

LINGUISTIC IMPOLITENESS: A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to briefly review state of the art of the theory of impoliteness. The most notable figure in the field is Jonathan Culpeper whose model of impoliteness was initially introduced as a parallel to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. The theory can be traced back to Goffman's theory of face. Using Goffman's theory face as a departure, Brown and Lavinson propose politeness principles in terms of conflict avoidance; this is the strategy to maintain face when face attack happens. There are, however, still other times in which people use linguistic strategies to attack face which tend to be impolite. Culpeper refers impoliteness to communicative strategies used to attack face, and thereby create social disruption. He classified five super strategies of impoliteness including Bald on record impoliteness, Positive impoliteness, Negative impoliteness, Sarcasm or mock politeness, and Withhold politeness.

Keywords: *politeness strategy, impoliteness strategy, face attack*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic politeness has occupied a central place in language study. A number of linguistic scholars have carried out research on linguistic politeness in a wide range of cultures. As a result, several theories have been proposed on linguistic politeness and politeness has been well-established scholarly. However, there is an insignificant amount of literature concerning linguistic impoliteness (Bousfield, 2008: 17). Linguistic impoliteness has not gained nearly as much attention as linguistic politeness. Current scholars—most widely known Jonathan Culpeper and Derek Bousfield—have begun to alleviate this imbalance. Watts (2003) includes impoliteness in his attempts to theorize politeness. He states that greater attention on politeness instead of impoliteness can be considered as astonishing because it is specifically impolite behavior that is more likely to be commented and judged in verbal interaction (Watts, 2003: 5).

English, like other languages, has various terms which refer in some ways to the notion of impoliteness. The term *rudeness* is often used as a synonym of *impoliteness*, and of course both terms have other synonyms. In linguistic pragmatics, the following terms are often used for impoliteness related phenomena: *Impolite(ness) rude(ness) aggravation, aggravated/aggravating language/facework, aggressive facework, face-attack, verbal aggression, abusive language*. So, what is actually linguistic impoliteness? To answer this question let me quote several definitions of impoliteness from different scholars. The following definitions are all taken from the linguistic pragmatics. Locher and Bousfield (2008: 3) define impoliteness as “behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context”. Lakoff talks about rude behavior for impoliteness. She stated that “rude behavior does not utilize politeness strategies where they would be expected, in such a way that the

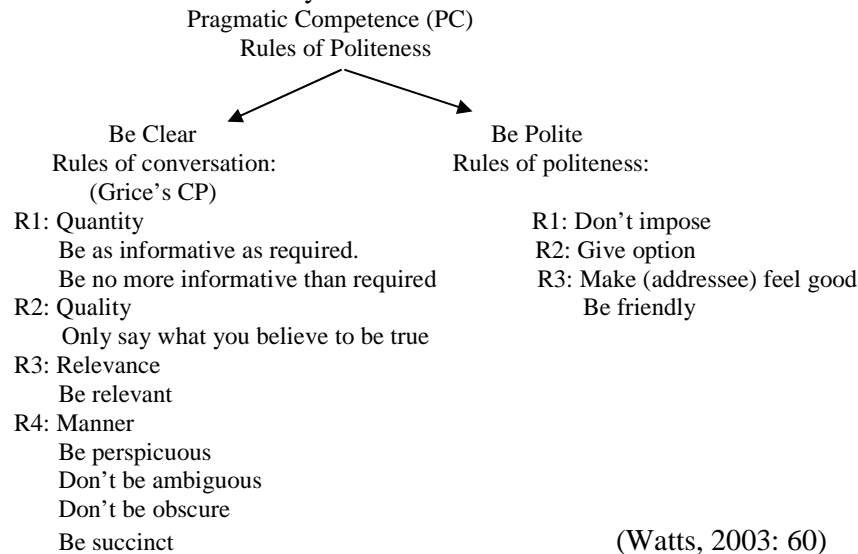
utterance can only almost plausibly be interpreted as intentionally and negatively confrontational” (Lakoff, 1989: 103). Meanwhile Beebe used the term rudeness to refer to impoliteness, saying that [...] rudeness is defined as “a face threatening act (FTA - or feature of an FTA such as intonation - which violates a socially sanctioned norm of interaction of the social context in which it occurs” (Beebe, 1995: 159). And Culpeper et al. vividly popularized the term impoliteness, saying that “[...] impoliteness, communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony [...]” (2003: 1546). “Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)” (Culpeper, 2005: 38).

The major aim of this paper is to review the literature on linguistic impoliteness as a technical term. The presentation will cover the followings: the definition of impoliteness and some of the most widely used models of linguistic impoliteness in literature, namely (1) From Politeness Theory to Impoliteness Theory, (2) The Concept of Face and Impoliteness, (3) Impoliteness Strategy, (4) Formulaic Impoliteness Expressions in English, and (5) Reactions to Impoliteness.

From Politeness Theory to Impoliteness Theory

In social relation, it is common for people to use linguistic strategies to maintain or promote harmonious relations. When conversing people generally adhere to cultural norm, showing that they are competent speakers. Lakoff (1989) is the first who attempts to set up pragmatic rules on conversation. She suggests two overarching rules of pragmatic competence: be clear and be polite. Rule one (be clear) is really the Grecian Cooperative Principle in which she renames the rules of conversation. Rules two (be polite) consists of a sub set of three rules: don’t impose, give options, make other people feel good – be friendly. In brief, Lakoff’s theory can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 1: Robin Lakoff’s Theory of Politeness



Brown Levinson’s theory of politeness first appeared in 1978. Their theory of politeness is certainly the most influential since it has witnessed innumerable reactions, applications, critiques, modifications, and revision. The names of Brown and Levinson have become almost synonymous with the word *politeness* as it is impossible to talk about politeness without referring to Brown and Levinson. They also relate their theory with Gricean framework, in that politeness strategies are seen as “rational deviations” from the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP). Nevertheless politeness has totally different status from CP. CP is a presumptive strategy; it is unmarked and socially neutral, the natural presupposition underlying all communication. Politeness needs to be communicated. Politeness principles are principled reasons for deviation from the CP when communication is about to threaten face. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 5) They see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance; thus, politeness “makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties.

Leech’s theory of politeness situates politeness within a framework of interpersonal rhetoric (1983: 82); the major purpose of Politeness Principle (PP) according to Leech is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within social group. The PP regulates “the social equilibrium and the friendly relation”, which enables us to assume that our utterances are being cooperative. Like Lakoff, Leech has further reason for setting up a PP in addition to a CP, that is, to provide an interpretation of conversational data where the CP alone appears to breakdown. Leech’s central model of PP is cost-benefit scale of politeness related to both the speaker and hearer. Politeness involves minimizing the cost and maximizing the benefit to speaker/hearer. Leech mentions seven maxims, all of which are related to the notion of cost and benefit: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and consideration.

Nevertheless social equilibrium and harmony in social communication (as Leech said) do not always win out (Cashman, 2006). Still, there are other times in which people use linguistic strategies to attack face or to strengthen the face threat of an act, i.e. they tend to be impolite. For this reason, there comes the emergence of the theory of impoliteness.

The first scholar to mention when talking about impoliteness is Culpeper (1996). He uses the term impoliteness to refer “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (2003: 1564). Another scholar is Bousfield who claimed that impoliteness is not seen as failed politeness but strategy to attack face. It is the reason why impoliteness has become increasingly popular object of study in recent years. Bousfield (2008: 72) states that “impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully delivered: (1) unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, (2) with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, ‘boosted’, or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted”. Thus, the key difference between politeness and impoliteness is a matter of intention: whether it is the speaker’s intention to support face (politeness) or to attack face (impoliteness) (Culpeper, 1998: 86). To account for the aspect of impoliteness, Culpeper (1996) proposes an impoliteness framework which is parallel but opposite to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness. In summary, in particular contexts, certain impoliteness activity is not regarded as marginal activity but actually an essential part of communication process.

The Concept of Face and Impoliteness

The term *face* is a central concept in studying linguistic politeness and impoliteness. This concept was originally introduced by Erving Goffman in the 1960s. He himself acknowledges this concept was originated from Chinese culture. It is common in our daily interaction that we present a particular image of ourselves to others. The particular image we present is called "face" by Goffman. This term is similar in meaning to the one we use in everyday speech when we say 'losing face, saving face, or being shamefaced'. Even in Indonesian people often say "*mukaku mau ditaruh mana; dia kehilangan muka*". Goffman used the term "face-work" to refer to the behaviour involved in presenting faces to others, protecting our own face and respecting the faces of others. Goffman (1967: 5) defines face as, "[...] as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". Goffman says our face is like a persona which we present in a conversation. It changes from situation to situation. For example, in one situation we might want to present the face of a good friend, whilst in another we may want to appear to be a knowledgeable student.

Probably the best-known theories in the field of politeness are the theories that take the concept of face into account. Well-known figures in this field are Brown and Levinson (1978) who derived the concept of face in their politeness theory. They see politeness in terms of conflict avoidance whose central themes are rationality and face, which are claimed to be universal features (possessed by all speakers and hearers). Such features are personified in a universal Model Person (MP). An MP is the one who is a willful and fluent speaker of a natural language, having two properties, rationality and face. They define face as an individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image, reputation or good names that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Such self-image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. Every individual has two types of face or want: negative and positive. An individual positive face is reflected in his desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others. An individual negative face is reflected in his desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have the freedom to act as one chooses.

In relation to the concept of face, Brown and Levinson (1987: 59-60) introduce the term FTA, face threatening act, such as warning, threatening, commanding, ordering, etc. These acts are often cannot be avoided. The purpose of politeness, therefore, is to soften the FTA since it is in everyone's mutual interest to do so. Any rational speaker wants to avoid FTAs and therefore uses certain strategies to mitigate the threat. When a person is about to perform an FTA, he or she has to estimate the degree of the face threat involved. They mention five strategies for performing FTA, namely: (1) *Bald On-record politeness*: This strategy is used in situations where people know each other well or in a situation of urgency. (2) *Off-record*: This strategy is more indirect. The speaker does not impose on the hearer. As a result, face is not directly threatened. This strategy often requires the hearer to interpret what the speaker is saying. (3) *Positive Politeness*: This strategy tries to minimize the threat to the audience's positive face. This can be done by attending to the audience's needs, invoking equality and feelings of belonging to the group, hedging or indirectness, avoiding disagreement, using humor and optimism and making offers and promises. (4) *Negative Politeness*: This strategy tries to minimize threats to the audience's negative face. An example of when negative politeness

would be used is when the speaker requires something from the audience, but intends to maintain the audience's right to refuse. This can be done by being indirect, using hedges or questions, minimizing imposition and apologizing.

Goffman's (1967) and Brown and Levinson's (1978) theories of face have been criticised as the theory only takes into account the personal and individual scope of face (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Culpeper, 2011). Spencer-Oatey (2005: 106) argues that, “[...] face can be a group-based phenomenon, and apply to any group that a person is a member of and is concerned about”. These groups can be a small ones such as a family or larger groups that a person belongs to such as nationality or ethnic group. When face is a group-based phenomenon it is referred to as social identity face. In this respect, Brewer and Gardner (1996: 84) mention three levels of self representation, namely: (1) the personal self which refers to the individual level, (2) the relational self which refers to the interpersonal level, and (3) the collective self which refers to the group level. Therefore, there are face threats that are aimed at the social identity face an interlocutor may have.

Impoliteness Strategy

Based on Brown and Lavinson's model of politeness strategy Culpeper (1996) writes a seminal article on impoliteness. He identified impoliteness as “the parasite of politeness” (1966: 8) and the politeness strategies are the opposite of impoliteness strategies. The opposite here refers to its orientation to face. Politeness strategy is utilized to enhance or support face which can avoid conflict while impoliteness strategies are used to attack face which cause social disharmony. As Culpeper (1996: 8) defines impoliteness as the use of strategies to attack the interlocutor's face and create social disruption. For this Culpeper proposes five super strategies that speaker use to make impolite utterances as follows:

Bald on record impoliteness

The FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and conciseway in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised. It is important to distinguish this strategy from Brown and Levinson's Bald on record. For Brown and Levinson, Bald on record is a politeness strategy in fairly specific circumstances. For example, when face concerns are suspended in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g. "Come in" or "Do sit down"), or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer (e.g. "Stop complaining" said by a parent to a child). In all these cases little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.

Positive impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

This can be done through the following ways, such as:

- *Ignore, snub the other* - fail to acknowledge the other's presence.
- *Exclude the other from an activity*
- *Disassociate from the other* - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together.
- *Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic*

- *Use inappropriate identity markers* - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains.
- *Use obscure or secretive language* - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target.
- *Seek disagreement* - select a sensitive topic. Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk.
- *Use taboo words* - swear, or use abusive or profane language.
- *Call the other names* - use derogatory nominations. (Culpeper, 1996: 357)

Negative impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants. This can be done through the following ways, such as:

- *Frighten* - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.
- *Condescend, scorn or ridicule* - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).
- *Invade the other's space* - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).
- *Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect* - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.
- *Put the other's indebtedness on record* - with a negative aspect, put the other's indebtedness on record (Culpeper, 1996: 358).

Sarcasm or mock politeness

The FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations. Culpeper's sarcasm or mock politeness is close to Leech's (1983) conception of irony "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature" (1983: 82). This is of course the opposite of Brown and Levinson's social harmony that is achieved through off-record politeness. One more point to add is that 'sarcasm' (mock politeness for social disharmony) is clearly the opposite of 'banter' (mock impoliteness for social harmony) (Culpeper, 1996: 356).

(5) Withhold politeness

This refers to the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. [...] For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness. (Culpeper, 1996: 8-9). To Culpeper, Brown and Levinson touch on the face-damaging implications of withholding politeness work by saying that "...politeness has to be communicated, and the absence of communicated politeness may be taken as the absence of a polite attitude".

Culpeper's superstrategies of impoliteness are further investigated and elaborated by Bousfield (2008) with four superstrategies. He believes that these four do not fall under the superstrategies in Culpeper's (1996) model. Bousfield (2008: 260-261) defines impoliteness as being the opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which

are purposefully performed unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, boosted, or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted. The four strategies are

- Criticize – dispraise hearer, some action or inaction by hearer, or some entity in which hearer has invested face
- Hinder/block – physically (block passage), communicatively (deny turn, interrupt)
- Enforce role shift
- Challenges (Bousfield, 2008: 125-134).

Table 1: Super Strategies of Politeness and Impoliteness

Politeness	Impoliteness
<p>Politeness is defined as using communicative strategies to create and maintain social harmony.^[2] This can be done in various ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being contextually appropriate • following social and cultural norms • being socially positive by addressing face needs <p>In order to save face, people have the option to use politeness super-strategies with FTAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bald on record is not attempting to minimize the face threat. • Positive politeness is showing you value someone so minimizing the threat to the positive face. • Negative politeness is not impeding on someone so minimizing the threat to the negative face. • Off record is avoiding responsibility for the FTA often by being indirect. • Withhold is not performing the FTA. 	<p>Impoliteness is defined as engaging in aggressive face-work in particular contexts to cause social disruption. This can be done in various ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speaker intentionally attacks face • the listener perceives a face attack • both of the above <p>There are also impoliteness super-strategies which can be used with FTAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bald on record is an unmitigated intentional face attack. • Positive impoliteness is attacking the positive face need by not showing you value someone. Examples include criticism, insults, disagreements etc • Negative impoliteness is attacking the negative face need by imposing on someone. Examples include orders, threats, requests • Off record is using indirect offence such as sarcasm or banter. • Withhold is failing to be polite when it is expected.

<p>Politeness super-strategies are determined by contextual factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power relations between speaker and listener • Social distance between speaker and listener • How great the threat of the face threatening act is 	
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In line with Spencer-Oatey’s (2005) theory of face which can be attributed to both individual and group-based phenomenon, Culpeper (2005: 40) proposes the different types of face attack, namely: (1) attacks on quality face (2) attacks on social identity face, (3) attacks on equity rights, and (4) attacks on association right. The examples can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Types of Face Attack

Attacks on	Definition of desire/ belief	Impoliteness strategies
Quality face	Desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities.	Attack the other's appearance; attack the other's ability/work.
Social identity face	Desire for acknowledgement of our social identities or roles.	Condescend, scorn or ridicule.
Equity rights	Belief that we are entitled to be treated fairly by others.	Frighten/threaten hinder or block the other physically or linguistically, challenge the other, impose on the other.
Association rights	Belief that we are entitled to associate with others in accordance with the type of relationship	Ignore or snub the other, disassociate from the other

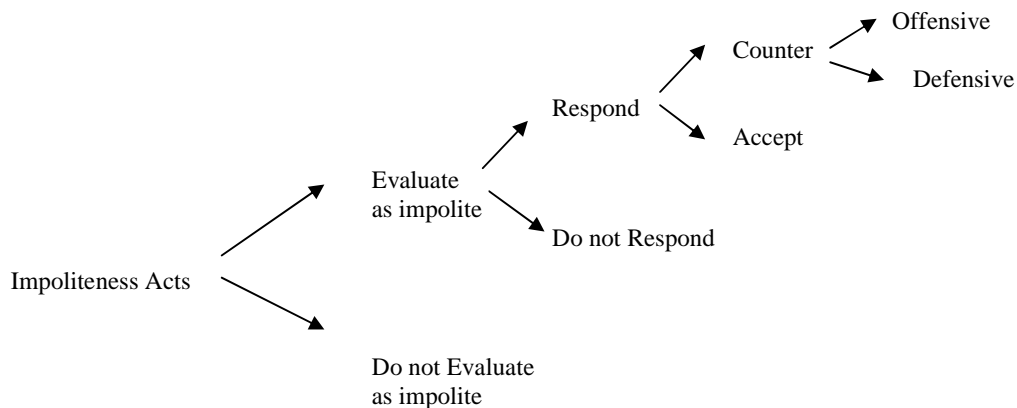
Formulaic Impoliteness Expressions in English

English is rich of communicative sources that can be used as impolite strategies such as words, grammatical structures, voice intonation, etc. However, in particular situation, particular communicative signal can be perceived by the target audience to be polite or impolite. This much depends on the context. For example, “sit down” said to guests coming to your house may be interpreted as polite invitation; however, “sit down” said by a defendant to a judge may be interpreted as an impolite instruction. Nevertheless, there are some relatively regular, conventional ways in which speakers attempt to achieve impoliteness. Which follows are examples of common conventional impolite expressions cited from Culpeper (2008: 2-3).

- Insults (name calling, etc.)
 - Personalized negative vocatives
[you] [fucking / rotten/ dirty / fat / etc.] [moron / plonker / dickhead / burk / pig / shit / bastard / loser / liar / etc.] [you]
 - Personalized negative assertions
you're [nuts / nuttier than a fruit cake / hopeless / pathetic etc.]
you [can't do anything right / stink / etc.]
- 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.]
- Condescensions: that's stupid / that's babyish
- Challenges (usually rhetorical questions: what are you fucking doing? Why do you make my life impossible)

Reactions to Impoliteness

With regards to the occurrence of impoliteness activity, there are inherently two ways to encounter impoliteness: to respond and to not respond (i.e. stay silent) (Culpeper et al., 2003; Bousfield, 2008). The latter (no respond) does not need any further explanation. A response to impoliteness may happen in various ways. The first way is that one can accept the impoliteness and submit to the other thus ending the situation. The second way is that one may counter either in defensive or offensive way. *Offensive strategies* are intended to match or escalate. These are the impoliteness super-strategies that have been defined by Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008). Meanwhile, the *defensive strategies* respond to a face attack is done by defending one's own face (Culpeper et al., 2003). These strategies include direct contradiction, abrogation, opt out on record, insincere agreement and ignore the attack. In short, responding to impoliteness can be done in one of the following ways, namely: (1) Not responding (2) Accepting impoliteness (3) Countering defensively, and (4) Countering offensively.



CLOSING

This paper has presented a brief state of the art to the theory of impoliteness. The most notable figure in the field is Culpeper (1996) whose model of impoliteness was initially introduced as a parallel to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. The theory can be traced back to Goffman's theory of face (a particular image of ourselves we present to others in our daily interaction). Using Goffman's theory face as a departure, Brown and Lavinson propose politeness principles in terms of conflict avoidance; this is the strategy to maintain face when face attack happens. This in accords with Leech's theory in whose major purpose is to establish and maintain feelings of comity within social group; it regulates "the social equilibrium and the friendly relation. Social equilibrium and harmony in social communication, however, do not always win out. There are still other times in which people use linguistic strategies to attack face and they tend to be impolite.

The first scholar to mention when talking about impoliteness is Culpeper who states that impoliteness refers communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony. Later he amended his theory in his subsequent publications (Culpeper et al., 2003 and Culpeper, 2005). This theory, I believe, is useful framework for describing and explaining the linguistic phenomena of impoliteness in general.

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