

Chapter 5

“One gives bad compliments about me, and the other one is telling me to do things” – (Im)Politeness and power in reported interactions between voice-hearers and their voices

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1. Introduction

Hearing voices, also known as auditory verbal hallucinations (AVHs), involves the perception of verbal content in the absence of an appropriate external stimulus. While AVHs can occur in people without a mental illness, they are seen as a characteristic symptom of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, with approximately 70% of individuals with such diagnoses reporting hearing voices (McCarthy-Jones 2012). AVHs also cuts across diagnostic groups, as voice-hearing can occur in bipolar disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders and obsessive compulsive disorders, among others.

While for some voice-hearers these experiences are a source of extreme distress and impairment, leading to a need for care, the actual phenomenology of voice-hearing is extremely heterogeneous, both in terms of form (sensory and conversational qualities, such as loudness, pitch) and content, with variations in terms of their affective impact. As a result, a sizable minority of voice-hearers cope well with their voices (Jenner et al. 2008). This is because distress is generally not caused by the mere presence of voices, but depends on a number of factors, including: what the voices say, and how; the relationship that voice-hearers establish with their voices; how they make sense of their voices; their perceived control over the voices; and their ability to live the life they want to live, particularly to have control over their goals in life (e.g. Mawson et al. 2010; Varese et al. 2017). In this chapter, we present insights from a pilot study exploring what a particular linguistic approach, namely the study of (im)politeness in interaction, can contribute to understanding the relationships between voice-hearers and their voices, and how these might relate to issues of power, control and therefore distress.

Factors determining the degree of distress that voices cause are, of course, attended to in clinical psychological research and practice. Interventions often aim to bring about change in power and control dynamics, e.g. by increasing the hearers’ coping and perceived control, changing the relationship with voices, challenging beliefs about the power of voices, etc. In fact, assessments of voice-related distress and the determinants of distress are often generally language-based (e.g. clinical interviews such as the auditory hallucinations subscale of the Psychotic Symptom Rating Scales, or PSYRATS-AH, Haddock et al. 1999). However, linguistic analysis is not typically used to explore individuals’ descriptions of their experiences and most current approaches to understanding and treating distressing voices are limited in a number of ways. First, they involve methods that capture *explicit processes*, i.e. questionnaires, interviews and psychometric assessments (e.g. PSYRATS) that rely both on voice-hearers’ conscious awareness of the nature of their relationships with voices and their willingness to disclose them. Second, current approaches often lack a consideration of the phenomenology or ‘lived experience’ of voice-hearing (Thomas et al. 2014; Woods et al. 2014). Finally, the ways in which the relationship between voice and hearer is

established and maintained (including power dynamics related to control) remains poorly understood.

We begin to address these shortcomings here by exploring *how* ten voice-hearers with schizophrenia-spectrum diagnoses use language to describe their interactions with their voices, in the course of interviews with one of the authors (FV) (see Varese et al., 2016; Varese et al., 2017; Demjén et al., 2019). This means that we take descriptions of the lived experience of interacting with voices as our starting point. Linguistic analysis generally, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, relies on systematic and theoretically based ways of investigating people's linguistic choices when they describe their experiences. In very general terms, this involves looking at what linguistic choices are made (consciously or not) in contrast with other choices that could have been made, how such choices pattern systematically, and what the implications of these choices might be. This makes it possible to develop an approach to the phenomenology of voice-hearing that also includes *implicit processes*, i.e. processes that are less amenable to conscious monitoring and manipulation. Evidence from other areas of the psychological sciences (e.g. experimental psychopathology) suggests that such implicit processes can be influential determinants of mental health and well-being (Franck, de Raedt and de Houwer J. 2007).

In linguistics, relationships between individuals, including power dynamics, are known to be reflected, negotiated, maintained, and challenged in interaction (see also Brookes; Chimbwete-Phiri & Schnurr; Kinloch & Jaworska; Stommel & Lamerichs; Thurnherr et al.; Zayts & Lazzaro-Salazar, all in this volume). We assume that this, to an extent, also applies to interactions between a person who hears voices and the voices that they hear, as in the following extract from our data:

Excerpt 1

it could be one minute past midnight, a brand new day and all of a sudden the voices will say "you worthless bastard". I am used to it now and they'll say "you worthless bastard and it's another day and we are gonna kick the fucking shit out of your head" and then they start on youⁱ then. They call you all sorts of things "useless, pathetic, hopeless, fat, evil, nasty bastard" and all that lot and they swear at you and they say "where's your fucking nurses now to support you and your mental health team they don't give a fuck about you" they say "why don't you teach the bastards a lesson and kill yourself blow the flat up, set yourself on fire, go out there later on today and walk under a bus" (Participant 6, our emphases)

Interactions between voices and voice-hearers are clearly not the prototypical kinds of interactions that linguists normally analyse. Analysts have no direct access to these interactions except as reported by the voice-hearer. Moreover, information about voices' identity, status or context is mediated through the hearer, or not available at all. As with reports of interactions more generally, it is highly likely that these accounts are not complete and precise records of all that the voices (or hearers) say, but simply a recollection of a particular selection deemed relevant by the hearer as a response to, in this case, research interview questions. This restricts the specificity with which linguistic frameworks can be applied. Nevertheless, voice-hearers' reports of interactions with their voices, as in Excerpt 1, are the closest we can get to that person's lived experience of those interactions, and should be taken seriously as their attempt to share those experiences in the context of the interviews we conducted. We therefore take voice-hearers' reports at face value, and apply to them linguistic tools known to surface relationships and power dynamics.

One set of such tools are various frameworks concerned with rapport management and linguistic (im)politeness in pragmatics (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987; Locher and Watts 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2008; Culpeper 2011a), a sub-discipline of linguistics, as we will introduce in more detail below.

Broadly, these frameworks explore how language is used to maintain or disrupt social harmony as individuals go about achieving their (interactional) goals. The excerpt above, for example, is rife with instances of language use (underlined) that appear to be designed to disrupt the possibility of a supportive and balanced relationship between Participant 6 and the voices he hears. The voices employ prototypical impoliteness formulae (such as insults and challenging questions; see below for more detail) to achieve this disruption. The mere fact that it is exclusively the voices producing these utterances, not the hearer, begins to point towards the nature of the relationship and power dynamic at play. The particular linguistic expressions that are attributed to the voices provide further evidence to this effect. In this chapter, we therefore explore the extent to which concepts and ideas from research in pragmatics may contribute new insights into the relationship dynamics between voice-hearers and their voices, in particular where issues of relative power are concerned. As we will set out below, power in the linguistic sense is related to control both in the sense of perceived control over voices and people's ability to live the life they want to live.

In what follows, we begin with an overview of relevant linguistic literature on power and (im)politeness, providing an introduction to our methodology, before presenting our data and specific methods. This is followed by our analysis of patterns of (im)polite behaviour in interactions between voices and hearers, as reported by the latter. While we focus on a very specific context in our analysis, the concepts we introduce from (im)politeness theory will be at play in any interaction in healthcare context and can therefore be used to shed light on the dynamics at work in other healthcare relationships as well.

2. Introduction to the methodology: power, rapport management and (im)politeness

In this section, we introduce the components of the analytical framework that will be applied in our analysis of reported interactions with the voices in our interviews. This analytical framework is formed of concepts drawn from linguistic approaches to power and interpersonal relationships in interaction, particularly from the branch of linguistics known as pragmatics. Research in pragmatics focuses on 'meanings that arise from the use of communicative resources in context, and in particular, the meanings implied by speakers, inferred by hearers, and negotiated between them in interaction' (Culpeper et al. 2018: 3). For reasons of space and accessibility, we cannot do justice to the debates associated with these concepts in the specialist literature, but these debates can be accessed via the studies we refer to in the course of this section.

2.1 Power

Linguistic choices in communication are one of the key means to exercise power. They can be used to influence people and states of affairs, and to maintain or alter power relationships between individuals and groups (Locher 2004). The investigation of power dynamics has at least two distinct pedigrees in linguistic research focusing on language in use: one sits within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA; see Galasiński & Ziółkowska, this volume, for an overview) and the other in the sub-discipline of pragmatics. In brief, the former tends to focus on institutional, ideological, political, etc. power embedded in texts and practices, while the latter tends to focus on interpersonal power dynamics within interactions.

In the CDA tradition, Fairclough (1989) makes an important distinction between 'power *behind* discourse' and 'power *in* discourse'. Power *behind* discourse is related to social and institutional settings in which people take on roles that have implications for who has power over whom (e.g.

workplace hierarchies; parent-child relationships in families; expertise in discussions of scientific issues). These are relatively static and dependent on pre-existing settings or contexts. Power *in* discourse, on the other hand, is to do with how power relationships are enacted and negotiated through choices made in communication, e.g. whether and how people address or refer to each other, tell each other what to do, criticize each other, etc. Power *in* and power *behind* discourse are seen as interconnected, since how one interacts with other people constructs and affects the power dynamics, even within institutional settings involving specific hierarchical constraints. But the fewer constraints there are behind discourse (as in the case of friendship groups), the greater the impact of the language used, because the absence of institutionally established hierarchies leaves more scope for constructing and negotiating power relationships in discourse.

The pragmatics tradition focuses on power as one aspect of the relationship between interlocutors. It is concerned both with how power behind discourse influences the choices that people (can) make in interaction, and with how these choices may themselves be used to construct and negotiate power relationships. Power is therefore not seen as static, but rather as highly dynamic, fluid and negotiated in interaction (Locher and Bousefield 2008).

2.2 Rapport management and (im)politeness

Power is one of several aspects of social relationships that make it a rather delicate matter to decide what to say and how to say it in interaction with other people. Pragmatics highlights in particular the balancing act we often have to engage in between achieving our personal or professional goals on the one hand, and maintaining social harmony on the other. For example, asking a friend to borrow their car for the weekend involves an imposition on that person, and providing critical feedback to a work colleague has the potential to cause offence. There are, however, a range of linguistic strategies at our disposal to try to protect the personal and professional relationships with the people involved, while still achieving the goals of asking for the favour or delivering the feedback. For example, one might check whether the friend needs the car that weekend before asking to borrow it, or tell the colleague that their performance is 'in need of improvement' rather than 'unsatisfactory'. In contrast, there are also circumstances in which interlocutors make linguistic choices that directly undermine social harmony, as when insults are exchanged among neighbours during long-standing disputes over noise levels or parking.

Which goals we set ourselves in interaction, and how we attempt to achieve them via language, is closely connected with power relationships. For example, asking someone to speak more quietly is likely to be linguistically realized rather differently by a teacher speaking to their pupils vs. an office worker speaking to a new colleague sitting at a nearby desk. And insults can sometimes be used to affect people's self-esteem and control their behaviour, for example in abusive relationships.

The pragmatics literature, broadly conceived, provides a set of concepts for making sense of these phenomena that are relevant to our data, including particularly: 'face', 'sociality rights', 'rapport management', 'relational work' and '(im)politeness' (Goffmann 1967, Brown and Levinson 1987, Locher 2004, Spencer-Oatey 2008, Culpeper 2011a,b). We will now introduce each of these concepts in turn.

The concepts of face and sociality rights capture different aspects of people that need to be attended to in interaction to avoid jeopardizing social harmony. 'Face' is related to commonsense notions like reputation, prestige, and self-esteem. In colloquial English, it is reflected in the idiom 'to lose face', which means 'that one's public image suffers some damage, often resulting in humiliation or embarrassment' (Culpeper 2011b: 398). In a more technical sense, 'face' is:

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share. (Goffman 1967: 5)

Brown and Levinson (1987) more specifically describe what they call ‘positive face’ as ‘the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62), and introduce the concept of ‘face threatening act’ for communicative acts that can go against this desire, such as criticism. Spencer-Oatey (2008) defines face as ‘people’s sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation, competence and so on’ (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 13), and breaks it down into three components:

- Individual identity face (sometimes ‘quality face’): ‘a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities; e.g. our competence, abilities, appearance etc.’ (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540)
- Relational identity face: ‘the self-concept derived from connections and role relationships with significant others’ (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 641)
- Social identity face: ‘the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles, and is closely associated with our sense of public worth.’ (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540)

To return to our previous examples, providing critical feedback to a colleague is problematic for social harmony because it undermines one or more aspects of their face, such as their individual identity face if their competence is criticized, or their relational identity face if they are told that colleagues do not want to work closely with them.

The notion of ‘sociality rights’ is used by Spencer-Oatey (2008) to capture social expectations of appropriate behaviour, fairness, mutual consideration, contractual/legal agreement, etc. (as an extension and specification of what Brown and Levinson (1987) rather confusingly call ‘negative face’). Sociality rights can be broken down into ‘equity rights’ (being treated fairly, not being imposed upon, or exploited) and association rights (being entitled to involvement and association with others) (Spencer-Oatey 2008). Asking a friend to borrow their car is problematic for social harmony in terms of equity rights, as it involves an imposition on their ability to dispose of their car as they wish. In Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 62) terms, this kind of request threatens the addressee’s ‘want’ that their ‘actions be unimpeded by others’.

Different overarching terms have been used to capture what people do in interaction to construct their relationships with other people. Locher and Watts (2008: 78) talk about ‘relational work’ to refer to ‘the work people invest in negotiating their relationships in interaction’. Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2007, 2008) uses the notion of ‘rapport management’ to refer to how interlocutors orient to face and sociality rights, and proposes three type of orientation that are particularly relevant to our data:

- Rapport maintenance orientation: ‘a desire to maintain or protect harmonious relations between the interlocutors’ (e.g. expressing a request via an interrogative rather than an imperative);
- Rapport enhancement orientation: ‘a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between the interlocutors’ (e.g. complimenting somebody’s cooking);
- Rapport challenge orientation: ‘a desire to challenge or impair harmonious relations between the interlocutors’ (e.g. humiliating the interlocutor).ⁱⁱ

The general notions of relational work and rapport management include the more specific phenomena that have been captured by theories of ‘politeness’ and ‘impoliteness’. Politeness theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), focuses on linguistic strategies aimed at mitigating face threats, which provided the basis for Spencer-Oatey’s rapport maintenance orientation (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997) for the use of the notion of ‘face enhancing acts’ in politeness theory). The study of impoliteness, on the other hand, focuses on the use of language to attack face and cause offence (cf. Spencer-Oatey’s rapport challenge orientation), and is particularly relevant to our data. Among the ways in which impoliteness can be achieved in language, Culpeper (2011a) identifies the following set of conventionalized formulae:

- Insults in the form of negative vocatives (e.g. ‘you fat moron’), negative assertions (e.g. ‘you can’t do anything right’), negative references (e.g. ‘your stinking mouth’), third person negative references within earshot of the target (e.g. ‘the daft bimbo’)
- criticisms/complaints (e.g. ‘that was absolutely rubbish’)
- challenging or unpalatable questions or presuppositions (e.g. ‘why do you make my life impossible?’)
- condescensions (e.g. ‘that’s childish’)
- message enforcers (e.g. ‘listen here’ as a preface to an utterance)
- dismissals (e.g. ‘shove off’)
- silencers (e.g. ‘shut the fuck up’)
- threats (e.g. ‘I’m gonna beat the shit out of you’)
- curses and ill-wishes (e.g. ‘go to hell’)

(examples from Culpeper 2011a: 135–136)

Whether the use of any formula actually results in offence, however, depends on how the hearer perceives it.

2.3 Impoliteness and power

As we have already mentioned, power is an important aspect of relational work as it affects the way in which interlocutors orient to one another’s face and sociality rights. Impoliteness, in particular, is often discussed in relation to the negotiation and exercise of power in interaction (see also Bousfield 2008; Locher and Bousefield 2008). Other things being equal, a powerful participant has more freedom to use fewer strategies to maintain others’ face and sociality rights, and more freedom to be impolite, i.e. to attack these. Culpeper (2011a) uses the term ‘coercive’ impoliteness, for the instances of impoliteness which seek ‘a realignment of values between the producer and the target such that the producer benefits’ (Culpeper 2011a: 226). This includes causing damage to an interlocutor’s face and reducing the power or status they have. As Bousfield and Locher (2008) put it:

impoliteness is an exercise of power as it has arguably always in some way an effect on one’s addressees in that it alters the future action-environment of one’s interlocutors [...] because an interlocutor whose face is damaged by an utterance suddenly finds his or her response options to be sharply restricted. (Locher and Bousefield 2008: 8-9)

Culpeper (2008) elaborates on this restriction of options stating that it arises because a hearer or addressee is pressured into action (see also García-Pastor 2008): self-preservatory action, for example, to maintain face and challenge the power dynamic, or not reacting and thereby accepting damage to face and ceding power to the speaker. In our introductory excerpt, Participant 6 does not respond to the voices’ impoliteness, but instead says that he is ‘used to it now’, suggesting that he has accepted the power imbalance between himself and the voices. Of course, as indicated above,

different kinds of impoliteness suggest different kinds of power. Insults, for example, make the speaker seem superior, while dismissals or silencers suggest that the speaker has the power to influence others' actions within or beyond the interaction (Culpeper 2008, drawing on Beebe 1995).

3. Data and methods

Our analysis below is a secondary analysis of semi-structured interviews with 10 voice-hearers with diagnoses of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. The semi-structured interviews included questions from the auditory hallucinations subscale of the Psychotic Symptoms Rating Scale (PSYRATS-AH; Haddock et al. 1999), sections of the Cognitive Assessment of Voices interview (CAV; Chadwick and Birchwood 1994) as well as questions developed to assess and quantify additional features of voices (e.g. self-report ratings of voice-related distress and pleasantness of voices; Varese et al. 2017). The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and anonymized for the original study, but to avoid preempting the linguistic analysis, one of the authors (FV) removed all references to specific quantitative ratings of voice-related distress before the transcripts were shared with linguistic researchers (ZD, ES, AM). Interview transcripts ranged from 1,125 to 6,526 words (average = 3,326; median = 2,885) and totaling 33,257 words, after these exclusions.

Our 10 participants were drawn from a larger sample of clinical and non-clinical voice-hearers recruited for a previous mixed-method investigation (Varese et al. 2016; Varese et al. 2017). Participants for our secondary analysis were selected from the original pool of participants according to two criteria: diagnostic homogeneity (to avoid likely variation due to the diversity of clinical features of participants) and 'spread' of voice-related distress scores (to ensure ability to contrast participants with differing levels of distress in the present analyses). All participants were also aged above 16 years; had experienced voices in the two weeks prior to participating in the study; had history of voice-hearing for a minimum of 6 months; and their experience of voices was not due to organic illness (e.g. brain injury), hypnagogic/hypnopompic states, or alcohol/drugs intoxication.

Table 1ⁱⁱⁱ below displays the participants' basic demographic characteristics (age, gender, education level), the number of years they have heard voices for, their scores on the amount and intensity of distress items of the PSYRATS-AH (ranging from 0 to 4), their self-reported ratings of voice-related distress and voice-pleasantness, and their scores on a measure of severity of anxiety, depression and stress symptoms in the week preceding the interview (the DASS-21; Lovibond and Lovibond 1995).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of interview participants

Participant ID (age, gender)	Education level	Eductaion years	Years since voice onset	PSYRAT-AH amount of distress	PSYRATS-AH intensity of distress	Self-reported voice-related distress*	Self-reported voice pleasantness*	DASS21
P6 (59, Male)	Secondary	9	19	4	4	10	0	58
P11 (51, Female)	Secondary	12	36	4	3	8	0	57
P13 (37, Male)	Secondary (GCSE)	12	10	1	1	2	8	0
P14 (20, Female)	Higher Education	18	1	3	2	6	0	43
P17 (44, Male)	Secondary	10	27	4	3	8	0	45
P19 (31, Male)	Secondary	10	3	3	3	8	0	41
P22 (40, Female)	Secondary (GCSE)	12	33	3	3	8	2	46
P24 (46, Male)	University degree	19	20	3	3	7	3	34
P29 (21, Female)	Secondary (GCSE)	16	1	2	2	7	10	26
P33 (47, Female)	Secondary (GCSE)	12	13	0	0	2	7	10

Notes: DASS21 = Short version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale; PSYRATS-AH = Auditory hallucinations scale of the Psychotic Symptoms Rating Scales

The original study received full NHS ethics approval (REC reference: 13/NW/0290) and R&D approval from the participating NHS Trusts, which allowed us to conduct our secondary, linguistic, analysis on the data set. As the audio recordings were no longer available, our linguistic analysis was conducted on the transcripts from the original study (see also Demjén et al., 2019). This involved dividing the

transcripts into clauses (minimal structures consisting of a verb and surrounding words that are closely linked to it grammatically), and manually coding each clause for a number of different linguistic dimensions. Among other things, we identified the clauses in which the voice-hearer reports speech exchanged between themselves and the voice, and coded them for the three main rapport management orientation categories we introduced earlier, i.e. maintenance, enhancement and challenge/attack in relation to face or sociality rights. Where relevant, we also coded for the presence of the (im)politeness formulae presented above.

We begin the analysis section below with an examination of patterns of rapport management, reflecting relationships that might cause distress, followed by examples of patterns that are likely to reflect more amicable relationships. Specifically, we begin with a focus on one participant, Participant 6, and use patterns in other interviews to demonstrate alternative, less distressing ways in which the relationship with voices can manifest. We begin with some overall trends, then look in more detail at the specific aspect of the person’s face or freedom of action that is attacked, maintained or enhanced, and what strategies are used to achieve these effects. The analysis is followed by an overview of the implications of our findings for clinical practice.

4. Analysis

Participant 6 (P6) is a man in his late 50s with a long-standing history of mental health difficulties; he has been hearing voices for almost 20 years. From the interview, it is clear that he values the support he is receiving from mental health services, and he is very concerned that he might no longer receive this support in the near future. As Table 1 shows, P6, according to the PSYRATS and CAV measures, is among the most distressed individuals among our interviewees. The interview was also one of the longest in our dataset at just over 6000 words.

4.1 Participant 6 and distress

At the highest level of generality, we can provide an overview of the frequencies of different types of (im)politeness strategies per 1000 clauses. The interview with P6 includes 1002 clauses uttered by the interviewee and among these clauses 124 were coded as voices’ attacks on some aspect of the hearer (approx. 124/1000 clauses) and 16 were coded as hearer’s attacks on some aspect of voices (16/1000 clauses), i.e. instances of impoliteness. There were no examples of enhancement in this interview and only two examples of potential maintenance, i.e. politeness. Table 2 below shows how this pattern of rapport management compares with other interviews.

Table 2 Normalised figures for clauses including enhancement, maintenance and attack of face or sociality rights

	P11	P6	P22	P24	P14	P17	P13	P29	P19	P33
Clauses overall	435	1002	132	311	503	691	287	336	256	732
(Im)politeness directed from Voices to Hearers										
Enhancement per 1000 clauses	0	0	0	10	0	2 ^{iv}	28	42	0	30
Maintenance per 1000 clauses	2	2	23	32	8	1	21	9	90	8
Attack per 1000 clauses	177	124	114	84	82	72	42	36	27	12
(Im)politeness directed from Hearers to Voices										
Enhancement per 1000 clauses	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0
Maintenance per 1000 clauses	0	0	0	0	8	0	31	0	8	0
Attack per 1000 clauses	18	16	0	0	12	0	1	0	0	4

Of course, such high level quantification is mainly useful as a way into the data and only begins to point towards the nature of the relationships between voices and hearers. We therefore now turn to exactly how these patterns are realised, addressing specifically the ways in which they might indicate a reduction in P6's ability to control his life and maintain his own self-esteem, potentially resulting in increased distress. Given the proportion of relational work in this interview that involves some form of impoliteness, we will focus on this in the discussion of P6. The examples in this section are P6's reports of what his voices say.

Starting with impoliteness directed at 'face', P6 reports hearing the kinds of insults, in the form of negative vocatives, that have been highlighted in the psychological literature as characteristic of voice-hearing and related distress. In the introductory excerpt, 'you worthless bastard' and 'useless, pathetic, hopeless, fat, evil, nasty bastard', uttered by the voices to P6, are typical examples of this. They constitute attacks on P6's individual identity face, including his appearance, character and general worth.

However, interestingly, the majority of the voices' attacks on P6's face are not negative vocatives but rather utterances such as the following:

- (1) 'it's gonna be a disaster, you're not gonna get on with the person, they're gonna plot against ya, they'll want to get rid of ya as soon as they meet ya, they'll-they'll do everything they can to rid of you off the books, it's gonna be a disaster, they're gonna be nasty, horrible people.'
- (2) 'they are all gonna get rid of you'
- (3) 'it's a lie they do know [who the next healthcare coordinator will be] and you're not getting one they want you out.'
- (4) 'they don't give a fuck about you'

These examples seem to fall between typical impoliteness formulae: they are negative assertions to an extent, but they are also similar to warnings or threats as they refer to or have implications for the future. Warnings overlap with threats (which are among the standard impoliteness formulae) in their future orientation, but tend to be designed to inform the person of some negative future eventuality for their own benefit. They are particularly interesting here because these are statements about someone else in relation to the hearer, not the hearer himself. The voices warn P6 by making negative assertions that either refer to the healthcare visitors, or the nature of their relationship with P6. In this way, the voices attack the hearer's relational identity face, i.e. his ability to have good relationships with others, and particularly his sense of being valued and supported by them. This is particularly important for P6. As outlined above, P6 not only values the support he is receiving from services, he is also worried that the support will be withdrawn.

Because warnings are generally intended to benefit the hearer, they are perhaps more difficult to recognize as impoliteness/face attack and therefore potentially more difficult to resist. While the main effect of threats tends to be intimidation (Culpeper 2011a), the same cannot be said of warnings, where the effect, in this case at least, seems to be to create anxiety. Specifically, these attacks both reflect and feed P6's most intense fears.

The voices also employ challenging or unpalatable questions to attack P6's relational identity face such as:

- (5) 'If you're getting on so great how come you never get any positives from the last visit? How come he's not here to support you now? Where is he when we're kicking the fuck out of you?'

Similarly to the previous set of examples, these extracts are questions about someone else in relation to the hearer, not the hearer himself. They insinuate that P6's relationship with the

healthcare visitor is not good, thereby undermining his confidence in a relationship that might be helpful for coping with the voices, and indeed the main social relationship that P6 has with anyone.

Turning now to impoliteness directed at P6's sociality rights – the desire for fairness, to be unimpeded and to associate with others – the voices attack P6 most frequently using commands and threats. The latter make violent predictions about things the voices will do to the hearer:

(6) 'we are gonna kick the fucking shit out of your head'

(7) 'and we're gonna fucking have you for this'

(8) 'you aren't gonna get no peace until you're dead'

These attack the person's right to be treated fairly, as well as their right to not be imposed upon, and are among the types of examples that clinicians are generally already well-attuned to. What is interesting here is that, in the impoliteness literature, threats are generally known to come with conditions (Culpeper 2011a). Conditional threats can potentially be counteracted by ensuring that the condition placed on them is not met. For example, if someone threatens to 'kick the fucking shit out of your head *if you do that again*', then, arguably, the addressee can avoid the 'kicking' by not doing 'that' again. The threats in our data, however, are non-conditional. As noted by Culpeper et al. (2017), non-conditional threats offer no opportunities to prevent the aggression in the threat being realised. They leave the addressee with no way out. This is likely to contribute to the distress experienced by voice-hearers whose voices employ these strategies. It is worth pointing out that Culpeper et al. (2017) were looking at threats in the context of religiously aggravated hate crime – such is the severity of the threats in our examples.

The commands P6's voices employ, which challenge P6's sociality rights, are similarly extreme^v:

(9) 'hang yourself'

(10) 'kill yourself blow the flat up, set yourself on fire, go out there later on today and walk under a bus'

These kinds of commands are not accounted for particularly well with prototypical impoliteness formulae: some can be interpreted as partly ill-wishes, but this category does not capture the full thrust of the utterances. They are most similar, in fact, to what Culpeper et al. (2017) describe as 'incitement' in the context of religiously aggravated hate crime. However, the individual being incited to violence is identical with the future victim, namely the voice-hearer. Culpeper et al. (2017) describe the effect of incitement as similar to threats, i.e. intimidation. In our case, however, the threat that P6 needs to fear is in fact himself. Such commands are well documented in the clinical literature on voice-hearing and schizophrenia and are known to be predictors of distress. In our data as well, this kind of impoliteness, aimed at the person's right not to be imposed upon, are quite typical of interviewees who are distressed by voices (e.g. P6, P11, P17). Given the complex way in which such commands induce fear, this is hardly surprising.

The voices are also reported as challenging P6's sociality rights in additional ways:

(11) 'your fucking [health] visit's winding down'

(12) 'you've had 25 minutes of your visit'

These utterances could be seen as simple statements of fact. However, in the case of P6, they are examples of context-driven implicational impoliteness (Culpeper 2011a), as they state things that P6 wishes would not happen. Because of their future orientation, these are similar to the warnings and threats discussed earlier: the voices repeatedly warning of a visit coming to an end can be seen as for P6's benefit, as he might want to know how much more time he has to get the support he needs (though he might be aware of this anyway). However, these statements are actually still indicating harm about to come to him – the time he has left to get support from nurses is coming to an end and he will then be at the mercy of the voices again. There isn't enough research to determine whether such implicational impoliteness causes as much or more offence than prototypical formulae (Culpeper et al. 2017), but in the case of P6 they are likely to be the source of more distress because

these particular utterances get under his skin: they once again reflect and reinforce *his particular* fears.

Overall then, even based on the information in Table 2, one can say that, in the interview with P6, the hearer and his voices have a rather asymmetrical and antagonistic relationship. The voices are reported as performing almost 8 times more attacks on face and sociality rights than P6. This is indicative of the power dynamic at play, since asymmetrical patterns of impoliteness tend to occur in situations where there is a more powerful individual targeting the less powerful (Culpeper 2008). Of course, quantification at this general level is only a starting point, however, we did find that, across our 10 interviews, the highest levels of distress tended to correlate with the highest numbers of attacks from voice to hearer (around 100 or more per 1000 clauses) (P6, P11, P22). Similarly, we observed that distress correlated with the absence of face enhancement strategies and low numbers of face maintenance strategies (P6, P11, P14, P17, P22), although the latter were less frequent in general. In other words, distress was associated with more antagonistic relationships between voices and hearers. The more detailed examination of impolite utterances employed by P6's voices revealed much more about why this might be the case. The voices claimed the power to influence both P6's sociality rights and to undermine his confidence or sense of self, i.e. face, and they did so using a variety of, often extreme, impoliteness formulae in combination, and at times designed to damage those aspects of P6 that were most vulnerable (his relational identity face, for example).

Most of the time, P6 does not challenge his voices. As already indicated in the introductory excerpt, he has rather gotten used to things as they are, including the power dynamic constructed through the voices' verbal behavior. This is especially interesting: given that P6's voices are not entities that exist within the shared external reality, at least not at the time of the reported interactions, there is no pre-existing power behind discourse; any power that exists only comes into play within discourse. In other words, any power that voices have is claimed and attributed via language in interaction and is not legitimated in any other way. In theory, this could make it easier for P6 to challenge the power dynamic suggested by the voices and makes Participant 6's acquiescence all the more marked. We find explanations for this in the instances where P6 does respond to the voices. P6 explains that if health visits go well, and he feels that 'they [health visitors] believed me' then this gives him 'sticks to hit [the voices] with':

(13)'you gotta get as much goodness and feedback out of that [health] visit as you can, so that when they've gone you've got some positives you can say "well nurse [NAME] said this and that and that, work that one out you bastards, sort that one out".'

However, when the visit does not go well, responding to or challenging the voices becomes difficult:

(14) 'and you can say "nothing" cos nothing did. You can't say well [NAME] said this but he didn't [NAME] said that, "no he didn't." [the voices contradicting the hearer]'

At other times, the voices are simply too powerful:

(15)'You try to over-shout them, but you can't and that's what it's like with the voices you try to shout back or fight back or anything like that and you can't.'

Some of these examples include elements of what Culpeper et al., (2003) describe as 'offensive counters', i.e. impolite responses to received impoliteness (e.g. 'you bastards' and presumably also 'fight back'). However, as these examples show, in contrast with the voices' attacks on P6's face, any responses are generally difficult to execute (as indicated by 'try' and 'can'), and sometimes frustrated or non-realised (as indicated by 'can't'). They are also contingent on circumstances beyond P6's control: the healthcare meeting and his relationship with healthcare professionals. This provides further evidence of the extent of the asymmetry between voice and hearer and the inevitable acceptance of the attacks this results in further damages P6's face and sociality rights (cf. Culpeper et al., 2003).

In Culpeper's (2011a) terms, the kind of impoliteness described in this section can be classified as 'coercive' (Culpeper 2011a: 226), as it 'involves coercive action that is not in the interest of the target'. Drawing on Tedeschi and Felson (1994), Culpeper (2011a) understands coercive action here as action designed to impose harm or force compliance. The intended harm need not be physical, but can also include damage to social identity, i.e. damage to face (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2008). This also reduces the target's power. In theory, coercive impoliteness is risky, because there is a high probability of retaliation, either immediately or in future (Culpeper 2011a). However, the range of formulae used by the voices and the range of face and sociality rights attacked can be seen as pre-emptive (and preventative) of any such retaliation.

In fact, it is worth noting that 'impoliteness' as an umbrella term tends to cover quite mild impoliteness and might even be seen as inadequate for the relational behavior we describe. The voices' overall behaviour towards P6, and indeed some other participants in our data, might therefore warrant Rudanko's (2006) 'aggravated impoliteness' label, which Culpeper et al. (2017) suggest for instances of religiously aggravated hate crime. The asymmetrical relationship and severity of the impoliteness behaviours (from voice to hearer), combined with the multiple aspects of the person attacked using a range of formulae, goes some way towards explaining why P6 (and others) are distressed by their voices. Some of these impoliteness formulae are obvious (e.g. self-harm commands and threats) and are adequately addressed by existing psychiatric assessments and interventions. Others, however, deserve more attention. Some forms of impoliteness (e.g. threat/warnings, unpalatable questions) are, on the surface at least, meant to be helpful to the voice-hearer, which means that, when they are used to undermine, they can be harder to identify and do something about. This in turn can result in a further reduction in hearers' sense of control over their lives, which leads to distress.

4.2 Other participants and patterns

Not all participants in our cohort reported such confrontational relationships with their voices. Participants 13, 29, and 33, for example, showed very different patterns in terms of (im)politeness and these differences help to explain, at least in part, why these participants were less distressed by their voices.

The more symmetrical or reciprocal nature of the relationship between voices and hearers, and the lower degree of antagonism, are already suggested by the figures in Table 2. The interviews with P13, P29 and P33, in particular, display lower frequencies (per 1000 clauses) of impoliteness, or rapport challenge orientation, and higher frequencies of instances of rapport maintenance orientation, which captures linguistic strategies used to a) minimize any threat to one's interlocutor and to 'maintain' each other's face and sociality rights; and b) actively bolster, or 'enhance' a counterpart's face or sociality rights. Because such strategies promote social harmony, they result in more amicable relationships and can therefore be linked to lower levels of distress. The precise ways in which social harmony is upheld in these relationships with voices is, of course, also of interest, not least because it might reveal strategies that can be usefully employed to make more antagonistic relationships with voices less so.

A crucial difference between, for example, P6's experience and that of both P13 and P33 is that the latter report or refer to the voices enhancing their individual identity face. In the extracts below, the voices actively praise or encourage the hearers, for example for past or future achievements or their general abilities (Note: some of these are reported in indirect speech):

(16)'You have done OK' (P33)

(17)'You will soon be writing that book'. (P33)

(18)'You are getting better' (P13)

(19)'Most times they praise me.' (P13)

(20) 'they try to support me'. (P13)

Similarly, P13 in particular, returns the politeness and encourages his voices:

(21) 'And I try and support her'

(22) 'supporting them in many ways'

While the indirect way in which these utterances (and Examples 26 and 27 below) are reported means that we cannot comment on any specific linguistic strategies, or indeed on whether they relate to face or sociality rights, the ways in which P13 labels them (praise, support) suggest enhancement. The relationship between power and face/rights enhancement has received very little attention in the linguistics literature. However, it could be argued that, for praise and encouragement to be meaningful, the speaker needs to be in a more authoritative position in some way (e.g. having a better idea about the abilities of the hearer than the hearer him/herself). But, crucially, any power that the speaker has is used for the hearer's rather than the speaker's benefit. The utterances above, for example, resemble parent-child interactions. Additionally, in the case of P13, because the enhancement goes both ways, there is a kind of reciprocity in place: power shifts back and forth between voices and hearer depending on the situation. This is reminiscent of close relationships such as that between siblings or friends. In fact, this is exactly how P13 describes the relationship, saying: 'I treat her like a sister' and 'they treat me as a friend'.

The amicable nature of the relationship between P13 and his voices is also evident in extracts such as following:

(23) 'I will try and correct her or point her in the right direction.'

(24) 'I am probably more giving them advice.'

P13 reports verbal behaviour on his part that potentially threatens the face or sociality rights of the voices. Correction implies criticism, which can fall under politeness or impoliteness depending on how it is performed. Advice similarly implies some problem, lack, or wrong doing that needs correction, albeit again with the hearer's interest in mind. However, the way in which these utterances are reported suggests that these potential threats to face and rights are uttered in a non-antagonistic way, even though the interviewee does not provide any specific wordings. Minimally, there is no evidence of any intent to cause offence, and the hedging that P13 uses in his reports ('try', 'probably', 'more') suggests that the advice and correction are delivered gently. Indeed, P13 even reports the voices seeking advice from him. This means that the voices actively defer to his knowledge and experience, which means that even a fairly unmitigated delivery would not disrupt social harmony.

Where there is evidence of potential impoliteness in interviews with less distressed participants, it is reported differently from more distressed interviewees such as P6 and P17. In P13's interview, for example, rather than harmful commands, voices' attacks on sociality rights mainly consist of challenging questions, which are only potentially undermining, and a dismissal ('Fuck off'), which is qualified as potentially 'jokey'. In the case of P29, the way the voices try to influence her freedom of action is even more mild and falls within the remit of politeness rather than impoliteness:

(25) 'Say I picked something up in the shop – she often says "There is no point in buying that."

The other day, I picked up a jumper in Next, and I heard her voice saying "There is no point in buying that"."

'There is no point in buying that' is indirect, which is one of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness mechanisms. It implies rather than imposes, making it easier for the participant to not comply. It is an attempt at exercising power, but not in a forceful way, ensuring that the hearer is not offended in the process. Similarly, the few commands that his voices issue at P13 even enhance face: 'Keep up your volunteer work. Keep doing the things that [...] Keep up the good work'.

When it comes to attacks on face, although P13 reports some insults, they are often milder than those in other interviews, or perceived as light-hearted:

(26) 'Every now and then, they will swear at me. Just rude words and things like that.'

(27) 'Sometimes they can take the mickey out of me as well.'

P29 reports some very harsh negative assertion insults (e.g. 'Your life isn't worth living') but points out that these are infrequent and associated with only one of the voices that she hears. P33 also reports some attacks in the form of negative assertions:

(28) 'you're sitting around too much'

(29) 'you're spiteful'

(30) 'you won't be able to do that'

These utterances potentially attack both face and sociality rights but not in a way that forces the participant into action or confrontation. In addition, there is evidence in at least some interviews that people who are less distressed by their voices are also able to challenge them. P13, for example, reports responding to the voices by saying 'You're unfair', while P33 responds with a possible attack on the voice's sociality rights: 'I can tell them to shut up'. This again suggests a more egalitarian or symmetrical relationship. A word of caution here, however: the fact that we are dealing with data where all this is effectively going on within one individual's mind means that the interpretation of reciprocal attacks is not quite so simple. P11, one of our more distressed participants, also reports attacking her voices' face and sociality rights in return: 'And I am saying out loud "Fuck off, and leave me the fuck alone. I'm sick of hearing you. I don't want to hear you anymore. Go away!"'. While this may suggest a more balanced power dynamic, the 'offense/counter-offense' nature of the exchanges (cf. Culpeper et al., 2003) results in a very antagonistic relationship, potentially akin to civil war.

Overall then, participants who are less distressed by their voices report fewer and milder instances of impoliteness on the part of the voices, which means that such voices do not exercise power as much as the voices of more distressed participants. The fact that hearers are able to resist or challenge their voices in return also supports this interpretation to some extent. In addition, there is evidence of politeness strategies to maintain and even enhance aspects of both the hearers and the voices, resulting in an amicable and symmetrical relationship.

5. Implications and recommendations for clinical practice

As outlined earlier, voice-hearing is not distressing for everyone. In clinical practice, health professionals attend to the factors that are known to play a role in distress, notably, hearers' relationships with voices, their perceived control over the voices, and their ability to control their life goals. However, there is still a limited amount of research on how relationships between voice and hearer, including power dynamics, are established and maintained, and the variety of ways that the phenomenology of voice-hearing specifically contributes to distress. It is this gap that our analysis has begun to address.

As we have shown, there are a number of ways in which particularly impoliteness can cause distress in people who hear voices, and how particularly the use of politeness might mean that the experience of voices is not distressing for some voice-hearers. Patterns that are likely to cause or contribute to distress in voice-hearers include:

- the presence of large numbers of attacks on a person's face or sociality rights;
- multiple types of face being attacked in combination with attacks on sociality rights;
- voices using multiple impoliteness strategies, including ones that could potentially masquerade as supportive on the surface;
- imbalance or lack of reciprocity in the relational work being reported;
- the hearer perceiving themselves as unable to react, respond, or resist fully in the way that they wish to do so.

These patterns contribute to distress because they represent limitations on the voice-hearer's ability to maintain a particular self-image and have the freedom to do things they want and not do things they do not want to do. These are important homeostatic processes that are absolutely linked to the general definition of control, as the ability to lead the life you want to lead (Varese et al. 2016, 2017). Therefore, curtailing these freedoms and rights leads to distress.

Linguistic patterns, on the other hand, that are likely to facilitate coping well include:

- fewer instances of impoliteness
- evidence of politeness mechanisms to maintain and even enhance face and/or sociality rights
- reciprocity in the (im)politeness being reported (except in cases where the balance is in the form of aggression from both sides);
- the hearer perceiving themselves as able to react, respond, or resist at least to some extent.

Our data does not allow us to determine a cause and effect relationship here. However, we know from the literature that interpersonal relationships and power are constructed and negotiated in interaction. This suggests that encouraging voice-hearers to interact with their voices in the ways that P13 and P33, for example, do, can, over time, improve the type of relationship they have. It might, therefore, be useful to continue thinking of the interactions with voices as interactions with other people, as is already the case in some existing relational therapies for psychosis/voice-hearing. In recent years, there has been a surge in interest in therapies that could specifically modify the relationship between hearers and their voices, such as AVATAR therapy (Craig et al., 2018), Relating Therapy for distressing voices (Hayward et al., 2018) and the Voice Dialogue approach developed within the context of the International Hearing Voices movement (Steel et al., 2018; Corstens et al., 2012). Future applied research could explore the value of applying rapport maintenance and enhancement orientations to manage the relationships and rapport with voices (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2008) in the context of these novel therapies with a growing evidence base.

Our analysis, especially of the particularly targeted attack that voices directed at P6, also suggests that it might be helpful in clinical practice to open up discussions about where an individual's priorities lie. As Spencer-Oatey (2008) points out, different aspects of face and sociality rights can be more or less important for different people, and the more that voices attack aspects of particular importance to a hearer, the more distressed they are likely to be. This is consistent with best practice in psychological therapies with people with psychosis, which stresses the importance of placing the client's goals, priorities and values at the centre of therapeutic interventions. A related avenue to explore is the issue of less obvious types of impoliteness, such as unpalatable questions and threats/warnings, for example. These might be more difficult to identify as attacks and therefore for hearers to resist, thereby meriting particular attention in a therapeutic context.

6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we reported on a pilot project that explored how concepts from rapport management and (im)politeness research can contribute to a better understanding of how relationships between voice and hearer are established and maintain, and how this is related to the degree of distress that voice-hearers might experience. These linguistic frameworks explore how language is used to maintain or disrupt social harmony as individuals go about achieving their (interactional) goals. They also acknowledge that relationships, including power dynamics are reflected, enacted and created in interaction. Importantly, linguistic analysis of this kind does not require that people, including voice-hearers, are aware of and willing to explicitly describe or assess the nature of their relationships with others. Such analyses can be performed with any kind of data that details what is said in verbal

interactions. While we focused on a very specific context in our analysis, the concepts we introduce from (im)politeness theory are at play in any interaction in healthcare context and can therefore be used to shed light on the dynamics at work in other healthcare relationships as well.

We centred our analyses around the concepts face and sociality rights, focusing on their enhancement, maintenance, or attack in the reported interactions between voices and hearers. The most distressing voices tended to undermine a voice-hearer using a variety of extreme impoliteness formulae (akin to those identified in contexts of religiously aggravated hate crime), designed to damage those aspects of the person that were most important to them. Such attacks tended to go unchallenged by the voice-hearer, which means that the voices successfully claimed power for themselves through the words they uttered (which is the only kind of power that exists in this particular context). We showed that such (im)politeness patterns, i.e. different types of attacks, can lead to distress because they result in limitations on the person's ability to maintain a particular self-image and have the freedom to do things they want and not do things they do not want to do. Future research would need to examine the extent to which such antagonistic relationships can be 'turned around' by actively applying politeness strategies that less distressed participants used.

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ⁱ It is worth pointing out that studies of (im)politeness tend to focus on direct speech, rather than direct reports of the kinds of things that are said. Indeed, depending on the level of detail in indirect speech reporting, certain kinds of linguistic analyses are impossible to perform. However, we follow Culpeper et al., (2017) in considering such more marginal instances of (im)politeness, provided that enough information is provided in the report for a basic categorization of the orientation of an utterance in terms of attack, maintenance or enhancement.

ⁱⁱ Spencer-Oatey's framework also includes 'rapport neglect orientation', but this is not sufficiently relevant to our data to be included here.

ⁱⁱⁱ The linguistic researchers (ZD, ES and AM) did not have access to the information in Table 1 prior to the analysis. The linguistic analysis was done 'blind' to avoid creating assumptions relating to distress. In this way, power and distress were linked with (im)politeness patterns on the basis of linguistic evidence and the linguistic assessments were examined in light of psychometric ones only retrospectively.

^{iv} These two clauses are negated, i.e. reports of enhancement *not* happening.

^v This is, in fact, what makes these commands instances of impoliteness, rather than bold-on-record politeness.