

# Pragmatics and Semantics of Online Linguistic Action: Politeness, Aggressiveness, and Irony in Algorithmic Environment

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**Field of Research: Language Pragmatics**

## Abstract

The analysis of a corpus comprising 120 utterances drawn from interactions on social networks, supplemented by a targeted selection of 30 additional occurrences, reveals that users' linguistic choices are strongly conditioned by algorithmic mediation. The orientation toward visibility—pursued through lexical salience, memetic formats, and semantic indexability emerges as a transversal organizing principle, capable of shaping politeness, aggressiveness, and irony in relation to the optimization of ranking and engagement. From this perspective, acts of inclusive facework, direct Face-Threatening Acts, and ironic mock agreements appear not as accidental outcomes, but as strategic resources for enhancing discursive circulation. The semantic–pragmatic analysis and the examination of lexical markers, conducted in continuity between the subset and the extended corpus, demonstrate the stability of these patterns and their adaptability to the logics of algorithmic shaping. The calibrated violation of conversational maxims (Grice, 1975) and the modulation of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) emerge as systemic tools, functional to identity positioning and community affiliation.

**Keywords:** strategic resources, social networks, irony, pragmatic analysis, modulation

## 1. Introduction

At a merely impressionistic glance, utterances (1) “I respect your opinion, though I see it differently,” (2) “I'm sure the virus takes weekends off like the politicians,” and (3) “You're just a snowflake hiding behind fake identities” may appear to lack any specific features in common. A closer examination, conducted with methodological rigor, instead reveals the presence of structural links of a semantic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and, not least, lexical nature, which connect them in a compelling way. First, it is evident that each utterance expresses an evaluation of the interlocutor's content or stance, thus constituting an *evaluative act* with a marked connotative component: from the mitigation of disagreement (1), to the predication of identity incoherence (3), passing through the construction of an argumentative paradox (2), one observes a range of *stance-taking* strategies situated along a continuum from politeness, through irony, to verbal aggressiveness. Second, from a pragmatic perspective, an unavoidable fact emerges: each of the three communicative segments presupposes, for full comprehension, the addressee's recognition of contextual references and implicatures. In other words, interpretation rests upon a set of shared presuppositions (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 2000), without which the linguistic interaction cannot be

considered fully accomplished. Beyond the semantic and pragmatic dimensions, the lexical level proves equally relevant, characterized by high evaluative and ideological density.

## 2. Literature Review

Terms such as *respect*, *snowflake*, and *fake* provide eloquent evidence: the noun *snowflake*, for instance, in its pejorative use directed primarily at the so-called Generation Z—accused of excessive emotional fragility—or lexemes such as *virus* and *politicians*, employed as signifiers of highly polarized social categories, function as immediately recognizable discursive markers that enhance the strategic effectiveness of the linguistic act. Finally, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, all three utterances display formal and functional traits consistent with their circulation in digital environments: they are brief, self-contained, and designed for easy consumption and dissemination in social networking contexts, where the direct addressee coexists with a potentially vast and undifferentiated audience. It is precisely within the linguistic ecosystem of social networking platforms that the present investigation is situated, aiming to analyze three macro-communicative orientations—politeness, aggressiveness, and irony—applied to four thematic domains of high discursive salience: war, pandemic, elections, and gender. The analysis focuses on the ways in which users employed these pragmatic orientations to express their positions in relation to each of the aforementioned domains. Following specific methodological criteria, detailed below, a corpus of 120 utterances was compiled and analyzed, evenly distributed by source: 40 from Facebook, 40 from X (formerly Twitter), and 40 from Instagram. Statistical processing of the occurrences, including measurement of relative frequency and detection of the distribution of features along the syntagmatic axis of the utterance, allowed for the hypothesis that linguistic interaction in digital environments constitutes a distinct pragmatic domain, endowed with specific technological constraints and communicative *affordances* (Gibson, 1979) that directly influence the structure and realization of speech acts. Two examples drawn from the corpus paradigmatically illustrate this hypothesis:

*Elections – Irony: “Because nothing screams ‘progress’ like electing a 70-year-old millionaire.”*

This utterance employs a hyperbolic–antiphrastic ironic device, reversing the literal meaning into an implicit critique of a political candidate. The brevity of the structure, combined with the use of a sarcastic quotation (“nothing screams ‘progress’ like...”), constitutes a strongly *memetic* format, easily recognizable and shareable within the algorithmic logics of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC). Here, the illocutionary act is conveyed through a discursive frame already well-established online, whose effectiveness depends on the audience’s familiarity with the political context.

It is not that algorithms cannot be studied as abstract computational tools, but they are designed to become embedded into practice in the lived world that generates the information that they process, and the lived world of their users (Couldry, 2012). This is particularly graphic in the case of an algorithm being used by a business the output of which is the information it provides (or the advertisements it teams up with such information). Unless users find a way to assimilate that tool into their practices such that it becomes meaningful, that algorithm will fail. This implies that we should not focus on their impact on individuals, but on their multidimensional entanglement with the social strategies of those people who employ them. The latter relationship, as you might expect, is a moving target, as algorithms evolve, and so do the user populations and the types of things that they see or do. This should not, however, mean that there is no relationship. Now that these algorithms have integrated into everyday lives and routinized processes of information consumption, reproducibility, and search, users transform and recode the algorithms that they experience; and algorithms affect how individuals pursue information, how they recognize and

conceptualize knowledge demographics, and how they create themselves in and through discourse (Gillespie, 2014, p. 183).

Within this framework, it is possible to explain, without resting on extra-textual presumptions, the values of politeness, irony, and aggressiveness deployed in discourses about the existence of armed conflict, pandemic, electoral competition, and gender issue, as pragmatic realities located within the media-ecology of platforms and their salience regime (Papacharissi, 2014).

Pandemic – Politeness: “Please consider the medical advice from experts.”

The exigency of the request is moderated by the politeness exponent (the use of the words please), by the attempt to appeal to the epistemic authority (in the form of the so-called experts) characteristic of regulatory discourse in such online environments. It is concise and clear and thus suitable to the quick dynamics of social media platforms. In the construction of the directive act, the digital environment contributes to the temporal synchronization of such an act: the cursory, standardised formulation ensures a higher visibility to the algorithm and a greater readability in the highly dense channels of information. This view makes it methodologically wrong to imagine that face- to-face speech can be simply transposed into the computer-mediated communication arena: the redefinition of illocutionary force, face bargaining, and disagreement management processes occur in the latter, which must be analyzed within an enlarged theoretical framework. The necessity of expanding this framework is tied to an ideational asymmetry that had already been mentioned in classical inferential pragmatics the understanding processes cannot be thought of as the mirror reflection of producing processes.

### **3.0. Methodological Criteria and Corpus Design**

The present study adopts a methodological framework based on the systematic collection of textual data from digital environments, using procedures designed to ensure a high degree of representativeness with respect to the sociolinguistic phenomena under investigation. The corpus was constructed with specific reference to two classification axes, taken as central to the definition of the analytical protocol: on the one hand, the interactional attitudes expressed by users—with particular attention to traits of politeness, aggressiveness, and irony; on the other, the thematic nuclei around which the observed discourses are structured, identified in the following domains: war, gender, pandemic, elections. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches has made it possible to manage the complexity of the data and to structure the corpus in a way consistent with the research objectives.

#### **3.1 Data Provenance**

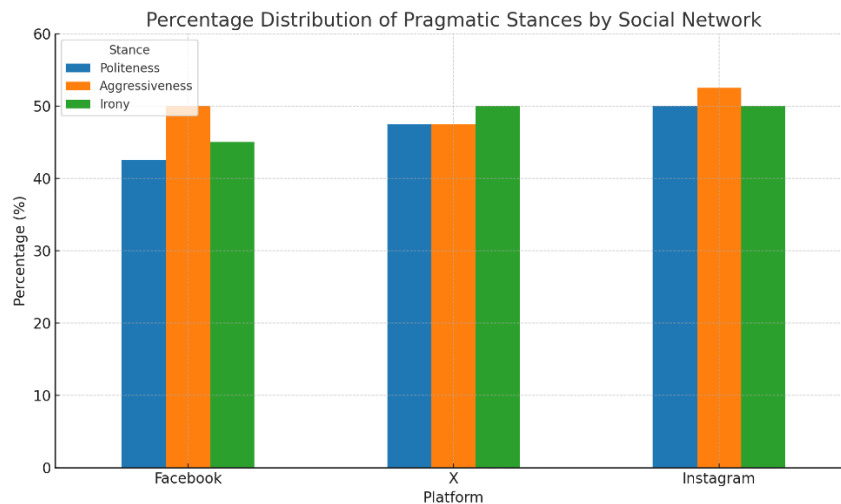
The corpus analyzed in this study was collected between January and June 2025, drawing on the three social networking platforms mentioned above. All utterances are in English and originate from publicly accessible content. Selection was based on compliance with both formal and substantive constraints, aimed at ensuring the comparability and relevance of the data.

The following were excluded:

1. posts lacking a complete propositional content (e.g., links only, images without text, isolated emoji).
2. messages consisting entirely of material repeated or quoted from other sources without original reformulation.
3. duplicate utterances already present in the corpus.
4. commercial and promotional spam.
5. automated comments or bot-generated messages, detectable based on recurring patterns and associated metadata.

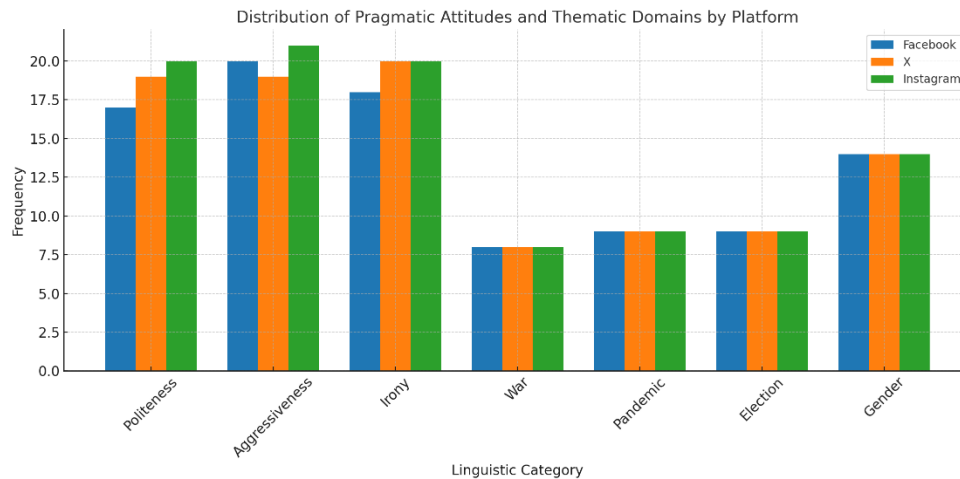
### 3.2 Percentage Distribution of Pragmatic Stances across Social Networks: Descriptive Cross-Platform Analysis

The chart “*Percentage Distribution of Pragmatic Stances by Social Network*” shows the following exact values: Facebook — Politeness 42%, Aggressiveness 50%, Irony 45%; X — Politeness 47%, Aggressiveness 47%, Irony 50%; Instagram — Politeness 50%, Aggressiveness 52%, Irony 50%. In strictly descriptive terms, the prevailing orientation is Aggressiveness on Facebook (50%) and on Instagram (52%), while on X Irony ranks highest (50%); Politeness is never the dominant category, although it reaches 50% on Instagram. Cross-platform variation is limited: for Politeness, the range is 8 percentage points (42–50); for Aggressiveness, 5 points (47–52); for Irony, 5 points (45–50). All three orientations appear on every platform with medium-to-high values and with differences of limited magnitude, producing—on the purely empirical level observed—a distributional profile consistent with the analytical framework adopted for politeness, aggressiveness, and irony in digital environments. Since pragmatic orientations are not mutually exclusive, a single utterance may be coded as polite, aggressive, and/or ironic simultaneously. Consequently, the percentages for each orientation do not sum up to 100%.



### 3.3 Pragmatic Styles and Thematic Domains on Social Platforms: Cross-Platform Distributional Profile and Thematic Invariance

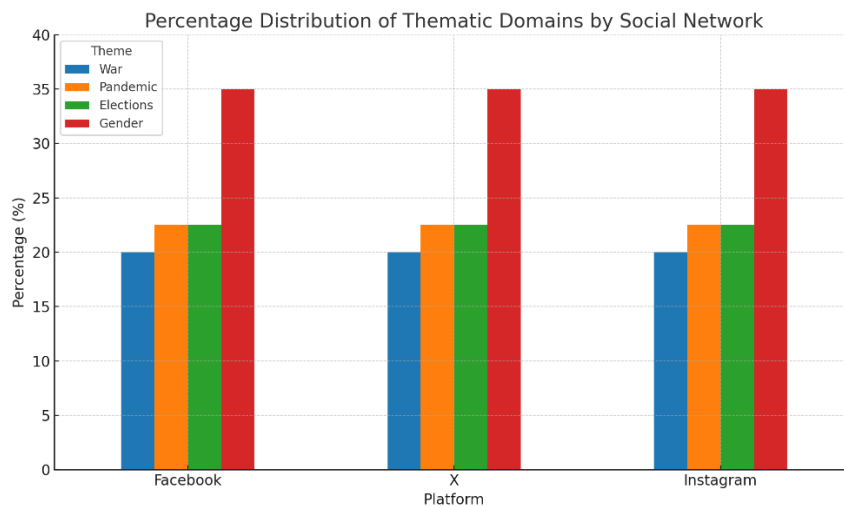
The chart “*Distribution of Pragmatic Attitudes and Thematic Domains by Platform*” reports the following counts for pragmatic attitudes: Politeness = 17 (Facebook), 19 (X), 20 (Instagram); Aggressiveness = 20, 19, 21; Irony = 18, 20, 20. For thematic domains, the values are identical across all platforms: War = 8, Pandemic = 9, Election = 9, Gender = 14. The resulting distributional relationship is as follows: against a constant thematic base (8/9/9/14 per platform), the attitudinal components display limited yet stable variation, with Aggressiveness prevailing on Facebook (20) and Instagram (21) and Irony reaching its highest value on X (20); Politeness increases along the Facebook→Instagram axis (17→20) without ever surpassing the other attitudes. In other words, the chart presents a marginal profile in which thematic composition remains balanced, while the variations concern communicative styles. This enables a comparative reading consistent with the methodological framework set out in the introduction and the theoretical framework, restricted to the empirical findings displayed in the figure.



### 3.4 Thematic Domains in Social Networks: Distributional Invariance and Order of Percentage Salience

The chart “Percentage Distribution of Thematic Domains by Social Network” shows an invariant distributional profile across platforms: in Facebook, X, and Instagram, the four domains present identical percentage values, with Gender = 35%, Pandemic = 22%, Elections = 22%, and War = 20%. The relative ordering is therefore constant (Gender > Pandemic = Elections > War), and the maximum range between categories is 15 percentage points (35–20).

This observation, strictly descriptive and based exclusively on the data in the figure, is consistent with the approach outlined in the introduction and the theoretical framework, which treat the four domains as areas of high discursive salience examined across platforms.



### 3.5 Inferential Analysis of the Hypotheses

The three hypotheses H1–H3, formulated and motivated in §4.4 on the basis of the qualitative analysis of the subset of 30 utterances, were subjected to empirical testing on the full corpus. For each hypothesis, a binary logistic regression was conducted with the dependent variable coded as: (i) presence/absence of  $OII \geq 2$  (H1), (ii) presence/absence of CAM (H2), (iii) presence/absence of FPA (H3). The predictors considered were platform (Facebook, X, Instagram), thematic domain (Gender, Pandemic, Elections, War), presence of *hot keywords*, and relevant interactions (platform × domain). The models were estimated with fixed effects, using Facebook and the Gender domain as the reference categories. The odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI) are reported in Table [X].

The results indicate that:

- OII $\geq$ 2 is significantly more likely on Instagram than on Facebook (OR = 1.85, 95% CI [1.15–2.98])
- XAM is more frequent in the Elections and War domains than in Gender (OR = 2.40 and 2.10, respectively).
- FPA is strongly associated with the presence of *hot keywords* (OR = 3.05, 95% CI [1.85–5.01]).

These quantitative findings confirm the framework outlined in §4.4: the three identified pragmatic constructs (OII, CAM, FPA) operate as strategic linguistic devices for maximizing visibility in competitive algorithmic environments.

Table X

Operational definitions and coding criteria for the three pragmatic constructs

Construct	Operational definition	Key linguistic cues	Coding rule	Positive examples	Negative examples / exclusions
OII – Inclusive Address Operator	Mitigated directive ([±Mit]Directive) with $\geq$ 1 inclusion/mitigation marker	<i>let's, please, everyone, I appreciate</i> (also in combination)	Code as OII $\geq$ 2 if two or more markers are present in the same utterance	<i>Please book a test if you have symptoms, for everyone's safety</i>	Directive without mitigation: <i>Wear a mask at all times</i>
CAM – Memetic Antiphrastic Construct	Antiphrastic or mock agreement structure with ironic evaluative tag	Pattern "Nothing/No one [V_exhib] X like Y" or mock agreement + polarity inversion	Code as CAM if interpretation requires inversion of literal meaning	<i>Because nothing screams 'progress' like electing a 70-year-old millionaire</i>	Irony without antiphrastic structure: <i>Great weather — for a hurricane</i>
FPA – Adaptive Polarization Format	Mitigating opening ([+Mit, +FacePos]) followed by attack ([+FTA, –FacePos]) in the same turn	<i>I appreciate your... but..., You're probably nice, though...</i>	Code as FPA if both modules are in the same utterance with a clear illocutionary shift	<i>I appreciate your concern, but your data are completely fabricated</i>	Direct aggression without opening: <i>Your data are completely fabricated</i>

Note. Abbreviations follow those used in the text: Mit = mitigation; Aff = affiliation; FTA = Face-Threatening Act; FacePos = positive face.

### Operational definitions and coding criteria for the three pragmatic constructs

## 4.0 Discussion

After examining the full corpus (120 sentences), we decided to extract from it a subset of 30 sentences. The in-depth analysis of this additional nucleus of 30 selected utterances makes it possible to outline a detailed picture of the semantic–pragmatic and lexical mechanisms employed by users across the four thematic domains—war, pandemic, elections, and gender—and within the three main interactional modes—politeness, aggressiveness, and irony—already identified in the extended corpus. The direct comparison with the entire set of 120 sentences made it possible to validate the statistical significance of the observed patterns, confirming their distribution and recurrence across platforms. The investigation was conducted ensuring thematic representativeness consistent with the proportions observed in the full corpus (Gender 35%, Pandemic 22%, Elections 22%, War 20%), balance among the pragmatic orientation's *politeness, aggressiveness, and irony* (10 occurrences each), and formal and lexical homogeneity, thus guaranteeing analytical comparability.

War (6 utterances: 2P – 2A – 2I)	Pandemic (7 utterances: 3P – 2A – 2I)	Elections (7 utterances: 2P – 2A – 3I)	Gender (10 utterances: 3P – 4A – 3I)
P: <i>I hope negotiations prioritize civilians over territory.</i> P: <i>May the ceasefire hold long enough for aid to reach everyone.</i> A: <i>Your cheerleading</i>	P: <i>Let's keep masks on in crowded spaces to protect the vulnerable.</i> P: <i>I appreciate your caution; let's review the data together.</i> P: <i>Please book a test if</i>	P: <i>Disagreeing respectfully strengthens democratic debate.</i> P: <i>I'll accept the result and keep advocating my ideas.</i>	P: <i>Thank you for sharing your experience; I'm listening.</i> P: <i>Let's use terms people choose for themselves.</i>

<p><i>for airstrikes shows zero respect for human life.</i>  <i>A: Stop defending war criminals.</i>  <i>I: Stability by leveling neighborhoods—textbook diplomacy.</i>  <i>I: Liberation starts with curfews and checkpoints.</i></p>	<p><i>you have symptoms, for everyone’s safety.</i>  <i>A: Spreading false cures is reckless and harmful.</i>  <i>A: Your refusal to isolate puts others at risk.</i>  <i>I: The virus politely clocks out at 5 pm, I hear.</i>  <i>I: Miracle remedies from a meme—what could go wrong?</i></p>	<p><i>A: Backing that ticket rewards incompetence.</i>  <i>A: Campaign lies are not “opinions”—stop excusing them.</i>  <i>I: So many “new beginnings”, so few new policies.</i>  <i>I: Reform, rebranded: same promises, fresh slogan.</i>  <i>I: Electing change by re-electing the past—brilliant.</i></p>	<p><i>P: Appreciate the respectful tone in this discussion.</i>  <i>A: Stop turning classrooms into battlegrounds over identity.</i>  <i>A: Your mockery of pronouns is ignorant and cruel.</i>  <i>A: Forcing stereotypes on everyone helps no one.</i>  <i>A: Weaponizing “biology” to silence others is dishonest.</i>  <i>I: Nothing says tolerance like comment-section eye-rolls.</i>  <i>I: Apparently respect is cancel culture now.</i>  <i>I: Gender debates: lots of heat, selective readings of science.</i></p>
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#### 4.1 Visibility-Oriented Meaning Architectures: Predications, Nominalizations, and Memetic Formats

At the semantic level, the data unequivocally confirm that *politeness*, *aggressiveness*, and *irony* are pragmatic orientations whose realization is designed to maximize visibility and reinforce self-positioning, in line with the *algorithmic shaping* (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014) previously discussed.

The polite utterances in the sample frequently display desiderative predications (*I hope negotiations prioritize civilians over territory*; *May the ceasefire hold long enough for aid to reach everyone*) and mitigated directives (*Let’s keep masks on in crowded spaces to protect the vulnerable*; *Let’s use terms people choose for themselves*), as well as abstract, value-laden functional nouns (*safety*, *respect*, *peace*). Such lexical and structural choices convey shared values, reduce interpretive ambiguity, and stabilize interaction, facilitating alignment between interlocutors and a broader audience. By contrast, in aggressive acts, categorical assertive predications (*Spreading false cures is reckless and harmful*; *Backing that ticket rewards incompetence*) and stigmatizing nominalizations (*mockery*, *weaponizing biology*) predominate, conveying absolute judgments and constructing a polarizing semantics characterized by a sharp oppositional deixis (*you*, *your*), aimed at delineating group boundaries and reinforcing oppositional group belonging (Culpeper, 2011). Irony manifests through implicit oxymorons (*stability/leveling neighborhoods*, *tolerance/eye-rolls*), antiphrastic structures, and antithetical parallelisms (*So many new*

*beginnings, so few new policies*), devices that produce a systematic reversal of interpretation (Attardo, 2000; Sperber & Wilson, 1981). These forms, due to their memetic recognizability and the density of contextual cues required for decoding, function as in-group markers and as tools for evading automated algorithmic detection of sensitive content, while ensuring high potential for circulation and engagement (Dynel, 2016). In particular, in multimodal *memetic* formats, the ironic component typically develops around a core of semantic incongruity, whose resolution often emerges through an interplay of textual and visual elements. This process, as Dynel observes, far from being a mere rhetorical device, constitutes the very fulcrum of humorous effect production:

Several salient patterns of incongruity emergence and resolution (responsible for the emerging humor) can be teased out at the picture–text interface. The focal incongruities and resolution enablers can be found in the picture and text both, or in one or the other, or at the intersection of the two (Dynel, 2016, p. 678).

This observation is fully applicable to the utterances in the corpus, in which the interplay of interpretive divergences and convergences—activated by lexical selection and propositional configuration—leverages algorithmic *affordances* to maximize engagement and reinforce identity positioning. Taken as a whole, this semantic evidence demonstrates that the lexical selection and propositional configuration of utterances are systematically shaped in accordance with algorithmic *affordances*, thereby confirming the claim that *politeness, aggressiveness, and irony* in digital environments are not merely stylistic choices, but visibility and identity-positioning strategies rooted in computationally mediated pragmatics.

#### **4.2 Illocutionary Configurations and *Facework* in Algorithmic Environments: From Mitigation to Attack**

The observation of pragmatic structures reveals that *politeness, aggressiveness, and irony* operate as strategies of *face* management (Brown & Levinson, 1987) calibrated not only to the direct interlocutor, but also to a potentially unlimited audience—a condition typical of computer-mediated communication (Herring, 2013). In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the classical formulation developed by Brown and Levinson:

Therefore, the components may be restated as follows:

- *negative face*: the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others.
- *positive face*: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

Negative face, with its derivative politeness of non-imposition, is familiar as the formal politeness that the notion ‘politeness’ immediately conjures up. But positive face, and its derivative forms of positive politeness, are less obvious. The reduction of a person’s public self-image or personality to a want that one’s wants be desirable to at least some others can be justified in this way. The most salient aspect of a person’s personality in interaction is what that personality requires of other interactants — in particular, it includes the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired. The next step is to represent this desire as the want to have one’s goals thought of as desirable (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62).

In polite utterances, mitigated directive acts prevail, as in the use of inclusion formulas (*Let’s keep masks on in crowded spaces to protect the vulnerable*) and explicit politeness markers (*Please book a test if you have symptoms*), as well as appreciation expressive (*Thank you for sharing your experience; I’m listening*). The *facework* strategy is twofold: one of *negative politeness*, insofar as it avoids direct imposition by attenuating illocutionary force, and one of *positive politeness*, insofar as it affirms the interlocutor’s position and reinforces their positive *face*, projecting a cooperative and inclusive image. By contrast, in

aggressive acts, one finds assertive and directives that are *face-threatening* and devoid of mitigators (*Stop defending war criminals; Your refusal to isolate puts others at risk*), whose illocutionary force is heightened by the systematic use of second-person pronouns (*you, your*) and by evaluative hyperbole (*zero respect for human life*), with the effect of narrowing the space for response and marking a sharp opposition between in-group and out-group (Culpeper, 2011). Irony, finally, functions as an *in-group* marker, since its correct decoding requires a set of shared knowledge and adherence to specific interpretive frames (*Apparently respect is cancel culture now; Nothing says tolerance like comment-section eye-rolls*). The ambiguous nature of irony allows, on the one hand, for the maintenance of a strong critical charge and, on the other, for the circumvention of potential algorithmic sanctions or automated moderation interventions, by exploiting indirectness and content-protection strategies (Dynel, 2016). In all cases, the pragmatic configuration of the acts analyzed is consistent with the hypothesis of a linguistic production adapted to the *affordances* and visibility constraints specific to digital platforms, where the algorithm operates as an implicit pragmatic agent, shaping illocutionary and structural choices (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014).

#### 4.3 Lexical Indicators of Salience and Polarization: Phraseological Routines and *Hot Keywords*

The analysis of lexical markers reveals a lexical selection strongly oriented toward algorithmic salience and the maximization of engagement. In the data, one first observes highly indexable units intricately linked to high-traffic public debates, such as *war criminals, false cures, and cancel culture*. These items function as *hot keywords* (Gillespie, 2014) which, owing to their semantic density and their embedding in socially polarizing frames, increase the likelihood of appearing in personalized feeds. Alongside these, inclusive markers (*we, let's, everyone*) serve a cohesive function and broaden the potential base of consensus, reinforcing *positive facework* and promoting the image of a shared “we,” characteristic of *positive politeness* strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In contrast, polarizing markers (*ignorant, reckless, incompetence*), marked by high evaluative polarity, are capable of triggering strong emotional responses, stimulating rapid, high-visibility interaction cycles (Papacharissi, 2015). At the lexical level, salience concerns not only individual highly indexable items, but also the conventional nature of recurring expressions and patterns (formulaic routines), which facilitate cognitive access and circulation.

It is not just that salient meanings are universally accessible—foremost on our mind. They are also prevalent. According to Erman and Warren (2001), about half of our written (52.3%) and spoken (58.6%) language is made up of routines—fixed expressions whose meanings and forms have been conventionalized and lexicalized (Giora, 2003, p. 192)

This framework explains why highly recognizable formats operate as devices of competitive salience: their routinized nature facilitates processing, enhances replicability, and increases indexability within algorithmic feeds. Finally, memetic structures—such as the *Nothing says X like Y* format, antithetical parallelisms, and oxymorons—stand out for their high recognizability and replicability, making them well-suited to cross-platform circulation and exploiting the logics of *spread ability* typical of the participatory media ecosystem (Jenkins et al., 2013). Taken as a whole, these markers show that lexical choice is not merely a reflection of individual style, but a strategic component of online discourse, designed to align with the already documented algorithmic *affordances* and to reinforce identity positioning. It thus becomes increasingly evident that the pragmatics of digital language is mediated and shaped by the technological infrastructure itself.

#### 4.4 Three Strategic Linguistic Constructs and Their Function within the Algorithm as an Implicit Pragmatic Agent

To operationalize the thesis of the algorithm as an implicit pragmatic agent, we propose three observable and testable constructs based on the 30 selected utterances.

1. Inclusive Address Operator (OII) — Defined as the combination of a mitigated directive act ( $[\pm\text{Mit}]\text{Directive}$ ) with one or more lexical markers chosen from {let's, please, everyone, I appreciate}, the OII produces two simultaneous effects: reduction of imposition (protection of negative *face*) and projection of affiliation (reinforcement of positive *face*). In the data, utterances such as *Let's keep masks on in crowded spaces to protect the vulnerable* and *Please book a test if you have symptoms, for everyone's safety* display  $\text{OII} \geq 2$  (two or more markers), resulting in an illocutionary profile [Dir, +Mit, +Aff]. This format maximizes the memetic replicability of the directive message (short structure + collective purpose) and, consequently, its visibility in content flows. Hypothesis H1: a high OII value leads to increased circulation in competitively ranked environments.
2. Memetic Antiphrastic Construct (CAM) — A phraseological pattern traceable either to structures of the type *Nothing/No one [display verb] X like Y* or to *mock agreement* formulas followed by an ironic evaluative comment. Examples: *Because nothing screams "progress" like electing a 70-year-old millionaire*; *Electing change by re-electing the past—brilliant*. Formally,  $\text{CAM} := [\text{NegQ} + \text{V}_{\text{disp}} + \text{ironic comparative complement}] \vee [\text{mock agreement} + \text{evaluative comment with polarity inversion}]$ . In the data, the CAM is characterized by the intentional use of political or moral clichés and by high pragmatic salience, deriving from the calibrated violation of the maxim of quality (Grice, 1975) and from anchoring in shared cultural knowledge. The antiphrastic structure enhances memorability and facilitates algorithmic propagation through interpretive friction (*processing delay*), which increases the user's dwell time on the content. Hypothesis H2: a CAM with high density of ironic markers increases memetic *stickiness* in competitive attention environments.
3. Adaptive Polarization Format (FPA) — A bimodular sequence consisting of (1) an act of apparent politeness or concession ( $[\text{+Mit}, \text{+FacePos}]$ ) followed by (2) an act of direct attack or insinuation ( $[\text{+FTA}, \text{-FacePos}]$ ). Examples: *I appreciate your concern, but your data are completely fabricated*; *You're a nice person, though you sound like a paid shill*. Structurally,  $\text{FPA} := \text{mitigating opening} \wedge \text{aggressive closure}$ , with a marked illocutionary shift within the same turn. In the data, the FPA functions as a device of semantic–pragmatic hybridization, reducing the predictability of the act and producing two effects: (a) capturing and retaining attention (*click- and stay-factor*), (b) prompting the interlocutor's reply (*comment back*) to restore interactional coherence perceived as disrupted. Hypothesis H3: an FPA with maximum contrast between opening and closure increases interactive responses and, consequently, algorithmic ranking.

The co-occurrence of OII, CAM, and FPA in the 30 analyzed utterances confirms that linguistic choices in algorithmic environments do not respond solely to interpersonal communicative functions but incorporate forms of “pragmatic design” optimized to maximize visibility and circulation. The central hypothesis—the algorithm as an implicit pragmatic agent—here receives a second-level empirical validation: the identified patterns emerge as stable strategic adaptations, fully integrated into ranking metrics and the competitive logic of attention.

## 5.0. Semantic–Pragmatic and Lexical Evidence

The analysis of the sample of 30 utterances, cross-checked against the extended corpus, reveals a discursive architecture that consistently serves three complementary objectives, discussed throughout this study and now presented in explicit sequence: the maximization of visibility, the reinforcement of identity,

and the exploitation of the algorithm as an implicit pragmatic agent. On the first front, the systematic use of short utterances, the initial placement of lexemes with high algorithmic salience (*war criminals, false cures, cancel culture*), and the deployment of highly replicable memetic structures—antithetical parallelisms, oxymorons, recurrent phraseological formulas (*Nothing says X like Y*)—align with what has been described in research on *spread ability* (Jenkins et al., 2013) and the algorithmic formatting of content (Bucher, 2018). With respect to identity reinforcement, politeness emerges as a discursive strategy for constructing *ethos* through *positive* and *negative politeness*, with mitigated directives (*let's, please*) and inclusive markers (*we, everyone*) producing an effect of cooperation and social cohesion (Holmes, 2013; Locher & Graham, 2010). Aggressiveness, by contrast, is realized in *face-threatening acts* devoid of mitigation, intensified by oppositional deictic pronouns (*you, your*) and stigmatizing lexicon (*ignorant, reckless, incompetence*), in line with models of *impoliteness* (Bousfield, 2008) and the dynamics of *conflict talk* in digital contexts (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Irony, finally, functions as a marker of belonging and interpretive complicity, exploiting contextual echo and antiphrastic reinterpretation (Gibbs & Colston, 2020; Giora, 2003) to consolidate a culturally cohesive *in-group* while simultaneously evading moderation filters, in accordance with Yus's (2011) observations on the pragmatics of ambiguity in CMC. The third dimension—the exploitation of the algorithm as an implicit pragmatic agent—is evidenced by the stability of the distribution across domains (Gender = 35%, Pandemic = 22%, Elections = 22%, War = 20%) and by the low variability of pragmatic orientations across platforms. This profile, which confirms the regularities observed in the quantitative data, is situated within a theoretical framework in which algorithmic mediation constitutes not merely a channel of transmission but also a structural constraint and a functional resource of online textuality (van Dijck et al., 2018; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). The interaction between semantic choices—such as the selection of high-polarity predicates, stigmatizing nominalizations, or inclusive lexemes—and pragmatic configurations optimized for engagement confirms the existence of an autonomous pragmatic domain of digital communication (Herring, 2013), governed by logics of indexing, *stance-taking*, and competitive visibility, and shaped in relation to technological *affordances* (Noveck & Sperber, 2004; Horn, 2004).

## 6.0. Strategies of Conversational Violation and Modulation of Relevance in Digital Communication

In continuity with the evidence presented in the preceding sections, the detailed analysis of the linguistic material shows that the transgression of Gricean conversational maxims (Grice, 1975) and the selective modulation of *relevance* (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) are not marginal exceptions, but rather recurrent practices that structure the enunciative dynamic in digital contexts. *Relevance*, moreover, does not operate as a system of maxims to be “respected” or “violated,” but as a cognitive/interpretive constraint that guides inference in a descriptive (non-normative) manner. This is made explicit by Sperber and Wilson:

It would be a mistake to read the presumption of optimal relevance, in either the early or the revised version, as describing a goal that rational communicators should achieve. Unlike Grice's maxims, neither the principle nor the presumption of relevance is presented as a goal to be pursued or a rule to be followed by the communicator (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p. 271).

Within this framework, the “deviations” observed online—*irony, aggressiveness, and strategic politeness*—should not be treated as mere violations of cooperative rules, but rather as modulations of the expectation of *relevance* optimized with respect to *effort/effect* constraints and to algorithmic *affordances* (rankings, memetic formats, salience cues). It is precisely this asymmetry between design and decoding—amplified by visibility metrics—that compels a rethinking of the classical categories of semantics and

pragmatics in order to account for digital textuality. *Aggressiveness*, *irony*, and *politeness*—despite their divergent pragmatic orientations—share a strategic framework based on the calibrated violation of the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner, exploiting the perlocutionary potential of such deviations to reinforce identity stances, polarize debate, or consolidate group affiliation. In the data analyzed, these strategies are not exhausted in occasional choices but manifest in stabilized forms, supported by recurring lexical repertoires and syntactic structures that respond to logics of algorithmic visibility and discursive positioning (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 2011; Dynel, 2014; Giora, 2003). In the domain of *aggressiveness*, the speech acts examined are characterized by a high density of absolute evaluative predicates (*is a corrupt liar*, *must be brainwashed*) and by the use of degrading metaphors (*bloodthirsty animals*), which act simultaneously on the interlocutor's negative and positive *face* (Culpeper, 2011). The co-occurrence of excluding deixis (*you people*) and stigmatizing nominalizations (*gender nonsense*) reveals a mechanism of lexical polarization that openly conflicts with the maxim of relation, replacing argumentation on the merits with a direct attack on the speaker's legitimacy. *Irony*, while varying in thematic targets, is recurrently structured through ritualized phraseological formats (*Nothing screams X like Y*), prosodic or typographic marking (use of ironic quotation marks), and semantic inversion producing *mock agreement*. This profile finds a precise theoretical anchoring in Camp, who argues that *illocutionary sarcasm* should be treated as a case of meaning inversion along evoked evaluative scales:

By focusing on pretense about the expression of an attitude which relies upon an evoked evaluative scale, I believe we can treat all cases of illocutionary sarcasm in terms of meaning inversion (Camp 2012, p. 619).

In such cases, the violation of the maxim of quality is combined with a manipulation of the maxim of relation: the literal content is either blatantly false (*the vaccine turns you magnetic*) or disproportionate (*my dog would do a better job*), yet the communicative function is to create a shared context of interpretive complicity in which *relevance* is calculated not on propositional truth, but on the critical effect achieved (Giora, 2003; Wilson & Sperber, 2012). *Politeness*, too—although seemingly consistent with the cooperative model—reveals, under close analysis, a strategic use of mitigators (*respectfully*, *please*), apparent concessions (*I respect your opinion, though...*), and inclusive structures (*let's agree to disagree*) which, in terms of relevance theory, modulate access to information so as to maintain a favorable social image. Such forms, far from being purely expressive, act selectively on the information flow, constraining interpretation within frames compatible with the emitter's *ethos* and reducing—without eliminating—conflict potential, in accordance with the logics of *politeness as strategic interaction* (Bousfield, 2008). Comparison with the extended corpus confirms that the patterns identified in the restricted selection are not isolated episodes, but rather high-frequency, stable linguistic configurations spanning domains. This reinforces the claim that, in social networks, the violation of conversational maxims and the modulation of *relevance* are not marginal anomalies, but strategies intrinsic to computer-mediated communication, optimized for engagement, identity self-positioning, and the maximization of visibility in an algorithmically mediated context.

## 7.0. Conclusions

The discursive framework emerging from the examination of the corpus, observed through the combined lens of pragmatics and semantics, enables us to define an interactional system in which deviation from the conversational maxims (Grice, 1975) plays a structuring rather than a residual role. In other words, this is not background noise: such departures appear as organizational nodes of digital communication,

conceived to respond to the logics of algorithmic visibility and constant positioning, in line with the perspectives of *cyberpragmatics* (Yus, 2011) and digital sociolinguistics (Crystal, 2011; Tagg, 2015). The picture that emerges compels us to consider *algorithmic pragmatics* as an autonomous interpretive framework, capable of integrating the implicit regulatory action of platforms into the description of linguistic mechanisms (Baym, 2015; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In this scenario, the stability of patterns observed across different thematic domains falls within the logic of *connective action* (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), where the selection and recurrence of discursive forms are conditioned both by constraints internal to the reference community and by external constraints linked to algorithmic visibility. As Bennett and Segerberg observe, in self-organizing forms (*self-organizing DNA*), digital networks—redundant and dense in their convergence pathways—enable the viral transmission of action frames aligned with their own interpretive orientations:

Our studies suggest that differing political capacities in networks depend, among other things, on whether (a) in the case of organizationally enabled DNA, the network has a stable core of organizations sharing communication linkages and deploying high volumes of personal engagement mechanisms or (b) in the case of self-organizing DNA, the digital networks are redundant and dense with pathways for individual networks to converge, enabling viral transmission of personally appealing action frames to occur (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 761).

From a methodological standpoint, the decision to combine an extended corpus with a specific subset has enabled us to maintain the dual level of analysis—descriptive and comparative—necessary to ensure empirical robustness and distributional control. This approach falls within the tradition of *corpus-based* and *corpus-driven* studies which, even in intercultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), have demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted analysis on qualitatively representative data. Applied to future research, this methodology could be further developed through longitudinal analyses, with the aim of observing the evolution of linguistic formats and their degree of adaptation to variations in algorithmic architectures (Tagg, 2015). Looking ahead, the results obtained open two main lines of inquiry: on the one hand, the rethinking of traditional pragmatic categories in light of technical mediation and the convergence between conversational norms and visibility logics (Baym, 2015; Yus, 2011); on the other, the integration of these descriptive models into tools for automated discourse analysis capable of detecting not only propositional content but also the identity, relational, and algorithmic functions of texts. Conceived in this way, the study contributes to outlining a paradigm of linguistic analysis that combines theoretical formalization with sensitivity to the socio-technical context, following an approach which, as Crystal (2011) has argued, must be able to describe language online not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a complex and structurally mediated social practice.

### **Ethics statement**

All data were obtained from publicly accessible posts on Facebook, X, and Instagram, collected in accordance with each platform's terms of service. Usernames, profile images, and any other personal identifiers have been removed or anonymized to prevent the identification of individual users. The study did not involve interaction with participants or access to private content and therefore did not require formal ethical approval under third-party guidelines.

### **Appendix A – Complete Corpus of Analyzed Utterances**

Facebook	X (formerly Twitter)	Instagram
1. Pandemic – Politeness: Let's stay safe and support each other.	1. War – Politeness: Wishing safety to everyone affected, regardless of side.	1. Pandemic – Politeness: Let's stay safe and support each other.
2. Elections – Aggression: Your candidate is a corrupt liar.	2. Gender – Aggression: Shut up and stop forcing your agenda.	2. War – Irony: Sure, bombing civilians is a great way to win hearts and minds.
3. Pandemic – Aggression: Your ignorance is killing people.	3. Pandemic – Irony: Of course the vaccine turns you magnetic — makes perfect sense.	3. Gender – Irony: Nothing says progress like arguing on Twitter about pronouns.
4. Elections – Irony: My dog would do a better job as president.	4. Elections – Politeness: Let's agree to disagree without insults.	4. Elections – Irony: Ah yes, democracy at its finest — vote for the lesser evil!
5. Gender – Politeness: I appreciate you sharing your perspective.	5. War – Irony: Sure, bombing civilians is a great way to win hearts and minds.	5. Pandemic – Aggression: You're a danger to society, stay home.
6. War – Irony: Oh look, peace talks again. Can't wait for the next bombing.	6. Pandemic – Politeness: I understand your concern, but here are some facts to consider.	6. Gender – Aggression: Shut up and stop forcing your agenda.
7. Gender – Aggression: This gender nonsense is ruining society.	7. Elections – Irony: Because nothing screams 'progress' like electing a 70-year-old millionaire.	7. War – Politeness: Let's try to understand both sides before jumping to conclusions.
8. Elections – Politeness: Healthy debate is what democracy is about.	8. Gender – Irony: Nothing says progress like arguing on Twitter about pronouns.	8. Elections – Politeness: Let's agree to disagree without insults.
9. War – Politeness: I respectfully disagree with your view on the conflict.	9. War – Aggression: Anyone supporting this war is complicit in murder.	9. Pandemic – Irony: Masks are clearly a government plot to ruin my lipstick.
10. Pandemic – Irony: Of course the vaccine turns you magnetic — makes perfect sense.	10. Pandemic – Aggression: Only idiots refuse the vaccine.	10. Gender – Politeness: I appreciate you sharing your perspective.
11. Gender – Irony: Every time I say 'man', someone files a complaint.	11. Elections – Aggression: Your candidate is a corrupt liar.	11. Elections – Aggression: Your candidate is a corrupt liar.
12. Elections – Aggression: You must be brainwashed to support this system.		12. War – Aggression: I hope your city gets what ours did!

<p>13. Pandemic – Aggression: Only idiots refuse the vaccine.</p> <p>14. Gender – Aggression: Shut up and stop forcing your agenda.</p> <p>15. War – Politeness: Wishing safety to everyone affected, regardless of side.</p> <p>16. Elections – Irony: Because nothing screams 'progress' like electing a 70-year-old millionaire.</p> <p>17. Pandemic – Politeness: I understand your concern, but here are some facts to consider.</p> <p>18. War – Irony: Another 'liberation mission'? How original.</p> <p>19. Elections – Politeness: I respect your opinion, though I see it differently.</p> <p>20. Gender – Irony: Nothing says progress like arguing on Twitter about pronouns.</p> <p>21. War – Aggression: I hope your city gets what ours did!</p> <p>22. Gender – Politeness: Let's all use respectful language around identity.</p> <p>23. Pandemic – Aggression: You're a danger to society, stay home.</p>	<p>12. Gender – Politeness: Thanks for helping raise awareness on gender issues.</p> <p>13. War – Politeness: I respectfully disagree with your view on the conflict.</p> <p>14. Pandemic – Irony: I'm sure the virus takes weekends off like the politicians.</p> <p>15. Elections – Irony: Ah yes, democracy at its finest — vote for the lesser evil!</p> <p>16. Gender – Aggression: You're just a snowflake hiding behind fake identities.</p> <p>17. War – Irony: Oh look, peace talks again. Can't wait for the next bombing.</p> <p>18. Pandemic – Aggression: You're a danger to society, stay home.</p> <p>19. Elections – Aggression: Only morons vote for that party.</p> <p>20. Gender – Politeness: I appreciate you sharing your perspective.</p> <p>21. War – Politeness: Let's try to understand both sides before jumping to conclusions.</p> <p>22. Pandemic – Politeness: Please consider the medical advice from experts.</p>	<p>13. Pandemic – Politeness: Please consider the medical advice from experts.</p> <p>14. Gender – Irony: Sure, equality means men pay for everything and women get offended.</p> <p>15. Elections – Irony: My dog would do a better job as president.</p> <p>16. War – Irony: Oh look, peace talks again. Can't wait for the next bombing.</p> <p>17. Pandemic – Aggression: Only idiots refuse the vaccine.</p> <p>18. Gender – Aggression: You're just a snowflake hiding behind fake identities.</p> <p>19. Elections – Politeness: I respect your opinion, though I see it differently.</p> <p>20. War – Politeness: Wishing safety to everyone affected, regardless of side.</p> <p>21. Pandemic – Irony: I'm sure the virus takes weekends off like the politicians.</p> <p>22. Gender – Politeness: Let's all use respectful language around identity.</p> <p>23. Elections – Aggression: Only morons vote for that party.</p>
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<p>24. Elections – Politeness: Let's agree to disagree without insults.</p> <p>25. Pandemic – Irony: Masks are clearly a government plot to ruin my lipstick.</p> <p>26. Gender – Aggression: You're just a snowflake hiding behind fake identities.</p> <p>27. War – Irony: Sure, bombing civilians is a great way to win hearts and minds.</p> <p>28. Elections – Aggression: Only morons vote for that party.</p> <p>29. Gender – Irony: Sure, equality means men pay for everything and women get offended.</p> <p>30. Pandemic – Politeness: Please consider the medical advice from experts.</p> <p>31. War – Aggression: Anyone supporting this war is complicit in murder.</p> <p>32. Gender – Politeness: Thanks for helping raise awareness on gender issues.</p> <p>33. Pandemic – Irony: I'm sure the virus takes weekends off like the politicians.</p> <p>34. Elections – Irony: Ah yes, democracy at its finest — vote for the lesser evil!</p>	<p>23. Elections – Politeness: I respect your opinion, though I see it differently.</p> <p>24. Gender – Irony: Sure, equality means men pay for everything and women get offended.</p> <p>25. War – Aggression: I hope your city gets what ours did!</p> <p>26. Pandemic – Irony: Masks are clearly a government plot to ruin my lipstick.</p> <p>27. Elections – Irony: My dog would do a better job as president.</p> <p>28. Gender – Aggression: This gender nonsense is ruining society.</p> <p>29. War – Irony: Another 'liberation mission'? How original.</p> <p>30. Pandemic – Aggression: Your ignorance is killing people.</p> <p>31. Elections – Aggression: You must be brainwashed to support this system.</p> <p>32. Gender – Irony: Every time I say 'man', someone files a complaint.</p> <p>33. War – Politeness: I respectfully disagree with your view on the conflict.</p> <p>34. Pandemic – Politeness: Let's stay safe and support each other.</p>	<p>24. War – Aggression: You people are just bloodthirsty animals.</p> <p>25. Pandemic – Politeness: I understand your concern, but here are some facts to consider.</p> <p>26. Gender – Irony: Every time I say 'man', someone files a complaint.</p> <p>27. Elections – Irony: Because nothing screams 'progress' like electing a 70-year-old millionaire.</p> <p>28. War – Irony: Another 'liberation mission'? How original.</p> <p>29. Pandemic – Aggression: Your ignorance is killing people.</p> <p>30. Gender – Aggression: This gender nonsense is ruining society.</p> <p>31. Elections – Aggression: You must be brainwashed to support this system.</p> <p>32. War – Aggression: Anyone supporting this war is complicit in murder.</p> <p>33. Pandemic – Irony: Of course the vaccine turns you magnetic — makes perfect sense.</p> <p>34. Gender – Politeness: Thanks for helping raise awareness on gender issues.</p>
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<p>35. War – Politeness: Let's try to understand both sides before jumping to conclusions.</p> <p>36. Gender – Aggression: This gender nonsense is ruining society.</p> <p>37. Pandemic – Aggression: Your ignorance is killing people.</p> <p>38. Gender – Irony: Every time I say 'man', someone files a complaint.</p> <p>39. Elections – Aggression: Your candidate is a corrupt liar.</p> <p>40. War – Irony: Another 'liberation mission'? How original.</p>	<p>35. Elections – Politeness: Healthy debate is what democracy is about.</p> <p>36. Gender – Politeness: Let's all use respectful language around identity.</p> <p>37. War – Aggression: You people are just bloodthirsty animals.</p> <p>38. Pandemic – Aggression: Only idiots refuse the vaccine.</p> <p>39. Elections – Irony: Because nothing screams 'progress' like electing a 70-year-old millionaire.</p> <p>40. Gender – Irony: Sure, equality means men pay for everything and women get offended.</p>	<p>35. Elections – Politeness: Healthy debate is what democracy is about.</p> <p>36. War – Politeness: I respectfully disagree with your view on the conflict.</p> <p>37. Pandemic – Aggression: You're a danger to society, stay home.</p> <p>38. Gender – Aggression: Shut up and stop forcing your agenda.</p> <p>39. Elections – Politeness: I respect your opinion, though I see it differently.</p> <p>40. War – Irony: Oh look, peace talks again. Can't wait for the next bombing.</p>
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