliteness is more likely to appear and mainly caused by the more powerful party. In Chinese context, the communicative subject constructs powerful pragmatic identity mostly in the interpersonal interaction between superiors and subordinates, seniors and minors.

By this time all the married women on the staff had been assembled. Not daring to go in, they hung about outside the window listening to Xi-feng discussing work-plans with Lai Sheng's wife inside the office. 'Now that I'm in charge here', they heard her telling the latter, 'I won't promise to make myself agreeable. I haven't got a sweet temper like your

mistress, you know. You won't find me letting you do every-thing just as it suits you. So don't let me hear anyone saying "We don't do it that way here"! From now on, whatever it is, you do it the way I tell you to, and anyone who departs by as much as a hair's breadth from what I say is for it good and proper, no matter how senior or how important she thinks she is!

—Chapter 14 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Xi-feng was sharp-toothed, smart, and good at reading people's faces. As a competent housekeeper of Rong-guo House, She enjoyed a high status and won the trust of the authority Grandmother Jia and Lady Wang. Due to the chaos of Ning-guo House, she was invited to take on the management of the funeral. As soon as she entered the Ning mansion, Xi-feng made the new regulations that all servants should obey in order to reach a fast and good management effect. The ancient Chinese ranks are extremely strict, and the servant must obey the master unconditionally. To establish her prestige and majesty in front of the servants, Xi-feng applied two impoliteness strategies at the same time: bold on record impoliteness and negative impoliteness. The former was performed in the way of warning (*I won't promise to make myself agreeable*) and order (*So don't let me hear anyone saying "We don't do it that way here!"*). The latter was implemented by frightening the listener (*anyone who departs by as much as a hair's breadth from what I say is for it good and proper*). Besides, her high tough rude tone enhanced the effect of impoliteness. There was no doubt that her words shocked the servants of Ning-guo House and highlighted her powerful identity. The following hard work and high efficiency of the servants was the portrayal of the positive role that her impolite words played.

4.2. Prominent Identity Construction

For the sake of getting the upper hand as much as possible in the interpersonal communication, the speaker will choose and present the most beneficial identity attribute for himself/herself, regardless of whether their power positions equal or not.

Xi-feng walked through into the main sitting-room inside. You-shi came out of the inner room to greet her. 'What is it, Feng?' she asked, observing Xi-feng's ugly expression. 'Something has upset you.' Xi-feng spat in her face.

'Nobody else wanted that precious sister of yours, so you had to foist her onto our family. Was it some phlegm that got into your heart? Was it rouge you'd swallowed, clogging up your thinking-tubes? Just what was it that made you think you could marry her to him at a time like that - a time when he was in double mourning: state mourning and family mourning? Now, thanks to you, we've got someone suing us: so even the people in the law-courts know what a jealous shrew I am and I have to sit by as helpless as a crab with no legs while total strangers discuss my character and wonder why my husband doesn't divorce me. What have I done wrong since I came to this place that you should want to treat me like this? Is it something that Grandma or Aunt Wang said that has made you set this trap for me, to get me out of the way? Let's go to court together, the two of us, and state our cases.....'

—Chapter 68 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

You Er-jie was such a peerless beauty that Xi-feng's husband, Jia Lian, took a fancy to her and even secretly smashed and placed her in the alley of Rong-guo House. After the news finally sunk in, furious Xi-feng rushed to the home of You-shi to seek justice. Although Xi-feng was a highly regarded stewardess of Rong-guo House, in this case, she couldn't benefit much from her powerful identity. On the contrary, it would only make everyone think that Xi-feng bullied her sister-in-law in a relatively weak position. Therefore, Xi-feng chose prominent identity, or we say, weak identity, the wife of Jia Lian, acting as the victim. By means of bold on record impoliteness, Xi-feng blamed You-shi relentlessly in the way of reprimand (*you had to foist her onto our family*) and question (*Was it some phlegm that got into your heart? Was it rouge you'd swallowed, clogging up your thinking-tubes?*). Describing herself as "*a crab with no legs*" highlights the image of a lonely and helpless wife who was betrayed by her husband and relatives. The rhetorical question (*What have I done wrong since I came to this place that you should want to treat me like this?*) strengthened her grievances and sadness that had been kept in the dark. And You-Shi was the wicked who hatched

the conspiracy to harm her (*set this trap for me, to get me out of the way*). Moreover, Xi-feng frightened You-shi by saying “*Let's go to court together*”, attacking her negative face. Through the construction of prominent identity, Xi-feng successfully got the sympathies of the spectators, and achieved her purpose of arbitrarily counting You-shi and venting anger.

4.3. Affective Identity Construction

Affective factors are one main line running through interpersonal pragmatics. Culpeper (2011) pointed out that face threatening acts can lead to the negative emotions such as anger, sadness, jealousy and humiliation. Affective identity reflects the interpersonal relationship with different degrees of intimacy.

Unfortunately it was the sharp-tongued Skybright who came forward to help him change his clothes. With provoking carelessness she dropped a fan while she was doing so and snapped the bone fan-sticks by accidentally treading on it. ‘Clumsy!’ said Bao-yu reproachfully. ‘You won’t be so careless with things when you have a household of your own.’…… Aroma had heard all this from the adjoining room and now came hurrying in. ‘Now what’s all this about?’ she said, addressing herself to Bao-yu. ‘Didn’t I tell you? As soon as I turn my back there’s trouble.’ ‘If you knew that already,’ said Skybright, ‘it’s a pity you couldn’t have come in a bit sooner and saved me from provoking him. Of course, we all know that you’re the only one who knows how to serve him properly. None of the rest of us knows how it’s done. I suppose it’s because you serve him so well that he gave you a kick in the ribs yesterday. Heaven knows what he’s got in store for me for having served him so badly!’

— Chapter 31 in *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Skybright was one of the four main maids in Bao-yu's house, enjoying the life of a lady there. She had arrogant nature and a strong spirit of resistance. Another maid, Aroma, was quite different from Skybright. She was kind to people and prudent in dealing with matters, gaining the favor and popularity of all people in the Rong mansion. On one hand, Skybright looked down on Aroma's groveling to their masters; on the other hand, she was jealous of Aroma's secret betroth to their master Bao-yu. Because Bao-yu offended Bao-chai, so he returned to his room in a mood of black despondency. Unfortunately, the sharp-tongued Skybright snapped the bone fan-sticks when she helped Bao-yu to change his clothes. Bao-yu, who was being in a low spirit, blamed Skybright for “*clumsy*” and “*careless*”. This is an obvious bold on record impoliteness. Skybright did not know why and thought that Bao-yu criticized her on purpose with the excuse of such a small matter. So she quarreled with Bao-yu and Aroma hurried to mediate and stop them. However, Skybright did not only appreciate her kindness, but mocked at her through impolite words. The sentence “*you’re the only one who knows how to serve him properly*” deliberately showed Aroma's competence, thus forming a sharp contrast with the other maids' incompetence (*None of the rest of us knows how it's done*). By means of positive impoliteness, Skybright intentionally alienated Aroma by saying “*you’re the only one*”, “*it’s because you*” and drew closer to the rest of maids through self-mentions “*we*”, “*us*”, indicating that they belonged to the same unskilled group except Aroma. The irritating and shaming reaction of Aroma confirmed that Skybright smoothly realized her intention of taunting and attacking Aroma and expressing dissatisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of impolite theory proposed by J. Culpeper and identity construction theory, this paper analyzes several classic dialogues in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. It is found that the speaker will construct ideal identity in specific contexts in interpersonal communication. Impoliteness is not a pragmatic failure, but an intentional speech strategy adopted by the speaker standing on his or her identity. The five impolite strategies, bold on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withhold politeness are widely used by the characters in the book. By virtue of impoliteness, the speaker successfully constructs powerful, prominent and affective identity. Furthermore, different impoliteness strategies are combined together in the process of identity construction. The interaction between impoliteness and identity construction reflects the

interplay between verbal and non-verbal factors in the process of communication. This article promotes the development and improvement of impoliteness theory and people's better understanding about impoliteness. But there are still some limitations which need forward efforts to address. For example, character groups should be classified (between masters, masters and servants, and servants) and the rapport-challenge orientation of communicative identity construction in specific contexts needs further discussion.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgement: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

REFERENCES

- Bousfield, D., 2008. Impoliteness in interaction. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Brewer, M.B. and W. Gardner, 1996. Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1): 83-93. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.71.1.83>.
- Brown, P. and S.C. Levinson, 1987. Politeness: Some universals in language usage. Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- Chen, Q. and Y.P. Ran, 2013. Identity construction in the context of intentional impoliteness——rapport-challenge orientation. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*, 6: 15-18.
- Culpeper, J., 1996. Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(3): 349-367. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(95\)00014-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(95)00014-3).
- Culpeper, J., 2011. Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence. Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J., D. Bousfield and A. Wichmann, 2003. Impoliteness revisited: With special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(10-11): 1545-1579. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166\(02\)00118-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(02)00118-2).
- Culpeper, J., M. Haugh and D.Z. Kádár, 2017. The palgrave handbook of linguistic (im) politeness. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Fina, A. and M.D. Schiffrin, 2006. Discourse and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, E.H., 1970. Reflections on the dissent of contemporary youth. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 51(1): 11-22.
- Garcés-Conejos, B.P., 2013. Introduction: Face, identity and impoliteness. Looking backward, moving forward: From goffman to practice theory. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 9(1): 1-19.
- Goffman, E., 1967. Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Haugh, M., 2007. The discursive challenge to politeness theory: An interactional alternative. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 3(2): 295-317.
- Hong, M.D., 2018. Identity construction of impoliteness in military context. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*, 25(1): 35-44.
- Labov, W. and D. Fanshel, 1977. Therapeutic discourse: Psychotherapy as conversation. New York: Academic Press.
- Lakoff, R.T., 1989. The limits of politeness: Therapeutic and courtroom discourse. *Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 8(2-3): 101-130. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.101>.
- Methias, N.W., 2011. Impoliteness or underpoliteness: An analysis of a Christmas dinner scene from Dickens's *Great Expectations*. *Journal of King Saud University-Languages and Translation*, 23(1): 11-18.
- Ran, Y.P. and W. Yang, 2011. A pragmatic analysis of deliberate offensive utterances in interpersonal conflicts. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 34(3): 49-55.
- Simon, B., 2004. Identity in modern society: A social psychological perspective. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Song, F., 2014. Research on impolite speech act: Case studies of 'a dream of red mansions'. *Masterpieces Review*, 8: 21-23.
- Xiao, Y., 2017. A study of international advances in research on pragmatics (2006-2015). *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 49(5): 699-709.

- Yang, Z. and G.D. Yu, 2007. On verbal impoliteness in Chinese language- from the perspective of adaptation. Foreign Languages in China, 4(4): 23-28.
- Zhou, L. and S.J. Zhang, 2015. Recent developments in face studies abroad. Journal of Foreign Languages, 38(3): 75-82.
- Zhou, L. and S.J. Zhang, 2018. Trends for focused topics of face, politeness and impoliteness: A mapping-knowledge-domain analysis. Computer-Assisted Foreign Language Education, 184: 106-112.
- Zhou, S.J. and S.Q. Cao, 2017. On mechanism of constructing recruits' social identity through impoliteness in military training discourse. Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages, 40(04): 26-34.
- Zou, Y., 2019. American research on 'A dream of red mansions' from the perspective of cultural theory. A Dream of Red Mansions, 1: 258-278.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of Publication and Social Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.