Aspects of Linguistic Impoliteness

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Edited by

Denis Jamet and Manuel Jobert

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INTRODUCTION

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Ever since the publication of *Politeness – Some Universals in Language Use* in 1978, the study of verbal interactions has been somewhat biased and "linguistic politeness" has established itself as the main research area. Brown & Levinson's model has of course been adapted and criticised but it remains highly influential. In *Principles of Pragmatics*, Leech [1983] suggested an alternative model more explicitly based on Gricean pragmatics but also favouring politeness. More recently, however, a new research paradigm has emerged, that of impoliteness. Many scholars, like Culpeper [1996], [2003], [2005] and [2010] or Bousfield [2008], now endeavour to counterbalance the previous theory and study the notion of "impoliteness" more thoroughly than ever before. Is the study of impoliteness set to replace the study of politeness? Is it simply a way of compensating for a research area that has been neglected for too long or is it the beginning of a new approach to the study of verbal interactions encompassing both politeness and impoliteness under the umbrella term of (im)politeness as Watts [2003] and Kerbrat-Orecchioni [2005] seem to advocate?

In *Talks and Talkers*, Robert Louis Stevenson [1882: 30-31] clearly indicates that two forces are at work in conversations: the first one can be defined as a positive force which secures harmony during verbal interactions while the other – the negative force – is based on verbal struggle. Stevenson's intuition seems to be corroborated by the various theories currently available to analyse speech-in-interaction. In *Empreintes de l'euphémisme, tours et détours* [Jamet & Jobert 2010], several papers

highlight the fact that politeness strategies are closely linked to euphemism while dysphemism is clearly on the side of impoliteness strategies. This suggests that the positive / negative force dichotomy concerns discourse but also the lexicon, hence, language at large. The fact that several competing theories exist indicates that research is actively in progress. The field, it seems, is now clear for linguists to consider the duality inherent in human behaviour, hovering between harmony and struggle, dubbed "politeness" and "impoliteness" by conversation analysts.

Another problem is raised when dealing with (im)politeness. The terms used tend to confuse the issue as they are used both technically i.e. linguistically, as well as in everyday language to characterise a person's behaviour or speech. Attempts have been made to distinguish between social (im)politeness and linguistic (im)politeness. Watts [2003: 30] explains:

> […] we rapidly encountered the term 'politeness' as a technical term used in the pragmatic and sociolinguistic study of socio-communicative verbal interaction, and I suggested that the use of the term should be referred to as 'second-order politeness' (politeness 2).

However, a certain porosity remains between the two types of (im)politeness and linguists should make sure that the definitions they provide are intuitively compatible with the lay meaning of the terms. As a matter of fact, between July and August 2011, the French newspaper *le Monde* published eighteen articles on "Politeness in the world" (*La politesse dans le monde*). Although these articles were aimed at the general public, they exhibit very interesting comments on language usage and behaviour in several countries. While some major differences were expected about politeness in China or in Columbia, it was surprising to discover major differences among European countries. Some of them concern social behaviours while others directly impact linguistic behaviour. For instance, in Germany, the notion of *Ehlichkeit*, often translated as "sincerity" is the basis for the understanding of how German conversations work: directness is politeness (*le Monde*, 8 August 2011). Similarly, in Spain, the more brutal the speech, the more the speaker seems to care about his/her interlocutor (*Le Monde*, 7 August 2011). The point of these remarks is not to highlight cultural and linguistic differences. These are well known and have been studied at length in *Politeness in Europe* by Hickey & Stewart [2005] or in *Politeness in East Asia* by Kadar & Mills [2011], to quote but a few. What is striking is that people from different backgrounds (those specializing in Anthropology, Linguistics, Media Studies, as well as lay people) are now tackling these

issues and it befalls to linguists to provide analytical frameworks accessible to specialists and lay people alike.

This is precisely the purpose of this book in which linguists, discourse analysts and literary critics contribute to the clarification of impoliteness as a common research paradigm. Although most contributors base their analyses on the pragmatics of talk-in-interaction, the variety of the subject-matter tackled makes this volume a valuable contribution to impoliteness. Various researchers have therefore been selected to contribute to *Aspects of Linguistic Impoliteness*, and the diversity of sub-disciplinary approaches is reflected in the multi-dimensional organisation of the five sections of the book which is divided into 5 thematic chapters, with 15 parts in all, as presented below.

The first chapter **"General Approaches to Impoliteness and Rudeness"** aims to study the links between impoliteness and rudeness, by providing a general framework for these notions. The chapter opens with an introductory article by **Jonathan Culpeper**, entitled "Impoliteness: Questions and Answers", which intends to define the very notion of "impoliteness", and the reasons for studying it. Related topics concerning the creativity of impoliteness, as well as the most frequent linguistic ways in which somebody causes impoliteness are also tackled. The main point is to demonstrate clearly that impoliteness, because of its complex nature, and the serious implications it has for interpersonal communication and society as a whole, is deserving of serious and concentrated academic study. **Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni** in "Politeness, impoliteness, non-politeness, "polirudeness": The case of political TV debates" shows that in order to identify an utterance as polite or impolite, its content (as a face-threatening act (FTA), a face-flattering act (FFA) or a combination of both), its formulation, and its context of production must be taken into account, and other categories besides politeness and impoliteness must also be introduced into the theoretical system. Here, the hybrid notion of "polirudeness" is shown to be essential. Kerbrat-Orecchioni provides a detailed analysis of two political speeches given during the 2007 French presidential election to demonstrate that the way an utterance is qualified by the analyst is entirely dependent on the definitions initially adopted. In "The power of impoliteness: a historical perspective", **Sandrine Sorlin** shows that throughout the ages the word "politeness" has taken on various meanings, and that the notion of "impoliteness" can be perceived more positively than it commonly is. Yet, linguistics always tends to define it as a violation of cooperative rules, even though those resorting to impolite

language may have different objectives. She goes on to examine the potential subversive power inherent in impoliteness, highlighting the parallels between politeness and political correctness, and concludes on a new definition of impoliteness that makes it a positive non-conformist resisting force.

The second chapter **"Impoliteness in Television Series and in Drama"** deals with occurrences of impoliteness in television series and drama and opens with **Linda Pillière**'s "*Dr. House* and the Language of Offense". The aim of this paper is not to reconsider theoretical frameworks nor to add another definition to the term "impoliteness", but to study how impolite language and behaviour work within a specific context and how they can be used to create humour. Linda Pillière's point is to offer a different way of viewing impoliteness that is based on theories of interpretation and context models, and to highlight the need to see offensive language in relation to context models, as the study of a television series, such as *House*, clearly demonstrates. In "Domestic and Professional Abuse in *Fawlty Towers*" **Manuel Jobert** shows that comedy-shows, such as *Fawlty Towers*, heavily rely on verbal abuse, which suggests that laughter is often triggered by impolite interaction, and that impoliteness is clearly one of the major sources of comedy both in the private and the public sphere. This tends to demonstrate that impoliteness is not simply an element of characterisation but an essential ingredient present on several planes simultaneously in the series. **Natalie Mandon** in "'Polite company'?: Offensive Discourse in William Congreve's Comedies" examines how Congreve successfully combines two aims: the staging of verbal interaction in which language is used to cause offence and at the same time achieve comic effect. She shows that determining what is offensive must rely not only on the response of stage characters but also on what we know about the linguistic norms of the period, i.e. what constituted appropriate and/or acceptable linguistic behavior and what did not in a seventeenth-century London theatre.

The third chapter **"Impoliteness in Prose Fiction"** mainly focuses on the discursive creations of impoliteness found in literary works. The chapters opens with a contribution from **Brindusa Grigoriu** entitled "Medieval Rudeness: The English Version of a French Romance Custom" in which Grigoriu offers a contrastive analysis of the French and the English version of Tristan and Ysolt following Brown and Levinson's "Politeness Theory". **Jacqueline Fromonot** in "Paradoxes of Impoliteness in *Vanity Fair*, by W.M. Thackeray" demonstrates that Thackeray varies

strategies to address the issue of linguistic impoliteness in fictional and metafictional passages. This contribution aims to show that impoliteness can be analysed using three related sub-categories: "polite impoliteness", "impolite politeness" and "impolite impoliteness", which can be used to structure the rhetorical and stylistic investigation of impoliteness in *Vanity Fair*. In "Impoliteness and rebellion in "Christmas" by John McGahern", **Vanina Jobert** focuses on the combination of verbal strategies of character, narrator and author, which produce a specific effect on the reader. Those verbal interactions help build a very specific text world ruled by rigid social codes and at the same time feature a dynamic process of rebellion. **Claire Majola** in "'Who are they to talk to us like that?' Narrative impoliteness and the reader" lays emphasis on the fact that impoliteness cannot be an aim, but a strategy and as such, a central component of what could be termed "authorial policy". After reminding the reader of the main taboo topics in Irish literature, she focuses on Colum McCann's story "Everything in this Country Must" to show how authorial strategies can be seen to "work on" the reader, thereby suggesting that literary interaction is face-flattering, or rather, face-enhancing.

The fourth chapter, **"Impoliteness in Philosophy of Language"**, concentrates on impoliteness and the philosophy of language. The chapter opens with **Célia Schneebeli**'s "Systematized impoliteness in the nonsense world of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*", in which she presents a reading of *Alice in Wonderland* using Geoffrey Leech's "Politeness Principle" and Lecercle's "Impoliteness Principle". As for **Simone Rinzler** in "Impoliteness, *agôn*, *dissensus* in "The Two Philosophers": Irvine Welsh and a political philosophy of language", she analyses a short story by Irvine Welsh, "The Two Philosophers", in which the rules of dialogue are flouted continuously. Rinzler resorts to Lecercle's *Philosophy of Nonsense*, in which he conceives a set of principles of struggle to deconstruct the two famous principles implemented by Leech – the "Politeness Principle" – and by Grice – the "Co-operative Principle".

The fifth and final chapter **"Impoliteness and Modern Communication"** offers three case-studies of impoliteness in modern communication, be it oral communication or virtual communication. **Isabelle Gaudy-Campbell** in "*You know*: (im)politeness marker in naturally occurring speech?" investigates the hedging function of *you know* and its face-saving dimension. Is *you know* a genuine address to the

hearer, or rather a fake address, a form of mock politeness, making it possible to impose a consensus by presenting it as agreed upon? In "Alternative spelling and censorship: the treatment of profanities in virtual communities" **Laura Goudet** presents a study of the ways used to avoid profanities and insults on the Internet, by focusing on the use of automated censorship scripts as a means to neutralize offensive words and expressions with a simple substitution command. The study is based on the most important African American related website, *Black Planet*, and examines other layers of identification, anti-identification and name-calling that come into play. The volume ends with **Bertrand Richet**'s "*Fanning the Flames?* A Study of Insult Forums on the Internet" which investigates insult forums on the Internet, raising key questions such as: Why and how is an insult forum created? How does it evolve? What does it imply? What is the usefulness of an insult forum? Can one really insult somebody else, other than on a very short term basis, for no other reason than the pleasure derived from the act of insulting?"

Each exploring a theme of its own, these five chapters bring together in a single volume a carefully chosen collection of scholarly reflections on linguistic impoliteness. Seeking to address the emerging interest, both academic and non-academic, in this topic, *Aspects of Linguistic Impoliteness* provides a multidisciplinary perspective. As such, it is an excellent reference for readers who seek both an introduction to impoliteness as well as a guide to the current breadth of scholarly work on this phenomenon.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL APPROACHES TO IMPOLITENESS AND RUDENESS

PART I

IMPOLITENESS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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1. What does this paper cover?

I have been researching impoliteness for over 20 years. During this time, I have forayed into various issues and explored a range of data. Along the way, my understanding of impoliteness has developed. This paper is a retrospective, reflecting on some key questions that have emerged and supplying possible answers. Fuller descriptions of many phenomena discussed can be found in Culpeper (2011).

In the remainder of this paper I will address the following questions: Why bother to study impoliteness? What is impoliteness? Is *impoliteness* the best label for "it", and what do the possible labels tell us about "it"? What are the most frequent linguistic ways in which somebody causes impoliteness? Is it the case that impoliteness is not creative? Is it the case that the British are now more impolite than they were? Is it the case that some people are predisposed towards being impolite?

2. Why bother to study impoliteness?

I conduct research in a number of different areas, including the language of Shakespeare. The different reactions I get from non-academics (and even sometimes academics) when I announce that my research is the language of Shakespeare compared with impoliteness is striking. Impoliteness is considered the nasty marginal stuff on the fringes of language and indeed society. There is little to understand or investigate because it is so simplistic. Hence, reactions are rather muted expressions of puzzlement about why anybody would want to research impoliteness.

In fact, there are several strong reasons why research is necessary. Impoliteness is socially important. It is highly salient in public life (much

more so than politeness). Public signs, charters, laws and so on try to prohibit it. It is also much talked about (in 2006 the best-selling author Lynne Truss published *Talk to the Hand: The Utter Bloody Rudeness of Everyday Life*). It can be highly damaging to personal lives. A saying in the UK, often delivered by parents to children, runs: "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me". Research suggests this is not always true (e.g. Burman *et al.* 2002; Greenwell and Dengerink 1973, 70). Impoliteness is—or at least should be—of interest to linguistics research. From a descriptive point of view, impoliteness plays a central role in many discourses (from military recruit training to exploitative TV shows), yet those discourses are rarely described in detail. From are a theoretical point of view, many theories, notably in pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics, are biased towards, and developed from, socially cooperative interactions—thus, they cannot adequately explain anti-social interactions. From a methodological point of view, traditional pragmatics research methods (e.g. discourse completion tasks, role play) are likely to be flawed, because informants may well not perform in a natural way when they know that repugnant behaviour is being recorded. There are also important spin-offs for other disciplines, including social psychology (especially related to verbal aggression), sociology (especially related to verbal abuse), conflict studies (e.g. resolution of verbal conflict) and media studies (e.g. exploitative TV).

3. What is impoliteness?

If this question were easy to answer, I would not have spent the time I have researching impoliteness. The somewhat elusive nature of impoliteness is one of the things that makes it interesting. Let us begin with an example. This is a diary-type report produced by one of my students:

> I was in a taxi with 5 other girls, on our way into town. The taxi driver seemed nice at first, commenting on how pretty we looked, etc. Then he turned quite nasty, making vulgar sexual innuendos, swearing a lot and laughing at us. He then insulted some of us, commenting on the clothes we were wearing and when we didn't laugh, he looked quite angry. He then asked where we were from, we told him, and then he started criticising and insulting us and our home towns. We mostly stayed quiet, giving non-committal, single word answers until we could leave.

I used this particular example to open my 2011 book on impoliteness precisely because it contains many impoliteness-related features. Note the

specific kinds of communicative behaviour reported to be produced by the taxi driver: "commenting", "innuendos", "swearing", "laughing", "insulted", "criticising", plus various non-verbal aspects, "he looked quite angry"; "his tone of voice and facial expressions also made us feel very uncomfortable". Each one of these kinds of communicative behaviour is worthy of investigation in its own right. But how do I know that such behaviour has anything to do with impoliteness? I asked my student reporters to reflect on their diary reports immediately after they wrote them (needless to say, so as not to bias the data, they were not told that I was interested in impoliteness). This student described the taxi driver's behaviour as "sexist, rude, very offensive and inappropriate given the context". We will discuss the labelling of impoliteness in more detail later, but here note that two labels, "sexist" and "rude", are metapragmatic labels for impoliteness, especially so in the case of "rude". So, what we have in this diary reflection is some evidence that one of the actual targets of the communicative behaviour took it as impolite.

More recently, I have used this particular example in presentations and discussed it with various audiences. It was suggested to me that this might not be a case of "genuine impoliteness" at all, but of "failed banter" on the part of the taxi driver. The notion of "pragmatic failure" was put forward by Thomas (1983). In essence, it concerns the failure to convey the right pragmatic meaning. Thomas was particularly concerned with pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communicative situations, where one participant might have different understandings of pragmatic resources and the situations in which they are used from other participants. There is indeed a cross-cultural dimension to this interaction: the taxi driver is highly likely to be a local, born and bred Lancastrian, whereas the passengers are students from other parts of the UK. Cultures, of course, do not simply correlate with nation states. Within any nation, there is much cultural variability. Whilst I cannot find any research proving the prevalence of banter in northern England, it is certainly generally assumed to be the case (compare the many hits for "Northern banter" in Google, compared with the very few for "Southern banter"). It is plausible that at least initially the taxi driver was attempting banter. Note that some support for this is in the fact that things turn nastier "when we didn't laugh". Sharing laughter is consistent with doing banter, not genuine impoliteness. The implications of not joining in banter or at least reacting positively (e.g. laughing, smiling) are that it could be taken as a rebuff. Banter is a way of promoting social solidarity (cf. Leech 1983), something which is stereotypically associated with Northern culture. So a rebuff could be taken as a way of promoting the opposite social distance, not only from the

taxi driver but also, especially if the passengers were from the south of England, from the taxi driver's cultural milieu. This may explain why "he looked quite angry". The following communicative activity may well have been closer to genuine impoliteness.

Impoliteness, then, is not something that is a given. In my earlier work (e.g. 1996; Culpeper *et al* 2003), I tended to emphasise the role of intention. Intention may be one aspect involved in the above example. It is possible that the passengers misunderstood the taxi driver's intention behind his early communicative behaviour. Obviously, we cannot get inside people's heads; the important thing here is the perception of intention. To fully accommodate that, in 2005 I produced the following definition of impoliteness:

> Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2). (2005, 38)

However, note that this definition still ties intention of some kind to the notion of impoliteness. Is it really the case that impoliteness only occurs if people take it to be intentional? The work I have done over the last six years would suggest that the answer is no. A common context in which behaviour is known not to be intentional but is still taken as impoliteness causing offence concerns interactions between socially close individuals, typically partners. In such contexts, the person who produces impoliteness is held responsible for not foreseeing its offensive consequences. As a result, I revised my definition of impoliteness thus (the key part is italicised):

> Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. *Situated behaviours are viewed negatively—considered "impolite"—when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be*. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. (Culpeper 2011, 254)

This definition also solved another problem, namely, my previous reliance on the notion of face. As Goffman puts it (1967, 5), face is "the positive social *value* a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". Obviously, issues of identity are tied up with the notion of face. Some impoliteness

phenomena very clearly relate to face, insults being a good example. But others are far less clear. In one of the examples I collected, a student informant describes how a member of staff at a bar was rude because he refused to serve her a glass of tap water. She reported that she felt it was her "right" that tap water should be available. This kind of impoliteness is fully accommodated by my definition above. The student expected to be served tap water, wanted to be served tap water, and moreover thought that it was her right to be served tap water. Such cases have less to do with the notion of face. Incidentally, the emotional correlates of face-related impoliteness as opposed to rights-related impoliteness are very different. Face-related impoliteness involves "hurt", whereas rights-related impoliteness, as indeed reported by the above informant, involve "anger".

4. Is *impoliteness* the best label for "it", and what do the possible labels tell us about "it"?

The English language is replete with words that can be used to describe impoliteness behaviours, including:

> bratty, ill-mannered (bad-mannered, unmannered, unmannerly), unruly, rude, discourteous, ungracious, abusive, not polite, ill-bred, bounderish, yokelish, ungracious, unrefined, uncouth, uncivil, crude, vulgar, lacking tact or refinement, insulting, insensitive, abrupt, brusque, curt, disrespectful, contemptuous, gruff, impudent, impertinent, insolent, cheeky, crusty.

I was motivated to investigate the labels for impoliteness for two reasons. One was that in common with other scholars I need a label for the phenomenon that I am investigating. The other is that the labels constitute part of the metapragmatic language for impoliteness. Investigating the usage of these labels—what they refer to, who uses them and in what contexts – should be illuminating.

In the world of linguistic pragmatics, the two labels which are repeatedly used are *impoliteness* and *rudeness* (along with their adjectival counterparts). In the adjacent fields of psychology and sociology, we find the terms such as *verbal aggression* and *verbal abuse* (along with their adjectival counterparts) for similar phenomena. In order to investigate the currency of these terms amongst the general public, I checked the frequency of these terms in the two-billion word Oxford English Corpus and found the following:

- Rudeness (1546) / **rude (19012)**
- Verbal abuse (1522) / verbally abusive (201)
- Verbal aggression (164) / verbally aggressive (64)
- **Impoliteness (30)** / impolite (874)

As can be seen, most frequent is *rude*; whereas, in contrast, the least frequent term is *impoliteness*, the very term I have been using in this paper. Indeed, the nominal form *impoliteness* is strikingly rare, considering it only achieves 30 instances out of 2 million. In fact, this suits my purposes. I adopt the term *impoliteness* partly because it displays the fact that this work is related to work on politeness, but also because its currency is so paltry that I can appropriate it as a technical term covering the various aspects of impoliteness that fall under the definition given in the previous section.

As to the issue of what the term *impoliteness* labels, clearly, a mere 30 instances are unlikely to reveal very much. Even the adjectival form with 874 instances would not result in particularly strong patterns. However, I had discovered that all senses and usages of *impolite* are in fact interchangeable with specific senses and usages of *rude* (there are some usages of *rude*, especially positive ones, that are not interchangeable with *impolite*). Thus, I could search on *rude* and *impolite* together, thereby examining a total of 19,886 instances—more than enough for patterns to emerge. Again, I deployed the Oxford English Corpus, and used the program Sketch Engine (see www.sketchengine.co.uk). This programme performs a statistical analysis of collocates in particular grammatical relations with the target item. Amongst the most interesting results is the finding that *rude/impolite* typically describe the following grammatical subjects (in rank order of strength of association): *doorman*, *bouncer*, *bartender*, *waitress*, *waiter*, *[New] Yorker*, *staff* and *French*. It is striking that many of these items relate to public service contexts such as restaurants and bars. It is here, presumably, that our expectations, wishes and indeed assumptions about entitlements to good service are infringed, resulting in the description of the person responsible for the offending behaviour as *rude* or *impolite*. We also might note the appearance of *[New] Yorker* and *French*. Here, it needs to be pointed out that data in the Oxford English Corpus reflects the cultures of the English-speaking world, and in particular that 60 per cent of the data emanates from North America. The appearance of *[New] Yorker* reflects the largely North American perception that people from New York are typically *impolite/rude*, and similarly the appearance of *French* reflects the largely North American perception that people from France are typically *impolite/rude*. I also identified what actions are typically described by the

words rude/impolite, and they include (in rank order of strength of association): *eavesdropping*, *interrupting*, *pointing*, *ignoring*, *declining*, *smoking*, *listening* and *laughing*. As can be seen, these items generally relate to intrusions and impositions, as well as disassociation. Such things are again contrary to what we expect, wish or think ought to be the case.

5. What are the most frequent linguistic ways in which somebody causes impoliteness?

As we saw from the data discussed in section 3, impoliteness can be quite a slippery notion. Nevertheless, there are in fact regular linguistic ways in which it is achieved. Amongst the most common in my data are the following (all are real examples; square brackets demarcate structural units; slashes separate optional elements):

Vocatives
- moron / plonker / dickhead / etc.
- [you] [[fucking / rotten/ dirty / fat / etc.] [burk / pig / shit / bastard/ loser / etc.]] [you]

Personal negative evaluations
- you're [nuts / nuttier than a fruit cake / hopeless / pathetic / stupid etc.]
- you can't do anything right

Dismissals
- get [lost / out]
- [fuck / piss] off

Silencers
- shut [it / your mouth, face / 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 / etc.]

(See Culpeper 2011, 135-6, for a more complete list)

It is not the case that impoliteness is inherent in the semantic meaning of these linguistic formulæ. But there is a case for saying that these formulæ are conventionally associated with specific impoliteness contexts, and thus are in a sense contextually tagged for impoliteness (see Culpeper 2010 for this argument, and Terkourafi, e.g. 2002, for a similar argument in relation to politeness). Thus, uttering one of these formulæ loads the

linguistic dice in favour of impoliteness effects. Something of this can be seen in the statement by Dog Chapman, a North American bounty hunter, who, commenting on the moment when he makes an arrest, said: "It's important to make a scary first impression. I know Christians get upset because I say 'Freeze, motherf***er!' but I told them that 'Freeze, in Jesus' name' doesn't work." (reported in *The Week*, 5/10/06).

Of course, impoliteness can and often does take place without any conventional impoliteness formulæ being uttered. In fact, I have some evidence that implicit ways of achieving impoliteness are slightly more frequent than explicit ways deploying impoliteness formulæ. 59 per cent of the student reports I collected did not involve impoliteness formulæ (although I have no way of telling whether that result may have been influenced by the methodology). An example is the following in which the informant describes an event in a bar where she worked:

> As I walked over to the table to collect the glasses, Sam said to Aiden "Come on, Aiden let's go outside," implying she didn't want me there. This was at the pub on Sunday night, and I just let the glasses go and walked away.
>
> I didn't particularly feel bad, but angry at the way she had said that straight away when I got there. We aren't particularly friends but she was really rude in front of others.

There is nothing, of course, inherently impolite in the words "Come on, Aiden let's go outside." Here, impoliteness comes about through implicatures generated in that particular context. Assuming that the words had relevance for the informant, then the likely implicature is that her arrival at the table is the reason why Sam suggests to Aiden that they go outside. The fact that she is excluded in something that presumably infringes what she expects, wants or thinks should happen, and hence is taken as impolite.

6. Is it the case that impoliteness is not creative?

As mentioned in section 2, impoliteness is generally assumed to be the entrails, or perhaps even the fæces, of language—a repugnant thing, best avoided. Moreover, as such, it is assumed to be simplistic, hardly meriting study. This assumption is not true. Impoliteness is often creative, and in fact achieves its effects through their creativity. This is the case with implied impoliteness, as illustrated by the final example of the previous section. The words "Come on, Aiden lets go outside" do not

straightforwardly convey impoliteness. That comes about through a more creative process of delivering particular words in a particular context at a particular time, signalling to the target that she should infer the meanings. The connection between creativity and inferencing is made by Carter in his book on language and creativity: "The well-known truths expressed by proverbs are usually oblique and implicit rather than direct statements, they often have a metaphorical basis and *their indirectness prompts interpretation and a 'creative' inference of meaning*" (Carter 2004, 134, my emphasis). There are also other kinds of creativity in the conduct of impoliteness that fit the kind of creativity regularly discussed in the field of stylistics as deviation from some norm (i.e. an unexpected regularity or irregularity) (e.g. Mukařovský, 1970; Leech, 1985). Let us consider some examples.

Exploitative TV shows, notably chat, talent and quiz shows such as *Jerry Springer*, *X Factor* and *The Weakest Link*, have become increasingly popular on British television, especially in the last couple of decades. Many of the shows have been franchised to other countries across the world. One of the ways in which these shows entertain is through creative impoliteness. Consider these lines from Anne Robinson, the host of *The Weakest Link*:

> Are you running on empty?
> He who stumbles should not survive.
> Give the heave-ho to the hopeless.

The first clearly exploits a metaphor, drawing on the source domain of the car. The second, apart from some alliteration involving sibilants, is a pseudo-aphorism involving an intertextual reference to the Bible (Apostles). The third deploys creative sound patterning: not only alliteration (*heave* / *ho* / *hope*) but also repetition of the same syllables (*the*, *ho*) and trochaic metrical patterning. Shakespeare, of course, did similar things, as we might note from this extended metaphor: "You are now sailed into the north of my lady's opinion, where you will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard" (*Twelfth Night*).

One problem in all this is whether impoliteness with creativity is actually genuine impoliteness. Creative devices can signal a more playful frame. Consider the case of banter, some forms of which exist as a heavily ritualised kind of language game. In America, this is known as "sounding", "playing the dozens", or "signifying". Labov's (1972) work has been influential in revealing the complexity of the insults used and the well-organised nature of this speech event. Typically, these insults are sexual, directed at a third person related to the target, and couched in

rhyming couplets. For example: “Iron is iron, and steel don’t rust, But your momma got a pussy like a Greyhound Bus” (Labov 1972, 302). However, creativity alone is not enough to signal a playful frame. Reviewing the literature on teasing, Keltner et al. (1998, 1233) suggest that devices accompanying the tease that indicate that it is “off-record, playful, and not be taken seriously” include “unusual vocalisations, singsong voice, formulaic utterances, elongated vowels, and unusual facial expressions”. Similarly, with banter the whole gamut of multimodal communication is often deployed to indicate a playful frame. Moreover, and this is the key point, there are cases where impoliteness is clearly genuine and also creative. I have already pointed to the example at the end of the previous section, which is not playful. A further example is this utterance: “do me a favour don’t have any children”. This was said by a U.S. male army sergeant major to a female recruit who is guilty of insubordination. It was said in the context of a fifteen-minute long “dressing down”, during which three non-commissioned officers fire insults and criticisms at the recruit, whilst denying her any kind of defence. The utterance is creative because it combines a conventional politeness formula, “do me a favour”, with an extremely impolite and unusual request “don’t have any children” (implying, in this context, that she should not have children because she herself is so bad). Not only does this deviate from the kind of request that typically follows “do me a favour”, but also, of course, we realise that the politeness of that formula is merely a sneering sarcastic veneer.

7. Is it the case that the British are now more impolite than they were?

Certainly, it is a common view in the UK that British people are becoming, indeed have become, more impolite. Ascertaining whether this is really true is, as one might imagine, a huge undertaking. A study that provides some insight is Culpeper and Archer (2008). In this we analysed 1,200 requests in trial proceedings and drama from around Shakespeare’s time. We found that 1 in 3 requests were made with the simple imperative, e.g. “Fetch me the water”, “Get thee gone”, “Bake the bread”, “Go!” (and over half of these had no additional polite supporting move). This contrasts with the evidence we have about requests in more recent decades. Only 1 in 10 requests are made with the simple imperative (cf. Blum-Kulka and House 1989). Most requests deploy forms such as “*Could you* fetch me the water?” (cf. Aijmer 1996). So, with regard to linguistic form we have moved away from direct requests to conventionally indirect

requests. Given that indirectness has been thought to be of particular value in doing politeness in British culture, it would seem to be the case that the British, far from becoming more impolite, have become more polite!

However, neither impoliteness nor politeness are simply in the words that are spoken or written, as we have seen. Indirectness undoubtedly was given a boost in British society in the Victorian period, when values relating to the individual such as privacy and self-respect became highly prized (see Culpeper and Demmen 2011). However, Victorian values are now being challenged by new ideologies. Cameron (2007) suggests that the challenge is coming from two particular directions. One is the advent of psychotherapy and its popularisation. Here, the direct expression of emotion is highly prized (it is good to express yourself, to let it all hang out). The other is the rise of corporate organisations. Here, the direct expression of views is seen as conducive to efficient communication and progression of the business (it is good to get to the point, to cut through the crap). This does not mean to say that indirectness is not highly prized any more. Many people clearly do prize it. But there are also others who are being influenced by newer ideologies which prize directness. This clash of values is partly what drives debates and agonising about impoliteness. Those more influenced by Victorian values are likely to be affronted by those behaving in accordance with values prizing directness.

8. Is it the case that some people are predisposed towards being impolite?

Impoliteness is often assumed to be an unfortunate behavioural aberration, a predisposition, or even to be the consequence of genetics. One might consider that the expression "genetically impolite" is slang for "someone who is of detestable nature, or lower intelligence" (http://www.urbandictionary.com). This illustrates the fact that people perceive a very close connection between behaviours and people: judgements about behaviours blur with judgements about people and the social groups of which they are a part. Describing someone as impolite is both a comment on their behaviour and a comment on them as a person and their cultural background.

There is no clear evidence that impoliteness relates to genetics. This is not surprising, because it is very difficult to establish connections between genetics and behaviours in general. However, we would not want to dismiss the possible role played by biological factors. Beatty and Pence (2010), reviewing studies pointing to biological causes of verbal aggression and those pointing to social causes, conclude that "verbal

aggression is best accounted for by biological factors rather than variables in the social environment" (2010, 21) (see also Heisel 2010, on prefrontal cortex asymmetry). Nevertheless, whilst biological theories clearly play a part, biological theories are not sufficient as full explanations of the complexities of (verbal) aggression. Moreover, research has also suggested that aggressive behavioural routines in particular situations can be learnt and enacted (e.g. Perry, Perry and Boldizar 1990), i.e. they are not genetic/biological. It seems likely that all this is the case for impoliteness too.

9. What should we conclude about impoliteness?

If there is one conclusion that I would like readers to take away, it is that impoliteness is deserving of serious and concentrated academic study. It is complex, not at all easy to pin down; it has serious implications for interpersonal communication and society as a whole; it is realised in fascinatingly creative ways. And, importantly, it is surrounded by myths and misunderstandings, which need to be dispelled.

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PART II

POLITENESS, IMPOLITENESS, NON-POLITENESS, "POLIRUDENESS": THE CASE OF POLITICAL TV DEBATES

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1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Politeness as face-work

As politeness (and its negative counterpart impoliteness)[1] plays an important role in all kinds of discourses, discourse analysis benefits most from incorporating this dimension into its work.[2] In this respect, we are greatly indebted to Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "whose work has acquired canonical status and exerted immense influence" (Harris 2001: 452) and who have unquestionably laid down the foundations for a new paradigm by endowing the notion of politeness with a real theoretical status.

From this standpoint, politeness is equivalent to *face-work*, a concept which does not exactly cover the notion of politeness as carried by everyday language. It is therefore necessary to distinguish from the outset, following Watts, Ide & Erlich (1992: 3), between the common-sense

[1] In this article we will use the term "impoliteness" rather than "rudeness" in order to keep in mind that we are dealing with a theoretical notion. However, as two words are available in English for the same notion, some researchers (such as Culpeper 2008) draw a clear distinction between them, from different (and sometimes even opposite) criteria.

[2] For example, we could show that principles of "preference" identified in conversation analysis cannot be accounted for satisfactorily without making use of observations of this kind (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2010: 78-80).