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On Impoliteness and Drama Discourse: An Interview with Jonathan Culpeper

Marta Dynel: Did you conceive of the tremendous impact of your 1996 article on impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996a) as you were writing it? Did you expect a new strand of research to arise thanks to your paper?

Jonathan Culpeper: I have a mixed reaction to that, and that’s partly to do with how it came about. By chance, I happened to watch a documentary called “Soldier Girls”. I think it must have been in 1990. I remember at the time thinking how on earth one could analyse this kind of interaction. And that was the beginning of the idea for a paper. But back in those days, if you didn’t record something, there was no way you could analyse it, because there was no YouTube where you could get data retrospectively. It was just a fluke that my younger sister left the tape recorder running, and so I actually had a copy of the data. I analysed it, and a bit of that analysis went into my PhD thesis, and then later became an important part of the 1996 article. So, that article owes its life to a couple of flukes. With those flukes in mind, I’d say I had no idea it would have the impact that it did. However, looking back on it, I have a slightly different perspective, because it seems to me that what is salient, what people talk about is impoliteness. You don’t have discussions so much about someone being very polite. From that point of view, is it is not such a surprise.

MD: Fluke may be the basic reason you got interested in impoliteness, but your giving insight into it is a different matter, which is undeniable and is certainly not the matter of luck but your intellect.

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JC: (laughter) I take this as flattery.

MD: (laughter) This was my intention and you can treat it as such. Let me move to the second question. Your initial classifications of impoliteness strategies (Culpeper, 1996a; Culpeper et al., 2003) have garnered a lot of support but they have also been challenged on similar grounds as Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of politeness strategies (Bousfield, 2008a; Dynel, 2009, 2013 forth). In your recent monograph (Culpeper, 2011), you no longer present any such taxonomy, focusing on several types of impoliteness realisations (e.g. implicational impoliteness and types of offence). Does this mean that your views have undergone a change in respect of the initial categorisation, and you are no longer supportive of your initial categorisation?

JC: Thank you for asking this question, because it gives me an opportunity to explain what I was trying to do. I have shifted focus; I haven't abandoned the old idea of pragmatic strategies. It is true that the strategies I coined for the 1996 paper have been challenged, and largely on the same grounds as people have challenged Brown and Levinson's work. However, it depends on which strategies you're talking about. Most of the challenges are to do with the superstrategies. Bousfield (2008a) combines positive and negative politeness, and, insightfully, points out that the bald on-record category involves face as well. But the output strategies in Bousfield are, in fact, basically the same set as the ones I coined, except for a couple of extras. I think that it is quite a robust set. A number of papers have come out using it (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011 is an excellent example), and showing it to be effective. In my more recent work (e.g. Culpeper, 2011), I decided it was not particularly newsworthy to go back and do that yet again. Broadly, I was thinking in terms of three levels. At the top, there is the conceptual orientation of how a particular act of impoliteness orientates towards two categories: face or sociality rights (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Then, there are pragmatic strategies, and finally at the bottom impoliteness formulae. As you go down, it becomes more micro, more linguistic. As for the pragmatic strategies in the middle, I did not ignore them. What I did recently was to try to get at them through a different (and for me more interesting) methodology than the usual qualitative/quantitative analyses of interactional data, namely, analysing meta-talk about strategies. For my 2011 book, I analysed manuals on and parodies of rudeness, as these are meta-linguistic reflections of how people are thought to be impolite. These represent communities talking about strategies which they recognise and which have a conventional status. Lo and behold, the strategies that emerged map quite nicely onto my 1996 set. What might have prompted your question is that it's true that, if you look at my current work, I don't focus on strategies so much, because, to me, they are old news, and I'd rather do new stuff! One other thing, the cautionary note about strategies that should always be sounded is that, though they are interesting in all sorts of ways, they are dangerous: identifying given strategies in a piece of data doesn't mean that it is, therefore, impolite, because these strategies are always subject to the context they are in.

MD: You've mentioned that language users give their feedback on impoliteness formulae and the communicative patterns they consider impolite, which is related to the problem of terminology and labels that we put on certain concepts. A particularly vexing impoliteness strategy is *sarcasm* or *mock politeness*, which involves pretended politeness and corresponds to what Leech (1983) discusses as *irony* (Culpeper, 1996a; Culpeper et al., 2003). Am I right in thinking that this terminological change that you introduced was determined by the fact that utterances embraced by this strategy implicitly, yet virulently, convey negative evaluation (criticism, disparagement, etc.), while irony may carry less vitriolic criticism or even, albeit only intermittently, carry positive evaluation? On the other hand, sarcasm tends to be used as a blanket term for various jibes and taunts, which need not involve irony (e.g. Partington, 2006), whilst the term "irony" appears to prevail in the pragmatic and cognitive literature used in reference to the phenomenon your strategy concerns. Overall, would you then concede that the strategy in question could also be called *sarcastic irony* (e.g. Jorgensen, 1996; Colston, 1997)?

JC: There's a problem with labels, as you said at the beginning. There's a problem with the label "irony", and there's a problem with sarcasm. Whenever I use the term "sarcasm", I almost always put in brackets "mock politeness" to try to pin it down. Sarcasm on its own as a lay term is used for all sorts of stuff, so I try to delimit it. Irony has the same kind of problem. If you look at the literature, there's a wide range of definitions. I initially started thinking in terms of Leech's (1983) Irony Principle. He says that most typical cases of irony involve mock politeness and that was my lead for it. Irony covers a lot of things, mostly negative, but there is a set of positive usages. If you look at Relevance Theory, it gives the impression that everything ironic is negative, but "everything" depends on the scope of the thing. I am talking only about the interpersonal effects. A lot of irony is for humorous effects, not designed to make someone feel bad—the type with negative interpersonal effects that I am interested. That's a more restricted scope for the notion of negative than in at least some of the irony literature.

MD: Sorry, if I may butt in, but how do you determine whether irony does have a negative interpersonal effect, based just on the data. A person may be offended but fail to let it show, while the speaker's intention may be to offend the hearer. Also, in multi-party talk, the speaker may mean to amuse one hearer and, simultaneously, disparage another.

JC: The general question is: How do you know that anything is impolite? The first place I would look is the hearer's response. You've got verbal evidence here. My favourite example is a discussion between my daughters, when one of them says: "Do you know anything about yoyos?". This seems perfectly innocent, but she said it with a prosody that was completely nasty, so the other one said: "That's mean". So there you have it. It's not my evaluation; she has given it to me in her response. Admittedly, in my data, you get quite a few occasions where hearers don't say anything that's going to help you understand how they took the effects. Sometimes, and obviously this is less reliable, there are non-verbal signs that the hearers are disturbed emotionally by what has just been said. There's literature on embarrassment, for example. People touch their chins and start looking down. This happens quite often in my data. These non-verbal responses indicate how they are taking what has just been said. But there are also occasions where you don't get even that. They are problematic, and I wouldn't deny it. So, from my point of view, the key component of irony in the context of impoliteness is that someone is offended by it, and we can examine the kinds of evidence I have mentioned. Note I said "from my point of view", as irony has much to do with what researchers take irony to mean. What does a lay person out there mean by irony? I would be interested in doing further work on people's understandings of irony, as I'm sure that would provide useful insights.

MD: And this is why irony may be considered polite or impolite. In the light of their research findings, a number of authors report that irony conveying negative evaluation may be deployed to dilute criticism, that is to render it less aggressive and sometimes humorous (Dews et al., 1995; Dews and Winner, 1995; Colston, 1997; Kumon-Nakumara et al., 1995; Jorgensen, 1996; Pexman and Olineck, 2002), as earlier observed by politeness researchers (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983). Would it be possible to conclude that biting irony may actually be geared towards politeness effects for the listener who is the target of criticism? I doubt that. My feeling is that researchers advocate different definitions of sarcastic irony, sometimes (mis)-taking it for critical, albeit friendly, irony which may indeed dilute criticism and be geared towards politeness effects. Would you say that the diversified use of labels leads to convolutions in the literature? Researchers refer to one another, not really appreciating the fact that the scope they're referring to and the phenomena they are discussing do not always overlap or may even be totally different.

JC: Absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more about labels, which is why I try to pin positive irony down to "mock politeness" and negative irony to "mock impoliteness". The focus is on a narrower strip of what is going on. What I tried to do in my 2011 book was exclude polite irony from my definition. I pointed out that the kind of negative or sarcastic irony that I was interested in would only come about if the politeness interpretation is ruled out by the context. In fact, in your question you mention Pexman and Olineck (2002). I recollect that they suggest if you have a politeness signal in a context where you obviously aren't trying to be polite, it seems worse, because of a mocking effect. That was exactly what I was trying to get at. Also, in my 2011 work I don't think I use the term "irony" as a category heading, but use it in the context of discussions of mixed signals and competing interpretations. If you want to pin down the terms or labels, I'm not so interested in the academic debates about what irony is (academics can forever quibble about where to draw the lines), as in trying to work out what people understand by irony, because at least we've got something to hang it onto by way of data.

MD: As you added *off record impoliteness* (i.e. impoliteness via implicature) to the model (Culpeper, 2005: 44), you suggested that it should substitute sarcasm "which can be separated out as distinct from the others, given its 'metastrategic' nature". Would you please explain why sarcasm should assume this superordinate position in your model of impoliteness?

JC: This meta-strategy is entirely driven by Leech, because that's the way he sees the Irony Principle (1983) working. Underneath you have the politeness principle. You work out that an utterance is polite (at a first-order level, in his terms), but also that it is not sincere (at a second-order level), and therefore we have ironic politeness or sarcasm. Initially, I was going down that line, and up until 2004 that's more or less how I saw it. These days, I much prefer talking about *mixed signals*. For example, that term accommodates different signals in one utterance, as in "I wonder if you could possibly shut up". You can mix the contextual appropriacy of signals, saying what is said in a context where we would be expecting politeness, with what is said in a context where we would be expecting impoliteness. Within the notion of mixed signals, you can talk about banter and other things. The underlying theory I have in mind is Rachel Giora's (e.g. 2003) work on salience. What she would say of mixed signals is that we work out meanings in terms of the competing salience of these signals. So that's where I was coming from. The meta-strategic stuff is what I have left behind after 2004.

MD: Thank you. This clarifies your perspective on the problematic notions of irony and sarcasm, and so we can skip to another fraught issue. Discussing impoliteness, many researchers, including yourself, emphasise the need to account for both the speaker's and the hearer's perspectives (Culpeper, 2005, 2008; Bousfield, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Locher and Watts, 2005, 2008; Mills, 2002, 2003, 2005; Watts, 2003; Arundale, 2006; Terkourafi, 2008; Haugh, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007). However, there is no unanimous agreement as to whether it is the speaker's intention (e.g. Bousfield, 2008a, 2010) or the hearer's recognition thereof (e.g. Locher and Watts, 2008) that is the sine qua non for the conceptualisation of impoliteness. How would you resolve the ongoing debate on this problem? As I gather, you are supportive of the speaker intention-based view of impoliteness (vis-à-vis (unintended) rudeness), asserting that it "is not unintentional" (Culpeper, 2005: 37) and that " 'plausible' intentions can be reconstructed, given adequate evidence" (Culpeper et al., 2003: 1552). Nevertheless, in your definition of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2005) premised on two conditions (the speaker's intentional act and the hearer's recognition of it), you appear to suggest that impoliteness comes into being as long as at least one of them is met, thereby implying that impoliteness arises when "the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking" (Culpeper, 2005: 38, cf. Bousfield, 2008a, 2008b). Also, defining irony, you have just placed emphasis on the significance of the hearer's perception, rather than the hearer's intention.

JC: This question is tricky, because there are several "me's" involved. There's the "me" back to 2005 and there's the "me" after. I'll go back to the 2005 and return to my younger self. Bousfield takes an extreme position and it's always nice to have people who take an extreme position, because you can bounce yourself off them. Certainly, on prototypical occasions, the evidence I have collected suggests that the producer is intending to be impolite and the target is perceiving it as a matter of the producer intending to hurt them. You probably get both a lot of the time. But I think there are occasions where you might have either. What I was trying to do in 2005 was say, "Well yes, you could have the speaker intending impoliteness and it might miss the mark, and so the hearer might never get it; and, vice versa, you could have the hearer thinking that was intended to be impolite, but the speaker never intended it that way". I was trying to accommodate both perspectives. You asked how I would resolve the ongoing debate on this problem. That is the key point, how do you actually get to know what's going on. To me, the answer is you do the empirical work and you find out, as far as you can, people's understandings in particular impoliteness events. Between 2005 and 2011 in my work leading up to my impoliteness book, this is what I was trying to do, that is, to collect impoliteness events and find out how people understood them. What emerged was that it wasn't always the case that someone would construe an act as both intentional and offensive, and yet in their commentary they would describe it as rude or impolite. It was transparent that impoliteness didn't have to be fully intentional, whether from a speaker or hearer perspective. This is why in my more recent definition, I got rid of full intentionality as a necessary condition. The evidence was flying in the face of that.

MD: Thank you for this explanation, but if we could focus again on the terminology and the labels, there's a bone of contention among the (im)politeness researchers who claim that impoliteness cannot be conflated with rudeness, and only one of those is intentional. If there is no intention on the speaker's part to cause offence, would you use the label of rudeness or impoliteness?

JC: I admit that I got frustrated by these labels. There was a point when I discovered that Marina Terkourafi (2008) and I had labelled particular behaviour in completely opposite ways. I had suggested that impoliteness involved intention and rudeness didn't, and I based that claim on a little work I'd done on British National Corpus. She said that impoliteness didn't involve intention and rudeness did, and she based that claim on the etymology of "rude" and "polite" across different languages. It seems to me crazy that we're coming to opposite conclusions. What I've done with my 2011 definition is to give a fairly broad one covering all types of "impoliteness-related behaviour", with some being more prototypical and some less. The downside of this is that, whilst it is more inclusive, it is not as precise. Bousfield's (2010) more recent thinking is in tune with this, as he suggests that some behaviours and contexts are more prototypical cases of impoliteness and some more marginal. This is a good way of pursuing the issue.

MD: Yes, but Bousfield (2010) does use the label "rudeness". In his taxonomy of rudeness and impoliteness dependent on four criteria, a prototypical act of successful impoliteness is intentionally performed by the speaker and received by the targeted hearer in accordance with the speaker's intention. However, this view may need to be extended to be applicable in the analysis of impolite multi-party talk, beyond the classical speaker-hearer dyad (Dynel, 2012). One may encounter a major problem in the case of an intentionally communicated act of impoliteness whose target can hear it, and listens to it, contrary to the speaker's intention. In other words, the speaker believes that the target of impoliteness is a non-participant, somebody who cannot possibly hear the utterance. Would you consider this an act of impoliteness, regardless of the speaker's lack of intention to have the face-threatening act be recognised by the target, let alone have him/her take offence at it?

JC: What we're dealing with here is a less prototypical case, but an interesting one, because it may test some of the boundaries. I was trying to think of a particular example of what you might have in mind. I came up with a scenario such that I'd found an e-mail talking about me in not very pleasant terms. It wasn't addressed to me, but it was at the trailing end of some other e-mail being forwarded. This is the sort of thing you're talking about, isn't it? Someone produced something that was an offensive act, and I found it offensive but they didn't intend me to read it.

MD: Yes, or it may be the matter of synchronous oral communication. You're talking to your colleague and you're offensive towards another person who, you think, is not there, but he/she happens to be standing behind the door and can hear you talking.

JC: In terms of definition, this would fit my current definition of impoliteness, but it would clearly be more marginal, a less prototypical case. Would I have been offended, yes, clearly, and there are quite a few theories in "attribution theory" that would predict you would be particularly offended. People assume that when you're talking to someone, they have a strategic purpose in mind, but obviously if you're reading someone talking about you to someone else, you think that they are delivering their "real" thoughts about you. So if they were negative, you probably are even more offended than if the same things were said to you directly. Whether that would require the label "rudeness" or "impoliteness" is an open question. What the lay person would use I don't know, and that's something that needs to be investigated. These marginal cases are interesting. I'm reminded of a paper that came out quite recently in the Journal of Pragmatics, which was to do with recycled complaints (Perelmutter, 2010). This paper looks at events when someone says something terribly nasty to someone else, but because of the power differential they don't respond to it. However, later on, they retaliate by telling other people what a nasty thing was said—they complain about it, not only getting their own back but also trying to redress their face with other people. In this case, is it impoliteness or not? The original person is not hearing it. These are at the boundaries, testing where we are. I couldn't say for sure whether the labels impolite or rude are best, but it is in the broad domain of what I'm talking about. To return to your scenario of someone who is ironic to someone and they take it as humorous but there's a third party, who is offended by it. Would that be taken as impoliteness? I suspect so, but ultimately that's an empirical question.

MD: The problem of labels and intentional face attack notwithstanding, you also argue that intentionality is a scalar concept (Culpeper, 2011), and thus, in its weaker versions, it may coincide with responsibility, control or foreseeability. Thus, you state that an act may carry offensive consequences which are intentional only in the sense that they are foreseeable. One may have a query about this claim. Even if the consequences can be envisaged, the speaker does not conceive of them while producing an offensive utterance, which is why he/she cannot be held responsible for intentional face damage, that is impoliteness, but only for unintentional face damage, which some (e.g Bousfield, 2010) call rudeness. On the other hand, one may endorse a view that intentions need not involve awareness and, therefore, that intentions manifest degrees of consciousness, ranging from fully conscious to entirely subconscious ones (e.g. Stamp and Knapp, 1990; Hample, 1992; Gibbs, 1999). Consequently, impoliteness may be only unconsciously intentional. Would you please comment on this?

JC: We've got several things going on in that question. We've got the notion of intention and the notion of intentionality. I talk about intentionality. If you take it as a folk concept, my main point of departure would be the work by Malle and Knobe (1997). That's a very useful description. They say there are five components. Three of them relate to intention, that is: desire, a plan of action to achieve your desire, and a decision to put the plan into action. When you've got these three things, that's intention, whilst intentionality comes up when you also have two other components. One is skills, you've actually got to be able to do it (so a counter-example would be the intention to win the lottery when you obviously haven't got the skills to do it), and the other one that they mention is awareness, the one which is particularly relevant to my data. Not all impoliteness is intentional, because sometimes the producer of impoliteness was not aware of the impoliteness effects they are causing. They get blamed, nevertheless, for not predicting those effects, especially in close relationships, in which one person thinks that the other one should have predicted the negative effects of what they were going to do. However, there is a problem and the problem is that Malle and Knobe's data are based on North American data. That leaves a doubt in my mind whether that notion of intentionality would be conceived of differently in other cultures, including whether the notion of awareness would be so critical to it.

MD: Given what you've said so far in reference to lay people's judgements, the answer to my next question is self-explanatory, but I will ask, anyway. What are your views on the dichotomy between the first-order approach and the second-order approach? I would like to enquire about this, since you do not seem to be preoccupied with this problem in your publications, whilst it has attracted avid scholarly interest (e.g. Locher and Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield, 2010; cf. Watts et al., 1992; Eelen, 2001; Bousfield, 2008a, 2010).

JC: I don't know. I'd be interested to know how you position me, because I don't position myself.

MD: Hard to say. If, in your recent work, you first take as your bedrock language users' perspectives, this will be closer to the first-order approach, rather than the second-order one. But then your earlier work was, I believe, definitely more top-down in the sense of theorising and assigning new labels, and so more of the second-order type, so there seems to have been a major change in your scholarly approach.

JC: Indeed, what you're detecting is a shift. My earlier work was very much of the (somewhat sneeringly called) "pseudo-scientific" second-order stuff. I did that, and was happy with it. What I did in my later work was both. When I'm talking about the top level, the conceptual orientation mentioned earlier, that's largely a matter of me, the pseudo-scientist coming in. But what I'm trying to do overall is integrate that with what people are actually thinking and talking about—first-order stuff. This is one way of trying to break endless cycles of second-order discussions—"Oh no, I say that irony is this" and "you say that irony is that". I'm trying to pin the top conceptual level down to something in real interaction. This whole debate about first / second-order starts off with Eelen's (2001) book, which is great, because it started a revolution, a corrective revolution, if you like, moving away from the second-order classic models and thinking about them anew again. My disappointment with the first-order discursive movement it helped fuel is that scholars engaged in it often don't put into action their own agenda. Have a look at the analyses in Watts, 2003. Don't get me wrong, this is a great book full of ideas, but if you look at the analyses he does, they look rather like the analyses I do, even though I've been tarred with the second-order brush. In addition, one of the things that discursive scholars often say is that you should look at the meta-language. Do they do it? No. For me, the methodology of choice, when you're looking at the usage of lexical items constituting meta-language, is corpus linguistics. Do they do that? No. For me, first-order scholars put up good ideas, but do not follow them through.

MD: This also shows in one of the notions that you have recently proposed, the notion of *conventionalised impoliteness formulae*, which need not be based on people's first-hand experience but on their knowledge of impoliteness metadiscourse (Culpeper, 2010, 2011). As you observe (Culpeper, 2010), taboo words will naturally fall into this category. Indeed, language users are well aware that taboo words are generally disallowed, socially and legally (Bousfield, 2010). On the other hand, swear words are known to foster solidarity politeness in certain communities of practice and in friendly and relaxed communicative contexts (e.g. Montagu, 1967; Wajnryb, 2005; Singleton, 2009; see Stapleton, 2010; Dynel, 2012 forth). Would you then say that taboo words should unequivocally be deemed as conventionalised impoliteness formulae, despite their solidarity function they manifest in friendly relationships?

JC: This is a great question because it raises a number of difficulties. I remember hearing a talk in 2009 that Geoffrey Leech gave on politeness and impoliteness where he mentioned taboo words as one of the areas that are quite specific to impoliteness, and he said this is one of the areas which his own Politeness Principle doesn't cover. But whilst they do come under the heading of impoliteness in almost any definition you can possibly think of, you get cases of taboo words that are used in a quite a friendly way. The paper that I love on this topic by Nicola Daly, Janet Holmes and colleagues (2004) is on "fuck" used in the factory context, where it's a solidarity marker. Now, to address the question of whether taboo or swear words are conventionalised impoliteness formulae. I'd say most certainly no, and I say this on the basis of my empirical data. In the 100 British English reports I had, it was only mentioned in two cases. In other cultures where I also collected impoliteness reports, it appeared even less. I did wonder whether that was a consequence of my reporting methodology rather than anything else. But that's not my only evidence, because it's clear from corpus searches on individual items. To take an example, think of someone saying "Shut up", which is fairly mild, and then cranking it up to, "Shut the fuck up!".

MD: Everything depends on the function of a taboo word, whether it is used as a term of abuse or otherwise.

JC: Absolutely. What I'm saying is that impoliteness formulae have conventionalised functions and effects. To count as conventionalised, formulae had to co-occur with impoliteness effects above certain thresholds (my guide was: 50% or above in a sample of 100 corpus cases had to have evidence that the target took the formula as impolite).

MD: Thank you for your explanation. Also, swearwords may display some humorous potential, which is related to my next question. Many researchers appreciate the humorous potential of impoliteness, especially in the context of mass-mediated discourse (e.g. Grindstaff, 1997, 2002; Wood, 2001; Culpeper, 2005; Bousfield, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Harris 2001; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Lorenzo-Dus, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Garcia-Pastor, 2002; Kienpointner, 2008, Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2009). The notion of humour/entertainment materialised by impoliteness appears to conform to the well-entrenched *superiority theory of humour*, one of the three central approaches in humour studies (see e.g. Berlyne, 1969; LaFave, 1972; Gruner, 1978; Zillmann, 1983; Martin, 2007; Ferguson and Ford, 2008). You also mention it in your two accounts of the humorous capacity in impoliteness. In your paper (Culpeper, 2005), you list four criteria ("intrinsic pleasure", "voyeuristic pleasure"; "the audience is superior" and "the audience is safe"), whilst in your recent book (Culpeper, 2011), you reformulate them as five types of pleasure ("emotional pleasure", "aesthetic pleasure", "voyeuristic pleasure", "the pleasure of being superior", and "the pleasure of feeling secure"). What do you consider to be the advantages of your postulates (Culpeper, 2005, 2011) over superiority theory?

JC: I'll start with a footnote. The difference between the four criteria that came up in my 2005 paper and the types of pleasure in my recent 2011 book is that I'm trying to make them more transparent. For example, originally, I had the notion "intrinsic pleasure", but what does that mean? Are all these accommodated by superiority theory? I don't think so, and that's why I wouldn't just use superiority theory. Some do clearly overlap with it. I think the key one that does is the pleasure of feeling superior (I'm thinking about the butts of jokes and so on). There is overlap with the pleasure of feeling secure, because you're in the position of security if you're a spectator on someone who is not so secure, and there is a certain pleasure in that. By voyeuristic pleasure, I was thinking of impoliteness that exposes private selves, and much of it does: for example, reality TV shows where they dig the dirt on someone. People get a certain pleasure out of that (even if I'm not one of those!). I guess you could relate that to superiority theory too, but other types of pleasure seem unrelated. Emotional pleasure has a certain thrill. People in psychology will say that people are aroused by viewing verbal fisticuffs. I don't think this is covered so well. And the one that is not covered at all by superiority theory is aesthetic pleasure. A lot of impoliteness, believe it or not, that is there for entertainment has a certain aesthetic quality, deploying poetic devices, etc. etc.

MD: Yes, this is true if we focus on the hardcore formulation of superiority theory, but there are proposals which conflate superiority and incongruity theory and shed light on the nature of linguistic forms and their creativity, because mere disparagement does not suffice as the source of humour (e.g. Zillman, 1983). Also, in the Freudian version of superiority theory, arousal is central. But as I was formulating the question, I came to realise that the main difference between your proposal and superiority theory is that superiority is focused primarily on the relationships between people, on disaffiliation and lack of solidarity, and how the speaker and hearers who laugh relate to the butt, who is put down, whereas your focus is on the stimulus, on the nature of impoliteness and its interpersonal consequences, which is more important to linguists.

JC: Yes. Also, I'm suspicious of theories that are supposed to encompass everything. What I was looking for and thinking about was all the things that might cause pleasure. What I was trying to do was enumerate them in a bottom-up fashion.

MD: Changing the topic, in your polemic concerning Mills's (2002, 2003, 2005) claims on the status of impoliteness prevalent in chosen discourses/ contexts, conceptualised as either communities of practice or the Levinsonian activity types (such as the army discourse, or the discourse of an exploitative TV show), you convincingly argue that *sanctioning* or *legitimating* impoliteness must be distinguished from *neutralising* it in context (Culpeper, 2005, 2011). You emphasise that neutralisation pertains to, for instance, *mock impoliteness* or accidental impoliteness, by dint of which the speaker does not mean to offend the target. This is why the alleged target will not perceive, let alone take offence at, the face attack (Culpeper, 2011). On the other hand, sanctioned or legitimated impoliteness is recognised as genuine face threat and may give rise to the hearer's being insulted, inasmuch as the context cannot override the salience of impoliteness. This happens even if such impoliteness may be viewed as being allowed, for instance, on the grounds of institutional power structures. Would you say that whether impoliteness can be regarded as sanctioned depends also on the nature of the face-threatening act, namely its semantic content and the linguistic strategy deployed?

JC: Short answer: yes. Basically, what I was interested in was that some people in the literature were conflating the terms "sanctioning" and "neutralising", yet it was quite clear to me that you could have a context in which the use of impoliteness is sanctioned but people are still taking offence, so it wasn't neutralised. That is why I wanted to separate the two terms. As regards your question, there are discussions where people argue about whether a particular utterance could be considered slander or something inappropriate. Even in the law, you have a framework for trying to work out specifically whether a particular word was legally allowed or not allowed. So yes, it depends also on what is said.

MD: My previous question is related to an example I've come up with. I was wondering how your conceptualisation of impoliteness would capture the following case: For the past few years, a man by the name of Jim has had a manager who tends to produce curt orders and shows abruptness in contacts with his employees. On the one hand, he transparently signals his superiority but, on the other, such conduct is simply in his character. Jim has learnt to take his manager's off-hand manner in his stride, being indifferent to the latter's brusque utterances, which new employees do find offensive.

JC: If you think about my definition of impoliteness, I'd say if people are saying things that they shouldn't be saying, you don't want them to say or even that you don't expect them to say, negative emotional consequences are very likely. In the particular example you mention of the employee, Jim, who experiences this, it is conceivable that over time, he attributes the behaviour to the manager's personality. I can think of some of my colleagues (fortunately very few!) who are not particularly nice, but after a while you begin to understand that this is the way they are; the impoliteness behaviour arises because of their personality rather than as a simple reaction to you, and this understanding reduces the impoliteness effect. As you said, I suppose someone coming new to the situation with a different understanding would be quite shocked and offended. There is a linkage here with attribution theory, which is about how you attribute causes to particular phenomena. So, Jim may understand it to be potential impoliteness, but isn't offended himself because he attributes the cause to the manager's personality.

MD: Impoliteness, on the whole, is interesting, which is why the research is so ample. What is your perspective on the deluge of submissions presenting case studies (frequently of a very narrow scope), which hardly contribute any conclusions significant to the methodology of the field of (im)politeness but, grounded on widely known premises and terminology, give some insight into second-order linguistic phenomena in chosen languages and cultures?

JC: Your question assumes that first-order is totally separate from second-order and I don't think that's the case. There's a lot of second-order stuff that does strike a chord with the first-order approach; it can overlap, even if it is not a total match. Locher and Bousfield (2008: 5) talk about second order notions informed by first order. Brown and Levinson (1987) is often said to be a second order work, but it does correlate to a degree with first order goings-on.

MD: Yes, but to be honest, I didn't mean to separate those, but only suggest that minute, if I may use the word, first-order studies are done on very narrow phenomena and language data and then they are named according to the second-order terminology, so that there should be some theory in the papers. But they are extremely narrow in scope, restricted to the use of a particular word in a particular culture. Would you consider such studies relevant?

JC: This reminds me of the Journal of Pragmatics submissions I get which would be, say, on one particular particle in an obscure language. Still, they are contributing to the descriptive picture and, from that point of view, they have a certain value. It would be better, of course, if they contribute to the theoretical or methodological side as well. My reaction is normally to say, "Yes, you have presented a nice description of X, can you frame it within literature and show how you can push it one way or another?". If they use a methodology that I find particularly tiresome, namely, the discourse completion task (a method that has been used ad nauseam for requests), for that, I will send it back and say, "Well, this methodology is extremely limited, how about doing some follow-up interviews, or using a complementary methodology to strengthen what you are doing?". You can never dismiss such studies, because they are contributing something, but whether that is enough depends on what you're trying to do with your research.

MD: What do you regard as the most promising and problematic issues in impoliteness research and/or prospective developments in this field?

JC: The problem I have, which shows in any talk I give, is the tension between the local and the general. The problem with making any statement about impoliteness is that I'm always deeply aware of the limitations of my own data, which is why I'm often not talking with authority about impoliteness in general but British English impoliteness in particular. There is a special issue coming soon in the Journal of Pragmatics on impoliteness across Englishes. I think that kind of thing is great because by looking at what is going on in particular pieces of the jigsaw puzzle we can see common patterns—generalisations emerge.

MD: Thank you, that was the last question on impoliteness. A different strand of research you pursue, namely characterisation (Culpeper, 1996b, 2001), appears to have inspired ample studies on (televised) drama discourse, in line with Barthes's (1974: 178) statement that "the character and the discourse are each other's accomplices". Rightly, you emphasise the importance of readers' knowledge of real people in understanding characters. Also, drawing on Phelan's (1990) work and the dichotomy between *synthetic types* and *mimetic individuals*, you differentiate between *flat* characters and *round* characters, respectively. Would you say that the appearance of the latter drastically affects the *code of realism* (cf. Bednarek, 2010) of a play?

JC: A little footnote: I take the categories of flat and round characters from Forster (1987 [1927]), but I reinterpret them in cognitive terms. The code of realism is a notion that I'm not very familiar with. It was cooked up well after my work. I'm a little bit puzzled by it. I had a quick look at what people are saying, and they are saying that the author's work "should" conform with a code of realism. This is rather like saying that Picasso should be conforming with a more realistic view of the world around him. If I've understood it correctly, I think that is a little bit crazy! So I wouldn't put it in terms of the "code of realism". But there is an important question here: how does realism tally with what's going on in fictional works (I was particularly interested in plays)? In reference to your specific question, my feeling is that the appearance of round characters won't affect the realism because the world is also full of flat people. We have lots of occasions where our understandings of other people in real life are very shallow and driven by cognitive stereotypes—flat people, but that's fine, that's realistic. So it is in a fictional work. It might not be a good fictional work, it might be totally boring if it is just populated by flat characters, but it won't necessarily be less realistic.

MD: Yes, and fully developed, idiosyncratic characters contribute to the beauty of fiction. Leaving the characters aside, regarding the ongoing debate on the verisimilitude of fictional discourse (e.g. Spitz, 2005; Kozloff, 2000;

Bubel, 2006; Bednarek, 2010; Dynel, 2011a), how does, in your opinion, the fictional discourse of contemporary drama, that is the discourse of films, series and plays, correspond to real-life language use and identity construction?

JC: My line on this has always been that to understand a fictional work, let's say a play, you cannot switch off your knowledge of real-life discourse. It's there and it helps you understand what's going on. Are there differences to do with the linguistic characteristics of the play vs. real conversation? Of course there are. I think it is Quaglio (2009) who's done some great computational work, looking at the kinds of differences. One of the differences is that there are more markers of attitude in fictional works, and you can understand why. This is because they indicate to the audience the particular attitudes of the characters. That is also true of some of the plays that I've looked at from Shakespeare. There is a difference though between fictional and real-life discourse. The key one for me is how you understand the language that you're reading or seeing. These differences of understanding relate to discourse structure. Let's take Mick Short's (1981) idea of embedded discourse, even if it is a slightly problematic one. The playwright or script writer conveys some message to the audience and within that message you have the character-to-character talk. That's the essential idea. For me, this partly explains why in fictional data if you get, for example, a performance error, someone stuttering, you would *not* edit it out, as you would in naturally occurring discourse. You'd try to read something into that "error". Let me give you a real-life example involving an act. There was an occasion not so long ago when I was in the University car park and I was backing my car out. My wife was behind the car and I didn't see her, so I nearly run her over. Imagine that's an event in a film. I suspect that the audience would say to themselves, "That guy is trying to bump off his wife, because he wants to get her money", or something like that. They want to read more into it, because they know it's not just an error; it's something that has been put there on purpose by the scriptwriter, and this is their licence to read more into it. There has been work by Zwaan (1993) in particular showing that people are willing to spend much more cognitive effort on certain fictional genres, trying to work out these connections and motivations. I think your question raises a bunch of issues from how you process things to the physical, discoursal bits and pieces.

MD: In terms of the stuttering example, recipients might try to read into it, but would you say that it does not necessarily violate the similitude of fictional discourse? Statistically, there may many differences, as Quaglio

(2009) and others observe, but from the perspective of a regular viewer, meaningful stuttering and other linguistic practices will not emerge as inconceivable, unimaginable.

JC: What strikes the viewer depends on what they have in mind. That's the interesting thing. Does the viewer have in mind the norm of the genre, or the norm of what happens in their daily lives? Is it a competition between the two, or are they going in and out at particular points? You might have different conclusions at different points, and I suspect that's the answer.

MD: This problem also concerns abundant impoliteness, which does not need to strike the viewer as being unimaginable. Combining impoliteness studies with research on cinema discourse and drama discourse (Culpeper, 1998, 2001), you rightly argue that conflict and impoliteness serve as catalysts of the plot, further characterisation and perform an entertainment function. Indeed, having viewers' entertainment in mind, script-writers sometimes construct quirky, ostensibly "round" characters who will employ impoliteness excessively, the etiquette and social norms regardless (cf. Dr House). Does this use of impoliteness in fictional discourse seem realistic (to avoid the notion of reality code)? Is it not the case that you look at the person who frequently uses impoliteness and think, "Yes, a person can be like that, but in real life we must not be so impolite."

JC: I'm going to come up with a generalisation. In all the examples of fictional cases I've looked at, there's a strong tendency for impoliteness to be much more creative than you generally find it to be in ordinary life. I've looked at, for example "Scent of a Woman", a film with Al Pacino, where it is very clearly the case. I was looking at your examples of "House" the other day, thinking they are actually quite creative. The creativity is the difference. But that is not to say that impoliteness is not creative in everyday life, because it is. I think it is just the matter of density. For me, that's the key difference. You get that creative aesthetic aspect cranked up in fictional works.

MD: You aver that the concept of the author (writer or playwright) reverberates in the reader's mind, as he/she keeps asking: "What did a playwright mean me to understand by one character's utterance to another in this particular context?" (Culpeper, 2001: 38). A question may arise as to whether this is what an ordinary reader (not a researcher) indeed does. Also, recognising the author's presence might correlate negatively with deriving pleasure from reading and following the plot. The same may hold for the process of film watching, notwithstanding the differences between the cognitive processes of reading and watching (e.g. the reader's having to picture the characters, settings and events). One may venture to claim that, whatever the genre is, the viewer should, ideally, be enthralled by the plot and let himself/herself be absorbed in the characters' world, being focused on their actions and utterances, rather than consciously ponder on what (and how) the film production crew means to convey to him/her. This will not obtain in the case of highbrow films and conscious interpretation of, for instance, symbols. What is your perspective on this?

JC: You cite a question that I originally wrote about 15 years ago. I looked it up. The key is the context: I said that it's the "basic issue", and I still think it is. The extent to which this is actually followed by the reader is another issue. Attribution theory would predict that behaviour engulfs the field. So, basically you're taken in by the action, that's what you're looking at. You're not looking at the discoursal context, the role of the playwright, or anything else. As you hint at in your question here, yes, if you're involved in this way, you're not actually asking yourself about what the playwright meant. But I think there are many cases where you are. Referring back to the car park example, that's exactly what I'm on about there. You're not taking it as an ordinary event. You're aware, even if very dimly, that it's a constructed fictional event and, therefore, you're paying more attention to it as such, searching for plot or character motives. Another example might be when I'm watching a film with my daughters, who tend to get scared by things, and I step in to make predictions that it's all going to be fine. I know the genre conventions of typical Hollywood films for children: they wouldn't have nasty stuff. What I'm doing is interpreting what I think the writer would intend us to understand in a film of this genre. So, I think you're right, if you're very involved in a film, you concentrate on the concrete specifics of what's going on you without the contextual processing about why, but there are cases when we allow ourselves to think a bit further and deeper.

MD: This brings us to an issue you've already mentioned: Short's (1981) *embedding* or the *levels of communication* (e.g. Clark, 1996; Bubel, 2008; Dynel, 2010, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d) and the participatory framework typical of fictional discourse, the central problem being the role of the reader or the viewer (Bubel, 2008; Dynel, 2011b and references therein). You subscribe to a view that playwrights produce dramatic discourse to be rendered by characters for audiences to "overhear" (Culpeper, 2001: 39). However, used technically (in terms of both reading and listening), the concept of *overhearing* (cf. Goffman 1981) may seem to be counter-intuitive, inasmuch as readers are legitimate recipients of playwrights' works, which comprise dialogues and text directed to the readers (information about the setting and characters). Whilst the reader might be considered an overhearer from the perspective of unknowing characters, the actual participatory framework should account for two levels of communication, in which the former is granted a ratified status by the author (Dynel, 2011b). Could I ask for your opinion on such a claim, please?

JC: I agree, but let me expand on that. I'm sure that when Mick Short was using the term "overhearer" and when I used it, it's exactly what you said. We're thinking about the relationship between the audience and the character on stage. Unlike the early modern audience, the modern audience is very much separate from the stage activity, listening into the goings-on. But of course the "overhearer" label doesn't work at the top level of playwright to audience; you're quite right that you need other terms and refinement of the model. Basically, I think that Short (1981) got part of the picture, but not the whole picture, and to have the whole, you need to come up with another type, as you did in your work.

MD: Thank you. As regards the methodology in drama discourse research, in your 2001 monograph devoted to characterisation primarily in drama, you choose to discuss text, rather than performance, and thus to give little insight into non-verbal features. Those constitute performance and display great variability. Would you please suggest how researchers should address this issue if their focus of investigation is the discourse of films, series or serials, and if they have no access to their screenplays? Characters' non-verbal communication constitutes a large proportion of meanings on the screen. The problem of variability in performance may not be relevant (except for re-makes), but variability in viewers' perception of non-verbal messages is a problem that looms large. Thus, a researcher may read too much into characters' non-verbal expression, while doing the analysis proper.

JC: As for the last problem you've mentioned, I think it's the other way around. What I've been interested in is how, in spoken communication, the meaning is much more pinned down by the fact that you've got prosody and visual signals. There's a very interesting study that looked at e-mail communication and the use of sarcasm without the prosodic and visual cues of spoken interaction (Kruger et al., 2005). This study concluded that you have a 50% chance of correctly understanding an utterance as sarcasm (i.e. the same chance as tossing a coin!). Prosody helps in anchoring and determining the message. You raise the problem of how you analyse film discourse if you have no access to the screenplays. This is the bane of my research students' lives. They come along to me, and say that they want to analyse some film or TV data and they can't find the screenplay. But I think there are things you can do with the actual film itself, even if it is difficult. Because you're dealing with multi-modal data, what you need is a transcription system that will handle that. About a year ago, in the Journal of Pragmatics, a paper came out looking at data from "Bridget Jones" (Desilla, 2012). This was done in an effective way, using a time line and columns with frames for the visuals and descriptions of the camera angle. What you're balancing here is the amount of detail and depth with what is practical. Can you include for every utterance a prosodic visualisation? Not for all things, as this would be impractical. The most you could do is reserve maximum detail for particular utterances.

MD: On the other hand, would you see any merit in doing research on film discourse, based on transcriptions devoid of prosodic cues? Would you say this may work in any research topics?

JC: Absolutely, it depends on the topic of research. There are transcripts available on the web, and you can analyse them. Whether you'd get the full picture, it depends. Let's say you're analysing impoliteness, I always encourage my students to look at the screen version to verify what's going on, for something may be said in a tentative way, and you don't get that from the script, so you have to double-check it. But if you're interested in, say, the grammatical characteristics of film dialogue, the transcripts alone may well be adequate.

MD: As co-editor of the Journal of Pragmatics, one of the most reputable linguistic journals, you must observe the constant influx of new research topics. What, in your view, are the most promising topical strands or methodological orientations pursued within pragmatics?

JC: If I look back on what's around at the moment, there's a special issue, and there's going to be another one, on emancipatory pragmatics. I don't like the label, but I like the enterprise. The whole idea, pursued by people like Sachiko Ide and Neal Norrick, is that a lot of pragmatics is biased towards Western thinking. If you look elsewhere, it doesn't match up too well. I like the idea of revisiting established notions and trying to push them in another direction, testing them out. Andreas H. Jucker reminded me of the work in variational pragmatics, a field that has been galvanised by Klaus Schneider and Anne Barron. For too long pragmatics, especially cross-cultural pragmatics has been focused on languages correlating with nation states. But of course there is much cultural variation within a particular language. I have a particular interest in the pragmatics of English English, which I'm sure differs in a number of respects from the pragmatics of other English is. Needless to say, one can explore varieties of German, of Spanish, and so on. A bonus of this kind of comparative work is that you're not comparing across languages, as is the case with much work on cross-cultural pragmatics, with all the problems that that entails. If only more papers in variational pragmatics would be submitted to the Journal of Pragmatics! More generally, papers that seem to have particular promise are often ones that are interdisciplinary. Off the top of my head, here is an example. There is work coming from CA (conversation analysis), revisiting pragmatic notions. I must admit that I don't really see "purist" CA as having much to do with pragmatics. Levinson (1983) has a lot to answer for when he put that CA chapter at the end of his pragmatics book! Purist CA stuff is focused on structures; it doesn't encompass the fullness of function, let alone the role of the human mind. For me, it is on the border of pragmatics. However, CA can be brought to bear on central pragmatic issues. Take the example of the paper by Walker et al. (2011) where they look at the notion of indirectness—or more precisely indirect responses. Indirectness is often discussed in pragmatics, but they turn it on its head and show how through CA you can understand it in different terms. There's real insight here. Actually, an extension of an answer to your question is: what might one have expected to appear but hasn't? I would have expected more papers to have appeared in the area of clinical pragmatics. With technologies such as MRI scans, one can gain some insight into pragmatic mechanisms that hitherto have been poorly understood.

MD: Thank you for this answer and for the wonderful discussion. I'm truly honoured you've accepted the invitation.

JC: I'd like say thank you for the wonderful questions.

MD: And thank you for the insightful answers.

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