

## **Guest Editors' Introduction**

### **Impoliteness in intercultural encounters**

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The idea for this special issue originated in a workshop, "Mapping Research on Impoliteness in Norway", jointly organized by the University of Oslo and Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in November 2015.

The aims of the workshop were to map the existing research about impoliteness in the Norwegian context, and to create an arena for the international networking and development of joint projects. The main conclusions from the workshop were that impoliteness seems to play an important role in all types of intercultural encounters and that it is important to pay sufficient attention to this phenomenon. Different perceptions of impoliteness by various social actors can lead to misunderstandings and even social exclusion. A gap in research about impoliteness and intercultural encounters was identified during the workshop. This special issue is an attempt to bridge the gap.

In this introduction we first overview the subtopics and methods of previous research on (im)politeness in intercultural communication and intercultural encounters, in order to position the findings and main arguments of the articles in this Special Issue. We focus on impoliteness, but acknowledge the fact that politeness and impoliteness are often connected.

## **The state of the art: Main topics and tendencies in research on impoliteness and intercultural communication/encounters**

Impoliteness has become an intensively studied topic over the last decade (for an overview, see Dynel, 2015). Kádár and Haugh (2013, p. 244) argue that there has been an unfortunate lack of studies on impoliteness in intercultural settings to date. Indeed, previous research has mainly focused on single languages (predominantly English), and on cross-cultural comparisons, for which the data were obtained independently from different cultural groups (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 4). Impoliteness in intercultural communication has not received much attention. In this respect, the difference between *cross-cultural* and *intercultural* studies is important: whereas cross-cultural studies examine native discourses across cultures (e.g., business meetings of Norwegians and Germans), intercultural inquiries involve the investigation of discourse by people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interacting in a lingua franca, or in the native language of one of the participants (Cheng, 2012). Haugh (2010, p. 139) relates the term *intercultural (im)politeness* to intercultural interactions in which participants have different (socio)cultural backgrounds, noting that in some views the term *cross-cultural* is used for all pragmatic phenomena relating to cultural differences. Haugh (2010) provides a very informative overview of research on intercultural (im)politeness that has mainly focused on interactional data and recordings of face-to-face interactions, and sometimes on ethnographic methods, (non)participant observations, reflections, and interviews. The topics that previous research has been concerned with reveal the three ways in which cultural divergence may lead to perceptions of intercultural impoliteness: divergent speech practices (e.g., divergences in the interpretation of silence as a speech practice), situation-specific expectations, and diverging sociocultural values (Haugh 2010, p. 143). In their recent overview, Haugh and Kádár (2017) not only review research on intercultural (im)politeness, but also concentrate on and discuss, among other things, important topics such as what counts as an intercultural encounter, the emic/etic distinction, identity, and adaptation to perceived local norms.

Research on understandings and perceptions of (im)politeness in interactions in which participants belong to different linguistic and cultural groups has often focused on how divergent practices and expectations can cause misunderstandings and offence. However, various researchers warn that intercultural settings do not have a default relationship with misunderstanding and offence. For instance, House (2008) challenges the view that intercultural interactions inevitably give rise to perceptions of impoliteness and offence.

Frequently examined topics in recent studies that are mentioned in this overview include general theoretical questions, such as what research on intercultural (im)politeness offers to

general research on culture and politeness. Further frequent subtopics are impoliteness and ritual, (im)politeness and globalization, perceptions of impoliteness by speakers of different languages, and impoliteness in the context of second language (L2) use and L2 teaching contexts.

### **Methodological issues**

Haugh (2010) suggests that research on intercultural (im)politeness can provide insights into methodological and theoretical issues (e.g., collecting and analyzing material, and the ontological status of politeness and culture) because it cuts across the micro-macro link. One may gain insight into the inherent variability in evaluations of (im)politeness from analyses of divergent speech practices, and, by gaining a better understanding of diverging sociocultural values, it is possible to shed more light on the inherent argumentativeness of (im)politeness.

### **(Im)politeness, ritual, moral order, ethnicity and globalization**

The 2013 volume *Understanding politeness* by Kádár & Haugh is based on a framework that relies on the concepts of social practice, time, and space. The authors' assumption is that an evaluation of (im)politeness always involves an implicit appeal to a moral order perceived to be shared by two or more participants by at least one of these participants (2013, p. 67). An important issue addressed is the relationship between (im)politeness and culture: discourse participants co-construct understandings of (im)politeness as being representative of cultural identities through discourse and interaction, which implies that the relationship between (im)politeness and culture is constituted through discourse (Kádár & Haugh 2013, p. 233).

In his study, which provides the first (im)politeness-focused interactional model of ritual, Kádár (2017) examines how people use ritual in interpersonal interaction, and the interface that exists between ritual and politeness and impoliteness. Because rituals have a strong impact on the life of people and communities, it is revealing to examine how they use politeness and impoliteness in a ritual action to maintain what they perceive as communal moral order. Cultural differences in the perception of what constitutes the moral order may cause significant misunderstanding when ritual practices occur in intercultural scenarios. At the same time, ritual practices may also contribute to the formation of intercultural common grounds in intercultural interactions.

Taking into account globalization, Rathmayr (2008) examines intercultural aspects of new Russian politeness, concentrating on Russians' evaluations of this phenomenon that connect it to westernization and the commercialization of discourse as two aspects of globalization. Sifinou (2013) considers issues of formality, informality, and terms of address. Without denying the homogenizing power of globalization, she argues that greater interconnectedness (globalization) does not necessarily mean cultural homogenization, but rather change arising from various sources.

Holmes, Marra, and Schnurr (2008) concentrate on impoliteness and ethnicity, specifically Māori and non-Māori inhabitants of New Zealand, Pākehā discourse in New Zealand workplaces. Māori norms, including discourse norms, are more likely to be ignored in most New Zealand workplaces, with the potential for misunderstanding, and even for offence and unintended insult. The authors notice differences in Māori and Pākehā meeting openings and critical comments in the workplace. In a later study, Holmes, Marra and Vine (2012) focus on intercultural interactions between Māori and Pākehā colleagues, and data from both Māori and Pākehā workplaces shed light on distinctive features of politeness in New Zealand workplace discourse.

## Evaluations of impoliteness in intercultural interactions

One recurring research subtopic is perceptions of impoliteness by different groups and speakers of different languages. For example, Hong (2008) looks at how Australians use the expression "bloody hell" in their casual conversation, and indicates that, from an intercultural point of view, saying "bloody hell" is perceived differently. It may be considered impolite in other cultures; however, it has been part of the ordinary discourse of Australian English speakers for a long enough time to express casualness and friendliness.

House (2010) discusses impoliteness in Germany in intercultural encounters in everyday and institutional talk. Her analysis shows that, when German speakers follow the particular communicative preferences of German linguistic culture, they do not see it as flouting conventionalized German interactional norms. However, the way they talk may be interpreted from the outside as being impolite. In the evaluation of impoliteness, Pike's emic/etic distinction (i.e., having an ingroup versus an outgroup perspective on a particular situation) is highly relevant. House argues that a neutral or objective assessment of impoliteness is probably impossible, and advocates a multi-method approach to interpreting intercultural interactions that might help in getting closer to identifying what counts as "impolite" in a particular situation and in a given cultural setting.

Various studies in the edited volume by Bargiela-Chiappini and Kádár (2011) are devoted to (im)politeness and the concept of "face" in intercultural and cross-cultural perspectives. It is pertinent here to refer to Grainger's (2011) work, which engages in the problematizing of culture: language, nationality, and culture do not have homogenous behaviors and practices, but nonetheless people's interactional behavior relates to their membership in different groups, including ethnic and national. Grainger argues that misunderstanding or misattribution of intention may arise when the interactants do not share the same interpretation frameworks, for example, recipients may misinterpret indirectness as vagueness or rudeness.

Safizadeh (2014) studies Canadian and Persian degrees of perceptions of (im)politeness in intercultural apology forms, observing cultural and gender differences in the level of perception of impoliteness.

Schauer (2017) investigates English and German native speakers' perceptions of impoliteness: speakers of these languages tend to agree on perceiving certain phenomena as impolite or inappropriate, but the ratings of inappropriateness scores exhibit differences as well as reasons given for the scoring.

Pleyer (2017) looks at identities and impoliteness in German translations of Harry Potter novels. Chen (2013) claims that the interlocutors in the movie she examined (featuring Chinese and Western characters) have different cognitive contexts, which are reflected by their knowledge script, psychological schema, and socio-psychological representation. Sinkeviciute (2017) looks at Australian and British intracultural and intercultural metapragmatic evaluations of jocularity.

## Impoliteness and the relation between first language and second language (L1 and L2) speakers

Impoliteness is frequently a topic related to the relationship between L1 and L2, and English is very frequently addressed in this context. Tajeddin, Alemi, and Razzaghi (2014) examine the perception of (im)politeness for the speech act of apology among native English speakers and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Although both groups mentioned similar criteria for measuring (im)politeness, the analysis of frequency counts displayed significant differences between the two groups in their degree of preference for each (im)politeness criterion.

In his chapter on (im)politeness in intercultural pragmatics, Kecskes (2014a) focuses on intercultural interaction in which one interlocutor uses his or her native language (e.g., English), and another uses the same language as L2 (or lingua franca). He emphasizes various phenomena that arise in such situations: for example, L2 speakers may overlook rude utterances by L1 speakers, or they may misunderstand banter and take offence. Furthermore, rudeness/impoliteness may be lost in the interaction despite contextual factors, which is related to the fact that non-native speakers process expressions or situation-bound utterances literally. Interlocutors in intercultural interactions hardly make up a "social community" in the traditional sense. Non-native speakers in intercultural interactions also may not feel how rude certain expressions are in the target culture, and thus use them more freely. In intercultural pragmatics, Kecskes (2014b) suggests that it is crucial to define what factors affect the speaker in making his or her utterance sound polite or impolite, and what factors affect the hearer in processing an utterance as polite or impolite: issues important in this respect are: intention, norms and cultural models, and context.

Kecskes (2015) argues that impoliteness may work differently in intercultural interactions than in L1 communication. Analyzing impoliteness within one language, most researchers seem to agree that no act is inherently impolite, and that such a condition depends on the context or speech situation that affects interpretation. This is not necessarily the case when interlocutors are using not their L1, but another language. The priority of semantic analyzability of an utterance for non-native speakers and their L1-based prior experience in meaning processing has a profound effect on how (im)politeness is processed: the polite or impolite load of expressions and utterances may be lost or an evaluative polite/impolite function may emerge where it should not.

These issues indicate an increased need for teaching (im)politeness. Rieger (2015) presents a class in (im)politeness to a group of fifteen adult learners in their early twenties in an advanced German language class at an Anglophone Canadian university. The study shows that there are variations in perceptions of impoliteness both within and between larger speech communities. Pedagogical recommendations for teaching impoliteness in the classroom are provided by Félix-Brasdefer and McKinnon (2016), who investigate how L2 Spanish learners conceptualize impolite behavior in intercultural interactions while abroad. Fifty impoliteness events were analyzed for perceived offense type. Sociocultural and linguistic competence characteristics with respect to the perceived offenses are then discussed. Félix-Brasdefer (2017) offers recommendations for enhancing learners' intercultural competence, which is very much related to evaluating some events as impolite.

Bleichenbacher (2008) considers impoliteness in the context of multilingualism in movies, in which conflict informs the stories, and the role of impoliteness in representations of L2 use and users in these movies.

### **Impoliteness, context and shared knowledge**

In his recent study, Kecskes (2017) addresses the view that no act is inherently impolite, and that such an interpretation depends on the context or speech situation that affects interpretation. He examines this context-dependency in intercultural communication, in which interlocutors cannot always rely on much existing common ground, shared knowledge, or conventionalized context but need to co-construct most of this in the communicative process. He argues that limited shared knowledge and common ground restrict the interpretation process to the propositional content of utterances. This may result in an increase in the actual situational context-creating power of utterances.

In their thorough overview of issues relevant for studying intercultural impoliteness, Kádár and Haugh (2017) note that most studies to date have focused on institutional encounters and face-to-face encounters. Everyday intercultural interactions have been neglected, as have languages other than English. They also emphasize a need for an analytical approach that

draws from not only a particular theoretical stance on culture itself, but also an appreciation of the importance of grounding one's analysis in the understandings of the participants themselves. This requires considering the relevance of the emic-etic distinction, processes of identification, and accommodation.

## Articles in this special issue

This special issue addresses (im)politeness in contemporary contexts, using real-language data, such as email messages, copy-editors' comments on literary translations, comments from blogs, as well as elicited self-experienced examples taken from surveys. The data analyzed is mostly written data and most of it is taken from professional settings. The contributions use various theoretical approaches, including applied linguistics, pragmatics, and intercultural communication. The methodologies used include surveys, interviews, and discourse analysis.

The articles in this special issue research topics connected to divergent speech practices (Rygg), situation-specific expectations (Felberg & Šarić; Solum; Marsden & Kádár), and diverging sociocultural values (all of the articles), as classified by (Haugh 2010, p. 143).

One of the main ideas present in the above-reviewed research on (im)politeness – that it is the *evaluation* of impoliteness and not the language itself that creates "impoliteness" – permeates all the articles in this issue. Evaluations are usually based on values, which are either overt or covert. Relatively new explanatory tools in this context, those of *scripts* and *moral order*, were used by Rygg and Fellberg & Šarić in addressing this issue.

The understanding of the term "intercultural" in this special issue is broader than just the ethnic definition. However, we acknowledge that people's interactional behavior often relates to their membership of ethnic and national groups. Indeed, the relationship between (im)politeness and culture is constituted through discourse (Kádár & Haugh 2013, p. 233).

Three of the articles in this special issue explore the under-researched professions: copy-editors and interpreters/translators (Felberg & Šarić; Marsden & Kádár; Solum). These professions or communities of practice, as the articles show, have their specific cultural traits that are somewhat in flux because these are professions in the making.

The topic of (im)politeness is often discussed in the media in Norway, as pointed out by Kristin Rygg in her article, "Typically Norwegian to be Impolite. Impoliteness According to Whom?". In the analyzed media discussions it is usually claimed that Norwegians are impolite. Rygg explores this claim by analyzing the book, "Typically Norwegian to be Impolite?" and comparing it with relevant newspaper articles, blogs and personal communication. Her approach is primarily through the linguistic theory of politeness. Rygg's article shows that some of the behavior that immigrants deem impolite is considered impolite by many Norwegians too. Other behaviour, it is suggested, is not generated by indifference to politeness or an intention to be impolite, but rather, the opposite: to show consideration through a "distance rule of politeness" that respects others' autonomy and personal space. She supports her claim by identifying and analyzing two *scripts* (some of them hidden): 1. To avoid wasting other people's time with trivia, 2. Self-sufficiency and independence as key notions that are considered a norm. Rygg divides impoliteness into formal, informal and professional. She claims that the violation of politeness norms can happen both in-awareness and out-of-awareness. The distance rule prevalent in Norway – that prescribes, among other things, not talking excessively if one does not have something "proper" to say – makes verbal forms of politeness less important. Some authors claim that there are few linguistic manifestations of formal politeness in modern Norwegian. The clash appears when those who are used to formal politeness in their languages expect the same from Norwegian speakers. The importance of congruence between speaker's and hearer's intent is underlined.

Liz Marsden and Daniel Z. Kádár, in their article, "The pragmatics of mimesis – a case-study of intercultural email communication", explore how recurrent patterns of interaction may

develop into localized convention and possibly ritual by examining a collection of 955 business emails. They analyze greetings, sign-offs and conversation topics in emails. This article feeds into the idea that conventional and ritual practices are key to capturing the fundamental aspects of interpersonal phenomena, including politeness and impoliteness. It shows how mimetic practices evolve and point at the possibility that they develop into in-group conventions or rituals.

The emails analyzed come from business communications between the proofreader/transcriber and her international clients. The clients come from 12 countries and the authors explore the possibility that the country of origin can play a part in what preferences correspondents have when it comes to, for example, greetings. However, country of origin is too simple a criterion, as the authors point out, when they call for gathering further sociocultural data – including time spent in the British education system, and desire to adopt UK cultural practices.

Kristina Solum explores interaction between translators and copy-editors in the process prior to the publication of literary translations in Norway. Both parties seem to be aware of the potential for conflict inherent in the copy-editing process. The data for the study include both naturally occurring and researcher-generated data consisting of nine translation drafts with copy-editors' comments and changes and 14 semi-structured qualitative interviews with copy-editors, translators and publishing editors. Solum argues that experienced copy-editors tend to be very polite, which she refers to as "acquired communicative competence". Another important point in this article is that some of the negative experiences of copy-editors and translators may be linked to the overall low degree of professionalization of Norwegian copy-editors as an occupational group.

The connection between negative experiences with impoliteness and a degree of professionalization of another occupational group – interpreters in the public sector – is explored in the article, "Interpreting impoliteness" by Felberg and Šarić. Interpreters in the public sector in Norway interpret in a variety of institutional encounters, and the interpreters evaluate the majority of these encounters as polite. However, some encounters are evaluated as impolite, and they pose challenges when it comes to interpreting impoliteness. This issue raises the question of whether interpreters should take a stance on their own evaluation of impoliteness and whether they should interfere in communication. In order to find out more about how interpreters cope with this challenge, in 2014 a survey was sent to all interpreters registered on the Norwegian Register of Interpreters. The survey data were analyzed within the theoretical framework of impoliteness theory using the notion of moral order as an explanatory tool in a close reading of interpreters' answers. The analysis shows that interpreters reported using a variety of strategies for interpreting impoliteness, including omissions and down-toning. However, the interpreters also gave examples of individual strategies for coping with impoliteness, such as interrupting and postponing interpreting. These strategies border on behavioral strategies and are in conflict with the Norwegian ethical guidelines for interpreting. In light of the ethical guidelines and actual practice, mapping and discussing different strategies used by interpreters might heighten interpreters' and interpreter-users' awareness of the role impoliteness can play in institutional interpreter-mediated encounters.

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