
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mock Impoliteness in Online Courses: A Study of Liu Xiaoyan's PEE Classes

Xu Hanyu

Master Degree Candidate, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

Corresponding Author: Xu Hanyu, **E-mail:** 2631555420@qq.com

| ABSTRACT

Mock impoliteness known as banter refers to the offensive way of being friendly. Many researches have examined mock impoliteness in sitcoms, talk shows and social platforms such as Wechat and Weibo, as well as in live streaming commerce. However, its application in educational settings remains underexplored. Drawing on Liu Xiaoyan's Postgraduate Entrance Examination (PEE) online courses, this study investigates three strategies in using mock impoliteness: (1) explaining key points, (2) motivating students and (3) engaging in self-deprecation. Through qualitative analysis, the findings demonstrate effective functions of mock impoliteness in alleviating tension and stimulating motivation, thereby enriching our understanding of strategic teacher discourse in digital environments, which may provide pedagogical implications.

| KEYWORDS

Mock Impoliteness, Online Courses, Teacher Discourse

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

| ACCEPTED: 01 February 2026

PUBLISHED: 19 March 2026

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2026.9.3.13

1. Introduction

The strategic use of mock impoliteness has drawn increasing attention in pragmatics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. Researches have demonstrated that mock impoliteness can enhance and foster interpersonal rapport, as well as convey significant messages. (e.g., Culpeper, 2011; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Chen, 2019). Nowadays, teachers are no longer confined to traditional authoritative teaching style. They tend to adopt flexible strategies in teaching, especially online courses, to reduce the distance with students and facilitate a relaxed learning atmosphere. However, most existing researches focused on the use of mock impoliteness in daily conversation, business interaction and media program. Few studies have paid attention to its use in educational settings.

Mock impoliteness in online courses refers to the communicative behavior which is superficially offensive but friendly in the interaction between teachers and students. It is often affiliated with multimodal cues such as emotion, intonation, gesture and so on. Liu Xiaoyan's online courses, especially her Postgraduate Entrance Examination (PEE) courses are typical, which attract a great number of learners. They are well-known for her playful teasing and jocular abuse. Such utterances are disseminated across major platforms such as Bilibili, REDnote, Weibo and are frequently utilized in students' daily communication.

Recently, most studies of online courses have focused on the characteristics of instructional language, such as speaking speed, vocabulary, sentence pattern, interactional pattern and technical improvement. Although some studies have touched upon humor strategies in teaching, mock impoliteness has rarely been explored as such a strategy.

In order to fill this gap, this study analyzed the use of mock impoliteness in Liu's PEE online courses based on transcribed video materials. It aims to address two research questions:

- (1) What forms of mock impoliteness are taken in Liu Xiaoyan's PEE class?
- (2) What functions does mock impoliteness serve in educational settings?

Copyright: © 2026 the Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Published by Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development, London, United Kingdom.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews prior research on mock impoliteness and online courses. Section 3 describes the data and analytical procedures. Section 4 examines three forms of mock impoliteness and their pedagogical functions. Section 5 discusses limitations and implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on mock impoliteness

Research on mock impoliteness has relatively mature theoretical foundation. Leech's (1983) banter principle first introduced mock impoliteness as an offensive way of being friendly and showing solidarity. He argues that banter can be used to establish and maintain social intimacy. Brown and Levinson (1987) demonstrates that insults or jokes may convey positive sentiment. In addition, they argues that when insulting a person, the audience may view it as strengthening intimacy, while the addressee who may be wounded is forced to accept it. Slugoski and Turnbull's (1988) investigates that the interpretation of insults is associated with social distance and affection. Subjects tends to regard insults as banter in conditions of high social distance or high degree of fondness. Culpeper (1996) defines it as "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence". He also argues that Leech neglects to specify the contexts in which the impoliteness is known to be untrue. Later, Culpeper (2011) explores impoliteness focusing on its contextual interpretation. He goes on to talk about multiple functions of mock impoliteness, that is, constructing relationship and identity, as well as being a form of exploitative humor. Haugh and Bousfield (2012) points out the problem of defining mock impoliteness with reference to a speaker's non-offensive intention. They stresses the definition of mock impoliteness in interaction and believed that it constitutes an independent social evaluation. Although jocular mockery and abuse can strengthen friendship, they still face the risk of operational failure.

Recent research highlights the role of mixed messages in mock impoliteness. Culpeper (2017) defines them as "mismatching interpersonal messages in interaction that are incongruous on at least one level of interpretation". Chen (2019) investigates "patch-up" jocular abuse in five popular Chinese novels, analyzing the mixed messages which help to do various kinds of relational work simultaneously. It finds that the use of the jocular abuse may contribute to characterisation and plot development. Liu and Yang (2025) explores ostensible offence in the hybrid institutional context of state-affiliated live streaming commerce in China, and identifies four types of mixed messages. The findings reveal that ostensible offence effectively achieves three institutional functions—enhancing credibility, sustaining engagement, and supporting cultural messaging, providing empirical support and theoretical interpretation for the strategic use of mock impoliteness in digital institutional discourse.

In addition to study mixed messages, Liu (2023) aims to investigate the third-party participants' metapragmatic evaluation in Danmaku comments in a Chinese online talk show *Roast!* The study shows that funniness and impoliteness are the most significant factors for Danmaku users' qualitative evaluations.

2.2 Research on online courses

With the development of digital technology in the field of education, online courses have become a significant part of the global education system. Research on their interactive models, discourse features and teaching effects has gotten increasing attention.

Early studies generally focused on normative features of teaching language, such as speaking rate, vocabulary difficulty, sentence structure, interaction patterns, and technological improvement (Li & Zhao, 2015; Liang, 2020; Ye, 2022). These studies regarded teaching language as the tool to transmit knowledge, emphasizing clarity and conciseness in teaching, while ignored the value of non-normative pragmatic features.

Some studies have already explored humor in teacher discourse in traditional classes. However, compared with it, the application of mock impoliteness in online courses is more compatible. On the one hand, it helps reduce the sense of distance created by the screen. On the other hand, its superficial offence can alleviate the tension in learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

In December 2024, Liu Xiaoyan attracted the attention of numerous college students due to her distinctive teaching style. Netizens have also created a large number of emojis, which turns her into an online focus. The exposure during this period significantly promoted the spread and popularity of her online courses.

Therefore, the primary data consists of Liu Xiaoyan's PEE online courses in 2025, covering six modules of vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, translation, cloze and new question type and the total duration is 60 hours. The other part of the data comes from Bilibili, one of China's most influential video-sharing platforms for young learners. Three videos are selected according to their more than 10 million views. These videos are transcribed and constitute a corpus.

3.2 Analytical procedures

The analytical procedures include four steps.

First, identification of surface impoliteness. Utterances that are superficially offensive are screened, including but not limited to direct criticism, derogatory directives, exaggerated insults.

Second, contextual incongruity analysis. Following Culpeper's (2017) notion of "mismatching interpersonal messages", an utterance was coded as mock impoliteness only when accompanied by clear multimodal and non-serious signals of humor or playfulness. These cues include the teacher's exaggerated tones, rich facial expressions, gestures and so on. These cues collaboratively help hearers to interpret within a non-serious frame.

Third, the analysis should examine whether the utterance serves teaching content and goals. For example, when teaching words, teachers may use seemingly offensive language to explain, with the aim of making it easier for students to remember these words. The interaction of the utterance to the immediate teaching context is key to interpreting it as "strategic" rather than "malicious".

Finally, interactional achievement verification. Following Haugh and Bousfield (2012), mock impoliteness is not solely determined by speaker intention but is co-constructed in interaction. It is crucial to observe students' responses in Danmaku comments, which can be used to confirm whether an utterance is a true mock impoliteness.

Drawing on the above framework, 127 typical utterances are selected. They can be divided into three types of explaining key points, motivating students and engaging in self-deprecation.

4. Analysis

Three distinct patterns of using mock impoliteness in educational settings are demonstrated in this section.

4.1 Mock impoliteness in explaining key points

In Liu Xiaoyan's PEE online courses, the use of mock impoliteness in explaining key points functions as a strategic pedagogical mechanism, which can be realized in two ways: vulgar homophonic association and negative personal judgment.

4.1.1 Vulgar Homophonic Association

When explaining the words, Liu Xiaoyan deliberately linked the pronunciation and meaning of the words with offensive or insulting expressions.

Excerpt (1) :

Splash, 你看 splash ——
死不拉屎, 已经两星期没拉屎了 · 你要干嘛去? 笑什么 · 不准笑 · 买点药 · 买点药吃 · 吃完以后 · 哇塞, 瞬间通畅飞溅 · 不解释了 · 听懂了对吧? splash, 飞溅 ·

Splash, look at splash, sound like "si bu la shi". You're constipated and you haven't had a bowel movement for two weeks. What are you going to do? Stop laughing. Go buy some medicine. After taking it, wow, suddenly everything flows smoothly and splashes out. No need to explain further. Got it, right? Splash means *fēijiàn*.

There are some responses typed on Danmaku:

"这辈子都忘不了 splash 了" (I'll never forget splash in my lifetime.)

"一边笑一边记" (I'm laughing while memorizing.)

"这词我能记十年 · 笑死了" (I'll remember this word for ten years.)

Liu uses impolite description to explain the word "splash". Under normal circumstances, students should feel repulsed. However, they did not hate such expressions and actually they typed "ha ha ha" and showed funny expressions. Through linking unfamiliar vocabulary to insults in the learners' native language, students can easily remember it and improve long-term memory about it.

Excerpt (2) :

Veto, 它的发音那么像谁? 畏头畏尾·听过吗? 考个研究生·那考不上怎么办? 不考研·哎呀·那以后找不到好工作怎么办? 做个事儿畏头畏尾的。不说了·真是觉得很恶心。

Doesn't the pronunciation of veto sound like "wei tou wei wei"? What if I don't pass the postgraduate entrance exam? If not taking it, how can I find a good job in the future? You are always timid and hesitant when doing something. Let's stop here. I really find this attitude irritating.

There are some responses typed on Danmaku:

“再也不敢畏头畏尾了” (I'll never dare to be timid again.)

“这词绝了” (This word is amazing.)

“刘老师骂醒我” (Teacher Liu woke me up.)

Although the words used by Liu are impolite, the comments demonstrate a deeper level of engagement. It not only helps the students learn the word's meaning but also has an influence on their attitudes and behaviors.

4.1.2 Negative Personal Judgment

When explaining exam-taking and learning skills, Liu Xiaoyan deliberately used abusive expressions.

Excerpt (1) :

0.5分就是把句子拆成四坨。上次,有同学说:“刘老师,是不是拿个尺子量一量,这句话是28厘米,然后除以4?”你个二愣子! 同学们·如果正好拆到reaction中间怎么办?

0.5 point means we need to split the sentence into four parts. Last time, a student asked me, "Mr. Liu, shouldn't we measure it with a ruler first? If this sentence is 28 centimeters long, then we should divide it by 4, right?" You idiot! What if we split it right in the middle of "reaction"?

There are some responses typed on Danmaku:

“这例子太形象了” (This example is so vivid.)

“记住了·不能量句子” (Got it, don't measure sentences.)

“确实会犯这种错哈哈哈哈” (I actually make this mistake.)

In this sentence, although there exists the impolite expression “你个二愣子”, Liu is actually emphasizing the exam skills. The comments reveal that students can distinguish between the surface impoliteness and its underlying pedagogical purpose.

Excerpt (2) :

一定不要死记硬背。哇塞,你又做那开始背着了,你叫我恶心死了! 同学们·咱们白讲了这过程。

Don't try to memorize by rote. God, you've started reciting again. You're making me sick. The explanation of this problem-solving process can be considered a waste of time.

There are some responses typed on Danmaku:

“马上停止死记硬背” (I will stop rote learning right now.)

“扎心了” (Heartache.)

Liu Xiaoyan's tone was lowered and she frequently frowned. However, students' responses did not show any sign of sadness and anger. Such dramatic emotional impact instantly reduces the distance of the online classroom, effectively capturing and sustaining student attention to effective learning methods and exceptional cases in exam.

4.2 Mock impoliteness in motivating students

In Liu Xiaoyan's PEE online courses, the use of mock impoliteness in motivating students can be viewed as the strategy to apply pressure, stimulate motivation and establish emotional resonance. It can be realized in two ways: cursing directives and derogatory analogies.

4.2.1 Cursing directives

Liu Xiaoyan frequently used the hypothetical sentence structure to exaggeratedly link the students' behaviors such as not opening mouth and reading to the failure of the postgraduate entrance exam.

Excerpt (1):

张嘴·不张嘴咒你研究生考不上。

Open your mouth. If you don't do that, I will curse you for failing the postgraduate entrance exam.

Excerpt (2):

谁要是不读·祝他总分考了430,英语就差一分达不到国家线。

If anyone doesn't read it, I wish he could get a total score of 430. But his English score is one point short, failing to meet the national passing standard.

There are some responses typed on Danmaku:

“吓死我了,马上张嘴”(That really scared me. I will read right now.)

“这诅咒太狠了”(This curse is too harsh.)

“刘老师为了让我们张嘴什么都说得出来”(Teacher Liu will say anything to urge us to open our mouths and read.)

It seems to be a malicious “curse”, but its essence is to force students to establish a sense of urgency by magnifying the cost of inaction, which can make the students overcome inertia.

4.2.2 Derogatory Analogies

Liu often used animal or personified images with extremely negative and insulting connotations to describe or satirize students' laziness or lack of concentration in order to change their behaviors.

Excerpt (1):

你可以像猪一样的活着·你永远不会像猪一样的快乐。

You can live like a pig, but you will never be as happy as a pig.

Excerpt (2):

回家吧好不好,回家吧,你比较适合做一摊狗屎·比较适合做一头猪·就在家里边。你见过猪吗·就猪怎么活你就怎么活呀。

Why don't you just go home? Go back. You're more suited to being a pile of dog shit, more suited to being a pig—just stay at home. Have you ever seen a pig? Live just as pigs do.

In response to such metaphor, Danmaku comments include:

“猪的快乐我确实学不来”(The joy of a pig is something I simply can't grasp.)

“这比喻绝了,再也不敢懒了”(This analogy is amazing, I'll never dare to be lazy again.)

“被骂醒了,马上学习”(I am woken up by such scolding and go to study right now.)

“这句话我能记一辈子” (I'll always remember this sentence.)

The teacher is not insulting students by comparing them to negative states such as “pigs” and “dog shit”, but rather launching a warning to stimulate students to reconfirm their identity as “active learners”.

4.3 Mock impoliteness in engaging in self-deprecation

Different from the above usage, in self-deprecation, Liu Xiaoyan directs the spearhead of mock impoliteness at herself. There are two types: self-deprecation on appearance and self-deprecation on intelligence.

4.3.1 Self-deprecation on appearance

Excerpt (1) :

比如我说，你看你长得丑的刘晓艳，屁股大的恶心的，哪像个老师，哪个老师屁股有你大。

For instance, I might say, “You are so ugly. Your ass is so big that it’s disgusting. How could you possibly be a teacher? No teacher has an ass as big as yours.”

This is the context where Liu wanted to tell the students not to be distracted by others’ judgments. Through mocking her own appearance, Liu demonstrated her strong psychological traits. This is not a true self-deprecation. In contrast, the comments such as “被刘老师圈粉了” (I become a fan of Teacher Liu), and “这心态绝了” (This mentality is amazing) demonstrate that it is a behavior that guides students to focus on their own learning and avoid external distractions.

4.3.2 Self-deprecation on intelligence

Excerpt (2) :

我不知道。就我这一个傻文科生，我怎么会知道什么叫气味电视机呢？

I don’t know. As for me, a silly liberal arts student, how could I possibly know what a “smell TV” is?

This is the context where Liu was teaching how to translate proper nouns. When a teacher acknowledges that she is a “silly liberal arts student”, she is actually reducing her omniscient image. For example, there is a significant comment on Danmaku: “原来老师也不知道，那我就放心了” (The teacher doesn’t know either. I feel relieved now). This greatly alleviates the anxiety of students who are under high-pressure exams and forced to prevent any mistakes. It helps to establish emotional resonance with students and inspire them to do better.

4.4 Results

Based on the data analysis, this study proposes three strategy for applying mock impoliteness in educational settings. First, teachers can appropriately use exaggerated or vulgar associations to create strong mnemonic anchors, when explaining complex or abstract concepts. Second, teachers can strategically use cursing directives and derogatory analogies to create a tense atmosphere, making students realize their negative states and change their behaviors. Third, teachers can appropriately engage in self-mockery, which can help to reduce their traditional authority and establish emotional resonance. Such a relaxed atmosphere might reduce students’ stress and enhance their confidence in learning.

5. Conclusion

This study examined mock impoliteness in Liu Xiaoyan’s PEE online courses, analyzing what forms of mock impoliteness are taken and what functions does mock impoliteness serve in educational settings.

Through analyzing the data, three forms of using mock impoliteness in educational settings are identified: explaining key points, motivating students and engaging in self-deprecation. Drawing on the incongruity between the teacher’s offensive utterances and students’ positive responses on Danmaku, the findings illustrate that mock impoliteness serves multiple functions in teaching such as reinforcing memory, stimulating motivation, alleviating tension and so on. This extends the application of mock impoliteness theory to educational contexts, revealing its potential in digital teaching.

There are some limitations of this study. First, this study mainly focuses on 2025 PEE classes. It indicates that the data is limited. In the future, this study needs to analyze the previous PEE online courses and make a comparison among them. Second, this study mostly concentrates on the context of postgraduate English entrance exam. Future research could compare how

teachers employ mock impoliteness across various subjects and cultural backgrounds, as well as exploring its long-term impact on students' academic achievement.

Statements and Declarations

This research received no external funding. And the authors declare no conflict of interest.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have helped me during the completion of this paper.

First and foremost, my deepest appreciation goes to professor Zhu, for his valuable guidance and continuous encouragement. His rigorous academic attitude and profound professional knowledge have greatly inspired me and benefited me deeply.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support, understanding and encouragement, which gave me the strength to overcome difficulties during my study.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the reviewers and editors for their constructive comments and suggestions, which helped to improve the quality of this paper significantly.

References

- [1] Brown, P., & Levinson, S., (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in linguistic usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(3), 349-367.
- [3] Culpeper, J., (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Culpeper, J., Haugh, M., & Kádár, D. Z. (Eds.). (2017). *The Palgrave handbook of linguistic (im) politeness* (pp. 323-355). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [5] Chen, X., (2019). "You're a nuisance!": "Patch-up" jocular abuse in Chinese fiction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 139, 52-63.
- [6] Haugh, M., Bousfield, D., (2012). Mock impoliteness, jocular mockery and jocular abuse in Australian and British English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44, 1099-1114.
- [7] Leech, G., (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. Longman.
- [8] Liu, S. (2023). You're so mean but I like it—Metapragmatic evaluation of mock impoliteness in Danmaku comments. *Discourse, Context and Media*, 53, 100700.
- [9] Liu, P., & Yang, L. (2025). "Do you have a conscience?": Ostensible offence in hybrid interactions of live streaming commerce. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 247, 57-77.
- [10] Slugoski, B. R., & Turnbull, W. (1988). Cruel to be kind and kind to be cruel: Sarcasm, banter and social relations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 7(2), 101-121.
- [11] 李晔, 赵冬梅. (2015). 《大学英语》微课程教师话语调查及其教学效用分析——以第一届中国外语微课大赛获奖作品为样本. *外语电化教学*, (05), 15-20.
- [12] 梁宇彤. (2020). 首届研究生汉语教学微课大赛获奖作品中的教师话语分析(硕士学位论文). 中央民族大学, 中国.
- [13] 叶子青. (2022). 2018-2020年研究生汉语教学微课大赛获奖作品中的教师话语分析及教学启示(硕士学位论文). 长安大学, 中国.
- [14] 张国, 闫赛雪. (2020). 虚假不礼貌中玩笑式侮辱研究——以《破产姐妹》中的会话为例. *中国海洋大学学报(社会科学版)*, 1, 113-121.
- [15] 赵林森. (2020). 汉语网络交际中的虚假不礼貌与互怼仪式共建 (英文). *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 43(01), 45-63+126.
- [16] 周树江, 戚飞. (2019). 机构性网络虚假礼貌运行机制及其语用效果研究——以网络问政栏目“网上民声”为例. *西安外国语大学学报*, (3), 28-33.