CONVENTIONALISED IMPOLITENESS TOWARDS
PERCEIVED ESL USERS ON AN ANONYMOUS
IMAGEBOARD

MOHAMAD AMMAR BIN ROSLI

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

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MOHAMAD AMMAR BIN ROSLI

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Matric No: TGB150039

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CONVENTIONALISED IMPOLITENESS TOWARDS PERCEIVED ESL USERS ON AN ANONYMOUS IMAGEBOARD

ABSTRACT

On 4chan, an anonymous imageboard, certain users are labelled as 'ESL' even though there are no information regarding their ethnicity, nationality, or languages spoken. Perceived ESL users on the website are often insulted, harassed, and ostracized by other users. To further understand this phenomenon, 1000 posts and 10 discussion threads containing the term 'ESL' are extracted from a third party archive of the website as data. To analyse the data, the conventionalised impoliteness formulae by Culpeper (2011) are used. The data analysis reveals that the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users are triggered by agrammatical posts and perceived ESL users are often stereotyped as being less intelligent compared to native speakers of English. In addition, the racial slurs found in the data also suggest that there seems to be a relationship between being perceived as ESL and being perceived as a minority on the website.

Keywords: Conventionalised Impoliteness, Anonymity, Computer-Mediated Communication, Online Harassment.

KETIDAKSOPANAN KONVENSIONAL TERHADAP PENGGUNA ESL DALAM FORUM IMEJ TANPA NAMA

ABSTRAK

Di 4chan, sebuah forum imej tanpa nama, sesetengah pengguna tertentu dilabelkan sebagai 'ESL' walaupun tidak ada maklumat tentang etnik, kewarganegaraan, atau bahasa yang dituturkan oleh penggeuna-pengguna tersebut. Pengguna yang dilabel sebagai ESL di laman web itu sering dihina dan dilecehkan oleh pengguna lain. Untuk lebih memahami fenomena ini, 1000 komen-komen dan 10 bebenang perbincangan yang mengandungi istilah 'ESL' telah diekstrak daripada arkib laman web 4chan sebagai data. Untuk menganalisis data, formula ketidaksopanan konvensional (Conventionalised impoliteness formulae) yang dirumus oleh Culpeper (2011) digunakan. Analisis data mendedahkan bahawa layanan yang kasar terhadap pengguna ESL telah disebabkan oleh ketidakcekapan mereka dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan mereka juga sering distereotaip sebagai kurang cerdik. Disamping it, kutukan yang berbaur perkauman yang terdapat dalam data juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan antara identiti sebagai ESL dan juga identiti sebagai kaum minoriti di laman web 4chan.

Katakunci: Ketidaksopanan Konvensional, Ketanpanamaan, Komunikasi Melalui Komputer, Gangguan Dalam Talian.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ESL   :   English as a Second Language

CMC   :   Computer-Mediated Communication

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

English as a Second Language (ESL) is a ubiquitous term that is commonly used in academic settings. However, the term could also carry negative connotations in certain contexts. In a study about multilingual students and identity, Marshall (2009) discovers that a number of students feel that the term is degrading and alienating. According to one respondent:

> "I feel humiliating, embarrassing and demeaning about the term ESL and it implies the sense that people who are illiterate are going to need it."

(Marshall, 2009, p. 52)

Non-native English speakers studying in English speaking countries are usually required to take remedial ESL classes in their first semester. Marshall (2009) further discovers that ESL students who are required to take these remedial classes often feel that they are at a deficit, even though they might have a high level of language competence, both in English and their native languages. The students feel like the ESL classes are a hurdle that they must overcome before they are accepted as a full-fledged university student. In another study, Sanner (2008) discovers that ESL students in a Baccalaureate nursing program would often choose not to speak in front of the class because they are too conscious of their accent. More interestingly, the ESL students suggest that the language barrier does not really contribute to difficulty in learning, but propose that stereotyping and discrimination based on their ESL status are the major causes that contribute to their academic struggles. This seems to suggest that in certain contexts language-based discrimination and stereotyping (in this case towards ESL students) could be more damaging than language incompetence.

Unfortunately, language-based discrimination towards non-native English speakers can also be found beyond academic or professional settings. For example, a part of 4chan users seem to be unnecessarily hostile towards perceived ESL users. In the website, perceived ESL users are not only labelled with the term ESL, but also insulted and excluded from discussions. Interestingly, the users of 4chan who are mostly native English speakers (Phillips, 2015) usually used impoliteness to deal with perceived ESL users. This research seeks to investigate this phenomenon, where users on an anonymous website seem to be unnecessarily hostile towards perceived ESL users through the use of conventionalised impoliteness.

The harassment of a specific group of individuals could be a symptom of a larger issue. Perceived ESL users could be considered as a minority on 4chan which is mostly used by native speakers of English. Harassment towards a minority group because of their language features could signify an aversion towards non-native English speakers in general. This issue is especially relevant to 4chan as the users of the website tend to be racist towards minorities as discussed as suggested by Phillips (2015).

1.2   Research Purpose and Questions

Based on a preliminary analysis, there are a number of 4chan posts that are impolite towards perceived ESL users. For example as of the 20th of July 2018, a search of the terms 'ESL' and 'shit' returns 2551 results, and a search of the terms 'ESL' and 'fuck off' returns 1312 results. The examples below include a part of the responses retrieved from the search (see Extract 1).

Extract 1.

> /a/ Anonymous Fri 20 Jul 2018 18:13:40 No.175860643 ViewReport
>
> >>175859513
>
> >Did you actually enjoyed
>
> Fuck off, ESL nigger.
>
>
> /a/ Anonymous Fri 20 Jul 2018 13:36:45 No.175853716 ViewReport
>
> >>175853635
>
> ESL fuck off
>
>
> /a/ Anonymous Fri 20 Jul 2018 08:50:09 No.175843178 ViewReport
>
> >>175842888
>
> fuck off ESL-kun, it's no where close to Engrish.

There are several reasons to study impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on 4chan. Firstly, the harassment towards perceived ESL users in the form of conventionalised impoliteness could be considered as a normalised behaviour of certain users of 4chan to marginalise and perceived ESL users from the website. It is worthwhile to examine the linguistic behaviour of said users to see how social actions are carried out using conventionalised impoliteness. Studying harassment towards a minority group in 4chan is important in the current political climate, as the website is known to be one of the main bases of a white nationalist movement called the alt-right (Heikilla, 2017).

Secondly, as suggested by Locher (2010), it is important to study both politeness and impoliteness in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to note the differences between such media and face to face communication. The structural differences between the two media might influence the type of impoliteness that exists in them.

Thirdly, impoliteness is not marginal in 4chan. Culpeper (2011) suggests that it is rather difficult to study impoliteness because impoliteness events are uncommon in society. For example, in the Oxford English Corpus, the phrases like 'thank you' and 'please' are much more common compared to pejoratives like 'cunt' and 'motherfucker'. Interestingly, this is not the case on 4chan. For example, the phrase 'thank you' returns 622 821 results, but the phrase 'fuck you' returns 3 201 341 results. This seems to suggest that 4chan is a place where impoliteness events are more likely to occur compared to other public discourses. This behaviour arguably has been normalised among the members of this community of practice. Watts (2018) suggests that 4chan users usually provoke each other by 'trolling' (posting inflammatory materials to cause discord), with each user aiming to be *'maximally' offensive'* (p.105). Impoliteness researchers have often studied situations where impoliteness is likely to occur, for example Garcia-Pastor (2008) studies power and impoliteness in political debates. Hence, it could be suggested that since impoliteness is not marginal in 4chan, the website is a suitable setting for impoliteness studies.

Finally, studying impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on 4chan could shed a light on the pervasiveness of language-based discrimination. Ng (2007) defines language-based discrimination as prejudice against a group of people that share the same language due to a particular language feature of theirs, such as accent or language competence. The phenomenon of perceived ESL users being treated with hostility on 4chan suggests that language-based discrimination does not only occur in universities or offices, but also in much more relaxed and non-formal environments.

Nishimura (2010) argues that in an anonymous communication where information about the interactants are not available, identities would be constructed based on written texts. He suggests that this is the case in the interaction between the users of 2chan, a

Japanese anonymous discussion board similar to 4chan. In order to understand impoliteness practices towards perceived ESL users, we must examine the posts on 4chan that contain said impoliteness. There are two questions asked in this research:

(a) *Research Question 1: What are the manifestations of conventionalised impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on 4chan? (Chapter 4.1)*

This question investigates the general pattern of impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on the website. 1000 comments towards perceived ESL users from the archive of the website are collected and used as data. Emerging patterns of impoliteness are noted and discussed in the analysis. The conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2011) are used as the basis for analysis.

(b) *Research Question 2: How is impoliteness co-constructed in 4chan discussion threads? (Chapter 4.2)*

The research question investigates the co-construction of impoliteness by two parties in 4chan discussion threads: perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. 10 discussion threads containing the interactions between the two parties are used as data. In general, a single discussion thread on 4chan could contain up to 600 posts before the thread is pruned or expired. For the sake of practicality, only strings of conversation that include the interaction between an impolite commenter and a perceived ESL user in a discussion thread is extracted as data.

1.3   Research Significance

I hope the findings of this study will educate the readers about online language-based harassment. The two research questions asked delve into the different kinds of harassment faced by perceived ESL users and also investigate the reasons behind the harassment. It is also hoped that the information presented in this study could be used to curb online harassment towards minority groups. For example, decision makers (at different levels

of society) will be able to make informed decisions to set up effective boundaries and rules in online communication.

This study also discusses the implications of truly anonymous communication. As the readers will see in the subsequent chapters, the harassment towards perceived ESL users range from simple name-calling to wishing death and serious injury. Hopefully, this will inspire the readers to think about the issues of freedom of speech and harassment, and the line that separates the two.

1.4   4chan: Anonymous Imageboard

4chan is an online imageboard where users can post images and comments anonymously. The website was created in 2003 by a 15-year-old student named Christopher Poole. At its early stage, 4chan was modelled after a Japanese anonymous message board called 2chan. In the beginning, the website was used mainly to discuss Japanese related media such as Anime and Manga. However, over the years more boards were added to cater to different types of interests, such as sports, video games, television and films.

Unlike other forums or message boards, 4chan does not require its users to register their emails or choose a username to communicate with other users. Users can simply post anonymously, and it could be suggested that anonymity is one of the defining characteristics of the website. Bernstein, Monroy-Hernandez, Harry, Andre, Panovich and Vargas (2011) suggest that anonymity and ephemerality of content make 4chan unique compared to other forum based websites. On the website, threads that have expired are simply deleted and they believe that the ephemerality of content is one of the most interesting features of 4chan.They conclude the study by suggesting that 4chan as a website has an enormous influence on the culture of the internet. In addition, they also suggest that the anonymity and the ephemerality of content on 4chan play a huge role in

influencing the internet culture. In 4chan, anonymity has become a central concept that defines the culture of the website. The following extract from the Frequently Asked Question section of the website captures this idea succinctly:

> "Anonymous" is the name assigned to a poster who does not enter text into the [Name] field. Anonymous is not a single person, but rather, represents the collective whole of 4chan. He is a god amongst men..."

> ("Frequently Asked Questions", n.d.).

Over the years, the website is known for its trolling antics. For example, in 2009 a number of 4chan users rigged the TIME magazine 2009 world's most influential poll. 4chan users collaborated and made sure that the creator of the website, Christopher Poole won the poll ("The world's most influential person is…", 2009). More recently, media outlets such as the Washington Post links 4chan with the rise of the alt-right and suggests that the website helps in securing Donald Trump's presidency through the use of memes (Ohlheiser, 2016).

1.4.1 The Structure of 4chan

Since its creation, the design of the website has stayed relatively the same, and because of this new users might find the website to be confusing to use. For example, The Wall Street Journal describes the website as:

> "...a quaint throwback to the earliest Web pages that have since been eclipsed in the newest iterations of the Web. While other Web sites focus on flashy-social networking features and eye-catching advertisements, 4chan's design is archaic and the color scheme is two-tone."

> (Brophy-Warren, 2008)

Figure 1.1 shows the catalogue of the anime board, /a/. At a particular time, up to 150 threads are available on each board. New threads that are made will replace the threads that have reached the maximum capacity. As of September 2017, there are 70 different boards on 4chan dedicated to a range of topics such as television, sports, video games, and music.
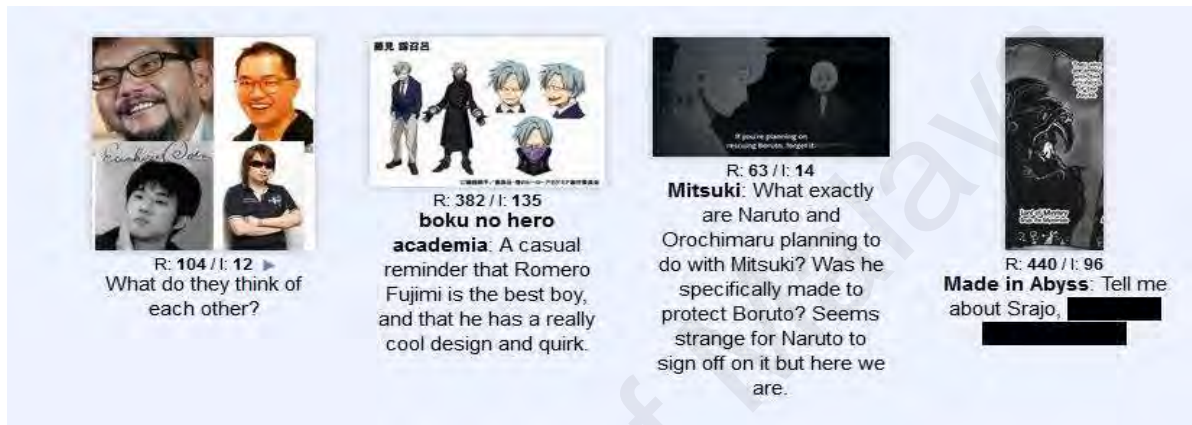
Figure 1.1: Catalogue of the anime board

Each board has a set of rules that must be followed by the users. For example, only anime-related content can be posted on the anime board. Users who fail to abide by the rules will be banned from posting on the website. The IP address of banned users will be restricted from accessing the website. In addition, IP ranges with repeated history of abuse are put on an auto ban list. Apart from the board-specific rules, the website also has a set of global rules, which apply to all of the boards on the website. The global rules include several laws that should be followed by all the users, such as all forumers must be at least 18, and no racist or inflammatory posts should be posted. The rules, however, do not stop the users from posting racist and malicious comments on the website. For example, Phillips (2012) notes that the majority of trolling on 4chan is targeted towards people of colour, particularly African Americans. She also notes that there are rather high instances of prejudice against homosexuality, usually involving the derogatory term 'faggot'. The rules are enforced by moderators who have the power to delete posts and threads from

the website. Moderators of 4chan are volunteers and only a number of moderators are available for each board. Due to the insufficient number of moderators working at a particular time, illegal content that is posted on the website often stay online for a prolonged period of time.
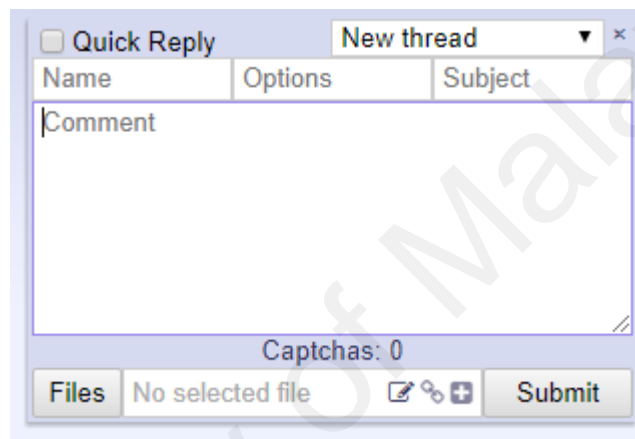
Finally, it must be noted that the website itself does not archive its own content. Threads that have expired will simply be deleted. The fact that 4chan does not archive its own content is one of the unique qualities of the website. Bernstein et al. (2011) argue that the ephemerality of 4chan is one of the contributing factors towards the unique, fast-paced culture of 4chan. Since the content on the website expires quickly, only materials that are interesting and captivating will survive and will be replicated as memes. For example, in recent years Pepe the frog has become synonymous with the alt-right movement and is a popular meme on the website. Users of 4chan have created numerous versions of the character as can be seen in Figure 1.2. However, there are several third-party websites that archive the content of 4chan. One of them is Desustorage Archive (desustorage.org), which is used in this study for data extraction.

Figure 1.2: Variations of 'Pepe the Frog' meme

1.4.2   Posting and Replying

To start a thread, users can simply click a button at the top of the website. Optional information such as names, email addresses, and thread subject can be included in the post as shown in Figure 1.3. If no information is provided, the name of the poster will be automatically set to anonymous. Posting with a name is usually associated with attention seeking and is frowned upon in the community. Bernstein et al. (2011) note that over 90% of 4chan users avoid using names and prefer to remain anonymous.

Figure 1.3: Reply box

There is a unique number assigned to every post on the website. This unique post number is essential in the process of communication and is used to quote or to reply to other posts. Figure 1.4 shows an example of a post. Information such as name, date and time of posting is available at the top of the post. In Figure 1.4 the name is set to anonymous since no name is provided by the user. The unique number of the post is available next to the time of posting. To reply to a post, one needs to click the unique post number and the number will be included in the reply in red ink as shown in the example. The mentioned post number will be preceded by the symbol (>>) to indicate that the post is a reply. The symbol (OP) means that the post quoted is the first post in a thread. The unique post number
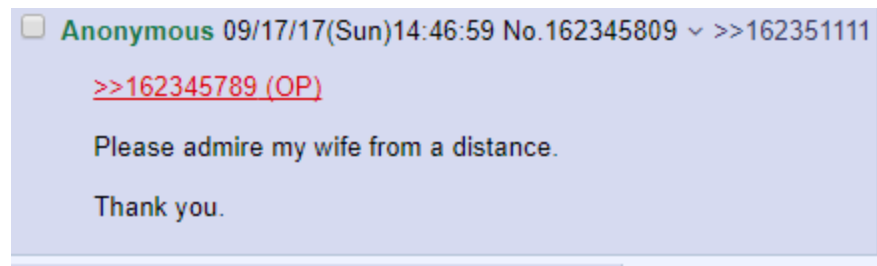
Figure 1.4: Example of a 4chan post

1.4.3 The Content of 4chan

As discussed previously, anonymity plays a central role in 4chan. No information such as ethnicity, country of origin, gender or age is available on the website. In addition, given the predisposition of the users to trolling, there is a very high chance that any attempt at surveying the population would result in failure. However, Phillips (2012) argues that the demographic information of the population of the website can be estimated based on the content posted there. She admits that this estimation is not empirical as it is possible that the users are just pretending to be who they are not. For example, an underage poster could be lying about his or her age to avoid being banned. However, she adds that the demographic information could still be useful in an attempt to understand 4chan as a website. Phillips (2012) suggests that most of the interaction that takes place in the website is conducted in English and the majority of the posters identify as Americans. During interaction, the concept whiteness is prevalent, and users identifying as non-whites are often marginalised. It is also suggested that the majority of the users are aged between 18-35, based on the cultural references made on the website. Finally, she suggests that 4chan is highly misogynistic. Posters that identify as females are often harassed with sexual demands and insults.

Bernstein et al (2011) also note that the content on 4chan could be offensive, particularly with regards to sexist, racist and homophobic language. For example, it is common on 4chan to add the suffix 'fag' to label a group of people. New users are known as 'newfags' and Australians are 'ausfags'. The offensive content of 4chan reported by

Phillips (2012) and Bernstein et al. (2011) can be found in the data of this research. For example, insults towards perceived ESL users are sometimes accompanied by racial slurs.

Researchers also discuss the prevalence of whiteness and nationalism on 4chan. For example, Ludemann (2018) argues that whiteness is ubiquitous on the website, and the users of the website have a propensity for politically incorrect discourses, as a form of resistance to the mainstream culture. In the study (Ludemann, 2018) describes how a 4chan user calls an immigrant a 'shitskin subhuman' and other forms of insults. In addition, (Heikkilä, 2017) argues that 4chan is a hotbed of white nationalism and has become a gathering place for the alt-right movement in recent years. Several racist memes that are popular online originated from 4chan. For example, the meme 'Shlomo Shekelberg', a racist caricature of a supposedly Jewish man is often used on the website to defend antisemitism. The 'Remove Kebab' meme which references the Bosnian Genocide is also commonly used in arguments involving Islamophobia on 4chan.

1.5   Limitations of the Study

Firstly, the anonymity of 4chan makes it impossible to empirically verify any demographic information about the population of the users of the website. Therefore, it is important to note that any findings or observations in this research that is related to the population of 4chan, are made based on two sources. Firstly, the content of 4chan that is extracted as data in this research and secondly three academic studies about 4chan (Bernstein et al. 2011, Phillips 2015, & Ludemann 2018). Hence, any claims or inference made based on this research should be made with this fact in mind.

Secondly, the impoliteness discussed in this research is limited to a specific type of impoliteness- conventionalised impoliteness as proposed by Culpeper (2011). As suggested by Culpeper (2011), there are several types of impoliteness that are not covered by the formulae (for example, sarcasm) as they only include the types of impoliteness that

are conventionalised in a number of contexts in the English language. Therefore, the results of this research should not be generalised to other types of impoliteness other than the ones included the formulae.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This section reviews relevant pieces of literature related to this research which revolves around the concept of conventionalised impoliteness. The relationship between impoliteness and computer-mediated communication (CMC) is also discussed as the data involved in this research are extracted from an internet message board. This chapter is divided as followed:

- Top-down models of impoliteness (Section 2.2)

- Conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Section 2.3)

- Impoliteness in the context of CMC (2.4)

- Anonymity in CMC and its effects (2.5)

Section 2.2 discusses models of impoliteness proposed by several researchers. Subsequently, section 2.3 deals with the conventionalised impoliteness formulae which were suggested by Culpeper (2011) as an alternative to previously discussed models of impoliteness. Furthermore, section 2.4 discusses impoliteness in the context of computer-mediated discussion. Finally, section 2.5 discusses anonymity and its impacts on communication.

2.2   Top-down Models of Impoliteness

Researchers have explained impoliteness through several different models. For example, in the model of impoliteness by Culpeper (1996, 2005), there are several strategies of impoliteness that could be used to describe a certain impolite event. Culpeper (1996) suggests includes 5 different strategies in the model which are:

Bald on record impoliteness: the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized.

Positive impoliteness: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants, e. g., ignore the other, exclude the other from an activity, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, use inappropriate identity markers, use obscure or secretive language, seek disagreement, use taboo words, call the other names.

Negative impoliteness: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants, e. g., frighten, condescend, scorn or ridicule, be contemptuous, do not treat the other seriously, belittle the other, invade the other's space (literally or metaphorically), explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect (personalize, use the pronouns "I" and "You"), put the other's indebtedness on record.

Sarcasm or mock politeness: the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.

Withhold politeness: the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness.

<div align="right">(Culpeper, 1996, p. 356-7)</div>

This is one of the earliest iterations of the model of impoliteness suggested by Culpeper (1996 based on the work of Brown and Levinson (1987) and relies on the concept of face. In the model, acts that threaten the positive or negative face of an individual are known as face-threatening acts (FTA). An act that threatens an individual's positive face (e.g. call the person stupid) is considered as a positive impoliteness. On the other hand, a FTA that violates an individual's negative face (e.g. threaten to punch the person) is considered

as a negative impoliteness. He further adds that the model could be thought of as a parallel to the politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson (1987). In 2005, Culpeper suggests an addition of a new category, which he calls off-record impoliteness to replace sarcasm or mock politeness.

> **Off-record impoliteness:** the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.

> (Culpeper, 2005, p. 44)

Culpeper (2015) suggests that over the years the model has proven to be robust as suggested by several other studies that have used the model as the basis of their research. Interestingly, Bousfield (2008) argues that the model of impoliteness suggested by Culpeper (1996, 2005) is overly complicated. He argues that the examples given by Culpeper (2005) to explain bald-on record impoliteness could also be categorised as either negative or positive impoliteness. Bousfield (2008) suggests that it is unnecessary to categorise these types of impoliteness separately. He proposes a more streamlined version of impoliteness strategies that only have two major categories: which are on-record and off-record impoliteness.

> **On record impoliteness** The use of strategies designed to explicitly (a) attack the face of an interactant, (b) construct the face of an interactant in a non-harmonious or outright conflictive way, (c) deny the expected face wants, needs, or rights of the interactant, or some combination thereof. The attack is made in an unambiguous way given the context in which it occurs.

> **Off record impoliteness** The use of strategies where the threat or damage to an interactant face is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature (cf. Grice [1975] 1989) and can be cancelled (e.g., denied, or an account / post-modification / elaboration offered, etc.) but where "…one attributable intention clearly

outweighs any others" (Culpeper 2005: 44), given the context in which it occurs. Sarcasm and the Withholding of Politeness where it is　　expected would also come under this heading, as follows:

(a) **Sarcasm:** Sarcasm constitutes the use of individual or combined strategies which, on the surface, appear to be appropriate but which are meant to be taken as meaning the opposite in terms of face-management. The utterance that appears, on the surface, to positively constitute, maintain, or enhance the face of the intended recipient(s) actually threatens, attacks and/or damages the face of the recipient(s) (see Culpeper 2005) given the context in which it occurs.

(b) **Withhold politeness:** More specifically, withhold politeness where politeness would appear to be expected or mandatory. Withholding politeness is within the Off Record category as "[…] politeness has to be communicated […] the absence of communicated politeness may, ceteris paribus, be taken as the absence of a polite attitude." Brown and Levinson (1987: 5).

(Bousfield, 2008, p. 95)

In the model proposed by Bousfield (2008), there are only two major categories which are on-record and off record-impoliteness. On-record impoliteness includes blatant and direct attacks on an individual's face while off-record impoliteness is implied. Both sarcasm and withhold politeness fall under off-record impoliteness. Despite Bousfield's (2008) criticisms, the streamlined model proposed by him still has elements from Culpeper's (2005) model which is a derivative of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. In a more recent publication, Culpeper (2015) suggests that these models could be considered as top-down models of impoliteness, as they are based on theoretical frameworks that are already established by previous researchers.

2.3   Conventionalised Impoliteness Formulae

Culpeper (2011) suggests an alternative way to approach impoliteness that is more data-driven, as opposed to the previous models of impoliteness that are based on the works of Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987). He introduces the conventionalised impoliteness formulae, which are based on several different sources of data. In addition, to ensure the robustness of the formulae, they were tested against the Oxford English Corpus (OEC) which contains more than two billions English words. The formulae are based on the concept of conventionalisation which suggests that there are certain phrases that are almost always interpreted as impolite across different contexts in the English language. There are two major views surrounding the issue of whether or not impoliteness is inherent in language.

For researchers who believe that linguistic impoliteness is inherent in language, context may take a less important role in determining the impoliteness of an utterance. For example, Cruse (2000) argues that the issue of politeness revolves around that issue of what is being uttered, and not around the reasoning or the belief behind the utterance. In other words, even though someone might not be intentionally impolite, if the utterance is impolite in nature, the utterance should be treated as such. However, Culpeper (2011) argues that Cruse's (2000) view is heavily influenced by the issue of semantics, and does not take into account the issue of pragmatics.

On the other hand, there are also researchers who believe that impoliteness is not inherent in linguistic expressions. This view suggests that the perception of impoliteness relies heavily on the context and are subject to the interpretation of the interlocutors and the hearers. For example, Fraser (1990) argues that inherently, a sentence is neither polite nor impolite. The expressions themselves are not as important as the judgment made on them. In other words, our perception of whether a sentence is polite or not that determines

its politeness, and not the sentence itself. There are also other researchers who echo the same view. For example, Watts (2003) also believes that linguistic structures by themselves are neither polite nor impolite. The perception of both politeness and impoliteness depends on the interpretation of those involved in the interaction. In other words, this camp believes that there is no such thing as inherently impolite linguistic expressions. What is being said is less important than the contexts and the perceptions of the hearers. For example, the phrase 'Fuck you' could be used as a joke among friends to further strengthen their friendship. However, this view is criticised by Culpeper (2011) who argues that it seems to ignore shared conventions of meaning in a language, and instead seems to suggest that the process of communication itself is very unstable and vague.

Hence, as discussed previously, even though context and intention play a part in the perception of impoliteness, it is possible for certain expressions that are statistically high in correlation with the occurrence of impoliteness to become conventionalised or synonymous with impoliteness. The conventionalised impoliteness formulae proposed by Culpeper (2011) is based on this notion. The formulae are based on expressions that are commonly used in impolite conditions that they have become conventionalised in the English language. Culpeper (2011) further adds:

> "The process by which expressions become semantically imbued with their politeness or impoliteness contexts assumes that some expressions have a more stable relationship with impoliteness contexts and effects than others and that over time those expressions begin to acquire conventional associations of the impoliteness contexts in which they are regularly used- they become conventionalised"

(Culpeper, 2011, p.34).

The impoliteness formulae are as follows:

Table 2.1: Conventionalised Impoliteness Formulae

Insults	1. Personalized negative vocatives – [you] [fucking/rotten/dirty/fat/little/etc.] [moron/fuck/plonker/dickhead/ berk/pig/shit/bastard/loser/liar/minx/brat/slut/squirt/sod/bugger/etc.] [you]
	2. Personalized negative assertions – [you] [are] [so/such a] [shit/stink/thick/stupid/bitchy/bitch/hypocrite/ disappointment/gay/nuts/nuttier than a fruit cake/hopeless/pathetic/ fussy/terrible/fat/ugly/etc.] – [you] [can't do] [anything right/basic arithmetic/etc.] – [you] [disgust me] / [make me] [sick/etc.]
	3. Personalized negative references – [your] [stinking/little] [mouth/act/arse/body/corpse/hands/guts/trap/ breath/etc.]
	4. Personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target) – [the] [daft] [bimbo] – [she]['s] [nutzo]
Pointed criticisms/complaints	– [that/this/it] [is/was] [absolutely/extraordinarily/unspeakably/etc.] [bad/rubbish/crap/horrible/terrible/etc.]
Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions	– why do you make my life impossible? – which lie are you telling me? – what's gone wrong now? – you want to argue with me or you want to go to jail? – I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience.
Condescensions	(see also the use of 'little' in Insults) – [that] ['s/ is being] [babyish/childish/etc.]
Dismissals	– [go] [away] – [get] [lost/out] – [fuck/piss/shove] [off]
Silencers	– [shut] [it] / [your] [stinking/fucking/etc.] [mouth/face/trap/etc.] – shut [the fuck] up
Threats	– [I'll/I'm/we're][gonna][smash your face in /beat the shit out of you /box your ears/bust your fucking head off/straighten you out/etc.] [if you don't] [X] – [you'd better be ready Friday the 20th to meet with me /do it] [or] [else] [I'll] [X] – [X] [before I] [hit you/strangle you]
Negative expressives (e.g. curses, ill-wishes)	– [go] [to hell/hang yourself/fuck yourself] – [damn/fuck] [you]
Message enforcers	– listen here (preface) – you got [it/that]? (tag) – do you understand [me]? (tag)

(Culpeper, 2011, p.135-6)

There are 9 different categories included in the formulae as shown in Table 2.1. The square brackets denote the characteristics of the structure of the formulae, and the slashes indicate possible alternatives or different variations of the formula. The conventionalised impoliteness formulae are devised based on several different sets of data obtained by Culpeper (2011). Among them are video recordings, informant reports, and a questionnaire about impoliteness perception. Based on the data, impolite phrases with common structural similarities are grouped together. To ensure the robustness of the formulae, all the phrases in the formulae are searched in the Oxford English Corpus (OEC) and in more than 50% of the time, they must be accompanied with evidence suggesting that they are interpreted as impolite.

In an analysis of the use of formulae in pragmatics, Bardovi-harlig (2012) suggests that the conventionalised impoliteness formulae by Culpeper (2011) posit that impolite utterances can be routinised. The formulae are used in this research because they provide specific structures that could be used as a guide in identifying different forms of impoliteness. In other words, the forms outlined by Culpeper (2011) in the formulae could be used as a more precise guide in the process of analysis compared to impoliteness strategies proposed by Culpeper (2006) and Bousfield (2008). For example, the formulae provided several different specific variations of insults that could be used to identify impoliteness in the data. Because of this, the formulae are less reliant on the context of impoliteness compared to impoliteness strategies, which rely heavily on the concept of face. As suggested by Culpeper (2011), the formulae were developed as a more precise alternative to the impoliteness strategies.

However, the formulae have several limitations. Firstly, Culpeper (2011) suggests that the formulae are not exhaustive, and that there are other types of conventionalised impoliteness that might not be included. For example, sarcasm, a type of impoliteness

that could be found in impoliteness strategies are not included in the formulae. Secondly, Bardovi-harlig (2012) argues that pragmatic formulae can be inconsistent in their specificity. She argues that some formulae are underspecified while some might be too specific. This issue is reflected to a certain extent in the conventionalised impoliteness formulae. As can be seen, the forms listed under insults are very specific, but the same could not be said about message enforcers. Despite their limitations, the formulae are practical as they provide a more precise alternative for identifying impoliteness compared to impoliteness strategies. The specific set of forms provided by Culpeper (2011) has been useful in identifying different categories of conventionalised towards perceived ESL users in the data.

2.4   Impoliteness in the Context of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

4chan is a bulletin board style forum, which can be categorised as a form of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Locher (2010) defines CMC as a type of communication or exchange of information that is facilitated by technology such as computers. She further adds that it is useful to distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication can be defined as an interaction that takes place in real-time, where interactants can respond to each other immediately. Examples for synchronous communication include live chat or live video conferencing. On the other hand, in asynchronous communication, there could be a delay in the interaction. Interactants in asynchronous communication might not receive an immediate response. For example, interactants communicating via email might have to wait several days before getting any response (if at all). Hence, the communication involved in this study is asynchronous as the website is practically a forum with a cooldown period before posting subsequent replies. Users of 4chan might have to wait for several hours before getting a response thus the communication is not instant.

In addition, Locher (2010) also suggests that most of the communication in CMC is still text-based, making it interesting for linguists to study. She further outlines several reasons to study impoliteness in CMC. Firstly, CMC contains discussion of norms in the form of written texts. Studying such texts allows us to further deepen our comprehension about what can be considered as impolite in certain settings. Secondly, it would be interesting to study the contrasts between impoliteness in real life and in CMC due the differences of both media of communication.

In a sense, CMC has several limitations compared to face to face communication. Since CMC is still dominantly text-based as suggested by Locher (2010), certain information that could be relayed in face to face communication is absent in CMC. For example, in face to face communication interactants can gauge the emotion of each other through body language and facial expression. In addition, prosody also plays a large part in face to face communication as the tone and volume of an individual's voice can be a key factor in the interpretation of a message. For example, Culpeper (2011) discusses how the prosodic characteristics of a person's voice can be used to gauge his or her emotional states. In addition, he also adds that intonation could exacerbate an impoliteness event. For example, a threat could be intensified by yelling. The dynamics of communication are also different between the two media. In asynchronous CMC especially, the delay in interaction can affect the flow of conversation as individuals will have more time to reflect thus lessening the chance of spontaneous outbursts.

Several researchers have argued that the differences between the two media might affect the type of impoliteness that is used in interaction. For example, in a study about impoliteness in CMC, Angouri and Tseliga (2010) discover that irregular punctuation marks and spellings are used by Greek students and academics to express their emotions. The data from the study were collected from two Greek forums. The first forum was

dedicated to academics and the second one was for students. Overall, 200 posts that contain disagreements were collected as data. Both of the forums were mainly text-based and they were asynchronous, so a forum user will usually have to wait for responses therefore the interaction is not instantaneous.

The discourse were then analysed with emphasis on face-threatening acts (FTA). In addition, the analysis is triangulated by interviewing a part of the participants that had agreed to be interviewed. The interviews provided an insight into the participants' thoughts and intentions regarding their interaction in the forums.

They discover that the participants in the study used unconventional spelling and punctuations such as using all capital letters or repeated use of certain punctuations such as '!!!' or '???' to express disagreement or frustration. They argue that this particular phenomenon can be interpreted as a clear influence of the medium of interaction (CMC). The unconventional use of spelling could be interpreted as an adaptation by the participants to express their emotions due to the lack or paralinguistic cues such as prosody or facial expressions in CMC.

In another study, Darics (2010) also acknowledges the differences between face to face communication and CMC as media of communication and suggests that these differences should not be neglected in studying politeness or impoliteness in both media. The data used in this study are comprised of instant messaging logs (IM) from 6 participants in a virtual team from various parts of the world. Since members of the virtual team live in different countries, they mainly communicate with each other via IM. Unlike 4chan and the forums used in the study by Angouri and Tseliga (2010), IM is synchronous. In other words, the communication takes place instantaneously in real time.

The discourse was analysed with reference to Brown and Levinson's concept of facework and Locher and Watt's (2005) discursive approach to politeness. Darics (2010) discovers that CMC lacks the social cues and prosodic aspects that are present in face to face communication. As discussed previously, there are several paralinguistic clues that are not present in CMC, such as body language or facial expressions. Hence, Darics (2010) suggests that interactants in CMC will usually employ "compensatory signs" to mitigate the lack of social cues in interaction. One of the most common compensatory sign is the use of emoticon while communicating via CMC. This is especially true for websites or applications that have built-in emoticon support, such as Facebook or WhatsApp. However, interestingly no emoticons could be found in the data. Interestingly, 4chan as a website does not support the use of emoticon or emojis. In addition, the use of more traditional emoticons such as ';)' or ';('is generally frowned upon in the community. Therefore, it could be suggested that the compensatory signs adopted by users of CMC vary depending on the medium. Darics (2010) also suggests that the use of unconventional spellings as one of the compensatory sign employed by users of CMC as an adaptive strategy for the lack of social cues in CMC.

On 4chan, most of the interactions take place textually. Even though users can post images, most of the images are usually tied to content. For example, posting anime pictures on the anime board and sports pictures on the sports board. The notion that CMC is different from face to face communication, and that the difference might affect the type of impoliteness used is further explored in chapter 4.1. The chapter includes a discussion about how the structure of the website influences the type of impoliteness present in the data.

2.5   Anonymity in CMC

There should be a clear distinction between pseudo-anonymity and total anonymity in the context of this research. Pseudo-anonymous websites usually require users to register using a username before they can interact with others. These websites, such as Reddit (Reddit.com) or popular gaming forums like Gamefaq (Gamefaq.com) allow users to use pseudonyms that are not linked to their real identities. Communication in such websites can be considered as partially anonymous since users essentially do not know the real identities of other users that they are communicating with. However, the communication could not be considered as totally anonymous, as there is a reputation attached to every username as suggested by Donath (1999). She argues that reputation plays a role in determining the character of pseudo-anonymous online identities. For example, reputation is very important for pseudo-anonymous sites like Reddit.com, a rather popular news aggregator website with over 500 million monthly visitors (as of September 2017). On Reddit, every post written by a user is archived. The post history of every user is easily accessible to others, which is easy to track in interaction. For example, a story written by a user with an inconsistent post history might not be believed by others, or an opinion posted by a user with a high number of racist comments might be simply disregarded.

On the other hand, on 4chan the anonymity is almost total. Users do not have to register and the default name is set to anonymous. According to Bernstein et. al. (2011), more than 90% of 4chan users interact anonymously. They also suggest that due to the anonymous nature of the website, the traditional reputation system simply would not function in 4chan. Not only the real-life identity of 4chan users are not known, users have no reputation based on previous comments. There is no post history, and it is impossible to know a user's stance on an issue since no such information is available on the website. The impacts of anonymity (online disinhibition effect, SIDE, and lack of accountability) are discussed subsequently.

Firstly, Suler (2004) notes that in online interaction, individuals sometimes do or say things that they would not in real life. He labels the phenomenon as the online disinhibition effect. The effects can be divided into benign and toxic disinhibition. In certain situations, individuals may act kindly towards other people online, such as offering condolences or advice. In 4chan, benign disinhibition could be seen in certain recurring threads such as the alcoholics thread known as /alck/ in the cooking board. Such threads are often visited by self-identified alcoholics, hence users in the threads are more likely to sympathize with each other. Suler (2004) considers these acts of kindness as benign disinhibition. On the other hand, being rude or unnecessarily harsh in online interaction is considered as a form of toxic disinhibition. Suler (2004) suggests that there are several possible reasons for online disinhibition. One of them is dissociative anonymity. He argues that being anonymous allows individuals to dissociate their actions online from their real identity. For these individuals, their online identity or 'self' is separate from their real life. What they do or say online have no effect on their real identity. This is consistent with the findings of Bernstein et al (2011), who suggest that the anonymity of 4chan may lead to disinhibited behaviour. They also note that because of this, the site is filled with antisocial behaviours. The total anonymity provided by the website allows 4chan users to dissociate themselves from their real identity, allowing them to say things that they might not have said in real life.

In addition, while the disinhibition theory suggests that anti-normative behaviour online could be explained by the dissociation of the real self from the online self, the social identity model of deindividuation effects theory (SIDE) theory suggests that anonymity might enhance the salience of group identity at the expense of individual identity. In cases where anti-normative behaviour is the group identity, anonymity might influence individuals who otherwise might behave normatively to do the opposite. SIDE explains the effects linked to computer-mediated communication in comparison to real

life face-to-face communication. According to the cognitive dimension of the SIDE theory, the anonymity provided by CMC can increase the importance of group identity and enhances depersonalization. Spears, Lea and Lee (1990), discover that when participants in an experiment remain anonymous and identities were hidden, group identities become more salient and the participants would be more likely to conform to normative views within the group. The same conclusion is reflected in a different experiment by Postmes, Spears, Sakhel and De Groot (2001). They also discover that group influence is stronger when the participants are anonymous. In 4chan, since almost all users are anonymous, it is possible that group identities becomes more central based on the SIDE theory. The anonymity provided by the website creates an environment where depersonalization is more likely to occur, thus leading to enhanced group identity. Individual users who might be polite in the real world may be influenced by the antinormative behaviour of 4chan users due to strengthened group identity as suggested by the SIDE theory. The antinormative behaviour of 4chan users is noted in several studies. For example, Bernstein et al. (2011) note that "...[4chan] is a crude place and is given to antisocial behavior.. styling the collective as "Anonymous" also suggests de-individuation and mob behavior" (p.6). In a different study, Phillips (2012) notes that:

> "Anonymity has a profound behavioral impact [on 4chan]. Most obviously, because there are no repercussions for posting racist, sexist, homophobic, or exploitative text and/or images, and because trolling is characterized by transgressive one-upmanship, /b/ is overrun by highly offensive and sometimes explicitly illegal content..."

(Phillips, 2012, p.498)

Therefore, since 4chan in general has been shown to be highly xenophobic, it is not surprising that the perceived ESL users are treated in such a way. If we consider the SIDE

model, the behaviour towards perceived ESL users on 4chan could be explained by the enhanced salience of group identity at the expense of individual identity due to the anonymity on the website.

The lack of accountability that anonymity offers is one of the main attractions of 4chan as a website. The creator of 4chan, Christopher Poole claims that any mistakes made in non-anonymous communication will be attributed to the individual, but this is not the case with anonymous communication (Halliday, 2011). Anonymity provides security as an anonymous user cannot be held responsible for what he or she has written online. Users communicating non-anonymously are more prone to face repercussions in real life based on their actions online. This includes being impolite towards other individuals. For example, in 2007, a lecturer from the University of Auckland was dismissed after his email was perceived to be rude to a student asking for extension after the death of a family member (Haugh, 2010). However, in 4chan the repercussions of being impolite are masked by total anonymity. In a study about impolite Youtube comments, Dynel (2012) argues that full anonymity might push someone to be fearless of repercussions. She argues that anonymous commenters online are more inclined to use abusive language and that they do not fear retribution or any repercussions since their actions online could not be traced back to their real identities. The only backlash that they could receive is impolite responses from other users, which will only further fuel the cycle of online aggression. In addition, Christopherson (2007) argues that anti-social behaviours are more tolerated in a computer-mediated communication such as 4chan, compared to face to face communication. Users might be more inclined to express non-normative ideas or views in an anonymous setting rather than somewhere where they might be identified. In the context of this research, it is possible that a user might feel more inclined to respond to the English usage of perceived ESL users by using impoliteness since they would receive no repercussion for their aggression.

2.6   Research Gap

Culpeper, Iganski, and Sweiry (2017) utilise the conventionalised impoliteness formulae to discuss hate crime on England and Wales. They argue that the formulae are effective in "describing and theorizing religiously aggravated hate crime" (Culpeper, Igansky, & Sweiry, 2017, p.19). Ultimately, this study has a similar goal with a different data set. This research considers the viability and practicality of using the conventionalised impoliteness formulae to identify impoliteness towards a specific group in CMC. Due to limited resources and time constraints, the data that are analysed for this research are not enough for any generalizations to be made. However, hopefully the research could open a path for a project at a larger scale. Researchers should also consider the possibility of using automated search. i.e., feeding the formulae into a search engine for detection of impoliteness which could be beneficial for detection of harassment.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods of data collection and several methodological issues involved in this research. The data for this research comprises of two data sets, the first set is 1000 4chan posts containing the word 'ESL', and the second set includes 10 threads containing interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. The two different data sets are designed to answer two research questions asked which are:

a) What are the manifestations of impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on 4chan?

b) How is impoliteness co-constructed in 4chan discussion threads?

To analyse the data, the conventionalised impoliteness formulae by Culpeper (2011) (see chapter 2) are used. The impoliteness in the data will be analysed based on the categories proposed by Culpeper (2011) in the formulae. The chapter is divided as followed:

- Introduction (section 3.1)
  - ○ ESL as a keyword (section 3.1.1)
- Data collection (section 3.2)
- Procedures of analysis (section 3.3)
- Ethical and practical considerations (section 3.4)
- Relevance of two data sets in the research (section 3.5)
- Scope and generalizability of the research (section 3.6)

3.1.1 ESL as a Keyword

Since the term 'ESL' is used as a keyword in the extraction of data, it is pivotal to ensure that the term is related to its conventional meaning, which is "English as a second language". Interestingly, there are several posts in the data that provide the definition (see extract 2).

Extract 2.

/int/ Anonymous Tue 30 Aug 2016 23:28:56 No.64210616 ViewReport

>>64210550

What ESL means

>nippon: English Shit Level

>everyone else: English Second Language

 Fri 19 Aug 2016 18:23:52 No.145927345 ViewReport

>>145927320

ESL - English as a Second Language

Both of the examples above seem to provide a clear definition of the term 'ESL", which suggests that the users of 4chan are aware to a certain extent of the meaning of the term. In addition, based on the analysis, impolite comments containing the term 'ESL' are sometimes accompanied by criticisms of the language used by perceived ESL users. Furthermore, the second data set shows that impolite comments are often caused by grammatical errors contained in the posts written by perceived ESL users. There, it could be inferred that in the context of 4chan, the term 'ESL' seems to denote its conventional meaning, which is 'English as a second language'.

3.2   Data Collection

For the first data set, 1000 posts containing the term 'ESL' were extracted from a third party archive of 4chan, which is called Desuarchive (desuarchive.org). A third party archive of the website was used because 4chan does not archive its own data. The data for both data sets were extracted on the 3rd of September 2016. To begin the process of data collection, the term 'ESL' was used as a search keyword. On the date of the data collection, a search of the term 'ESL' returns over 11,000 results, suggesting that 'ESL', or English as a second language was a topic that was often discussed on the website. The first 1000 posts were then extracted and transferred into a Word document (see Appendix A). The data were read and 5 irrelevant posts were excluded. The irrelevant posts were not related to the topic of 'ESL', or English as a Second Language, for example, one post has the term 'ESL' as a part of a Youtube URL and another post just contained random letters that happened to include the term. Another 5 posts were then collected to replace the irrelevant posts.

For the second data set, instead of collecting individual posts, 10 threads containing interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters were collected instead. 10 posts from the 1000 posts from the first data set were chosen at random and the corresponding post from the section was used to extract the thread from the archive. However, if the post chosen did not contain impoliteness, a new post was selected to replace it. Since a thread in 4chan can include up to 600 posts, only strings of conversation containing the interaction between the perceived ESL users and the impolite commenters were used as data (see Appendix B). The first post of the thread, (hereby known as OP) which usually establishes the topic for the thread is also included to provide a better context of the thread.

3.3 Procedures of Analysis

The first set of data were transferred into a table. The conventionalised impoliteness formulae was then used as the basis for analysis. Specific forms of impoliteness that could be identified in the data based on the formulae (e.g. "fuck off" can be categorised as a dismissal) were tagged and listed on the table. It should be noted that one comment can contain more than one categories impoliteness. For example:

>>64420827 Shut up you fucking ESL moron.	Insult Silencer

The phrase "you fucking ESL moron" is a personalised negative vocative, which can be categorized as an insult based on the formulae. In addition, the phrase "shut up" is a conventionalised dismissal. Therefore, the post above was tagged with both insult and silencer. Each of the tag contributed to the overall number of impoliteness in the data.

The second research question investigates the co-construction of impoliteness. Therefore, the focus was on the exchange between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. For example, what triggers the impoliteness and how it escalated. Firstly, in the thread, comments that contained impoliteness towards a perceived ESL user was noted. Next, the comment that preceded the impoliteness was examined. The preceding comment then was labelled as "trigger". As the name suggests, the preceding comment to the impoliteness usually contains the trigger for the impoliteness. Any unusual pattern in the trigger was noted and became the basis for analysis. Finally, the subsequent comments in the thread were also examined. Any escalation or further discussion were noted and analysed.

3.4   Ethical and Practical Considerations

The data from this research was obtained from the archive 4chan and can be considered as a naturally occurring data. Culpeper (2011) argues that in impoliteness research, naturally occurring data such as written interaction or TV recordings are preferred due to ethical and practical considerations. He adds that older research tend to use artificial settings to study impoliteness, for example, researchers would create a situation that requires the participants to be impolite. These settings might create unnecessary tension for the participants. In addition, because of the artificial settings, the participants might not be able to behave naturally.

Another important issue that must be taken into consideration is the consent of the participants involved in the research. Herring (1996) argues that there are two types of computer-mediated communication: public and private. Private communication involves two or more individuals interacting in a medium that is not accessible to the public. For example, two friends exchanging emails or a forum that requires the approval of a moderator or a password for entry. For private communication, Herring (1996) argues that permission must be granted before any part of the interaction could be used as data in a research. On the other end of the spectrum is public communication, where the interaction is freely available to everyone. Since public communication is available to everyone, Herring (1996) argues that for such data, no permission is required as long as the data is reproduced with no malicious intent and credit is given. Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov, and Stillwell (2015) have a similar view. They suggest that publicly available data such as public Facebook comments do not require the permission of the author to be used as data. However, they added that the identity of the authors must be protected. In the case of 4chan, it could be argued that since no registration is required for the website, and the website itself is freely accessible to the public, there should be no ethical issues involved in collecting the data. In addition, the anonymous nature of the

website guarantees that the participants will not be harmed or affected by the content discussed in this research.

There are also several practical issues that should be considered when discussing the process of data collection for this research. When studying discrimination, methods such as interviews or questionnaires allow the researcher to gain an insight into the feelings of the oppressor and the oppressed which are undoubtedly valuable. However, such methods are not suitable for 4chan for several reasons. Firstly, the almost total anonymity provided by the website makes any procedures of sampling difficult. Phillips (2015) notes the difficulty of verifying the demographics of online trolls in CMC due to the anonymous nature of the trolling culture.

"Take, for example, the precise breakdown of race, gender, and class within the troll space. Given the anonymity of participating trolls, this information was empirically unverifiable"

(Phillips, 2015, p.123)

Even though Phillips (2015) suggests possible demographic information about the users of 4chan as discussed in section 1.3, it must be noted that it is, in essence, an estimation based on the content of the website, and should not be taken as an empirical fact. Secondly, attempts at surveying or interviewing the population will most likely be met with trolling, given the track record of the website. Finally, soliciting information about the users of 4chan is a bannable offence in several 4chan boards. Hence, most researchers studying the website rely mainly on the content of the website as sources of data (Bernstein et al, 2011, Phillips, 2016, Ludemann, 2018).

3.5   Relevance of Two Different Data Sets in the Research

Both of the data sets were collected for the purpose of answering the research questions. Collecting 1000 4chan posts for the first data set allow the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users in the data to be analysed based on Culpeper's conventionalised impoliteness formulae (2011). By doing so, the first research question, which is to investigate the functions of impoliteness towards perceived ESL users in 4chan could be further understood. On the other hand, the focus of the second data set is on the interaction between impolite commenters and perceived ESL users, rather than the act of impoliteness itself. By examining the interaction, the second research question, which is to study the co-construction of impoliteness could be investigated.

3.6   Scope and Generalisability of the Research

This research has a rather small scope as the data are only obtained from one website. In addition, as previously discussed 4chan as a website is unique because of the culture of anonymity and its lack of moderation. Thus any results from this research could not be generalised to other forums and discussion websites as the data might not be comparable. However, in the process of data collection, sufficient data have been gathered for the analysis hence the findings should be able to reflect the population of 4chan to a certain extent. It would be interesting for future studies to look into the treatment of perceived ESL users in other websites, especially in pseudo-anonymous or non-anonymous discussion forums. A larger scale project on 4chan involving more data could also improve and enrich the current literature available on the subject.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the data analysis for this research. The first research question is discussed in section 4.1 while the second research question is discussed in section 4.2. Finally, section 4.3 addresses several issues that are related to both of the research questions, such as the identity markers of ESL as a group, and the racial slurs that are found in the data.

4.1 Manifestations of Conventionalised Impoliteness Towards Perceived ESL Users on 4chan

This section discusses the manifestations of impoliteness towards perceived ESL users in 4chan based on the conventionalised impoliteness formulae by Culpeper (2011). The data, which are 1000 posts containing the word 'ESL' are extracted from the 4th of August 2016 to the 5th of September 2016 using the term 'ESL' as a keyword in the archive of the website (desustorage.org). The conventionalised impoliteness formulae were developed by Culpeper (2011) as an alternative to previous impoliteness models proposed in his earlier works (Culpeper 1996, 2005). He derives the formulae based on the notion of conventionalisation, which posits that there are certain words or phrases in any languages that are almost exclusively used in contexts that are impolite that the phrases themselves become associated with impoliteness- therefore conventionalised. There are 9 categories of impoliteness proposed in the formulae which are listed in the literature review section together with their respective structure and possible forms. It should be noted that the forms proposed by Culpeper (2011) are suggestions based on his data, and are not definitive. In the context of this research, a part of the impoliteness found in the data adheres to the structure provided in the formulae. For example, the most common form of dismissal in the data is 'fuck off', which can be found in the formulae. On the other hand, there are also other forms of impoliteness found in the data that are

not included in the formulae. For example, the phrase 'stop posting you ESL' could be considered a conventionalised silencer because the phrase can be interpreted as an attempt to silence the hearer in the same way a speaker tells a hearer to 'shut up'.

Since the data extracted for this section only contain individual posts from 4chan, the intents and the feelings of the interlocutors involved could not be ascertained. Therefore, it should be noted that the categories of impoliteness discussed in this section (or the decision as to what can be considered impolite) could be considered as an interpretive analysis based on the conventionalised impoliteness formulae, and not on the feelings of the interlocutors (in this case impolite commenters and perceived ESL users). In other words, this section deals with the manifestations of conventionalised impoliteness that exists in the data based on the formulae, and does not include discussions of the effect of the impoliteness towards ESL users. However, the reaction of perceived ESL users towards the conventionalised impoliteness used against them are discussed in the second research question which is discussed in section 4.2.

Finally, when discussing the frequencies of impoliteness in the data, it is important to note that a single post can contain more than one type of impoliteness (see extract 3)

Extract 3. Insult, Ill-wish

/a/ Anonymous Wed 10 Aug 2016 07:20:00 No.145451869 ViewReport

>>145451823

You exacerbated it you fucking ESL ape. Go step on a live wire.

The comment above contains a conventionalised insult in the form of personal negative vocative "you fucking ESL ape" and a conventionalised ill-wish "go step on a live wire".

Table 4.1: Categories of Conventionalised Impoliteness

Categories	Frequency	Percentage (Frequency/ total number of impoliteness)
Insults	209	50.6
Dismissals	76	18.4
Unpalatable questions/ presuppositions	47	11.4
Pointed criticisms/ complaints	46	11.1
Negative expressives	20	4.8
Silencers	9	2.2
Condescensions	5	1.2
Threats	1	0.2
Message enforcers	0	0
Total	**413**	**100**

Overall, 27% out of the 1000 posts containing the word 'ESL' fit the conventionalised impoliteness formulae. Table 4.1 illustrates the frequency of impoliteness categories made by 4chan forumers towards perceived ESL speakers. The highest category is insults (209), followed by dismissals (76), unpalatable questions (47), criticisms (46), negative

expressives (20), and silencers (9). Meanwhile, threats (1), condescensions (5) and message enforcers (0) have relatively low frequency compared to the other types of impoliteness. The categories of impoliteness and the frequency of each category are discussed subsequently.

4.1.1 **Insults**

In the conventionalised impoliteness formulae, insult is the most encompassing category as Culpeper (2011) includes four different subcategories of insults which are: personalized negative vocatives, personalized negative assertions, personalized negative references and personalized third-person negative references. In the data, perceived ESL users are commonly insulted with profanities. Therefore, it is rather unsurprising to see out of all the categories of conventionalised impoliteness, insult has the highest frequency at 50.6%. In other words, over half of the impoliteness found in the data are insults. For example, there are over 50 variations of insults towards perceived ESL users involving the word 'faggot' such as "ESL faggot" or simply "ESLfag". Interestingly, insults also usually co-occur with other types of impoliteness such as criticism or dismissals (see extract 4).

Extract 4. Insult (Personalized negative vocative)

/m/ Anonymous Wed 10 Aug 2016 21:53:31 No.14604083 ViewReport

Quoted By: >>14604166

Oh wow learn English before you try to shit on someone you ESL fuck.

In the example above, the impolite commenter insults the perceived ESL user by using the expletive 'fuck'. The phrase "you ESL fuck" could be categorised as a personalised negative vocative based on the conventionalised impoliteness formulae. Jay and Janschewitz (2008) suggest that one of the main purposes of swearing is to convey emotions, especially frustration or anger. In addition, Beebe (1995) suggests that venting

anger is one of the main functions of instrumental rudeness, which can be defined as rudeness done to achieve a goal. In this context, it is possible that the impolite commenter is trying to display his or her frustration towards the perceived ESL user by insulting the user. In addition, by telling the perceived ESL user to learn English, the impolite commenter insinuates that the ESL user's English proficiency is subpar. On the other hand, the insult in the subsequent example is simpler compared to the first since it is not prefaced by an advice from the impolite commenter. The insult is rather straightforward, the impolite commenter simply calls a perceived ESL user 'dumb', suggesting that the ESL user is intellectually inferior (see extract 5).

Extract 5. Insult (Personalized third person negative reference)

/a/ Anonymous Wed 17 Aug 2016 10:57:59 No.145797708 ViewReport

>>145797688

He's a dumb ESL poster

The comment above is a personalized third person negative reference, as the insult mentions the "dumb ESL poster" in third person. Culpeper (2011) suggests that there are several ways in which insults are used in interaction. In certain cases, insults could be interpreted as humorous and serve to tighten the bond between speakers and hearers. For example, insults are commonly used in friendly banters between friends. On the other hand, insults are also commonly used to express strong feelings or emotions as suggested by Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Beebe (1995). In the context of this research, it is rather difficult to see the insults targeted towards perceived ESL users as a form of banter. This is because they usually co-occur with other types of impoliteness (such as complaints and criticisms about language) that display dissatisfaction towards the perceived ESL users, especially regarding the issue of language use in 4chan. Hence, based on the data it could be argued that on 4chan, the insults used towards perceived ESL users are malicious in nature, and not a form of friendly banter between friends.

Extract 6. Insult (Personalized negative reference)

/ a/ Anonymous Mon 05 Sep 2016 23:22:56 No.146774595 ViewReport

>>146767594

>>146767412

>ESL
It's 0.1 seconds, even if that "doesn't make sense" or whatever in your little ESL mind.

In the example, the impolite commenter makes a personalized negative reference towards the perceived ESL user by referencing his or her "little ESL mind". The phrase "little ESL mind" is an insult because it insinuates that the perceived ESL user is unintelligent. This is a common theme in the impoliteness used against perceived ESL user which is discussed later in this section.

Interestingly there are also a relatively high number of racial slurs being used as insults in the data, particularly against Mexicans and Southeast Asians (see extract 7).

Extract 7. Insult. (Personalized negative assertion)

/m/ Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 09:48:05 No.14586130 ViewReport
>>14586122

That's because you're a filthy ESL chink SEAmonkey, you incorrigible fool.

The example showcases a personalized negative assertion, one of the subcategories of conventionalised insults in the formulae. The insult "you're a filthy ESL chink SEAmonkey, you incorrigible fool" is rather loaded. Firstly, the perceived ESL user is described as a "filthy ESL chink SEAmonkey". Apart being described with the adjective filthy, the ESL user is also called a chink SEAmonkey. Chink is a slur that is commonly used by 4chan users to describe people of Asian descent, and SEAmonkey is slang for Southeast Asian monkeys, another slur with a racist connotation. In addition, the perceived ESL user is also called a fool, which is intensified with the adjective

'incorrigible'. As we have seen previously, insulting the intelligence of perceived ESL user is a pattern that can be seen repeatedly in the data. Evidence of racism in the insults towards perceived ESL users can also be seen in the next examples (see extract 8).

Extract 8. Insult (Personalized negative vocatives), ill-wish

Anonymous Sun 07 Aug 2016 23:15:56 No.145336860 Report

Quoted By: >>145337127

>ESL spicfag is here

Kill yourself.

/fit/ Anonymous Mon 05 Sep 2016 18:01:55 No.38588928 ViewReport

>>38588913

>ESL SEA-nigger

not surprised to be honest

The first example contains the slur 'spic' which is commonly used to insult Spanish speaking immigrants in the United States, while the impolite commenter in the second example uses the term 'SEA-nigger'. In this context, SEA refers to southeast Asia, and the term 'nigger' is offensive towards the African American community. The existence of these antagonistic comments reflects the attitude of 4chan users towards minority groups, which is closely related to their language use and their status as perceived ESL users. In this case, both regions (South America and Southeast Asia) have a huge number of non-native English speakers which might explain the bias towards them from native English speakers of 4chan. The relationship between ethnicity and language is further explored in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

4.1.2   **Dismissals**

In the conventionalised impoliteness formulae, dismissals are imperatives that are used to dismiss, reject or oust the hearer from a particular place or context. For example, Culpeper (2011) considers the phrases 'go away' and 'fuck off' as conventionalised dismissals. In this research, conventionalised dismissals are used by a part of the users of 4chan to dismiss and exclude perceived ESL users from a discussion. Dismissals can also be interpreted as an attempt to convey their aversion towards ESL speakers or a way to let them know that they are not welcome and should leave the website. Bousfield (2008) suggests that being dismissive of someone or someone's need is a common tactic employed to convey impoliteness. He argues that snubbing is usually employed by interlocutors to stop interactants from interacting with the snubber. The dismissals commonly used by perceived ESL users could fall into this category. By telling the perceived ESL users to shut up, the impolite commenters are effectively trying to stop communicating with perceived ESL users (see extract 9)

Extract 9. Dismissal

/a/ Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 14:42:51 No.145654750 ViewReport

>>145654726

ESL go and stay go

/a/ Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 13:37:53 No.145920318 ViewReport

>>145920179

ESL faggot pls go

The first example is a rather typical dismissal with the impolite commenter simply telling the perceived ESL user to "go and stay go". Meanwhile, the second example shows that dismissals are also used by 4channers together with derogatory terms or insults. In this case, the slur 'faggot' is used together with the dismissal. The slur 'faggot' that is used

will further intensify the hostility in the comment. In addition, most of the impolite commenters chose the phrase "fuck off" when dismissing perceived ESL users. Culpeper (2011) suggests that impoliteness could be exacerbated and intensified by using more vulgar words. For example in this case, "Fuck off ESL" is more intense in its impoliteness compared to "ESL go away". This could explain the choice of words used by the impolite commenters when dismissing perceived ESL users. In a part of the comments, the intent behind the dismissals are also included by the impolite commenters as can be seen in the next example (see extract 10).

Extract 10. Dismissal

/int/

English language appreciation thread

Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 18:27:20 No.63450290 ViewReport

This thread is for native english speakers only, ESL people need to fuck off.

The example above is targeted towards perceived ESL user in general, and not a particular ESL user as suggested by the phrase "ESL people". It illustrates a clear example of exclusion targeted towards perceived ESL users on 4chan. Ironically, the comment is posted on the international board /int/, the only board on 4chan where language learning is not only welcomed but encouraged by the moderators and administrators. Therefore, by creating a comment with the title "English language appreciation thread" and blatantly dismissing perceived ESL users on the international board, it could be suggested that here the impolite commenter is deliberately trying to harass perceived ESL users. The example demonstrates a clear relationship between native English speakers perceived ESL users on 4chan. It appears that some native speakers of English believe that ESL users should be excluded on 4chan (see extract 11).

Extract 11. Dismissal

> /a/ Anonymous Tue 09 Aug 2016 05:44:33 No.145403704 ViewReport
> Fucking ESL get out of this board and actually learn English

This example further strengthens the view that perceived ESL users are dismissed because of their English proficiency. In the example, the perceived ESL user is dismissed with a conventionalised dismissal "get out" which is intensified with the word 'fucking' and is asked to "actually learn English". By telling the perceived ESL user to get out and learn English, the impolite commenter is implying that at the time the comment was written, the English proficiency of the perceived ESL user was not sufficient enough for him or her to be on 4chan.

Dismissals are the second most common type of conventionalised impoliteness that could be found in the data with 76 occurrences which makes up 18.4% of the total number of impoliteness. Even though most of them are usually single sentences that contain only dismissals such as "ESL fuck off" or "ESL go away", a part of them include clues as to why the perceived ESL users are dismissed. As shown in the previous two examples, language or issues related language proficiency have been repeatedly cited by the impolite commenters as the reason for the dismissals against perceived ESL users. Unlike insults, dismissals appear to be more goal oriented. The conventionalised dismissals used in the data are all in the imperative form, which display a clear purpose of the impolite commenters which is to exclude and oust perceived ESL users on 4chan.

4.1.3 Unpalatable Questions

Asking questions that cause the hearer discomfort can be categorised as a form of impoliteness. Culpeper (2011) suggests that unpalatable questions are one of the conventionalised forms of impoliteness that is often used in the English language. A part of these questions are rhetorical in nature and are asked to provoke a feeling of irritation to the hearer rather than genuinely seeking for information. For example, a question that

implies the hearer is stupid could be considered as a conventionalised unpalatable question. Bousfield (2008) also discusses a rather similar category of impoliteness which he calls 'challenges'. He suggests that challenges are always in the form of questions. In an attempt to be impolite, speakers could ask hearers question that would challenge the hearers' position or status.

In the context of this research, there are questions that are asked towards perceived ESL users that could be interpreted as unpalatable as they appear to bring a certain level of discomfort towards perceived ESL users (see extract 12).

Extract 12. Unpalatable question

---

his/ Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 12:10:15 No.1635687 ViewReport

>>1635622

wow are you ESL or just an angry autist?

that's not an explanation.

/a/ Anonymous Thu 01 Sep 2016 09:36:42 No.146553293 ViewReport

Quoted By: >>146553369

>>146553194

>Stupid *SoL adapted with a lot of **moe don't make something good.

Are you an ESL or something? You come across as mentally retarded.

Slice of life, a genre of anime and manga that focuses on the daily lives of the characters

**Something cute, endearing.*

Both of the questions in the extract ask whether the hearers are ESL or mentally challenged. The questions are binary questions that demand one or the other, and in these cases, selecting either answer downgrades the responder. The questions are rhetorical in nature since they are designed to trap the perceived ESL users with answers that will

downgrade them. It is clear that unfavourable binary questions like these with downgrading answers are meant to disempower the responder.

Interestingly, unpalatable questions also co-occur with concerns or criticisms about language (see extract 13).

Extract 13. Unpalatable question

 /a/ Anonymous Mon 29 Aug 2016 21:28:37 No.146436581 ViewReport

>>146436380

are you the same ESL blurter from yesterday who confuses the proper use of your and you're?

The impolite commenter above questions the perceived ESL user's English proficiency by asking a specific question regarding the use of "your and you're". The question is discomforting because it clearly implies that the language used by the perceived ESL user is subpar. In addition, the impoliteness is exacerbated by the word 'blurter' (Australian slang for buttocks). There are also instances where the perceived ESL users are simply asked: "Are you ESL?". On the surface, this question seems harmless, especially when it is used in an appropriate context, e.g. a language classroom. However, given the general treatment towards perceived ESL users in 4chan, and the fact that these questions are sometimes prefaced by criticisms or insults towards perceived ESL users, it could be argued that such questions are impolite in nature (see extract 14).

Extract 14. Unpalatable question

> /k/ Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 09:09:42 No.31186262 ViewReport
>
> >>31186035
>
> Your reading comprehension is atrocious.
>
> Are you ESL?

The question is prefaced by a direct criticism of the perceived ESL user's reading comprehension. By criticising someone's ability to comprehend what he or she is reading, one is implying that he or she is unable to understand what is going on, hence not suited for discussion. Unpalatable questions also suggest that the hostility towards perceived ESL users by impolite commenters seem to stem from the language used by perceived ESL. The issue of language and hostility towards perceived ESL users is further explored in the subsequent section (4.2).

4.1.4 Criticisms

Interestingly, the data show that criticisms often co-occur with discussions of language. The data show that most of the criticisms or complaints are impolite commenters complaining about the language used by perceived ESL users (see extract 24).

Extract 24.Criticism

> /mlp/ Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 03:32:39 No.28191195 ViewReport
>
> >>28191128
>
> He's probably an ESL. He doesn't have a very good grasp on English and that's why most of what he ever says consists of the two simple words: fuck off. Anything more complex requires too much effort and the result often is... well, you can see for yourself.
>
>
> /a/ Anonymous Thu 18 Aug 2016 06:17:14 No.145840719 ViewReport

> >Magika
>
> How's the translation? I see it's the same dude who translated *Ultimate Anti-Hero and that read like it was a poorly edited **machine TL or translated by an ESL that still doesn't have a complete grasp on grammar.
>
>
>
> /a/ Anonymous Thu 04 Aug 2016 07:08:43 No.145154066 ViewReport
>
> >>145152500
>
> Who are you quoting? What does that greentext even mean? The OP has a much better grasp of the English language than you do, ESL-kun.
>
> /m/ Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 20:31:27 No.14588028 ViewReport
>
> >>14588023
>
> So he didn't say that at all?
>
> Ok.
>
> I don't know why ESL want "english" releases when it doesn't matter whether it's english or japanese, they don't know either language.
>
> *A Japanese light novel written by Riku Misora
>
> **Machine translation. Some light novels are translated from either Chinese or Japanese into English via softwares such as Systran or Google translate.

All of the examples above contain impolite commenters complaining about the language of perceived ESL users. The first three examples specifically mention that the perceived ESL users do not have a good grasp on the English language, while the last example goes as far as to suggest that the ESL user does not know either English or Japanese. In the data, the perceived ESL users are criticised because of their lack of language ability in communication. Criticisms toward the perceived ESL users can be seen as attempts by impolite commenters to justify their aversion towards them. Even though a part of the criticisms do not contain insults or offensive words, they could be more damaging to the perceived ESL users as users of 4chan will be more likely to associate perceived ESL users with incompetence.

4.1.5 Negative Expressives and Ill-wishes

According to Culpeper (2011), this category includes curses such as "fuck you" and ill-wishes such as "Kill yourself" or "I hope you die". In the data, all of the ill-wishes involve impolite commenters wishing or hoping perceived ESL users death or serious injury (see extract 22).

Extract 22. Ill-wish

/a/ Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 19:22:36 No.146278100 ViewReport

>>146278073

Kill yourself, ESL.

/a/ Anonymous Tue 23 Aug 2016 13:11:15 No.146131717 ViewReport

>>146131243

Kill yourself ESL-kun

/r9k/ Anonymous Sun 21 Aug 2016 07:20:55 No.30840240 ViewReport

>>30838737

>>30840125

ESL garbage, fuck off and kill yourself.

Sage

/a/ Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 09:54:55 No.145962183 ViewReport

>>145961221

>ESL-kun made that poll

>OP is him

> Kill yourself. Your waifu is shittier than even Yui.

/a/ Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 14:11:55 No.146271340 ViewReport

>>146271235

>Keitai posting AND ESL posting

Literally die.

/a/ Anonymous Sun 07 Aug 2016 23:15:56 No.145336860 ViewReport

>>145336772

>>145336818

>ESL spicfag is here

Kill yourself.

The impoliteness used in the examples are straight-forward are direct. The impolite commenters are wishing the perceived ESL users death "literally die" or are asking them to commit suicide. There are also several variations of ill-wishes other than the examples mentioned above (see extract 23).

Extract 23. Ill-wish

/a/ Anonymous Wed 10 Aug 2016 07:20:00 No.145451869 ViewReport

>>145451823

You exacerbated it you fucking ESL ape. Go step on a live wire.

/a/ Anonymous Tue 09 Aug 2016 22:42:55 No.145433633 ViewReport

>>145433479

Good god tie a rope around your neck and bungie jump off of mount everest ESL-kun

Though slightly different from the earlier examples, both of the examples above revolve around the idea of wishing the perceived ESL users death or serious injury. Interestingly, compared to other types of impoliteness such as criticisms, negative expressives rarely occur with language correction.

The ill wishes in the data seem to be more malicious and severe compared to other forms of impoliteness. For example, perceived ESL users are dismissed and insulted with the words 'stupid or 'dumb'. However, most of the ill wishes ask the perceived ESL users to commit suicide instead. This severity could be explained with 4chan's fascination with suicide. (Nagle, 2017) writes about 4chan and suicide:

> "The forum's preoccupation with suicide, which became used as a verb to 'an hero', often takes the form of painful expressions of anonymous users' desire to commit suicide themselves and at the same time it mocks suicide victims and those who express sympathy with the victims... They thus reject the perceived sentimentality of the mainstream media's suicide spectacles and instead remake it as their own dark spectacle, in which pity is replaced by cruelty".

(Nagle, 2017, p.32)

Therefore, it could be suggested that the ill wishes towards perceived ESL users are an effect of 4chan's obsession with suicide. However, even though the notion of suicide is normalised to a certain extent on 4chan as suggested by Nagle (2017), the ill wishes could still have an impact on the perceived ESL users. At the very least, the impoliteness conveys the extreme dislike of the impolite commenters towards the perceived ESL users.

4.1.6 Silencers

Silencers are commonly used to censor or suppress the hearer from further talking or responding. Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003) argue that telling others to shut up, which is a type of conventionalised silencer is "an aggressive means of impending speech", (p. 1559). They suggest that by telling others to shut up, an individual is actively trying to limit or impose on the hearer's freedom. In this case, the freedom of talking or voicing out one's opinion. In the context of 4chan, such silencers could be seen used against perceived ESL users (see extract 15).

Extract 15. Silencer

>>64420827

Shut up you fucking ESL moron.

The impolite commenter in the example above tells the perceived ESL user to shut up and further exacerbates the impoliteness by using the slur "fucking" and adding the insult "moron" at the end, which implies that the perceived ESL user should be silent due to his or her lack of intelligence.

Extract 16. Silencer

/a/ Anonymous Tue 16 Aug 2016 08:47:39 No.145745624 ViewReport

>>145745589

Shut the fuck up you ESL ape. You ruined these threads for two months straight. Go get the shit kicked out of you by cops.

The impolite commenter begins by telling the perceived ESL user to shut up, which is intensified by the insult 'ape'. In addition, the impolite commenter also blames the perceived ESL user on the poor quality of the threads for the past two months. Finally, the impolite commenter wishes the perceived ESL user to get kicked by cops. It should be noted that the silencer is accompanied by other types of impoliteness, which could

intensify impoliteness contained in the message as suggested by Culpeper (2011). It is also interesting to note that in the data, there are several variations of silencers used towards perceived ESL users (see extract 17).

Extract 17. Silencer

/tg/ Anonymous Thu 18 Aug 2016 07:33:10 No.48853749 ViewReport

>>48853629

ESL please stop posting.

/a/ Anonymous Thu 18 Aug 2016 00:10:40 No.145823391 ViewReport

Stop reposting this everywhere, you retarded ESL newfag. Your taste is awful and you barely read manga.

Instead of telling the perceived ESL users to shut up, the impolite commenters in the examples above instead tell the perceived ESL user to stop posting. It could be argued that the effect is rather similar to telling them to not contribute to the ongoing discourse. Essentially, by telling the perceived ESL users to stop posting, they are imposing on their freedom and could be considered as an "an aggressive means of impending speech" as suggested by Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003). Interestingly, even though the first example contains the common positive politeness strategy (please), it could be interpreted as mock politeness. Bousfield (2008) suggests that mock politeness is the use of politeness that is insincere, therefore could be interpreted as impolite. In this case, the post essentially violates the freedom of the ESL user by telling the user to stop posting, and thus the comment could be interpreted as impolite. The examples above seem to suggest that the medium of interaction (in this case CMC) might have an effect on the type of impoliteness used in interaction. On 4chan, telling other users to stop posting would make more sense as they communicating via written posts and not face to face (see extract 18).

Extract 18. Silencer

/a/ Anonymous Fri 12 Aug 2016 16:37:42 No.145563068 ViewReport

>>145563050

ESL please stop posting. You don't even understand what we're talking about.

/a/ Anonymous Mon 29 Aug 2016 21:20:33 No.146436380 ViewReport

>>146436308

>You're retarded
ESL Mexican please stop posting

A similar pattern could be seen in the two examples above. Both posters requested that the perceived ESL user to stop posting. As suggested previously, due to the medium of communication (4chan being an online imageboard) asking someone to stop posting has the same effect as asking someone to shut up. As suggested by Locher (2010), the medium of communication can have an impact on the type of impoliteness used. In this case, the conventionalised dismissal "shut up" has evolved into "stop posting" due to the medium of communication.

4.1.7 Condescensions

Culpeper (2011) associates condescensions with patronising behaviours, which can include emphasizing one's superiority by belittling others (see extract 19).

Extract 19. Condescension

/r9k/ Anonymous Sat 27 Aug 2016 23:37:28 No.30993993 ViewReport

>>30993973

not him but that's pretty close, little ESL boy

The impolite commenter above uses a condescending tone when replying to a perceived ESL user, by first using the adjective 'little', and then adding the insult 'boy', which can be considered as an insult when used to describe an adult male. Since 4chan is

an 18+ site, it could be assumed that the impolite commenter is trying to be deliberately condescending in tone towards the perceived ESL users. This is strikingly similar to an example discussed by Culpeper (1996) where a female soldier was getting reprimanded by a non-commissioned officer for refusing to complete a task. The officer uttered the following sentence towards the female soldier. *"You really impress people with your little act, girl".* The first part of the sentence could be interpreted as sarcasm or mock politeness since it is followed by the condescending phrase 'little act'. In addition, the officer also used the word 'girl' to refer to an adult female soldier, which could be considered as an attempt to belittle her.

In a similar vein, perceived ESL users are also labelled as underage (see extract 20).

Extract 20. Condescension.

> **/a/ Anonymous** Mon 05 Sep 2016 21:28:22 No.146770474 ViewReport
> \>>146770439
> I want esl underage kuns to leave

In the example, the perceived ESL user is belittled by the impolite commenter who labels the user as underage. Interestingly in the example, the Japanese honorific 'kun' is used. As discussed previously, mismatched honorifics can be a tool of impoliteness in the Japanese language as suggested by Nishimura (2010). The honorific 'kun' could be used by an older person to address someone younger (i.e. a teacher addressing his student). In this case, it could be argued that the condescension (by being labelled as underage) is intensified by the honorific, which further intensifies the notion that the perceived ESL user is younger. Given the fact that the comment is posted on the anime board, it is likely that the impolite commenter is aware of the role of honorifics in the Japanese language. In addition, the comment also contains a dismissal "I want ...to leave". In this case, the dismissal appears rather simple and straight forward, but taking into account the fact that underage users are not allowed to use 4chan, the effect of the dismissal is strengthened. In other words, the comment contains two different types of impoliteness. Firstly, the

condescension with the 'underage' label and the use of the 'kun' honorific, and secondly the conventionalised dismissal which is rationalized with the condescension.

The following example illustrates the attempt of an impolite commenter to appear superior towards a perceived ESL user by insulting his or her language ability (see extract 21).

Extract 21. Condescension

/a/ Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 01:40:26 No.145940935 ViewReport

>>145940760

Yeah, it means you have an intuitive understanding of the language and can string sentences together without sounding like a tool and making grammar mistakes every five words.

>Some natives are niggers, homeless, deaf or have other disabilities.

Pick a random homeless guy from the street and he'll still be better at the language than your average ESL.

In the extract, the commenter begins by implying that a native speaker has the ability to string sentences together in English without making errors. The impolite commenter then compares the language ability of an ESL to a native homeless person. The highly prejudiced comparison (towards both parties compared) highlights the inferiority of ESL speakers when it comes to matters concerning language. The example above is interesting because it sheds some light into the feelings and thoughts of a presumably native speaker of English towards a perceived ESL user on the site. It shows that native speakers of English feel superior compared to perceived ESL users because of their English competency.

4.1.8 Message Enforcers and Threats

As shown in Table 4.1, there is only one threat and no message enforcer that could be found in the data. This pattern is certainly interesting and there are several inferences that

could be made based on the medium of communication and the total anonymity of the website. Culpeper (2011) suggests that message enforcers could be used to intimidate someone in a face to face situation. He describes the example of a police officer trying to intimidate an immigrant taxi driver. In the conversation, the police officer uses message enforcers such as "You got that", and "Do you understand me?" several times which manage to elicit answers from the taxi driver. Since the taxi driver is an immigrant, the message enforcers used by the police officer further strengthened the message and intimidated the taxi driver. In addition, the answers given by the taxi driver serve as a confirmation that he understood the police officer.

However, in 4chan the communication is not face to face and more importantly, not instantaneous. To avoid spams from bots (autonomous program designed to spam 4chan with advertisement etc), 4chan has a cooldown period where you are not allowed to post another comment for 1 minute before posting a second reply, and the more one posts the longer the cooldown period will get. As shown in the example of the police officer and the taxi driver by Culpeper (2011), the interlocutor expects a reply from the hearer after using a message enforcer but this is rather unlikely on 4chan, as Bernstein et al. (2011) suggest that almost half of the threads on 4chan have no replies. Hence, since the interaction on 4chan is not face to face and not instantaneous, there is very little benefit from using message enforcers on the website. This might explain the relatively low number of message enforcers on the website.

In face to face communication, threats are a very powerful tool commonly used to get the hearers to comply with a demand. For example, Limberg (2009) argues that verbal threats are commonly used in police work. He discovers that based on his data, police officers at times use verbal threats as a *'powerful linguistic device'* to get the target to do something. However, in this research the number of threats are relatively low compared

to other categories of impoliteness despite their usefulness. The lack of physical threats could be explained by the impossibility of the threats to be carried out due to the anonymity of 4chan users. Limberg (2009) discusses how a police officer threatens to pepper spray a suspect is the suspect does not comply with his demand. In this context, the physical threat is a real possibility since the police officer is able to carry the threat out. In another study, Ferber (2018) describes how a professor is threatened with physical violence by a stranger on the internet who claims to know her home address. However, due to the anonymity on 4chan, no physical threats could be carried out since the majority of users do not know any information about other users. The anonymity on 4chan protects a large number of its users from physical threats which would explain the relatively low number of physical threats being used as an intimidation tool.

As suggested by the adaptation of the silencer, the lack of threats and message enforcers could also suggest that the medium of interaction could affect the type of impoliteness used. The non-instantaneous communication and the total anonymity of 4chan might play a part in the relatively low number of threats and message enforcers used in the website.

4.2 The Co-construction of Impoliteness in 4chan Discussion Threads

The first research question studies different manifestations of impoliteness in individual posts. On the other hand, the second research question examines the co-construction of impoliteness by analysing the interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. The triggers and the escalation of impoliteness are also discussed in this section.

Jacoby and Ochs (1995) define the term co-construction as the collaborative effort of two or more interactants in a certain context. The participants in co-constructive activities do not necessarily have to agree or support each other's' arguments as disagreements

could also be co-constructed. In this context, the term co-construction is used to describe the interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters and how the occurrence of impoliteness could be attributed to the action of both parties.

Since the process of co-construction is the collaborative effort between at least two different parties, we should first establish the interactants involved in the co-construction of impoliteness in the context of this research. Due to the anonymity of the website, it is almost impossible to ascertain the number of users involved in one discussion thread. However, as suggested by Phillips (2015) in her study about 4chan, the content of the website could offer some clues about the participants involved in a discussion. The data collected suggest that there are at least two distinguishable groups that revolve around the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users.

The first group is called the impolite commenters. In the context of this study, impolite commenters on 4chan leave comments that contain insults and other kind of impoliteness towards perceived ESL users. It is possible that a large number of comments containing the word 'ESL' are written by impolite commenters because such comments usually contain impoliteness directed towards perceived ESL users. On the other side are the perceived ESL users themselves. They are users who have been identified and labelled by the impolite commenters as 'ESL' and have received criticisms, insults and other types of impoliteness because of that.

Collecting strings of conversation that contain interactions from both impolite commenters and perceived ESL users are pivotal in understanding the impoliteness in the website. The data collected show that impolite comments towards perceived ESL users are usually triggered by posts that do not adhere to conventional grammar rules such as posts that contain spelling errors or mismatched subject-verb agreement. In other words, a 4chan user is more likely to be perceived as ESL and be harassed with impoliteness if

the comment written by the user is agrammatical. Out of the 10 threads collected, 9 of them contain agrammatical posts which might have triggered the impolite comments.

Extract 25. Dismissal.

(1) Anonymous Mon 08 Aug 2016 04:41:21 No.145351792 Report

Pretty dissapointing that the whale showed up, more Subaru suffering would of been awesome in that scenario.

(2) Anonymous Mon 08 Aug 2016 04:42:05 No.145351837 Report

>>145351792

I want ESL fags to go.

In the example above, the commenter in (1) is perceived as an ESL user by the commenter in (2) rather suddenly. The comment in (2) could be classified as a conventionalised dismissal as it is clear that the impolite commenter wants the perceived ESL user to be excluded from 4chan. The impoliteness in the comment is also intensified by the slur 'fags', a commonly used term to insult other users as discussed by Phillips (2015). It is also interesting to note that the commenter in (2) uses the plural term "fags", which suggests that the dismissal is not only intended towards the ESL user in (1), but also towards ESL users in general.

The comments were taken from the anime board /a/, on a thread that discusses an anime called RE:ZERO. Apart from the commenter in (2) labelling the user in (1) with the term ESL, discussions about language or language related issues are non existent in the thread.. This seems to suggest that the impoliteness (dismissal, insult) towards perceived ESL user in this case is triggered by the content in (1). The perceived ESL user in (1) uses the phrase "would of" instead of "would have" which might have triggered the impolite commenter in (2). The next example is rather similar, where the post that triggered the ESL labelling contains a grammatical mistakes (see extract 26).

Extract 26. Dismissal.

(1)Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 13:33:57 No.145920179 Report
>>145919821
I guess other who liked that faggot can relate to being a cuck huh?
(2) Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 13:37:53 No.145920318 Report
>>145920179
ESL faggot pls go

In the example above, several 4chan users on the anime board are discussing an anime voice actor and the user in (1) suggests that fans of said voice actor are "cucks" (slang for cuckold, another common insult used on 4chan). The comments in the second example follow a similar pattern to the first one where a perceived ESL user is dismissed in (2) and insulted following a comment that is not grammatical (1). Again, the thread does not contain any discussion or reference towards language so it is highly possible that the impoliteness is triggered by the agrammatical comment written by the perceived ESL user in (1). The next example further strengthens the postulation that the impoliteness is triggered by the perception of language incompetency since the impolite commenter implies that the perceived ESL user's English is subpar (see extract 27).

Extract 27. Insult.

(1)Anonymous Wed 24 Aug 2016 07:15:39 No.146162598 Report
>>146162397
>not going to happen.
you sir reminds me of the retards from a long time ago thinking that, "Amrecian ships and Birtish ships is impossible be inculded in kancolle".
(2)Anonymous Wed 24 Aug 2016 07:17:07 No.146162654 Report

> >>146162598
>
> Please learn to write actual English you retarded ESL. I was one of the main people spending hours fighting back the Axiscolle retards in these threads.

In the example, the users are discussing a game called Kantai Collection. There are several spelling errors in (1), in addition to the subject-verb disagreement in the phrase "you sir reminds me". As a response, the user in (2) labels the user as ESL and reminds him to "write actual English". This shows that the user notices the agrammatical English used in (1) and is complaining about it. The ESL user is also insulted with the word retarded. There is certainly a pattern that could be observed in this and the previous examples; comments that contain impoliteness against perceived ESL users are preceded by comments that do not follow conventional English grammar. Further examples of how non-conventional English grammar triggers impoliteness are discussed subsequently (see extract 28).

Extract 28. Dismissal, insult.

> (1) Anonymous Fri 12 Aug 2016 04:46:56 No.145535196 Report
>
> >>145531138
>
> Heh what did was she doing
>
>
> (2)Anonymous Fri 12 Aug 2016 04:47:23 No.145535210 Report
>
> >>145535196
>
> Fuck off ESL.
>
>
> (3) Anonymous Fri 12 Aug 2016 04:49:52 No.145535328 Report
>
> >>145535210
>
> fuck off Kancolle belongs to SEA

The example starts with the perceived ESL user in (1) posing a question that is agrammatical ("Heh what did she was doing?"). Subsequently, the user in (1) is dismissed by the impolite commenter in (2) with a conventionalised dismissal "fuck off". In (3), the perceived ESL user responds with a counter dismissal with the same level of intensity and suggests that Kancolle (a game) belongs to Southeast Asia since it is a rather popular game in the region. As a response, the impolite commenter in (4) insults the perceived ESL by insulting "SEAmonkeys" (Southeast Asian monkeys). Interestingly, in 4chan SEAmonkey(s) is not an uncommon. As of January 2019, the term 'SEAmonkey(s)' have been used over 1500 times on the website.

Again, the exchange follows a similar pattern to the previously discussed examples. However, we could see a response from the perceived ESL users, suggesting that there is an animosity between the impolite commenter and the ESL user. We could also see that the exchange between the two parties are equally aggressive to a certain extent. For example, conventionalised dismissals (fuck off) are used by both parties towards each other. However, in this case, the exchange halted without any meaningful resolution which seems to suggest that the act of labelling or calling out another user with the term 'ESL' does not contribute towards anything meaningful.

Extract 29. Criticism.

> (2) Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 23:14:19 No.146284519 Report
>
> >>146284265
>
> >that horrendous sentence structure
>
> >Capitalization all over the place
>
> >kys
>
> Properly learn English before trying to convey a message using it, ESL-kun.

In this particular example, the relationship between language use and impoliteness is direct. The interaction begins when a perceived ESL user in (1) criticises a character from a manga and suggests that the fans of the character to consider suicide ('Kys' is an abbreviation of kill yourself). An impolite commenter then criticises the language used in the post, citing the 'horrendous sentence structure' and the 'capitalization all over the place'. The commenter also advises the perceived ESL user to learn English properly, before using it to convey a message.

Even though the response from the impolite commenter could be interpreted as a form of feedback regarding the language used by the perceived ESL user, the remark is patronising and not constructive. It only points out the mistakes made by the perceived ESL user and does not offer and instructive advice in order to improve the sentence. Since the criticism is targeted towards the language used by the perceived ESL user, it could be suggested that the impoliteness (in this case criticism) towards the user is triggered by perceived language incompetence due to the agrammatical language used in (1). Interestingly, the impolite commenter also uses the honorific 'kun' in the comment towards the ESL user, which makes the message more patronising when combined with the criticisms and the advice given. Even though there is no escalation here, the example shows a clear relationship between the impolite commenters and perceived ESL users.

Extract 30. Dismissal, insult.

(1)Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 10:51:10 No.146602793 Report

>>146602181

Someone must of tipped of Netflix to the memes

(2)Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 10:52:29 No.146602845 Report

>>146602793

>must of

It all comes to-fucking-gether.

These are the people on /a/. This has to be an all-time low.

(3)Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 10:54:03 No.146602882 Report

>>146602845

I'm sorry anon, being a wageslave is killing my brain

(4) Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 11:02:07 No.146603140 Report

>>146602882

Go to sleep, your an ESL faggot.

In the example above, the impolite commenter in (2) complains that the perceived ESL user in (1) had made grammatical mistakes by quoting the phrase "must of" in the post. By pointing out the mistake and complaining about the "people on /a/", the user insinuates that the quality of the board has dropped because some users do not have the ability to communicate properly in English. It should also be noted that the impolite commenter in (2) uses the word 'fucking" in his post which can be considered as the first sign of aggression in this exchange.

In (3), instead of responding to the aggression in (2), the perceived ESL user seems apologetic and produces an explanation to the mistake made in (1). "Wageslave" is slang in 4chan for having a job, so in (3) the perceived ESL user is presumably apologising because the mistake made in (1) is a result of the user being tired from his or her job. However, even with the apology, the user is labelled with 'ESL' and dismissed in (4). In addition to the conventionalised dismissal, the ESL user is also insulted with the slur 'faggot'. The example shown here illustrates how an agrammatical post by a perceived ESL user could trigger impoliteness and how the impoliteness could escalate (see extract 31).

Extract 31. Dismissal, insult.

(1)Anonymous Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:09:59 No.146691847 Report
I FUCKING TIRED OF THIS BITCH!
If she is your waifu, you have a disgusting
(2)LAwLz !LAwLzaWU1A Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:11:48 No.146691939 Report
>>146691847
Go to bed ESL-Kun.
(3)Anonymous Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:19:26 No.146692339 Report
>>146691939
No, and Fuck You Fucking Autist Retarded Shitty

In the string of replies above, a perceived ESL user (1) is dismissed by an impolite commenter who tells the user to go to bed (2). The comment written by the perceive ESL user in (1) seems to be agrammatical. The first sentence is missing the copula 'am' and the second sentence is incomplete. Given the fact that (1) precedes the dismissal in (2), it can be presumed that the inaccuracies in (1) is the trigger. At the surface level, the

dismissal could be seen as an attempt to exclude perceived ESL users from the discussion. However more interestingly, we could also interpret the dismissal as being patronising because of the Japanese honorific 'kun' that is used. According to Matsuda (2002), the Japanese honorific 'kun' is usually used to address either someone who is of lower status than the speaker (for example, a teacher addressing a student) or male children. Using the honorific 'kun' in this context can be seen as an attempt by the impolite commenter to patronise the perceived ESL user. By telling the ESL user to go to bed, the impolite commenter is being patronising, comparable to an adult telling a young child to go to sleep because it is past the child's bedtime.

Finally, there is a response by the perceived ESL user in (3) which is interestingly agrammatical as well. As suggested by Culpeper (2011) sometimes impoliteness is used to elicit a response or to trigger the hearer. In this case, the dismissal in (2) seems to be successful in eliciting a response from the perceived ESL user. It should be noted that even though the impolite commenter was being impolite by dismissing the ESL user, the ESL user escalates the situation by disagreeing with the impolite commenter (refusing to go to bed) and using the conventionalized negative expressions (fuck you), and further insulting the impolite commenter. In this case, we could see how both parties play different roles that contribute to this phenomenon. Interestingly, as shown by the subsequent examples the phenomenon is again repeated due to the attitudes from both parties (see extract 32).

Extract 32. Dismissal.

---

(1)Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:44:22 No.145253919 Report

Both anime and manga are fucking stupid that why /a/ hate this shit.

(2) Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:51:30 No.145254255 Report

>>145253919

Fuck off ESL

(3) Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:56:45 No.145254476 Report

>>145254255

No

(4) Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 06:00:49 No.145254633 Report

>>145254476

this is an english speaking board

In the extract above, a perceived ESL user is dismissed by a commenter after posting
the agrammatical comment in (1). The perceived ESL user suggests that /a/, the anime
board of 4chan hates both the anime and manga of a certain franchise because they are
'stupid'. Rather than responding with a rebuttal or a counter-argument, the commenter
simply dismisses the perceived ESL user by calling the user an 'ESL' and telling the user
to 'fuck off' in (2). By labelling the perceived ESL user with the term 'ESL', the
commenter brings attention to the language being used in the post. As suggested by
Nishimura (2010), in cases where the identity of the interactants are unknown (such as an
anonymous message board like 4chan) the message itself becomes a part of identity. In
the example above, it is possible that the perceived 'ESL' user is called an 'ESL' due to
the language that is used in the post written by the user. Hence, it is likely that in this case
the impolite commenter assumes the identity of the perceived ESL through the content of

the message and used impoliteness to point out that there are grammatical inaccuracies in the post written.

Interestingly, the dismissal is responded with a simple 'no' in (3) presumably by the perceived ESL user, suggesting that the user refuses to leave the discussion. The response, although tamer compared to the previous example, highlights the outlook of perceived ESL users on the board. In both examples, when ESL users are being labelled as ESL and dismissed, they showed a clear refusal to the demands of the impolite commenters. In the final post of the discussion, the impolite commenter adds that /a/, the anime board of 4chan is an English speaking board, which implies that the website is not a place for perceived ESL users. This escalation by the impolite commenter further strengthens the view that the perceived ESL user is being labelled with the term 'ESL' and is being dismissed due to the language used by them. Other than the perceived grammatical inaccuracies, there are no other indications that the user might be a second language speaker. Similar to the previous example, the escalation displays a strong sense of exclusion, where perceived ESL users are shown to be excluded by impolite commenters. Interestingly, perceived ESL users are also ridiculed for their language proficiency even though there is proof that what they have written could be understood by other posters as shown in the next example (extract 33).

Extract 33. Unpalatable question, insult.

> (1) Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 10:52:11 No.145647021 Report
>
> Was this in the manga or LN? Thanks for saying that anon-kun though, so it is possible with what you said it was Satella's scent from his power. This show, every answer leads to another question what that leads to another question. Endless questions
>
>
> (2) Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 11:46:22 No.145648925 Report
>
> >>145647021

What the fuck are you trying to say, you ESL faggot?

(3) Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 11:10:13 No.145647677 Report

>>145647021

The manga hasn't gotten there yet, but it's in the LN. However, it's something that isn't made too obvious, and Rem never encounters Al in any loop afterward where Subaru might have been in a calmer state of mind that he wouldn't fuck things up if he were told more. It actually seems to be the kind of thing you might miss if you weren't paying attention, but there would be no reason for that scene if something wasn't up with Al. There's a picture of her warning Subaru here. >>145645980

I actually think it's pretty fitting for the Bishop of Pride to have an understated role and for him to avoid the spotlight. Sloth preaches Diligence, Greed believes himself to be Magnanimous, and Wrath just wants to share the Love.

(4)Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 11:49:14 No.145649036 Report

>>145648925

Doesn't matter to you as the person clearly understood.

In the example, the users of 4chan are discussing an anime called RE:ZERO. A user posed a question in (1), asking whether a specific scene in the anime is based on the manga or the light novel (LN). The question is rather straightforward, but the comment contains a sentence that is phrased rather awkwardly "This show, every answer leads to another question what that leads to another question". As a response, the impolite commenter in (2) labels the user in (1) as ESL and insults the user with the word 'faggot'. The impolite commenter in (2) implies that what is written in (1) could not be understood, thus indirectly questioning the English proficiency of the perceived ESL user.

Interestingly, a different user in (3) responds to the question in (1) with a rather detailed explanation, suggesting that the question posed in (1) could be understood after all. Subsequently, in (4) we see a comment from the perceived ESL user responding to the

impolite comment in (2). The ESL user argues that the post in (1) could be understood so the patronising question in (2) is invalid.

We have seen in section 4.1 how ESL users are generally blamed for the poor quality of threads because of they are perceived to lack the ability to communicate properly in English. However, interestingly in this exchange we could see that even though the ESL user managed to convey his or her thoughts properly (at least enough to be understood), they are still labelled as ESL and are discriminated against. This seems to suggest that the perceived ESL users are insulted not because they could not communicate properly, but rather because their language fail to meet a certain standard. The examples provided in this section show that even though the triggers might not follow conventional grammar rules, they could be understood in general.

In a study about "grammar Nazis" in a Czech internet forum, Sherman and Svelch (2015) discover that the "grammar nazis" in the study are mostly believers of the standard language ideology, which can be defined as the belief that the citizens of a nation should communicate in one standard language that is maintained and regulated by dominant institutions of the nation. They also note that since one's language is usually related to one's socioeconomic status, the "grammar nazis" attempt at policing the language of other might be a form of social discrimination. In other words, in the case of Sherman and Svelch (2015), the act of policing language in their context could be understood as attempts of one group to control the other through language. In 4chan, it could also be argued that the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users are attempts towards policing the language on the website. However, instead of differentiating social classes (as in Sherman and Svelch (2015), the language policing attempts on 4chan serve to marginalise non-native English speakers on the website.

Extract 34. Insult.

---

(1)Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:37:34 No.145971042 Report

>>145970638

That is true, but then chances are, those guys are also ESLs, so you end up getting idiots paying for shit translations. Really, learning moon is the way to go.

(2) Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:48:35 No.145971389 Report

>>145971042

I find posts like yours quite... funny, some people learn english and japanese besides their native language to translate shit so some idiot can complain "it's not perfect for me, you ESL"

Note that I'm not defending SHIT translations, I'm just pointing your asshole attitude and commentary implying that only english natives can provide good translations.

(3) Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:50:14 No.145971433 Report

>>145971389

>ESL-kun being triggered and can't accept that his English is shit

(4) Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:50:41 No.145971445 Report

>>145971389

Not him but 99% of ESL translations read quite awkwardly at certain points if not through the whole thing. It's always best to translate into your native language.

The interaction above revolves around the issue of unofficial manga translations. For less popular manga titles that do not have official translations, fans would usually translate the manga themselves. If there are no volunteer translators for a manga, fans would at times commission a translator group to translate their favourite manga from Japanese into English. The discussion begins when a user in (1) suggests that the majority of the individuals involved in translating manga into English are second language speakers themselves, so they will not be able to produce a decent translation. The user

then suggests that manga fans should learn Japanese instead of relying on the subpar translations provided by ESL translation groups. Interestingly, a perceived ESL user in (2) (the user is labelled as 'ESL' by a commenter for this post) replies that he or she is baffled with such views since the ESL translators must have spent a tremendous amount of time and effort into learning a second language. So according to the user, suggesting that only native speakers could provide excellent translations is rather rude. An impolite commenter then responds in (3) with a conventionalised criticism by suggesting that the previous user is an ESL who could not accept the fact that his or her English is terrible. Another commenter adds that almost all of the translations done by ESL translators read rather awkwardly and it is better for them to translate Japanese manga into their own native language rather than English. It is also interesting to note that the impolite commenter addresses the perceived ESL user as 'ESL-kun'. The example above is interesting because even though the comment by the perceived ESL user does not seem to contain any grammatical accuracy, the user was still labelled as ESL due to his or her sympathetic view towards ESL translators in general. The interaction shows that a number of 4chan users believe that ESL users are not able to communicate in English effectively and that their command of English is inferior compared to native speakers.

4.3   Discussions of Data Analysis

This section further discusses several implications from the data analysis in section 4.1 and 4.2 The first subsection discusses the stereotypes of perceived ESL users that could be found in the data, and the second subsection discusses the relationship between the label 'ESL' and the concept of ethnicity on 4chan.

4.3.1 Stereotypes of ESL Users

Even though the posts containing the word ESL that were extracted as data were written at different times and posted across different boards and threads, there are several consistent themes that could be found. Firstly, the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users (particularly insults) often stereotypes them as being less intelligent. For example, the word stupid is used repeatedly to insult perceived ESL users 4chan (see extract 35).

Extract 35. Silencer, Insult

/a/ Anonymous Mon 22 Aug 2016 10:11:48 No.146072072 ViewReport

>>146072038

Shut up stupid ESL

/a/ Anonymous Mon 22 Aug 2016 09:39:47 No.146070847 ViewReport

>>146069021

Could you learn english for once stupid ESL

Interestingly, the second example directly mentions the English language, with the insinuation that the perceived ESL user could not communicate in English well because of the user's stupidity. There are also several different variations of insults that question the intelligence of perceived ESL users (see extract 36).

Extract 36. Insult

/a/ Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 05:40:09 No.145899293 ViewReport

>>145898930

No, he's definitely a dumb ESL. See >>145899109

/a/ Anonymous Wed 17 Aug 2016 10:57:59 No.145797708 ViewReport

>>145797688

Dumb ESL poster

/a/ Anonymous Mon 29 Aug 2016 05:41:19 No.146405740 ViewReport

Quoted By: >>146405858

There's literally only one person that retarded in this site, the ESL-kun shitposter from the *TLR threads, but he's a underage spic that clearly suffered from malnutrition when he was a child so he has an excuse.

/a/ Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 21:30:03 No.146281032 ViewReport

>>146280970

>ESL fag can't make a counter argument because he is too retarded to form a coherent sentence in English

**BFTO like always.

*To Love Ru, a Japanese manga

**Blown the fuck out

The last example also mentions how the perceived ESL user is *"too retarded to form a coherent sentence in English"*. The example implies that the ability to speak English well is related to the level of intelligence that someone has. In a way, it could be argued that it seems that a number of 4chan users seem to hold the belief that perceived ESL users, in general, are less intelligent than native speakers of English. The stereotype of perceived ESL users being less intelligent is also used by native speakers of English as a justification to exclude and silence perceived ESL users on the website (see extract 37).

Extract 37. Silencer, insult, dismissal.

/a/ Anonymous Thu 18 Aug 2016 00:10:40 No.145823391 ViewReport

>>145812011

Stop reposting this everywhere, you retarded ESL newfag. Your taste is awful and you barely read manga.

/a/ Anonymous Fri 12 Aug 2016 20:34:32 No.145567867 ViewReport

>>145567247

He's a retarded ESL who didn't even watch the anime, ignore him

/m/ Anonymous Mon 08 Aug 2016 21:35:23 No.14596658 ViewReport

>>14596653

Fuck off ESL fag, no one cares about your uneducated opinions

The examples shown above suggest that impolite commenters on 4chan seem to have a rather coherent view of perceived ESL users. Based on the insults thrown towards perceived ESL users, the impolite commenters in general seem to hold the belief that perceived ESL users are stupid, or at least less intelligent than the users who are fluent in English.

Therefore, in this context it could be suggested that 'ESL' as a group identity is salient enough for the impolite commenters to easily notice and differentiate perceived ESL users from other 4chan users. As discussed in the literature review, anonymity could increase the importance of group identity at the expense of individual identity. In the context of this research, it is possible that the impolite commenters view the individuals who are perceived to be weak in grammar as 'ESL' users in general rather than different individuals. It could be suggested that the anonymity has intensified the group identity of ESL users and because of that, the group's identity markers become exaggerated. In other

words, it is possible that due to the increased group salience, perceived ESL users are treated as one generalised group with several negative traits by the impolite commenters. Unfortunately, as shown in the data, these traits include having a weak command of the English language and being stupid.

However in the context of 4chan, it appears that the process of being labelled as an ESL is a one way process. The impolite commenters seem to label those that they perceived to be less proficient in the English language with the label 'ESL'. On the other hand, the data do not contain evidence of the perceived ESL users identifying themselves as ESL. Therefore, when discussing the term group identity, I must emphasise that the identity of perceived ESL users is ascribed by one group to the other; in this case the ESL identity is being ascribed by the impolite commenters towards the perceived ESL users and not the other way around.

4.3.2 ESL and Ethnicity

Spears (2017) suggests that in anonymous communication people are more likely to follow the normative view of the group. Even though it is difficult to ascertain what is normal for the users of 4chan, there is one striking similarity that could be found in several of the research that studied 4chan. As discussed in chapter 1.3.4, researchers such as Bernstein et al (2011), Phillips (2012), Heikilla (2017) and Ludemann (2018) have all reported the tendency of 4chan users to discriminate minorities or people of colour. The data in this research support the finding of the previous researchers to a certain extent. There are several racial slurs being used as insults towards perceived ESL users, particularly towards people of colour (see extract 38).

Extract 38.Insult.

/m/ Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 02:56:15 No.14662498 ViewReport

Quoted By: >>14662523

>I-i-it's not shitty, it's camp! It was totally planned to be bad, that means it's good!

Retarded -and- an ESL, José? You should go back to school and get that diploma instead of posting on 4chan.

a/ Anonymous Mon 29 Aug 2016 21:06:23 No.146436022 ViewReport

>>146436001

fucking ESL Mexicans

/a/ Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 12:54:52 No.145969422 ViewReport

>>145969126

There was a mexican ESL-kun around, he was annoying. If you'd been around you'd know. How old are you, you seem like a newfag.

The examples shown above contain slurs towards Spanish speaking users or south-east Asia. Taking into account the racial slurs used against ESL and the tendency of 4chan users to be antagonistic towards minorities as reported by several researchers, we should consider the possibility that expressing their displeasure towards perceived ESL users is also related to the perception of race and ethnicity. Since 4chan has been shown to be racist towards minorities, it is possible that certain users (impolite commenters) are using English competency as a test to see whether a person is white or not. The relationship between perceived English competence and ethnicity could also be found in the data (see extract 39).

Extract 39. Insult.

/m/ Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 04:48:23 No.14662922 ViewReport

>>14662918

>combat sequences

So you can't read and are ESL verified for certain now, go back down the border, Pablo

/a/ Anonymous Thu 25 Aug 2016 23:53:02 No.146235740 ViewReport

>>146234837

Because 4chan is full of weebs, some people simpatize with him thinking he is a ESL nip. But while there is no proof, he will always be a dirty spic for me

The second comment is interesting because it shows that there is a hierarchy between different ethnicities on 4chan. The poster suggests that since 4chan is full of weebs (people who like anime), people could sympathize with Japanese ESL users, but not those from Spanish speaking countries. This post shows that being an ESL, especially if you are from a developing country is not wanted in 4chan.

The same attitude towards perceived Central or South American users can be seen in the first post, where the user dismisses the perceived ESL user by telling him to 'go back down the border". These two examples have shown that the perceived ESL users are not only excluded and disliked because they are perceived to be incompetent in English but especially because being incompetent in English is seen as a sign that the user is a minority that is not from the Anglosphere. The next comment succinctly captures the feelings and attitudes of a part of the users of 4chan towards perceived ESL users (see extract 40).

Extract 40. Insult, ill-wish.

/a/ Anonymous Thu 04 Aug 2016 10:40:23 No.145161573 ViewReport

The English language is a near-ideal intelligence filter. It is possibly the most needlessly complex and internally inconsistent language there is, so the ability to speak it grammatically correctly or not is a fantastic way to identify, isolate, mock, and disregard idiots. Case in point: niggers, Mexicans, underage, and millenials. All people who should be laughed out of this site. And don't think it gives your smugly constructed image of the stupid American a leg up, those of the retarded masses are less able to speak their language properly than the average German. So, if you're bitching about ESL idiocy and inability to write in English not being accepted (as it shouldn't), you're an untermensch piece of shit and should kill yourself. See you, illiterate spics!

The commenter argues that due to the complexity of the English language, it is the perfect test to filter out those who are not welcomed on the site. Interestingly, the example of people who should be excluded from the website specifically mentions two groups (African Americans and Mexicans) who are among the largest and most common minority groups in the United States. This seems to support the argument of Phillips (2012) to a certain extent, where it is suggested that most of the users of 4chan are from the United States based on the content posted on the website. In addition, the example above seems to support the findings in section 4.2 which suggest that the perceived ESL users are identified by their use of English. In other words, grammatical accuracy is treated as a test in this context and those who did not manage to follow basic grammar conventions will be labelled as ESL will be mocked and excluded.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1   Impoliteness as a Form of Response

The impolite commenters chose impoliteness as the main form of response towards perceived language incompetence. As shown in the data, the impoliteness used towards perceived ESL users will most likely lead to further aggression. In fact, the situation is sometimes escalated with impoliteness from perceived ESL users themselves, contributing towards a cycle of aggression from both sides. Therefore, if the goal of the impolite commenters is to improve the language standard of the website, they are failing. This seems to suggest that the impoliteness used towards perceived ESL users with regards to their language might not be necessarily instructive in nature. Sherman and Svelch (2014), in their study about "grammar Nazis" in CMC, suggest that:

"... ridicule of language use can be highly political, often pitting relatively more educated, "superior" members of the grammar "police" against "culprits", implied to be less cultured and educated. On some occasions, culprits may be foreigners, ethnic minorities, or the disabled."

(Sherman & Svelch, 2014, p. 19)

They argue that individuals who ridiculed the language of others in online communication might be driven by resentment and loathing. They continue further by suggesting that language could be used as a tool of exclusion, and as a tool for certain groups to feel superior to others. Interestingly, they also discover racial slurs being used in conjunction with criticisms about language in their study.

In this research, we have discussed how impoliteness is used as a tool to exclude and alienate perceived ESL users, through the use of dismissals, insults and other forms of conventionalised impoliteness as shown in chapter 4. Perceived ESL users are also derided and painted as less intelligent in the data. Their opinions are also discredited

because of their language. In 4.1 it is also discussed how there are several racial slurs used towards perceived ESL users, mainly towards Mexicans and South East Asians. Therefore, it could be inferred that even though the main trigger is related to language, the impoliteness used is not employed as instructive measures to 'correct' the English used by ESL, but as a tool for exclusion so that the impolite commenters could feel superior to the perceived ESL users.

5.2   Impoliteness as a Form of Language-based Discrimination

The previous chapters have discussed how perceived ESL speakers on 4chan are treated with hostility by other users of the website. It must be noted that impoliteness is not marginal on 4chan, and several studies have described the propensity of the users of the website to use offensive language, e.g. Phillips (2015) argues that trolls on 4chan often use and engage in behaviours and language that are "so outrageously offensive it almost defies categorization" (p.72). In another study, Ludemann (2018) describes how posters on 4chan would usually paint people of colour as either being childish or having other negative qualities. For example, a poster implies that Middle Eastern immigrants who currently reside in Germany are useless and rely heavily on the welfare system.

Even though impolite language is to a certain extent normalized on 4chan, we must not simply regard the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on the website as usual banter among users. The impoliteness towards perceived ESL users as shown in the data lacks the playfulness that is usually present in banter among friends. The impoliteness towards perceived ESL users therefore should be understood as a form of language-based discrimination. As shown in section 4.2, perceived ESL users are isolated and dismissed due to their perceived weakness in communication.

To further explore the notion of impoliteness (towards perceived ESL users on 4chan) as a language-based discrimination on 4chan, we shall discuss the nexus of language

discrimination as suggested by Ng (2007). He discusses language-based discrimination under several headings which made discrimination possible. To start, he defines language-based discrimination as the biased or discriminatory action against a person or a group due to their language, which can include language proficiency, accent, and even styles of speech. In the context of this research, perceived ESL users are being discriminated by impolite commenters because they are perceived to have a weak command of the English language. In this case, the discrimination takes the form of impoliteness, where native speakers of English insult, dismiss, and ridicule perceived ESL users on the website due to their (perceived) language incompetence.

The first heading discussed by Ng (2007) is the linguistic justification of discrimination. He argues that competence in a privileged language usually becomes the justification to discriminate against others (for example immigrants or refugees) who might not speak said language well. For example, an employer who does not want to hire foreign nationals could simply reject their applications for failing to meet the language requirement set for the job. Unfortunately, Ng (2007) added that language-based discrimination is closely related to other forms of discrimination such as ones that are based on ethnicity, nationality or even age. For example, he argued that in Hong Kong in the 1950s, discrimination based on age was rather rampant since only the younger generation could speak English well. In the context of this research, we could find justifications given by native speakers of English to defend their attitude towards perceived ESL users. For example, the data show that the perceived ESL users are usually blamed for the diminishing quality of threads on 4chan. According to several users, the inability of the perceived ESL users to communicate well has caused the quality of discussion on 4chan to deteriorate. The perceived ESL users are also blamed for other language-related issues. For example, in the anime board perceived ESL users are usually blamed for bad fan translations of popular manga and anime. Ironically, the complaints

usually come from self-identified native English speakers who could not understand Japanese and had to rely on fan translations.

Secondly, language-based discrimination could also be encoded in the language and culture of a certain group. Prejudiced stereotypes which paint those who do not speak the privileged language in a negative light could further discriminate against the oppressed group. Ng (2007) argues that sexist language shows the linguistic encoding of patriarchy, while racist stereotypes and racial slurs reflect the racist encoding that is available in a certain language. For example, he further argues that the word Arabs and Muslims are often associated with several negative qualities such as being barbaric and violent in the western world since the 11th century.

Interestingly, in this research, the insults used against perceived ESL users also include these encoded racist discriminatory languages that further support the notion of language-based discrimination on 4chan. For example, several posts discussed in 4.1.1 include racial slurs such as 'spic' ' when insulting perceived ESL users. The usage of racial slurs when insulting perceived ESL users suggest that the discrimination against perceived ESL users are not only based on language alone but also include other factors such as ethnicity or race. Ng (2007) summarises the linguistic encoding of discriminations as:

> "Language is a cultural repository of ideas for portraying particular out-groups. These ideas and the language in which they are encoded reflect power inequalities and associated discriminations (e.g., sexist, racist, and ageist languages)"

(Ng, 2007, p. 106).

Finally, after a period of time, language-based discrimination could be routinised. In such cases, the language-based discrimination against a particular group has become normalised and widely practice by individuals in a society. For example, the usage of

male generics (chairman, mankind) is still widely practised today even though more gender-neutral alternatives are available.

In this research, it could be argued that discrimination against perceived ESL users which takes place in the form of conventionalised impoliteness has been normalised to a certain extent. Several posters in the data have mentioned that the hate towards perceived ESL users has become somewhat a meme on the website. A meme is usually an image, text, or a video that is spread widely on the internet. In the process, the piece of meme usually changes as it is often edited before it is reposted on the internet. This seems to suggest that the complaints and the insults thrown toward perceived ESL users occur regularly enough that they have spread across different boards on the website. In addition, the word 'ESL' on 4chan has also evolved to carry a rather negative connotation. Perceived ESL users are not only blamed and criticised for their communication skills, but also for other unrelated reasons. For example, in the data, perceived ESL users are blamed for posting unrelated content to the topic of discussions even though that has nothing to do with one's language ability.

5.3   4chan: Between Free Speech and Harassment

The 19th article of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights proclaims that every individuals should be free to express their opinions in various media without interference. In other words, one should be able to express an opinion without getting censored or banned. Interestingly, a number of 4chan users believe the site is a haven for free speech. According to one of the users of 4chan:

> "4chan is literally the last bastion of free speech on the internet. Stormfront and right wing sites have been shut down or otherwise neutered. Censorship heavy Reddit is the most popular discussion board on the world. Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have cracked down on right wing opinions too. We're literally the last

beacon of civilization surrounded by the barbarian hordes. Stop being a cheap fuck and support the site."

("Anonymous", 2018)

The argument presented by the anonymous poster above is not entirely baseless. The censorship on 4chan is considerably more lax compared to other social sites such as Reddit or Facebook. As can be seen in the data of this research, posts containing harassment towards other users (which include racial slurs) are not deleted. On the other hand, Facebook has been known to ban its users for malicious content. Recently, Infowars, a far-right conspiracy theory page was banned from Facebook, Apple music, and Youtube for breaching the community guidelines and terms of services of those websites. Alex Jones, the creator of Infowars is known for spreading conspiracy theories. He claimed that the Sandy Hook incident which took place in 2012 was fabricated and that no victims had actually died during the incident. Currently, the parents of the victims of the incident are suing Alex Jones for emotional distress caused by his statement. Another alt-right figure, Richard Spencer was also banned from Facebook in April 2018 a week after Mark Zuckerberg announced that Facebook would be banning hate groups from their sites. Spencer is known for being a white nationalist and had called for the creation of a 'white ethnostate' in the United States. The alt-right, as a movement, has been known to orchestrate mass organised harassments towards individuals who they believe are against their ideologies. Ferber (2018) describes how several academics were harassed after their names appeared on Professor Watchlist- a website dedicated to "expose and document college professors who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom" (Professor Watchlist, n.d.). The academics involved were harassed through CMC such as emails and messages on their social media accounts. Racial slurs such as "nigger" and "kikes" were used against the academics as insults. Several academics were also threatened with physical violence

Online harassments have been shown to affect individuals negatively. The Pew Research Centre (Duggan, 2017) discovers that online harassment can cause mental and emotional distress among its victims. A survey involving over 4,000 Americans reveals that online harassment can cause serious real world repercussions such as anxiety, emotional distress, and paranoia. 44% of the respondents felt that the online harassments that they had experienced had mentally and emotionally burdened them. Therefore, steps should be taken to curb and minimise online harassments. The centre urges platform owners and governments to improve current policies and laws to address the issue of online harassments. On 4chan, racist content is only allowed on the random board /b/. Unsurprisingly, /b/ is known for its racist attitudes towards people of colour as noted by Bernstein et. al. (2011). However, racial slurs are still widely used by 4chan users as outside of the board /b/ as can be seen in the data of this research. This seems to suggest that the rule against racism on 4chan is not properly enforced by the admin and moderators of the website. Therefore, rules and regulations that are set by online platforms should also be enforced if the issue of online harassment is to be addressed.

5.4   Online Harassment: Practical Advice and Solutions

Social media have become ubiquitous and unfortunately so has online harassment. (Duggan, 2017) reports that over 40% adult Americans have experienced different forms of online harassment. In this section, I discuss several practical advice and solutions that could be taken to prevent online harassment.

Let us first discuss the factors that contribute to the hostile atmosphere of 4chan. As a website, 4chan gets its revenue from advertisements and 4chan passes, which allows users to bypass the Google captcha code before posting, allowing for a smoother browsing experience. However, due to the notoriety of the website, larger corporations usually refrain from advertising on 4chan which resulted in poor revenue. In the past, the website

was almost closed down several times due to insufficient funding. Because of this issue, the moderation team on 4chan consists mainly of volunteers and they are severely understaffed. The lack of moderation with regards to racist comments could be attributed to this. Therefore, platform owners should be aware of the importance of a good moderation team in order to curb harassment. More importantly, users should be equipped with tools in order to protect themselves from trolls and harassers. For example, websites like twitter even has a function where users can share their block list among friends so that they would not be harassed by similar users.

It is also important to raise awareness about online harassment. Discussions about online harassment in public spaces will create a conversation about its pervasiveness and what can be done to curb it in different environments. This could be achieved by organising talks or seminars in different levels of society, such as schools, universities, and even work spaces. For example, UNICEF Malaysia has organised campaigns against different forms of bullying ("Bullying is just not cool!", n.d.). Such campaigns could be effective to raise awareness about online bullying and should be continued and improved in the future. In a study by Veletsianos, Houlden, Hodson, and Gosse (2018), female victims of online harassments have been reported to accept the fact that online harassments are a part of their life, and will not likely to be solved in the near future. In addition, a part of the participants also blamed themselves for the harassments and felt that they were responsible for the harassments in the first place. The researchers urge the public to support the victims of online harassments and help to avoid them from occurring in the future. Social media users must be aware of the dangers that come with online communication, such as the possibility of being stalked and doxxed (publishing information about someone with malicious intent) using the information that we post online. More importantly, they must know their rights as users so that they could protect themselves from such harassments. For example, in Malaysia the Communications and

Multimedia Act 1998 [Act 588] prohibits Malaysian citizens from making, creating or soliciting anything that is "obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person" (Malaysian Communications And Multimedia Commission, n.d.). Therefore, Malaysians are protected by law from being harassed online and victims of cyberbullying can lodge a report with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1   The manifestations of Conventionalised Impoliteness Towards Perceived ESL Users on 4chan

The first research question investigates the manifestations of conventionalised impoliteness in the data. The analysis reveals that in 4chan, conventionalised impoliteness is used against perceived ESL users to exclude, mock and isolate them. For example, in the data conventionalised dismissals are used repeatedly (76 times) to oust perceived ESL users from 4chan. There also seem to be two major targets of insults toward perceived ESL users which are their intelligence and ethnicity. Perceived ESL users are stereotyped as being less intelligent by the impolite commenters. In addition, racial slurs such as "spic" and "SEAmonkeys" are also used to insult perceived ESL users.

The lack of message enforcer and the low number of threat (1) could be explained by the medium of communication. Since 4chan is asynchronous (there is a delay in the communication), it would make little sense to use message enforcers such as "listen here", or "do you get that?". In addition, due to the anonymous nature of the website, physical threats would not be effective since they could not be carried out. This is consistent with the view of Locher (2010). She suggests that the medium of communication might influence the manner in which impoliteness is used.

6.2   The Co-construction of Impoliteness in 4chan Discussion Threads

The data reveal that the impoliteness toward perceived ESL users is usually triggered by agrammatical posts. In other words, comments that contain impoliteness towards perceived ESL users are usually preceded by comments that contain grammatical inaccuracies. This seems to suggest that the impolite commenters seem to perceive language incompetence as one of the identity markers of ESL users on 4chan.

It is important to note that the impolite commenters have chosen conventionalised impoliteness to respond to perceived ESL users, suggesting that their response is malicious in nature. Considering the widespread use of conventionalised impoliteness towards perceived ESL users, it is likely that the goal is to exclude and mock them, rather than to improve the standard of English on 4chan.

Taking into considerations the points discussed above, we could infer that the usage of conventionalised impoliteness towards perceived ESL users is a practical choice. If the goal is to inflict damage towards a group of users who are perceived to be incompetent in English, using conventionalised impoliteness would deliver the maximum amount of impact since they are more easily recognisable compared to other forms of impoliteness such as sarcasm or mock politeness. In other words, someone who is perceived to be incompetent in English would be more likely to take offence at the phrase 'fuck you' compared to a subtle sarcasm.

It could also be suggested that this phenomenon is made possible by two factors that make 4chan known: anonymity and the maliciousness of its users. The lack of accountability and the tendency for depersonalisation due to the anonymity might influence certain users to behave aggressively. In addition, researchers have noted the tendency of 4chan users to discriminate against minorities and people of colour. As discussed in section 4.3.1, there seems to be a relationship between being ESL and being perceived as non-white on 4chan. This might also contribute towards the harassment of perceived ESL users.

6.3   Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could increase the scope of the research by including more data from other forum based websites. This could include social media, such as Facebook, or more accessible forums such as Reddit.com. In addition, one of the main issues with the data

in this research is the lack of context due to the almost total anonymity of 4chan. The issue could be mitigated by focusing on only one specific board for data collection. Since each board has a limited set of topics that they could discuss, it is easier for the researcher to understand and approximate the context of the discussion in the data.

In addition, due to the method of data gathering (keyword search), the data presented in this research are one-sided. The data contain impoliteness that is mostly targeted towards perceived ESL users. In other words, apart from the interactions between the two groups in the second data set, this study does not include data that exhibit the perspective of perceived ESL users themselves. It would be interesting and also beneficial to understand their feelings regarding the harassment. Future research could mitigate this issue by collecting data that are more representative of both sides.

Malaysian researchers could also benefit from more localised data. In Malaysia, there are several popular forums (most notably Lowyat.net) that could be used as the basis for data extraction. Even though Malaysian users might not be as harsh to ESL users as 4channers, it would be interesting to see how language correction is handled on a local website.

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