

## **Impoliteness Strategies Used by the Employees of Karen's Diner in Serving Their Customers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research paper focuses on the impoliteness strategies employed by the employees of Karen's Diner in serving their customers. Through this research, I would like to know how Karen's Diner's employees apply impoliteness as a strategy in communicating with their customers and why they use the impoliteness strategies. To support this research, I use the theory of impoliteness by Jonathan Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011). In this study, I discovered that Karen's Diner employees apply impoliteness as several strategies, including by rejecting customers, by ordering customers, by warning customers, and by insulting customers. In addition, I also discovered that the employees of Karen's diner use the four impoliteness strategies to entertain their customers that can be seen from the positive reactions given by customers to the impoliteness treatments from the employees such as saying that they enjoy being at Karen's Diner, they recommend other people to visit Karen's Diner, and they will return to Karen's Diner.

**Keywords:** impoliteness; impoliteness strategies; karen's diner

### **INTRODUCTION**

Restaurant is a commercially operated food industry company that provides tangible products in the form of food and beverages, and also provides services in the form of food serving (Marsum, 2005). In addition, restaurants are also engaged in the hospitality industry such as hotels and tourism, which prioritize the best service to their customers (Kandampully et al., 2001). In other words, the quality of service provided to customers is equally crucial as the quality of the meal provided. To maintain good restaurant service quality, employees need to be friendly and have a good attitude in serving their customers. That way, employees must apply politeness in communicating with customers so that the quality of restaurant service is maintained properly.

Since it is carried out by humans, it is typical for restaurant employees to mess up in providing service, such as dropping the customer's meal or uttering impolite words to customers. However, there is a restaurant named Karen's Diner whose employees intentionally treat their customers in an impolite manner. Karen's Diner is a 1950's-US-Style burger restaurant which was first established in October 2021 in Sydney, Australia. This restaurant has a concept that deviates from the restaurant in general. Usually restaurant employees provide the best service to customers, but in this restaurant, employees intentionally provide terrible service to customers. Even so, this restaurant promises delicious food according to their motto "Great Food, Terrible Service".

This restaurant's concept of bad service is based on the name "Karen" in "Karen's Diner". Karen is a pejorative slang for middle-aged white women who love to cause a scene and use their white privilege to demand their own way (Greenspan, 2020). Karen's presence can be found in public places such as in restaurants, where they will ask for the manager at the slightest inconvenience. Since Karen's Diner's employees are intentionally being impolite, they use impoliteness as their strategy in serving the customers. The writer is interested in using Karen's

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Diner as a research object because it is the first restaurant with an unusual concept, and because its employees intentionally use impoliteness as a strategy in communicating with the customers.

## ANALYSIS

To find out how the employees of Karen's Diner apply impoliteness as a strategy in serving their customers and why they apply the strategies, I use the theory of impoliteness strategies by Jonathan Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011)

### **How the Impoliteness are Used by the Employees of Karen's Diner**

Based on the data that has been collected, the writer found that the employees of Karen's Diner use impoliteness in serving their customers by applying several strategies, such as impoliteness by rejecting customers, impoliteness by ordering customers, impoliteness by warning customers, and impoliteness by insulting customers.

#### **1. By Rejecting Customers**

From the many TikTok videos uploaded by the customers of Karen's Diner, the writer found that there are several videos showing how the employees of Karen's Diner apply impoliteness by rejecting their customers. Rejecting customers means employees refusing to do what the customers ask. Two of which is the employee's utterance seen in the TikTok video uploaded by @vivifean and @giobrogenie. Below is the conversation between the employees and the account owners.

TikTok Account: @giobrogenie

Customer: Please, can I have a Coca-cola?

Employee: **No.**

TikTok Account: @vivifean

Customer: I want more sauce.

Employee: **No, you don't. You can go with that.**

The first customer @giobrogenie ordered a coca cola from an employee, but the employee rejected the request by simply saying "no". Then, the other customer @vivifean asked an employee for additional sauce, but the employee refused to give it and said the customer had enough sauce. Both the employees' utterances are included in the bald on record impoliteness since the rejection of the customers' request are conveyed in a concise, clear, and unambiguous manner. Bald on record impoliteness is deployed where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer in a direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way (Culpeper, 1996). The utterances were very clear to show the two customers that the employees refused to take an order for a coca-cola for one customer, and refused to provide additional sauce for the other customer. That way, customers can understand if their order was clearly rejected, and they can call another employee to order coca-cola and ask for additional sauce. To sum up, the employees of Karen's Diner apply the impoliteness strategy by rejecting customer requests.

#### **2. By Ordering Customers**

In addition to applying impoliteness by refusing customers, the writer found that there are several videos that show how Karen's Diner employees behave impolitely by ordering their customers. Ordering customers means the employees dare to command their customers to do something. The two examples below are Karen's Diner's employees ordering their customers to do something.



@bee.wac

Employee: **Grab them.**

Customer: Thank you.

In the figure above, a customer with a TikTok account @bee.wac looked like she wanted to take a drink that was in the hand of an employee. The employee told the customer to take the drink out of his hand, rather than placing it directly on the table. Serving food or drinks directly to the table is an employee's job, but this employee did not do his job and instead ordered the customer to take it herself. Moreover, this action is included in negative impoliteness since in this case the employee attacked the customer's negative face, namely to have freedom in action. Negative impoliteness is the use of strategies designed to attack the addressee's negative face wants (Culpeper, 2005). By telling the customer to take her own drink, the employee has limited or disturbed the customer's freedom of action, since the customer is under the employee's orders.



@heyfionawang

Employee: Can you let us out?

Customer: **Open the door yourself.**

In the second figure above, the account owner @heyfionawang is seen struggling to open the restaurant door. She had previously asked the employee there to open the door and let her and her father go. However, the employee refused by telling the customer to open it herself. Accompanying customers to enter and leave the restaurant is the employee's responsibility, yet the employees there tell their customer to open the door herself, especially the door is difficult to open. In addition, this action included negative impoliteness since the employee attacked the customer's negative face wants, namely to have freedom of action. Just like the previous customer, this action included negative impoliteness because the employee told the customer to open the door herself, meaning that the employee limited her freedom to act as a customer for asking to be served. To sum up, the employees of Karen's Diner apply the impoliteness strategy by ordering the customers to do what employees should do.

### 3. By Warning Customers

Besides the impoliteness strategies by rejecting and ordering customers, the writer also finds videos showing that the employees of Karen's Diner also implement an impoliteness strategy by warning their customers. Warning here means Karen's Diner employees warn their customers not to ask for something. Usually restaurant employees will let customers ask for anything, as long as the request is reasonable and does not violate anything. However, the employees there boldly warn customers not to ask for something, even if the request is supposed to be provided by the employees. Below are the two examples showing employees warning customers not to ask for something.

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TikTok Account: @butteryslippers  
 Employee: Who the fuck asked for tomato sauce?  
 Customer: Me.  
 Employee: You dumb bitch. **Do not ask for any more sauce.**

TikTok Account: @xixiplease  
 Customer: I think I ordered pickles but I don't see the pickles  
 Employee: Here you go your fucking pickles, your majesty  
 Customer: Thank you so much.  
 Employee: **If you bother me for one fucking time, I'm gonna lose my shit.**

The employees warn their customers not to ask for something they should be responsible for providing. @butteryslippers asked the employee for tomato sauce, and the employee warned the customer not to ask for any more sauce while delivering the tomato sauce. Also, @xixiplease asked an employee for pickles because she could not find pickles on her burger, and the employee warned the customer not to bother her further, or the employee would lose her temper. Usually, restaurant employees will accept additional requests from customers such as extra sauce, napkins, or cutlery. However, Karen's Diner employees employ a strategy of impoliteness by warning customers not to ask them to do what is supposed to be their job.

Furthermore, both statements from Karen's Diner's employees include negative impoliteness, because it aims to attack the negative face of customers by limiting their freedom to act as a customer. Negative impoliteness is the use of strategies designed to attack the desire of the recipient's negative face (Culpeper, 2005). By warning, the employees force customers to comply with the warning and limit their freedom as customers who should have the freedom to ask employees to do or get something. To sum up, the employees of Karen's Diner apply the impoliteness strategy by warning the customers not to ask the employees to do what they are supposed to do.

#### **4. By Insulting Customers**

In addition to the impoliteness strategies by rejecting, ordering, and warning the customers, the writer found videos showing that employees also use the impoliteness strategies by insulting their customers. Insulting here means the employees of Karen's Diner intentionally insulting their customers. Here are two conversations between employees and customers where the employees insult the customers.

TikTok Account: @melika\_zaidi  
 Customer: Can I get a diet coke please?  
 Employee: **Boring.**

TikTok Account: @cindysarleen  
 Employee: what are you drinking?  
 Customer: Just tap water.  
 Employee: **Ew, broke ass cheap ass girl.**

The two employees insulted the menu ordered by the customers. The first customer, @Melika\_zaidi, ordered a diet coke from an employee, but the employee expressed her distaste for the menu by saying the customer's order was boring. On the other hand, an employee asked for the order of the second customer, @cindysarleen, and the customer said that he ordered tap water only. The employee responds to the customer insultingly that the customer is poor because he only ordered cheap or maybe free tap water. Both employee responses indicated that

the employees of Karen's Diner used impoliteness strategies by insulting the menus ordered by customers.

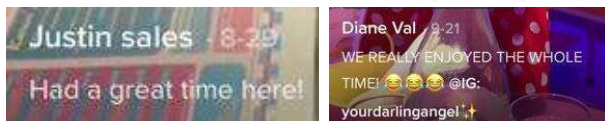
In addition, the employee's statement that insults the first customer's order is boring included in the bald on record impoliteness, because the employee intends to attack the customer's face directly with a brief "boring" statement that clearly shows her dislike of the customer's order. Bald on record impoliteness is deployed where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer in a direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way (Culpeper, 1996). Moreover, the employee's statement insulting the second customer's order is included in positive impoliteness, because the employee aims to attack the customer's positive face wants (to be respected) by not respecting the customer through the use of inappropriate identity marker "broke ass cheap ass girl". Positive impoliteness is a strategy designed to attack the addressee's positive face wants (Culpeper, 1996). To sum up, the employees of Karen's Diner apply the impoliteness strategy by insulting the customer's order. In conclusion, the employees of Karen's Diner use impoliteness strategies in serving their customers by rejecting customer requests, telling customers to do what is supposed to be the employee's job, warning customers not to ask employees to do what is supposed to be the employee's job, and insulting customer's order.

### **Why the Impoliteness Strategies are Used by the Employees of Karen's Diner**

According to the data collected, the writer found that the purpose of Karen's Diner's employees applying impoliteness strategies in serving customers is to entertain customers, since the customers feel entertained by the impoliteness treatments towards them.

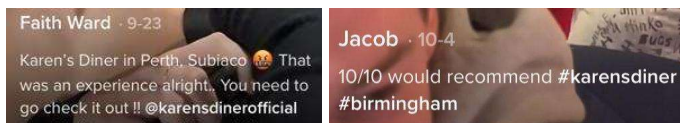
The purpose of Karen's Diner's employees using impoliteness strategies is to entertain the customers, and this can be seen from the positive reactions given by the customers to all the impolite treatments given by the employees.

First, there are various customer comments saying that they enjoy their visit to Karen's Diner. Below are two TikTok video captions uploaded by Karen's Diner customers.



One customer wrote in the video caption that he had a great time at Karen's Diner, and another customer wrote that she enjoyed her whole time at Karen's Diner. That way, they feel entertained by the impoliteness strategies that Karen's Diner's employees use in serving them.

In addition, there are also some customer comments saying that they recommended their video viewers to visit Karen's Diner. Here are two TikTok video captions by Karen's Diner



One customer wrote that the viewers should go and check Karen's Diner out, while the other customer gave a rating of 10 out of 10 and recommended it to the viewers to come to Karen's Diner. This also shows that Karen's Diner's customers are entertained while they are there so they are willing to recommend it to others.

Moreover, there are also customer comments saying that they will come back to Karen's Diner. The following are two customer reviews of Karen's Diner uploaded via Youtube.

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Youtube Account: Eddie Hall the Beast

Customer: I'll be coming back without the cameras, just me, and my wife, and my son.

Youtube Account: LOOSH

Customer: Food? Great. Service? Terrible, But you know what? I would go back, believe it or not. It was an experience

One customer said that he would return to Karen's Diner with his wife and son, while the other said that the food was good and the service terrible, but he would come back again because it was an experience for him. This also shows that Karen's Diner's customers are entertained by the terrible service from the employees so they want to come back there next time.

Thus, the customers can be said to be entertained by the impoliteness strategies employed by Karen's Diner's employees because they say that they enjoyed their visit to Karen's Diner, they recommended their video viewers to visit Karen's Diner, and they would return to visit Karen's Diner. In addition, this is also in line with Culpeper's (2011) theory regarding one of the purposes of using impoliteness, namely for entertaining, which is generated when the speaker pokes fun at the hearer and exploits the target's feelings for enjoyment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through this research entitled "Impoliteness Strategies Used by the Employees of Karen's Diner in Serving Their Customers", I found in-depth information regarding impoliteness, such as how impoliteness is used and why impoliteness is used. I also discovered that impoliteness that is usually used unintentionally can apparently be used intentionally to achieve a certain goal. One example is the restaurant Karen's Diner, the object of my research, which intentionally uses impoliteness in serving their customers. Having discovered something odd with their employees serving customers with impoliteness, I decided to do a research, and found that Karen's Diner deliberately uses impoliteness as a strategy in serving their customers to achieve their goal.

Karen's Diner employees use impoliteness in serving their customers by applying several strategies, including impoliteness by rejecting customers, by ordering customers, by warning customers, and by insulting customers. This is the answer to my first research question: "How do the employees of Karen's Diner apply impoliteness as a strategy in serving their customers?" To answer my first research question, I must uncover the impoliteness strategies used by the employees of Karen's Diner in communicating with customers. I found that they exercise impoliteness by rejecting customers, ordering customers, warning customers, and insulting customers through multiple steps. I had to watch a lot of TikTok videos to see patterns of employee behavior, and pick a few that I saw used the most. That way, I was able to discover the four impoliteness strategies that Karen's Diner employees use.

Karen's Diner employees use impoliteness in serving their customers with the aim to entertain customers, since the customers are entertained by the impoliteness treatments towards them. This is the answer to my second research question: "Why do the employees of Karen's Diner use impoliteness strategies in serving their customers?" To answer my second research question, I have to discuss the reason Karen's Diner's employees apply impoliteness strategies, and I look for them through customers' responses to employees' behaviors. I found that Karen's Diner employees use impoliteness strategies to entertain customers through several steps. I had

to watch a lot of TikTok videos to find the positive reactions that customers gave to the disrespectful treatment by Karen's Diner employees, and pick a few that I saw used the most. With that said, I can conclude that Karen's Diner employees use impoliteness strategies to entertain customers.

After doing this research, I am amazed by the innovation by Karen's Diner who dares to use impoliteness which is considered bad for a restaurant business that emphasizes politeness. The restaurant business is in the hospitality business and strictly prohibits its employees from treating customers impolitely, but Karen's Diner intentionally treats customers impolitely using impoliteness strategies. This is also evidenced by the success of Karen's Diner's new innovation to entertain customers considering the unique concept of this restaurant cannot be found in other restaurants.

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@Karen's Diner #karen #karensdiner #karensgoingwild #karenssoftiktok  
#kensoftiktok #karensdiner.au #karensalert #sydney #sydneyfood #sydneyfoodie  
[Video]. TikTok. <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSRPmep5C/>

Xixiplease [@xixiplease]. (2022, July 27). Replying to @michellesmoonbubble not @nuguluke  
at the end this is my last ever Karen's Diner video- enjoy #karensdiner #karensdiner.au  
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