

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

The Structure of Impolite Events in Computer-Mediated Conversation

Insulting Adjectives in Comments on a Discussion
Board of a CNN U.S. News Piece

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
3. FROM POLITENESS TO IMPOLITENESS	5
3.1. FACE AND (IM)POLITENESS	5
3.2. COOPERATION AND (IM)POLITENESS	8
3.3. IMPOLITENESS	10
3.3.1. <i>Insults and name-calling</i>	14
3.3.2. <i>Irony and sarcasm</i>	17
3.4. HOW TO DETECT AN (IM)POLITE UTTERANCE?	19
3.5. IMPOLITENESS METADISOURSE	20
3.6. IS IMPOLITENESS INHERENT IN LANGUAGE?	23
3.7. TOWARDS CONVENTIONALIZED IMPOLITENESS FORMULAE	24
3.8. REACTIONS TO IMPOLITENESS.....	27
3.9. COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND IMPOLITENESS	29
4. DATA	32
4.1. POLITICAL DICHOTOMY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	32
4.2. SOME PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS WITH THE DATA	33
5. METHODOLOGY	35
6. RESULTS	37
6.1. INSULTING ADJECTIVES	37
6.2. THE AIM OF IMPOLITENESS-TRIGGERING EVENTS.....	39
6.3. STRUCTURE OF THE CONVERSATION FOLLOWING IMPOLITENESS-TRIGGERING EVENTS .	40
6.4. SUPERSTRATEGIES USED IN IMPOLITE EVENTS	43
7. DISCUSSION	54
7.1. ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	54
7.2. GENERAL GOAL OF THE STUDY	57
7.3. RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY	58
8. CONCLUSION	60
9. REFERENCES	62
9.1. PRIMARY SOURCES.....	62
9.2. SECONDARY SOURCES.....	62
9.2.1. <i>Online references</i>	66

1. Introduction

Every student of English linguistics has probably heard of politeness, politeness studies or Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]) politeness theory. I myself was one of those students who found it fascinating that such a field existed and one could do research on it. Politeness is a field of pragmatics that has been widely researched from many angles, one of them being cultural (cf. Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2005). However, after a while of reading about different politeness principles and their realizations I found that there seemed to be a piece missing from the puzzle. What if one does not want to be polite or fails to be polite by accident or for whatever reason? It is acknowledged that politeness is something we should all strive for (cf. Leech 1983). However, as many probably have noticed from their own private lives this seems not to be always the case. This is where the study of impoliteness comes in.

Impoliteness is a field of pragmatics that has become relatively popular in recent years. As a field of study it was overlooked by many researchers until the 1990s when the first theories of impoliteness were introduced (e.g. Culpeper 1996; Kienpointner 1997). The first impoliteness theories had much in common with the best known politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978 [1987]) that had been dominating the field since its first publication. However, in the past years impoliteness has become more popular among researchers and the importance of studying impoliteness has been widely recognized.

Impoliteness has been studied in many different media and contexts, such as television shows (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008) and everyday interactions (Culpeper 2011). A rising medium for impoliteness studies is the field of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC). Many researchers have used material from CMC (e.g. Lu 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011) to study impoliteness and impolite events. This can be easily explained as CMC offers vast amounts of open access data. The amount of different communication methods in CMC to be researched is immense and expands from blogs to social networks and from different types of open access discussion boards to more private messages such as electronic mail. In addition to this, CMC offers the opportunity to study the layperson communicating. However, there is a down side to researching CMC; it is an anonymous medium and it is perceived ephemeral (Sproull and Kiesler 1991). This could have an effect on the interlocutor and how for instance

truthful he/she is while engaging CMC. Moreover, it is virtually impossible to detect a dishonest user or a user who wants to provoke other users without being subjective.

My own interest in studying CMC lies in many conversations that I have had in my personal life on social media and reading different discussion boards. I personally find CMC an extremely fascinating medium. It gives people the freedom to write virtually about anything and everything but sometimes these comments and their purpose may be questionable. In addition to this, it is difficult to map out the motives that lie behind writings that are controversial. Such cases have been seen for example in Finland with some political blogs that take a critical stance on immigration. However, I am not interested in how people write on blogs or their topics. What I am interested is how the laypeople communicate on these discussion boards.

My study aims to shed light on how impoliteness is realized and used in the domain of CMC, and in particular, on a discussion board for commenting on news on CNN U.S. - website (Cohen 2012). This is done by examining the appearance of certain insulting adjectives in impoliteness-triggering events, and by observing the aim of these impoliteness-triggering events. In addition, close attention is paid to how these impolite utterances are responded to and what kind of impoliteness superstrategies are used in the conversation.

2. Research questions

The research questions of this study are heavily influenced by prior studies on impolite utterances in television shows (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). One point of focus is the appearance and use of adjectives in impoliteness-triggering events. Adjectives and their use in impolite events are subjects that researchers have not yet touched upon. Therefore, the approach of this study is somewhat experimental. Another focus point is the impoliteness-triggering events and their aim. This again is a field that researchers have overlooked, especially in the domain of CMC. The third point of focus is the issue whether impoliteness-triggering events are retaliated by using a counter attack. As the fourth point of focus I have chosen to look at the impoliteness superstrategies used in the comments, paying additional attention to the superstrategies of sarcasm and calling the other interlocutor names. Therefore, the research questions are,

1. Do impoliteness-triggering events contain insulting adjectives? What is their function?
2. At whom are the impoliteness-triggering events aimed?
3. What is the nature of the conversation in CMC that follows an impoliteness-triggering event: who is insulted and what counter-attack strategies are used?
4. How are the impoliteness superstrategies of sarcasm and calling the other names used in CMC?

As previous studies (e.g. Sproull and Kiesler 1991) note that CMC is not subjected to the same rules as face-to-face communication, and traditional norms for language use (e.g. politeness) lose their standings. As stated above, one unique factor for this is the anonymity of CMC. As these traditional norms become somewhat redundant it can be expected that this change will be seen in the language as well. Therefore, the first hypothesis for my study is that impoliteness-triggering events in CMC contain insulting adjectives. My second hypothesis is that the impoliteness-triggering events are aimed at the second person or the other participants of the conversation. The second hypothesis is based on prior research by Bousfield (2008). In addition to this, the third hypothesis of my study is that the impoliteness-triggering events in CMC are retaliated with counter

strategies that mirror those used in spoken language (Culpeper et.al. 2003; Bousfield, 2008), i.e. defensive strategies are used more often to retaliate an impoliteness-triggering event than offensive strategies. My fourth hypothesis expects that sarcasm is a more dominant impoliteness superstrategy than calling the other names. This hypothesis is based on a previous study by Hancock (2004) where it was noted that interlocutors use irony more in CMC than in face-to-face conversations.

It may seem that the research questions are rather loosely connected. However, the general goal for these four research questions is to map how impoliteness is realized in political discussions on CMC. With the help of these four research questions I will get a broad look on the structure of impolite events in the data. I do realize that CMC is a heterogenous domain, and that my study and its results should not be taken as valid for regarding the whole domain of CMC. Moreover, I expect this study to inspire other researchers to study impoliteness in CMC more widely.

In order to answer my research questions and to prove or disprove my four hypotheses, I will conduct a corpus study on comments found on a discussion board for commenting the piece of news entitled “‘War over Women’ kicks off Obama-Romney race” (Cohen 2012). The news piece was published April 11th 2012 on CNN U.S. –website. In addition to using methodology connected with corpus studies, I will also conduct qualitative research manually after locating an impolite event. I will discuss the results in both quantitative and qualitative terms. These results will provide useful information for reaching the general goal of this study.

3. From politeness to impoliteness

In previous studies regarding impoliteness (e.g. Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2011; Bousfield 2008; Terkourafi 2008) the most traditional approach is to begin with a definition of what impoliteness is. This will be my approach to the theoretical background as well. Impoliteness is a rather difficult concept to define without relying on some of the earlier works regarding politeness strategies (e.g. Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1987). In general, politeness is seen as a result of a conversational contract and it basically is socio-cultural behavior with the goal of establishing and/or maintaining equilibrium between the interlocutors (Watts et al. 1992). Furthermore, Nevala (2010b: 419) states that, “Politeness is an essential part of social relations: not only the way in which the speaker approaches the hearer but even more so the hearer’s evaluation of the speaker’s words has an effect on the rest of their interaction”. In addition to this, politeness is linked with rapport management that aims at maintaining the harmony of a communicative situation (Spencer-Oatey 2002; Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2005).

3.1. Face and (im)politeness

Goffman (1967 [1971]) introduced the notion of *face* as a concept that an individual has in interaction. Goffman (1967: 5) defines face as, “[...] as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”. Face reflects the interactant’s expectations and feelings in a communicative situation. The expectations in an interaction are guided by rules made by communicative groups and these rules instruct how much feelings should be involved in a communicative situation. The involvement of expectations and feelings in interaction are determined by institutionalized lines that direct the interactants on how to behave in a situation and how much face is expected to be involved in a situation. These ground rules of social interaction are learned through socialization. Interactants in a communicative situation strive to save face of both the self and the other. According to Goffman (1967), this *face-saving* is a condition of interaction and not the objective. Face-saving is done through *face-work* that can have a defensive orientation that aims to save the self’s face or protective orientation that aims to save the other’s face. Using proper reference is one way of conducting face-work (cf. Nevala 2010a). In addition, interactants strive for implicit cooperation in communicative situations. However,

communicative situations often involve multiple participants, and therefore face threats may arise even by accident.

Goffman (ibid.) distinguishes three levels of responsibility that an interlocutor may have in a face-threatening situation. First of all, a person may appear to have acted innocently when a face threat occurs. Then again, a person may have the intention to cause open insult by being malicious. At the third level are incidental offences that are unplanned but can be expected as a consequence of some action. These three levels of responsibility indicate that face threats are closely connected with an individual's own perceptions and expectations in a communicative situation. In addition, there are basic kinds of face work. The first strategy of face work is the avoidance process that aims to avoid contacts and topics that may cause a face threat. If a face threat arises one should act as if it did not appear. A face threat can also be ratified when it appears and is then corrected. Goffman (ibid.) calls this the corrective process. The corrective process is similar to a ritual as the interchange in the process has a clear construction (i.e. challenge-offering-acceptance-thanks)¹. Nevertheless, face-work can be treated as something others are expected to perform. This enables a person to angle for compliments or even safely offend someone. Aggressive and insulting exchanges can lead to a competition between interlocutors. In these competitive situations the loser appears foolish, therefore he/she loses face while the winner may gain an improved status within a group by being considered more witty and humorous.

Probably the best-known theories in the field of politeness are the theories that take the notion of face into account. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1978 [1987]) introduce the terms of *negative* and *positive face*. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define face as,

[...] the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself consisting in two related aspects: (a) negative face: the basic claim to...freedom of action and freedom for imposition (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants, crucially including the desire that self-image be appreciated and approved of.

¹ Cf. Goffman (1967) pp.19-23.

Terkourafi (2008: 50) has gone even further to define face by dividing the notion of face in to two concepts, *Face1* and *Face2*, and *Face2* is defined as, “[...] (a) the biological grounding of face in the dimension of approach versus withdrawal, and (b) the intentionality of face i.e. its directedness, or aboutness”. *Face2* includes both positive and negative features and is universal. Terkourafi (2008: 52) states that,

[...] *Face2* cannot be an attribute of individuals in isolation. Individuals alone do not 'have' face and cannot 'gain' or 'lose' face. Rather, *Face2* is grounded in the interactional dyad. Without an Other to whom they may be directed, face concerns cannot arise.

The notion of Terkourafi's (2008) *Face2* has arisen from the theory of *politeness1* and *politeness2* by O'Driscoll (1996), where *politeness1* is the notion of everyday politeness while *politeness2* is the linguistic and academic sense of why, when and how some expressions achieve social adequacy. Therefore, *Face1* relies on *politeness1* or the layperson's perspective of politeness.

Goffman's (1967) and Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]) theories of face have been criticized for only taking into account the personal and individual scope of face (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005; Culpeper 2011). Spencer-Oatey (2005:106) states that, “[...] face can be a group-based phenomenon, and apply to any group that a person is a member of and is concerned about”. These groups can be for example one's family or larger groups that a person belongs to such as nationality or ethnic group. When face is a group-based phenomenon it is referred to as *social identity face* (cf. Culpeper 2011). Furthermore, Brewer and Gardner (1996: 84) define three levels of self representation, that are,

- 1) the personal self which refers to the individual level
- 2) the relational self which refers to the interpersonal level
- 3) the collective self which refers to the group level.

This shows that there are face threats that are aimed at the social identity face an interlocutor may have. In fact, Leach et al. (2010) note that if an in-group a person belongs to is devaluated or appears to be devaluated then this person is highly likely to identify with the in-group more strongly. Social identity face is a notion that my study will take into account when analyzing the data. In addition to this, Goffman's (1967)

notion of face is heavily relied on in this study with the modifications made by Brown and Levinson (1978 [1987]) and Terkourafi (2008).

3.2. Cooperation and (im)politeness

Grice (1989) first introduced the general idea that communication is a rational and cooperative activity and he points out the importance of *implicature* in conversations. In other words, in a conversation the interlocutors may imply meanings both conventionally and unconventionally. What comes to play in interpreting these implicatures is intuition. Grice's (1989) theory concentrates on *the Cooperative Principle* (CP) that is key to utterance interpretation. CP basically indicates that hearers expect the speakers to behave cooperatively. Furthermore, Grice (ibid.) developed the *maxims of the Cooperative Principle* that are sub-principles for this theory. The four maxims are *the maxim of quantity*, *the maxim of relevance*, *the maxim of manner* and *the maxim of quality*. Providing as much information as is required in a certain conversation is called the maxim of quantity. The maxim of relevance is the convention that regards the information provided to be relevant to the discussion. The speakers should follow the maxim of manner in order to make their contribution clear, brief, and orderly. The final expectation in a communicative situation is the maxim of quality that expects that the speakers do not say what they believe to be false or do not have adequate evidence of. Grice (ibid.) notes that the maxim of quantity overweighs the other maxims. Some situations may call for these maxims to be flouted or violated to make the communicative situation more effective. In addition to this, these maxims are not always obeyed and sometimes even cannot be obeyed.

As Grice (ibid.) acknowledges, it is possible for an interlocutor to break the CP. This can be done by violating overtly (e.g. lying), opting out, clashing (when two maxims cannot be filled at the same time) and violating covertly (sarcasm). According to Grice (ibid.) following the maxims in a communicative situation leads to effective communication. However, Bousfield (2008) points out that an interactant needs to cooperate in a linguistic sense even when communicating lack of cooperation in a social sense (i.e. arguments, or trying to convey impoliteness).

As cooperativity seems to be a key component in the study of (im)politeness it is important to define what it means. Kienpointner (2008: 244) defines cooperativity as “[...] two persons A and B interact cooperatively if they 1) try to reach a goal G which is mutually accepted, 2) try to do this by fair and efficient means and 3) are equally interested in reaching G or at least share some interest in reaching G”. An interaction may be cooperative to some degree when only one or two of the mentioned criteria are met (Kienpointner 2008). Therefore, cooperativity in interaction means that two people have a certain agreement on the purpose of the communicative situation they engage in.

Leech (1983) views that the CP enables one participant in a conversation to communicate assuming that the other participant is being cooperative. However, CP is not the only measure that guides a successful conversation. Leech (1983) acknowledges that a *politeness principle* (PP) exists in communication. This means that even Grice’s (1989) maxims of cooperation can be overruled by other implicatures. PP maintains the social equilibrium and the amiable relations that enable us to assume that in a communicative situation the other interactants are being cooperative. While politeness is important to the social relations of the interlocutors it regresses the logic of a conversation. Then again, if the main point of communication is effectiveness, then being polite can be considered to hinder this.

According to Leech (1983) there are different illocutionary forces for politeness. These are competitive and convivial. Competitive illocutionary forces are essentially discourteous (e.g. asking for money) and the PP is needed to mitigate the request. In convivial functions politeness takes a positive aspect and it is inherently courteous. Furthermore, Leech (ibid.) notes that when being polite one is often faced with a conflict between CP and PP. In these situations one has to choose how far to concede one for the other. In addition to this, politeness is essentially asymmetrical as what is polite to the speaker is impolite to the hearer (e.g. in request situations where negative face is involved). This creates a pragmatic paradox as a speaker may in some situations expose him/herself to a situation where his/her negative face will be violated. Figure 1 presents Leech’s (1983: 107) cost and benefit scale where utterances are ranked based on their politeness and cost or benefit to the hearer.

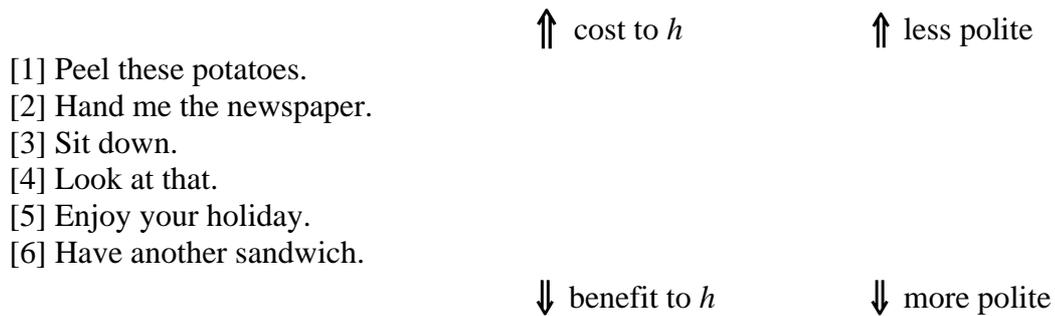


Figure 1. Leech's (1983:107) cost and benefit scale

Figure 1 shows how requests (e.g. example [1]) are more costly to a hearer's face and there is a need for mitigation of the request. Then again, when an utterance benefits the hearer it is more polite, but may be more costly to the speaker (e.g. example [6]). Example [6] therefore presents an asymmetrical situation. The more cost there is to the hearer the more impolite the utterance is perceived to be. These situations can be seen as negative impoliteness as it offends the hearer's negative face.

3.3. Impoliteness

Impoliteness cannot be fully explained through the former politeness models and superstrategies such as Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]), *bald on record* and Grice's Maxims of Cooperation (1989) (Culpeper 1996, 2011; Bousfield 2008; Limberg 2009). Brown and Levinson (1987) have been criticized on their bald-on-record superstrategy mainly because it lacks explanation (cf. Bousfield 2008). Basically, bald on record refers to a communication situation where the interactant or interactants speak directly and unambiguously. In regards of Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]) politeness theory, directness in interaction would be perceived as face threatening and therefore impolite. For example, Culpeper et al. (2003: 1546) state that, "[...] it is precisely those utterances that have the directness of bald on record which are difficult to interpret as either polite, impolite, or something in between". Bald-on-record superstrategy has also been criticized for being a superstrategy that does not and cannot appear outside "the theorist's vacuum" (Bousfield 2008:62).

In his study Goffman (1967) notes that there are three types of impoliteness: insults, disagreeing and 'unwitting' offences. Culpeper et al. (2003) point out that Goffman's

(1967) categorization of impoliteness may be helpful, but is not all encompassing. Then again, Goffman's (ibid.), and Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]) politeness frameworks have provided a useful point of departure for many theories on impoliteness. Culpeper (1996: 356-357) introduces the following superstrategies for impoliteness:

1. Bald-on-record impoliteness. This is distinct from Brown and Levinson's bald-on-record strategy, which is deployed for polite purposes in fairly specific circumstances, namely, where there is little face at stake, an emergency situation, or no intention of damaging the face of the hearer. In contrast, bald-on record impoliteness is typically deployed where there is much face at stake, and where there is an intention on the part of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.
2. Positive impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants ('ignore, snub the other', 'exclude the other from the activity', 'disassociate from the other', 'be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic', 'use inappropriate identity markers', 'use obscure or secretive language', 'seek disagreement', 'make the other feel uncomfortable (e.g. do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk)', 'use taboo words', 'call the other names', etc.).
3. Negative impoliteness. The use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants ('frighten', 'condescend, scorn, or ridicule', 'invade the other's space', 'explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect', 'put the other's indebtedness on record', 'hinder or block the other—physically or linguistically', etc.).
4. Sarcasm or mock politeness. The use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realizations. Sarcasm (mock politeness for social disharmony) is clearly the opposite of banter (mock impoliteness for social harmony).
5. Withhold politeness. Keep silent or fail to act where politeness work is expected.

These superstrategies are further investigated and elaborated by Bousfield (2008) with four superstrategies that he feels do not fall strictly under the superstrategies in Culpeper's (1996) model. These are:

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

Culpeper's (1996) superstrategies relate to the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson's (1978 [1987]) and the notion of face. Culpeper (1996: 355) admits that there exists a connection between impoliteness and politeness in a way that impoliteness is the parasite of politeness rather than an unproblematic opposite to politeness. However, Culpeper et al. (2003) state that the main difference between politeness and impoliteness lies in intention. What this means, is that politeness can be regarded as the speaker's intention to endorse the face and impoliteness as the speaker's intention to attack it. Nevertheless, impoliteness does not need to be intentional (Culpeper 2011). This is a point of debate in impoliteness studies at the moment. Bousfield (2008: 260-261) states that,

I define impoliteness as being the opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully performed unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, with deliberate *aggression*, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

Many impoliteness researchers (cf. Culpeper 1996) agree that there exists a link between impoliteness and the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978 [1987]). However, I will also take into account the point of view that impoliteness does not need to be intentional (Culpeper et.al. 2003). Therefore, I will use the following definition of impoliteness by Culpeper (2010: 3233) for this study,

Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person's or group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively 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 always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not.

Culpeper's (2010) definition takes into account the situational and contextual factors of impoliteness, and in addition to this, it does not over emphasize the connection between politeness and impoliteness.

It is important to differentiate the notions of first order impoliteness (impoliteness1) and second order impoliteness (impoliteness2). Researchers (e.g. Watts 2008) note that when the discussion refers to the layperson's or participant's view of impoliteness it is referred to as first order impoliteness. Second order impoliteness refers to the researcher's view of impoliteness and theories of impoliteness. With this distinction it is made clear that the academic concept of impoliteness may not be the same as the layperson's view. The layperson's view has been studied through impoliteness metadiscourse by Culpeper (2010, 2011).

Impoliteness may come in various forms. As Culpeper (2008) mentions, many times the impoliteness is directed towards a person's negative face rather than the positive one. This is understandable as negative face relates more to actions and requests when positive face is more personal and interlocutors tend to be more aware of violating the other's positive face. In addition to this, Culpeper (2011) notes that if a conversation has a positive beginning the negative turn is perceived as more impolite even though to another person it may sound perfectly normal in another situation.

3.3.1. Insults and name-calling

As one point of interest of this study are insults and insulting adjectives it is important to look at them more closely. As noted above, Culpeper (1996) defines name-calling as positive impoliteness. While Culpeper's (ibid.) superstrategies do not contain the category of insults in general, I would argue that insulting someone is positive impoliteness rather than negative impoliteness. Insults are usually aimed at a person's positive face which is according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) "[...] the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' claimed by interactants, crucially including the desire that self-image be appreciated and approved of". Therefore, I will treat insults as positive impoliteness.

Culpeper (2011: 256) defines insults as "Producing or perceiving a display of low values for some target." He further divides insults into four categories:

- 1) Personalized negative vocatives (e.g. you fucking moron)
 - 2) Personalized negative assertions (e.g. you are such a disappointment)
 - 3) Personalized negative reference (e.g. your stinking mouth)
 - 4) Personalized third-person negative reference (e.g. she is nutz)
- (2011:135).

These points to the fact that the form insults take can vary. Furthermore, Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000:73) note that there are three elements to an insult,

- 1) It contains a predication about the target;
- 2) The predication is perceived as inappropriate and demeaning by the target;
- 3) The target believes that the speaker made the predication with the intention to hurt or demean him or her.

By combining Culpeper's (2011) four categories of insults and Jucker and Taavitsainen's (2000) three elements of insults, it becomes clear that insults are personalized and have a specific target towards which they are aimed at. Insults do not have to be overtly personal but rather they have to refer to something that the targeted

person feels strongly towards (Kienpointner 2008). In addition to this, Chapman, (2008: 2) notes that, “[...] insults necessarily are directed toward another person”. However, a derisive remark of an absent third party can be an insult if it is degrading to the person being addressed (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). For example, my study focuses on how laypeople comment on and discuss political news. Some participants may find it insulting when another participant comments on one of the candidates in the U.S. Presidential elections of 2012 derisively. This also links to the notion of social identity face discussed earlier.

One aspect of insults is name-calling. Chapman (2008: 5) notes in his study that insulting epithets are conventional and often fall under certain semantic categories such as for example social standing, individual characteristics and intellectual characteristics. The conventionality of insults should not be a surprise as the illocution of insults is to threaten someone’s face (Culpeper 2011). However, insults can contain creative epithets or words that are to some extent unusual (Chapman 2008). Carter (2004) states that there are four types of creativity for impolite language: pattern-re-forming, pattern-forming, situational deviation and unusual explicitness. Pattern-re-forming appears when there is an unexpected irregularity from a norm. Then again, pattern-forming appears when there is an unexpected regularity in a norm. A deviation in a situation can be considered creative, as well as, implicitness that is unusual for the circumstances.

There are many reasons to use insults in communicative situations. Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) point out that insults require the perlocutionary effect of an utterance to the receiver and therefore, are hard to investigate. An utterance can be insulting unintentionally and an interlocutor can find an utterance insulting while another interlocutor may interpret the same utterance differently. For clarity, Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 74) present the pragmatic space of insults (Figure 2).

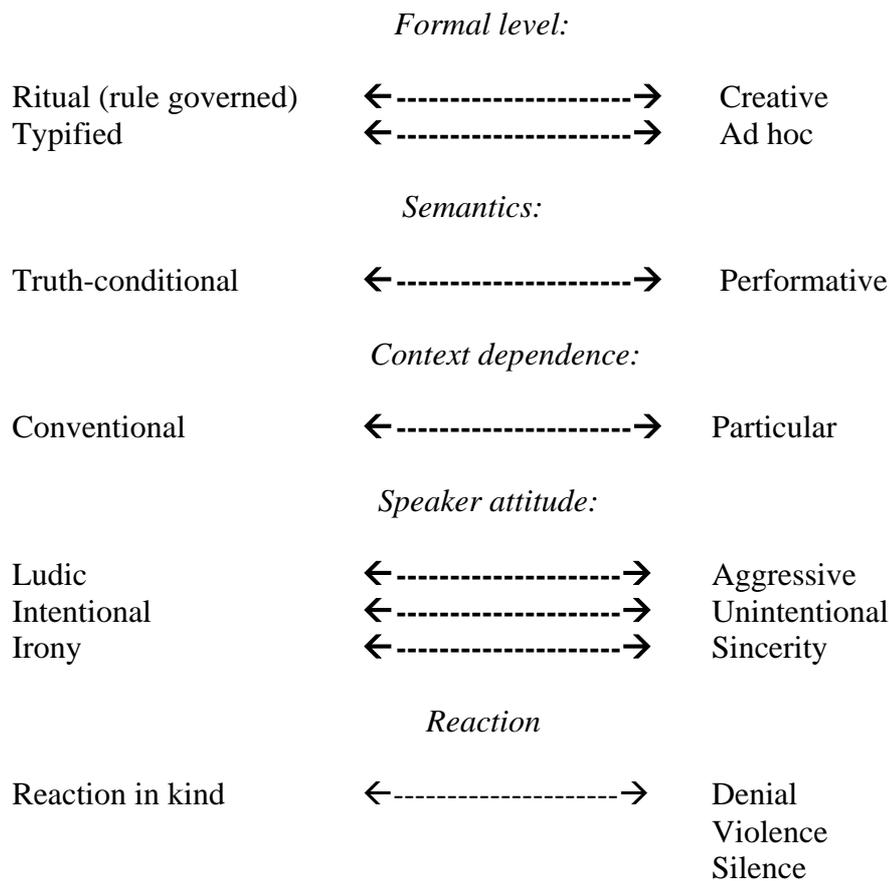


Figure 2. Pragmatic space of insults (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000:74)

As can be seen from Figure 2 insults can be formed differently and even the reaction insults evoke can be different. The various implementations of insults lie in the hidden meanings in different communities of practices.

There are no previous studies made on insulting adjectives. Adjectives have two major categories, *descriptors* that describe color size and weight, chronology and age, emotion and other characteristics, and *classifiers* that limit or restrict a noun's referent (Biber & Leech 2002: 197). If the quote from Culpeper (2011: 256) on insults given above is taken into consideration it becomes quite clear that the adjectives that can be evaluated as insulting fall under the descriptor category. Therefore, in this study the adjectives will be treated as descriptors and not as classifiers.

3.3.2. Irony and sarcasm

Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) present irony as a category in the speaker attitude dimension of their pragmatic space of insults (see Figure 2). However, irony does not appear in the impoliteness superstrategies provided by Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008). Culpeper (1996) does mention sarcasm as a way of implying impoliteness. However, sarcasm is closely tied to irony. For example Lee and Katz (1998) note that the difference between irony and sarcasm lies in that sarcasm is directed towards a specific person. Then again, irony is not directed towards a specific victim. Therefore, I believe irony needs to be investigated in more detail in impoliteness studies.

Irony can be defined in many ways. In this study the definition for irony used is by *The Oxford English Dictionary* or *OED* (2012) and irony is defined as,

A figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used; usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt.

Hancock (2004) refers to irony as *pragmatic insincerity* as the intended meaning of an utterance is something other than is expressed. Irony is often used to evoke humor, diminish, enhance critique, being polite, being rude and to increase solidarity (Burgers et al. 2012). In addition to this, irony can be used to imply praise (Pexman and Olineck 2002; Burgers et al. 2012). Previous studies show that irony is better appreciated in different situations than literal statements (Van Mullen et al. 2011). However, Pexman (2008) notes that

Given the ambiguity inherent in ironic language, the puzzle for researchers has been to understand how we grasp the meaning of ironic remarks. Certainly, the process is complex. The perceiver must draw inferences from the speaker's words, judge the speaker's attitude about the situation and about his or her words, and assess how the speaker intends his or her words to be perceived by others.

Furthermore, Burges et al. (2012) note that irony involves evaluation and usually opposites between literal and intended meaning. This creates a *gap* where irony appears (Attardo et al. 2003). Grice (1989: 53-54) states that "To be ironical is, among other

things, to pretend [...] and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as pretense would spoil its effect”. To have its desired effect irony has to be hidden in the utterance and cannot be overtly stated (e.g. “I speak ironically...”) but rather has to be covert.

Leech (1983) introduces *the irony principle* (IP). Irony is often perceived to exploit the politeness principle (PP), and generally it takes the form of over politeness or mock-politeness. It often misleads or deceives the hearer. Irony is important in communication as it is a useful tool to manifest aggression without being overtly insulting, but rather this aggression takes a more precarious verbal form. Therefore, IP steers aggression away from conflict. In addition to this, mock-politeness, mock-impoliteness and banter can be used to show solidarity within a group (Culpeper 2011). However, Leech (1983) notes that there are different varieties of irony and their offensiveness may vary: comic irony, offensive irony and sarcastic commands. Leech (ibid.) stresses that in order for the IP to work in the way that its illocutionary force is realized, it needs to be clearly recognizable. A hearer of an ironic comment uses mainly intuition to work out the meaning. However, there are other sets of data that the hearer needs to have in order to recognize a particular conversational implicature within an ironic utterance. According to Grice (1989: 31) these are:

1. The conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any reference that may be involved;
2. The Cooperative Principle and its maxims;
3. Context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance;
4. Other items of background knowledge;
5. The fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

In addition, Hancock (2004) notes that there are different communicative cues that are used to signal irony: contextual, verbal and paralinguistic. Contextual cues show the discrepancies between the utterance and the circumstance within which it has been uttered. Verbal cues include adjectives and adverbs that are used with an evaluative intent. Then again, paralinguistic cues include tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and so on.

As this study focuses on the medium of CMC detecting irony can be somewhat difficult. Previous studies on irony in CMC (e.g. Hancock 2004) have noticed that there are cues to signal irony in CMC as well. These are the use of amplifiers, ellipsis, punctuation, emoticons and adapted vocalization signals (e.g. *haha*, *mmm*). In addition to this, Hancock (ibid.) notes that even though we expect irony to appear in CMC less than in face-to-face conversations, in actuality speakers in CMC use more irony. Then again, in face-to-face communication interlocutors get more feedback on whether or not their ironic utterances and their illocutionary force or their intended meaning are understood by the other the way they were meant by the speaker (ibid). This makes using irony as a communicative tool in CMC rather problematic.

As mentioned above, irony is closely related to sarcasm (Lee and Katz 1998). *OED* (2012) defines sarcasm as, “A sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt. Now usually in general sense: Sarcastic language, sarcastic meaning or purpose.” While this definition does not seemingly connect sarcasm and irony, sarcasm is thought to be, although not always, but “frequently ironic” (Opitz 2012: 278). Furthermore, Opitz (ibid.) states that “Sarcasm, in short, uses irony to convey contempt, and this contempt is immediately apparent to all those paying attention”. Sarcasm is used to ridicule another and it is stated more overtly than irony. Opitz (2012) notes that sarcasm can even be bitter and derisive name-calling. In the realization of irony and sarcasm lies the main difference between the two. Another difference is the fact that sarcasm is aimed at a certain person while irony is more general (Lee and Katz 1998).

Irony and sarcasm are both important notions in my study. Previous studies (e.g. Hancock 2004) have noted that irony in general appears in CMC more than in face-to-face communication. Then again, sarcasm is an impoliteness superstrategy (Culpeper 1996) but has not yet been studied as such in CMC.

3.4. How to detect an (im)polite utterance?

Culpeper (2011: 22) notes that impoliteness “[...] is in the eye of the beholder”. An utterance or event in a certain situation or context may be perceived as impolite by one member but not by another member of a conversation. The emphasis should therefore be put on the context of the utterance, not on the linguistic form it actually takes.

Furthermore, as mentioned above impoliteness does not need to be intentional (Culpeper 2011). There are other aspects that come to play when an utterance is interpreted as being impolite. As Culpeper (2002) notes impoliteness depends on contextual judgments that the interlocutors make in the communicative situation. These judgments can be of the personality, social relation and role of the other and group membership. It is important to note that different groups have different value systems. This also can affect an individual's perceptions of what is socially acceptable behavior in communicative situations.

Impoliteness is in many ways connected with power relations that are asymmetrical (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper, 2008). In asymmetrical power relationships impoliteness can be expected from the participant in the communicative situation who is higher ranked in power rather than the participant of lower rank. However, this does not rule out the possibility of impolite actions appearing from the lower ranked participant. In a situation where the lower ranked participant expresses an action of impoliteness reasons may vary. For example school children may use impoliteness in certain situations as a mean to be perceived as one of the "cool kids" (Culpeper 2011). Most likely in this kind of situation the goal is to gain respect or improve status within a social group.

3.5. Impoliteness metadiscourse

While impoliteness is connected to politeness it also has its own metadiscourse. Metadiscourse can be defined in its simplicity as "[...] language which focuses on language itself" (Culpeper 2011: 73). For example, as seen in section 3.3., there are many academic definitions for impoliteness. However, there are definitions among the laypeople on what impoliteness is as well. Culpeper (2011: 71) notes that, "[...] in everyday life a myriad of terms are encountered, including *bitchy*, *mean*, *uncivil*, *disrespectful*, *ill-mannered*, *cheeky*, *brusque* and *discourteous*". While the terms used may differ, there is still a certain similarity between them. All the terms refer to somewhat antisocial behavior. The variety of terms is easily explained with the fact that impolite behavior and expressions are noticed and discussed more than polite ones as impolite behavior is considered a deviation from the norm (Culpeper 2010).

Impoliteness metadiscourse is often guided by rules that have arisen from social norms (Culpeper 2010). These social norms are directed by different groups and their expectations or as Culpeper (2010: 3229) notes “ [...] impoliteness metadiscourse (e.g. condemning an impoliteness behaviour, upholding a rule) can be driven by the need to demonstrate one’s orientation to a group and the norms by which it is constituted”. Therefore, impoliteness can be seen as an attitude containing of certain evaluative beliefs involved with certain behavior. Furthermore, Culpeper (2010: 3240) states that impoliteness

[...] is clusters of attitudes shared amongst members of a social group which constitute ideologies [...] and could be labeled, for example “conservative”, “racist” or “sexist”. Some attitudes constitute “impoliteness” ideologies, which play a role in determining what counts as impolite and sustain and are sustained through metadiscourse by those who dominate the particular group power structures. Insults, for example, particularly those involving social identities and face (e.g. racist and sexist insults), can be means of controlling others as well as maintaining dominant groups in society at the expense of others.

What is perceived as impolite is therefore a group-based phenomenon. The metadiscourse of impoliteness is guided by groups that are more powerful than others. However, it needs to be noted that individuals belong to different groups and therefore, what is perceived as impolite can vary greatly between individuals.

As ideologies are to some extent an important aspect of impoliteness metadiscourse it needs to be looked at more closely. Ideologies are socially shared belief systems and as defined by van Dijk (2006: 116) they are

[...] primarily some kind of ‘ideas’, that is, belief systems. This implies, among other things, that ideologies, as such, do not contain the ideological practices or societal structures (e.g. churches or political parties) that are based on them. [...] Ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group, that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction. Different types of ideologies are defined by the kind of groups that ‘have’ an ideology, such as social movements, political parties, professions, or churches, among others.

Ideologies are commonly expressed in discourse by different members of a group, as van Dijk (2006: 121) notes, “[...] when group members explain, motivate or legitimate their (group-based) actions, they typically do so in terms of ideological discourse”. Therefore, it can be expected that a discussion on a political topic would offer some insight to how ideologies and impoliteness metadiscourse is constructed between different groups.

Furthermore, Culpeper (2011: 98-100) points out the mapping of key metalinguistic labels onto conceptual background, which can be seen in Figure 3. In Figure 3 small capitals indicate metalinguistic groups of impoliteness labels that Culpeper (2011) found in his research. The bold letters represent different dimensions of impoliteness. Figure 3 can be used to analyze impolite behavior in different context. For example Culpeper (2011: 100) notes that,

[...] the **RUDE** and **VERBALLY AGGRESSIVE** groups, which comprise labels that are typically used in interaction between strangers in public situations, and the **INCONSIDERATE** and **HURTFUL**, which comprise labels that are typically used of interactions between friend or family members in private situations.

This shows that people label impolite events differently in different context and one factor is the in-group/out-group dichotomy. It should be mentioned that Culpeper (2011) notes that the third dimension seen as the diagonal line is a hypothesis about the gravity of the offence.

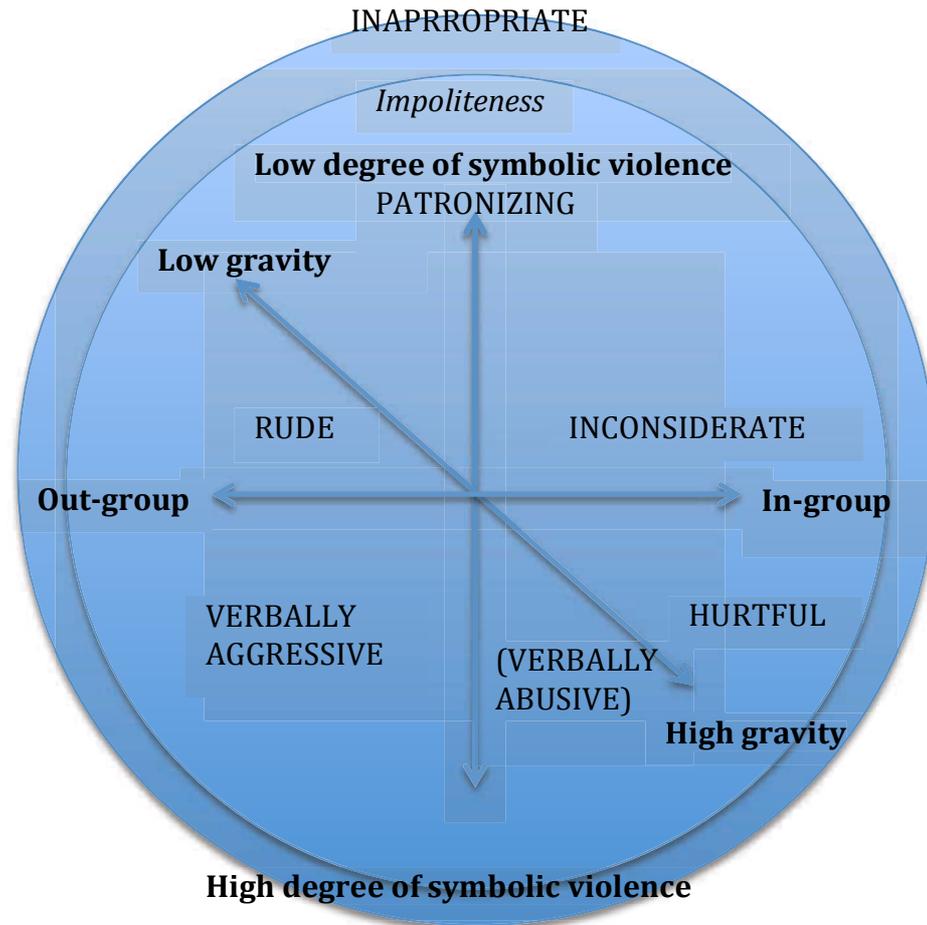


Figure 3. Mapping key metalinguistic labels onto conceptual background.

3.6. Is impoliteness inherent in language?

A theory that researchers (Fraser 1990; Watts 2003; Locher 2004; Bousfield 2008; Limberg 2009; Culpeper 2011) in the field of impoliteness disagree on is whether impoliteness (or even politeness) is inherent in language and whether an utterance can be inherently impolite. Limberg (2009: 1380) notes that, “[j]udgements on impoliteness are not linearly linked to the illocutionary force of a particular speech act, or to its syntactic and lexical phrasing”. Furthermore, Culpeper (2011: 119) states that, “[...] meanings can only be inherent in speech acts if speech acts themselves have a degree of determinacy and stability”. A speech act is not only the linguistic form of the utterance

but also depends heavily on the interpretation of the context it has been made in. Even taboo language can be considered as friendly banter and should not be judged as impolite without knowledge of the context (Jay 1992; Jay and Janschewitz 2008; Ickes et al. 2011).

The approaches that emphasize the role of context are often referred to as ‘post-modern’ or ‘discursive’ (e.g. Locher 2006; Watts 2008). This study will rely on this discursive approach on impoliteness and take context into account when analyzing the data. Moreover, a dualistic view (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2011) will be relied on. This means that both semantic and pragmatic impoliteness are seen as opposites on a scale and impoliteness can be more determined by the linguistic expression or the context.

Culpeper (2011: 195) states that, “[...] impoliteness is a negative evaluative attitude towards behaviours in context”. Some researchers (e.g. Watts 2003) note that there appears to be a certain plot to interaction that organizes an interaction into appropriate sequences. This plot is activated by the context, frequency and recency of an interaction (Culpeper 2011). In addition to this, it has been noted that social behaviors take place in the context of other social behavior that can have some influence over the other. One can also manipulate the context through one’s own actions.

3.7. Towards conventionalized impoliteness formulae

The discussion on whether impoliteness is inherent in language has led to the search of conventionalized impoliteness formulae. Terkourafi (2005) has devised conventionalized politeness formulae based on frequency of specific types of contexts. Terkourafi (2005) implies that politeness is a habit that people follow, but impoliteness is more rare and therefore finding impoliteness formulae can be difficult. However, this works against the frequency of appearance of impoliteness. Culpeper (2011: 256) presents a table in which he points out his own findings within conventionalized impoliteness strategies and formulae (see Table 1).

Table 1 Conventionalized impoliteness strategies and formulae discussed in Culpeper (2011:256).

Conceptual orientation	Some impoliteness strategies (derived from impoliteness manuals)	Some impoliteness formulae (derived from Culpeper (2011))
Face (any type)	<p><i>Insults</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of low values for some target</p> <p><i>Pointed criticism/complaint</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of low values for some target</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insults (personalized negative vocatives, personalized negative assertions, personalized negative references, personalized third-person negative references in the hearing of the target) - Pointed criticisms/complaints - Negative expressions (e.g. curses, ill-wishes) - Unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions
Association rights	<p><i>Exclusion</i> (including failure and disassociation): Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of inclusion</p>	
Equity rights	<p><i>Patronizing behavior</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of power that infringes an understood power hierarchy</p> <p><i>Failure to reciprocate</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of the reciprocity norm</p> <p><i>Encroachment</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of infringement of personal space (literal or metaphorical)</p> <p><i>Taboo behaviors</i>: Producing or perceiving a display of behaviors considered emotionally repugnant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Condescensions - Message enforcers - Dismissals - Silencers - Threats

Culpeper (2011: 153) proposes that “[...] conventionalized impoliteness formulae vary according to three scales: degree of conventionalization, the extent to which they are context-dependent or context-spanning, and the degree of offence they are associated with”. Culpeper (ibid.) further notes that these three scales are connected, “[...] more offensive items are more context-spanning and more conventionalized”. However, conventionalized impoliteness formulae (Table 1) are usually absent in impoliteness

events. Culpeper (2011:155) notes that in his study out of a 100 reported impoliteness events only five involved conventionalized impoliteness formulae.

There exists an uncertainty on whether or not conventionalized impoliteness formulae can be constructed and if these formulae exist not only in theory but in practice as well. However, there exist formulae for exacerbating the offensiveness of impoliteness (Culpeper 2011). There are various ways in which an interlocutor can intensify the impoliteness of an utterance. For example modifiers, taboo words, prosody and non-verbal features can increase the impoliteness of an utterance. For a linguist these would fall under the labels of pragmatic/discourse markers, illocutionary force modifiers, hedges/boosters and modality. Moreover, Jay (1992) points out in his work on North American data that in addition to these features people are also susceptible to the kind of speaker, location and specific word used. This notes again the importance of context when interpreting impoliteness.

Majority of the impoliteness events reported in Culpeper (2011) are categorized as “implicational impoliteness” that are further divided into three groups according to the mismatch that appear in the triggering event. These three groups are,

- (1) *Form-driven*: the surface form or semantic content of behaviour is marked.
- (2) *Convention-driven*:
 - a. Internal: the context projected by part of a behaviour mismatches that projected by another part; or
 - b. External: the context projected by behaviour mismatches the context of use.
- (3) *Context-driven*:
 - a. *Unmarked behaviour*: an unmarked (with respect to surface form or semantic content) and unconventionalised behaviour mismatches the context; or
 - b. *Absence of behaviour*: the absence of behaviour mismatches the context (Culpeper 2011: 155-156).

To make these categories clearer some examples are needed. Culpeper (2011: 157) notes that form-driven triggers can be snide comments, insinuation, innuendo, casting aspersion and digs. These are implicit messages that produce negative consequences for

certain individuals. Convention-driven impoliteness includes sarcasm, teasing or intentional provocation with playful off-record markers and humor. These impoliteness strategies send mixed messages that can lead to confusion and the message might end up being unclear to the hearer. In these cases the linguistic message and the context mismatch. Culpeper (ibid.) points out that an external mismatch would be a situation where A is being rude to B but B replies in a polite manner and behaves amiably. Then again an internal mismatch happens for instance with a sarcastic tone. Culpeper (2011:180) states that, “[...] any behavior judged to be impolite has involved a contextual judgement to some extent”. Therefore, it can be said that all impoliteness is context-driven.

3.8. Reactions to impoliteness

Verbal insults and taunts are repeatedly reciprocated (Baron and Richardson 1994). The basic pairs of a verbal attack and counter attack are OFFENSIVE-DEFENSIVE and OFFENSIVE-OFFENSIVE (Culpeper et.al. 2003). There are inherently two ways to encounter impoliteness: to respond and to not respond (i.e. stay silent) (Culpeper et.al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). The latter does not need any further explanation. Then again, responding can happen in various ways. First of all one can accept the opposition and submit to the other thus ending the situation. One can also deny the opposition and either compromise or counter the attack in a defensive or offensive matter. This then again, gives the speaker that triggered the events the chance to either respond or not respond creating a possible standoff (see Figure 4).

The offensive strategies used in a response are the impoliteness superstrategies that have been defined by Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008). Offensive strategies respond to a face attack with another face attack while defensive strategies respond to a face attack by defending one's own face (Culpeper et.al. 2003). It should be noted, that in previous studies of impoliteness the OFFENSIVE-OFFENSIVE pair is not realized clearly in the data (cf. Culpeper et.al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). This may be due to the social and situational constraints of the discourse types studied². This study will look into the structure of reciprocation in CMC by defining the counter attack strategies used in the comments following an impoliteness-triggering event.

² cf. Culpeper et al. (2003) study on the tv-show "Clampers" where responses of the clampers are limited.

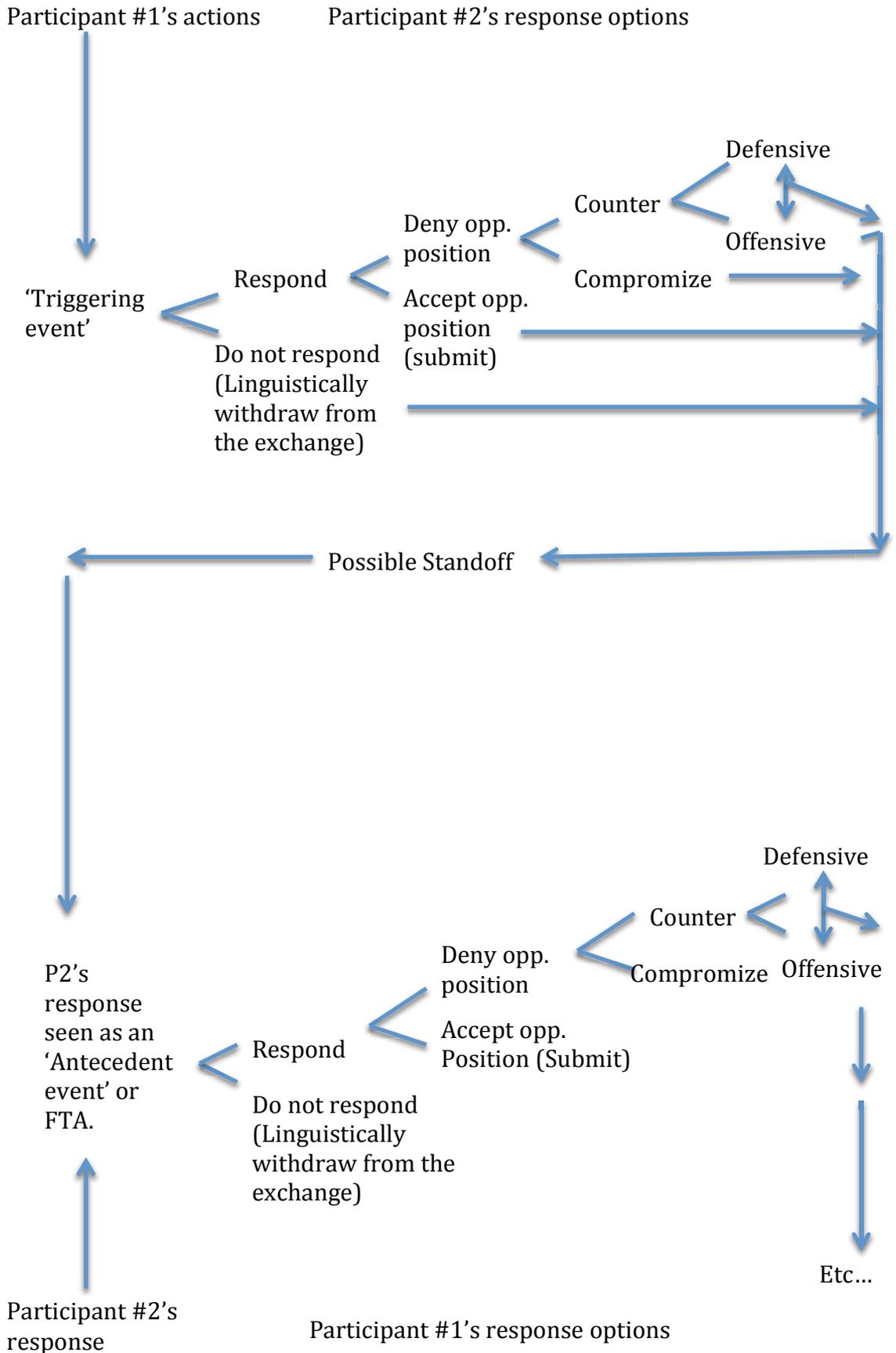


Figure 4. Response strategies to impoliteness (Bousfield 2008: 219)

Figure 4 exemplifies how an impolite event can unwrap itself. Figure 4 shows an interaction between two participants. The event begins with an impoliteness-triggering event from participant #1 that is then responded by participant #2. As Figure 4 presents participant #2 can respond in various different ways. If neither of the participants is willing to give ground to the other this can theoretically form an endless cycle.

3.9. Computer-mediated Communication and Impoliteness

There is an ongoing debate among researchers on terminology regarding computer-mediated communication (CMC) (c.f. Jucker and Dürscheid 2012). While I do acknowledge that CMC as a term may be out dated and there are other terms nowadays to be used such as Jucker and Dürscheid's (ibid.) term "keyboard-to-screen communication" or "KSC", the term CMC is still prevalent in many of the studies connected with my research (e.g. Sproull and Kiesler 1991; Hardacker 2010) and linguistic studies in general (Herring et al. 2013). This is why CMC is the term I chose to use in my paper.

CMC is an everyday method of communication for many. The Internet itself has become more than a source of entertainment and information. The Internet's usage for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships is increasing. As the communicative ability of the Internet increases, many linguistics and communication theorist have become more interested in researching CMC strategies (Locher 2006; Lu 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011). Sproull and Kiesler (1991: 58) state that, "[...] computer-based communication technology creates a new forum for human communication, one whose rules are not like those of any other forum". Furthermore, Claridge (2007: 87) states that,

Computer-mediated communication (CMC), especially the web-based public variety, has the potential to influence and partly transform the nature of public debate by uniting people with shared values and goals in a common cause – regardless of their separation in space and (potentially) time.

This makes CMC an interesting domain for impoliteness studies as it can be seen as somewhat a group based phenomenon that individuals contribute to.

According to Sproull and Kiesler (1991) the new social situation created by CMC makes traditional norms (e.g. striving to be polite) and expectations lose their status. Sproull and Kiesler (1991: 49) add that, “Electronic messages are often startlingly blunt, and electronic discussions can escalate rapidly into name calling and epithets, behavior that computer buffs call *flaming*”. Flaming suggests that in CMC actions and decisions may become more extreme and impulsive. This is also influenced by the fact that CMC is perceived as ephemeral (Sproull and Kiesler 1991). In CMC the group dynamics are different compared to face-to-face communication. Electronic communication is asynchronous, which makes taking turns redundant. Claridge (2007) states that especially discussion boards or forums on CMC are not only dialogic but rather polylogic. In addition to this, in CMC participation is more equal than in face-to-face discussions, which is due to issues with prestige and social status that are usually absent in CMC (Herring et al. 2002). Therefore, CMC offers a solid base for research on impoliteness as the amount of data is immense. However, many discussion forums and websites monitor the usage of taboo words and straight insults.

Another CMC phenomenon is *trolling* which is posting a comment that is intentionally controversial (Herring et al. 2002; Hardaker 2010). A post that is considered trolling does not have to be realistic or express writer’s own opinion, as the point of the post is to provoke people. Herring et al. (2002) point out that trolling and flaming are different in that flaming happens with an audience that is relatively small (e.g. electronic mail). A troll aims to provoke the more naïve and vulnerable readers. In actuality flaming and trolling often coalesce as both intent to disrupt the discussion and both can lead to argumentation. Hardaker (2010: 237) defines a troll as,

[...] a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement.

It must be noted that trolling is virtually impossible to detect, as the detection of such a comment is highly subjective. This may lead to false accusations when other users see it

as their own responsibility to elicit a troll in a conversation particularly to help the new users of a forum to identify a troll (Hardaker 2010).

It is important to remember that in CMC many aspects of face-to-face communication are missing. There is no clear way for the interlocutors to share paralinguistic cues such as gestures, voice or expressions through CMC (Kruger et al. 2005). There are various ways in which users of CMC try to portray their feelings and the hidden meanings of different utterances. The best-known strategies are emoticons, punctuation and capitalization (indicating shouting) (Crystal 2001). However, the majority of people use themselves as reference points when trying to express sarcasm, seriousness or emphasis (Kruger et al. 2005). This indicates that people are basically egocentric when using CMC and language in general (cf. Benveniste 1958), and what might be obvious to us is not necessarily that to others and miscommunication is likely to occur in these situations (Kruger et al. 2005).

Previous studies on CMC and (im)politeness include researching expressions of impoliteness and politeness on online chats (cf. Lu 2010), as well as from an American Internet health column (cf. Locher 2006). However, many previous researches have overlooked the possibilities to find data from comments on news articles that are available on various news websites (e.g. CNN, MSNBC). These comments are usually left anonymously and, depending on the topic, can offer heated debates where flaming and trolling can occur. Previous studies (e.g. Sproull and Kiesler 1991) have noticed that when a group is arranged to speak anonymously flaming was especially extreme. Therefore, the anonymity that occurs in this medium can increase the interlocutors' willingness to be impolite.

4. Data

The data was compiled from the United States of America version of CNN -website. From there an item of news was looked into more deeply and the conversation thread that followed this piece of news was analyzed through the use of a corpus tool. I picked the news item based on the amount of comments it had gathered. There was no criteria on the topic rather I wished for the news item to be current and the medium to be based in the United States of America.

In this case the piece of news comes from the U.S. edition of CNN entitled “‘War over Women’ kicks off Obama-Romney race”. As the title refers this piece of news was published close to the date³ when Mitt Romney was very likely to become the presidential candidate for the Republican party. The news piece discusses gender equality in the work force and the battle of the two candidates over the women voters. This piece of news was first published on the website on April 11th 2012 by Tom Cohen. The piece of news contains a video clip that is available on the same webpage. On the 30th of April 2012 the discussion that followed this news item had 5661 comments. However, the corpus of this study consists of the first 1125 of these comments. There are 54,699 tokens all together in the corpus. The corpus tool AntConc 3.2.4m (Anthony 2012) counted all separate markers as tokens.

4.1. Political dichotomy of the United States of America

As my data is collected from a conversation thread that follows a political news piece, it is pertinent to make a few notes of the political system and the political climate of the United States of America. In the U.S. the political system is basically bipartisan (Barone 2012). The two parties are those of the Republican party, sometimes referred to as the GOP or grand old party, which is considered to be more a conservative party and the Democratic party, which is considered to be a more liberal party (Judis 2012). The ideological dichotomy points, that the two parties can have difficulties when working together. Furthermore, Wayne (2011: 167) notes that,

³ April 3rd 2012 Romney had 49.26 per cent of the popular vote of the Maryland Republican primary and the next candidate had 28.72 per cent ("Maryland State Board of Elections". Elections.state.md.us. 2012-04-18. Retrieved 2012-07-19). At this point Romney was considered the winner or the Republican primaries.

Today, the parties continue to be distinctive in their policy orientations. Civility in political discourse has declined, as has the comity within Congress as well as between it and the White House. Warring partisan coalitions contest policy publicly rather than deliberate it quietly behind closed doors. Reaching compromise has become more arduous, and serving constituency interests remain key to reelection.

Then again, Burden and Kimball (2002) note that the ideological distinction of the two parties is not that clear cut and therefore, voters are at times quite lost when trying to find a candidate in any election be that congressional or presidential or something more local. In addition to this, Wayne (2011) states that the American media is in part guilty for the confusing political situation as the media tries to make the election news as captivating as possible, which then again, results in media coverage lacking substance.

Layman and Carmines (1997) note that the U.S. politics have become more cultural and value-based. Such cultural orientations as religious traditionalism and post-materialism significantly influence American political behaviors. This can be seen in the rise of conservative movements such as *the Tea-party movement*, which is a conservative branch of the Republican party, one of its most prominent members being the former Republican vice President candidate Sarah Palin (Barone 2012). Again, these different views offer a great point of departure for witnessing political dichotomy.

As mentioned above I did not intend to use a political news piece as the source for my data. The most important criteria for choosing the data was that the topic was current and it would evoke much conversation. The piece of news chosen had gathered 5661 comments in less than a month, and was therefore a good candidate. It is quite simple though to see reasons why this topic has evoked so much conversations when taking into account the political dichotomy of the United States of America.

4.2. Some problems and limitations with the data

There are some limitations within the data that need to be taken into account in this study. As noted above, some of the tokens in the data are repetitions of comments made earlier in the conversations and repeated later by other users. This will skew the data

slightly, but as there are close to 55,000 tokens in the data such repetitions are not considered to be a problem. Moreover, these cases do not appear in the comments that are qualitatively analyzed in this study. In addition to this, as can be seen from the discussions I have chosen as examples, the participants can directly respond to another user which is shown in the data as “in reply to [...]”. Although this is quite a regular phenomenon I do not think it skews the data to the extent of it being a problem. Moreover, I find it a useful tool when analyzing the aim of certain comments.

With CMC there are always demographic issues. Usually users sign in to discussion threads with a nickname. Sometimes these nicknames can give away the users age, sex or some demographic information, however, this is rare and heavily influenced by the researcher’s own perception. For my study demographic features are not relevant. I will focus on the linguistic structure of the conversations rather than examining the socio-economic or gender differences of the users.

As this study concentrates on impoliteness and on how people react to impoliteness, a noteworthy issue is the fact that most of the discussion boards on the websites of global news corporations are monitored and censored. The website for CNN gives clear community guidelines on what kind of language use should be avoided. For instance, “You agree not to upload, post or otherwise transmit any User Content that is offensive to the online community, including blatant expressions of bigotry, racism, abusiveness, vulgarity or profanity” (CNN 2010). In all, there are 16 points in the guidelines. Some of these immediately restrict the amount of data available for studying impoliteness and insults. However, some users are aware of these restrictions and have created innovative insults such as “m0r0n” which refers to the word “moron” with a different spelling that could slip through the moderators.

5. Methodology

The data is analyzed through methods that are relevant to an Impoliteness Realization (IR) study (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011). With a study that regards the realization and reaction to impoliteness, it is important to both explore the data manually and to provide numerical results for validating the conclusions. Therefore, a mixed-method approach is essential in order to get both quantitative and qualitative results. It should be noted that this study does not investigate the variation that may occur in an impoliteness interpretation study that searches “participants' explicit/implicit assessments of certain linguistic behavior as impolite according to relevant norms” (Lorenzo-Dus et al. 2011: 2582). While I agree that impoliteness interpretation is an important part of impoliteness studies, it would be virtually impossible to track down the users of the discussion board studied in order to get meaningful results.

As there is no ready-made corpus on comments found on online news websites I had to compile one. I compiled the corpus by the copy/paste function of copying the conversation threads to a text document. It was then used as a file on the free corpus tool AntConc 3.2.4m (Anthony 2012). These impolite utterances are located in the data by using AntConc KeyWord tool to search tokens from a word list of impolite adjectives. As there are no previous studies for impoliteness and insulting adjectives I had to create a list of insulting adjectives⁴. This I did by using methodology that was inspired by previous corpus studies on impoliteness metalinguistic labels (Culpeper 2011).

The list of adjectives was compiled with the help of the website of *Collins Dictionaries* (2012) and its thesaurus function for American English. Words that were synonymous to *stupid*, *foolish*, *childish*, *naïve* and *nasty* were then examined on *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* (Davies 2008) and the KWIC function was used to discover if the word does in reality have negative connotations. However, due to the size of the *COCA* i.e. 450 million words, it is virtually impossible to count how many times these negative connotations appear. Therefore, the adjectives chosen for closer studies are ones that intuitively connote something negative especially when part

⁴ Jucker and Taavitsainen (2008) use adjectives to find compliments and this has influenced my methodology.

of an impolite event. It is important to note that only the synonyms that could be found in the corpus compiled for this study are included. In addition to this, ambiguous expressions (e.g. *mean* and *simple*) are not included as the results for these words are very high in number and finding the desired connotations would be strenuous. As Table 2 shows five adjectives that are emphasized (*stupid*, *foolish*, *childish*, *naïve* and *nasty*) were closely examined with *Collins Dictionaries* (2012) to find their synonyms.

Table 2. Adjectives as they appear in my corpus and *COCA*.

Adjective	Appearance in my corpus	Appearance in <i>COCA</i>
Stupid	20	1675
Dumb	7	743
Simple-minded	1	42
Obtuse	1	82
Dim	2	583
Foolish	3	545
Idiotic	1	95
Pointless	1	202
Childish	5	122
Naïve	1	779
Nasty	2	970
Despicable	1	145
Bad	18	19259
Critical	2	6064
Dangerous	5	5365
Serious	2	10941

These adjectives could be analyzed as metalinguistic labels of impoliteness depending on their appearance.

With the help of these adjectives a total of 48 different conversations were found for closer analysis in this study. However, it is possible that there are more impolite events in the corpus that were not detected with the help of the chosen adjectives. After the impolite acts were detected from the corpus by using these metalinguistic labels they were then closely examined to find how they appear in impoliteness-triggering events, who is insulted in the event itself and the following conversation. Not only were these insults a point of interest in this study, but also the reactions of the other users were closely examined as well as the strategies used in the impoliteness-triggering events and the following conversations.

6. Results

In order to present clear and meaningful results I provide both numerical evidence and examples. The examples show how I have analyzed different comments. It should be noted that all emphasis (i.e. underlining) is my own and the grammatical errors in the examples are from the original comments and have not been corrected in order to keep the examples authentic. In addition to this, I have divided my results into different sections according to the research questions they refer to.

6.1. Insulting adjectives

In my data the chosen adjectives occurred 72 times (see Table 3). The adjectives appear in 48 different conversation threads. The conversation threads vary in length; the longest conversation thread has 14 comments and the shortest only one. However, further investigation shows that these adjectives rarely, or in fact only 13 times, appear in the impoliteness-triggering events as Table 3 exemplifies.

Table 3. Adjectives in triggering events

Adjectives in triggering events	13
Stupid	4
Dumb	1
Simple-minded	0
Obtuse	0
Dim	0
Foolish	0
Idiotic	1
Pointless	0
Childish	1
Naïve	1
Nasty	1
Despicable	0
Bad	2
Critical	0
Dangerous	2
Serious	0

Only 18,1 percent of the adjectives chosen for closer examination appear in impoliteness-triggering events. However, in all thirteen cases where the adjective

appears in the impoliteness-triggering event it is clearly aimed at the person insulted and refers to his/her actions. Therefore, my first research question on what role adjectives play in impoliteness-triggering events can be answered: these adjectives add to the force of the insult as examples (1) and (2) portray.

(1) swampgas33

its unpresidential and childish of a president to balme others for their own failure

AGoodwin

I guess that means most of our presidents have been childish.
in reply to swampgas33

edmondantes

WHAT IF HE HAS NOT FAILED?
in reply to swampgas33

Buckyfan24

No. However, it is "childish" to begin a sentence without a capital letter and end it without a period.
in reply to swampgas33

skytag

Trolling the web to annoy total strangers is one of the most childish behaviors I know.
in reply to swampgas33

Example (1) presents the usage of the adjective *childish* in both an impoliteness-triggering event as well as in the following conversation. In the impoliteness-triggering event by swampgas33⁵ *unpresidential* is already an insult towards President Obama. However, the adjective *childish* is added on the comment to make the comment even more insulting. The second comment by AGoodwin is rather sarcastic and repeats the adjective *childish*, which is again repeated in the fourth and fifth comments. In the fourth comment Buckyfan24 personally insults swampgas33 by criticizing his/her writing abilities. Then again, in the last comment of this chain the user skytag replies to swampgas33 using the superlative form of the adjective *childish* and questions his/her

⁵ Note: I use the user names in the form they appear in the data. For example, I do not correct capital letters as can be seen with the username swampgas33.

sincerity by calling the comments *trolling* i.e. provoking the other users with comments that are not his/her own opinion. This chain of comments shows how adjectives can be used and are used as adding to the insult as well as conveying impoliteness in the following questions.

In example (1) the adjective *childish* in the comments of Buckyfan24 and skytag that follow the impoliteness-triggering event by swampgas33, are used as metalinguistic labels for impoliteness. These comments criticize the impoliteness-triggering event. This is done by repeating the same adjective as swampgas33 uses in his/her comment. However, the comments by Buckyfan24 and skytag do reflect their attitude towards the impoliteness-triggering event as both users make it clear they do not agree with the triggering comment.

As examples (1) and (2) show, the adjectives are used as descriptors, but this is easily explained through the descriptive nature of the adjectives chosen for this study. However, it is clear that in my data insulting adjectives appear more in the conversation that follows the initial comment. The reason for this may be in the fact that there are more comments in the following conversation than there are impoliteness-triggering events. In my corpus there are 48 impoliteness-triggering events that I located with the help of the adjectives analyzed. It is difficult to prove or disprove my first hypothesis through these results without making generalizations. It is clear that more research on this topic is needed. Nevertheless, impolite adjectives have proven to be useful tools in detecting impolite events in corpus analysis.

6.2. The aim of impoliteness-triggering events

My second research question regards the aim of the impoliteness-triggering events. In my data majority of the impoliteness-triggering events consist of insults that are aimed towards a third person as the can be seen from Table 4.

Table 4. The aim of impoliteness-triggering events

3rd person	42
2nd person	6
All together	48

From the 3rd person insults 21 are aimed at President Obama. Mitt Romney is insulted five times, although in one case Romney's name is misspelled as Robmey. Both the Republicans and Liberals are insulted twice. There are various insults aimed at other groups or persons such as the tea party, right wingers and Dick Cheney. From the six cases of second person insults only two are aimed at other people taking part in the discussion. This indicates that in CMC the insults in impoliteness-triggering events are usually aimed at groups of people or people absent from the discussion as example (2) indicates,

(2) **LMarie59**

Not calling for new taxes or even upping the taxes was by far the most idiotic thing a President could have done. NO President in history, but one, has ever done this. It is in part why we are here. The deficit due to this will be carried until 2020 or better.

This comment makes one wonder, why heated debate and indeed, insults appear in CMC when the insults are not exclusively personal or directed to another interactant in the conversation, but rather aimed at people outside the conversation. This appears to have something to do with the participants' social identity face and how they associate themselves as a part of a group and an ideology.

6.3. Structure of the conversation following impoliteness-triggering events

My third research question focuses on the structure of the conversation following the impoliteness-triggering events. The impoliteness-triggering events are 44 times out of 48 followed by some kind of discussion as Table 5 indicates.

Table 5. The aim of insults in conversation following an impoliteness-triggering event.

The triggerer	30
A group	6
No conflict	7
No reply	4
3rd person (Obama)	1
All together	48

In 30 cases of the following discussion the triggerer of the impoliteness event is the one being insulted. This is 62.5 percent of all the cases. However, if only the cases where there appears to be a conflict are taken in to account the percentage rises from 62.5 to 81.1. This indicates that there exists a clear division between who is insulted in the triggering event and who in the following discussion. While the triggering events are more often aimed at a third party that is absent from the discussion, the following conversation is aimed at a participant of the on going conversation as can be seen from example (3).

(3) **swampgas33**

b.o.'s legacy will be his picture permanently on the food stamp

edmondantes

BUT IT WILL BE AN 8 YEAR EDITION. TOO BAD, SO SAD
FOR U

in reply to swampgas33

The triggering event is aimed at b.o. or Barack Obama. The following comment by the user edmondantes is clearly aimed at the triggerer, as can be seen from the personalized use of the second person pronoun *you* as well as the reply being made directly to the user swampgas33. It is also worth noting the capitalization of the letters, which according to Crystal (2001) may indicate that the response includes the sense of shouting.

My third research question regards not only who is insulted in the following conversation, but also the strategies used after the impoliteness-triggering events in the counter attack. There are different strategies for countering an impoliteness-triggering event (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). The response and the impoliteness-triggering events form pairs where the impoliteness triggering is offensive and the counter reaction can be either offensive or defensive. The starting point of my study is that impoliteness-triggering events are inherently offensive. The data analyzed in this study consist of 48 impoliteness-triggering events. These events are followed by conversation in 44 cases, and out of these 44 cases 37 have some kind of conflict. These 37 conversations have in all 215 comments including impoliteness-triggering events. In

all the following conversations consist of 178 comments. Table 6 shows the results for the counter attack strategies.

Table 6. The counter attack strategies used after an impoliteness-triggering event.

Counter attack strategy	Appears
Offensive	149
Defensive	29
Total	178

Of the comments 83.7 percent that follow an impoliteness-triggering event use the offensive counter-attack strategy. It is clear that the more prevalent counter-attack strategy in the data analyzed is offensive. Example (4) presents a short conversation where the offensive counter-attack strategy is used.

(4) **DerekFlint**

I still think we need to get a closer look at Barries birth certicate.
Trump knows the truth, but has been paid to keep
quiet.....TEAMERICA

Buckyfan24

The true tea-ba99ers are Birthers. The definition of dumb. These people are the most worthless human beings in this nation.
in reply to DerekFlint

In example (4) an impoliteness-triggering event is directed towards Barack Obama and his supporters. This is retaliated by another user with a direct offence towards another group (“tea-ba99ers” meaning the tea party) by using an inappropriate identity marker *tea-ba99ers* which refers to a sexual act. In Buckyfan24’s comment we can see how the users of the discussion board employ innovative means or in this case spelling to override the community guidelines (CNN 2010). In addition to this, Buckyfan24 explicitly associates the user with the tea party and calls them *dumb* as well as “most

worthless human beings in this nation”, or in other words making a personalized offence.

What is very interesting in my data is that there are no cases of countering an impoliteness-triggering event by compromise or even submission. As mentioned, agreement and therefore a lack of conflict appears in the data seven times. These cases can have impoliteness strategies (e.g. sarcasm) in them, but no conflict appears. In addition to this, there are four situations where a conflict is avoided by the no-response strategy.

6.4. Superstrategies used in impolite events

The impoliteness superstrategies used for analyzing the impolite events in this study are provided by Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008). These superstrategies are introduced in section 3.3. Table 7 presents to what extent these superstrategies appear in my data. It should be noted that Table 7 presents only the superstrategies that appear in the data analyzed.

As mentioned, there are 215 comments in my data from which 37 appear in impoliteness-triggering events and 178 appear in the subsequent conversations. Table 7 shows that positive impoliteness, i.e. the impoliteness superstrategies that are aimed at the positive face, are more common in the comments that follow the impoliteness-triggering events while both negative and positive impoliteness strategies have even usage in impoliteness-triggering events. Not surprisingly on-record impoliteness is more commonly used than off-record impoliteness in both impoliteness-triggering events as well as the conversations following them.

Table 7. The appearance of impoliteness superstrategies in the data analyzed.

SUPERSTRATEGIES	Following conversation	Triggering event
ON-RECORD IMPOLITENESS	183	58
POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS	106	29
”Ignore/snub the other”	0	1
”Exclude other from activity”	5	0
“Dissociate from other”	23	8
“Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic”	28	1
“Use inappropriate identity markers”	5	8
“Seek disagreement”	4	7
“Use taboo words”	3	1
“Call the other names”	38	3
NEGATIVE IMPOLITENESS	77	29
“Frighten”	3	0
“Condescent, scorn, ridicule”	34	6
“Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect”	40	23
OFF-RECORD IMPOLITENESS	30	0
“Sarcasm”	30	0
WITHHOLD POLITENESS	54	13
“Criticize”	22	8
“Enforce role shift”	2	
“Challenge”	30	5
Total usage	267	71

As Table 7 shows different impoliteness superstrategies can be used and are used in one single comment. Furthermore, this is presented in example (5).

(5) **John P. Tarver**

Many middle aged black men find themselves impotent at Obama's age.

burnout321

and old men like you have been proven to be senile and lose any reasonable thinking abilities. You shouldn't post pictures of you being so old and looking senile and making stupid comments. But being senile, I guess I understand.

in reply to John P. Tarver

Buckyfan24

John P. Tarver continues to show that he is a racist.
in reply to John P. Tarver

greenscreen

What the????
in reply to John P. Tarver

The first comment or the impoliteness-triggering event in example (5) uses the superstrategies of “condescend, scorn, ridicule” and “explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect”. This is done by questioning President Obama’s virility and associating him with elderly people. It is rather obvious that there is no evidence for this claim and it is definitely used to evoke negative feelings from others. The following comment by burnout321 that defends President Obama uses the impoliteness superstrategies of “use inappropriate identity markers”, “explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect”, “condescend, scorn, ridicule” and “call the other names”. burnout321 calls John P. Tarver explicitly *a senile* which according to *OED* (2012) is “An aged person; one who exhibits the weakness or diseases of old age”. Buckyfan24 explicitly associates the other with a negative aspect by calling John P. Tarver *a racist*. Then again, from Buckyfan24’s following comment it is noticeable that the user John P. Tarver is a frequent contributor to the comment site and this makes one wonder if he is *a troll* or trolling the conversation. However, detecting a troll is highly subjective and not in the scope of this study, but the possibility of trolling should be noted. To conclude the closer examination of this conversation thread, the last comment by greenscreen can be seen as sarcasm as it indicates a disbelief of the previous comments and uses deviating punctuation.

My fourth research question focuses on the superstrategies of calling the other names and sarcasm. I will now look at examples in detail for both superstrategies. For clarity, Table 8 presents the amount in which these two superstrategies appear in the data analyzed.

Table 8. Appearance of the superstrategies of “call the other names” and “sarcasm”.

SUPERSTRATEGIES	Following conversation	Triggering event
“Call the other names”	38	3
“Sarcasm”	30	0

In total, impoliteness superstrategies are used 267 times in the conversation following an impoliteness-triggering event. The impoliteness superstrategy of “call the other names” appears in 14.2 percent of the cases. Sarcasm appears in 11.2 percent of the cases, and in all but one of these cases sarcasm is portrayed with at least one irony marker. Irony markers are the use of amplifiers, ellipsis, punctuation, emoticons and adapted vocalization signals (e.g. *haha*, *mmm*) (Hancock 2004). In addition to this Hancock (ibid.) notes that adjectives and adverbials can be used as verbal cues for irony when used in an evaluative sense. However, I will not look at adjectives as verbal cues for irony but rather as exacerbating the offensiveness of impoliteness.

In impoliteness-triggering events, different impoliteness superstrategies appear 71 times. Out of these 71 times, name-calling makes only 4.2 percent of the cases which is not a very high percentage when compared to other impoliteness superstrategies, such as “explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect”. It appears in 32.4 percent of all the cases of superstrategies used in impoliteness-triggering events. An interesting point is that sarcasm does not appear at all in impoliteness-triggering events. The reason for this is likely the fact that impoliteness-triggering events aim to evoke conflict and sarcasm as an impoliteness superstrategy is easily misinterpreted.

Example (6) presents a conversation thread where both sarcasm and call other names is used in the conversation following an impoliteness-triggering event.

(6) Save America

Obama win on his past record.Ha ha ha haaaaaaaaaaaaa Obama has bin failer since day he was born stupid Muslim

RationalDoc

Don't drink and type.
in reply to Save America

leftis4ward

Ignorant hill jack! He doesnt need your uninformed vote anyway!
In reply to Save America

CallmeIshmae

Uhh, yeah, right...Obama is the stupid one. "eye roll"
in reply to Save America

JonesMatthew

Racist.
in reply to Save America

lemonbelly

Just so you know, your grammar doesn't imply that you were born a smart American.
in reply to Save America

While the first comment by the user Save America contains irony markers (*Ha ha ha* etc.) it cannot be analyzed as sarcastic. In fact, I would classify this as pragmatic noise (cf. Culpeper and Kytö 2010). Then again, the second comment by RationalDoc is sarcastic as it takes the common saying “Don’t drink and drive” and changes the concept to refer to drunk typing. The comment implies that Save America must have been under the influence of alcohol to write his comment, and therefore should not be taken seriously. The third comment by leftis4ward uses name calling by referring to Save America as *Ignorant hill jack*. This name-calling can be seen as rather innovative as it does imply that the other is somehow intellectually challenged but does not state it overtly. Then again, the user CallmeIshmae’s comment is clearly sarcastic. The comment contains irony markers (*Uhh, yeah, right*) and the paralinguistic cue of an eye roll (“*eye roll*”) although in written format. JonesMatthew’s comment can be considered as name-calling, however, it can also be classified as explicitly associating with a negative aspect. The last comment in this conversation thread can be seen as sarcastic, but it is too explicit to clearly classify as such.

There are only three cases where name-calling appears in an impoliteness-triggering event. In all three cases the name-calling is aimed at a third person absent from the conversation. This trend can be seen from example (7).

(7) AgMax

Barack 'the poverty pimp' Obama will soon be nothing more than a bad memory.

JonesMatthew

Recent polls disagree.

in reply to AgMax

AgMax

Really? Presidential Tracking Poll for Wednesday shows that 27% of the nation's voters Strongly Approve of the way that Barack Obama is performing his role as president. Forty percent (40%) Strongly Disapprove, giving Obama a Presidential Approval Index rating of -13

in reply to AgMax

In his first comment on this discussion thread the user AgMax calls President Obama *the poverty pimp*. Again, this is an innovative use of name-calling as this implies that President Obama is somehow enabling the increase of poverty as the word *pimp* implies that he is involved in prostitution and in this case the prostitution of poverty. In addition, as mentioned above, this comment is not exclusively aimed at a certain participant of the conversation, but rather towards the President and his supporters. This comment can be seen as an attempt to evoke conflict. The only other participant JonesMatthew seemingly ignores the impolite part of this utterance (i.e. the name-calling), and focuses on the claim that President Obama will be succeeded by the Republican candidate Mitt Romney. In this conversation thread impoliteness superstrategies, and especially name-calling appear. However, the event is rather one sided and a clear conflict is missing, even though the user AgMax tries to evoke a conflict with two comments.

In the data analyzed sarcasm does not appear in impoliteness-triggering events. However, it does appear in comments following impoliteness-triggering events as can be seen in example (6). Sarcasm is used in 11.2 percent of all the superstrategies in the conversations following impoliteness-triggering events. Example (8) further points out how sarcasm is used in comments following impoliteness-triggering events.

(8) **qwerty11**

There are a few in the white guilt lib crowd that still are actually trying to defend the hapless leadership that Obama has imposed on us.

JonesMatthew

Like saving our economy, or the auto industry or student loan debt consolidation. Yes, all hapless. [eye rolling]

in reply to qwerty11

richmanni

obama hasn't imposed anything on us you melodramatic dingleberry.

in reply to qwerty11

edmondantes

QWERTY=RACIST

in reply to qwerty11

destro007

Ur idea of leadership is protect corporations and abandon middle class and the poor. Dont need that.

in reply to qwerty11

burnout321

Qwerty is too stupid to be a racist. qwerty is a paid troll... not even smart enough to make up his own material. He probably wears a white sheet over his head, but its only because he thinks its a shirt with no sleeves or hole for his little head.

in reply to qwerty11

In this conversation the user JonesMatthew uses sarcasm to indicate that he disagrees with the user qwerty11. Sarcasm is quite easy to detect as he includes the paralinguistic cue of eye rolling, [eye roll] in his comment. The rest of this conversation thread does not include sarcasm but rather name calling such as melodramatic *dingleberry*, *racist* and *paid troll*.

Sarcasm is indicated in the comments in various different ways. It seems that sarcasm is realized in CMC often through some irony marker as noted in examples (6) and (8). Furthermore, example (9) shows this.

(9) Copperbug

The Koch Brothers funding Romney ... 'nuff said.

greenscreen

Romney 2012!

in reply to Copperbug

KingObango

Solyndra funding Obama. 'Nuff said

in reply to Copperbug

richmanni

oh lordy, a green energy corporation funding the president... so much worse than a military contractor funding the president.

in reply to KingObango

FRAILEYS4

What, because the Koch brothers are rich... they are bad people?

in reply to Copperbug

edmondantes

NO THEY ARE BAD BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY DO WITH THEIR MONEY.

in reply to FRAILEYS4

srmmedia

Ron Paul will run third party if not nominated .. Romney will never be POTUS .. NUFF SAID

in reply to Copperbug

This conversation starts out with the user Copperbug criticizing Romney and his campaign funding. While the second comment just shows support for Romney, in the third comment the user KingObango uses mimicry by repeating the impression *'nuff said*. Although mimicry is not categorized as an irony marker in previous studies on sarcasm and irony on CMC (cf. Hancock 2004), I would analyze it as such. Mimicry

can be seen as a strategy to be sarcastic by using the words of the other participant. However, this is a case of covert use of sarcasm. Then again, following KingObango's comment richmanni is clearly sarcastic as he/she uses an adapted vocalizing signal and the impression *oh lordy* and implying that green energy is bad for the world. The rest of the conversation does not have sarcasm although mimicry appears again in the last comment. I would analyze the comment by srmmedia as challenging rather than sarcasm even though there is the element of mimicry.

As mentioned there are irony markers that can be used to produce irony or sarcasm in a conversation in CMC (Hancock 2004). These irony markers are the use of amplifiers, ellipsis, punctuation, emoticons and adapted vocalization signals. Table 9 presents how these irony markers as well as mimicry, which I will treat as an irony marker, appear in the data analyzed.

Table 9. Irony markers used in the data.

Amplifiers	3
Ellipsis	8
Punctuation	12
Emoticons	3
Adapted vocalization Signals	4
Mimicry	3
Total	33

As Table 9 presents, there are 33 instances of an irony marker in my data. It should be noted that I analyzed only the irony markers that I found in comments that I classified as sarcastic or ironic. Among these comments there was only one utterance that did not contain any irony markers. This utterance was "Don't drink and type" and was presented in example (6). The most common irony marker in the data is punctuation. I would argue that it is an easy method to use when conveying sarcasm or irony but it can be applied to convey other feelings or emotions such as surprise (e.g. Really?!). The second most used irony marker is ellipsis. Again this method is used in CMC in many places not for the sake of conveying irony or sarcasm but other feelings. Therefore, when drawing conclusions from such irony markers one should be careful.

In my data there are three cases where two irony markers occur within a same comment. One of these comments is presented in example (10).

(10) **JonesMatthew**

Like saving our economy, or the auto industry or student loan debt consolidation. Yes, all hapless. [eye rolling]
in reply to qwerty11

This comment is part of the conversation of example (8). Here we can see the irony markers of ellipsis and emoticons. I analyzed the paralinguistic cue *[eye rolling]* as an emoticon as it does imply a certain facial expression a person could perform to indicate sarcasm. The ellipsis in this sentence is quite clear and does not need further discussion.

In my data there appears one case where three irony markers are used in one utterance and this is presented in example (11).

(11) **richmanni**

oh lordy, a green energy corporation funding the president... so much worse than a military contractor funding the president.
in reply to KingObango

The comment in example (11) is a part of the conversation found in example (9). The comment by the user richmanni contains the irony markers of adapted vocalized signals, punctuation and amplifiers in the form of comparative *so much worse*.

As noted in section 6.2. the aim of impoliteness-triggering events is usually on the third person. This trend is followed with the superstrategy of name-calling as Table 10 presents.

Table 10. The aim of name-calling and sarcasm

	2 nd person	3 rd person
Triggering events		
Name calling	0	3
Other		
Name calling	17	21
Other		
Sarcasm	16	14

The name calling in impoliteness-triggering events is aimed at a third person, which follows the common trend among the aim of impoliteness-triggering events. However, in the comments following impoliteness-triggering events there is slight difference among the aim for sarcasm: 2nd person aim appears in 53.3 percent of the cases and 3rd person aim in 48.2 percent of the cases. Then again, for name calling there is a difference: 2nd person aim appears in 44.7 percent of the cases and 3rd person aim 55.3 percent. It seems that sarcasm is portrayed to be easier to use against the second person as it is a more covert and an indirect impoliteness superstrategy than name-calling that is used more for the third person insults.

7. Discussion

This study set out to detect how impoliteness is realized and structured in CMC. The aim was to discover how laypeople use impoliteness and its various implementations in conversation that follows a political news piece on the CNN U.S. news website. In order to observe the structure of impolite events in CMC from different angles four research questions were given. In addition to this, I gave four hypotheses and a more general goal for the study.

The point of departure was the analysis of different insulting adjectives and how they are used in impoliteness triggering events in CMC. This approach may seem unexpected as impolite adjectives have not been studied before. However, this proved to be a useful tool for detecting impolite events in the vast amount of data I had. I hypothesized that insulting adjectives would appear in impoliteness-triggering events in the data since CMC is not subjected to the same rules as face-to-face communication. Moreover, I expected that impoliteness-triggering events would be aimed at a second person rather than a third person as had been the case in previous studies (cf. Culpeper et al. 2003, Bousfield 2008). In addition to this, I hypothesized that impolite events would be countered with defensive strategies rather than offensive ones and that sarcasm would appear more frequently in the data than the impoliteness superstrategy of calling the other names as the discussion board is moderated.

7.1. Answers to the research questions

The first research question of this study considered the structure of impoliteness-triggering events and more precisely, are adjectives used in impoliteness-triggering events. It was hypothesized that adjectives would appear in impoliteness-triggering events as traditional roles of the language disappear in CMC. While insulting adjectives did appear in impoliteness-triggering events 13 times, this is still only 18.1 percent of all the appearances of the selected adjectives. However, as stated before this is due to the imbalance of the data: more comments appear in the following conversations than in the impoliteness-triggering events. More data is needed in order to specify the purpose for using adjectives in impoliteness-triggering events, although in my study adjectives were used exacerbate the offence.

The second research question aimed to specify who is insulted in the impoliteness-triggering events. Previous studies on television shows (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008) have noted that an impoliteness-triggering event is usually aimed at the second person involved and taking part in the interaction. This was the hypothesis for my study. However, in CMC the impoliteness-triggering events are usually aimed at a third person. This is easily explained by the nature of CMC being asynchronous and anonymous. Furthermore, it is impossible to know who is looking through these conversations when there is no face-to-face contact. This can be a factor for some users that want to evoke conflict. It is easier to insult a third party in an anonymous domain and evoke these conflicts among the supporters of different groups or ideologies. It is clear that the impolite events in the data analyzed are connected with social identity face, group membership and ideologies.

The third research question aimed to expose who is insulted in the comments that follow an impoliteness-triggering event and what counter-attack strategies are used. As the results show, most of the insults in the following conversations are aimed at the triggerer of the impolite event. This is the case in 81.1 percent of the instances where there appears to be a conflict. The percentage is very high. This is an interesting point as most of the impoliteness-triggering events are aimed at a third party that is highly likely to be personally absent from the conversation (e.g. President Obama and Mitt Romney). This proves again that social identity face, group membership and ideologies are factors to be taken into account when analyzing impolite events in CMC. In addition to this, impoliteness-triggering events are countered with an offensive counter attack in 83.7 percent of the conversations where there appears to be a conflict or conversation. However, the third hypothesis of this study states that impoliteness-triggering events are retaliated with a defensive counter attack strategy. This hypothesis is clearly not fulfilled in the data analyzed. In 77.1 percent of the conversation threads analyzed there appears retaliation. Moreover, out of the 178 comments in these conflictive conversation threads 83.7 percent are offensive. This proves that the counter-attack strategies used are offensive towards the other's positive face. The reason for this must lie again in the anonymous nature of CMC. Offensive attacks are somewhat easy to make as there is basically no reason to expect that one is offending someone he/she might know or ever meet face to face.

In previous studies (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008) offensive-offensive pair is not noted as a pattern of impolite conversation as there have been some social and situational constraints that limit the interlocutors. However, this study proves that offensive-offensive pairs do exist and these structures appear frequently in CMC. The reason for this is the lack of demographic information as well as the lack of information on participants' social backgrounds due to anonymity. Interactants in CMC are equal or at least, seemingly equal.

My fourth research question focuses on impoliteness superstrategies, especially sarcasm and calling the other names. As the results show both of these strategies are used in comments that follow an impoliteness-triggering event. However, sarcasm does not appear in impoliteness-triggering events. This is easily explained by the fact that impoliteness-triggering events aim to evoke conflict. The use of sarcasm in impoliteness-triggering events is nonexistent as sarcasm can be difficult for others to interpret. In addition, as seen from the examples, the comments in my data are usually short and there is no room or desire for a user to give the other all the background knowledge needed to interpret a sarcastic comment. Nevertheless, sarcasm does appear in the data analyzed 30 times in the comments following an impoliteness-triggering event. Sarcasm is indicated in all but one of these 30 cases with at least one irony marker. The most popular irony marker in my data was punctuation that appeared in twelve cases. Furthermore, sarcasm is more commonly aimed at a second person in the conversation rather than a third person. This indicates that the covert and indirect of sarcastic insults are used with more personal impoliteness.

Name calling in CMC is a rather common superstrategy. It appears in 14.2 percent of all the cases in conversation following an impoliteness-triggering event and in 4.2 percent of the cases in impoliteness-triggering events. However, I hypothesized the opposite and expected name-calling to be barely used in the conversations. Name-calling is used more often to refer to the third person in the conversation. The impoliteness superstrategy of name-calling is used somewhat innovatively as the discussions on the CNN website is moderated. Innovative name-calling is quite apparent in the data analyzed. The following different ways of calling the other names are found in the data:

*Foolish troll, a tool, cowards, genius, bozo, Obozo (refers to President Obama), poverty pimp, zombies, war dodging coward, rightwing nincompoops, lemmings, clown, war mongering Neocon puppet candidate, O'bomya, republican gods, silly tea party, flip-flopper puppet, the thieving democrats, idiot (x 3), losers, loser (x 2), stupid liberals (x 2), liberal fruitcake, melodramatic dingleberry, racist (x 5), paid troll, senile, Ignorant hilljack, cr*cker, Dubbya (refers to George W. Bush), worthless Birther, Birthers and a dim.*

In all name-calling appears 42 times in the data analyzed. Furthermore, I counted 32 different epithets that are used in the conversations. This suggests that name calling in CMC is innovative. In addition, as noted in the discussion about adjectives, adjectives are often used to add to the force of insult. As a further note, for example all the three cases where the term “idiot” is used are by the same user richmanni. Moreover, there are in all 77 users in all the conversations analyzed and as stated there are 215 comments. This means that users often contribute more than one comment to the conversations. However, analyzing how users contribute to the conversations is not in the scope of this study.

7.2. General goal of the study

The general goal of this study was to map how impoliteness events are realized in CMC and especially in a discussion board that is used to comment on a piece of news. As the results for my research questions show, impoliteness events are realized differently in my data than was expected. The main reason for this is that my hypotheses were based on studies on face-to-face impoliteness (Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008). However, the language used to convey impoliteness in my data did not follow my hypotheses. Sproull and Kiesler (1991) note that in CMC the rules that guide face-to-face conversations become redundant. Therefore, I expected the impoliteness triggering events in my data to be colorful and full of insulting adjectives, but this did not happen. Another aspect that I expected due to prior studies was that the impoliteness superstrategy of sarcasm would appear more in the data than calling the other names (cf. Hancock 2004). Then again, this was a highly experimental hypothesis as there are no

previous studies made of name-calling and CMC. In addition to this, the hypothesis was based on previous studies on the use of irony in CMC (ibid.) and even though irony and sarcasm are connected there are still some crucial differences between the two, for example the aim (see sections 3.3.2.).

While the four hypotheses did not hold in the light of the evidence, there are still a few interesting points that can be made on the basis of the results in regards of the general goal of this study. The examples chosen for this paper show that in CMC, and especially in my data, the interlocutors use innovative language to get over the constraints of a discussion board where language use is moderated. Insults do not use taboo language as it is not permitted on the discussion boards but they use the superstrategy of calling the other names very innovatively. In addition to this, users of such discussion boards do use paralinguistic cues (i.e. “eye roll”) in order to get their point through to the others (e.g. portray sarcasm). However, these paralinguistic cues appear in the data analyzed only three times, but in all these cases the user is trying to convey sarcasm.

As I was conducting my study on this randomly chosen data I became more aware of the fact that this data actually conveys the feelings and opinions of the layperson. This brings an interesting perspective to my study. While this was not a concern for my research I feel like some conclusions can be drawn. For example my data portrays the dichotomy of the political atmosphere in the United States of America. The impoliteness-triggering events are usually aimed at one of the presidential candidates of the 2012 elections or one of the parties but still conflicts arise. In the CMC data chosen for this study social identity face, group membership and ideological views have a great role. In addition to this, data from this kind of source may indicate something about the layperson’s skills to interpret different sources of medium (i.e. to detect trolls). However, this was not a focus point of my study, and therefore should be studied in the future.

7.3. Reliability of the study

Detecting impoliteness in any conversation is highly subjective. Detecting impoliteness in CMC and analyzing it is in my point of view a more difficult task than doing the

same with face-to-face conversations. There are no phonological or facial markers to help. I do acknowledge that there may be comments that I have analyzed as sarcastic for instance when to others they would not seem such. While it is important to note the subjective aspect in my study, I have tried to achieve a more objective point of view.

Another important notion in regards of the reliability of this study is the notion of trolling. There is evidence in my data that show that even the participants are aware of the notion of trolling. However, it is difficult and virtually impossible to say which comment is a troll and how does detecting a troll affect another participant's actions on these discussions. This again is an issue about the skills to interpret different sources of media. I have stated before that trolling and its various aspects are not in the scope of this study. Then again, in studying online conversations and especially conflict situations in these conversations it is something that should not be overlooked. I think that the reliability of my study may be more at risk from this trolling point of view than my own subjectivity.

8. Conclusion

The methodology of this study is a novel application of a corpus methodology similar to Culpeper's (2011) for mapping out the metadiscourse of impoliteness. Insulting adjectives have not yet been used to locate impolite events in corpus studies. This proved to be a rather fruitful approach, although there are some limitations as the list of adjectives is somewhat subjective even though I tried to use adjectives that have negative connotations.

While the results of this study are promising the data analyzed is rather limited. Further research should be conducted on the language used in various discussion boards available to anyone online in order to make more reliable and far-reaching generalizations. Another important point to mention is that this study more or less ignores the layperson's view. There is no way in which the participants of these conversations could be contacted and asked whether or not they found these seemingly impolite comments insulting in the moment they were produced and if these comments were even meant to be perceived as impolite. In addition to this, the emotions these conversations evoke on others cannot be examined. Moreover, it is clear that emotions play a role in these conversations. The emotions involved in these conversations should be studied, however, that is highly problematic from the methodological point of view.

It should be noted that while my study ignores the layperson's view in regards to impoliteness realization, it does still focus on the language used by the laypeople. Even though I do not have any demographic information of any of the users it is highly unlikely that all the comments would be provided by people involved in the academia, let alone the field of impoliteness. Therefore, I am confident that the language analyzed here is that of the laypeople. In addition to this, the language in the data analyzed portrays the laypeople's view of the political situation in the United States of America to some extent. However, it should be noted that there is no way in which I could map out the sincerity of the participants and my assumption of the language reflecting the attitudes of the laypeople may be too abrupt. Moreover, this is a subject that should be studied more.

In my personal life I have found that comments on news pieces can offer interesting views and values of the layperson. Therefore, I am convinced that the study of this medium is important. As my study shows impoliteness can appear anywhere and in many forms. Impoliteness does not have to be triggered by abusive or offensive language but rather through comments that others may disagree with. In the beginning of this study I assumed that impoliteness is realized in the same way in CMC as in face-to-face conversations. This general hypothesis did not hold. CMC appears to be a medium highly different and in some ways incomparable. It is a medium where people can provoke others in ways that are virtually impossible in face-to-face communication. It is a unique form of communication and gives researchers of language in use many opportunities that should be grabbed in the near future.

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