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Toxic Talk and Narrative Power in Virtual Arenas: A Pragmatic-Narrative Analysis of Impoliteness in Online Game Communication

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of language impoliteness in digital communication, especially in online game chat media, using the framework of the theory of impoliteness from Jonathan Culpeper in a pragmatic study. As multiplayer games evolve as complex social interaction spaces, the feature of chats between players is often an arena for speech that is not only aggressive and offensive but also strategic and meaningful. This study aims to identify the form, function, and contextual triggers of impoliteness players use in competitive and dynamic gaming environments. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with documentation techniques as the primary data collection method. Data is collected from *Mobile Legends* game chat logs and relevant content from popular social media such as Instagram and TikTok. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions based on five strategies of impoliteness within the framework of Culpeper: bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness (sarcasm), and withhold politeness. The study results show that rude speech is used not only as an emotional expression but also as a tool to build dominance, provoke opponents, and strengthen group identity. Repetitive use of rudeness forms a narrative pattern that reflects norms, conflicts, power, and alliances within the digital community. Abusive

speech not only acts as face-threatening acts but also becomes part of a social *storyline* that builds interaction dynamics in the online gaming community. This study makes a real contribution to developing the study of digital pragmatics and narrative linguistics.

Keywords: Impoliteness; Pragmatics; Online Game Chat; Digital Communication; Language Aggression

1. Introduction

Multiplayer online games have evolved into one of the world's most dominant forms of digital entertainment and a dynamic and interaction-packed new social space. Through communication features such as chat, games such as Mobile Legends, Dota 2, and League of Legends become an arena where players work together and compete, and build, maintain, or negotiate identities and power relations through language[1–3]. The context of online games allows players from various cultural backgrounds to interact directly and competitively[4] so that verbal conflicts often arise in conversations through chat features[5]. In a space that is anonymous, competitive, and free of conventional social norms[6], expressions of frustration and forms of speech that are aggressive, insulting, provocative, and verbal harassment often appear[7–9], which is generally known as toxic talk[10, 11].

This phenomenon has prompted research on impoliteness in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Haß and Wächter Jin[12] show that impoliteness in CMC generally focuses on intracultural contexts, although data from China and Japan show that even indirect communication styles can lead to impoliteness, especially in anonymous interactions. Graham[13] points out that impoliteness in online games is often rooted in a moral order that is sexist and exclusive, especially towards female gamers. Idree[2] added that impoliteness is used strategically to express anger or embarrass opponents in intercultural competition. Khazraie and Talebzade[14] observed that impoliteness strategies in online communities such as Wikipedia Talk Pages are on record and often used to escalate complex discursive conflicts.

Broader studies have also linked impoliteness to other forms of verbal violence in CMC, such as flaming, trolling, and swearing[15]. Nasution[16] highlights that restrained anger is the primary trigger for the use of abusive language in online spaces. Akinmusuyi[17] discusses the link between conflict, identity, and disrespectful strategies in online communities, while Kavanagh et al.[18] reveal that women in

sports with public profiles face disproportionate harassment, reflecting and reinforcing real-world misogyny online. A study by Bossetta[19] and Errasti et al.[20] demonstrates that the architecture and engagement strategies of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook influence both the nature of user interactions and the linguistic styles adopted by users.

However, most of these studies still emphasize the form of speech or trigger factors, such as anonymity[21], competition[22], and cultural background[12] without linking it to the broader narrative function, namely, how the speech functions to form *a social* storyline community. In digital communities, speech reflects local meanings and constructs social narratives about who is dominant, who is marginalized, and how solidarity is formed[23–25]. In this regard, narrative approaches such as those developed by Bamberg[26] and De Fina and Georgakopoulou[27] offer a critical analytical framework for understanding the role of micro-interactions in forming digital social structures.

By integrating pragmatic approaches and narrative linguistics, this study examines toxic talk as face-threatening linguistic acts and a discursive element that shapes the structure of power and identity in the online gaming community[15, 28]. The impoliteness framework of Culpeper[29, 30]—including the strategies of bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness, and withhold politeness—has been widely used in the study of digital interaction[31]. This strategy explains how speech is used to attack socially. However, in the narrative approach, each utterance is also seen as part of the story's construction, which, in the context of repeated interactions, contributes to the formation of social storylines in the form of conflict, domination, marginalization, or solidarity[26, 27].

The transition from pragmatic studies to narrative approaches creates space for multidimensional synthesis, which is still rarely applied in the study of online games. Most studies have not examined how repetitive forms of profanity shape the social narrative patterns of communities, even though toxic talk is part of discursive practices such as flam-

ing and cyberbullying that impact psychological well-being and digital social structures [15, 32].

The understanding of toxic talk as an impoliteness strategy and its role in constructing the social narrative of online games is an area that remains minimally explored. Thus, important gaps in the literature need to be filled to understand the dual function of toxic speech as both a linguistic act and a discursive construct. The combined pragmatic and narrative approach explores how speech simultaneously shapes social reality at the micro (linguistic strategy) and macro (community story structure) levels. In this approach, researchers identify forms of impoliteness and delve into narratives constructed through patterns of interaction (who is dominant, who is marginalized, and who receives support) within the gaming community.

Thus, in the context of increasing global attention to hate speech, digital verbal violence, and online content moderation, this study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study expands the scope of digital pragmatic studies and narrative analysis in CMC. In practical terms, the findings of this study can be leveraged by game developers, policymakers, and digital literacy practitioners in creating virtual interaction systems that are more ethical, inclusive, and reflective.

This study aims to identify the forms and strategies of toxic talk used by players in online game chat features based on the theory of impoliteness, analyze the social context of its emergence, and explore how the repetitive use of speech shapes social narrative patterns that reflect identity relationships, conflicts, and power in virtual communities. With a combined analytical model between pragmatic and narrative linguistic approaches, this study is expected to provide a new perspective in understanding the dynamics of linguistic communication in a competitive digital space based on real-time interaction and contribute to shaping a more reflective and inclusive virtual communication environment.

2. Materials and Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach [33, 34] to explore profanity's forms, strategies, and functions— commonly known as toxic talk—in chat in-

teractions in multiplayer online games. The focus of this research lies in two layers of analysis: first, the classification of impoliteness based on the impoliteness framework of Culpeper [29, 30]; second, the analysis of the social narrative dimension through the narrative positioning approach [26] and small stories [27]. This combined approach was chosen because it provides space to understand indecent speech as face-threatening acts and as part of a narrative construction that shapes power relations, conflicts, and solidarity in digital communities. Thus, this approach allows the simultaneous exploration of linguistic (micro) and social-discursive (macro) meanings.

The primary data was obtained from the public chat logs of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, one of Southeast Asia's most popular online games. Complementary data is taken from social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, specifically from public content that displays verbal interactions between players in real-time or match recordings (gameplay clips). Data was collected by non-participatory observation and visual documentation techniques, including screenshots and video clips. The data was selected by purposive sampling, considering the diversity of the game context (ranked mode, public lobby, or team conflict) and speech characteristics that met the criteria: verbally offensive, provoked confrontation, or contained elements of sarcasm/aggression. Data coding was conducted to organize digital data sources, facilitate the retrieval of original content, and ensure the traceability of analysis during the interpretation process. Each entry was assigned a unique code (e.g., D001 and D002) based on its order of appearance, platform type (Mobile Legend, TikTok, or Instagram), and publication date, as outlined in **Table 1**.

The analysis is conducted in two integrated stages, in which all speech is coded based on the five impoliteness strategies in the first stage. In the second stage, the classified data is re-analyzed to identify its contribution to building a social storyline of the community, for example, narratives about player dominance, marginalization, or team solidarity (**Table 2**). An integrative example can be found in utterances such as: *"Noob! Go uninstall!"* which is categorized as positive impoliteness as well as marking the narrative position of the speaker's superiority.

Table 1. Codes For Digital Data Sources Based on Platform and Publication Date.

Code	Source	Date
D001	TikTok Solo Player	4/13/2023
D002	TikTok Solo Player	4/15/2023
D003	TikTok andi ketupat lembu	5/13/2023
D004	TikTok I'Mpii	6/25/2023
D005	TikTok micRamdon	8/6/2023
D006	TikTok Skyzho	12/17/2023
D007	TikTok micRamdon	12/19/2023
D008	Instagram az Karagazzo	12/27/2023
D009	Instagram az Karagazzo	1/1/2024
D010	Instagram az Karagazzo	1/8/2024
D011	TikTok micRamdon	1/21/2024
D012	TikTok micRamdon	1/25/2024
D013	Mobile Legend	4/14/2024
D014	Mobile Legend	4/14/2024
D015	TikTok micRamdon	5/8/2024
D016	Mobile Legend	6/12/2024
D017	Mobile Legend	6/12/2024
D018	TikTok wiwik dnc	8/6/2024

Source: Data collected by the author(s).

Table 2. Stages of Data Analysis.

Phase	Theoretical Framework	Focus of Analysis	Purpose
1.Impoliteness Strategy Analysis	Culpeper[29, 30]	Classification of the five impoliteness strategies: •Bald on Record •Positive Impoliteness •Negative Impoliteness •Mock Politeness •Withhold Politeness	Explain the function of speech as face-threatening acts in competitive interactions.
2.Micro Narrative Analysis	Bamberg[26]; De Fina & Georgakopoulo[27]	•Position of the speaker and speaking partner •Narrative patterns of identity, power, and conflict •Community storyline structure	Uncovering how toxic talk shapes the social narrative of the community over and over again

Source: Author's theoretical analysis.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, triangulation was conducted across platforms by comparing data from various game sessions and different social media sources. The data reduction, presentation, and concluding procedure is applied according to the principle of qualitative analysis[35]. This research adheres to the code of ethics for online research by maintaining the anonymity of all informants/users and using only publicly available data without manipulation. There is no direct intervention in player activities or the gaming community.

3. Results

3.1. Verbal Rudeness Strategy in Mobile Legends Game Chat Feature: Analysis Based on the Impoliteness Framework

The results of the data analysis show that there are five main strategies of impoliteness used in online communication in the Mobile Legends game, following the impoliteness theory from Culpeper[29, 30], namely: (1) direct impoliteness (bald on record), (2) positive impoliteness, (3) negative impoliteness, (4) mock politeness, and (5) withhold politeness.

3.1.1. Bald on Record Impoliteness

The bald-on-record impoliteness strategy refers to a form of speech that directly attacks the speech partner without a mitigation or politeness strategy and tends to ignore the negative and positive faces of the interlocutor[29, 30]. In the context of online games like *Mobile Legends*, this form typically appears when players feel frustrated with the performance of teammates who are perceived as incompetent, especially in fulfilling strategic roles.

Data 1:

Fredrinn: "Romer rotasi. Woi romer." / "Romer rotation. Hi romer."

Masha: "Hyper main save ja." / "Hyper play save!"

Fredrinn: "Sumpah males bgt dapet roamer

kek gini." / "Swear, very lazy to get romer like this."

Harley: "Main santui ajah." / "Play, cool!"

Fredrinn: "Minimal openin map gitu." / "At least open the map."

(D013, *Mobile Legends, 14-04-2024*)

In the quote above, Fredrinn reprimanded Masha for failing to perform her roamer duties. The sayings are direct verbal attacks that contain expressions of frustration and identity degradation. The interjection "woi" contributes to the confrontational impression, given that the word carries a rough and urgent connotation in Indonesian culture. This speech shows two main characteristics of bald-on-record impoliteness. First, a politeness strategy is absent. Fredrinn does not try to disguise his criticism but openly conveys his dissatisfaction. Second, hierarchical relational positioning through performative judgment, Fredrinn positions himself as a more competent player than Masha, who is implicitly placed in an inferior position.

From the perspective of narrative positioning[26], Fredrinn constructs himself as the dominant narrator in the small story, which actively reproduces the social structure based on performance evaluation. This occurrence shows that bald-on-record impoliteness is not only a form of emotional expression but also a discursive mechanism for maintaining or seizing authority within the team.

3.1.2. Positive Impoliteness

The positive impoliteness strategy is used to damage the positive face of speech partners—that is, self-image as individuals who want to be appreciated, accepted, and recognized socially[29, 30]. In the context of competitive digital interactions such as Mobile Legends, this strategy comes in the form of humiliation, denial of social connection, abandonment, and the use of degrading identity labels. These speeches are a means to reorganize social relations through the symbolic delegitimization of the opponent.

1. Ignoring and underestimating

Data 2:

Fredrinn: "Itu ga bisa roam. Suren." / "It can't roam. Suren."

Masha: "Lu aja." / "You!"

Fredrinn: "Buang-buang waktu." " / A waste of time."

(D013, *Mobile Legends, 14-04-2024*)

Masha's "Just you" response directly rejects Fredrinn's surrender proposal. The remarks not only imply disagreement but also ignore Fredrinn's social initiatives. Within the framework of positive impoliteness, this action undermines Fredrinn's positive face as a team member who attempts to take over coordination but is rejected without a politeness strategy.

2. Separating Yourself from Social Connections

Data 3:

Minotour: "Yalooh buang-buang flicker aja lu bang bang." / "you, you're a idiot, bro."

Lesley: "Terserah gua lah tai, lu siapa anjing ngatur-ngatur." / "It's up to me shit! Who are you dog, as if powerful"

Minotour: "Eh tolol." / "huh, stupid."

(D004, *TikTok – I'mpii, 25-06-2023*)

Lesley dismissed criticism from Minotour with an explicit remark: "Who are you dog, as if powerful." This speech contains swearing and expressly separates itself from the teamwork structure. The taxonomy of positive impoliteness includes a sub-strategy of disassociation, in which the speaker rejects reciprocal relations and weakens social cohesion.

3. Showing Disinterest

Data 4:

Valentina: "Tolol semua lu." / "You are all stupid."

Alpha: "Lu yang tolol gua jedotin kepala lu, bacot doang diajakin ribut ngomong doang." / "You're stupid, I'll bang your head, chattering only, asked fuss, chattering only."

Valentina: "Ya iyalah, lu tolol makanya gua bacotin lu kalau lu pinter, gak gua bacotin, dasar legends."/ "You're stupid, so I'm going to chatter you if you're smart, I don't chatter you, bastard legends."

(D018, *TikTok – Wiwik dnc, 06-08-2023*)

Valentina's statement confirms that she doesn't see the value or contribution of Alpha, as indicated in " if you're smart, I don't chatter you." This speech systematically ignores the validity of Alpha's performance and positions itself

as a moral and technical judge. The speech reveals a lack of interest in the opponent's existence, eroding the positive face in layers.

4. Using inappropriate nicknames

Data 5:

Atlas: "Ya yatim goblok main Ling tolol anjing!" / "Yeah, you stupid orphan, playing Ling, stupid dog!"

Ling: "Bocah kontol bocah kontol." / "A small dick boy, dick boy."

Atlas: "Ya tolol goblok." / "Yeah, stupid idiot."

(D003, *TikTok – andi ketupat lembu, 13-05-2023*)

The use of labels such as "orphan," "idiot," and "dog" not only reflects momentary emotions but also reproduces social stereotypes associated with a particular ethnicity, class, or status. These nicknames are included in the sub-strategy of inappropriate identity markers, which aggressively attack the opponent's dignity. In the discourse of the online gaming community, this action is a form of symbolic violence that strengthens the relationship of domination.

Positive impoliteness in online game interactions reflects emotional outbursts and serves as a tool for social positioning. Through explicit insults, relationship denial, and the use of derogatory labels, players produce interpersonal hierarchies that form identity narratives such as "team burden" or "unworthy player." These strategies show how language maintains symbolic status in competitive communities.

3.1.3. Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness refers to a linguistic strategy that directly attacks the negative face of the opponent, namely the individual's desire to be valued for his or her autonomy, free from pressure, distraction, or threats[29, 30]. In online games, this strategy involves physical threats, derogatory taunts, and accusations that undermine the opponent's credibility both personally and socially.

1. Verbal threats (Frighten)

Data 6:

Carmila: "Lu idiot apa gimana si anjing." / "You're an idiot, what and how dog."

Franco: "Lebay lu." / "So salty, you."

Carmila: "Lu tolol ngerti draftpick gak anjing?" / "You dumb; you know how to play draft-pick dog?"

Franco: "Gak usah lebay la." / "No need to be salty."

Carmila: "Apanya lebay sini gua pukulin kepala lu anjing." / "Which is salty, here I blow your head, dog"

(D009, *Instagram – az Karagazzo, 01-01-2024*)

The phrase "here is a blow to your head" explicitly threatens Franco's security. Pragmatically, this speech was not just an expression of anger but an attack on Franco's negative face: the freedom to play without fear or pressure. In the framework of negative impoliteness, this includes a sub-strategy of fright, which shows dominance through symbolic violence.

2. Ridicule and Sarcasm

Data 7:

Wan-wan: "Lu liat nih gua terbang." / "You see, I'm flying."

Melisa: "Mana terbang ayo." / "Where, flying!"

Wan-wan: "Sabar." / "Be patient."

Melisa: "Terbang ke bulan lu." / "Flying to your moon."

(D005, *TikTok – micRandom, 06-08-2023*)

Melisa's response of "flying to the moon lu" is sarcasm that equates Wan-wan's statement with something irrational. The speech humiliates the speech partner by laughing at his claims, weakening Wan-wan's autonomy in building his self-image. This corresponds to the ridiculous sub-strategy, where humor controls the narrative and diminishes the interlocutor's social value.

3. Condescending and Delegitimizing

Data 8:

Amoon: "Kagak dibuka anjing mapnya gimana gua mau farming yang betul tolol, pada akun joki si susah mainnya, bisa ke mythic hasil jokian semua, apa akun beli? CODan?" / "The map isn't open, dog, how can I farm correctly stupid, the jockey account is difficult

to play, you can go to the mythic, they're all jockeys, is it a paid account? COD?"

Eudora: "Kosong tiga satu." / "Zero three one."

Amoon: "Ya iyalah tiga satu lu kagak dibuka map, lu liat dong." / "Sure, three one, you didn't open at the map, see it."

(D006, TikTok – Skyzho, 17-12-2023)

Amoon's speech doubted Eudora's credibility by accusing her of being a jockey account user or a paid account (paid by COD). This accusation deprives Eudora of the legitimacy of Eudora's performance, not only technically but also morally, as a true performer. This act is a condescending sub-strategy because it puts speech partners in an inferior position that does not deserve community recognition. This action marks a symbolic positioning that completely weakens the opponent's authority.

Negative impoliteness in online game interactions indicates a more aggressive form of domination, attacking the autonomy of the opponent. The strategy of threats, sarcasm, and delegitimization reinforces the internal social hierarchy within the team, serving as a mechanism of control and symbolic exclusion. Within the framework of narrative positioning, this strategy serves as the primary tool for creating the distinction between "real players" and "failed players" in competitive digital communities.

3.1.4. Mock Politeness

The strategy of mock politeness (or sarcasm) is a form of disguising politeness when the speaker formally uses a politeness structure but intends to convey insults or sharp sarcasm[29]. In online game interactions, this strategy is generally used to disguise criticism or demeaning speech toward partners through sarcastic humor, which pragmatically still undermines a positive face.

Data 9:

Kagura: "Tutor Ling *dong* bro." / "Tutor Ling bro."

Ling: "Suruh Ling sini anjing." /"Ask Ling to bring the dog here."

Kagura: "Lingnya cuma bisa bunuh buff." / "Ling can only kill the buffs."

Ling: "Mak lu nih gua bunuh goblok gua tusuk." / "Your mother, I'll kill her idiot; I stabbed her."

(D012, TikTok – micRandom, 25-01-2024)

Kagura's "Tutor Ling bro" remark seemed polite on the surface, as if acknowledging Ling's superiority. Nevertheless, in the context of the game and the conversation sequence, this speech is a form of irony that makes fun of Ling's poor performance. The follow-up warning, "Ling can only kill buffs," clarifies that the previous request was not a request for help but rather a sharp insinuation that discredited Ling's technical abilities.

Pragmatically, this is a convenient example of mock politeness because it combines elements of politeness with the function of humiliation. Within the framework of narrative positioning[26], Kagura positions herself as a dominant narrator who not only evaluates but also shapes the narrative so that she is technically more competent. On the other hand, Ling is positioned as an object of ridicule, which fails to meet the normative expectations of the community.

This strategy is a form of verbal aggression that is more implicit but no less destructive than direct speech. Because it uses a politeness format, mock politeness also plays a role in refining power by making criticism a joke and subordination as socially acceptable humor. Mock politeness is a strategic means of social positioning in the online gaming community. By disguising insults as a form of politeness, the speaker maintains a social image while still delegitimizing his speaking partner. This strategy demonstrates how language can be manipulated to control narratives and shape collective identities through subtle yet highly effective means of establishing social hierarchies.

3.1.5. Withhold Impoliteness

The withhold impoliteness strategy occurs when the speaker deliberately does not convey the forms of politeness that are normatively expected in social interactions, such as gratitude, apology, or recognition of the contribution of the speech partner[29, 30]. The absence of this speech is not accidental but rather a form of passive domination that implies symbolic superiority.

Date 10:

C: "Gua pake MM ya." / "I use MM, yes."

P: "Gua ajalah, lu roam aja nanti gua gendong." / "Just me, you roam, and I'll carry you on my back."

C: "Ya udah lu aja." / "Ok, just you, done."

P: (did not respond)

(D017, Mobile Legends, 2024-06-12)

In this interaction, player C is willing to give in and give the role of *Marksman* to player P. However, P does not provide any response, including gratitude or acknowledgment for the compromise. This silence is pragmatically significant because it fails to acknowledge C's cooperative actions.

Within the framework of withholding impoliteness, P's verbal non-involvement reflects a form of social control through silence. The absence of polite speech is an implicit way to position oneself as a dominant actor not bound by the norm of mutual politeness. From the perspective of narrative positioning[26], P positions himself as the center of control, and he does not need to affirm his speech partner because he feels that he has higher authority, both technically and socially.

This phenomenon can also be read through the approach of small stories[36], where the act of silence is not neutral but is an implicit narrative that conveys "who deserves attention" and "who can be ignored." In a competitive gaming environment, this strategy effectively strengthens the hierarchy without requiring explicit criticism.

Withholding impoliteness is a form that does not use speech but instead uses silence to convey social dominance. By not responding to the positive actions of the speaking partner, the speaker reinforces the symbolic position as a party that does not need to be involved in the norm of politeness. This strategy demonstrates that even silence has ideological value in shaping identity and power within the online gaming community.

3.2. "Toxic Talk" Strategies in Online Gaming Communities: Narrative Positioning and Small Stories Approaches

To analyze toxic talk in its entirety, this study integrates the theory of impoliteness[29, 30], narrative positioning[26], and small stories[27]. Culpeper provides a linguistic classification of the strategy of impoliteness; Bamberg clarifies how speech ideologically positions speakers and speech partners in interaction, while De Fina emphasizes that short speeches in in-game chats are micro-narratives (small stories) that

cumulatively shape the identity and social hierarchy of the gaming community.

3.2.1. The Position of Speakers and Speaking Partners in Micro Narratives

The impoliteness strategy not only functions as a tool for emotional expression but also as a narrative instrument to position oneself in social relations[26]. In this context, speakers employ strategies such as mock impoliteness, positive impoliteness, and negative impoliteness to establish a superior image while undermining the position of their speech partners.

An explicit example is seen in Kagura's speech (D018): "Tutor Ling dong bro." This speech is a form of mock politeness[29], a pseudo-politeness used for sarcasm. From a narrative positioning perspective, Kagura positions herself as a symbolic mentor figure, while Ling is portrayed as an incompetent player. Socially, this reinforces Kagura's identity as an authoritative team member and strengthens the narrative of dominance.

Something similar happened in Valentina's (D018) speech: "Yes, yes, you're stupid, that's why you're smart, not shattering, basic legends." This strategy combines positive impoliteness (explicit humiliation) with positioning that affirms Valentina's superiority over Alpha while negating Alpha's social and symbolic capacity. This speech is not just verbal aggression but is a small story that establishes a social role in the community structure.

However, the dominant position is not final. Resistance appeared in Alpha's reply: "Yes, I legends, why dog!" Although this reply is a form of reverse impoliteness, it still serves as a micro-narrative that challenges the dominant narrative. According to Bamberg[26], this kind of response is a form of identity repositioning, although it often does not succeed in reversing the hierarchy.

In quote D011, Carmila uses negative impoliteness to threaten Franco: "What's up, here I hit your head, dog." It is a frightening strategy[29] that aims to create psychological dominance. This narrative positions Carmila as a legitimate strategic authority and revokes Franco's capacity as a team agent. This event is an example of a small story that combines verbal violence and hierarchical positioning.

Amoon's accusation to Eudora (D015): "You can go to the mythic, they're all jockeyed," reflects a form of moral

delegitimization through negative impoliteness (ridicule and condescending). Amoon frames Eudora as an inauthentic player, reinforcing her identity as a legitimate and competent community member. According to De Fina, such remarks form a collective storyline that normalizes social exclusion based on performance assumptions.

On the other hand, resistance to the dominant narrative is shown by Ling (D004), who responds to Atlas' insult with: "Dick boy dick boy." It is a form of bald, on-record impoliteness and a small story about symbolic revenge. While not effectively repositioning power, this response illustrates that social positions are always negotiated through symbolic battles in language.

Thus, the micro-narrative in gaming community interactions suggests that the strategy of impoliteness is not just a form of crude expression but a means to negotiate power, identity, and hierarchy. Through a simultaneous analysis of linguistic forms (Culpeper), interactional positioning (Bamberg), and micro-narrative structures (De Fina), it can be concluded that the positions of speakers and speech partners are actively and dynamically formed through everyday discourse in the online game ecosystem.

3.2.2. Narrative Patterns in Gaming Communities: Negotiating Identity, Power, and Conflict Through Toxic Talk

In online gaming communities, the narrative patterns formed in players' verbal interactions do not simply reflect individual communication. Identities, such as those of pro players, team loads, or jockey accounts, result from a discursive micro-interaction process. **Table 3** presents a systematic mapping of the relationship between impoliteness strategies[29, 30], narrative positioning processes[26], and identity construction through small stories[27] in online gaming communities. Each quotation represents a form of speech that functions not only as an affective expression but as a discursive instrument for negotiating social positions, regulating power relations, and producing and reproducing hierarchical structures within teams. Through this framework, micronarratives are understood as symbolic battlegrounds that show how power and identity are constructed, maintained, and fought pragmatically and ideologically.

Table 3. Narratives of Identity, Conflict, and Power.

Quotation	Key Strategies	Identity Built	Sources of Conflict	Forms of Power	Resistance Type
N.7 – Valentina vs Alpha	Positive impoliteness	Valentina as a superior player, Alpha = low rank	Low rank (legends)	Verbal rude + Positioning	Minimal, Alpha only replies rudely
N.17 – Kagura vs Ling	Mock impoliteness	Kagura = tutor/sindiran superior	Ling's inability to play	Sarcasm and ridicule	No, Ling was even more provoked
N.6 – Carmila vs Franco	Negative impoliteness	Carmila as a team organizer (draft)	Franco was misjudged to have been mistaken	Verbal, physical threats	Passive (Franco mutes: "Don't get carried away")
N.8 – Amoon vs Eudora	Negative impoliteness	Amoon = "real" player, Eudora = "jockey account"	Team performance and trust	Narrative dominance, status delegitimization	Eudora replies informatively
N.5 – Atlas vs Ling	Positive impoliteness	Atlas = aggressor dominate	Dislike + ethnicity/locality	Inappropriate nicknames	Ling replied with vulgar insults
N.10 – P is silent against C	Withhold impoliteness	P = power center (no need to thank you)	Lack of appreciation	Power through silence	C shows no resistance

Source: Authors analysis.

Overall, the patterns reflected in **Table 3** show that forms of impoliteness in online gaming communities are not just linguistic deviations, but narrative instruments actively used to produce, reproduce, and negotiate identity and power. Each type of impoliteness strategy[29, 30], whether in the form of positive, negative, mock, or withheld impoliteness, represents a form of social practice that is intertwined with positioning[26] and small stories[27].

Using positive impoliteness and mock impoliteness allows the speaker to take a dominant position by evaluating the speaking partner negatively or sarcastically. When the narrative is opposed, resistance can arise through counter-discourse (counter-rebuttal) or strategic silence (withholding impoliteness), which marks the inequality of power in a non-verbal mode. Through this mechanism, online gaming communities form a discursive ecosystem that continues to

reproduce social structures through micro-interactions, making toxic talk a functional element in broader social practices.

3.2.3. Online Game Community Storyline Structure

The storyline in this community generally follows a schematic discursive cycle: triggering tension → indecent evaluation →, the positioning of social identity → the response of speech partners → the escalation of conflict and the affirmation of symbolic power → the mastery of narratives → the reproduction of norms and collective identities. This process does not occur randomly but instead follows a repetitive and systematic pattern, reflecting the social logic inherent in competitive digital ecosystems like Mobile Legends.

1. Tension Triggers: Technical Errors as Discursive Triggers.

This cycle starts from triggering tension when a player is considered to have failed to meet the team's expectations—technically (build, rotation, map awareness) and strategically (role or item selection). In the quote, "It can't roam. Suren." (D008), the speech not only conveys functional disappointment but also becomes an initial trigger for narrative positioning practices[26]. Players begin to be implicitly positioned as a "team burden" without having to mention the label explicitly.

2. Impoliteness Evaluation: Language as a mechanism of social exclusion

The next stage is performance evaluation, which is rarely done constructively in this community. On the other hand, evaluation is often packaged in the form of positive impoliteness or mock impoliteness[29], as in the quote: "Yes, yes, you are an idiot... Basic Legends." (D016). This speech attacks the aspect of competence and the honor of the speaking partner while emphasizing the speaker's position as a symbolic authority. This strategy contains a dimension of social exclusion, where language becomes a tool to "symbolically expel players" deemed unworthy.

3. Social Identity Positioning: Pro vs. Burden, Original vs. Jockey

After a quick evaluation, the identity positioning process takes place more explicitly. Criticizing players often frames themselves as representations of "real" players or "pro players," and instead defines their speaking partners as "jockey accounts" or "fake players." In the quote, "You go to mythic as they're all jockeys?" (D015), Amoon actively challenges Eudora's moral legitimacy within the community. This positioning is based on technical performance and forms a symbolic boundary between "us" and "them" in the community's identity.

4. Speech Partner Response: Verbal Resistance and Strategic Silence

The response to such identity claims is not always passive. In quote D004, Ling counters Atlas' curse with "Dick boy dick boy," which reflects a counter-discourse based on impoliteness. Meanwhile, in D007, P chooses to remain silent after getting the desired role from C. This silence is a form of withholding impoliteness, where the absence of speech becomes a symbol of power that requires no explanation. In the context of small stories[27], this kind of resistance still contains narrative value: they renegotiate who has the right to speak and who deserves to be ignored.

5. Escalation of Conflict and Symbolic Power Consolidation

Conflict escalates when resistance is not strong enough or triggers a more aggressive response. At this stage, the form of speech changes to negative impoliteness, as in Carmila's quote to Franco: "Here I blow your head, dog." (D011). This speech is not just an expression of frustration but an instrument of intimidation that embarrasses the social existence of speech partners in the team. Symbolic power is formed through speeches like this that affirm the superiority of the speaker's narrative.

6. Narrative Mastery: Power through Language

In online gaming communities, those who control the narrative tend to have social influence over team dynamics. A phrase like "Who is the dog?" (D014) or "Just me, you roam, and I'll carry you on my back" (D007) asserts informal authority that does not need to be confirmed by the game system but is confirmed by the language used in the chat. This mastery of narrative is a form of cultural power that functions as "discourse leadership."

7. Reproduction of Norms and Collective Identities

The final stage of this cycle is the internalization of abusive speech as part of community norms. The saying

"You dumb, you know how to play draft-pick, dog?" (D011) no longer sounds like an individual slur but rather as a justification for an established social structure. In this context, small stories serve as an institutionalization device: they become a social script that is repeated, trusted, and inherited in the next game.

The cycle of toxic talk in online gaming communities reflects complex social dynamics. Through the integration of impoliteness theory (Culpeper), narrative positioning (Bamberg), and small stories (De Fina & Georgakopoulou), it can be concluded that toxic talk is not just a distorted linguistic interaction but rather an evaluative, symbolic, and ideological mechanism that institutionalizes power relations through language and micro-narratives.

4. Discussion

Unlike previous studies that only saw toxic talk as a linguistic deviation or expression of interpersonal conflict, this study shows that rudeness—which in this context is referred to as toxic talk—serves as an institutionalized narrative strategy to shape symbolic power in digital communities. The findings of this study reveal that toxic talk in the online gaming community is not just a form of linguistic impoliteness but rather a complex and structured discursive system that plays a central role in the reproduction of identity, power, and social norms in competitive digital ecosystems such as Mobile Legends. By combining the theory of impoliteness [29, 30], narrative positioning [26], and the concept of small stories [27], this study succeeded in revealing that toxic speech in chat features is not a spontaneous expression alone, but part of a micro-narrative that is ideologically and strategically charged.

Theoretically, this study expands the application of impoliteness theory by demonstrating how Culpeper's five impoliteness strategies—bald on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock impoliteness, and withhold politeness—are used systematically in the formation of the social structure of online gaming communities [37, 38]. Unlike traditional contexts [30], rude speech here serves as negotiating social positioning through micro-narratives full of evaluation and symbolism of power. For example, positive impoliteness strategies such as "Yeah, you're stupid, so I'm going to chatter you" (D018) act as a symbolic means to

lower the positive face of speaking partners and simultaneously reinforce the speaker's authority as a "pro player." This strategy does not work in isolation but is intertwined with the speaker's dominant positioning and the verbal resistance of the speaking partner, as demonstrated by Ling's rude reply (D004).

The consequences of the systematic use of this strategy can be further observed through an analysis of the social position of players. These findings reinforce the importance of narrative positioning, in which speakers and speech partners position each other in dynamic power relations. Speakers use impoliteness strategies to form social roles (e.g., mentors, jockeys, team loads), while speech partners respond with resistance or resignation. This strategy can be seen in Kagura's satire "Tutor Ling Bro" (D012), which subtly asserts superiority through mock politeness while positioning Ling as inferior. However, the resistance of the speaking partner is like in the saying, "Yeah, you stupid orphan, playing Ling, stupid dog!" (Alpha) or "dick boy dick boy" (Ling), indicating that the dominant structure is not static. It also affirms that toxic talk is a symbolic negotiation arena, not just a one-way relationship [39].

Using the small stories framework reveals that toxic talk cumulatively forms community storylines that reproduce norms, social roles, and power structures. The cycle of identity → conflict → power shows that each utterance, whether rough or silent (withhold impoliteness), serves as an institutionalized narrative script and continues to be reproduced in the ensuing game [27, 40]. For example, sayings such as "You're stupid, so I'm going to chatter you" strongly indicate that impoliteness has become a normative narrative that justifies such actions as a symbolic right, not an ethical violation.

This study complements previous literature that links impoliteness with moral dominance and social exclusion in online spaces. In contrast to Graham [37], who views impoliteness as a reflection of personal conflict, this study shows that impoliteness also works as a collective mechanism to affirm and maintain symbolic hierarchies in digital communities [41, 42]. These findings also expand the contributions of sociolinguistic, pragmatic studies that emphasize the importance of social context and the role of identity in the manifestation of impoliteness.

Locally, this data also shows that rude speech such,

as "whoa," "dog," and "shit", in the Indonesian context is not just a representation of emotions, but a symbolic tool for constructing and negotiating social structures based on performance, status, and moral perceptions within the community. This narrative explores how impoliteness fosters solidarity and resistance within the local digital culture.

Important implications of these findings include reorienting the design of chat game moderation that considers narrative-based and pragmatic approaches to more accurately detect the context and intent of speech[43]; the development of narrative-based NLP geared towards reading storyline structure and positioning, rather than just filtering profanity; community policies that are sensitive to the dynamics of resistance, solidarity, and informal authority in micro-interactions; and the need for cross-cultural and longitudinal studies to explore whether narratives of dominance and identity are universal or culturally and temporally specific.

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of impoliteness in the realm of digital social pragmatics by demonstrating that the strategy of impoliteness is not only a form of interpersonal aggression but also an institutional mechanism that functions to maintain a symbolic order in online communities.

This research has limitations. The data collected is sourced from a single type of gaming community and a specific cultural region, so the results cannot be generalized to all online gaming contexts or other cultures. In addition, this study has not examined multimodal aspects such as emoji, voice, or gesture expressions in streaming platforms, which are also an essential part of online in-game communication.

Going forward, it is suggested that similar research use virtual ethnographic approaches or multimodal conversational analysis to capture the dynamics of interactions more intact. Cross-cultural studies between Indonesian servers and other regions, such as Japan or the United States, are also needed to assess the variability of cultural contexts in the structure of toxic talk.

Thus, toxic talk is not just an ethical violation or linguistic phenomenon but is part of the narrative, social, and ideological structure that actively shapes the ecosystem of digital communities, especially in online games. This phenomenon reflects the dynamics of power and identity legitimacy that are institutionalized through daily discourse between players. Therefore, understanding toxic talk as a complex discursive

practice is an essential step toward designing a digital space that is more equitable, culturally reflective, and sensitive to hidden power relations. Future research and policy must focus on these dynamics to create inclusive and equitable virtual interactions.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that toxic talk in the online gaming community is not just a form of linguistic deviation or spontaneous emotional expression but a structured and institutionalized discursive practice to shape, maintain, and reproduce symbolic power, social identity, and norms of interaction in a competitive digital ecosystem. By integrating the theory of impoliteness (Culpeper), narrative positioning (Bamberg), and the concept of small stories (De Fina & Georgakopoulou), this study offers a new conceptual framework that positions rude speech as an ideological narrative strategy in micro-interactions.

The identified interaction cycles—ranging from technical triggers, impoliteness evaluations, identity positioning, and symbolic resistance to narrative dominance and norm reproduction—indicate that toxic talk has become a functional element in the social structure of the online gaming community. Utterances such as "You're stupid, so I'm going to chatter you" or "Tutor Ling bro" serve as expressions of conflict and as acts of discourse representing a symbolic right to evaluate, control, and position speech partners hierarchically.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study expands the horizon of digital social pragmatism by constructing toxic talk as an institutional mechanism for producing the symbolic order of virtual communities. Practically, the results of this study encourage the development of discourse-based interventions in the design of game communication systems, narrative and context-based NLP algorithms, and critical digital literacy education sensitive to power dynamics in the online space.

The study has cultural and platform coverage limitations, so generalization of findings requires caution. Therefore, follow-up studies with a virtual ethnographic approach and multimodal and cross-cultural analysis are recommended to deepen understanding of temporal and cultural variations in toxic talk practices.

Thus, this study contributes to mapping impoliteness

strategies in online games and proposes a new conceptual framework for understanding how power and identity are formed in virtual spaces through language. Understanding these practices as complex discursive phenomena is an essential first step toward designing a more inclusive, culturally reflective, and equitable online interaction ecosystem. Further research is recommended to explore these dynamics cross-culturally and longitudinally, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings and expanding their theoretical generalizations.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, N.N. and A.M.F.H.S.; methodology, N.N.; software, A.M.F.H.S. and A.S.J.; validation, N.N., S.S.S., and M.M.; formal analysis, N.N.; investigation, S.S.S.; resources, M.M.; data curation, N.N.; writing—original draft preparation, N.N.; writing—review and editing, N.N. and A.M.F.H.S.; visualization, A.M.F.H.S.; supervision, N.N. and M.M.; project administration, N.N. and S.S.S.; funding acquisition, N.N. and A.S.J. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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