Prerequisites: It is expected that students have read the units on politeness, speech acts and conversation analysis.

Objectives: The module will acquaint students with the concept of Impoliteness and its strategies.

Keywords: Mock and Inherent Impoliteness, Face Threats, Impoliteness Strategies, Face Aggravation

Contents

1.0. Introduction: History and Definitions of Impoliteness
2.0. Culpeper’s Impoliteness strategies
   2.1. Inherent and Mock Impoliteness
   2.2. Impoliteness Strategies
2.2.0. Impoliteness Superstrategies
2.2.1 Strategies for Positive Impoliteness
2.2.2. Strategies for Negative Impoliteness

3.0. Lachenicht’s Notion of Impoliteness
4.0. Bousfield’s Notion of Impoliteness
5.0. Summary
6.0. Self Assessment
   6.1. Questions
   6.2. True/False
   6.3. Multiple choice questions
7.0. Weblinks
8.0. References

Story board: A figure of a person labelled as the ‘impoliteness analyst’ can be shown analysing the talk of two characters, Seema and Anil. Matchstick figures animation can be used for the figures. Their dialogue is as follows:

Seema: You are crossing the line.

Anil: No

Seema: Yes you are, I was standing here. Shift.

Story board: Match stick figures can be shown in action performing impoliteness strategies in 2.2.1. and 2.2.2. like two people not sitting together and one person getting in the way of another one.

1.0. Introduction: History and Definitions of Impoliteness

It is common knowledge that though research literature on politeness far outweighs that on impoliteness, yet the latter is a growing field that draws on several concepts from multiple disciplines: verbal aggression from socio psychology, verbal abuse in sociology, verbal conflict from conflict studies, exploitative entertainment from media studies, workplace interactions in business studies and impoliteness in literature (Culpeper 2011). Any work on impoliteness is informed by Brown and Levinson’s (1987) now classic writings on politeness where they discussed several politeness strategies that were employed by individuals to save ‘face’ (the desire to be appreciated and liked and not be hindered in one’s work) while performing one’s job.
This was followed by Leech’s discussion of politeness maxims (1983) however in these approaches harmonious interaction was treated as the norm and impoliteness was viewed as a deviation from the norm. It is only in the 1980’s and 1990’s that researchers in sociopragmatics (Lakoff 1989; Kasper 1990; Beebe 1995; Kienpointner 1997; Culpeper 2005) took note of the anomaly of impoliteness, delineating that it was in fact a ubiquitous, systematic and strategic practice found in everyday discourse and conflict talk (Culpeper 2011).

The notion of face changed with respect to impoliteness. No longer did individuals save one’s face to be polite (Brown and Levinson 1987) but they also engaged in face-attack and face-aggravation when they were impolite (Lachenicht 1980; Craig et al 1986; Tracy and Tracy 1998), that is, they damaged a person’s public image causing the person to feel embarrassed or inferior in some way. In fact many politeness analysts such as Sara Mills (2003) and Locher and Watts (2008) argue that impoliteness essentially involves a discursive struggle between participants where one see how the dynamics of power play out between the perpetrator of impoliteness and the recepient, hence the focus should be on the struggle between participants and their use of impoliteness. Several works have been produced in the area of impoliteness, notably Bousfield and Locher’s (2008) edited volume that focusses on the interplay between impoliteness and power in various social contexts such as political campaigns, conflict and workplace; Bousfield’s (2008) detailed discussion and analysis of (im)politeness and implicature; Culpeper’s (1996) model of impoliteness that focusses on the strategies that cause face-damage and his recent work (2011) that charts out a dynamic interpersonal model of impoliteness and the conventional impoliteness strategies used in media and real-life interaction.

With so many researchers working in the area and each with a different orientation, there seems to be no one definition of impoliteness. For constraint of space, I will broadly describe the aspects of impoliteness that have been emphasized by impoliteness researchers. Lakoff is of the view that impoliteness is behaviour that is “intentionally and negatively confrontational” (1989:103), giving rise to conflictual situations. Beebe includes face threats and social norms as part of impoliteness. For her impoliteness is the equivalent of face-threatening behaviour that is against social expectation and social norms (Beebe 1995). Terkourafi expands the notion of impoliteness, making it a progressive cline from politeness, rudeness to impoliteness (unmarked politeness, unmarked rudeness, marked politeness, marked rudeness and impoliteness). For her impoliteness is equivalent to rudeness that is against social norms and is face-threatening to both the hearer and the speaker: “marked rudeness … not conventionalised relative to the context of occurrence; it threatens the addressee’s face (and through that, the speaker’s face) but no face-
threatening intention is attributed to the speaker by the hearer” (2008:70). She also states that over-politeness can be a form of impoliteness that threatens a person’s face. Bousfield and Locher attempt to give a broader and much shorter meaning of impoliteness. For them the lowest common denominator of impoliteness is any “behaviour that is face aggravating in a particular context” (2008:3). For Bousfield impoliteness is inextricably linked to deliberately hostile and unwarranted behaviour coupled with aggression, the latter increasing the face-threat and therefore the face damage. It is the use of “intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face threatening acts (FTA’s) which are purposefully delivered … unmitigated …with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, ‘boosted’, or maximised in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted” (2008:72). Unlike the sociopragmatic meanings of impoliteness discussed so far, several researchers provide psychological and sociolinguistic perspectives on the topic at hand. Holmes et al are of the view that impoliteness is verbal/linguistic behaviour that threatens a person’s social identity, violating the norms of appropriacy or decorum in social contexts (2008). Kienpointner informs us that impoliteness involves “noncooperative and competitive communicative behaviour” that harms personal relationships by creating an atmosphere of antipathy that serves egocentric interests (1997: 259). It thus creates a psychologically negative environment where the egoistic needs of a person are fulfilled.

Even Culpeper’s understanding of impoliteness (on whose work this unit is largely based) has changed over the years from strategies used for attacking one’s face and causing “social disruption” (1996:350) to a broader view that takes into account the situational contexts, social norms about politeness and how individuals mediate their identities in these contexts. He states that,

impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organizations including in particular how one person’s or a group’s identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered impolite – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours … cause or are presumed to cause offence.” (2011: 254)

The degree and the quality of offence depends on attitudinal factors, linguistic/pragmatic factors and contextual/co-textual factors which will be dealt in the second unit as part of Culpeper’s interpersonal model. I will now describe what characterises impoliteness and the
strategies for damaging face as discussed by three theorists namely Culpeper (1996), Lachenicht (1980) and Bousfield (2008).

2.0. Culpeper’s Impoliteness Strategies

Culpeper’s discusses the notions of inherent and mock impoliteness before explaining the superstrategies and strategies of impoliteness. Let us discuss each of them in detail.

2.1. Inherent and Mock Impoliteness

Culpeper, in his seminal paper ‘Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness’ discusses the concepts of inherent and mock impoliteness and proposes strategies for Impoliteness based on Brown and Levinson’s Politeness model (1987). According to him, inherent impoliteness occurs for a small number of acts such as digging one’s nose or farting. Asking or telling someone to not engage in these acts is impolite because of two reasons: these acts are socially considered impolite and in whichever manner the speaker tells the hearer to refrain from doing these acts, it will be impolite. Thus “an inherently impolite act does not involve virtual or potential offence; it is in its very performative offensive and thus not amenable to politeness work” (1996: 351). In contrast to inherently impolite language, we have mock impoliteness commonly called banter or as Culpeper puts it “impoliteness that remains on the surface since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence.” (1996: 352). For example most of the advertising slogans used by Clif Dickens, an American graphic designer whose slogans have appeared in several dailies and are available on the internet, are a reverse of what the product claims to sell. They can be considered cheeky, rude and impolite in the sense that they tell the truth about the product but they are a form of banter because the designer clearly does not want his slogans to be taken as insulting or derogatory comments. Look at the one on Altoids (a box of flavoured mints, popular in America) that reads:

ALTOIDS: USED FOR HOLDING ANYTHING BUT MINTS

Anyone who has had mint from these boxes knows that once the mints are eaten, the box is used for keeping any nick-nacks and is a useful storage item. Thus the slogan constitutes banter; impolite on the surface level but not to be taken seriously.

2.2. Impoliteness Strategies
Culpeper’s strategies of impoliteness are modelled on those of Brown and Levinson’s as he states “impoliteness is very much the parasite of politeness” (1996: 355). Brown and Levinson use the variables of relative power, social distance and the rank/size of the imposition of the act involved to measure the extent of a face-threatening act (FTA), that is, the lesser the imposition (force) of an act, the lesser power and social distance there needs to be between participants and lesser is the degree of politeness and vice-versa. For example, an employer asking his employee to work on the weekend when he has plans for an out-station trip is imposing on the latter’s face; it is a forceful imposition and therefore requires more power and social distance between the two (the employer being the powerful party) and hence more politeness is needed by the employer to implement this act. Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss five politeness superstrategies, the use of which denote the degree of face-threat and likewise Culpeper (1996) proposes five impoliteness superstrategies where the use of each successive strategy increases the level of face-threat.

2.2.0. Impoliteness Superstrategies

1) Bald on Recod Impoliteness: Unlike Brown and Levinson’s Bald on record that happens in some situations (such as an emergency exit in case of fire) where the face of the hearer is not important and one can therefore be direct, leaving out politeness, Culpeper’s superstrategy involves the use of speech and behaviour that directly impinges on someone’s face (here, face is important). Culpeper writes that in such situations the face-threatening act is performed in a “direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way” (1996: 356). For example, when a mother says ‘don’t leave the room’ to her child when scolding him or her for not completing home work is a clear directive that threatens the child’s face.

2) Positive Impoliteness: here strategies are used to “damage the addressee’s positive face wants” (Ibid.). These include harming the hearer’s sense of solidarity, affiliation and harmony with others. For example, two children playing with one another do not include a third child who is sitting close by and wants to play with them. They do not acknowledge his wishes and thereby hurt his sentiments or positive face, making him feel lonely.

3) Negative Impoliteness: here strategies are employed to “damage an addressee’s negative face wants.” (Ibid.) that include the hearer’s desire for freedom of action. Look at the following exchange between two girls from different economic backgrounds:
a. Kiran: I spent the summer holidays with family.

b. Jyoti: Oh that’s so dull! Wr had a great time! My father took us to Disneyland in America.

Jyoti shows off her financial power over Kiran by mocking the way Kiran spent her holidays and boasts of her trip to America. This action by Jyoti figuratively invades Kiran’s personal space and sense of freedom, making her feel small.

4) Sarcasm or Mock Impoliteness: As the name suggests, face-threat is created here by the use of surface-level politeness that is not meant to be taken seriously. Culpeper bases his idea on Leech’s concept of irony (1983) but he prefers the term sarcasm since it causes more social disruption, hence is more impolite. For example, a teacher might sarcastically refer to a boastful student who pretends to know a lot but actually know nothing as ‘a genius’ or ‘an Eistein.’

5) Withholding Politeness: Here, face threat is created by not being polite when it is expected. For example, not greeting someone who greets you is clearly impolite because the other party expects to be greeted.

Each of these superstrategies is performed through various ‘output strategies’ that highlight either positive impoliteness or negative impoliteness. Culpeper does not explicitly explain what these two types of impoliteness are but we can provide an explanation based on Brown and Levinson’s concepts of positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness is the use of politeness strategies that enhance a hearer’s positive face or the desire to be liked while negative politeness is the use of strategies that mitigate a person’s negative face, that is, the desire to not be impeded in their work. Thus we can say that positive impoliteness is the use of output strategies that attack someone’s positive face, making them feel embarrassed or hurt and negative impoliteness attacks someone’s negative face, obstructing their work and compelling them to do what they do not wish to. Like, Brown and Levinson, Culpeper (1996) too provides a list of output strategies for both types of impoliteness.

2.2.1. Strategies for Positive Impoliteness

1) Ignore and snub the other – that is, failing to acknowledge the other person’s presence and their wants, making them feel hurt.

2) Exclude the other from an activity creating in-groups and out-groups, and heightening their loneliness.
3) Disassociate or distance oneself from the other - deny association or any common ground with the other person; For example, avoid sitting or playing together.

4) Being disinterested, unconcerned and unsympathetic to the hearer’s presence and his/her wants.

5) Using inappropriate identity markers - for example, using the title and surname in a close relationship (Mr. Rajiv Mehta for one’s husband) or using a nickname in case of a distant relationship (referring to one’s colleague by their nickname in public).

6) The use of obscure or secretive language - for example, when we mystify the other person with jargon or technical language (many academicians and doctors are guilty of this, intentionally and unintentionally), or when we use a code that is known to everyone in the group except the addressee (talking in a vernacular known to others but not the target).

7) Seek disagreement – by speaking on a sensitive topic as one’s religion or sexual behaviour.

8) Making the other person feel uncomfortable - for example, using silence or jokes to create tension or engaging in small talk.

9) Using taboo words – mostly abusive and profane language. For example, when men use expletives before their female colleagues whom they do not know so well.

10) Calling names – that is, using derogatory terms of address for the other person. For example, referring to your chubby friend as moti/mote and other terms that mock their obesity.

2.2.2. Strategies for Negative Impoliteness

1) To frighten the other person – that is, to instill a belief that action(s) detrimental to them will occur. For example, scaring someone into believing that if they do not perform a particular religious ritual, they will fall ill.

2) To condescend, scorn or ridicule the target by emphasizing one’s power. One way of doing this is by being contemptuous.

3) By not treating the other person seriously or by belittling them (e.g. use diminutives). For example, referring to one’s wife as ‘little baby’ or ‘little princess’ can be considered impolite if the wife strongly wishes to assert her identity.

4) Invading the other's space literally, for example by positioning ourselves physically closer to the other than the relationship permits or metaphorically by asking or speaking about information that is too intimate considering the relationship. For example, asking
about a person’s sex life, an intensely personal issue, is clearly impolite.

5) Explicitly associating the other with a negative aspect such as using personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you.’

6) Putting the hearer’s indebtedness on record, that is speaking about what the speaker has done for the hearer causing him/her to feel embarrassed.

Apart from these, we are informed that the structure of the conversation can be more susceptible to impoliteness as is the case with conflict talk. Moreover, nonverbal behaviour such as shouting or avoiding eye contact can magnify impoliteness (Culpeper 1996).

Task: Work with your friend and write down one incident in which you or friends have used impoliteness. Mention the strategies used.

3.0. Lachenicht’s Notion of Impoliteness

Before we move on with other details of Culpeper’s interpersonal model of impoliteness it is necessary to briefly discuss another theorist’s views on impoliteness, that of Lachenicht’s (1980). His views are based on the use of aggravating language that damage the face of the addressee or hurt him/her and like Culpeper he too bases his work on Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory. For instance, he explains impoliteness superstrategies that aggravate one’s face-threat:

1) Off record – ambiguous speech consisting of hints, insinuations and irony.

2) Bald on Record – direct statements that are face-threatening. For example, ‘Get up.’

3) Positive Aggravation – those that indicate that the hearer is not appreciated or does not belong to a group (causing positive face damage).

4) Negative Aggravation – those that attack the addressee’s negative face (freedom to act).

He even discusses several output strategies like Culpeper calling them strategies for positive and negative aggravation. For constraint of space I will only mention those that are not found in Culpeper’s model.

1) Strategies for Positive Aggravation: to convey to the hearer that he or his things are not liked, offend his or her sensibilities or beliefs, wish them ill, disclaim commonly held opinions, ignore and interrupt him or her when they speak, be totally disinterested in what he/she is doing, don’t give or ask for something, refuse to do or say something and use negative politeness.

2) Strategies for Negative Aggravation: show one’s ability and wish to force the hearer into
doing/saying something, emphasize one’s power and status and the hearer’s lack of power, be indirect, talk like powerful people, question the hearer, tease and bait him into action, insist that the hearer be humble and deflate his sense of self, challenge him either directly or indirectly, stress on one’s rights and obligations, contradict, use force, threats and violence and employ positive politeness that is unsuitable to the context.

A quick glance at the strategies will show that Lachenicht’s strategies (1980) for negative aggravation or impoliteness are more substantial and expressive than Culpeper’s. Also as Bousfield (2008) says Lachenicht proposes that these strategies can be mixed, unlike Brown and Levinson who were against mixing of politeness strategies even though research showed otherwise. Culpeper’s approach, unlike Lachenicht’s explains in detail inherent and mock impoliteness, however, both the theorists ignore the use of impoliteness in larger discourse structures, how contexts create impoliteness, how impoliteness interacts with illocutions, and what are the prosodic and paralinguistic aspects of impoliteness. In his interpersonal model (2011) Culpeper attempts to study the prosodic features but it is not a detailed study. He does provide a context based model affected by individuals’ attitudes and the ways in which impoliteness interacts with implicature. Also, both of them employ Brown and Levinson’s variables (power, social distance and rank) for measuring FTA while other researchers have suggested that more variables such as the affective dimension can be added to studying impoliteness and politeness (Bousfield 2008).

4.0. **Bousfield’s Notion of Impoliteness**

Bousfield’s strategies overlap with those of Culpeper and Lachenicht. However the following strategies deserve mention because of Bousfield’s detailed analysis namely,

1) Criticizing the hearer for some action they have undertaken and that they value or for some action that they did not perform. For example, criticizing a learner for not participating in the school debate.

2) Blocking someone’s space physically (this is different from invading their space in conversation). For example, coming in the way of somebody in a queue.

3) Enforcing role shift, that is, forcing the hearer to shift from one social/discoursal role to another. Bousfield gives an example from the show *The Clampers* where the speaker forces the hearer who is speaking in the role of ‘the representative of the local council’ to speak for himself and answer the speaker’s questions like a ‘private citizen.’

4) Challenging’s the hearer’s position, viewpoint, rights, obligations, ethics by questions or comments. For example, a speaker can ask the hearer: So you think you are capable of
5) Shouting: here, the hearer makes the speaker aware of his anger and figuratively invades his/her space. This can overlap with the use of abusive language.

In addition Bousfield discusses the role of impoliteness at the utterance and discourse levels particularly utterance ‘beginnings’ and ‘ends’ in a conversation that pave the way for the use of impoliteness. For example:

A: Is this pen yours? (this constitutes an utterance ‘beginning’ to talk impolitely)
B: Yes ma’am.
A: Why is it lying here without the cap?
B: Sorry for the stain on your book.
A: You will never leave it open? Do you understand? (this can be an utterance ‘end’)
B: Yes I do.

Bousfield (2008) also describes in detail the triggering events for the use of impoliteness and the choices speakers and hearers have at every step in the conversation to either mitigate or enhance the use of impoliteness. It can be represented diagrammatically as:

```
Triggering Event
      /\        /
     /  \      /  \
   /    \    /    \
  /      \  /      \
 /        \|        \
Respond Do not respond
    /\      /\      /
   /  \    /  \    /
  /    \  /    \  /
 /      \|      \|
Deny, oppose Accept, submit
    /\            /\      
   /  \          /  \      
  /    \        /    \     
 /      \      /      \
Counter Compromise
    /\            /\      
   /  \          /  \      
  /    \        /    \     
 /      \      /      \
Defensive Offensive
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5.0. Summary

In this unit we have explored the concept of impoliteness, its varying definitions, types of face and kinds of impoliteness along with the different strategies for positive and negative impoliteness as offered by different theorists. Although Culpeper’s approach is by far the most
popular and applicable, Lachenicht’s and Bousfield’s terminology ably supplement and broaden Culpeper’s by giving us more terms and concepts for analysis. In the next unit we will briefly discuss Culpeper’s interpersonal model for the use of impoliteness and analyse a text in terms of the impoliteness strategies explained in this unit and the next.