

Linguistic Impoliteness and Social Disruption in Literary Discourse

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Abstract

Communicative strategies that are employed to promote and maintain social harmony have always been the focus of politeness theories or politeness phenomenon (Culpeper, 1996: 349). However, little research has been conducted in the field of politeness studies to examine communicative strategies with the opposite orientation, i.e., the communicative strategies that are used to disrupt social harmony. In other words, linguistic means of attacking 'face' causing social conflict or disruption have not been given enough focus in research on politeness especially in literary discourse. The present study aims at examining the model of 'impoliteness', as first proposed by Culpeper (1996) and as revised and developed later by Culpeper et al (2003) and Culpeper (2005), in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* to see how intentional impoliteness can attack face and how addressees respond to this offensive act. To do so, the researcher will analyze two extracts from this novel to illustrate how impoliteness strategies can help in reflecting social disharmony among characters in terms of 'face' and 'sociality rights' components and in elaborating on some character traits as well since impoliteness is an essential part of the communicative process.

Keywords: impoliteness, social harmony/disruption, linguistic strategies of impoliteness, face and sociality rights.

Introduction:

A linguistic approach to a literary work can help reveal the role which impoliteness plays, in addition to the social variables, in explicating the characters' verbal interaction. In other words, several linguistic forms that disclose a joint perception of social distance and power, and consequently reflect impoliteness, can be spotted in some instances of the characters' verbal interaction.

The relative social power and social distance are basic components of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) canonical theory of politeness which has been the focus of many attempts at understanding the linguistic mechanisms at work in asymmetric discourse instances. The same components play a vital role in reflecting on impoliteness and as has been shown in many applications where the focus is on oral instances of dialogue and where the tendency in discourse

studies is on looking into interpersonal, face-to-face exchanges. Less effort has been done on written texts, let alone literary ones (Ermida, 2006). This paper is intended with the aim of filling this gap by focusing on literary discourse, more specifically on Montgomery's novel *Anne of Green Gables*.

This paper will begin by briefly reviewing impoliteness as a counter part of politeness and as proposed by Culpeper (1996, 1998) and as modified later by Culpeper et al. (2003) and Culpeper (2005). It will then apply some of the conceptual framework to the analysis of two speech events: the speech event representing Anne-Rachel's first meeting in chapter nine and the other event is extracted from chapter fifteen of Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* where Anne finds herself in a situation through which she unveils what others consider rebelliousness or even rudeness when she brakes the slate on Gilbert Blythe's head in the classroom upon calling her 'carrots'.

What is impoliteness?

It is well-known that people usually use linguistic strategies to maintain or promote harmonious social relations. Brown and Levinson (1987:1) claim that politeness "makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties". Leech (1983: 82) believes that politeness is the "maintenance of social equilibrium". But equilibrium and harmony do not always win out (Cashman, 2006). Still, there are other times in which people use linguistic strategies to attack face or to strengthen the face threat of an act, i.e. they tend to be impolite and Culpeper (1996) uses the term "impoliteness" to refer to this case. So, impoliteness, to Cashman (2006) is not to be seen as "failed politeness but as instrumental and even functional". That's why the subject of impoliteness has become increasingly popular as an object of study in recent years (Culpeper, 1996; Bousfield and Locher, 2008; Limberg, 2009). Culpeper et al. (2003: 1564) define impoliteness as "communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony". An example like '*You must have shit for brains*', (in criticizing an essay, for instance) could be interpreted, given suitable context, as extreme positive impoliteness for several reasons: 'shit' is a taboo word, the criticism is personalized through the use of 'you', and the speaker flouts the maxim of quality to implicate the impolite belief that the person referred to 'has no intelligence'. While an utterance like '*It was bad*', describing the same situation, could be interpreted as polite or impolite depending on the context:

For example, if it were not part of someone's role (as a tutor, say) to make the criticism, and if it were known that the addressee was particularly sensitive to the criticism, then '*It was bad*' would seem to be impolite it should be noted that the key difference between politeness and impoliteness is a matter of intention: whether it is the speaker's intention to support face (politeness) or to attack face (impoliteness) (Culpeper, 1998: 86).

To account for the aspect of impoliteness, Culpeper (1996) proposes an impoliteness framework which is parallel but opposite to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness to account for some contexts where 'impoliteness activity' is not a marginal activity but an essential part of the communicative process. Actually, there were a number of calls to include hostile communication or confrontational discourse within personal communication by some researchers such as Craig et al. (1986), Tracy (1990), Lakoff (1989), Penman (1990), and Liu (1986) who investigated politeness in the Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansion* and discussed impoliteness as an extension of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987).

Before enlisting the linguistic impoliteness strategies, the researcher finds it useful to account for two points. First, close friends are more likely to have close identity of face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 64) and sometimes 'intimacy' is taken to mean 'affect', therefore expect less concern for face when the relationship is one of dislike (Culpeper, 1996: 355) and this is typical of Anne's reaction towards both Mrs. Rachel, the neighbor, and Gilbert Blythe, the school mate, with whom she had nothing but a feeling of dislike. Second, a characteristic feature of impoliteness in 'equal relationships', where they lack default mechanism by which one participant achieves the upper hand, is its tendency to escalate where an insult can easily lead to a counter-insult and when it becomes the best way to save face in the light of verbal attack is to counter attack (Harris et al., 1986). Verbal aggression sometimes escalates into physical violence as when Anne, for instance, hits Gilbert Blythe with a Slater on the head when he calls her "Carrots" to criticize her red hair while they are attending their class in chapter fifteen of *Anne of Green Gables*.

Impoliteness strategies

Impoliteness is very much the parasite of politeness and the impoliteness super-strategies are the opposite of politeness super-strategies; opposite in terms of orientation to face. Instead of enhancing or supporting face, impoliteness super-strategies are a means of attacking face and causing social disharmony. Culpeper (1996: 350) defines impoliteness as the use of strategies to attack the interlocutor's face and create social disruption. For this he suggests the following super-strategies:

Bald on record impoliteness

Here the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized. It is important to distinguish this strategy from Brown and Levinson's bald on record. For Brown and Levinson, bald on record is a 'politeness' strategy in fairly specific circumstances, for example, when face concerns are suspended in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g. 'Come on' or 'Do sit down'), or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer (e.g. 'Stop complaining' said by a parent

to a child). In all these cases little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer (Culpeper, 1996).

Positive impoliteness

This strategy is designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants through the following:

1. Ignore or snub the other.
2. Exclude the other from the activity
3. Dissociate from the other
4. Be disinterested
5. Use inappropriate identity markers
6. Use obscure or secretive language
7. Seek disagreement
8. Make the other feel uncomfortable
9. Use taboo words
10. Call the other names (Culpeper, 1996: 357).

Negative impoliteness

This strategy is designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants through the following:

1. Frighten
2. Condescend, scorn or ridicule
3. Invade the other's space
4. Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect, put the other's indebtedness on record (Culpeper, 1996: 358).

Sarcasm or mock politeness

The FTA, here, is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realizations. Culpeper's understanding of sarcasm is close to Leech's (1983) conception of irony "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature" (1983:82). This is of course the opposite of Brown and Levinson's social harmony that is achieved through off-record politeness. One more point to add is that 'sarcasm' (mock politeness for social disharmony) is clearly the opposite of 'banter' (mock impoliteness for social harmony) (Culpeper, 1996: 356).

Withhold politeness

To Culpeper (1996) withhold politeness means the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. Brown and Levinson (1987: 5) touch on the face-damaging implications of withholding politeness work by saying that "...politeness has to be communicated, and the absence of communicated politeness may be taken as the absence of a polite attitude".

Cashman (2006) states that Culpeper (2005: 38) revises his definition to include the role of the hearer "impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates a face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)". While Culpeper's revised definition acknowledges the role of the hearer in assessing impoliteness, Mills (2003: 139) suggests that impoliteness is primarily as evaluative phenomenon, relying on the assessment of the behavior of the speaker and his/her role in the community of practice, i.e., the model she is calling for.

Types of attacks

In 2005, Culpeper moves away from Brown and Levinson (1987) in terms of replacing the negative/positive dichotomy but he does not explicitly revise his model in terms of Spencer-Oatey's (2002) concept of 'rapport management'. The reason behind this is that a single strategy may represent attacks on more than one of the two components of rapport management: face and social rights. Accordingly, Culpeper (2005) proposes the following attacks (Cashman, 2006: 228), though he does not explicitly carry out this re-mapping task (Cashman, 2006: 223):

1. Attacks on quality face
2. Attacks on social identity face
3. Attacks on equity rights
4. Attacks on association rights

Strategies to attack all the above aspects of face are the same as in Culpeper (1996). Culpeper et al. (2003:1563) map out the strategies available to a hearer and as shown in Figure (1) below:

Attacks on	Definition of desire/belief	Impoliteness strategies
Quality face	Desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities	Attack the other's appearance; attack the other's ability/work.
Social identity face	Desire for acknowledgement of our social identities or roles	Condescend, scorn or ridicule

Equity rights	Belief that we are entitled to be treated fairly by others	Frighten/threaten hinder or block the other physically or linguistically, challenge the other, impose on the other
Association rights	Belief that we are entitled to associate with others in accordance with the type of relationship	Ignore or snub the other, disassociate from the other

Figure 1: Summary of the provisional alignment of impoliteness strategies with Spencer-Oatey's (2002) concept of rapport-management.

After an occurrence of impoliteness, an interlocutor may or may not respond. A response may accept the impoliteness or counter it and the counter may be defensive or offensive. Offensive strategies are intended to match or escalate while defensive strategies include direct contradiction, abrogation, opt out on record, insincere agreement and ignore the attack. In short, responding to impoliteness can be done in one of the following ways and as illustrated in figure (2) below:

1. Not responding
2. Accepting impoliteness
3. Countering defensively
4. Countering offensively

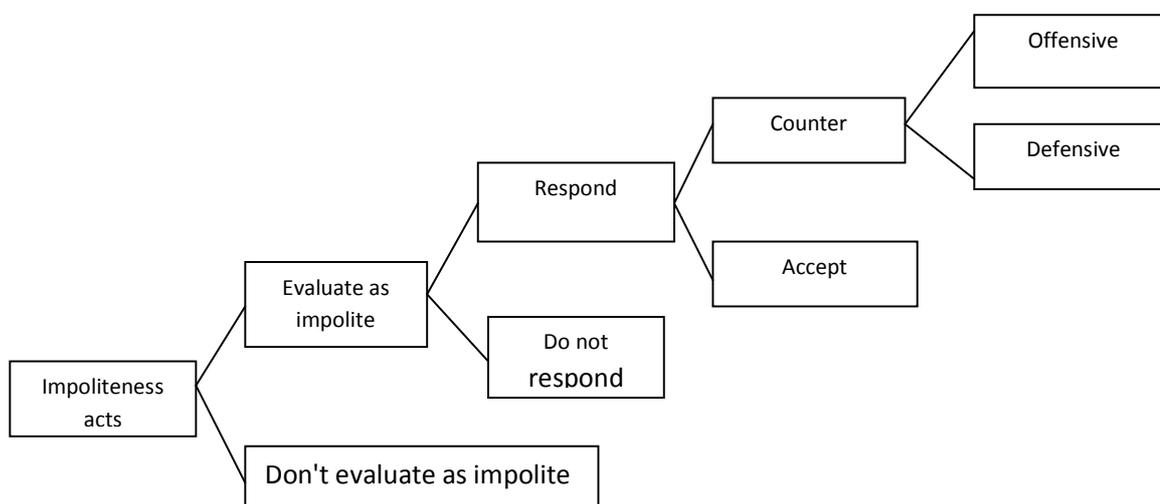


Figure 2: A summary of response options adopted from Culpeper et al. (2003: 1563) and modified in the light of Culpeper's (2005) definition of impoliteness (Cashman, 2006: 236).

Aggravated impoliteness

Culpeper et al. believe that there is no sharp dividing line between strategies of impoliteness and those of aggravated impoliteness. Rather,

Aggravated impoliteness represents the high end of the impoliteness scale or continuum. To assess a face attack's position on the scale, attention needs to be paid to the content and the form of the attack, as well as to the context and the circumstances in which it is mounted, with the account taken of the intentions of the speaker (2003: 838).

A strategy of aggravated impoliteness represents a more serious manifestation of ill will or malice than 'mere' impoliteness; the difference between the two is not one of kind, but one of degree. To Rudanko (2006), "aggravated impoliteness does not necessarily require the cumulative repetition of a strategy of impoliteness or a combination of such strategies". At a more specific level, three features may be identified, on the basis of his study, as contributing to aggravated impoliteness: First, an act of aggravated impoliteness is prototypically gratuitous, with the speaker's intention to offend the hearer. Second, it is prototypically one-sided and when impoliteness is done tit-for-tat, it is less regarded as an illustration of aggravated impoliteness. Third, an act of aggravated impoliteness typically involves careful planning by the speaker.

Still, there are other means by which impoliteness can be transmitted (Culpeper, 1996). The structure of conversation itself is sensitive to violations and Brown and Levinson (1987: 233) point out that such violations as interruptions, ignoring selection of other speaker, not responding to prior turns, etc. are all FTAs in themselves. They also have little to say about paralinguistic or non-verbal impoliteness: avoiding eye-contact or shouting, for example, could be a means of conveying impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996).

In this paper, Culpeper's linguistic strategies of impoliteness are intended by the researcher to show instances of Anne's behavior that leads to social discord and conflict with the others. In other words, Anne in her journey to achieve a harmonious social life- sometimes she behaves violently especially when provoked by certain people, namely Mrs. Rachel and Gilbert Blythe. For instance, in one situation she tends to be verbally rude and impolite when Mrs. Rachel accuses her of being skinny and in another situation she shows non-verbal impoliteness when she breaks the slate on Gilbert's head as soon as he behaves impolitely by calling her "carrot" and pulling her hair before the whole class.

Analysis of two extracts from the novel

The following extract represents the first meeting between Anne and Rachel, one of the Island's residents in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*:

- (1) Rachel: *"Well, they didn't pick you for your look that is sure and certain. She's terrible skinny and homely, Marilla. Come here child, child, and let me have a look at you. Lawful heart, did anyone ever see such freckles? And hair as red as carrots! Come here, child, I say."*
- (2) Anne: *"I hate you-I hate you. I hate you. How dare you call me skinny and ugly? How dare you say I'm freckled and redheaded? You are a rude impolite unfeeling woman!"*
- (3) Marilla: *"Anne!"*
- (4) Anne: *"How dare you say such things about me? I don't care if I do hurt your feelings by saying so! I hope I hurt them"*
- (5) Rachel: *"Did anyone see such a temper?"*
- (6) Marilla: *"Anne go to your room and stay there until I come up."*
- (7) Rachel: *"Marilla Cuthbert, you don't mean to say that you are upholding her in such a terrible display of temper as we've just seen?"*
- (8) Marilla: *"No.... She is never taught what is right. And you were too hard on her, Rachel."*

In this exchange that includes Anne the new comer to Avonlea, Marilla the one who has adopted Anne as a daughter and Rachel the gossip of the city and Marilla's friend and neighbor, we find that Mrs. Rachel starts with the linguistic marker "well". To Francesca (2001: 31), 'well' appears to have two functions; it signals the opening to a topic or the modification of a challenging opinion. So in the case presented in (1), 'well' initiates an explosion in the face of Anne, a bitter criticism of Anne's looks, to which Anne responds first "non-verbally" as the narrative tells us by approaching Mrs. Rachel and second "verbally" in which she shows a great deal of impolite behavior, at least, to Mrs. Rachel.

Anne's impolite behavior arises as a result of Rachel's attack on her 'quality face'. The quality face aspect of the 'face component' of rapport management is defined by Spencer-Oatey (2002: 540) as "a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities, i.e., our competence, abilities, appearance etc." Therefore, the most obvious strategy used to attack Anne's quality face in the above extract is that of 'attack the other's appearance' and as indicated by Rachel's utterance in turn (1) '*Lawful heart, did anyone ever see such freckles? And hair as red as carrots!*' where she implicates the impolite belief that Anne is lacking in those characteristics of beauty. In doing so, Rachel employs the sub-strategy of positive impoliteness 'ridicule' which is heightened by the use of the adverb 'ever'. Besides, this example shows that Anne's equity right 'to be treated fairly' is also violated. Anne's response to this attack is to counter in an offensive manner as indicated in turn (2) "*How dare you call me skinny and ugly? How dare you say I'm freckled and redheaded? You are a rude impolite unfeeling woman!*" with

the discourse goal 'stop calling me names as you have no right to say so' which constitutes an objection to whatever mentioned (bald on record impoliteness). Anne feels that she hates this lady for describing her as 'skinny', 'ugly', 'freckled' and 'redheaded'. Such negative aspects of appearance put Anne's 'quality face' and her self-esteem in danger because 'quality face is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of such personal qualities as these, and so is closely associated with our sense of personal self-esteem' (Spencer-Oatey, 2002: 540). In short Anne's impolite response could be justified in this speech event, through her offensive counter, as a reaction to Rachel's severe attack and negative evaluation of her physical appearance.

Anne, in this incident and for the first time in the novel, shows her real bad temper and her rebellious nature when she gets irritated by Rachel. She is calm and quiet when treated fairly, but when ill-treated or humiliated or when her self-esteem is hurt, she shows a real loss of temper like other children in similar situations. So, one can say that there is a sort of aggravated impoliteness on the part of Rachel since she has the intention to offend her interlocutor, Anne. Because it is not one-sided and because it is done tit-for-tat, this example is less regarded as an illustration of aggravated politeness.

No collapse in conversation is noticed since Rachel is still responding by issuing a "yes/ no question" which constitutes an indirect suggestion not to keep Anne anymore "*Marilla Cuthbert, you don't mean to say that you are upholding her in such a terrible display of temper as we've just seen?*" and also an indirect refusal of such a bad temper on the part of Anne to which Marilla responds by issuing an order to Anne by asking her to go to her room and to stay there, partly to satisfy Mrs. Rachel and partly to have a better chance later on to scold her for her impolite behavior in private, not before Mrs. Rachel. Though the question is negative and a positive reply is somehow expected, on the part of Rachel, Marilla doesn't agree. This is very revealing in that it tells how much Marilla cares a lot about Anne and her feelings in spite of her rude conduct towards Mrs. Rachel. So for Anne being untaught and for Mrs. Rachel being inconsiderate saves the politeness principle and the cooperative principle and puts them back to work again especially when Anne doesn't respond to Marilla's request immediately and keeps on reproaching Mrs. Rachel. Moreover, Marilla's justification in (8) counts as a reply to Rachel's indirect proposition that Anne is too bad tempered to stay with the Cuthberts.

In another speech event, in chapter fifteen of the book, Anne shows more violence when she responds to Gilbert Blythe's impoliteness offensively:

Gilbert: "*Carrots! Carrots!*"

Anne: "*You mean, hateful boy! How dare you!*"

One more time, Anne's quality face is attacked, i.e., her appearance, by Gilbert's description of her long red braids as 'Carrots' which infuriates her and makes her unaware of anything but to

revenge Gilbert Blythe by smashing the slate on his head before the whole class. Gilbert's 'Carrots', which represents sarcasm or mock politeness, reflects the impolite belief 'You are not beautiful'. This also can be seen as a 'name-calling' strategy that is used to cause maximum positive face damage to Anne. Anne's hair color is a sensitive issue to the extent that it causes her real problems and that is why she is expected to respond offensively. Anne's non-verbal behavior in this speech event is highly considered to contribute to the creation of a tense atmosphere that ends up with Anne standing beside the board the rest of the afternoon as a punishment imposed by Mr. Phillips, the teacher. This sort of conflict in social interaction seems to be a cause of social disharmony that leads to a sort of tension between characters that eventually leads to character development. This might justify why Anne cannot bear such comments that attack her 'face' as she matures and grows older and why she keeps being not in good terms with Gilbert till the end of the book.

In this speech event, aggravated impoliteness is initiated by Gilbert Blythe who is seen carefully planning to annoy Anne and this is clear from Montgomery's narrative "*Gilbert Blythe wasn't used to putting himself out to make a girl look at him and meeting with failure. She should look at him....*". In other words, Gilbert has the intention to offend his interlocutor and that is why he approaches her and pulls her hair and calls her "Carrots". So Anne's bad temper and rebellious nature are detected in her character due to others' impolite beliefs implied in their impolite linguistic behavior.

Conclusion

Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness, initially introduced as a parallel to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness and later amended in subsequent publications (Culpeper et al. 2003 and Culpeper 2005), proved useful in classifying the impoliteness strategies in different discourse types in general. The present study has also proved the practicality of the impoliteness model in studying the social dynamics of interaction in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* where some characters' behavior, namely, that of Anne, Rachel and Gilbert, has been studied in relation to impoliteness strategies, sub-strategies, types of attack (related to face or sociality rights) and the response to such attacks whether offensive or defensive. The analysis has shown the verbal and non-verbal resources used to realize a variety of strategies used to attack the interlocutor's face and sociality rights. Among the most frequently used strategies to attack quality face, the researcher has examined attacks on the participants' appearance represented by Anne's red hair and her skinny body. Such verbal resources include unfavorable comparisons that to Anne count as insults especially in the classroom situation where it is impossible for Anne to tell or justify her action as she cannot even repeat Gilbert's words "Carrots! Carrots" and report to her teacher what has happened unlike where she shouts at Rachel "*How dare you call me skinny and ugly....*". To both attacks, Anne responds offensively but her response is verbal in the first speech event and non-verbal in the second.

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