

"You're a Damned Dumb!" Political Trolls of Iraqi Female Parliamentary Members on X Platform

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تاریخ قبول النشر ۲۰۲۵/۳/۲۰

تاریخ استلام البحث ۲۰۲۵/۲/۱۰

Abstract

With the spreading unchecked growth of access to social media worldwide, the internet has given birth to the incessant phenomenon of cyber trolling. Cyber trolling is often characterized as aggressive behaviors with negative impacts on online communication. The present research investigated the pragmatic resources and choices of trolling behavior used by Iraqi users against Iraqi female parliamentary members (MPs) on X platform. To achieve the research objectives, a purposive sampling technique was used for the collection of data. The data were collected from X platform accounts of six Iraqi female MPs representing different political stands and demographics. The analysis involved identifying, classifying and counting actual tokens of trolling forms, impoliteness strategies, and trolled speech acts across data sets from the X platform. The analysis revealed that Iraqi users of X platform use *provocation* and *ideological misalignment* as the most frequent forms of cyber trolling with Iraqi female MPs. As for impoliteness strategies, Iraqi users employ *negative face-oriented strategies* more frequently than *positive face-oriented strategies*. Besides, *direct trolled speech acts* commonly employed by Iraqi users when trolling Iraqi female MPs. Finally, based on the research findings, a number of conclusions, implications and recommendations are presented.

Key Words: *Political trolls, speech acts, impoliteness, X platform, Iraqi female MPs.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the widespread availability of internet and digital information technologies has been utilized to harm or disturb others via cyber trolling. Cyber trolling has become a serious problem and an increasing concern for social media users of all demographics across the globe. It is a form of verbal and non-verbal cyber aggression that is characterized as an act of online aggression with an imbalance of powers between the individuals involved. It is an online communicative practice

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realized in many forms and guises. Particularly important in the context of cyber trolling, is the permanent nature of the online posts, unless they are removed, and the ease, fast and wide circulation of such posts in media (Nansel, et al. 2001, p. 2094). Verbal trolls consist of offensive language, verbal harassment, negative comments about the victim's identity, abusive expressions, verbal attacks, insults, derogatory nicknames, threats and irony (Stavridi, 2020, p. 3-4). Due to the increased recognition of this phenomenon worldwide, appropriate legislation for cyber trolling prevention has been formulated. Recently, there have been some positive initiatives for legislating certain cybercrime prevention laws to restrict the spread of this negative behavior.

Cyber troll is relatively similar to traditional troll as it is a combination of the aggressive behavior, repeated acts, and the victim's inability to defend him/her (Hosseinmardi, et. al, 2015, p. 49). In a UNICEF's recent report, 36.7 % of social media users in the world are victims of online trolls (UNICEF, 2019). In this respect, Facebook, X platform (previously known as Twitter) and Instagram have been reported as the top social platforms used for the wide spread of verbal and non-verbal incidents of aggression and cyber trolls (Chan, et.al, 2021). As for the Iraqi context, despite the prevalence of cyber trolls on social media in Iraq, little attention has been devoted to researching this problem and, consequently, relevant legislation has been slow to develop (Mahmood , 2020).

Cyber trolling is considered as a crime of language as it is loaded with rudeness, threats, insults and offensive messages and attitudes (Stavridi, 2020, p. 8). Such behaviors foster severe conflict and verbal violence in public discourse. Researchers attribute aggressive comments and behaviors on cyber tools to many factors like anonymity, sociocultural, organizational, gender and personality factors (Danet, 2013, p. 639). Temirgazina (2013) stresses that "verbal troll falls under the category of destructive interpersonal communication. It involves various forms and attributes of interpersonal communicative contacts which have a hurtful, destructive effect on the counterpart's personality, and can complicate relations" (p. 823).

Cyber trolling has been differently labeled as "*cyber bullying*", "*flaming*", "*cyber aggression*", "*technology-based victimization*", "*stalking*" and "*heckling*" implying all the negative act of posting offensive and aggressive messages over the internet (Selkie, et.al, 2016). Danet (2013) maintains that all forms of behaviors fall under the broad category of cyber trolling. Trolling is an elusive phenomenon viewed negatively as verbal aggression, insult, or hostile verbal or non-verbal behavior. Behaviors like hostility, aggression, intimidation, insults, offensive language, sarcasm, and unfriendly tone best characterize the trolling act (Turnage, 2007). Trolling is defined here as asocial or aggressive verbal acts practiced online. It is commonly understood as sending antagonistic, inflammatory messages with the intent of provoking others into conflict (Dyrel, 2016, p. 358,).

Trolling can be best explained by a theory of pragmatic principles. Speech acts and linguistic rudeness/impoliteness theories can be realized, directly or indirectly, in verbal aggression. According to the rules of communication, the transmitter and receiver, of aggression for example, cooperate and the receiver of a message should understand and take into account the speaker's intention and engage in the corresponding act or behavior. People are affected by verbal aggression on a different scale, and at the same time, it is a violation of the communication norms. Aggressiveness coincides with cooperativeness in the sense of convergent antagonistic speech behaviours, as framed in Speech Accommodation Theory (Biscetti, 2020, p. 14). In this respect, Stavridi (2020) maintains that people who are exercising, more often use in/direct performative speech acts of criticizing, threats, insults, attacks, swearing, etc. known as "*words grunts*" in the theory of pragmatic communication.

The existing research examined the spreading phenomenon of cyber trolling from various perspectives including computer sciences, information technology, psychology, sociology, education, media and communication, and mental health. Little scholarly attention has been paid to investigate the pragmatic resources of trolling in online political discourse (Dyner, 358, p. 2016). More precisely, verbal trolls towards female MPs on social media have received scarce attention in existing research. Accordingly, the present research fills this gap by investigating the pragmatics of trolling used by Iraqi users against Iraqi female MPs on X platform. The interdisciplinary nature of the present research contributes to research findings in several related disciplines like computer-mediated communication, information technology, gender studies, cultural studies, media and linguistic pragmatics. It addresses the following research questions;

1. What are the forms of trolling behavior used against Iraqi female MPs on X platform?
2. What are the categories of impoliteness strategies used in the troll of Iraqi female MPs on X platform?
3. What are the categories of speech acts used in the troll of Iraqi female MPs on X platform?

2. Cyber Trolling: A Theoretical Account

Social media platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram have gained popularity as key tools for news, journalists and their organizations. Such platforms have become a part of many people's day-to-day routines. They are best characterized by two main features. First, they require some forms of participation. Second, social media involves some interaction. Such interaction can be established with friends, family, or acquaintances, or with new people who share common interests or even a common acquaintance circle (Matulewska and Gwiazdowicz, 2020, p. 380). Though, such platforms contribute a lot to facilitate human communication, verbal and non-verbal cyber trolling becomes a serious problem and an inevitable part of interaction in social media.

Politics attracts more trolling than other topics of discussion, and has a strong negative sentiment. Politics has been rated as the subject most likely to provoke trolling behavior (Parmelee and Bichard, 2012). Parmelee and Bichard, (2012) further maintain that politicians have been utilizing X platform to promote their political agendas across the world. Conflicts and aggression in public communication frequently take place in political posts and comments in social media. Hirschová (2019) remarks that aggressive communicative behaviors become almost standard and the most important instrument to forward one's attitudes and position. Such platforms are openly attacked with criticism, mockery, irony and vulgar expressions. Offensive speech actions taking the form of accusations of the opponents are nevertheless tolerated by the interlocutors, and are received without reservation on the part of the audience (p. 163).

Cyber trolling is considered to be one of the diseases of the 21st century. It is a relatively new phenomenon occurred with the emergence of the ubiquitous internet and social media pervading all spheres of our lives in contemporary information age (Matulewska and Gwiazdowicz, 2020, p. 6). It affects mental health, education, safety and general well-being for individuals across the globe. It is "an aggressive, intentional act, using electronic forms of contact such as social networking sites, repeatedly and over time against victims who cannot easily defend themselves" (Smith, et al., 2006, p. 376). Cyber trolling is largely associated with impoliteness, rudeness and aggressive linguistic behavior; and it is recognized as socially-negative face-work (Bousfield, 2008, p. 101).

Cyber trolling can take a set of different forms and behaviors. For Hardaker (2013, p. 238-260), cyber trolling can have one of the following forms; criticism, digression, shock, antipathy, endangment, aggression, and pre-empt accusation. Likewise, Feinberg and Robey (2009) maintain that there are several negative behaviors that constitute cyber trolling including harassment, humiliation, exclusion, cyber stalking, flaming, defamation, denigration, impersonation, outing and exclusion. In spite of the fact that there is a relative similarity between traditional trolling and cyber trolling, there are certain differences between them. The power imbalance in cyber trolling experience refers to; (i) anonymity (ii); the troll's technological skills; and/or (iii) the ability to invade their victims' privacy (Kift, et. al, 2010). Likewise, Erdur-Baker (2010) remarks that the difference between traditional trolling and cyber trolling is guided by two assumptions; (i) the victims know who their troller is; and (ii) there is a power imbalance between the victim and the troller.

Different factors can stand behind cyber trolling behaviors. Some scholars maintain that culture, gender, power and imposition play a significant role, and they are widely reported as crucial variables. According to Li (2007), culture should be regarded as a forecaster for cyber-harassment and its victim and can affect trolling behaviors, rates of involvement and victimization. Al-Zahrani (2015) reports that gender factor has an impact on how often trolling happens. Men are found to be actively involved in cyber trolling, with their target being females. Biscetti (2020), on the other hand, maintains that the degree of social power tends to be directly correlated with the degree of aggressiveness on the interlocutor. And the type of personal relationship (e.g., familiar, strange, and intimate) contributes to determining aggressive strategies and linguistic choices.

Cyber trolling has received little scholarly attention in linguistics research in general, and in pragmatics in particular (Hardaker, 2010). Very few studies of pragmatics of cyber trolling in social media exist to date. In one study, Schauer (2016) examined verbal aggression against transgender people in seven electronic articles published in British mainstream media between 2001 and 2015. The research findings revealed that writers employ a wide variety of verbal aggression and manipulation strategies that are used by the writers to attack transgender individuals and to present their attacks as the defensive actions of powerless individuals that are being persecuted by a powerful transgender lobby. Ardi, et.al, (2020), on the other hand, analyzed the speech act of flaming in the Malaysian context. The data was a compilation of Twitter statuses consisting of 2.5 million words. The tweets were analyzed based on different subcategories of flaming. The study adopted a qualitative approach through contextual analysis. The findings showed that flaming in Malaysian context can be direct and indirect based on the intentions to offend other tweeters. Besides, language uses among youngsters specifically the tweeters are not in line with the values and ethics that have been practiced in the Malaysian culture and society.

Saengprang and Gadavanij (2021) investigated the language of cyber trolling toward celebrities in Instagram. Data were collected from the Instagram accounts of two celebrities; one is Korean, and another one is British. The study adopted the speech acts framework to analyze and categorize trolling comments. The analysis revealed that Korean celebrity received harassment, whereas British celebrity experienced harassment and denigration according to cyber trolling forms. Additionally, indirect speech acts were commonly found in the case of Korean, whereas direct speech acts were frequently used in the case of British. Irimba, et.al, (2021), on the other hand, examined the discursive construction of online hate rhetoric and the injurious potential of online micro-speech acts and performative modality of selected Facebook and Twitter posts during the 2017 general election in Kenya. Working within a forensic pragmatics framework, a purposive sample of 160 posts were collected and analyzed. The findings showed how micro-speech acts and performative modality work in service of aggressive ideology in the form of overt and covert appeals for collective prejudice

against marked ethno-political out-groups. That is, violent speech acts yield potential pragmatic force in the service of aggressive ideology by leveraging the performative and action-like property of language whose utterance may be construed to actually perform an act of linguistic violence with potential to cause mental, emotional and/or physical pain.

The present study is different from the afore-reviewed studies in two aspects. First, the linguistic and cultural contexts (i.e., Iraqi context) are different and not examined yet. Second, the discourse genre and the target people examined are also different (i.e., the political discourse and Iraqi female MPs). Given the lack of comparable studies on the Iraqi context, the present study investigates offensive and trolling language against female MPs on X platform in Iraq. The study has excluded male politicians from its scope due to their over representation and the unmanageable size of data. Instead, it provides explorative insights regarding the triads of verbal trolls that Iraqi female MPs are facing online. The inclusion of X platform is justified by the statement that language use varies according to different settings, and that every plan of a particular setting is conveyed differently and appropriately. Language use in X platform differs from other social media platforms like Facebook, for example. This is probably because Facebook is more of a socializing nature compared to Twitter (nowadays called "X" platform), which in most cases, used by most individuals formally and not for socializing purposes (Ludwig and Ruyter, 2016).

3. A Pragmatic Framework of Cyber Trolling

As a start, a pragmatic framework has been proposed to account for the phenomenon of cyber trolls used by Iraqi online users against Iraqi female MPs on X platform. The proposed model of verbal cyber trolling consists of three pragmatic components: (1) forms of verbal cyber trolling (2) impoliteness strategies, and (3) speech acts. Components of verbal trolling that explicitly attack the target female MPs or to make them feel bad, or a combination of both are considered here as verbal tokens of cyber troll. Cyber trolling can be realized as different forms of behaviors. Following Fichman and McClelland (2020), cyber trolling is classified into a set of forms including *derailment*, *hyperbole*, *ideological misalignment*, *insulting*, *personal attacks*, *provocation* and *pseudo sincerity*. Table 1 below outlines the main strategies of cyber trolling with a brief elaboration.

Fichman and McClelland's (2020) taxonomy of forms of cyber trolling. Table 1:

| Forms of Cyber Trolling | Elaboration |
|--------------------------|---|
| Derailment | Purposefully leading a conversation off track. |
| Hyperbole | Exaggerating one's strength or weakness. |
| Ideological misalignment | Comments made because of a difference in political opinions and stance. |
| Insulting | Statements meant to insult an individual. It includes swearing, mocking and name-calling (referring to an individual with negative words that make them appear bad or vicious). |
| Personal attacks | Statements meant to target an individual. It includes character assassination (attempt to damage someone's reputation by slander or misrepresentation of their views/behavior). |
| Provocation | Statements intended to elicit a specific reaction. |
| Pseudo sincerity | Providing the impression of particular motivations while actually being driven by other motivations. It includes sarcasm. |

The frameworks of impoliteness strategies and speech acts are mainly based on Garcia-Pastor's (2008) impoliteness strategies and Koller and Darida's (2020) trolled speech acts respectively with some modifications to suit the data under analysis. When used, impoliteness strategies and speech acts are either violating Spencer-Oatey's (2005) "sociality rights", consisting of association rights such as respect and empathy, and "equity rights", involving fair treatment and the absence of commands, or are making use of strategies that are intending to attack face (Schauer, 2016, p. 11).Culpeper (2011) remarks that impoliteness is of great social importance as it is involved in aggression, abuse, trolling and harassment. Both cyber trolling and impoliteness perform negative attitudes toward specific behaviors and addressees in specific contexts. Culpeper defines impoliteness as communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony (p. 5). Relatedly, Garcia-Pastor (2008) has outlined two broad categories of impoliteness strategies associated with cyber trolling behaviors along with a set of sub-strategies (p. 108) as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Garcia-Pastor's (2008) taxonomy of impoliteness strategies associated with cyber trolling.

| Type of Impoliteness Super Strategies | Type of Impoliteness Sub-Strategies |
|---|---|
| 1. Positive face-oriented strategies | a. Convey dislike for and disagreement with hearer's things, actions, values and opinions. b. Be ironic. c. Dissociate , distance from hearer. d. Ignore hearer. e. Belittle or diminish the importance of hearer and hearer's things, actions, values and opinions. f. Deny in-group status. |
| 2. Negative face-oriented strategies | a. State that communicative act(s) as common or shared knowledge. b. Indebt hearer. c. Refer to rights, duties and rules not respected, fulfilled or complied with respectively. d. Increase imposition weight e. Refuse hearer and hearer's things, actions, values and opinions f. Challenge g. Frighten h. Dare |

As harmful intention is a significant component of cyber trolling, the study adopts the speech acts framework to identify the troller's intention of cyber-trolls on X platform. Speech acts theory relates verbal actions to intentions as "it places intentionality at the core of human communicative actions. Intentionality engenders responsibility for action, and an aggressive action typically involves volition and representation. The types of intentions relevant to aggressive and trolling actions are both illocutionary and perlocutionary. Their illocutionary intention is to harm or coercion, and their

perlocutionary intention is achieved by their illocutionary intention" (Biscetti, 2020, p. 12). Irimba, et. al, (2021) maintain that speech acts theory is exploited to find out how the illocutionary force and the potential perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary speech are leveraged by X users to achieve the desired hateful and offensive speech intention (p. 79). Closely associated with cyber trolling is the use of aggressive speech acts which are generally used to achieve harmful and coercive goals to the targets. They are typically associated with antagonistic and conflictive social interaction but are not always equitable with antagonistic or non-cooperative behavior. When used aggressively, some speech acts are face-threatening acts that cause a threat to the individual's expectations regarding self-image, and thus constitute aggressive and offensive acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In this respect, Koller and Darida (2020) categorized speech acts into four categories based on their prototypical properties of trolling tendencies as follows; (1) *indirect trolled speech acts* (verbal acts that do not directly affect the target, but are mediated); (2) *direct trolled speech acts* (verbal acts that directly hit or afflict the target during the communication); (3) *repressive trolled speech acts* (verbal acts that suppress or intimidate the target); and (4) *alienative trolled speech acts* (verbal acts that intend to alienate or marginalize the targets from their community) (p. 4). Table 3 below presents the main categories of trolled speech acts.

Table 3: Koller and Darida's (2020) taxonomy of trolled speech acts.

| Types of Trolled Speech Acts | Illustration |
|--|---|
| 1. Indirect trolled speech acts | It includes <i>slandering, stigmatizing, and stereotyping.</i> |
| 2. Direct trolled speech acts | It includes <i>insulting, threatening, mocking, accusing, belittling, humiliating and blaming</i> |
| 3. Repressive trolled speech acts | It includes <i>ordering, frightening, scolding, and provoking.</i> |
| 4. Alienative trolled speech acts | It includes <i>silencing, isolating, discrediting and discriminating.</i> |

4. Research Methodology

A purposive sampling technique was used for the collection of data which had the required characteristics relevant to the objectives of the present research. The researcher collected data from X platform between January and April 2024. A total of 600 tweets, from 6 Twitter accounts of Iraqi female MPs representing different political stands and demographics, were considered for analysis. The Iraqi female MPs are largely representatives of the wide spectrum of Iraqi society with reference to ethnicity, religious sects and political associations. More precisely, a randomized sample of 100 tokens of negative and offensive language for each female MPs was analyzed. The negative comments were Iraqis' posts on the X accounts of the selected Iraqi female MPs. To gain insights into the trolled comments against Iraqi female MPs, it has been intentionally selected a time period where no elections have been held in Iraq for collecting the study data to investigate the general attitude towards female MPs on X platform.

Following Irimba, et al., (2021), the comments were examined within their conversational context while paying attention to the specific comments whose apparent communicative content and intent

appeared to hurt, threaten, intimidate, degrade, embarrass others or promote feeling of hatred against Iraqi female MPs based on their political associations. As trolling language can be used by anyone and towards anyone, no special consideration is paid to the trollers' gender, age, ethnicity, etc. due to the difficulty in establishing these factors reliably when collecting data online. It is important to note that comments with negative sentiments are found in the case of all six female MPs. The researcher manually classified comments with negative sentiments into abusive and trolling language.

A mixed qualitative-quantitative approach was used through the process of data analysis in accordance with the purpose of study. The data was electronically retrieved and anonymized in line with the common ethical principles. Moreover, the researchers asked the consent of the six Iraqi female MPs to use the negative comments of their accounts for the purpose of this study only. The data was analyzed within the proposed pragmatics framework identified above. The researchers analyzed comments in their original language (i.e., Iraqi Arabic), then translated them into English. Content analysis method was used to capture trolling messages in the data, and make conclusions obtained through identification and interpretation of data. In labeling and categorization processes, besides the researchers, a linguistics expert was consulted in the identification of trolling comments to establish the reliability of data coding and analysis. The expert was given the definitions, classifications and related examples to help him accurately label and categorize cyber trolls. The findings were similar in most cases with the researchers' identification, and reconciliation was arrived at after discussion.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Forms of Cyber Trolling

As illustrated in Table 4 below, various forms of verbal cyber trolling were found in comments posted by Iraqi trollers with varying proportional preferences. Generally speaking, the overall tokens of verbal cyber trolls in the entire comments by Iraqi users of X platform are (1450/100%). That is, Iraqi female MPs are the target of trolls mostly through *provocation* and *ideological misalignment*. Their preferences for the use of different forms for cyber trolling are arranged in a descending order as follows; *provocation* (370/25.51%), *ideological misalignment* (310/21.37%), *insulting* (255/17.58%), *personal attacks* (234/16.14%), *derailment* (144/9.93%), *hyperbole* (75/ 5.19%), and *pseudo sincerity* (62/4.27%). It is evident that the most recurrent forms of cyber trolls are *provocation* and *ideological misalignment*. The same preference has been reported by Fichman and McClelland's (2020) study. They found that American female politicians were more trolled than male politicians on Twitter mostly through *provocation* and *ideological misalignment*. Such findings support prior research that found females are disproportionately the target of cyber violence (Backe, *et al.*, 2018) in general, and trolling in particular (Herring, *et al.*, 2002). Akhtar and Morrison (2019) found that female British MPs are more likely to face racial and sexual trolls paired with misogynistic comments compared to their male counterparts who are facing more abuse based on their professional duties and actions. Part of this tendency can be attributed to the fact that the political landscape of Iraq is still largely a male-dominated context, and different socio-cultural factors make it difficult for women to actively participate in politics. Chirillo and Roddey (2019) maintain that "challenges remain for Iraqi women attempting to overcome individual, structural and cultural barriers to participate equally and meaningfully in political life. Furthermore, women who decide to engage in political affairs frequently fear for their safety, being subjected to personal attacks and harassment on "their person,

their family, and their honor "(p.16). In some instances, comments are physically and sexually abusive, and women who are politically associated are more targeted than others. Such online trolling can push some women to not say what they truly want since they simply do not want to deal with the consequences, or it can push them to leave the platform (Feiner, 2019).

Table 4: The distribution of main forms of cyber trolling in X platform.

| Forms of Cyber Trolling | X Platform No. & % |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Derailment | 144/9.93% |
| Hyperbole | 75/ 5.19% |
| Ideological misalignment | 310/21.37% |
| Insulting | 255/17.58% |
| Personal attacks | 234/16.14% |
| Provocation | 370/25.51% |
| Pseudo sincerity | 62/4.27% |
| TOTAL | 1450/100% |

In the following paragraphs, a random illustrative sample of comments is presented by citing authentic examples from the study data. Below are examples of the different forms of cyber trolling as used by Iraqi trolls' comments on the Iraqi female MPs' accounts. Example No. 1 illustrates the use of derailment by an Iraqi troll with the female MP. Here, she was posting on how difficult the current political scene in Iraq, the troll derailed from the post content as shown below;

١- قلقانه على رواتبكم وامتيازاتكم خانم!

1- *You are worried about your salaries and privileges, Maam! (Derailment)*

The use of derailment resembles the digression strategy suggested by Hardaker (2013). It functions as "luring others into a discussion, which though not necessarily overtly argumentative, frustrates users with its pointlessness and circularity" (Herring et al., 2002, p. 372). That is, it involves straying from the main purpose of the discussion by introducing irrelevant topics.

Example 2 below illustrates the use of hyperbole. Here, the troll insinuated to the limited political potentials of Iraqi female MP through delimiting her duties to household affairs and nothing more.

٢- اقصى امكانياتك الطبخ! لا تدخلين بالسياسة!

2. *Your maximum potentials are cooking! Stay out of politics! (Hyperbole)*

In example 3, the use of ideological misalignment is employed when the troll strongly denied the Iraqi female MP's comments based on her political association and stand regarding the Iraqi parliamentary election in October 2021.

٣- كلهم كذب! انتي وجماعتك و حزبك انتهت صلاحيتكم وما كاعد تتحملون الخسارة لان ببساطة ما الكم

قاعدة جماهيرية!

3. *It is all a lie! You, your allies and party are outdated and couldn't bear the loss simply because you lack mass base! (Ideological misalignment)*

Within example 4, the use of insulting is employed by the troll toward the Iraqi female MP. Here, the troll used outright insults through describing her as a dumb.

٤- غبیه! طیح الله حظج!

4. *You are such a dumb! God damn you! (Insulting)*

Example 5 below shows the use of the personal attacks. Here, the troller aggressively attacked the Iraqi female MP through direct threats of murdering or assassination. The troller tends to ignore the post content, and instead attacks the target female MP.

٥- مال سحل والله! مو مال احترام!

5. *You need trailed along on the ground! Swear to God! You deserve no respect! (Personal attacks)*

Both forms of insulting and personal attack are directly linked to Hardaker's (2013) aggressing strategy where the troller is "openly and deliberately aggressing the hearer, without any clear justification, and with the aim of antagonising the hearer into retaliating" (p. 77).

In example 6, the troller used provocation. Here, the troller attempted to trigger some reactions from his/her Iraqi female MP through stirring up and provocation. Provocation is "heavily predicated on deceiving the group and covertly manipulating face, ego, sensitivities, guilt, morals, and so forth, usually to trigger emotional responses" (Hardaker, 2013, p. 73);

٦- انتي وينج والسياسة يمعوده!

6. *O You have no qualification of being a politician! (Provocation)*

Example 7 indicates that the troller employed the use of pseudo sincerity as the troller started positively commenting on the performance of the female MP at the beginning, then the troller said something negative about her future political prospect. The pseudo sincerity strategy is clearly linked with Hardaker's (2013) endangerment trolling strategy as it "intentionally disseminates poor advice, giving out incorrect information under the guise of being innocently unaware that the information is wrong, and so on. It is used to masquerade as help or advice while actually causing harm" (p. 75).

٧- انتي اشتغلتي زين بدورتك البرلمانیه بس لا تعتقدین تستمرین نائبة بالبرلمان!

7. *You worked well in your parliamentary session. Don't believe that you are going to be acting as MP anymore! (Pseudo sincerity)*

It is observed that behaviors that are pseudo-sincere and communicate serious opinions and views are deliberately used, and sometimes employ satire to communicate those negative opinions.

5.2 Categories of Impoliteness Strategies

Table 5 presents the statistical distribution of impoliteness strategies associated with the act of cyber trolling against Iraqi female MPs in the entire comments. Overall, the statistical results reveal that Iraqi trollers employ both face aggravating impoliteness strategies in their trolled comments against Iraqi female MPs with a total of (1160/100%). They employ *negative face-oriented strategies* more frequently than *positive face-oriented strategies* with (754/65%) for the former and (406/35%) for the latter. The use of both types of impoliteness strategies by Iraqi cyber trollers can be justified as to control the topic of the interaction and hold the floor to radiate the image of ability to handle every possible attack from their contenders. With the same findings, some research reported that negative face-oriented impoliteness strategies are the most frequent strategies used in political online discourse and discussion than positive face-oriented impoliteness strategies (Wijanarko and Sembodo, 2018). More precisely, within the positive face-oriented strategy, its sub-strategies are sporadically distributed with the prevalence of the category of convey dislike and disagreement

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(140/34.48%) followed by other sub-strategies as follows; *be ironic* (117/28.81%), *belittle or diminish* (97/23.89%) and, *dissociate or distance* (19/4.67%). As for negative face-oriented strategy, the category of *refusing hearer's actions* ranks first with (317/42.04%) followed by other sub-strategies as follows; *challenge* (145/19.23%), *refer to rights* (101/13.39%), *state that communicative act(s) as common* (88/11.67%), *frighten* (44/5.83%), *indebt hearer* (34/4.05%), *deny in-group status* (33/8.12%) and *dare* (25/3.31%). The identified impoliteness strategies involve aggression, abuse and offence, and perform negative attitudes toward the female targets under study. In addition, they are all on-record impoliteness strategies, and no single token of off record strategies has been found in the study data due to the fact that off record strategies make it more difficult for the hearer to feel confident that the speaker is trolling, and to therefore deal with him/her as a troller.

Table 5: The distribution of impoliteness strategies in X platform.

| Impoliteness Super Strategies | X Platform No. & % | Impoliteness Sub-Strategies | X Platform No. & % |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1. Positive face-oriented strategies | 406/35% | a. Convey dislike and disagreement with the hearer's actions, values and opinions. | 140/34.48 % |
| | | b. Be ironic. | 117/28.81 % |
| | | c. Dissociate or distance from hearer. | 19/4.67% |
| | | d. Belittle or diminish the importance of hearer and hearer's actions, values and opinions. | 97/23.89% |
| | | e. Deny in-group status. | 33/8.12% |
| 2. Negative face-oriented strategies | 754/65% | a. State that communicative act(s) as common or shared knowledge. | 88/11.67% |
| | | b. Indebt hearer. | 34/4.05% |
| | | c. Refer to rights, duties and rules not respected, fulfilled or complied with respectively. | 101/13.39 % |
| | | d. Refuse hearer's actions, values and opinions. | 317/42.04 % |
| | | e. Challenge | 145/19.23 % |
| | | f. Frighten | 44/5.83% |
| | | g. Dare | 25/3.31% |
| TOTAL | 1160/100 % | | |

The examples below are a selected illustrative sample of the different impoliteness strategies used by Iraqi online trollers in their comments of Iraqi female MPs. Their comments are predominantly sexist and misogynistic instances of abusive language. Starting with positive face-oriented strategies, example 1 illustrates the use of the strategy of "convey dislike and disagreement with the hearer's

in example 6 below. This strategy is typically used to make fun of someone's opinion or knowledge by repeating something the opponent has said. Here, the troller mocks the female MP's promises of fighting against corruption and enforcing laws, and nothing happens in reality.

6- وين فرض القانون ومحاربة الفساد اللي سبتينه بيه انت وجماعة حزبك!

6- What about what you said and your party about enforcement and corruption combating over and over! (**State that communicative act(s) as common or shared knowledge**)

In example 7, the strategy of indebt hearer is used. Such strategy claims that the opponent is the cause of negative events or actions. It also conveys the opponent's debt of gratitude to the speaker. Here, the troller blames the female MP by stating that she and her political party are responsible for the bad living circumstances in Iraq.

7- انتي وجماعتك خربتوا الاقتصاد والزراعة والتجارة وما بقيتوا شي!

7. *You and your allies are responsible for destroying the economic, agriculture and commerce!* Nothing left! (**Indebt hearer**)

Example 8 shows the use of the strategy of "refer to rights, duties and rules not respected, fulfilled or complied with respectively". It reflects the speaker's expectations that rights, duties and rules are not respected or fulfilled by the opponents. This strategy is the more refined form of the strategy of "belittle or diminish the importance of H and H's things, actions, values and opinions". In this example, the troller attacks the negative face of the female MP simply because she and her political allies failed to fulfill their promises for their folk people.

8- شنو اللي سويتوا من ٢٠٠٣ لمحافظات الجنوب والوسط اشو لا ماي لا كهرباء ولا مدارس!

8. *What have you been doing for the southern and middle governorates since 2003? No water, electricity and schools!* (**Refer to rights, duties and rules not respected, fulfilled or complied with respectively**)

In example 9, the strategy of "refuse hearer's actions, values and opinions" is employed by Iraqi trollers. This strategy seems to be similar to the strategy "convey dislike and disagreement with the hearer's actions, values and opinions". The difference between them is that the latter "does not convey a refusal of imaginary or real imposing offers from the adversary" (Wijanarko and Sembodo, 2018, p. 33). In the example below, the troller accused the female MP of being behind the propaganda of region separation from the federal government of Baghdad. It indicates that the troller plainly refused her opponent's actions and stance.

9- تنسين لو اذكرك منو اللي روج موضوع انفصال الاقليم!

9. *Do you want me to remind you of who was propagating the issues of region separation?* (**Refuse hearer's actions, values and opinions**)

Example 10 illustrates the use of the strategy of challenge. The strategy is not exactly similar to the meaning of the word itself. It addresses imposition "that manifested as demands from the speaker to the hearer that s/he proves her/his claims, implying that s/he could not do so and conveying disagreement with her/him" (Garcia-Pastor, 2008, p.110). Here, the troller challenged the female MP to give up first her financial benefits as an MP before discussing and talking about a fair salary scale and social justice.

10- ليش ما تتنازلين عن امتيازتك كناية اولاً قبل ما تتكلمين عن توحيد سلم الرواتب؟

10. *Why don't you first waive your privileges as a parliament member before talking about a fair unified salary scale?* (**Challenge**)

In example 11, the strategy of frighten is employed. It is used to "instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur" (Culpeper, 2011). In this example, as if the troller threatened the female MP, and expected that her political prospect is going to be on the edge soon.

11. *Your end is soon! (Frighten)*

The last strategy of dare is illustrated in example 12 below. The strategy takes an imperative form where troller tends to force the listener to do or say something in a more direct manner. From the example below, the troller clearly asked the female MP to speak honestly and stop telling lies.

۱۲- كافي كذب!

12. *Stop lying! (Dare)*

Here, the use of dare strategy aims to control the topic of the ongoing interaction. It can be inferred that the use of most impoliteness strategies, whether positive or negative, is intended to control the topic of ongoing discourse and hold the floor.

5.3. Categories of Speech Acts

Speech acts are examined in the context of trolling discourse which is an online verbal exchange characterized by aggressive and impolite language resulting from discrepancy of ideas and opinions between the interactants. The speech acts associated with the verbal trolling on X platform are categorized in Table 6 below. It is evident that the statistical distribution of *direct trolled speech acts* significantly exceeds the distributions of other speech act categories. The statistical distributions of the entire categories of speech acts are arranged, from most frequent to least, as follows; *direct trolled speech acts* (420/42.85%), *repressive trolled speech acts* (290/29.59%), *indirect trolled speech acts* (198/19.28%), and *alienative trolled speech acts* (72/7.34%). Within the main category of *indirect trolled speech acts*, *slandering* (125/63.14%) significantly exceeds *stigmatizing* (73/36.86%). For the main category of *direct trolled speech acts*, *mocking* (107/25.47%) ranks first followed by other speech acts as follows; *belittling* (88/20.95%), *blaming* (65/15.47%), *accusing* (61/14.52%), *threatening* (55/12.22%), and *insulting* (44/10.47%). As to the main category of *repressive trolled speech acts*, *ordering* (133/45.86%) significantly exceeds *provoking* (89/30.68) and *frightening* (68/23.44%). Finally, within the main category of alienative trolled speech acts, *discriminating* (44/61.12%) relatively exceeds *isolating* (28/38.88%).

Table 6: The distribution of the categories of trolled speech acts in X platform.

| Main Categories of Trolled Speech Acts | X Platform No. & % | Sub-Categories of Trolled Speech Acts | X Platform No. & % |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Indirect trolled speech acts | 198/19.28% | a. Slandering | 125/63.14% |
| | | b. Stigmatizing | 73/36.86% |
| 2. Direct trolled speech acts | 420/42.85% | a. Insulting | 44/10.47% |
| | | b. Threatening | 55/12.22% |
| | | c. Blaming | 65/15.47% |
| | | d. Accusing | 61/14.52% |
| | | e. Belittling | 88/20.95% |
| | | f. Mocking | 107/25.47% |
| 3. Repressive trolled speech acts | 290/29.59% | a. Ordering | 133/45.86% |
| | | b. Frightening | 68/23.44% |
| | | c. Provoking | 89/30.68 |
| 4. Alienative trolled speech acts | 72/7.34% | a. Isolating | 28/38.88% |
| | | b. Discriminating | 44/61.12% |
| TOTAL | 980/100% | | |

6. Hhhhhhhhaaaaaaaa! You are so smart! (*Mocking*)

In example 7, the troller uses the speech act of provoking. The troller is trying intentionally to make the Iraqi female MP [feels annoyed](#), enraged, and exasperated;

٧- حالج حال باقي الحرامية!

7. You are just like other thieves. (*Provoking*)

Example 8 shows the use of the speech act of ordering. Here, the troller tends to exercise his assumed power over the female MP. The ordering act is exclusively in the interest of the troller, and the expected reaction is obedience on the part of the female MP;

٨- افتحي ملفات الفساد مال جماعتك!

8. Open the corruption files of your party members/allies! (*Ordering*)

Example 9 reveals the use of the act of discrimination. Here, the troller tends to make a distinction of gender. Based on her sex, the troller is insinuating that the trolled female MP is not capable of being a politician, and her sole role is house holding. It is a discriminatory discourse against Iraqi female MPs via stating that they are not worthy to lead and take a political role in the Iraqi political scene in comparison to male MPs;

غير وكت انتن تحكمن والمفروض انتي تبقين بالبيت! ٩-

9. The irony of fate is you are ruling. You are supposed to stay at your home. (*Discriminating*)

The analysis so far points out the deliberate use of pejorative and aggressive discourse as a constitutive part of trolling speech acts which aggravate, in turn, their injurious perlocutionary impact on Iraqi female MPs. The illocutionary force of trolled speech acts used are intended to yield the perlocutionary effect of provoking the feelings of fear and anxiety on the part of the Iraqi female MPs. Such trolling behaviors are face-threatening acts that are produced on purpose. In fact, when the intention is disqualifying the female MPs, trolling seems to be an effective strategy.

6. Conclusions

So far, the present research examined the pragmatic resources of trolling behaviors employed by Iraqi online users against Iraqi female MPs on X platform. Cyber trolling is a deliberate verbal misbehavior that disrupts online communication and interactions. The research showed that Iraqi online users employed different forms for cyber trolling including *provocation*, *ideological misalignment*, *insulting*, *personal attacks*, *derailment*, *hyperbole*, and *pseudo sincerity*. Of which, *provocation* and *ideological misalignment* are the most frequently forms used. As far impoliteness strategies associated with trolling behaviors are concerned, Iraqi online users employed *negative face-oriented strategies* more frequently than *positive face-oriented ones*. As for speech acts used, Iraqi online users employed four main categories of trolled speech acts including; *direct trolled speech acts*, *repressive trolled speech acts*, *indirect trolled speech acts*, and *alienative trolled speech acts*. More precisely, direct trolled speech acts are the most frequent ones used by Iraqi online users when trolling Iraqi female MPs. Pragmatic choices of speech acts and impoliteness strategies serve altogether the aggressive ideology by positioning Iraqi female MPs as deserving victims of the trolling behaviors.

It has been noticed that the kind of cyber trolling examined here can be considered as a form of misogyny used for the perpetuation of patriarchal hierarchy in Iraqi society. It has substantiated a

direct link between online verbal harassment and the gendered nature of digital contexts constituting a form of hate speech. Iraqi female MPs were more likely to be the target of online trolling. They were more likely experiencing abusive and misogynistic comments, and this might lead them to be concerned for their personal safety and reputation. Such online act might push some Iraqi female MPs to leave the platform or not say what they truly want because they simply do not want to deal with the consequences. The anonymity of social media encourages Iraqi online users to post and comment threads which are the grounds for personal attacks, conflictive stands and aggressive language. That is, Iraqi online users share their opinions in sarcastic, ironic and antagonistic way which turns the ongoing discourse into aggressive trolling behaviors through the use of violent speech acts, impoliteness and disruption.

Research findings speak to the social media users, policy makers and law enforcers to be mindful of how harmless tokens of aggressive online content and discourse could yield hate speech often with a buildup effect on the psychological states and mental health of online audience. Efforts of different bodies can be made to educate online users about trolling, and to respect the privacy of online audience when using online communication platforms via maintaining communication ethics and avoiding aggressive content and discourse.

Acknowledgement

This research is generously supported by the University College London and the Nahrein Network for which the author is indebted. The author gratefully acknowledges their assistance and support for Iraqi scholars and researchers.

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"أنت غيبةٌ للغاية!" متصیّدو السياسة من النائبات العراقيات على منصة "إكس"
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ملخص

مع الانتشار غير المنضبط للوصول إلى وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في جميع أنحاء العالم، ولدت الإنترنت الظاهرة المستمرة للتنمر الإلكتروني. غالبًا ما يُميز التنمر الإلكتروني بالسلوكيات العدوانية التي لها آثار سلبية على التواصل عبر الإنترنت. بحثت هذه الدراسة الموارد والاختيارات البراغمية لسلوك التنمر المستخدم من قبل المستخدمين العراقيين ضد عضوات البرلمان العراقيات على منصة X. لتحقيق أهداف البحث، تم استخدام تقنية أخذ العينات القصدية لجمع البيانات. تم جمع البيانات من حسابات منصة X لستة من عضوات البرلمان العراقيات اللواتي يمثلن مواقف سياسية وسكانية مختلفة. تضمن التحليل تحديد وتصنيف وحصص رموز أشكال التنمر، واستراتيجيات عدم الغضب، وأفعال الخطاب المتنمر عبر مجموعات البيانات من منصة X. كشف التحليل أن المستخدمين العراقيين لمنصة X يستخدمون الاستفزاز وعدم التوافق الأيديولوجي كأكثر أشكال التنمر الإلكتروني تكرارًا. مع البرلمانيات العراقيات. أما بالنسبة لاستراتيجيات القلة في الأدب، فإن المستخدمين العراقيين يستخدمون استراتيجيات موجهة نحو الوجه السلبي بشكل أكثر تكرارًا من الاستراتيجيات الموجهة نحو الوجه الإيجابي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن أفعال الكلام المباشرة المتعمدة التي يستخدمها المستخدمون العراقيون عند التنمر على البرلمانيات العراقيات. أخيرًا، استنادًا إلى نتائج البحث، يتم عرض عدد من الاستنتاجات والتداعيات والتوصيات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: المتنمرون السياسيون، أفعال الكلام، القلة في الأدب، منصة X، البرلمانيات العراقيات.

"تو دامايكي نه فره تيت!" ترؤله سياسييه كاني ژناني په رله مانتاري عيراق له سه ر پلاتفورمي ئيكس

پروفيسور ناصر عه بدولعه زيز نه لزوبه يدي (دكتورا) به شي ئينگليزي، فاكه لتي ئاداب، زانكوي به غداد.
 پروفيسوري ياريددهر ته هاني عه واد جاسم (ماستر) به شي عه ربه ي، كوليژي زانسته ئيسلامييه كان، زانكوي به غدا.

له گه ل گه شه ي بيسنووري ده ستگه يشتن به توره كومه لايه تيه كان له سه رانسه ري جيهاندا، ئينته رني ت ديارده ي به رده وامي ترؤلينگ نه ليكترؤني سه ريه له داوه. ترؤلينگ نه ليكترؤني زورچار به هه لسوكه وتي توندوتيزي ده ناسرئته وه كه كاريگه ري نه ريئي له سه ر په يوه ندي ئونلاين هه به. نه م توپژينه وه به سه رچاوه پراگماتيكي وه هه لپژارده كاني ره فتاري ترؤلينگ له لايه ن به كاره ينه راني عيراق له دژي نه نداماني په رله ماني ئافره تي عيراق له سه ر پلاتفورمي X تاقى كردوو ه ته وه. بو گه يشتن به ئامانجه كاني توپژينه وه كه، ته كنيكي نمونه ي مه به سستار بو كوكردنه وه ي داتا به كاره ينرا. داتاكان له نه كاوتني پلاتفورمي ئيكس كوكراونه ته وه كه شه ش ئافره تي په رله مانتاري عيراقى نوينه رايه تي بيروبوچووني سياسي و ديمؤگرافياي جياواز ده كن. شيكردنه وه كه بريتييه له ناسينه وه، پوليئن كردن و ژماردني نمونه ي راسته قينه ي فورمه كاني ترؤلينگ، ستراتيجه كاني بئ نه دهب و كرداره كاني قسه كردني ترؤلينگ له هه موو كومه له داتاكانى پلاتفورمي X. توپژينه وه كه ده ريخستوو به كاره ينه راني عيراقى پلاتفورمي ئيكس زياتر ئيستيفزاز و ناهاوسه نكي ئايدؤلؤزي وه ك شيوازيكي ترؤلكردني نه ليكترؤني به كارده هينن. له گه ل ئافره تي په رله مانتاري عيراقى له رووي ستراتيجه ي بئ نه دهبه وه، به كاره ينه راني عيراقى زياتر ستراتيجه ي نه ريئي ده موچاو به كارده هينن وه كه له ستراتيجه ي پوزه تيف. سه ره راي نه وه ش، به كاره ينه راني عيراقى به شيويه به كي گشتي قسه ي ترؤلينگ به كارده هينرين كاتيكي ژناني په رله مانتاري عيراقى ده كه نه ئامانج. له كوتاييدا، به پشت به ستن به نه نجامه كاني توپژينه وه كه، چه ندين ده رنه نجام، ده رنه نجام، و راسپارده ييشكه ش كراون.

وشه سه ره كيه كان: ترؤلي سياسي، قسه كردن، بئ نه دهب، پلاتفورمي ئيكس، په رله مانتاري ئافره تي عيراقى.