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Special Issue

Introduction: Strategic uses of politeness formulae. Analytical approaches and theoretical accounts.

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Introduction: Strategic uses of politeness formulae. Analytical approaches and theoretical accounts.

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This Special Issue aims to contribute to debates in the literature on (mock) im/politeness in synchrony and diachrony, with particular (but not exclusive) reference to apologising and thanking.

The collection of papers arose from an invited colloquium held as part of the iMean5 conference at the University of the West of England, Bristol, in April 2017 entitled; "'Just how sorry are you, mate?' Norms and Variations in im/polite language behaviour: apologising and thanking". The colloquium brought together researchers from different theoretical and methodological perspectives working on the sociopragmatic norms and variations and on the discursive and strategic usages of tokens typically associated with politeness across different languages or varieties of a language, in synchrony and diachrony. In this Special Issue, we hope to demonstrate that the multiplicity of methodological approaches helps to shed light on differing aspects of complex social interactional phenomena.

The overall aim of the Special Issue is to uncover (socio)pragmatic patterns in the ways that (mock) im/politeness is enacted, how usage varies, how terms evolve semantically, and where there are fundamental differences cross-linguistically or across regional varieties of pluricentric languages. The papers additionally explore how usually polite expressions emerge as candidates for 'abuse', i.e. how they can be invoked to perform (mock) impoliteness.

The Special Issue contributes to current debates on the semantics and pragmatics of politeness behaviours across (varieties of) languages, with particular reference to Chinese, English, French and Italian. By analysing the ways that polite speech acts are formulated across different languages, varieties of pluricentric languages, and across time, the Special Issue contributes to our knowledge of inter- and intracultural pragmatics, highlighting elements which are shared across varieties/time as well as key differences, and of variability in the norms and perceptions of the relative politeness of the speech act.

We set out to investigate different types of variation in synchrony and diachrony. We are interested in the ways that norms converge and diverge across languages and language varieties, which etymons politeness markers emerge from diachronically, how elements which have conventionalised politeness functions come to have mock or impolite functions (over time), and why and how hearers' interpretations or evaluations of (mock) im/politeness differ. A number of the papers in the special issue seek to provide theoretical accounts for these phenomena.

Contributors to the special issue focus on two speech acts: apologies and thanks and two (apparently) polite formulae: *hehe* and *HTH*, and have in common an empirical focus. The range of data investigated is, however, varied: from spoken synchronic corpora (e.g. BNC, COLT), diachronic written corpora (i.e. the Italian comedies

corpus in the paper by Ghezzi and Molinelli), a parallel corpus (i.e. OPUS), online discussion forums, as well as evaluative comments/discussion provided in response to (im)polite events.

Variation in the production and interpretation of (im)polite behaviours is found across age-groups (Aijmer), languages and cultures (Wang and Taylor, Haugh and Chang, Beeching, Fedriani, Ghezzi and Molinelli), varieties of pluricentric languages (Beeching), and situations (Murphy).

This introduction contextualises the different approaches to (socio)pragmatic variation and change adopted by the different contributors to the Special Issue. It starts, in Section 1, with a brief history of where we have got to in theorising im/politeness phenomena before moving on, in Section 2, to conventionalisation and diachronic studies. Finally, we argue for the importance of prototype approaches and evaluation questionnaires as a means of integrating lay and 'scientific' analyses of im/politeness in Section 3. At each stage, references will be made to the individual articles in the special issue which illustrate the different theoretical stances and methodological approaches.

1. A very brief history of im/politeness theorising

Politeness1 and politeness2

Starting from Lakoff in 1973, and followed by Brown and Levinson's classic study in 1978 (itself inspired by Goffman's (1955) notion of face), politeness studies now have a long history and thousands of books and articles have been written on the topic to date. The focus on impoliteness has been more recent and, whilst slower to take off, has become something of a cottage industry of late (a simple search in the Journal of Pragmatics for the term impoliteness shows that since Culpeper 1996 which might be argued to have kick-started interest in this area, the number of papers has gone from single figures in most years in the 1990s and 2000s, to an average of 28 papers a year between 2010 and 2018. Even more recently, mock im/politeness and its status have begun to attract scholarly attention with articles by Haugh and Bousfield (2012) on banter in male-only interpersonal interactions, Leech (2014: 100, 233, 238) on irony and banter, Haugh 2014a and 2017 on 'jocular mockery' and Taylor (2015, 2016) on sarcasm and irony.

The debates which have raged in the literature have concerned first order and second order issues and the extent to which im/politeness can only be gauged through the eye of the beholder as it is 'subject to immediate and unique contextually-negotiated factors' (Fraser 1990: 234). Eelen (2001) took traditional theories of politeness to task because they failed to take ordinary everyday notions of politeness (politeness1) into account. Politeness1 (or first order politeness), an 'emic' entity, was opposed to politeness2 (second order politeness), the scientific view or 'etic' entity. Eelen also made plain the dynamic view that people create society and social norms through social interaction, a view which is borne out by the papers in this special issue.

Politeness1, our 'everyday notions' of politeness or etiquette might include 'say thank you nicely', 'it's rude to stare', 'don't talk with your mouth full' and metalinguistic comment, with the use of epithets, such as 'bitchy', 'catty', 'condescending', 'patronising', 'passive aggressive', 'ironic', 'sarcastic' indicating levels of im/politeness.

Politeness2, the 'scientific' view of politeness, is generally attributed to the model propounded by Brown and Levinson ([1978] 1987) and highlights the relationship between being polite and social/power structures. The 'scientific' view hinges on the fact that speakers tend to be more polite to interlocutors who are more socially distant or in more powerful positions than themselves. It makes the sociologically crucial point that hierarchical social structures are encoded in language. The universality of Brown and Levinson's model has been roundly criticised, particularly by scholars of East Asian languages (e.g. Ide, 1989). It remains, nonetheless, the most authoritative model to date.

These debates have not abated, and do not look to be resolved in the near future. The question of identifying conventions associated with particular languages or nations is a very live one, as we can see from Haugh and Chang's paper (this issue) which shows how a supposedly homogeneous group of Australians have very differing views on how polite someone is in a particular context (see also the articles in Haugh & Schneider (2012)).

Terkourafi (2005) outlined a programme to integrate first order and second order politeness, and recent work has incorporated evaluations of im/politeness (see both Haugh and Chang, and Murphy, this issue) which appear to do just that. By asking participants how they rate the level of politeness or impoliteness involved in a particular exchange in a particular context, everyday notions of im/politeness (politeness1) can be integrated into theories of im/politeness (politeness2).

Mock politeness and mock impoliteness

From a terminological point of view, the im/politeness field seems to dogged by brackets and slashes, something which we are guilty of ourselves in the title to this special issue: "Doing (mock) im/politeness…" and for which we can only (insincerely) apologise. These bracketed and slashed elements seem to imply that politeness and impoliteness are straightforward alternatives, that impoliteness is in some way the opposite of politeness, and mock politeness and mock impoliteness are related, albeit antonymously.

The reality is more complex. The brackets and slashes obscure the fact that we are investigating four very different phenomena, all of which are ranged along continua, rather than being two pairs of entities in polar opposition to one another:

- Doing politeness
- Doing impoliteness
- Doing mock impoliteness
- Doing mock politeness

Let's take each of these in turn.

Doing politeness

'Doing politeness', as we have said, has received the greatest amount of scholarly attention in the literature from the last quarter of the twentieth century. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997), to mention but one scholar, highlighted the need to recognize that some utterances are 'apolite' and some are 'hyperpolite', in other words, that there are gradations in degrees of politeness, and what is considered a norm or basic standard of politeness, not particularly polite nor impolite can be termed 'apolite' while an exaggerated level of politeness in a particular context might be considered 'hyperpolite'. Watts (2003) talked of apoliteness as 'politic' or unmarked behaviour – but the notion of being polite just for the sake of being polite is of course contested, some individuals considering it to be hypocritical. This ambivalence was highlighted by Blum-Kulka (2005: 257), in relation to lay persons in Israel:

> "politeness" is positively associated with tolerance, restraint, good manners, showing deference and being nice to people, but is simultaneously referred to in a negative manner as something external, hypocritical, unnatural.

Because what might be considered polite is not absolute but contingent on situations and the individuals interacting in those situations, it is tempting to follow the post-modernist route described by Watts (2005: xxi) and espoused by e.g. Mills (2003) and make collections of case studies, supported by lay conceptualisations and anecdotal evidence. That this route has ultimately proved less than fruitful was, however, highlighted by Christie (2015: 263) in an epilogue to the tenth anniversary edition of the *Journal of Politeness Research* where she wondered whether there has been 'an over-emphasis on what is dynamic and local about the process of meaning-making rather than on what is social and shared about the process'. This is a view which was shared by Grainger (2013) who suggested that the baby may have been thrown out with the bathwater in the discursive politeness approach and that traditional pragmatic theory (in the Gricean and Austinian moulds) still had its place in understanding interpersonal pragmatics.

The current special issue subscribes to the view that there are general norms of politeness which can be made explicit for non-native speakers, for example, and working out what these norms are is very useful (even if they are subject to change and open to abuse), alongside cross- and intercultural studies. Politeness is considered as something which is social and shared. However, socially polite conventions are arguably also a habitus in Bourdieu's sense, whereby speakers enshrine social distance and power differentials unthinkingly in their daily behaviour. Some of the conversations which we routinely engage in concern how one has been addressed and whether it should be considered rude. These conversations are to do with contesting one's addresser's assumptions about power hierarchies. Evaluations, therefore, are not simply to do with linguistic appropriacy but to do with social appropriacy.

Doing impoliteness

Culpeper (1996: 356) argued that impoliteness is very much a parasite of politeness and used Brown and Levinson's (1987) five superstrategies to model impoliteness:

(1) *Bald on record impoliteness* - the face-threatening act (FTA) is performed in a direct, concise, way in circumstances in which face is important.

(2) *Positive impoliteness* – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

(3) *Negative impoliteness* – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.

(4) *Sarcasm or mock politeness* – the FTA is performed with use of politeness strategies which are obviously insincere.

(5) Withhold politeness – the absence of politeness where it would be expected.

In outlining his impoliteness strategies, Culpeper importantly refers to these applying in 'circumstances in which face is not irrelevant or minimised' (*ibid.*) and when 'the[re is an] absence of politeness where it would be expected' (*ibid*: 357). If an army major uses a bald on-record imperative to instruct a recruit, the imperative (which might in other circumstances be deemed highly impolite) is considered normal unmarked, apolite or politic behaviour.

Culpeper (2011) took a more discursive approach to impoliteness while also enumerating a range of formulaic strategies for performing impoliteness (2011: 135-6). More recently, Culpeper et al. (2017:2) concede that there is 'no one-size-fits-all definition of politeness and impoliteness'.

The difficulty in associating 'polite' or 'impolite' to particular linguistic forms is reflected in the evaluation questionnaires used in the articles by both Haugh and Chang and Murphy (this issue).

Doing mock politeness

Mock politeness can be deemed a form of impoliteness, 'an apparently friendly way of being offensive' (Leech 1983: 144). This is an area which has been pursued more recently and more intensively with a wealth of empirical data in Taylor (2015, 2016), and, interestingly, in a DMC context in relation to the #sorrynotsorry hashtag in Matley (2018).

A number of the articles in this Special issue explore the ironic use of a conventionally polite formula as a form of mock politeness. Murphy's paper addresses the sincerity of 'I'm sorry' as an apology in unusual collocations such as 'I'm sorry you're such an arsehole". Fedriani looks into the historical development of the ironic mock polite use of *per favore* ('please') in Italian while Ghezzi and Molinelli explore *scusa, scusi* and *mi scuso* and the constraints associated with each of these apology forms. Aijmer's contribution to this issue shows how mock apologies using *excuse me, sorry* and *pardon* are drawn upon by teenage speakers in the COLT Corpus for fighting, teasing, joking, novelty and creativity and, overall, as a means of expressing their adolescent identity and solidarity with their peers. Meanwhile, Wang and Taylor (this issue) explore the mock polite uses of *hehe* in Chinese data and *HTH* (Hope That Helps) in DMC contexts – their findings appear to confirm those of Matley (2018) that CMC and DMC contexts provide rich pickings in

terms of impoliteness and 'online antagonism undertaken for amusement's sake' (Hardaker 2015: 202).

Beeching found vanishingly few ironic uses of apology in her spoken French and English data and concludes that ironic uses are not denotative. How the hearer interprets the 'conventionally polite' locution depends on the extent to which s/he has been exposed to ironic performative conventions: this might account for differences in hearers' interpretations or evaluations of mock politeness.

Doing mock impoliteness

Leech (1983: 44) suggested that;

> while irony is an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock politeness), the type of verbal behaviour known as "banter" is an offensive way of being friendly (mock impoliteness)

He goes on to say that banter or "mock impoliteness" has the effect of "establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity". To that extent, mock impoliteness is a form of positive politeness: by being impolite, you demonstrate that you are sufficiently close to your interlocutor that you can dispense with the usual norms of politeness.

Mock impoliteness, the 'jocular mockery' referred to, for example, in Haugh and Bousfield 2012, Haugh 2014 and 2017, has received considerable attention in the literature in recent years and is not a focus of the current Special Issue but we mention it here for completeness' sake.

2. Conventionalisation and diachronic studies

Diachronic studies (cf. Brinton 2014, 2017, Ghezzi and Molinelli (eds.) 2014), have investigated the pragmaticalisation/grammaticalisation of language items conventionally used in enacting linguistic im/politeness and the extent to which they remain judiciously implicit, and/or become coded as a new sense or conventionalised usage in a process of im/politeness-induced semantic change (Beeching 2007; 2016; Taylor, 2015). A number of the papers address thorny methodological issues such as how (and whether it is possible) to disambiguate sincere from insincere usages and explorations of first-order evaluations of the relative politeness of particular acts are also included.

The conventionalised norms of politeness are, arguably, 'politic' (Watts 2003) rather than sincerely felt. They serve to oil the wheels of everyday social interaction. As we have seen, apologies and thanks can also be adopted to present a respectful, apologetic or grateful persona in (c)overtly mock polite ways which may be implicit and so do not necessarily generate an implicature of impoliteness (cf. Haugh 2014b: 278, and see Murphy 2015, 2016 on politicians' apologies). What is more, as we have seen under 'Doing mock politeness' above, the norms associated with particular forms can be called upon strategically to implement (what might be construed as) impoliteness.

A number of the papers address this issue, and the degree to which mock politeness can be said to be conventionalising as impolite. While both polite and impolite messages can be implied rather than stated, Leech (2014:224) suggests that

> the tendency to use implicature is probably stronger in the case of impoliteness, as it serves a defensive function. The speaker can claim not to have made an offensive remark, and the escalation of impoliteness into more violent confrontation can be averted.

Indeed, Leech (2014: 232) refers to sarcasm and irony as 'second-order pragmatic principles that exploit politeness'. Irony can be conventionalised ('A fine friend YOU are') but, arguably, this type of impoliteness is not semanticised or denotative. There is no generalizable 'performative illusion' (Ducrot, 1980) which blocks the reading of the core semantics. The interpretation of the politeness formula as ironic is contextually-driven and triggered by a pragmatic mismatch between the overtly polite formula and the co-text. A rise in frequency of ironic uses might suggest that they are undergoing pragmaticalisation. The papers in this Special Issue provide further empirical evidence in support of these theoretical propositions. Moreover, the papers reveal that such uses are not restricted to spoken data (where irony can be carried through intonation) but also occur in online and other written formats.

3. Integrating Politeness1 and Politeness2

We suggested in Section 1 above that im/politeness is a question of degree. It is, however, not only politeness and impoliteness which exist along continua (rather than well-defined poles) but also speech acts more generally. The Special Issue takes up ideas first suggested by Jucker & Taavitsainen (2008) who suggest that "speech acts are fuzzy concepts" which "can be analysed in relation to neighbouring speech acts, to their changing cultural groundings, and to ways in which they are realised" and that their fuzziness "requires a prototype approach; individual instances vary in their degree of conformity to their prototypical manifestations and sometimes the group identity is only vague" (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2008:6). The contributions to this Special Issue take this beyond the speech act per se, applying this idea at the level of conventionalised politeness formulae: modelling speech acts as prototype elements gives further explanation for why some *sorry*s or *thank*s are viewed as more apologetic or grateful than others, and may be interpreted in different ways by different hearers.

With this in mind, the volume recognises the contribution made by first order politeness (commonsense/ everyday views of what is meant by 'polite') by incorporating evaluation data and metapragmatic commentary, along with researcher analyses, to better capture alternative interpretations. This type of mixed method approach, recommended and implemented for example by Barros García and Terkourafi 2015, has as yet been infrequently adopted in studies of norms and variations in perceptions of im/politeness. Haugh and Chang's analysis (this issue) demonstrates that there is indeed significant variability in evaluations of (im)politeness amongst their Australian respondents and highlights the need to take into account the distributed nature of pragmatic variation. There may well be normative judgements that are made – but the variation in interpretation of intentions is what explains the variability in responses. Murphy's study of *I'm sorry* provides further support for this view of distributed variability. He argues furthermore that the 'prototype approach' to speech acts proposed by Jucker and Taavitsainen (2008) is a productive one which can explain why attitudes can differ and why 'I'm sorry', as a generalised conversational implicature rather than an explicit expression of apology,

is an ideal candidate to perform both politeness and impoliteness. We hope the papers in this special issue encourage further work integrating politeness1 and politeness2 to explore other speech acts typically associated with (mock) im/politeness.

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