



REVIEW



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Translating impoliteness - literature review, translation challenges, and translation strategies in cross-cultural communication

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In recent years, research integrating translation studies with impoliteness has steadily increased, significantly contributing to the interdisciplinary development of both fields. However, there remains a lack of reviews that examine how impoliteness is translated across languages and cultures, particularly from a pragmatic standpoint. This study addresses this gap by providing a focused literature review of translation studies on impoliteness, centered on current research trends, methodologies, and analytical perspectives. Twenty-one articles published between 1998 and 2023 were selected from the Scopus and Science Direct databases, focusing on translation studies and impoliteness. Analysis of these studies reveals that cultural differences represent a primary challenge when translating impoliteness. In response, strategies such as euphemism and omission are commonly adopted, often resulting in a dilution of the original pragmatic force. The findings of this study aim to guide future interdisciplinary research on translation studies and impoliteness for translators and researchers, highlighting key challenges and practical strategies in translating impoliteness across cultural boundaries.

Introduction

Translation has been widely acknowledged as a cross-cultural activity with a time-honored history. It was much influenced by applied linguistics and taken as a linguistic phenomenon, more concisely as a process of linguistic transcoding (Schäffner, 2011). The values of the source language (SL) and target language (TL) can be continuously reflected in the translation (Moqattash, 2017). According to House (2016), textual materials deliver messages as well as culture, making translation an effective means of bridging cultural gaps and communicating the values, traditions, and practices of particular communities and the interchange of ideas across linguistic boundaries (Sang and Zhang, 2008).

Translation has shifted from simple linguistic conversion to a functionalist approach (Nida, 1969), followed by the cultural turn (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1998) and the social turn (Bourdieu, 1990). It has absorbed a lot of nutrition from different disciplines and developed into one that involves culture (e.g., House, 2016), politics (e.g., Yang, 2012), society (e.g., Pan and Liao, 2020),

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and more, going beyond purely literary texts. A notable emerging area is the intersection between translation studies and impoliteness within pragmatics.

Despite growing scholarly interest, systematic reviews specifically addressing the translation of impoliteness remain scarce (Kádár et al., 2020), which limits our understanding of how impoliteness-related language is managed in different translation contexts. Therefore, this present study is designed to fill the gap by conducting a literature review on the translation of impoliteness regarding the current status and to identify the potential issues in this field.

The findings of the study reveal the past research focuses, fields, methods, and themes, which are helpful for us to get a clearer idea of the current status. The challenges, translation strategies, and issues are beneficial to translators to pay attention to employing the appropriate strategies to deal with challenges in translation. Overall, this study is novel in this field and is hoped to serve as a reference to scholars and translators who are willing to conduct interdisciplinary studies and translation practices on translation and impoliteness.

Literature review

Impoliteness. Impoliteness is defined as communicative strategies giving rise to conflict and social disharmony (Culpeper, 1996). It is linked to conceptually interrelated notions such as disagreement (e.g., Sifianou, 2012), argument (e.g., Antaki and Hutchby, 1997), offense (e.g., Culpeper, 2011), aggression (e.g., Kádár et al., 2013; Zhou, 2020), and other paroles giving rise to contradictory positions and threatening face. This section does not aim to clarify the complex and inconsistent usage of the terms but rather provides an overview of studies on categories of impoliteness and their translation to offer some context for this research.

The varying use of related concepts of impoliteness has prompted scholars to make distinctions and adjustments (Huang, 2017). Covering all the literature on related concepts of impoliteness, such as disagreement, offense, and aggression, is quite complex due to the broad scope of topics and contexts. Additionally, research on impoliteness spans various areas, including structural features, pragmatic functions, language strategies, influencing factors, and conflict resolution, while drawing from multiple disciplines and employing a wide range of theories, such as politeness theory (Leech, 1983). Furthermore, since impoliteness arises from breaking the politeness principle, it is theoretically grounded in politeness theory (Hu and Fan, 2019).

In relation to impolite discourse, academic research primarily explores areas such as response strategies and interpersonal pragmatic functions. The investigated subjects encompass (non-) strategic conflict responses (e.g., Ran and Liu, 2011), mitigating conflict responses (e.g., Zhuang, 2012), as well as refusal responses (e.g., Pietikäinen, 2018). For example, the study of impoliteness in diplomatic contexts has concentrated on military-diplomatic discourse involving territorial disputes, trade frictions, political interviews, presidential speeches, and congressional debates. These studies primarily employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) (e.g., Bhatia, 2006; Cap, 2017), in the field of pragmatics (e.g., Bull, 2013; Bull and Fetzer, 2010; Chilton, 1990; Harris, 2001). Additionally, other theoretical and methodological approaches are employed to examine the implicit characteristics of political discourse and discourse strategies, and face threats that arise in the context of political interest conflicts.

Translation of impoliteness. Different perspectives, theories, and approaches were postulated to look into the process and product of translation (e.g., Baker, 2006; Bourdieu, 2018; Lewis and

Gentzler, 1995; Nida, 1969; Pym, 2007; Venuti, 1995). Translation studies of discourse are multidisciplinary, often drawing on research from sociolinguistics, discourse studies, pragmatics, and semiotics, and highlighting the crucial role of translators as cultural mediators (Hatim and Mason, 1990). Impoliteness, as a sociocultural phenomenon, broadly pertains to human communication and linguistic behavior. It is an important concept in pragmatics opposite to politeness and a common phenomenon, but not marginal in daily life since social harmony is hardly a universal goal (Bartłomiejczyk, 2020). The study on impoliteness integrating translation over the years has garnered a share of scholarly attention. Some scholars regard the translation of impoliteness as cultural-mediated and can be contextually specific (e.g., Kecskes, 2017; Pavesi and Formentelli, 2019; Stamouli, 2020). Hence, the translation of impoliteness in different fields manifests different characteristics and renders challenges to translators, be it in language or culture (Al-Badawi, 2022). Research on the translation of impoliteness has mainly concentrated on conversational dialog that violates politeness norms, particularly within the contexts of audiovisual translation (AVT), court interpreting, press translation, and literary translation.

A substantial part of the literature emphasizes the translation of audiovisual content (e.g., films, TV series) across cultures, with a particular focus on handling swear words and insults (e.g., Abu-Rayyash et al., 2023; Khalaf and Rashid, 2019; Valdeón, 2020). Swear words and insults, as manifestations of linguistic impoliteness, pose distinctive challenges for translators and have garnered significant scholarly attention. For example, Sánchez (2015) observed how linguistic features associated with Black identity, including impoliteness and swearing, are translated into Spanish. Valdeón (2020) investigated the vulgarization in AVT from English to Spanish, identifying three strategies for handling swear words. In a similar field, Napoli (2020) shows how these adjustments can lead to shifts in impoliteness. The studies indicate that translators typically either “domesticate” or “foreignize” impolite language according to cultural norms, frequently softening offensive expressions in the TL, which weakens pragmatic equivalence (Khalaf and Rashid, 2020).

Another area of research centers on the translation of impoliteness in legal contexts, where maintaining accuracy is critical, yet challenges arise due to the need for linguistic sensitivity and face-threatening acts (FTAs) (e.g., Gallez, 2015; Gómez, 2023; Tran, 2021). Tran (2021) interviewed lawyers and interpreters and developed a technique that utilizes euphemisms to interpret expletives accurately without resorting to swearing, though not offering a literal translation. The author asserts that this method preserves both the accuracy of the interpretation and the interpreter’s comfort and dignity. Additionally, an experimental study evaluated whether students with advanced language and interpreting skills could successfully interpret insults, offensive language, or taboo words in court environments (Gómez, 2023). Results indicated that despite their skills, students struggled with interpreting impolite or taboo language, highlighting an additional challenge. It was suggested that the interpreter training should include specific exercises focused on handling impolite language (Gómez, 2023).

Translation of impoliteness is also found in press translation, particularly engaged with the translator’s role as a mediator. In *Understanding Impoliteness through Translation*, Sidiropoulou (2021) incorporated the concept of the translator as a mediator within the impoliteness framework. Through a comparative analysis of English-Greek press translations, the author contends that translation affects the degree of impoliteness and informs the mediator’s approach to adjusting the content for a new target audience. Locher and Watts’ (2008) four categories of impolite behavior were employed to illustrate how the mediator navigated

relational work with the target audience, who had to depend on their own understanding to interpret the translated segments. When there was a risk that the ST might be perceived negatively, the translator, in their role as mediator, intervened to make adjustments. For example, the ST “Why do Muslims flock to the ‘Evil West?’” was translated into “Who are indifferent towards Syrian refugees?” (originally in Greek) (Sidiropoulou, 2021, p. 50). In this book, the author argued that (im)politeness theory provides a useful framework for understanding and assessing translation phenomena across various genres. The monograph also demonstrated that incorporating research on impoliteness from pragmatics is enriched by a translation perspective, offering mutual benefits to both fields.

Impoliteness frequently occurs in literary works, especially within character dialogues. The fourth series of Harry Potter, entitled *Harry Potter and Goblet of Fire*, and its translated version in Indonesian were studied by Nafiah et al. (2020) to translate its impoliteness strategies. They found four types of impoliteness strategies in the ST and the translation techniques to translate by using Culpeper’s (1996) impoliteness strategies. Humiliation, accusation, fright, and provocation were identified, and 15 techniques were employed. A study under a similar frame comes from Puruhito et al. (2022). They analyzed the translation techniques that influenced the speech acts involving impoliteness in the English and Bahasa Indonesia versions of the novel *Gerald’s Game*. Four types of speech acts - assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive - were identified as violating the politeness maxim, with sixteen translation techniques applied. The reduction technique, in particular, shifted speech acts from expressive to assertive types. The study suggests that translation techniques affect the nature of impoliteness, with the reduction technique being recommended as the preferred approach for translating impoliteness strategies (Puruhito et al., 2022). In translating the impolite Arabic expressions, Abdullah et al. (2018) observed that translators transmitted the implicit meaning by polite words or euphemistic words, which are more appropriate for the English audience.

The focus on equivalence in translating impoliteness is also evident in the comparative analysis of impolite expressions in the Chinese classic *The Red Mansion*. Zhang (2023) compared the translation preferences of impolite expressions, such as criticism, by Yang Xianyi and David Hawkes using functional equivalence theory. The study concluded that Hawkes favored domestication, while Yang Xianyi leaned toward foreignization, offering notable examples of impoliteness in translation strategies in literary works. However, the overarching strategies of domestication and foreignization fail to fully capture the specific impolite language used by the speaker, while also overlooking the translator’s mediation and cultural differences.

Across the studies reviewed, a common trend is the tension between maintaining the pragmatic force of impolite language. Except for studies on the general impoliteness of speech acts, there is other research regarding the subcategories of impoliteness, such as sarcasm (Zawawi and Maghfiroh, 2020), taboo words (Abdelaal and Al Sarhani, 2021; Zamora and Pavesi, 2021), and challenge strategy (Yang et al., 2024). It is evident that studies combining impoliteness and translation have garnered a share of attention from academics, but till today, there has been no focused literature review on it. Previous research has not offered an integrated investigation of the challenges and strategies in translating impoliteness, which demonstrates the importance of the current study. Therefore, this study proposes to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What is the current research status of studies on translation of impoliteness?

- (2) What are the translation challenges posed to the translators in translating impoliteness identified from the literature?
- (3) What are the translation strategies employed to deal with impoliteness identified from the literature?

Methodology

Literature sources and inclusion criteria. For this literature review, a targeted search was conducted using Scopus and ScienceDirect, both widely used databases known for their extensive collections of peer-reviewed journal articles across diverse academic disciplines. Time was restricted to 2023, allowing for the inclusion of both foundational works and contemporary research, thereby ensuring broad coverage and a deeper understanding of the evolution in this field.

The selection criteria focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles directly related to the research topic. The inclusion emphasized articles offering theoretical insights, empirical data, or case studies while excluding conferences, books, book chapters, and other types of literature. Papers not written in English were also excluded, as English serves as the primary language for international academic communication, providing broader readership and reference value.

To align with the scope of the study, only articles specifically addressing impoliteness and translation were included. If an article’s relevance was unclear, its keywords and abstract were reviewed to determine its suitability for inclusion. This selection process ensured a focused literature review to cover diverse perspectives and approaches pertinent to the topic.

Searching procedures. The journal article search began with the ScienceDirect database, using the keywords “impoliteness” and “translation” in the advanced search. The results were filtered to include only English-language research articles, excluding those published in 2025 and 2024. This search yielded 52 articles. These were exported in RIS format for import into Mendeley, a literature management software, and also as text files to facilitate key information extraction, such as titles, abstracts, authors, keywords, and journal names.

Next, the Scopus database was searched using the query model (TITLE-ABS-KEY), again employing the keywords “impoliteness” and “translation” in the advanced search. The search was limited to 2023 and included only English-language materials, excluding non-English articles. Conference papers, books, book reviews, book chapters, and dissertations were also excluded. This search retrieved 771 articles on impoliteness, of which 40 were directly related to both impoliteness and translation. These 40 articles were exported directly to Mendeley for further management. As of July 26, 2024, a total of 823 articles were gathered from both databases.

Screening and collection. The retrieved articles were filtered based on predetermined selection criteria. The screening process involved an in-depth review of titles and abstracts. Articles focused on the field of interpretation were excluded as they did not align with the research focus. However, due to the complexity of impoliteness-related concepts, articles discussing related notions, such as “offense,” were included even if they did not explicitly address impoliteness. This approach ensured a broad yet relevant dataset. To ensure the reliability and accuracy of the selected data, two researchers independently reviewed the results, cross-checking the selection to validate the authenticity of the data.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the filtering process began with 52 articles retrieved from the ScienceDirect database. Each article underwent a thorough evaluation, starting with the title and abstract and, in some cases, extending to the full text. After this review, 45 articles were deemed irrelevant to the study, leaving 7

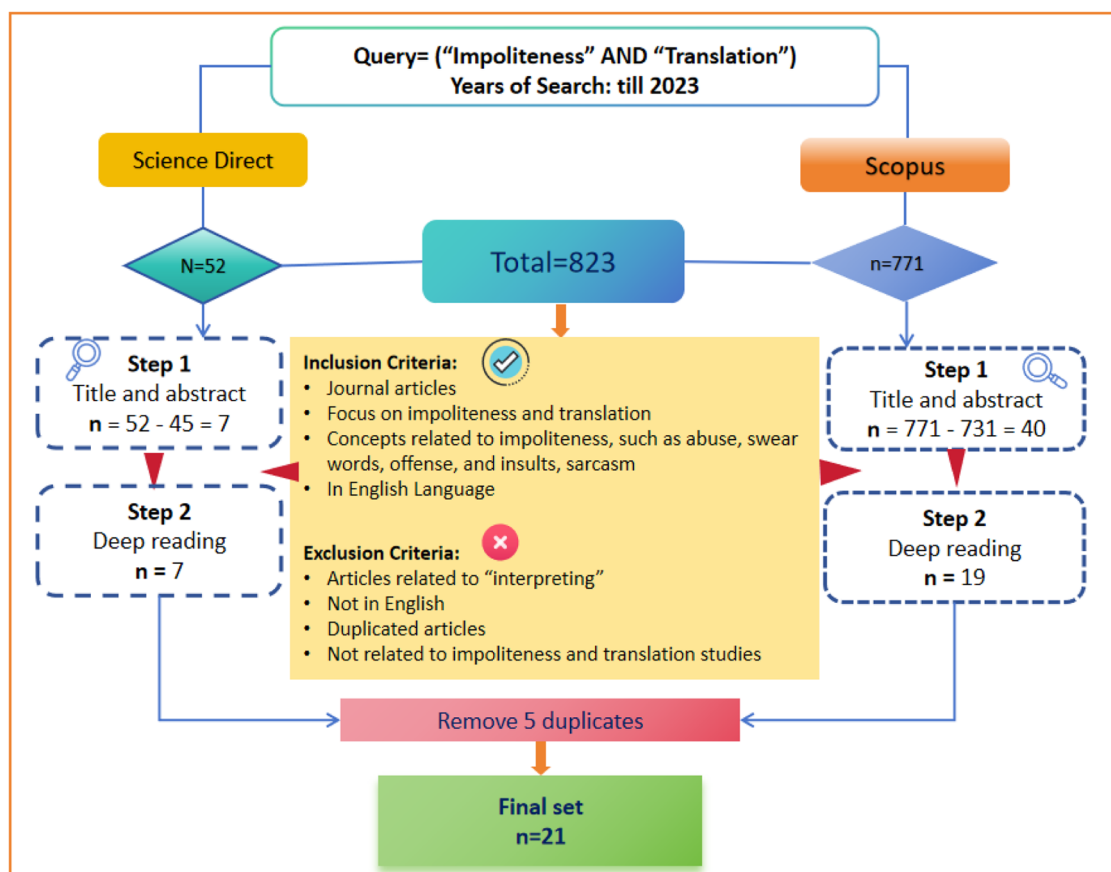


Fig. 1 Searching procedure and screening results. This figure illustrates the literature search and screening process. It shows the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included at each stage of the review following the PRISMA flow.

relevant articles for further analysis. A similar procedure was applied to the Scopus database, where 40 articles were retrieved. Titles and abstracts were examined, and when necessary, full texts were reviewed to clarify the categorization of ambiguous articles. This process resulted in 19 relevant articles being selected from Scopus. After comparing the 7 articles from ScienceDirect with the 19 from Scopus, 5 duplicate articles were identified. These duplicates were merged, leading to a final total of 21 unique articles selected for in-depth analysis.

Coding and analysis. The coding and analysis process aims to answer the three questions. Firstly, the downloaded full texts of all 21 articles were read one by one, and their specific information was listed in separate Excel spreadsheets for later statistical counts and analysis. For example, the country of the articles was listed in an Excel sheet, and the authors published in different years were recorded in a separate sheet. The research methods were also categorized in a single sheet. Then, the themes and different perspectives were classified to analyze the translation strategies and challenges implied in the articles. During the analysis process, this study answered the research questions one by one and finally located the potential issues in translating impoliteness.

Findings

Current research status of translation of impoliteness

Countries distribution of publishing. The current research status stated in the first research question was answered by investigating the countries of publishing, years of publishing, and research methods.

As shown in Table 1, there are in total 9 countries involved in the studies of impoliteness and translation over the past years. Greece stands out with the highest number of contributions, accounting for four studies ($n=4$). Italy, Jordan, and Spain follow closely, each contributing three studies ($n=3$). Iraq, Switzerland, and Oman have each produced two studies ($n=2$). Meanwhile, Serbia and South Africa have each contributed one study ($n=1$). These studies are predominantly concentrated in Europe and the Middle East, while contributions from Africa, Asia, and the Americas remain limited. Such regional imbalance could restrict the diversity of research perspectives and the scope of cultural contexts.

Years of publishing. Figure 2 illustrates the yearly count of publications on translation in impoliteness from 1998 to 2023. Research activity was minimal before 2015 but showed notable growth afterward, peaking in 2020 (5 publications). This peak was followed by a slight decline in subsequent years. The overall trend suggests that while the topic remained relatively unexplored for over a decade, it gained substantial momentum after 2015, particularly around 2020. This surge could indicate emerging issues or new theoretical approaches in the field, but the slight decline after 2020 may point to a potential stabilization or refocusing of research efforts.

By linking Table 1 and Fig. 2, it was found that the earliest study in this dataset was by Ndlovu and Kruger in 1998, while more recent research includes work by Ávila-Cabrera (2023), Jucker and Seiler (2023), and Pavesi and Formentelli (2023). Sidiropoulou appears frequently with publications in 2015 and 2017, and co-authoring in 2021, indicating consistent

contributions to the field. Pavesi and Formentelli (2019, 2023) and Khalaf and Rashid (2019, 2020) are also recurrent authors. The number of studies increased and so did the authors, especially between 2019 and 2023, suggesting growing interest in the subject.

Research methods. As shown in Table 2, qualitative research methods in previous studies primarily included case studies, corpus analyses, and descriptive or comparative analyses, focusing on the translation of offensive language such as swear words, insults, and

taboo terms in subtitling, dubbing, and literary contexts. For example, case studies by Vujić et al. (2018) and Jucker and Seiler (2023) provided in-depth examinations of impolite language, highlighting the cultural and social implications of hate speech and swear words. Similarly, Locher (2020) employed thematic analysis to investigate relational aspects of politeness and impoliteness in subtitling across different cultural contexts.

Some qualitative studies, including corpus-based analyses by Khalaf and Rashid (2019) and Pavesi and Formentelli (2019), systematically evaluated how offensive language is translated between languages such as English, Arabic, and Italian, particularly examining frequency and translation strategies. Additionally, descriptive analyses by scholars such as Valdeón (2020) and Abudayeh and Dubbati (2020) examined the translation of vulgar and offensive expressions across various genres, providing structured insights into translation practices.

Comparative analyses, as seen in studies by Khalaf and Rashid (2020) and Napoli (2020), highlighted cross-cultural differences by comparing how swear words and similar expressions are rendered across languages. Pragmatic models, such as Culpepper's framework employed by Al-Badawi (2022), deepened the understanding of the social functions of impolite language in translation. Mixed-methods research was utilized by Sánchez (2015) and Sidiropoulou (2015, 2017), integrating qualitative corpus analyses with quantitative methods like questionnaires and participant feedback. For instance, Sánchez (2015) combined purposeful sampling and comparative analysis to explore the translation of vernacular African American English into Spanish, while Pavesi and Formentelli (2019) assessed audience reactions to swear words using corpus data alongside questionnaires. However, purely quantitative studies were not identified in the dataset.

Identified translation challenges of impoliteness. Challenges exist in the translation of impoliteness. To address question two, the articles were read carefully, and the challenges were examined.

Countries	Countries no.	Authors and the years of publishing
Greece	4	Pollali and Sidiropoulou (2021) Sidiropoulou (2017) Sidiropoulou (2015) Kefala (2021)
Italy	3	Pavesi and Formentelli (2019); Pavesi and Formentelli (2023); Napoli (2020);
Jordan	3	Al-Badawi (2022); Abudayeh and Dubbati (2020); Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019)
Spain	3	Valdeón (2020); Sánchez (2015); Ávila-Cabrera (2023)
Iraq	2	Khalaf and Rashid (2020); Khalaf and Rashid (2019)
Switzerland	2	Jucker and Seiler (2023); Locher (2020)
Oman	2	Sabtan (2022) Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021)
Serbia	1	Vujić et al. (2018)
South Africa	1	Ndlovu and Kruger (1998)

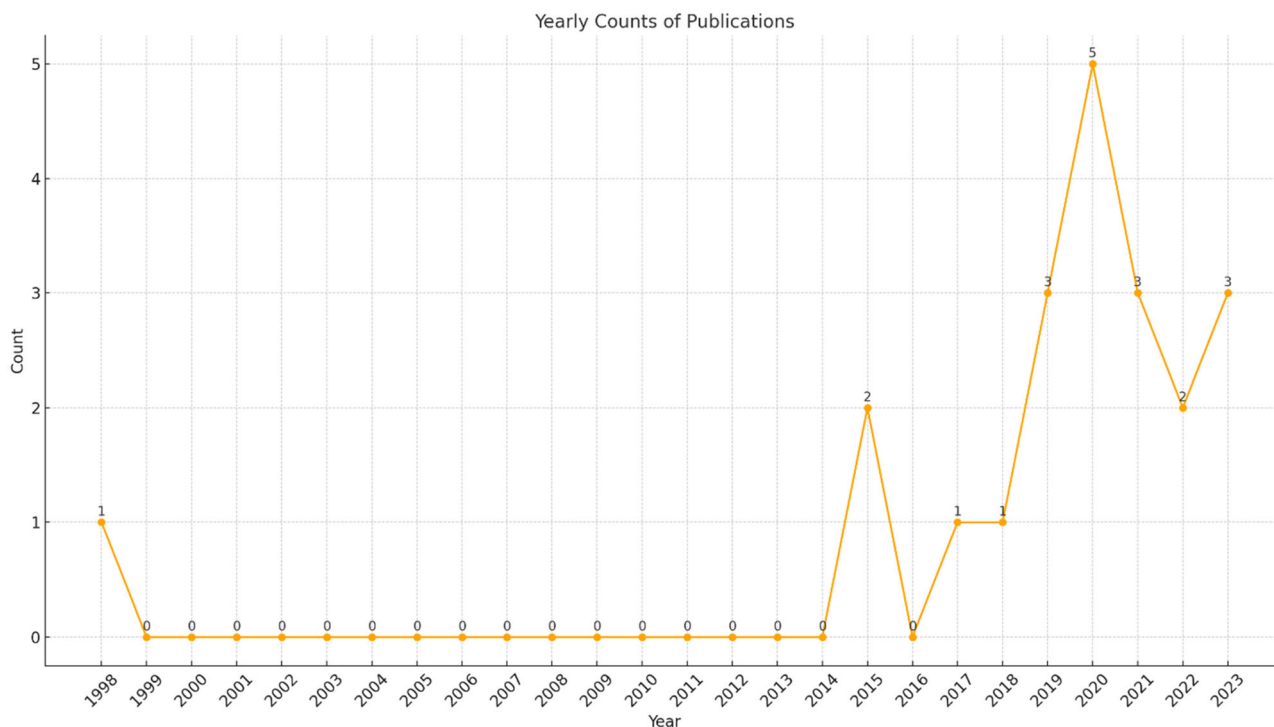


Fig. 2 Yearly counts of publications. This figure presents the number of publications related to the topic per year. The data points indicate annual output, showing trends over time.

Table 2 Research methods of studies on translation in impoliteness.

Research methods	Authors and the years of publishing	Instruments	Contexts
Qualitative research	Vujić et al. (2018)	Case study	Hate speech English-Serbian Political campaigns
	Khalaf and Rashid (2019)	Corpus analysis Pragmatic Analysis Wajnryb's (2005) model	Swearwords English-Arabic Subtitling
	Pavesi and Formentelli (2019)	Corpus analysis Comparative analysis	Insults English-Italian Dubbing
	Khalaf and Rashid (2020)	Purposeful sampling Skopos theory Venuti's domestication and foreignization	Swearwords English-Arabic Subtitling
	Valdeón (2020)	Purposeful sampling Descriptive analysis Comparative analysis	Swearwords/Vulgarization English-Spanish Dubbing
	Abudayeh and Dubbat (2020)	Descriptive analysis Politeness theory	Offensive language English-Arabic News channels
	Locher (2020)	Thematic analysis	Relational work Korean- non-Korean Subtitling
	Napoli (2020)	Comparative analysis Requests theory	Requests English-Italian Dubbing
	Kefala (2021)	Descriptive analysis Schwartz's value chart	Relational work Greek-English Tourism advertisements
	Sabtan (2022)	Descriptive analysis Baker's pragmatic equivalence	Swearwords Arabic-English Subtitling
	Al-Badawi (2022)	Critical analysis Pragmatic-stylistic approach Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (1987) Culpepper's Impoliteness framework Grice's Cooperative principle	Euphemistic expressions Arabic to English Literary text
	Ndlovu and Kruger (1998)	Descriptive translation studies	Terms of address English-Zulu Literary text
	Ávila-Cabrera (2023)	Descriptive translation studies Comparative analysis Content analysis	Insults English-Spanish Dubbing & Subtitling
	Jucker and Seiler (2023)	Case study Corpus-based approach	Bowdy expression Middle-Age English-Modern English Literary text
Mixed-methods research	Sánchez (2015)	Purposeful sampling Comparative analysis Descriptive analysis	Black English English-Spanish Dubbing
	Sidiropoulou (2015)	Comparative analysis Questionnaires	Relational dynamics English-Greek Stage playtext
	Sidiropoulou (2017)	Pilot study Experiment Quantitative analysis	Impolite language English to Greek Political science discourse
	Pavesi and Formentelli (2019)	Corpus-based analysis Questionnaire	Swearwords English-Italian Dubbing
	Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019)	Contrastive analysis Case study	Taboo words English-Arabic Subtitling
	Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021)	Content analysis Comparative analysis Pedersen's (2005) subtitling strategy typology Pedersen's (2017) quality assessment model	Taboo words English-Arabic Subtitling

The translation is not merely a linguistic transfer, it also engages with social norms and culture, thus, the translation of impoliteness has posed challenges to translators across cultures. In dealing with certain cultural characteristics, it is difficult to fully erase them and opt for bearing the original identity. Sánchez (2015) studied the translation of black English, finding that despite the translation tends to use neutralization, the translated text may still retain some ethnic markers- cultural or linguistic elements that reflect the ethnic identity of the original content. For example, “Nigga” was translated into “Negro” in Spanish (p. 434). As a result, the translation could still convey a distinctive and recognizable ethnic identity, even though it has been “neutralized” to some extent (Sánchez, 2015).

Translating culturally sensitive swearwords is a challenge to translators. Swearwords play a significant role in expressing characters’ emotions, backgrounds, and relationships. How they are handled in amateur Arabic subtitles of American crime dramas was studied by Khalaf and Rashid (2019). It highlights that swearwords often lose their intended pragmatic functions due to a lack of proper contextual analysis during the translation process. For example, the swearword “fuck” was used by the characters to tease the addressee to create laughter. It was translated into “tabban” (May evil befall) in Arabic, which is used to express stronger religious impulses such as going astray and being lost or destroyed. This leads to discrepancies between the original English intent and the Arabic subtitled versions, often altering the communicative effect the swearwords were meant to have. The study identifies that such issues stem from insufficient attention to the illocutionary force of swearwords and the complex cultural differences in handling profanity (Khalaf and Rashid, 2019).

Valdeón (2020) probes into the “vulgarization hypothesis” in the context of translating swearwords from English into Spanish in audiovisual media. The study finds that the translation process leads to an increased vulgarity in the TL, particularly in Spanish, during the period from 2006 to 2016. It concludes that vulgarization does occur to some extent, driven by the need to align the translation with the expressive force of the original content.

Sabtan (2022) also examines the challenges in translating swearwords from Arabic into English for subtitling. The study reveals the cultural and ideological sensitivities in swearwords, and there is a lack of a direct equivalent, creating a challenge for subtitlers. For instance, the Arabic phrase بني آدم (bani adam) is not an abusive word, which literally means “son of Adam,” a neutral referring to any human being. But in this context, it is a term of insult, implying that the addressee is a stupid person. In the TL, it is translated as “airhead,” suggesting a silly person (p. 160). The study underscores the complexity of maintaining the cultural elements of swearwords while adapting to the cultural norms in the TL. Similar to swearwords, insults in films serve as a key means of expressing impoliteness. How these expressions are handled through dubbing is also complicated.

Pavesi and Formentelli (2019) focus on English and Italian films, comparing insults of original and dubbed versions. While Italian films use insults more frequently, English films exhibit more mock impoliteness. It highlights that dubbed films blend source and TL elements, often reflecting a hybridization. In another study, Pavesi and Formentelli (2023) investigated swearwords, which function pragmatically within film dialogs to express emotions, enhance characterization, and create solidarity or conflict among characters.

The challenge of translating hate speech lies in avoiding the reinforcement of negative stereotypes while ensuring the translator upholds ethical responsibility. Translators face the challenge of balancing fidelity to the original text with the risk of

perpetuating harmful discourse. Vujić et al. (2018) propose strategies such as incorporating ethical guidelines into translation pedagogy, sensitizing translators to the social implications of their work, and promoting critical thinking to handle hate speech effectively in multilingual settings. Translators’ personal ethical and moral standards play a significant role in shaping their translations, particularly when translating from their native language (L1) to a second language (L2) (Vujić et al. 2018).

The challenges of translating the complex (im)politeness strategies are studied by Jucker and Seiler (2023) in *Chaucer’s Miller’s Tale* from Middle English into modern English. The tale includes bawdy and impolite language that plays a significant role in character development and humor. The key terms, such as the notorious Middle English word “queynte” implying impoliteness, are a challenge for translators. They have to balance between euphemism and vulgarity. The varying levels of politeness to maintain the humor and societal commentary embedded in the original text need the translator’s careful handling. This involves evaluating both the narrator’s (im)politeness towards other characters and Chaucer’s intended relationship with his readers (Jucker and Seiler, 2023).

The translation of euphemisms can lead to a loss of cultural implications, particularly in maintaining politeness or avoiding impoliteness. In Naguib Mahfouz’s *Palace of Desire*, some translated euphemisms lose their mitigating function, making the text appear more impolite or less polite than intended in the original Arabic. This highlights the challenge of balancing cultural and religious sensitivity in cross-linguistic translations, where impoliteness might be inadvertently introduced due to differing norms of expression (Al-Badawi, 2022).

The translation also reflects cultural differences in communication and self-representation. In Greek-English tourism ads, politeness strategies are used to shape interactions between hosts and tourists, often requiring strategic adaptation to fit the cultural norms of the target audience (Kefala, 2021). It emphasizes the challenge of balancing global and local perspectives in tourism advertising, aiming to preserve both cultural identity and appeal to an international audience. Im/politeness can influence identity construction through translation. Using Bucholtz and Hall’s identity formation principles, Pollali and Sidiropoulou (2021) show that theater translation choices reflect shifting societal values and gender roles. Translators’ discursive options renegotiate characters’ identities based on cultural norms, with audience preferences leaning towards intense character portrayals. (Pollali and Sidiropoulou, 2021).

Languages and cultures are interwoven with each other. The translators’ decisions are influenced by the need to maintain relational dynamics between different cultural contexts, from Sidiropoulou’s (2015) perspective, often mediating between the source and target audiences. In evaluating how offensiveness is portrayed in the stage translation, the author examines the relational aspects of translation, focusing on how translation acts as a mediator between languages and cultures. Interpersonal relationships and cultural contexts are reflected and constructed through translation. Translation is taken as a relational and interactive process. The relational work is also found in another study. Subtitlers of Korean dramas actively mediate cultural elements of relational work, often choosing to preserve the original intent of Korean politeness and relationship dynamics, allowing non-Korean audiences to access the cultural depth of the original content (Locher, 2020).

Identified translation strategies of impoliteness. To address question three, this study analyzed all 21 retrieved articles, and the results are presented below. As shown in Fig. 3, previous

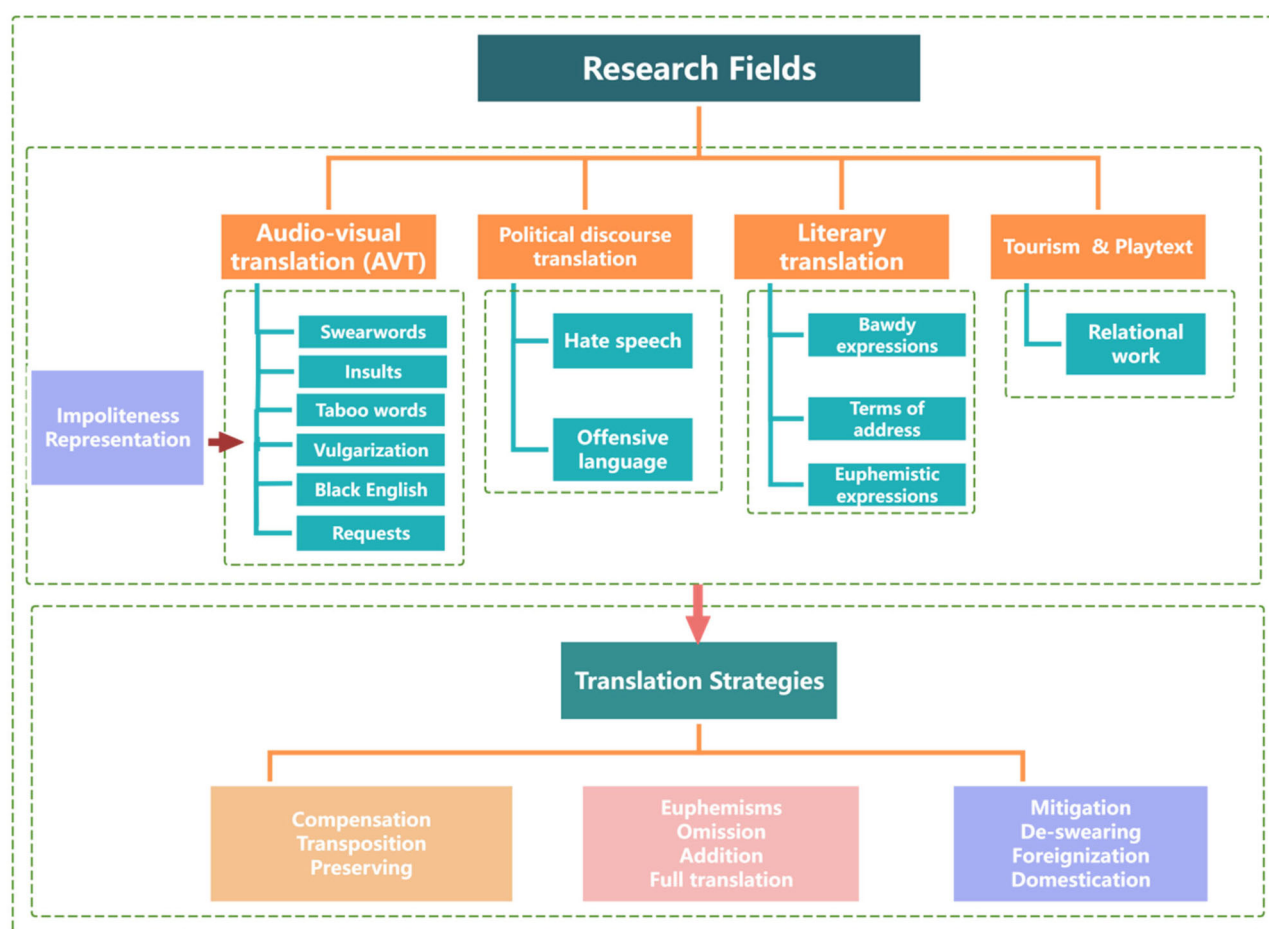


Fig. 3 Translation strategies identified in the related research fields. This figure summarizes the translation strategies commonly reported in the reviewed literature in audio-visual translation, political discourse translation, literary translation, tourism, and playtext translation.

research on translation in impoliteness spans five main areas: AVT, political discourse translation, literary translation, tourism translation, and stage play translation. In each of these fields, impoliteness is manifested through different linguistic features. In AVT, impoliteness is mainly represented by swearwords (Khalaf and Rashid, 2020, 2019; Pavesi and Formentelli, 2023; Sabtan, 2022; Valdeón, 2020), insults (Ávila-Cabrera, 2023; Pavesi and Formentelli, 2019), taboo language (Abdelaal and Al Sarhani, 2021; Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2019; Gómez, 2023), vulgarization of language (Valdeón, 2020), black English (Sánchez, 2015), and requests showing impoliteness (Napoli, 2020). Most of them are situated in dubbing and subtitling, in which their translation renders challenges for the translators (Abdelaal and Al Sarhani, 2021). In the field of political discourse, impoliteness is represented by hate speech in political campaigns (Vujić et al. 2018) and offensive language in political science discourse (Sidiropoulou, 2017). Impoliteness-related translation problems are demonstrated in impolite speech acts, also found in literary texts, represented by bawdy expressions (Jucker and Seiler, 2023), terms of address (Ndlovu and Kruger, 1998), and problems of euphemistic expressions (Al-Badawi, 2022). Apart from the linguistic features presented in the previous fields, the relational work or dynamics in the stage playtext translation (Sidiropoulou, 2015) and relational work in online tourism advertising (Kefala, 2021).

Translating impoliteness is expressed through various linguistic features in different fields, presenting significant challenges for translators. In response to these challenges, researchers have identified and proposed specific strategies to address the

translation of impoliteness. Additionally, numerous factors must be taken into account, leading to varied translation strategies across different genres and contexts. As shown in Fig. 3, it illustrates how these translation strategies are employed by translators and identified corresponding to the impolite representations.

Date back in 1998, Ndlovu and Kruger (1998) investigated the translation of Zulu terms of address in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, which reflected the cultural and social norms of Zulu speakers. Direct translation of some English terms would have implied unintended impoliteness in Zulu. For example, “sir” in English shows respect, but directly translating it into the Zulu equivalent “mnumzane,” which could as less respectful. To address this, the translator Nyembezi employed cultural substitution, omission, and addition to ensure that the translation remained culturally appropriate and acceptable to the Zulu audience. This strategy allowed the novel to maintain its respectful tone while preserving differences in the original language (Ndlovu and Kruger, 1998).

In translating black English (involving obscene language, vulgar terms, insults, and cursing) into Spanish in dubbing, translation strategies of preserving and neutralizing showcase different percentages at different levels, such as lexical, phonological, prosodic, and discursive (Sánchez, 2015). The strategy overall tends towards neutralizing, despite the deletion of the original black-speech marker. The preserving strategy (such as compensation) maintains the black trait by employing a distinctive use of language in the target text, which is mainly used in lexical markers.

Different translation strategies were employed by the translators in translating culturally sensitive swearwords in dubbing and subtitling. Khalaf and Rashid (2020) studied translating English movies into Arabic, and the findings show that subtitlers often adopt domestication strategies, toning down or deleting swearwords to align with cultural norms. However, some instances of foreignization occur to preserve the authenticity of the source text. Overall, the translation approach leans more toward satisfying the target culture's sensitivities (Khalaf and Rashid, 2020).

Sabtan (2022) also examines strategies for translating swearwords from Arabic into English for subtitling. The study reveals that many Arabic swearwords are either euphemized or omitted when translated into English due to cultural and ideological sensitivities. In the same context, taboo words are also translated by euphemisms and omission techniques due to cultural and ideological constraints (Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2019). Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) also highlight two predominant strategies used by the subtitlers: euphemism and omission. They observe that euphemistic translation involves toning down the offensive nature of the original swear words, making them culturally appropriate for the Arabic-speaking audience. Omission, on the other hand, involves completely removing certain swear words or taboo expressions when a suitable, culturally acceptable translation cannot be found (Abdelaal and Al Sarhani, 2021). However, omission leads to a significant loss of the connotative functions intended by the original language, which can affect the overall impact and cultural context of the film in the TL (Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2019).

Ávila-Cabrera (2023) examines insults in Quentin Tarantino's film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* translated into European Spanish in both dubbed and subtitled versions. The literal translation is often avoided due to cultural differences. Instead, euphemisms are used in subtitling to tone down the severity of insults, especially when the original terms are too strong for European Spanish audiences. In contrast, dubbing tends to retain more of the emotional and social weight of the insults, as the spoken format allows for more flexibility than subtitling.

The translation of offensive language in the political arena also gained attention. Abudayeh and Dubbati (2020) investigated how Arabic translators handle Trump's controversial and offensive language in political campaigns. The results show that translating Donald Trump's ethos as a confrontational speaker who uses insults strategically outweighs the need to protect the positive face of Arab audiences. As a result, translators aim to preserve his public image rather than soften his controversial remarks (Abudayeh and Dubbati, 2020). Sidiropoulou (2017) found that translations in political science discourse from English to Greek tend to shift towards more positive politeness strategies in the Greek versions, although negative politeness is also present. Over time, these politeness features appear to "degenerate" due to the influence of English on the Greek academic language, likely driven by globalization.

Napoli (2020) explores how dubbing constraints impact the translation of (im)politeness in speech acts, particularly requests, in films. It examines how modifications during dubbing can alter the politeness levels of characters, potentially making them appear more or less polite than in the original version. These shifts are a result of pragmatic adjustments required by the audiovisual medium. Translators may adopt different pragmatic strategies in the dubbed version due to the audiovisual constraints.

Locher (2020) investigates how fan translators handle the complex Korean politeness system when subtitling for English-speaking audiences. The study finds that fan translators often lean towards foreignization, preserving culturally specific address

terms and relational work, which may not have direct equivalents in English. This allows non-Korean audiences to engage more deeply with the cultural context of the dramas.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to review the existing literature on translating impoliteness, specifically addressing current research status, translation challenges, and translation strategies. In this section, the findings are analyzed and discussed. The first question "What is the current status of research in translation of impoliteness?" is addressed by examining the countries, the number of yearly published articles, and the research methods utilized by the researchers. The findings reveal that studies on translation in impoliteness have been conducted in nine countries, as shown in Table 1. However, somewhat surprisingly, the studies are mostly from European and Arabic countries. Many other countries in Asia and America, such as China and the US, are not found in the related articles. This suggests that the translation of impoliteness has not garnered substantial attention within these regions. This finding may imply that the linguistic impoliteness phenomenon is more common in these contexts and the translation of it requires more attention, such as swearwords, insults, and taboo words.

In the publication years of the articles presented in Fig. 1, it is demonstrated that the earliest related article was published in 1998. Despite recent growth, the overall research volume remains modest. Even now, not many researchers and institutions have devoted themselves to the research (Kádár et al., 2020), suggesting translating impoliteness is still an emerging, under-explored area deserving further attention. Therefore, research in this field can embrace more interdisciplinary studies to welcome more scholars from other fields to contribute to the existing knowledge body.

The research methods the researchers employed in their studies are mainly qualitative, with the number of 15 articles (See Fig. 2). Descriptive translation studies, thematic analysis, and comparative analysis are the common instruments adopted by the researchers, while it is clarified that in translation studies, descriptive analysis plays a dominant role in analyzing the phenomenon and translation activity. It is understandable because the translation involves texts and cultures the most. While most of the studies are product-oriented, the process of translating impolite speech acts should be highlighted more. Besides that, there are 6 articles utilizing mixed-methods research, in which the questionnaire is the most frequently used instrument and the translation process is underlined. This instrument is primarily used to collect the target readers' reception and review of the translation. But the scale is not equal. No quantitative studies were found. To some extent, it proves that translation studies can't go alone without qualitative analysis. Nonetheless, this demonstrates that the research methods and instruments in investigating translation and impoliteness are relatively few and need to be more diversified.

In research question two, "What are the translation challenges posed to the translators in translating impoliteness identified from the literature?", four primary elements are related. The first comes identity. The translation of impoliteness can reshape an identity in characters or roles. For example, translating terms of address, which are deeply embedded in cultural context, highlights a common challenge in literary translation. They carry connotations about social hierarchy, intimacy, and respect, which can vary dramatically between cultures. The shift in how characters address each other or are referred to in translation can alter their relationships and societal roles, even delivering impoliteness, thereby influencing the overall portrayal of the narrative and its characters (Ndlovu and Kruger, 1998; Pollali and Sidiropoulou, 2021).

The second element is culture. The translation of impoliteness not only involves linguistic expertise but also requires an acute sensitivity to cultural contexts, as demonstrated in several studies that explore how these elements are handled across different languages and media (Khalaf and Rashid, 2019; Sabtan, 2022). However, it has to be noted that because of cultural constraints, it is difficult to render culturally bound expressions into another language, particularly those expressions related to sex, excretion, and others (Abdelaal and Al Sarhani, 2021). Thus, it demonstrates that translation is not merely linguistic but profoundly socio-cultural.

Due to cultural constraints, achieving a balance between the source text and the target text is essential. When translating impoliteness, the translator must carefully balance the original text's level of impoliteness while adhering to the cultural and social norms of the TL. For instance, studies on the translation of swear words and impoliteness in Spanish dubbing reveal the careful decisions translators make to respect the cultural expectations of the target audience, while still preserving the emotional tone and meaning of the original content (Sánchez, 2015; Valdeón, 2020). It is hard to keep the balance between two different cultures. This underlines the need for translators to possess a deep understanding of cultural differences in both SL and TL. Therefore, it is suggested that future research could benefit from more focus on specific linguistic features that challenge translators, incorporating more empirical data on audience reception to gauge the effectiveness of different translation strategies better.

In response to the third research question, "What are the translation strategies employed to deal with impoliteness identified from the literature?", different translation strategies were identified by the researchers, such as omission, compensation, euphemism, and domestication. The finding proves that they are trying to overcome the challenges in translating impoliteness. Euphemism, with similarities to de-swearing or mitigation, was taken as the commonly used strategy in mediating the impoliteness and the original texts (Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2019; Jucker and Seiler, 2023). The literal translation is not found in these findings. This is attributed to the impoliteness full of culture-bound elements and the cultural differences across languages. However, it has to be noted that the strategies are more frequently applied in audiovisual contexts and focus on very few impoliteness categories. The contexts of these studies are relatively limited, and the genres are not diverse. Therefore, the translation strategies may not be generalized and applied to other fields. Very few studies were conducted on other impoliteness categories of political discourse, characters' dialogue, social media neologisms, legal settings, etc. Therefore, further empirical translation studies in these fields can be integrated with more impoliteness categories, such as sarcasm, threatening words, hindering, criticism, and snubbing.

Conclusion

This study aims to review the existing research on the translation of impoliteness over the past years. The findings reveal that relatively few countries (only nine) have focused on this topic, with no studies found from Asian countries (except Arab nations) or American countries. Research in this field has grown since 2014, with an increasing number of studies. The most common contexts for these studies include AVT, literary texts, political discourse, and tourism. Impoliteness in these contexts typically involves offensive speech acts, such as swearwords, insults, taboos, crude expressions, and derogatory forms of address. Some researchers, like Sidiropoulou (2015), also focus on relational aspects of impoliteness. The predominant research method is qualitative, with few studies employing mixed methods and none using quantitative approaches.

One of the main challenges identified in translating impoliteness is cultural differences. Translators must strike a balance between preserving the connotations of impoliteness in the original text and adapting it to the cultural norms of the TL. Translation strategies vary by context, with euphemisms often used to soften impoliteness and offensive content, favoring a more domesticated approach. Nevertheless, these strategies may not be applicable across all fields due to cultural constraints in different contexts.

However, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were drawn from only two databases, Scopus and ScienceDirect, which, while reputable, may not encompass the full range of studies available on the topic of translation and impoliteness. Relevant studies published elsewhere were excluded, so there is a risk of missing significant research published in other databases that may offer valuable insights, particularly from underrepresented regions. Second, the inclusion of non-English articles potentially overlooks valuable insights from other scholarly traditions and languages. Therefore, considering non-English language sources could further broaden the scope, offering a more diverse range of cultural and regional perspectives on translation practices. Moreover, the scope of the literature reviewed was restricted to journal articles, which may have excluded other important forms of scholarship. Additionally, more keywords could be added to do the literature retrieval. Lastly, as this study was mainly qualitative, it relied heavily on interpretative thematic analyses, which inherently involve subjective judgments. Although measures such as independent cross-checking and thick description by researchers were undertaken, interpretive bias cannot be entirely eliminated.

Despite these limitations, this study is significant for researchers and translators interested in impoliteness and translation, as it highlights existing research gaps. For example, future research could adopt a wider range of methodologies rather than focusing solely on qualitative approaches. The scope could also be expanded to include more interdisciplinary areas such as political discourse translation, character dialog in literary works, social media neologisms, and legal discourse. Conducting more empirical studies would strengthen the field of translation studies and impoliteness in pragmatics, leading to more effective strategies for addressing translation challenges. Additionally, the findings are valuable for translators, such as subtitlers and dubbers, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and appropriate strategies when dealing with impoliteness in other languages.

Data availability

Data generated during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Author contributions

WY was responsible for the study design, the main manuscript text, figures, and tables. SNSA was responsible for revising and supervising. LHA was responsible for supervising. MXY was responsible for data collection and proofreading. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This study does not involve human participants or their data.

Informed consent

This study does not involve human participants or their data.

Additional information

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