

**Mock Politeness in English and Italian:
A Corpus-assisted Study of the
Metalanguage of Sarcasm and Irony**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the product of my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Charlotte Taylor (February 2015)

ABSTRACT

This thesis represents the first in-depth analysis of mock politeness, bringing together research from different academic fields and investigating a range of first-order metapragmatic labels. The investigation is based on a corpus of c. 96 million words taken from two online forums, one based in the UK and one in Italy. For the analysis, I combine corpus linguistics and more traditional qualitative approaches. A key aspect to the analytic process is that it is led by participant understandings of mock politeness and so I take a bottom-up approach to filling some of the gaps in the field. The research aims to tackle three questions. The first addresses which metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data. In the second question, I ask how these metapragmatic labels and the behaviours which they describe relate to one another within and across languages. In the third question, I ask what is the relationship between (a) the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels and the behaviours which they describe and (b) the second order descriptions. In this regard, the use of data from two different cultures is important because it provides an opportunity to investigate to what extent the existing theory accounts for behaviours in different contexts. The findings show that mock politeness cannot be equated with sarcasm, and that the metapragmatic label which may be applied to a mock polite interaction depends on a range of contextual factors, including the participation role of the evaluator and gender of the performer. The range of metapragmatic labels and realisation of mock politeness vary across the two sub-corpora, and the research showed that mock politeness is both structurally and functionally more varied than anticipated by the existing literature.

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THESIS CONVENTIONS

- 12 point Times New Roman is the default typeface used in this work
- 11 point Times New Roman is used for examples
- 10 point Times New Roman is used for footnotes
- *Italics* indicate analysed words and phrases
- SMALL CAPS indicate analysed lemmas
- **Bold** is used to highlight information in examples
- Underlining is used to highlight features in some tables
- [square brackets] indicate translations
- Grey font colour is used for translations from Italian to English in examples
- An asterisk on a word in italics e.g. *patronis** indicates a wildcard and could indicate *patronise, patronising, patronised, patronisingly*
- ‘single quotes’: indicate quoted words and quotations
- “double quotes”: indicate quotes within quotes
- All examples are reproduced faithfully to the original, including non-standard spellings, punctuation and so on.

CONTENTS

Declaration.....	I
Abstract.....	II
Acknowledgements.....	III
Thesis conventions.....	IV
Contents.....	V
List of figures.....	xii
List of tables.....	xv
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Defining mock politeness.....	2
1.3 Why mock politeness?.....	3
1.4 Why a corpus linguistic approach?.....	6
1.5 The corpus.....	7
1.6 Research questions and aims.....	8
1.7 Thesis contributions.....	10
1.8 Thesis structure.....	11
CHAPTER 2 Analysing mock im/politeness.....	14
2.1 Which im/politeness?.....	14
2.1.1 Operationalising face.....	15
2.1.2 Operationalising impoliteness.....	17
2.1.3 Im/politeness in interaction.....	19

2.2 Whose im/politeness?.....	23
2.2.1 Im/politeness and the anglocentric viewpoint	23
2.2.2 First and second order im/politeness: Definitions and practice.....	25
2.3 Locating im/politeness: Metapragmatic approaches	29
2.4 Communicating mock politeness	33
2.4.1 Im/politeness as norm-based.....	35
2.4.2 Im/politeness as (conversational) implicature	38
2.4.3 Conventionalised im/politeness	45
2.4.4 Conclusions to communicating mock politeness.....	48
2.5 Analysing mock politeness from a cross-cultural perspective	49
2.5.1 Cultural stereotypes and mock politeness.....	50
2.5.2 Challenges in cross-cultural/linguistic analyses of im/politeness	51
2.6 Analysing mock politeness in an online community	52
2.7 Conclusions	55
CHAPTER 3 Im/politeness mismatch.....	57
3.1 Introducing mock politeness	58
3.1.1 Naming mock politeness: Second-order struggles	58
3.1.2 Structures of mismatch	62
3.1.3 Naming mock politeness: First order candidates.....	65
3.2 Mismatch: An overview	65
3.2.1 Mismatch in humor theory.....	66
3.2.2 Mismatch in irony studies.....	68
3.2.3 Mismatch in im/politeness studies.....	69
3.3 Functions of im/politeness mismatch.....	69
3.3.1 Politeness to avoid face attack / to facilitate face attack	70
3.3.2 Politeness to facilitate face attack.....	71
3.3.3 Deception.....	72
3.3.4 Mock impoliteness.....	74

3.4 Patronizing and condescending.....	78
3.5 Conclusions	81
CHAPTER 4 Irony and sarcasm.....	83
4.1 Challenges in investigating irony and sarcasm	84
4.1.2 Little second-order agreement on what ‘irony’ and ‘sarcasm’ refer to	84
4.1.2 Little analysis of lay perspectives and use.....	86
4.2 Mismatch in irony studies	87
4.2.1 Mismatch in the cognitive structure of irony.....	88
4.2.2 Levels of mismatch.....	91
4.2.3 Mismatch as a cue to irony	93
4.2.4 Processing mismatch	95
4.3 Facework functions of irony and sarcasm.....	97
4.3.1 Face-saving: Hearer-focussed.....	97
4.3.2 Face-saving: Speaker-focussed.....	99
4.3.3 Face-enhancement	100
4.3.4 Face-attack.....	102
4.4 Accounting for contradictory findings on the effects of irony / sarcasm on face	103
4.4.1 Acceptable aggression	104
4.4.2 Participation role.....	104
4.4.3 Deniability	105
4.4.4 Other factors	107
4.5 Shared and distinguishing features of irony and sarcasm	107
4.6 Users of irony / sarcasm	110
4.6.1 Culture	110
4.6.2 Gender.....	112
4.7 Conclusions	112

CHAPTER 5	Methodological approaches to im/politeness mismatch.....	115
5.1	Types of investigation	115
5.1.1	Text analysis	118
5.1.2	Data elicitation.....	118
5.1.3	Experimental investigations.....	121
5.1.4	Self-reported usage	123
5.2	Identifying the object of study	123
5.2.1	Metalanguage/metapragmatic studies of mock politeness	126
5.2.2	Researcher decides a priori	127
5.2.3	'Naïve' approach	129
5.3	Corpus linguistics and im/politeness.....	129
5.3.1	Combining corpus linguistics and im/politeness: An overview	130
5.3.2	Advantages and disadvantages to combining corpus linguistics and im/politeness	132
5.3.3	Key notions from corpus linguistics	135
5.4	Summary	142
CHAPTER 6	Description of corpus construction, annotation and tools.....	143
6.1	The data sources: mumsnet and alferminile	143
6.2	Ethics and online data	149
6.3	Corpus tools.....	150
6.3.1	Tools used for corpus building and editing	150
6.3.2	Tools used for corpus analysis.....	151
6.4	Building the corpus	154
6.4.1	Identifying mock politeness terms.....	155
6.4.2	Identifying dummy seeds for BootCaT	156
6.4.3	The search terms	158
6.4.4	Testing the data collection techniques	161
6.4.5	Description of the corpus.....	162

6.4.6 Methodological limitations to the corpus construction	163
6.5 Annotating the corpora	164
6.5.1 Annotating im/politeness mismatch	166
6.5.2 Limitations to the annotation process	168
6.6 Summary	168
 CHAPTER 7 Evaluation and use of the metapragmatic labels irony and sarcasm	170
7.1 Introduction	170
7.2 A collocational approach to evaluation of irony and sarcasm.....	170
7.2.1 Co-occurrences of irony/ironic and sarcasm/sarcastic	171
7.2.2 Ironic/sarcastic and co-occurrence with explicit im/politeness labels.....	173
7.2.3 Ironic/sarcastic in the distributional thesaurus	177
7.3 Evaluation, functions and participation roles	181
7.3.1 Evaluation and participation role.....	182
7.3.2 Functions of mentions	185
7.3.3 Evaluation and gender	190
7.4 Summary	193
 CHAPTER 8 Examining the behaviours labelled as <i>ironic</i> and <i>sarcastic</i>	195
8.1 Introduction	195
8.2 Evaluation in the behaviours described as IRONICO/ironic and SARCASTICO/sarcastic	196
8.3 Facework in the behaviours indicated as ironic and sarcastic.....	198
8.3.1 Face-attack.....	200
8.3.2 Face-saving.....	212
8.3.3 Face-enhancing.....	222
8.4 Mismatch in the behaviours labelled as ironic and sarcastic	224
8.4.1 Absence of im/politeness mismatch	227

8.4.2 Location of im/politeness mismatch.....	230
8.5 Summary	235
CHAPTER 9 Metapragmatic labels and mock politeness.....	238
9.1 Introduction	238
9.2 References to insincerity in meta-politeness labels.....	239
9.2.1 Mock politeness.....	244
9.2.2 Mock politeness or deceit?	244
9.2.3 Politeness as an institutional requirement.....	246
9.2.4 Excess politeness	246
9.2.5 Summary.....	247
9.3 Which metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness?.....	248
9.4 Facework (and deniability) in the behaviours	253
9.4.1 The ‘impolite’ element: Expression of negative attitude.....	254
9.4.2 The ‘mock’ element: Mismatch and indirectness.....	255
9.4.3 Identifying mock politeness: a brief summary	259
9.5 How are the mock polite behaviours evaluated?.....	260
9.5.1 Participation roles and evaluation.....	261
9.5.2 Evaluation of mock politeness labels: A collocational network perspective	269
9.6 Targets and producers of mock polite behaviours	273
9.7 Summary	279
CHAPTER 10 The shape of mock polite behaviours	282
10.1 Introduction	282
10.2 Types of im/politeness mismatch.....	283
10.2.1 Mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and attack on face	288
10.2.3 Mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and violation of sociality rights	289

10.2.3 Mismatch of upholding sociality rights and violation of sociality rights	290
10.2.4 Mismatch of upholding sociality rights and attack on face	291
10.2.5 Metapragmatic labels and types of im/politeness mismatch	292
10.2.4 Mock politeness and mismatch of addressee.....	296
10.3 Mock politeness as a group activity	298
10.4 Mock politeness and gender	301
10.5 Mismatch location	304
10.5.1 Internal mismatch	306
10.6 Conventionalisation: The case of HTH	310
10.5 Summary	314
CHAPTER 11 Conclusions	318
11.1 Overview	318
11.2 Findings	318
11.2.1 What metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?	319
11.2.2 How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another within languages?.....	320
11.2.3 How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another across languages?.....	322
11.2.4 What is the relationship between the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels, and the behaviours which they describe, and the second order descriptions?.....	323
11.2.5 Methodological contributions.....	326
11.3 Limitations	326
11.4 Future research	328
References	331
Appendix 1: Frequency of mismatch in behaviours described as <i>ironic / sarcastic</i> ..	369

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Deconstructing the first-second order distinction, from Haugh (2012: 123)	29
Figure 5.1 A visual portrayal of evaluative meanings based on prototypicality representations	138
Figure 6.1 Screenshot of the mumsnet talk section	146
Figure 6.2 Screenshot of alfeemminile forum topics.....	147
Figure 6.3 Screenshot of CONE display of <i>women</i> and <i>men</i> from the mumsnet concordance corpus.....	153
Figure 6.4 Screenshot of information added to each occurrence of a metapragmatic label.....	165
Figure 7.1 Concordances of <i>sarcas*</i> and <i>rude*</i>	174
Figure 7.2 Concordances of <i>sarcas*</i> and <i>polit*</i> , <i>friend*</i> , <i>kind*</i>	175
Figure 7.3 Who is evaluated as being <i>sarcastic/ironic</i> and how are they evaluated?	183
Figure 7.4 Context within which the labels <i>ironic/sarcastic</i> are used	185
Figure 8.1: Facework prioritised in descriptions of behaviours.....	199
Figure 8.2 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as <i>sarcastic</i>	201
Figure 8.3 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as SARCASTICO	201
Figure 8.4 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as <i>ironic</i>	203
Figure 8.5 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as IRONICO	203
Figure 8.6 Concordance lines showing co-occurrences of IRONICO [ironic] and SDRAMMATIZZARE/DRAMMATIZZARE [play down/be melodramatic].....	218
Figure 8.7 Frequency of mismatch in behaviours described as ironic / sarcastic	226
Figure 8.8 Location of mismatch	231

Figure 8.9 Screenshot showing structure of forum messages in the Italian forum (example 23)	233
Figure 8.10 Screenshot showing use of space in sarcastic utterances	234
Figure 9.1 Percentage of behaviours which performed mock politeness: UK data...	250
Figure 9.2 Number of behaviours which performed mock politeness: UK data	251
Figure 9.3 Percentage of behaviours which performed mock politeness: Italian data	251
Figure 9.4 Number of behaviours which performed mock politeness: Italian data...	252
Figure 9.5 Venn diagram showing the overlap of mismatch (pink) and expression of negative evaluation (green).....	260
Figure 9.6 Who performs the behaviour: UK data	261
Figure 9.7 Who performs the behaviour: Italian data	262
Figure 9.8 Evaluation of first person behaviours: UK data	263
Figure 9.9 Evaluation of third person behaviours: UK data	264
Figure 9.10 Evaluation of first person behaviours: Italian data [Italian items: cutting/make fun/viper/laugh at/underhand].....	267
Figure 9.11 Evaluation of third person behaviours: Italian data [Italian items: biting/tease/make fun/viper*/laugh at/underhand/mock/sadis*/paternis*/patronising]	268
Figure 9.12 Collocational display showing evaluative items (up to 100 collocates per node)	271
Figure 9.13 Collocational display showing evaluative items (up to 100 collocates per node)	272
Figure 9.14 Collocational display showing nouns in the mumsnet corpus (up to 100 collocates per node)	274

Figure 9.15 Collocational display showing nouns in the alfemminile corpus (up to 100 collocates per node)	275
Figure 9.16 Collocates of boys and girls in the mumsnet corpus	278
Figure 10.1 Types of im/politeness mismatch in mock polite behaviours.....	286
Figure 10.2 Mock polite behaviours classified according to surface politeness: UK data	293
Figure 10.3 Mock polite behaviours classified according to surface politeness: Italian data [Italian items: MAKE <i>fun</i> , <i>underhand</i> , <i>paternalis*/patronis*</i> , LAUGH <i>at</i> , <i>sarcastic</i> , <i>viper*</i> , <i>ironic</i> , MOCK, <i>sadis*</i>].....	294
Figure 10.4 Mock polite behaviours classified according to aspect attacked: UK data	295
Figure 10.5 Mock polite behaviours classified according to aspect attacked: Italian data [Italian items: <i>paternalis*/patronis*</i> , MAKE <i>fun</i> , <i>ironic</i> , <i>underhand</i> , LAUGH <i>at</i> , <i>sarcastic</i> , <i>viper*</i> , MOCK, <i>sadis*</i>].....	295
Figure 10.6 Distribution of third person mock polite behaviours by label and gender	302
Figure 10.7: Type of mismatch in the mock polite utterances.....	305
Figure 10.8 Selection of 10 concordance lines showing HTH accompanying bald on record face attack	312

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 Summary of types of investigation into mock politeness	116
Table 5.2 Summary of means of identification of mock politeness	125
Table 6.1 Details of test corpora compiled for identification of mock politeness terms	157
Table 6.2 Search terms potentially signalling discussion of mock politeness.	159
Table 6.3 Comparison of data returned using four different sets of parameters for the data collection	161
Table 6.4 Corpus size.....	163
Table 6.5 Questions designed to aid classification of facework and sociality rights, adapted from Culpeper et al. (2010: 606-613).....	167
Table 7.1 Thesaurus results for ironic and sarcastic	179
Table 8.1 Most salient verb collocates of IRONICO in ItTenTen.....	218
Table 9.1 Summary of modifying collocates of polite/cortese etc.	241
Table 9.2 Translation of the Italian items displayed in Figures 9.3 and 9.4	250

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This thesis aims to cast light on the somewhat neglected area of mock politeness. The principle objectives are to bring together research into mock politeness which has been carried out in different fields, to investigate the ways that mock politeness is talked about and performed, and, in so doing, to test the claims against observed usage. In order to investigate such usage, I analyse data from informal, naturally-occurring conversations in two online forums, one British and one Italian.

The choice of data is central to the thesis, which is based on three key assumptions. The first assumption is that the analysis of naturally occurring data is essential to understanding how language is used because ‘human intuition about language is highly specific, and not at all a good guide to what actually happens when the same people actually use the language’ (Sinclair 1991: 4). As a result, a corpus approach is taken. The second assumption is that ‘corpus data do not interpret themselves’ (Baker 2005: 36). Therefore, a theoretical framework is required for that stage of research, in this case the theory of im/politeness. The third assumption is that the significant evaluations of im/politeness are made by participants in interaction (following, for instance, Locher & Watts 2005). And so, this study starts from first-order or participant perceptions (the first/second order distinction is discussed in Chapter 2).

These participant perceptions are accessed in the two major stages to this analysis: in the first, I analyse the metapragmatic terms which are used to discuss mock politeness; in the second, I use these terms to retrieve the actual interaction which the participant is describing, and then analyse those mock polite behaviours.

In this introduction, I define *mock politeness*, as it will be used in this study; I explain why I have chosen to focus on mock politeness, and why I have taken a corpus approach; I then introduce the research aims and questions; I describe what contributions this study can make to our discipline; and, in the last section, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Defining mock politeness

The definition of mock politeness which is employed throughout this thesis is that mock politeness occurs when there is an im/politeness mismatch leading to an implicature of impoliteness. As such, it falls within the category of implicational impoliteness (Culpeper 2011a). Crucial components in this definition are the presence of *mismatch* and evaluation of *impoliteness*, which are addressed in detail in Chapters 3 and 2 respectively. The description used here is similar to the recent definition from Haugh (2014), who defines mock politeness implicatures as occurring when

an ostensibly “polite” stance, which is indicated through the occurrence of a (non-) linguistic form or practice that would in other circumstances be associated with a polite attitude, masks or disguises an “impolite” stance that arises through implicature

Haugh (2014:278)

However, the definition used in this study is deliberately broader in scope, for instance in the specification of *mismatch* rather than *masking* or *disguise*. This wider definition is employed because I want to address both those instances where the mismatch arises from contextual factors, as illustrated in (1), and where it is explicitly present in the co-text, as illustrated in (2).

(1) I am very hot on manners. I usually say something if someone doesn't thank me to be honest - a sarcastic "no problem" might remind them to be polite next time.

(2) AIBU to think this is the best put down ever?

I just heard this quote. I think it was in a movie, or correct me if I heard it here.

I think it is just priceless..

I'd like to see things from your point of view but I can't stick my head that far up my ass.

(Examples from the mumsnet corpus)

Having outlined what mock politeness refers to, in the following section I explain why it is such a fascinating topic for investigation, and why more research is required in this area.

1.3 Why mock politeness?

This thesis follows, and fits into, two recent trends within im/politeness studies, as discussed below. First, a focus on impoliteness as an interactional strategy, not just an aberration or unavoidable stance. Second, a focus on mismatch and implicational im/politeness.

Regarding the first movement, if politeness came of age in the 1980s following the seminal publications by Leech (1980[1977], 1983), Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) and Lakoff (1973), then the 2000s was the decade in which impoliteness grew into a field of study. By way of a very rough indication, searches on Google Scholar for publications with 'impoliteness' in the title retrieve the following numbers:

1991-1995: 1 publication;

1996-2000: 5 publications;

2001-2005: 13 publications;

2006-2010: 109 publications;

2011-2014: 120 publications.

Thus, this thesis follows a growing trend of interest in impoliteness and conflictive interactions. However, although the increase in impoliteness publications and conferences clearly represent the opening up of a new field, it still appears to be the case that impoliteness is the ‘poor cousin’ of politeness (Locher & Bousfield 2008: 2).¹ If we use the same rough test of academic attention, the number of publications retrieved with ‘politeness’ in the title number 1090 for the period 2011-2014, that is a difference of nearly tenfold. Thus there is still much scope for development of the field and this thesis aims to contribute to this growing field.

The second movement with which this thesis aligns itself is the focus on implicational im/politeness. The increased visibility of impoliteness came about as researchers drew attention to the fact that the existing politeness frames did not account for participants using bald on record strategies because they were *choosing* to be offensive. Similarly, in the focus on mismatch, one aspect that I wish to draw attention to is the offensive function that ostensible redress and politeness may perform. Thomas (1995: 143) summarises the functions of indirectness, as follows:

- The desire to make one’s language more interesting
- To increase the force of one’s message
- Competing goals

¹ The series of *Linguistic Impoliteness and Rudeness* (LIAR) conferences began in 2006 and was followed by conferences in 2009 and 2012.

- Politeness/regard for face

What I aim to do in this study is place ‘impoliteness’ at the bottom of the above list. In so doing, as mentioned, I position myself once again within a trend which is gaining momentum, as evidenced by recent extensive discussions of implicational impoliteness (Culpeper 2011a; Haugh 2014). Despite these recent developments, to date, the main focus of im/politeness mismatch has been mock impoliteness (e.g. Bernal 2008; Haugh 2010, 2014; Haugh & Bousfield 2012; McKinnon & Prieto 2014), and in this study I contribute to redressing that balance.

Outside the field of im/politeness studies, mock politeness has been more extensively addressed in the field of irony studies (discussed in Chapter 4) and, to a lesser extent, in social psychology under the heading of ‘patronising’. One objective in this study is to bring together (and test) the insights and findings from these different fields into a more unified description of mock politeness. This may also offer insights to the additional field of sentiment analysis where researchers are grappling with the difficulties of automating recognition of implicit meanings, in particular sarcasm (e.g. Reyes et al. 2012; Maynard & Greenwood 2014; Liebrecht et al. 2013).

To sum up, what makes mock politeness so interesting is that the mismatch means that a hearer/target is required to ‘construct’ his/her own offence and it provides the opportunity to study creative and avoidable impoliteness. It is also an area that has been underdeveloped to date (cf. Haugh 2014: 280) and that is ripe for development given the recent trends in the field towards analysis of impoliteness and mismatch.

Having outlined my interest in the topic area, in the following sub-section I set out the reasons for the methodological approach.

1.4 Why a corpus linguistic approach?

According to Romero-Trillo (2008)

pragmatics and corpus linguistics have not only helped each other in a relationship of mutualism, but, they have also made common cause against the voices that have derided and underestimated the utility of working with real data to elucidate the patterns of language use

Romero-Trillo (2008: 1)

They are, therefore, a combination that is ideally suited to an empiricist approach to linguistics. One possible barrier to corpus pragmatics is that corpus linguistics has often been criticised for neglecting context in the search for quantity (e.g. Widdowson 2004). However, the model which is employed here is grounded in the importance of analysing language in use, following the Firthian principle that '[w]e must take our facts from speech sequences verbally complete in themselves and operating in contexts of situation which are typical, recurrent, and repeatedly observable' (Firth 1957:35).

In this study, im/politeness theory and corpus linguistics play complementary roles, essentially, to adapt Sinclair's (2007) metaphor, they give the study head (theory) and legs (data). As Hunston (2007: 27) tells us, '[f]irstly, corpora give us the opportunity to quantify and make it particularly easy to quantify forms. Secondly, they allow us to observe multiple uses of a word or phrase in context'. This provides two persuasive reasons for adopting the corpus approach, but the third, and most important, is provided by Sinclair, who stated that '[t]he language looks different when you look at a lot of it at once' (1991: 100). The corpus approach offers new ways of looking at the data and therefore potential for new insights. The power of the corpus approach for

generating findings is then complemented by the theory of im/politeness, as Sinclair also (reluctantly) said ‘[i]t is impossible to study patterned data without some theory’ (2004: 10) and the theory allows us to ask meaningful questions, and to interpret the responses that we get. The question of methodology, and potential limitations, are explored in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.5 The corpus

I have already mentioned the importance that is attributed to contextualised, naturally occurring data in this study. The data used here comes from two internet forums, one based in the UK and one in Italy. However, the occurrences of mock politeness which are discussed by the participants in these forums go beyond the immediate environment of the forum and often occurred in non-computer mediated interaction. These two data sources were chosen because they allow me to analyse informal conversation without losing situational context features, as would almost certainly occur with transcribed spoken data (discussed further in Chapter 6). That is to say that, as an analyst, I experience the context and the data in a similar way to the original participants. Furthermore, there is no observer effect as the conversations took place independently of me, as a researcher.

An important feature of the datasets is that they are in different languages (English and Italian) and from different countries. The rationale for selecting data from two languages and countries is to enhance the comparison of the participant usage of mock politeness with the existing academic description. More specifically, it allows me to identify potential anglocentric bias in the academic descriptions.

The motivation for choosing online data sources is further discussed in Chapter 2, and the forums and corpus compilations are described in Chapter 6.

1.6 Research questions and aims

The central aim of this thesis is to contribute to our knowledge of how the full range of mock politeness is evaluated and performed, and to relate this new knowledge to the existing theory. This underlying objective has been broken down into the following research questions:

1. What metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?

As noted above, there has been little research on mock politeness to date, and it is not known what terms participants themselves use to indicate mock polite behaviours. This is what I set out to redress with this question which is reported in Chapters 7 and 9. In Chapter 7 I test to what extent *sarcastic* and *ironic* (and Italian equivalents) indicate mock politeness. While in Chapter 9 I look at the wider range of potential metapragmatic labels. The sub-questions are therefore:

1a. Are the metapragmatic labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data? (Chapter 8)

1b. What metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data? (Chapter 10)

2. How do these metapragmatic labels and the behaviours which they describe relate to one another within and across languages?

With this question, I explore to what extent the different metapragmatic labels indicate different kinds of mock politeness and different contextual features for the performance of mock politeness. The second part to this question is the comparison across languages and here I seek to discover whether the cognate labels are used and

evaluated in similar ways, and whether they refer to similar kinds of impoliteness behaviour. The sub-questions are:

2a. How do the labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* relate to one another within and across the (British) English and Italian corpora? (Chapters 7 and 8)

2b. How do the wider range of metapragmatic labels relate to one another within and across languages? (Chapters 9 and 10)

This information then informs the following question.

3. *What is the relationship between (a) the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels and the behaviours which they describe and (b) the second order descriptions?*

The exception to the paucity of research into mock politeness mentioned above is the focus on irony and sarcasm and indeed these have often been equated with mock politeness (e.g. Leech 1983). Therefore, in Chapters 7 and 8 I respond to this second question with particular reference to irony and sarcasm and evaluate to what extent the lay usage of these terms matches with the academic theorisation. In Chapters 9 and 10, I investigate to what extent other metapragmatic labels and the behaviours they indicate fit into the existing models. Therefore the sub-questions are:

3a. What is the relationship between the first-order (participant) uses of *ironic* and *sarcastic* and the second order (academic) descriptions? (Chapters 7 and 8)

3b. What is the relationship between the English and Italian first-order uses of the wider range of metapragmatic labels, and the behaviours which they describe, and the second order descriptions? (Chapter 10)

1.7 Thesis contributions

This thesis contributes mainly to the field of im/politeness but also that of irony studies. The main contributions are the following:

The thesis addresses an under-researched area and constitutes the first extensive discussion of mock politeness. It aims to consolidate and unite research into mock politeness from two perspectives. First, by drawing on research into mock politeness from different fields and carried out under different names, such as ‘sarcasm’ and ‘patronising’. Second, by bringing together a range of behaviours which perform mock politeness in different ways. Previous studies, by focussing on sarcasm and irony, have limited the type of mock politeness that can be examined. For instance, the kind of overt mismatch which was shown in example (2) has been excluded from previous discussion. Moreover, im/politeness behaviours discussed under the labels of ‘patronising’ and ‘condescending’ have not previously been included in discussion of mock politeness. However, as will be seen, they are frequently based on this kind of im/politeness mismatch.

The second main area of contribution relates to the methodological approach, both in the use of empirical data and the emphasis on the first order participant perspective. In the field of irony studies, empirical analyses of naturally occurring behaviours have been somewhat neglected. Furthermore, within these studies, the analysts’ understanding of what constitutes irony and sarcasm has been accepted as ‘superior’ to that of the language users, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 (Burgers et al. 2011; Dynel 2014). This lacuna is addressed directly in this study which places the participants’ evaluations at the centre of the analysis. In the first phase, I analyse the ways in which the metapragmatic labels are used and evaluated by the participants.

This is similar to the process in Partington (2006) who investigated how *ironic* was used in newspaper discourse. However, I then go beyond this analysis of the metapragmatic label to investigate the behaviour which the label described. This innovation allows me to evaluate the second-order, academic theories from an empirical participant perspective. This assessment is enhanced by employing data from two languages and countries, thus testing the second order academic theory more extensively.

The methodology of combining corpus linguistics and im/politeness is also innovative in the way that it is carried out. It constitutes a challenge to Ruhlemann (2010: 290) who states that ‘some pragmatic aspects inevitably escape corpus linguistic analysis [...] in a corpus, only those phenomena can be studied fully whose lexical form(s) and pragmatic function(s) display a straightforward one-to-one relationship’. In this thesis, I intend to do exactly what Ruhlemann says is not possible: in investigating mock politeness, where the lexical form and pragmatic functions do not display a straightforward one-to-one relationship.

1.8 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 presents the research context with regard to im/politeness. I address the topic from the practical perspective of structuring this investigation and so identify operationalisable definitions of face and impoliteness and test the theories of im/politeness for their capacity to deal with mock politeness. Furthermore, I discuss the problems of anglocentricity in im/politeness and the importance of distinguishing between lay and academic viewpoints. The metapragmatic approach is then presented as a means of addressing this gap. Finally, I discuss the analysis of im/politeness with

reference to cross-cultural/cross-linguistic data and online texts. This chapter serves to underpin the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Chapter 3 addresses the second key concept in mock politeness, the issue of mismatch. I discuss how mismatch has been conceived and employed in previous studies, in order to form a base for the analysis of *mock* politeness. I also examine the various functions which may be performed through im/politeness mismatch in order to orient mock politeness within the full frame of im/politeness mismatch. Research into behaviours which are labelled as *patronising* are also evaluated for relevance to mock politeness.

Chapter 4 continues from the previous chapter as it also focusses on mismatch, but it surveys, more specifically, research into irony and sarcasm. These are considered separately because they have been studied much more extensively, and the discussion in this chapter forms the basis against which the observed usages can be compared. The discussion of facework functions of irony and sarcasm is particularly important for the subsequent analysis of mock politeness. The discussion presented here highlights the lack of agreement in the field about what irony and sarcasm are, and how they relate to one another.

Chapter 5 surveys the different methods which have been employed in research into (potential) mock politeness, and then discusses previous applications of corpus linguistics to im/politeness study in more detail. This chapter aims to show the range of approaches that are available and to demonstrate why I have chosen to take a metalinguistic approach which employs corpus linguistics.

Chapter 6 presents the data and corpus software that I used for this research project. The two forums are presented and contextualised and I describe the corpus

compilation and annotation. The software used for compilation and interrogation are also described.

Chapter 7 investigates how the metapragmatic terms *ironic*/IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO are actually used by participants in the two online forums. These participant evaluations from two different languages are compared and contrasted with the second-order academic theorisation.

Chapter 8 presents the findings from the investigation into the behaviours which were labelled as *ironic*/IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO. I discuss whether the labels are indeed used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data. Drawing on the research presented in Chapter 4, I compare the behaviours described as *ironic*/IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO. I also report on the comparison of the first-order (participant) behaviours and the second order (academic) descriptions.

Chapter 9 reports on which metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data. I also examine those labels which did not indicate mock polite behaviours and discuss whether the impoliteness or mismatch element was missing. The labels are then compared both within and across languages.

Chapter 10 focusses exclusively on mock polite behaviours and relates the findings to the second-order academic theorisations. I discuss the extent to which the observed behaviours are more creative and varied than accounted for in the existing literature. The comparison of the labels is also reported, indicating how the choice of label is dependent on contextual variables rather than structures of mock politeness.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis. In this chapter, I return to the research questions outlined above, and report on the findings. I then address the limitations to the current project, and look forwards to future projects which could emerge from this study.

CHAPTER 2 ANALYSING MOCK IM/POLITENESS

In this chapter, I start by clarifying what I mean by im/politeness, emphasising the importance of creating an operationalisable construct and examining im/politeness as part of language interaction.² I then briefly discuss the problems of anglocentricity in im/politeness study and discuss the need to distinguish between lay and academic viewpoints. In the third section, I present the significance of a metapragmatic approach for the analysis of im/politeness, in light of these concerns. In the following section, I discuss some models of im/politeness in order to identify a suitable frame for this project. The models are applied to two instances of impoliteness to verify their ability to account for this type of impoliteness. My aim here is to approach this rather vast area from a practical perspective of how im/politeness can be operationalised and analysed, thus informing my analysis in Chapters 7-10. In the final two sections, I discuss the analysis of im/politeness with reference to cross-cultural/cross-linguistic data and online texts.

In the following chapters, which also survey previous research, I will look at work on 'mismatch' of form and function or expectations, and more specifically research into irony and sarcasm, which will help inform this study of mock politeness.

2.1 Which im/politeness?

In this section, I attempt to clarify how the terms *im/politeness* and *face* are used in this study (although the main discussion of how im/politeness is communicated is left for Section 2.4). My intention is not to try and resolve the complex positions taken up

² The form im/politeness is used to refer to both politeness and impoliteness throughout this study.

regarding these concepts, but to specify an operationalisable understanding of the key concepts of face and impoliteness.

2.1.1 Operationalising face

The concept of face and its relationship to im/politeness has been the subject of extensive discussion, although it is not within the scope of this brief review to survey such debates on face or the relationship between facework and im/politeness (see, for example, Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Haugh 2013a for theoretical discussion; or St. André 2013 for a historical perspective). For the purposes of this study, I will be adopting Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2002, 2008) analytic frame for face and I will be assuming that facework is an important component in im/politeness (discussed below). The Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2002, 2008) model has been chosen for three main reasons: first, because it breaks the concept of face into more detail than other models, which has practical advantages at the analytic stage. Second, because it was developed in order to discuss intercultural communication and therefore is potentially better suited for a cross-cultural analysis (e.g. as used in García 2010). Third, because it has been successfully applied to the analysis of impoliteness (see, for example, Culpeper et al. 2010; Cashman 2006, 2008).

According to this model, we can distinguish between three types of face and two categories of sociality rights, which are described below. The model of face returns to Goffman and is therefore defined as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (Goffman 1967: 5, cited in Spencer-Oatey 2008: 13). The components are:

Quality face: This refers to an individual's desire to be positively appraised in terms of competence, abilities, appearance and so on (Spencer-Oatey 2002:

540). While primarily drawing on Goffman, this also corresponds quite closely to positive face in the Brown and Levinson model.

Social identity face: This refers to an individual's sense of group identity and need for that group identity to be favourably appraised. For instance, in the English dataset analysed here, there is often conflict between the two groups who identify as 'stay at home mothers' and 'work outside the home mothers', and a criticism of a member of a group with reference to their working choices, is frequently received as a criticism of the choices of all members in that group. As Spencer-Oatey (2008: 13) states, this specification of a collective identity represents an attempt to respond to criticisms regarding the individualistic nature of the Brown and Levinson model (e.g. Matusmoto 1988; Ide 1989; Mao 1994).

Relational face: This refers to an individual's desire to have their role in a given relationship favourably appraised. For instance, being recognised as behaving like a good mother towards her child is an important face want in the datasets I analyse in this project.

The next set concerns sociality rights, which broadly refer to an individual's expectations and entitlements regarding their interactions with others (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 13) and, as such, correspond with Brown and Levinson's concept of negative face.

Sociality rights, Equity: This refers to an individual's belief that s/he is entitled to be treated in a way that is perceived to be fair and equal.

Sociality rights, Association: This refers to an individual's belief that s/he is entitled to social involvement with others. According to Spencer-Oatey (2008:

16) this is related to both ‘interactional involvement/detachment’, which is concerned with quantity of interaction, and also ‘affective involvement-detachment’, which is concerned with the quality of sharing ‘concerns, feelings and interests’.

These categories are discussed further in Chapter 6 where I explain how they were applied to the data analysis. Given that I am interested in mock politeness, I will primarily be discussing how participants attack face and rights (as outlined above) and thus perform impoliteness.³ However, the role of self face-enhancement and face-saving will also be important in understanding why a participant chooses to perform mock politeness.⁴

2.1.2 Operationalising impoliteness

The definition of impoliteness has proved almost as problematic as that of face. For instance, Locher and Bousfield (2008: 1) reported there was little agreement among the contributors to their edited collection and Culpeper (2011:19-20) lists nine definitions just from the contemporary field of linguistic politeness. The ‘lowest common denominator’ in such definitions according to Locher & Bousfield (2008) is that ‘[i]mpoliteness is behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context’ (2008: 3). This clearly relates impoliteness to face, although given that I have chosen to use the Spencer-Oatey frame, this would need to be modified to :

³ The term *attack* rather than *threaten* is preferred, following Culpeper (2011) because, as he states, ‘[t]he semantics of ‘threat’ herald future damage’ (2011: 118) but in most cases I will be discussing actual past/present damage.

⁴ See, for instance, Craig et al. (1986) on the need to include the speaker’s face.

impoliteness is behaviour that attacks face *or sociality rights* in a particular context

However, this definition lacks an element which shows *who* evaluates the behaviour as impolite. If we consider Culpeper's (2005) definition, this states that

Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).

Culpeper (2005: 38)

In this definition, we then have reference to the perceptions of a speaker (indirectly) and hearer. This is important as an acknowledgement that impoliteness is an evaluation that is made by a participant, it is not an absolute value that will be shared by all participants. It then follows that I am not assuming that participants need to agree on an interpretation for a given speech event to be classified as impolite.⁵

Furthermore, from a practical perspective, situating the evaluation with a participant makes the identification more operationisable, because it is no longer necessary to seek confirmation from multiple participants of a shared evaluation. Thus, the 'lowest common denominator' definition could be adapted to:

impoliteness is behaviour that is *evaluated by a participant* as attacking face or sociality rights in a particular context

⁵ This follows Leech (2014) who argues that 'the attribution of politeness to an utterance can mean either "S intends it be polite" or "O interprets it to be polite" or both (2014: 222). However, it is in contrast to some other models, for instance Haugh & Bousfield (2012: 1103) on mock impoliteness state that 'in an interaction involving only two participants, both of those participants must evaluate the talk or conduct as non-impolite for it to count as mock impoliteness'.

It may be noted that one element I have not transferred from Culpeper (2005) is the reference to intentionality (also in Terkourafi 2008; Bousfield 2008; Harris 2011 *inter alia*). This has been omitted because it is not something which I can consistently measure in my analysis and therefore it could be misleading to include it, although it is almost certainly a factor in the perception of the gravity of the impoliteness (as in Culpeper's 2011a definition).

Another omission in the definition that I have adapted is that I do not refer to a self-centred view of the attack, as for instance in Holmes et al. (2008: 196) who define impoliteness as being 'assessed by the hearer as threatening *his* or *her* face or social identity' (my italics). In the definition developed here, I have left space for the evaluation to refer to attack on another's face (as in Terkourafi 2003).

These modifications leave me with a definition that allows for replicable analysis of impoliteness. However, it should be acknowledged that it is limited insofar as it relies on face as a concept which, therefore, 'tacks the notion of impoliteness on to the notion of "face-attack" [which] simply transfers the explanatory load on to another notion that may itself be controversial' Culpeper (2011a: 23).

2.1.3 Im/politeness in interaction

The final point that I would like to make with regards to how im/politeness is addressed in this study is that I am interested in 'impoliteness in interaction' (to borrow the title of Bousfield 2008). That is to say both that I consider im/politeness to be an evaluation that occurs with reference to interaction between participants, and that I assume that impolite speech events will usually have a 'before' and an 'after'. In doing so, I am drawing on two significant (and overlapping) approaches to im/politeness: the discursive approach (e.g. Locher & Watts 2005; Mills 2003; Watts

2003; Linguistic Politeness Research Group 2011) and the relational approach (e.g. Locher & Watts 2005; Watts 2003; Spencer-Oatey 2008).

These two approaches belong to the so-called second wave of im/politeness research (Culpeper 2011b; Grainger 2011) which was reacting against the perceived limitations of the first-wave research, most frequently epitomised by the work of Brown & Levinson (1978/1987). Some key criticisms to which the second wave were responding include the following, identified in Culpeper (2011):

- (1) Ignoring the lay person's conception of politeness, as revealed through their use of the terms polite and politeness, and instead postulating a facework theory as a theory of politeness;
- (2) Claiming to be universal (a particular issue with regard to their conception of "face" applied across diverse cultures);
- (3) Basing the politeness model on an inadequate pragmatic model, which is biased towards the speaker and the production of language and which fails to account for key ways in which politeness is understood; and
- (4) Failing to articulate an adequate conception of context, despite the key importance of context in judgments of politeness.

Culpeper (2011b: 409)

In the discursive approach, the response to these criticisms lead to a diverse set of practices, but which share three common assumptions according to Mills (2011), which are:

- (1) A view of what constitutes politeness (particularly the fact that most of these theorists argue that politeness does not reside in utterances, and they are also interested in the relation between politeness and impoliteness).

(2) Secondly, discursive theorists try to describe the relation between individuals and society in relation to the analysis of politeness (they generally do not consider that identity is pre-formed, and they argue that politeness is constructed jointly within groups).

(3) Thirdly, discursive theorists tend to use a similar form of analysis (although they obviously draw on different theoretical models). They tend to question the role of the analyst, and they focus on the analysis of context. They tend to analyse longer stretches of interaction than traditional politeness theorists and they tend to focus on issues of judgement of politeness rather than assuming that politeness is an element which can simply be traced within the utterance itself. They tend to be wary of making generalisations and they also tend to see politeness as a resource which can be accessed by participants rather than something inherent in utterances.

Mills (2011: 35)

From this summary, important elements for the present study relate to the importance of co-construction, to the focus on judgements of im/politeness and the need to analyse longer stretches of text.

With reference to the latter, the significance of analysing longer stretches of text is that it allows the researcher to investigate the ways in which impoliteness utterances can be 'prepared for', the way in which they may be combined, and the ways in which the sequences may conclude (Bousfield 2008: 146). Thus it responds to the criticisms of the first wave that such approaches tended to focus on single utterances (e.g. Mullany 2011) and discussed im/politeness strategies as if they occurred 'one at a time' (e.g. Bousfield 2008). With reference to impoliteness specifically, response turns are discussed in Bousfield (2007), Culpeper et al. (2003), Cashman (2006), Dobs and Blitvich (2013). With particular reference to mock politeness, responses have

been addressed in studies of patronising behaviours (e.g. Becker et al. 2011) and irony (Gibbs 2000).

However, where I differ from the discursive approach regards the final comment in point (3) above in which Mills notes their wariness of making generalisations.⁶

Ogiermann (2009: 266) identifies one difficulty arising from this approach, which is that ‘postmodern theorists avoid making generalisations and predictions in respect to politeness, while regarding it as unpredictable, which suggests that everything is open to an interpretation as anything and there is no way of predicting the effect of one’s behaviour on other people’. Furthermore, and of particular relevance to this study, Culpeper (2011b) identifies the problems for cross-cultural research:

If we throw out universal concepts or more radically any kind of generalization, how can we compare the politeness of one culture with that of another, if each is defined solely within its own terms? It would be the equivalent of comparing apples with oranges and concluding that they are different; whereas applying dimensions of variation (e.g. the absence/presence of seeds, edibility, sweetness) gives us a handle on the differences.

Culpeper (2011b: 410)

⁶ I also consider the emphasis on stating that ‘politeness does not reside in utterances’, not ‘assuming that politeness is an element which can simply be traced within the utterance itself’, not considering politeness as ‘something inherent in utterances’ (Mills 2011: 35) to be something of a straw man argument because I have not encountered any substantial body of literature which asserts this.

2.2 Whose im/politeness?

In this section, I continue the process of specifying what I mean by im/politeness by focussing on the question of *whose* im/politeness is being investigated. I address this first from a cultural standpoint, by discussing the ways in which our theories of im/politeness and face are strongly influenced by the cultures of our dominant scientific language: English. I then move on to the distinction between first and second order concepts of im/politeness and discuss how this may help address the issue of anglo-dominance.

2.2.1 *Im/politeness and the anglocentric viewpoint*

A strong thread of criticism directed at Brown & Levinson's (1987) 'Politeness: some *universals* in language usage' (my italics), was that the features they identified and even the underlying assumptions were not applicable to all cultures (e.g. Gu 1990; Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1988). Despite similar criticisms and the rise of culture-specific im/politeness analysis (see, for example recent collections edited by Kádár & Mills 2011 and Bargiela-Chiappini & Kádár 2010) the potential bias towards an anglocentric viewpoint still exists. This is because there are three interrelated ways in which im/politeness may be considered to be, or risks being, anglocentric: the first is that much published research has been carried out on English-speaking cultures, the second is that much published research has been carried out by English-speaking researchers and the third is that English constitutes the dominant scientific language in our area of study. These three points are clearly interlinked but where they differ is in the overtness with which they operate, which presents something of a cline. For instance, in the case of the first, the researcher is likely to be conscious of the limitations and the solution is relatively easy insofar as it involves para-replication of the study across other cultures. However, in the case of the last point, the researcher is

highly constrained (is there an alternative available?) and much less likely to be conscious of the limitations. Therefore, this is the element which is discussed in more detail below.

In a recent paper on the lexical item *rude*, Waters (2012: 1051) notes that while impoliteness may be a universal concept, ‘the words used to describe such behaviours are not universal. They are language-specific and they reflect particular culture-specific construals of what is appropriate and inappropriate and why. Not recognising their culture specificity risks ethnocentricity’.⁷ According to Haugh (2012), the adoption of English as the scientific language of im/politeness may lead to two problems. The first is that it may ‘unduly restrict the scope of what we as analysts treat as worthy of interest, because words and concepts inevitably encapsulate a worldview, including ways of perceiving, categorizing and evaluating our social world’ and, second, ‘the use of English for some concepts may mask important differences as well as underlying assumptions about those concepts in different languages and cultures’ (2012: 116). Another issue is that there is, of course, no single anglo culture.

In this study, I partially address the potential anglocentricity of the theoretical constructs of mock politeness by comparing the academic second order construct with the first order usage in two languages and cultures. However, in the longer term, if we accept that a single language is likely to continue as the dominant language of academia in our field, then two processes seem necessary. First, the academic

⁷ Although according to Wierzbicka (2014) this anglo-dominance is also a more widespread problem that goes beyond im/politeness study.

language needs to be analysed and the culture-specific elements identified. Second, as we isolate the anglo influences, we need a process of 're-location' of the scientific language, away from the national/cultural centre, in line with the ways in which the English language as a whole has re-located away from its cultural base (Saraceni 2010).

In the following section, I discuss the notions of first and second order im/politeness and how this distinction may help us to counter the potential anglocentric bias.

2.2.2 First and second order im/politeness: Definitions and practice

One of the primary distinctions made in current studies of im/politeness is between the notions of first order im/politeness and second order im/politeness (also notated as *im/politeness*₁ and *im/politeness*₂ following Eelen 2001) and sometimes referred to as *emic* and *etic* approaches. Watts et al. initiated discussion of this distinction with reference to im/politeness in 1992, stating that:

We take first-order politeness to correspond to the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of socio-cultural groups. It encompasses, in other words, commonsense notions of politeness. Second-order politeness, on the other hand, is a theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage

Watts et al. (1992:3)

The importance of studying this kind of first order im/politeness has been emphasised in recent years, in particular with the development of the discursive approach, which emphasises the central role of lay understandings (see Eelen 2001; Mills 2009; Locher & Watts 2005). This has been reflected in the development of the concepts of *face*₁ and *face*₂. For instance, Haugh (2012: 121) argues that a first order concept of face

should be built up from the explicit use of face terms and also from experiences of face₁ where ‘the emic or folk terms would not normally apply since they lie outside the folk discourse or ideology on face in that culture’ (see also for instance Terkourafi 2008, following O’Driscoll 1996; Haugh 2013a *inter alia*).

However, the first/second order division is not without complications (see Haugh 2007b; Bousfield 2010 for overviews). Here I will address just two: the difficulty of distinguishing between the two both in theoretical and applied terms, and the potential limitations of only focussing on the first order.

One difficulty is keeping these two orders separate (as noted in Eelen 2001; Haugh 2007b; Terkourafi 2011) and how, in practice, the first/second order distinction is operationalised in the analytic procedures. To take a practical example, Paternoster (2012: 312) draws on Watts’s (2003) thinking regarding the discursive struggle that surrounds politeness and concludes that a theory of politeness should focus on the ways in which lay people evaluate politeness. Accordingly, she chooses fictional works as her dataset because they will be more likely to contain first order evaluations. However, in her analysis she notes that ‘the recipients of Montalbano’s impoliteness withhold explicit negative evaluations’ (2012: 312). There is no narratorial evaluation in the extract she provides and thus there is no evidence of such first order impoliteness evaluations. So it appears that it was the analyst using her own judgement to decide what was im/polite, in other words, applying a second-order practice.

Similarly, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al. (2013: 104) emphasise the first-order nature of their study, stating that ‘[t]he research informed close-reading of the corpus led to the identification of a number of recurrent patterns of identity construction and

negotiation vis-à-vis impoliteness in a bottom-up fashion, drawing on metapragmatic comments (Eelen 2001)'. However, the researchers do not specify what these metapragmatic comments were, how many were found, how they clustered or were distributed etc. and, therefore, once again it is not possible to really see what effect the first order focus had on the research process and findings.

In the work on irony and sarcasm (discussed further in Chapter 4), it is often unclear whether the researchers are using first or second order models, or if they distinguish between the two, which is troubling from the perspective of the anglo-influence (as discussed above). For instance Kreuz & Glucksberg (1989) define 'nonsarcastic irony' as follows:

An example of nonsarcastic irony would be "Another gorgeous day!" said when it has been gray and raining for the 15th day in a row. The remark about the gorgeous day would *normally* be interpreted as rueful and ironic, indicating displeasure with the weather, but not necessarily as an intention to hurt anyone.

Kreuz & Glucksberg (1989: 374, my italics)

The fact that the term *nonsarcastic irony* (and others) was defined with reference to 'normal' interpretation suggests that they are thinking of an a-theoretical model, and yet this is a very influential theoretical paper on irony.

Nor do the difficulties end with such inconsistencies. Another challenge that arises is that if one only focusses on first order, then how is it possible to abstract out of the description of a single event towards a broader understanding of im/politeness behaviour, i.e. how can it move from case-study to academic study? As Terkourafi (2005b) puts it:

an a priori denial of the possibility of prediction is to deny the possibility of theorizing about politeness at any level (even at the level of participants' folk theories about politeness). What we are then left with are minute descriptions of individual encounters, but these do not in any way add up to an explanatory theory of the phenomena under study.

Terkourafi (2005b: 245)

Furthermore, as Culpeper (2011b: 410) points out, if we cannot abstract out of the local, how can we compare across cultures?

In reality, the response is that many researchers use first order as a way of identifying data for analysis, or complementing the second order analysis. To take another example, Lorenzo-Dus (2009) asks participants to offer lay evaluations of the interactions under study and then continues with a second order discussion. In other cases, it is explicitly stated that the two will be combined, as in Terkourafi (2011) and Dynel (2012), who commits to an approach in which 'the second order (etic) view must first recruit first order (emic) phenomena' (2012: 163). In this study, as discussed in Chapter 5, I start with first-order terms and use these to try and understand their relationship to the each other, and to second order discussions.⁸

A final point relates to the terms 'first' and 'second' themselves: in analysing the occurrences of mock politeness in this study it became apparent that there were both (a) two groups using the metapragmatic labels (the lay participants in the forums and

⁸ As a typographical convenience, where I use the terms politeness or impoliteness, unless otherwise specified, I am referring to the second-order academic notion, when I use italics I am referring to the lexical item used in the corpus, i.e. the first order labelling.

academic writers in articles) and (b) two different functions of the terms (similar to 'use' and 'mention'). In discussion of first and second order, these two have often been conflated into first order use (lay people using the terms) and second order theorisation (academics 'mentioning' or reflecting on im/politeness). But this is not the only possibility (as anticipated by Eelen 2001), because lay people too will theorise about what exactly constitutes *sarcasm* and so on, as illustrated in (1).

(1) I once told someone their comment was bitchy. They accused me of calling them a bitch. I think that calling someone a bitch is a personal attack, but calling someone's comments bitchy isn't and that they are very different?

This distinction is clarified in Haugh (2012) who deconstructs the first / second order distinction, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

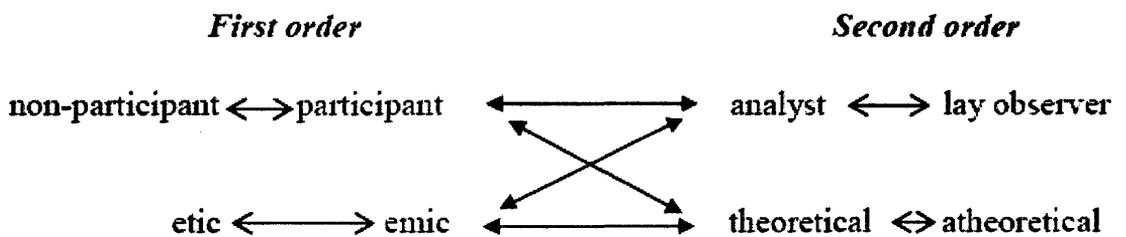


Figure 2.1 Deconstructing the first-second order distinction, from Haugh (2012: 123)

In the following section, I try to show how both first and second order notions of im/politeness can be addressed through the study of metalanguage and metapragmatics, and survey previous metalanguage research into mock politeness.

2.3 Locating im/politeness: Metapragmatic approaches

Given the importance of addressing lay understandings of politeness and face, as seen in the preceding section, the rationale for a metalanguage approach becomes clear.

Therefore, in this section I introduce the concepts of metalanguage and metapragmatics as this forms the starting point for analysis in this project.

Metalanguage may be broadly understood as referring to language used to talk about language, and more specifically, as Jaworski et al. (2004: 4) suggest, to refer to language ‘in the context of linguistic representation and *evaluations*’ (my italics). Originally conceived to complement Jakobson’s (1960) other five functions of language (referential, expressive, conative, poetic and phatic), what makes the metalingual function so important is this capacity to refer to meaning itself which ‘enables or at least helps the interlocutor to understand how what is said is meant’ (Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 2). As analysts, the value of this data is immense, particularly in the way that it can shed light on some of those problems arising from conflating first and second order conceptualisations. *Metapragmatics* is a somewhat more recent concept, and, as used in this study broadly refers to ‘that area of speakers’ competence which reflects the judgements of appropriateness on one’s own and other people’s communicative behaviour’ (Caffi 1994: 2461).⁹ Clearly these two areas overlap, but what we are targeting with *metalanguage* is the analysis of the expressions that people use to discuss im/politeness and expressions which they feel constitute im/politeness, while with *metapragmatics* we target the understandings of behaviour on which such judgements are based. In Culpeper’s (2011a) terms this then leads us to focus on the *metalinguistic expression*, for instance, the label *mocking*, and the *metapragmatic comment* which, as shown in (2), refers to the expression of opinion regarding pragmatic implications of behaviours.

⁹ It should be noted that this is only one of three senses for metapragmatics according to Caffi (1994).

(2) And I don't think [name] **was mocking** that woman's size, she was stating a fact in a reasonable way IMO (example taken from mumsnet corpus)

Although the example here contains both, as Culpeper (2011a: 100) notes, metapragmatic comments will not necessarily contain metalinguistic expressions. Indeed, not all metapragmatic study is based on these. For instance Spencer-Oatey (2011) and Cashman (2008) privilege the post-event interview for elicitation of evaluations.

According to Jaworski et al. (2004), the power of the metalanguage approach is that

It is in the 'interplay' between usage and social evaluation that much of the social "work" of language – including pressures towards social integration and division, and the policing of social boundaries generally – is done. [...] In another regard, speakers and writers make active and local use of the metalinguistic function of language in goal-oriented ways in communicative acts and events themselves

Jaworski et al. (2004: 3)

Thus, the analysis of metalanguage can tap into the ideological assumptions that are being enacted. As noted above, this means that for many researchers (for instance, Culpeper 2009; Jucker et al. 2012; Waters 2012) analysing metalanguage allows the researcher to investigate first order understandings and address the problems raised by an exclusively second order analysis, such as the potential anglo-dominance of theoretical models. From a practical perspective, the analysis of metalanguage can also offer a 'short-cut', indicating that a certain kind of facework has indeed occurred (Locher 2011: 203).

In terms of approaches to investigating metalanguage, Kádár & Haugh (2013: 192) list three: corpus analysis, lexical/conceptual mapping and metapragmatic interviews/questionnaires. However, this division is somewhat problematic in that the third indicates a *data collection* method, the second indicates a method of *data analysis* and the first could refer to either or both. An alternative division, based on function, might be between:

- investigations which aim to use the metalanguage to understand the social evaluations which underpin it, for example Culpeper (2009) on the metalanguage of impoliteness, Jucker et al. (2012) on the metalanguage of politeness, Waters (2012) on *rude*, Simpson (2011) on *irony*;
- investigations which attempt to elicit the metalanguage which could be used to cover the concepts/behaviours of interest, for example Culpeper et al.'s (2010) diary reports of events 'in which someone said something to [a participant] which made [them] feel bad (e.g., hurt, offended, embarrassed, humiliated, threatened, put upon, obstructed, ostracised)' (2010: 601);
- investigations which use the metapragmatic comment as a way of tracking down behaviours, for example Williams (2012) who used the search terms *mock* and *scorn* in order to try and identify verbal irony in a corpus of Middle English.

In this study I use the first and third of these approaches to investigate terms used for mock politeness, and the methodological processes are discussed further in Chapter 5.

However, as Davies et al. (2011) note, 'while [using metalinguistic comments] might aid us in *identifying* behaviour classed as im/polite, the comments do not necessarily explain *why* this judgement has been made'. As the title of this section indicates, the

purpose of the metalanguage approach in this study is to locate im/politeness, and for the analysis models of politeness and ‘mockness’, that is to say mismatch, are required. Thus, in the following section, I address the first of these by discussing some theories regarding how im/politeness is communicated and test which can account for mock politeness.

2.4 Communicating mock politeness

In this section, I examine previous claims regarding how im/politeness is conveyed by asking: what processes have been theorised to explain the means by which a hearer could perceive an utterance as impolite?¹⁰ Although there is, inevitably, some overlap, this is not quite the same as asking ‘what *is* im/politeness?’ but is an attempt to identify the underpinning theory of communication of evaluative meaning behind the various models of im/politeness. More specifically, I will discuss these models in terms of their capacity to explain the processes involved in mock politeness.

As noted in work by Fraser (1990, 2005[1999]), Escandell-Vidal, (1998), Jary (1998), and Haugh (2003), *inter alia*, work within im/politeness has tended to follow two strands or identify two means of communicating politeness: that im/politeness is inferred and that it is ‘anticipated’, that is to say expected. I start by briefly surveying the more norm-based understandings of how im/polite meaning is communicated, then move on work which appears to primarily fall into the first category, and finally I look at work which emphasises conventionalisation in the construction of im/politeness

¹⁰ The term ‘hearer’, as used here and throughout this thesis, encompasses the range of ratified and unratified recipients (in Goffman 1981 / Levinson [1988] terms) as well as the implied hearer/s the speaker has in mind. It is applied to both written and spoken communication.

perceptions. It should be noted that these three possibilities are not necessarily constructed as mutually exclusive, and some authors anticipate the functioning of more than one approach in their models, a point to which I return below.

As a way of illustrating the different explanations for how im/politeness could arise, I will take two examples from my pilot study. A poster on one of the online forums, mumsnet.com, started a thread with the title ‘What ways have you found to tell posters they’re being a cock but without getting your post deleted?’, which constituted a request explicitly requesting off-record impoliteness expressions (the first response suggested ‘Surely you don't mean XYZ as that would make you a right cock, which you just can't be. Can you?’). The thread quickly gathered 105 responses and the examples below illustrate two kinds of response that I want to consider further:

(3) just call them a cunt

I also like the passive aggressive ☺ and a nicely placed HTH [hope that helps] at the end of your post:

You are a cunt ☺ HTH

(4) My favourite. Not mine, but I copied it. And now everyone knows and will want one.

“Get a fucking grip.

HTH.”

Awwwww. I love it.

(5) you say YOURE A FUCKER

As can be seen, the second suggestion in (3) and the suggestion in (4) employ im/politeness mismatch by combining the face attack (*You are a cunt* and *Get a fucking grip*) with the ostensibly polite move represented in *HTH* [hope that helps]. In contrast, the first suggestion in (3) and the suggestion in (5) suggest a bald on-record

strategy (*just call them a cunt and you say YOU'RE A FUCKER*). In the following discussion, I will try and interpret how the hypothetical hearer might be expected to understand these two kinds of impoliteness according to the various models proposed. It should be noted that in some ways this is unfair as some of the models I discuss have been developed to deal with politeness rather than impoliteness, thus the intention is not to critique the model generally but to test the applicability to mock politeness. These two different realisations are chosen to see to what extent the different models are able to differentiate between the bald on-record impolite and mock polite variants.

2.4.1 Im/politeness as norm-based

The theorisation of impoliteness as norm-based forms one of the two principle approaches, although, as noted above, the two are not always considered to be mutually exclusive. This norm-based category also encompasses many discursive approaches¹¹. Such approaches differ from those relying on implicature (discussed below) because, according to Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al.,

the discursive approach (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003, 2008; Locher and Watts 2005) [...] views the construction and reproduction of mental concepts by means of language (such as polite, rude, and aggressive) as being carried out discursively. A discursive approach, therefore, advocates a constructionist rather than a rationalist approach to politeness and rudeness

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al. (2010b: 691)

¹¹ Although some of these, e.g. Locher and Watts (2005) and Locher (2004), also incorporate Relevance Theory to theorise the mental processing.

To illustrate how these viewpoints may account for my data, I take two examples here. One of the earlier models drawing on norms is the conversational-contract view (Fraser 1975, 1990; Fraser and Nolen 1981). They suggest the existence of a conversational contract, which constitutes a set of expectations about how the various participants should behave and what rights and obligations each member possesses. The conversational contract may be the result of general conventions, for instance, speaking sufficiently loudly to be heard; institutional conventions, for instance communicating in whispers during a church service; or terms determined by previous encounters or by the specifics of that situation, for instance a podiatrist has the right to ask a patient questions, but only of a particular kind (all examples from Fraser 1990). When participants operate within the norms of this conversational contract they are judged as polite. Therefore, in this model, there is no implicature, as Fraser (1990) states

The intention to be polite is not signaled, it is not implicated by some deviation(s) from the most 'efficient' bald-on record way of using the language. Being polite is taken to be a hallmark of abiding by the [Cooperative Principle] – being cooperative involves abiding by the [conversational contract].

Fraser (1990: 232)

Within this model, impoliteness would seem to be a failure to abide by the conversational contract, and there is no way of distinguishing between the two strategies of impoliteness discussed in this section (*just call them a cunt and you say YOU'RE A FUCKER*). Both the bald on-record and mock polite utterances would be classified in the same way as not abiding by the conversational contract and therefore judged as impolite.

In the reference to right and obligations, we might note the similarity with Spencer-Oatey's concept of sociality rights, as discussed above, and her approach is indeed related in that it is based on expectations. Spencer-Oatey (2005: 97) states that im/politeness consists of 'the subjective judgements that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behaviour' and subsequently that '[p]eople's expectations about social appropriateness are based primarily on their expectations which in turn are based on their beliefs about behaviour'. Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003) theorise a set of sociopragmatic interactional principles to further describe these processes, which are defined as 'socioculturally-based principles, scalar in nature, that guide or influence people's productive and interpretive use of language' (2003: 1635). These are described as being similar to conversational maxims (discussed below) but the processing mechanism for comprehension of im/politeness differs insofar as it does not seem to depend on implicature. Therefore, in order to explain how impoliteness might be achieved through the example of *YOU'RE A FUCKER*, we might say that, for the hearer, this would be seen to violate Spencer-Oatey's components of sociality rights (association and possibly equity), and it would also attack quality face. However, the model would provide the same explanation for the communication of impoliteness in *You are a cunt* ☺ *HTH* and therefore fails to distinguish between the bald on record and mock polite utterances. Thus, on its own, this model is not appropriate for my data, although, as noted above the conceptualisation of face and rights is very helpful in adding detail to the analysis. In order to differentiate mock politeness from bald on record impoliteness, it appears that what is required is a model which provides information about how the communicated impoliteness is processed.

2.4.2 Im/politeness as (conversational) implicature

Work on im/politeness as implicature falls into two main groups: those which posit a politeness principle or maxim and those which do not. I will take examples of theories from each in order to see how they can handle the mock polite data.

Politeness as a principle

In the group which have been referred to as first wave politeness (Culpeper 2011b), politeness is positioned as a principle or maxim and is implicated thus drawing on Gricean pragmatics. According to Grice (1975), meaning is the sum of what is said and what is implicated (what the hearer infers), based on the assumption that the speaker is rationally adhering to the Cooperative Principle. The Cooperative Principle is set out as ‘a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged’ (Grice 1975: 45). Two of the most influential early authors to address im/politeness from this Gricean perspective were Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983), both of whom posited a Politeness Principle. For Lakoff (1973), the Politeness Principle was a kind of fall-back, whereby if a hearer notices that the speaker is not adhering to the Gricean maxims s/he may search for an explanation in the sub-maxims of politeness (don’t impose; give options; make [the addressee] feel good, be friendly, Lakoff 1973: 298). Therefore, politeness is implicated through deviation from the Cooperative Principle (CP) and explained through reference to the Politeness Principle (PP). In the first example, *YOU'RE A FUCKER*, there is no clear deviation from the CP, apart from the non-literal form of the insult. In the second example, *you are a cunt* ☺ *HTH*, this could be seen a flouting two maxims of the CP: quality (can both parts be simultaneously true?) and manner

(the contrast causes ambiguity). In Lakoff's model, these deviations from the CP could not subsequently be explained by recourse to the PP and so the hearer might then infer impoliteness, although it is not clear how the hearer is lead to infer impoliteness rather than any other reason for violating the CP.

In a similar way to Lakoff's model, Leech (1983)'s Politeness Principle holds that politeness could be communicated by the non-adherence to a CP maxim which would be explained by the hearer with reference to the maxims of politeness (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy). Although Leech (2005: 18) states that his position is that 'a theory of politeness is inevitably also a theory of impoliteness, since impoliteness is a non-observance or violation of the constraints of politeness', it is not clear how the impoliteness would be inferred in earlier models. Following Leech (2014) we can hypothesise that in *YOU'RE A FUCKER*, there is no clear deviation from the CP, apart from the non-literal form of the insult. The second example, *you are a cunt ☺ HTH*, violates the maxim of approbation and therefore impoliteness may be inferred.

Politeness as a maxim

Other researchers have posited politeness not as a principle to stand alongside the Cooperative Principle, but as a maxim to sit with the Gricean maxims of Quality, Quantity, Manner and Relevance.¹² Although this group is part of the first wave, like those above, it continues to attract attention, as for instance in Kallia (2004) and Pfister (2010) who both posit a maxim of politeness. Kallia (2004) argues that her

¹² See for example Gu (1990); Edmondson & House (1981); Kasher (1986); Myers-Scotton (1993); Burt (2002); Fukada (1998).

model can account for both anticipated and unexpected im/politeness as well as the dual functions of politeness: that is politeness as ‘a strategy employed in order to achieve smooth interaction’ and to ‘convey indirect messages to the addressee, i.e. implicatures of politeness’ (2004: 146). The sub-maxims that she puts forward are:

Submaxim 1: Do not be more polite than expected.

Submaxim 2: Do not be less polite than expected.

Kallia (2004: 162)

In this case, the example *You are a cunt*, ☺ *HTH* would flout both sub-maxims, as the *HTH* is more polite than might be expected given the preceding co-text of the insult using a taboo term. When these two sub-maxims are flouted, the hearer could infer that the speaker intends to convey impoliteness, and it may be hypothesised that the simultaneous flouting of both submaxims would lead to greater cognitive investment in the processing.

In contrast, within Pfister’s (2010) more recent framework, an utterance is interpreted as polite by the intended hearer if and only if:

1. The speaker thereby does not impose on the hearer, and
2. The speaker thereby shows approval of the desires and actions of the hearer

Pfister (2010: 1278)

These two maxims clearly echo Brown and Levinson’s (1987) negative and positive face wants. In the case of the mock polite example, *You are a cunt*, ☺ *HTH*, it would clearly flout the second, and in the context of the public forum, would probably flout the first too. However, a weakness with this model is that it cannot differentiate between the processing of the bald on record impoliteness suggested in *YOURE A FUCKER* and the mock polite instance; both simply flout the maxims.

Politeness in relevance theory

The next group might be labelled post-Gricean in that they draw on Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986) to explain how im/politeness is conveyed. Relevance Theory (RT) develops Grice's model and shares the same focus on inferential models of communication, in other words how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning. As explained in Wilson and Sperber (2005),

[t]he central claim of relevance theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. The aim is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension

Wilson & Sperber (2005: 607)

They argue that an input is identified as relevant according to the cognitive effect that it yields and the amount of processing that it requires. In turn, this means that if an utterance requires processing effort, then the expectations of relevance will be higher, and this point is particularly germane to the discussion of surface im/politeness.

Furthermore, they state that both explicit and implicit content is communicated via inference and with reference to the principle of relevance. Because of this focus on the *processes* of understanding, it is expected that the approach will hold greater explanatory power in describing mock politeness.

In order to test the ability to distinguish between the two impolite suggestions both are briefly discussed here. In the first, explicit, strategy of *YOURE A FUCKER*, the hearer might assume that the utterance is relevant, combine the explicit premise that the speaker thinks the hearer is *A FUCKER* with the contextual information that this is a response to the hearer's own message and form the contextual implication that, as a

result of the message posted, the hearer intends to convey (public) disapprobation of the hearer i.e. impoliteness. This first hypothesis would yield a positive cognitive effect and therefore we may assume that the hearer is likely to stop processing at that point. With reference to the second example, *You are a cunt ☺ HTH*, the explicit content is more complex as there appear to be two contrasting premises: a) that the speaker thinks the hearer is *a cunt*, and b) that the speaker is expressing friendliness (the ☺ emoticon) and is framing their response as helpful to the hearer (*HTH*). It is assumed in the RT model that the hearer will follow the path of least effort to arrive at an interpretation, but in this case, presumably, it would be necessary to test various interpretive hypotheses, with reference to the context, before (possibly) arriving at the speaker's intended meaning of impoliteness. Therefore, following the relevance theory comprehension process, we can see how it highlights the extra processing effort required in the second instance of impoliteness.

One early theorist to apply Relevance Theory to the study of im/politeness was Jucker (1988), followed by others including Escandell-Vidal (1996, 1998), Jary (1998), and later work such as Watts (2003) and Christie (2007) which offers an overview of developments. However, although working within a framework that is driven by Gricean models of communication, not all researchers employing relevance theory consider im/politeness to be communicated by implicature and some tend more to a norm-based, sociocultural explanation, for example Locher and Watts (2005) and Locher (2004).

Im/politeness as implicature

The next set of theories discussed here also consider im/politeness as being communicated by implicature, but do not posit the existence of a politeness principle or maxim. The most influential of these is, of course, Brown and Levinson

(1978/1987) who posit politeness as ‘implication in the classical way’ (1987: 5), that is to say that it is communicated via conversational implicature. More specifically, they state that:

In our model, then, it is the mutual awareness of ‘face’ sensitivity, and the kinds of means-end reasoning that this induces, that together with the CP allows the inference of implicatures of politeness. From the failure to meet the maxims at face value, plus the knowledge of face-preserving strategies, the inferences are derived.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 5-6)

Their model was designed to address politeness but we could try and invert it for the interpretation of the examples from the forum. If we consider the second example, *You are a cunt ☺ HTH*, it flouts two maxims from the Cooperative Principle (Quality and Manner) and therefore, could lead to an impoliteness implicature, because, in addition, it also inverts the same positive and negative politeness strategies. If we consider Culpeper’s (1996) model, which adapts Brown and Levinson for description of impoliteness, the implicature would still come from flouting the CP, and understanding of impoliteness could come from the *knowledge of face-attacking strategies*, to reword the Brown and Levinson citation above.

More recently, Culpeper (2011a) offers a systematic analysis of implicational impoliteness derived from analyses of how impoliteness was implied/inferred in reported impoliteness incidents (2011a: 155). The following three types are identified:

- (1) Form-driven: the surface form or semantic content of a 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 a 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 a behaviour mismatches the context.

Culpeper (2011a: 155-156, italics in original)

If we consider the two forum examples, the first suggestion of simply calling someone *A FUCKER* would not fall into this category of implicational impoliteness and needs to be considered separately as conventionalised impoliteness (discussed further below), while the second utterance could be described in terms of 2a, that is to say each part of the utterance is convention-driven, the first conventionally expressing impoliteness, the second conventionally expressing politeness, and therefore ‘the context projected by part of a behaviour mismatches that projected by another part’ because the two components cannot simultaneously be believed.

An important feature of this model is that implicature is *one* of the ways in which im/politeness is communicated. As Haugh (2007a) argues, implicature does not account for all communication of politeness, and the implicature-driven models may be too heavily dependent on speaker intention. Haugh (2007a) argues instead for an approach to politeness implicature based on Arundale’s Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication (e.g. 1999), positioning politeness implicatures not simply as indirect meanings that arise from a consideration of potential speaker intentions, but arising from collaborative interaction. In the case of implicational impoliteness,

the collaboration is particularly important because a hearer/addressee is actively involved in constructing his/her own face attack.

2.4.3 Conventionalised im/politeness

Interpretations of politeness that account for conventionalisation, such as Culpeper (2005, 2010, 2011a) and Terkourafi (2003, 2008), like those which rely on (conversational) implicature, also draw on Gricean pragmatics and indeed the two are likely to go together.¹³ Conventionalised meaning is seen as a sort of halfway house between conventional and non-conventional meanings, or as Culpeper (2010) puts it, between semantics and pragmatics. This midway position has also been noted in experimental studies, for instance, research by Gibbs (1986) found that conventionalised indirect utterances were processed as quickly as direct forms.

With reference to mock politeness, we can envisage two key roles for conventionalisation: (1) the behaviours which are used to express the insincere politeness may involve conventionalised politeness formulae, and (2) the mock polite behaviour itself may be conventionalised for the expression of impoliteness, as illustrated in the following exchange from a television series:

Humphries: Minister, with the greatest possible respect--

Hacker: Oh, are you going to insult me again?

¹³Although Watts (2003) also discusses conventionalised meanings under the term expressions of procedural meaning (EPMs), where procedural meaning refers to the communication of interpersonal (relational) senses. These EPMs are understood as expressions which have acquired the pragmatic meaning over time, and therefore their interpretation by a potential hearer is dependent on her/his previous exposure. In Watts' description, one role of the EPMs is to constrain potential interpretations which the hearer may derive according to relevance theory (2003: 211). In this case, they do not directly communicate politeness, but avoid the inadvertent communication of impoliteness.

It is clear that the second speaker interprets the politeness formulae of the first utterance (*with the greatest possible respect*) directly as a pre-insult.

We can see how the former kind of conventionalisation works with reference to the example used throughout this section of *you are a cunt* ☺ *HTH*. Terkourafi (2003) draws on Grice's distinction between generalised and particularised implicatures, therefore, according to her model,

[i]t emerges that such an implicature [that the speaker is being polite] will be *particularised* if the speaker's utterance in context is indirect and ambivalent, or conventionalised for some use but used in a context other than the one relative to which is it conventionalised. However, such an implicature will be *generalised* if the speaker uses an expression which is conventionalised for some use relative to the (minimal) context of utterance

Terkourafi (2003:150, italics in original)

Thus we may see how the model breaks each implicature down further, integrating conventionalisation. According to Terkourafi's model, in the second example, *you are a cunt* ☺ *HTH*, we have two utterances which are conventionalised for the general context in which they are used: the first would be *YOURE A FUCKER* which is conventionalised for expressing impoliteness, and the second would be ☺ *HTH*, conventionalised for expressing politeness in this context. The two parts to the utterance are logically marked in that it is difficult to sustain that both are true. The hearer would therefore need to continue the inferential process and discard one of the two possible interpretations. Assuming that the polite interpretation is discarded, the hearer would now attribute the impoliteness in two different ways, the first, through the conventionalised form and the second, through the extra effort expended, that the

wish to help is insincere and the reverse is intended.¹⁴ Thus we can see that this model is more effective in distinguishing between the two impolite expressions.

A key question arising with conventionalisation is how this process occurs, for instance in Levinson (2000), conventionalisation is discussed within a frame of diachronic meaning shift. However, there is no reason to assume that meanings which become conventionalised will necessarily move further along the cline towards conventional meanings; at any one, synchronous moment in time. Conventionalised meanings may be conventionalised for particular contexts while remaining non-conventional in others, as I explore in Chapter 10. This is central to Terkourafi's (2003) definition, in which she describes 'conventionalisation as a relationship holding between utterances and contexts, which is a correlate of the (statistical) frequency with which an expression is used in one's experience in a particular context' (2003: 151). The focus on (statistical) frequency also shows how corpus linguistics (discussed in Chapter 5) may be useful in investigating this area. However, as Culpeper notes, an interesting feature is that 'people have knowledge of impoliteness formulae which far exceeds their direct experience of them. So frequency cannot be the sole or even dominant factor in their conventionalisation' (2010: 3243). In explaining this phenomenon he emphasises the role of indirect experience and experience of metadiscourse, 'the long shadow of impoliteness behaviours' (2010: 3243).

¹⁴ This is not to say that the form *HTH* could not be conventionalised elsewhere to express insincerity, indeed, as discussed in Chapter 10, it appears to be conventionalised for mock politeness in some forums on the English site.

Another salient issue relates to the degree of conventionalisation and subsequent effect on perceptions of im/politeness. Culpeper (2011a) presents the results of an empirical study and reports that conventionalised impoliteness formulae will vary according to three scales: first, the degree of conventionalisation, for instance whether an item is only conventionalised when accompanied by a particular prosody; second, the extent to which they are ‘context-spanning’, i.e. are conventionalised as impolite in a range of contexts; third, the degree of gravity of offence associated with the formula (2011a: 137).

If we apply this to the two forum examples once again, we may say that the first suggestion *YOU'RE A FUCKER* would be quite highly conventionalised within the culture and context of use, it also has a relatively high context-span, given that it would be considered offensive in many other contexts. The degree of gravity is more difficult to discuss in absolute terms. In contrast, the second example *you are a cunt* 😊 *HTH*, when the utterance is taken as whole, is less highly conventionalised and so is likely to place a somewhat greater processing requirement on the hearer. The salience of conventionalisation is shown in Kim (2014) who found that native speakers were more likely to rely on conventionalised ironic formulae (such as ‘yeah, right’) in interpreting an utterance as ironic, while the non-native speakers in the study cited violation of quality and quantity maxims, the use of rhetorical questions and non-verbal features as more influential cues.

2.4.4 Conclusions to communicating mock politeness

From the overview of im/politeness theories discussed here, it is clear that for the discussion of mock politeness I require a model which can account for conventionalisation and the differences between mock polite and impolite utterances. I

will therefore be drawing on the Culpeper's (2011a) model of impoliteness as it has been created for this purpose, and where appropriate, I will make reference to relevance theory in the discussion of cognitive effort/reward. I can now combine the discussion of impoliteness from Section 2.1.2 with these theories in order to develop the working definition of mock politeness which is that:

mock politeness occurs when there is a im/politeness mismatch leading to an implicature of impoliteness

In the following section, I discuss the first of two key aspects of context: culture. The importance of culture for understanding conventionalisation is noted by Ogiermann, in her study of the speech act of apology in English, Polish and Russian, where she claims that:

Although I agree with the postmodern view that utterances can only be classified as polite when they are interpreted as such by the addressee, I would argue that the extent to which particular utterances are likely to be interpreted as polite or interpreted literally is culture-specific. Every language has at its disposal a range of culture-specific routine formulae which carry "politeness default values" (Escandell-Vidal 1996: 643).

Ogiermann (2009: 267)

2.5 Analysing mock politeness from a cross-cultural perspective

There seem to be two principle motivations for cross-cultural analyses of im/politeness. In the first, the researcher aims to describe cultural practices with the intention of improving intercultural communication or cross-cultural resources (e.g. Mapson 2014 on im/politeness in sign language interpreting). In the second, the researcher aims to identify features which are shared across cultures and which could,

therefore, form a second-order academic theorisation and/or identifies features which are not shared with the aim of critiquing conceptualisations. For instance Fillippova (2014) investigates the development of children's understanding of irony in two different cultural contexts in order to 'establish whether the findings from the study of Canadian population collected previously in a major Canadian city [...] hold for a speech community in Czech Republic' (2014: 212). This study primarily falls into the second type because I employ two language sets as a way of checking applicability of second order discussion and identifying shared characteristics of mock politeness.

2.5.1 Cultural stereotypes and mock politeness

Although this study primarily draws on data from two cultures in order to test the second order theory, another motivation came from observing the way that mock politeness is strongly associated with particular (national) cultures at both lay and academic second order perspectives, thus reflecting Mills's (2009) claim that 'generalisations about impoliteness at a cultural level are frequently underpinned by stereotypical and ideological knowledge' (2009: 1047). The stereotypes of mock politeness at a lay level are discussed in Taylor (2015), but here I would like to focus on the academic work. For instance, Ajtony's (2013:10) analysis of stereotypes in the UK television show *Downton Abbey* tells us that '[a]nother stereotypical English trait of some of the characters is their humour (English humour!) blended with irony' (2013:10), but there is no evidence for the assumption that such behaviour is typically English, or specification about what 'English humour' consists of. Similarly, Maynard & Greenwood (2014: 4328) tell us that '[s]arcasm occurs frequently in user-generated content such as blogs, forums and microposts, especially in English' and '[w]hile not restricted to English, sarcasm is an inherent part of British culture' (2014: 4328), but, once again, this is not an outcome of the analysis, but an a priori assumption.

Furthermore, this stereotype is not only found in English academic work, for instance Almansi (1984) discussed irony in terms of being ‘tipicamente inglese’ [typically English] both currently and historically, noting how the English language has been ‘abituata da secoli al contatto/uso di questo tropo’ [accustomed for centuries to contact with/use of this trope] (reported in Polesana 2005: 62).

This association of mock politeness with cultural stereotypes creates two problems. First, there appears to be a conflict between the assumptions embedded in the stereotype of irony as peculiarly English or British and the lack of empirical evidence. Second, if mock politeness is so culturally specific (to English speaking cultures), how can the analysis of those cultures alone lead to a generalizable second order theory? With reference to the latter point, Rockwell & Theriot (2001: 46) state that ‘[c]ulture is a primary area in which encoders of sarcasm may differ. Most studies of irony and sarcasm have been conducted on American, English-speaking subjects. Therefore, it is not known if individuals from other cultures will express sarcasm in the same manner or with the same frequency as English speakers’. This is therefore, one of the areas I will be able to address in this study.¹⁵

2.5.2 Challenges in cross-cultural/linguistic analyses of im/politeness

As we have seen from the discussion regarding anglocentrism in Section 2.2.1, one key issue in this area is detaching the baggage of stereotypes from the cultures under analysis. A related set of issues in the discussion of im/politeness across cultures concerns the choice of terms used to discuss the im/politeness practices. In a first-

¹⁵ Although mock politeness has received little cross-cultural attention, differences in practices of mock impoliteness or banter have been discussed, see for instance Haugh & Bousfield (2012).

order metalanguage study this becomes even more important to ensure that we are comparing like with like. The difficulties of identifying functionally equivalent terms is well-documented in translation studies, and has been noted in im/politeness studies, such as Pizziconi (2007) and Haugh (2012). In this study, I decided to use a wide range of possible items to try and avoid excluding important indicators. A closely related issue is the need for the analyst to identify whether key concepts, such as face, are being conceptualised in comparable ways in different cultures (discussed in Haugh 2012, also raised in Mazzotta 2009).

A second, very broad issue is the need to avoid essentialism in the approach to culture, thus assuming that all members share certain values (see, for instance Kádár & Haugh 2013 for an overview). Although I have primarily discussed national or language-based cultures here, because that is the focus of this study, it should be noted that national cultures are political constructs, and as such, these categories may not be meaningful for the analysis of interaction. Furthermore, national or language cultures are just one of many social identities that participants may take on, and the same individual may be a member of various cultures.

In the following section, I address a second key aspect of context for this study: the use of computer-mediated discourse.

2.6 Analysing mock politeness in an online community

The analysis of online communication is often cited as a constituting a contribution to originality in itself, almost irrespective of the actual object of study. This assumes that computer-mediated interactions are significantly different from other (mediated or non) interactions. As an illustration of this approach, Yus's (2011) introduction to cyberpragmatics states that '[o]n the Internet, the expression of politeness is common

and often compulsory, which indicates its importance beyond face-to-face interactions' adding that '[t]ypically, politeness on the Net is called netiquette' (2011: 256). However, this both assumes a very limited approach to the scope of im/politeness (i.e. that politeness = netiquette) and that internet interactions are disconnected from other interactions. The aforementioned claims for uniqueness are frequently based on an assumption that CMC presents a greater challenge to its users than face-to-face interaction. For instance Whalen et al. (2013) emphasise the interest of analysing irony in the 'impoverished environment' of CMC. However, there are three principle problems with this claim for innovation based solely on the provenance of the texts studied.

- First, as Crystal (2001; 2011) among others has noted, the written medium was used creatively in asynchronous letters and quasi-synchronous notes long before blogs and online chats. One of the difficulties in this regard is that like is rarely compared with like in discussion of computer-mediated and non-computer mediated written discourse. More specifically, the aspects of 'field' and 'tenor' (in the Hallidayan sense) are frequently overlooked in comparisons of a single aspect of 'mode' perhaps because more intimate and personal interactions are, by their nature, less public and more ephemeral than other written sources.
- Second, CMC is now a well-established means of communication, as Barton and Lee (2013: 8) comment '[n]ew technologies are no longer new [...] a generation of people are growing up taking digital media for granted'. Therefore it should no longer be a surprise to us as an academic community that people can use a range of resources to accomplish familiar interactional goals.

- Third, and, more specific to the field of irony studies, the very long history of (verbal) irony in literature would suggest that the absence of visual/aural paralinguistic features has not previously considered a barrier to non-literal language use. Thus it is not clear why there is an a priori assumption that CMC will be uniquely challenging for participants.

This is not to deny the potential interest of studies which analyse CMC, but to challenge the notion that it is any more surprising that people can use non-literal language or accomplish complex interactional goals in computer-mediated language than in non-computer-mediated spoken or written language. Indeed, in one of the few studies available of mock politeness in CMC, Hancock (2004) found, contrary to his expectations, that verbal irony was used more frequently in CMC dyads than face-to-face interactions.

I would also like to emphasise that in discussion of computer-mediated communication, it is important to consider all aspects of the register of the text. To take an example from a recent paper on irony, Burgers et al. state that:

irony may differ in subtle and important ways between written and spoken communication. For instance, in contrast to irony in conversations (see Gibbs, 2000), writers who use irony cannot “repair” their text when a reader does not understand the irony

Burgers et al. (2012: 261)

However, this does not apply the data used this study, which is *written conversation* (and, as will be seen in Chapter 7 involves much *repair*). In this example, as frequently occurs, mode has been collapsed from ‘the role language is playing in the interaction’ (Eggins 2004: 90) to a duality of written/spoken medium. In fact, the

variable that Burgers et al. are discussing is not written/spoken itself but relates to the spatial/interpersonal distance (Martin 1984) which includes feedback as a main factor. This particular variable also allows us to attend to the importance of time expectations for responses which varies greatly in different forms of online communication, from the near-synchrony of chat to the slower expectations of email.

More important variables than the 'written' form are likely to be the complex ranges of footings (Levisin 1988) which are occasioned (who is speaking? who is listening?) and the impact of potential/partial anonymity (for instance, Hardaker [2010] on trolling).

The greatest advantage to studying mock politeness in online interactions from my perspective is that it provides a way of accessing large amounts of contextualised conversational data which can be collected without falling into the observer's paradox (Labov 1972).

2.7 Conclusions

In this section, I have introduced the concepts of face and impoliteness as they will be used in this study. I have also tried to set out the importance of starting with lay participant and observer perspectives and the advantages of a metalanguage/metapragmatic approach. I then surveyed some major theories of im/politeness and tested whether these are flexible enough to handle mock politeness as well. The (neo)Gricean systems offer most information in terms of how a hearer could perceive im/politeness and those which incorporate and acknowledge conventionalisation seem most appropriate for my purposes. As it has been specifically developed for impoliteness study, Culpeper's (2011a) model has the greatest explanatory power and comprehensive coverage. Finally, I have focussed on

two particular contexts that apply to my data and analysis: culture/language and computer-mediated interaction. I have set out how culture relates to my study, in that I am interested in seeing how two different first order perspectives relate to the dominant second theory view.

CHAPTER 3 IM/POLITENESS MISMATCH

In this chapter, I focus on im/politeness mismatch and examine how mismatch has been conceived and employed in previous studies, in order to form a base for the analysis of one type of mismatch: mock politeness. What I want to achieve in this chapter is show how mock politeness fits within an existing body of research, and to investigate which aspects can be employed in the study of mock politeness.

As introduced in the previous chapter, mock politeness is understood here as occurring when there is a im/politeness mismatch leading to an implicature of impoliteness. However, one of the difficulties related to the analysis of mock politeness is that the types of behaviour which are covered by the definition used in this study have mostly been analysed in fields other than im/politeness, using a different set of terms. Two significant exceptions to this tendency are Culpeper (2009, 2011), whose metalanguage approach to impoliteness includes discussion of mock politeness, and Williams (2012) who analyses the lexical items *MOCK* and *SCORN* in a corpus of Middle English. Most frequently, these behaviours have been discussed and researched under labels such as 'irony' and 'sarcasm' (discussed in the following chapter) and 'patronizing' and 'condescending', which have mostly been carried out in the discipline of (social) psychology.

The second difficulty that arises in surveying previous research is that even within im/politeness studies there has been substantial debate regarding the naming of the behaviours I label as mock polite. Therefore, I start this chapter by clarifying the concept of mock politeness as it is used in this study. I then move on to broader discussions of mismatch with the aim of identifying overlaps which can inform the analysis in this study. In the following section, I narrow down the focus to

im/politeness mismatch and examine the various functions which may be performed, in addition to mock politeness. The aim of this section is to orient mock politeness within the full frame of im/politeness mismatch. In the last section, I address research into behaviours which are labelled as ‘patronising’ and evaluate whether these should be included within mock politeness. In the following chapter, I address research into behaviours which are labelled as ‘irony’ and ‘sarcasm’.

3.1 Introducing mock politeness

In this section, I address the naming of mock politeness and then the structures of mock politeness. In this section, as I am focussing on mock politeness as a second order concept.

3.1.1 Naming mock politeness: Second-order struggles

The phenomenon described here under the label *mock politeness* (following Culpeper 1996, who in turn, took it from Leech 1983), has frequently been discussed within im/politeness studies using other terms, such as *irony* and *sarcasm*, (e.g. Leech 1983, followed by Culpeper 1996), *off-record impoliteness* (e.g. Bousfield 2008; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010a), *implicational impoliteness* (Culpeper 2011a) and *over-politeness* (Paternoster 2012). Considering this plurality, I will start by looking at the use of these terms and, where appropriate, explaining why I have preferred to retain the label *mock politeness*.

Starting with *irony*, there has been a tendency to equate *irony* and *sarcasm* with *mock politeness* and *teasing* and *banter* with *mock impoliteness* (following Leech 1983).

However, there are clearly some problems with this division, firstly, because the features are not parallel structures. For instance, Haugh & Bousfield (2012: 1103) ‘treat mock impoliteness and banter as linked, but discrete concepts. The former

constitutes an evaluation while the latter constitutes an action'. Second, irony is also classified as a strategy of off-record *politeness*, for instance in Brown and Levinson (1987: 222), the utterance 'John's a real genius. (after John has just done twenty stupid things in a row)' is used as an example of an off-record *politeness* strategy. Third, if we consider ironic compliments (also referred to as asteism), for instance 'you're a terrible friend' said to a good friend (example from Pexman and Olineck 2002), then these too would be classified as politeness not impoliteness because the aim is face-enhancing. Therefore, in this study I will be assuming that irony and mock politeness are large, autonomous areas which overlap.

With reference to *sarcasm*, this was equated with mock politeness in Culpeper (1996) who defined it as cases of impoliteness where 'the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations' (1996: 356).¹⁶ This covers the area of mismatch on which I wish to focus but the term *sarcasm* appears too narrow for the range of im/politeness mismatch that I wish to consider, for instance, the use of co-textual mismatch in garden path structures. In addition, as for irony, there is the possibility of sarcasm being used for communicating politeness through banter which makes it both too narrow and too wide. However, studies of irony and sarcasm have much to contribute to this project and are considered in more detail in the following chapter.

The next set of terms, *off-record* and *implicational impoliteness*, are much broader in terms of the range of language features to which they might be applied. In Culpeper's

¹⁶ The term was not used in Culpeper's later models, as seen below.

revised 2005 model, the category of ‘sarcasm or mock politeness’ is replaced with ‘off-record impoliteness’, defined as instances where ‘the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others’ (2005: 44) with sarcasm being separated out as distinct from the others, given its “metastrategic” [using politeness for impoliteness] nature’ (2005:44). Irony is also classified as off-record impoliteness in Lachenicht (1980), following Brown and Levinson (1987). Building on these models, Bousfield (2008) condensed the strategies of impoliteness into just two super-strategies of on-record and off-record impoliteness, and sarcasm is embedded within off record impoliteness. He does not list it as a separate second-order strategy like Culpeper (1996, 2005) on the basis that he considers it, by definition, to be expressed indirectly and is therefore off-record. *Off-record impoliteness* is also the preferred term for Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010a), who makes a set of further distinctions within the category:

within the ‘off record impoliteness’ broad category, I distinguish between: ‘implicated impoliteness’ (cases where the implicated meaning could correspond to any of the myriad of impolite meanings realized on-record by the strategies listed in the taxonomy), ‘sarcasm’ (cases where the use of politeness is obviously insincere) and ‘withhold politeness’ (cases where politeness is absent where it should be expected or mandatory)

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010a: 71)

However, this sub-division, perhaps by virtue of providing greater specification, presents two internal inconsistencies. First, the term ‘sarcasm’ appears to be reserved for non-deniable forms of impoliteness, which raises the issue of whether such behaviours are therefore actually off-record, as in Bousfield’s definition. Second, the splitting of ‘withhold politeness’ and sarcasm from ‘implicated impoliteness’ suggests

that implicature is not relevant to the processing of the impoliteness which seems counter-intuitive given that silence must rely on implicature in order to communicate meaning. Given these unresolved issues, and, more fundamentally, the emphasis on cancellability as a defining feature, the category of *off-record impoliteness* will be too narrow for the purposes of this study which aims to also examine the overt mismatch of im/politeness forms, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The next group, *implicational impoliteness* (presented in Culpeper 2011a, also applied in Aydınoğlu 2013) focuses on the means of understanding the impoliteness by defining it as ‘an impoliteness understanding that does not match the surface form or semantics of the utterance or the symbolic meaning of the behaviour’ (2011a: 17). Implicational impoliteness is the best fit for the kinds of features which are discussed in this study as it accounts for different structures of mismatch, as discussed in the following section.

Another term that has been used to refer to similar features is *over-politeness* which is the preferred label in Paternoster (2012), following Watts (2003), although this appears somewhat under-defined. She identifies occurrences of over-politeness in two sets of fictional texts and finds that it is predominantly used as insincere politeness to deceive the recipients (discussed below), although she also cites a single example where the over-politeness was intended to be recognised and interpreted as face-threat.¹⁷ The use of *over-polite* is also analysed in Culpeper (2008, 2011) as part of his

¹⁷ However, as there is no description of how these events were identified as over-polite or whether there was any methodological sampling process the proposed relative frequencies should be treated with great caution (discussed further in Chapter 5).

overview of metapragmatic impoliteness comments and he finds that it most frequently refers to relational mismanagement or failed politeness, although he also notes the potential of *over-polite* to refer to sarcasm. From these studies, *over-politeness* appears too narrow for this study because it would not encompass contextual mismatch (discussed further below).

3.1.2 Structures of mismatch

In previous research investigating im/politeness mismatch in institutional settings (Taylor 2011), I found that mock politeness was realised in two main ways in the institutional data sets. In the first, the mock politeness was created through a textually explicit clash of evaluations, achieved through the juxtaposition of easily recognised negative politeness features and the intensification of a face attack. In the second, the politeness was intensified beyond credible interpretation, given knowledge of the context of production. These two forms of mock politeness can be accounted for in Culpeper's more extensive model of implicational impoliteness (discussed in Chapter 2), which is shown again below.

- (1) Form-driven: the surface form or semantic content of a 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 a 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 a behaviour mismatches the context.

Adapted from Culpeper 2011a: 155-156 (italics in original)

What I had described as contextual mismatch fits within the category of convention-driven external mismatch. To take an example from previous research, Williams (2012) provides the following from his study of MOCK and SCORN behaviours in the late medieval period (c.1200–1500). The context to the utterance is that the speaker has just killed one of the hearer’s men:

‘Take yow here this present or ye goo,
And I shall do my part to send yow moo.’
Tho wordes toke the kyng in Mокkery

[‘Take this present before you go,
And I shall do my best to send you more.’

These words the King took in mockery’ Generydes (2476–2487, cited and translated in Williams 2012: no page numbers)

The context expressed by *And I shall do my part to send yow moo* projects a different context (promising desired goods), from the one in which it is uttered (expressing threat of future violence). This mismatch is further intensified in the reference to *this present* which here refers to a dead man.

In contrast, co-textual mismatch fits within the category of conventional-driven internal mismatch, as for instance in *You are a cunt* © HTH, the example which I used to test the flexibility of the theories of im/politeness in Chapter 2. With reference to metalanguage, an important component to the present study, Culpeper notes that these

behaviours labelled as convention-driven mismatch are likely to be covered by labels such as *sarcasm*, *teasing* and [*harsh/bitter*] *jokes/humour*.

In addition, the model proposes the *form-driven* category which may allow for the identification of previously neglected patterns. According to Culpeper, possible metapragmatic labels for this grouping would include: *insinuation*, *innuendo*, *casting aspersions*, *digs*, *snide comments/remarks*. This category would also include mimicry.

This differentiation between the types of mismatch is significant because much previous research has concentrated on the second kind: external mismatch. For instance, Leech's (1983) model of irony only accounted for external mismatch. Although, in his more recent model (Leech 2014: 237), *conversational irony* (equated with sarcasm) is seen to occur when the polite interpretation is 'untenable in context – typically because of its manifest breach of the CP [cooperative principle], and the conflict between what is said and the demeanour of the speaker (whether conveyed through tone of voice, intonation, or other nonverbal signals)'.

Thus, this later model could also refer to certain kinds of internal mismatch, for instance where one of the mismatched components is communicated via the tone. This is quite typical of irony more generally (see Chapter 4). But what has not been recognised previously is the relevance of the garden-path of internal mismatch (discussed further in Section 3.2.).

Drawing on this model, in the analysis chapters of this thesis I investigate whether mismatch appears to be a salient feature in first order mentions of mock impoliteness, and in the analysis of the behaviours themselves I note whether any mismatch is present and, if so, where it is located. I also note any correlation between the metapragmatic comment used and the type of mismatch which it describes.

3.1.3 Naming mock politeness: First order candidates

This brief discussion of types of mismatch has also shown the range of first-order expressions which may be used to refer to mock politeness, from Culpeper (2011) we have *sarcasm*, *teasing* and [*harsh/bitter*] *jokes/humour*. From Williams's (2012) historical study, *MOCK* and *SCORN* were also found to refer to behaviours which performed face-attack and included some meaning reversal, although this was more frequently in terms of illocutionary mismatch rather than propositional truth values.¹⁸

In the following section, I approach mismatch from a broader perspective in order to see how the structure discussed here have already been addressed in other fields.

3.2 Mismatch: An overview

Attention to pragmatic mismatch has primarily come from the fields of humour studies, irony studies and im/politeness studies and indeed these three fields overlap considerably. For instance, if we take irony, it is considered a Politeness Principle for Leech (1983), and a way of contributing humour to a text for Attardo (2001).

The three fields of humor, irony and im/politeness studies may be seen as sharing an interest in similar interactional phenomena but viewing them from different perspectives and with different goals. Moreover, the focus of research for all three is frequently the interactional outcomes in a given context (e.g. how is humour received? what functions does irony perform? which behaviours cause offence?) and the

¹⁸ In the case of *MOCK*, the face attack was closely accompanied physical action (in mode terms, it would have been at the extreme end of the experiential distance continuum).

linguistic structures used in their creation. In the following sections, I briefly explain the central role of mismatch within these areas.

3.2.1 Mismatch in humor theory

Humor theory, according to Attardo (1994), has been dominated by three main approaches: *incongruity* theories, *hostility or disparagement* theories and *release* theories.¹⁹ The first set, incongruity theories (e.g. Koestler's bisociation theory [1964]; Suls' incongruity-resolution theory [1972]; Attardo's relevant inappropriateness theory [2000a]; Raskin's [1985] semantic script theory of humor),²⁰ is the most relevant here because these approaches share a common theme of mismatch.²¹ The mismatch in such theories is predominately conceived at a cognitive level. For instance, in Koestler's bisociation theory, the mismatch is envisaged as occurring between 'habitually associative contexts' (1964: 35) and humour is the result of two of these contexts being brought together simultaneously, requiring a cognitive 'oscillation' between the two.

Although, these theories focus on the cognitive mismatch, clash may be analysed at the language level too. Firstly, through analysis of how different scripts overlap or are opposed, as anticipated by the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH, initially developed in Raskin 1985). Second, in the identification of features which evoke or activate the different schemata, as for instance in *register mismatch* (discussed in

¹⁹ Although, as Attardo (1994) notes, they are not mutually exclusive.

²⁰ Raskin did not intend for this theory to be viewed as pertaining to only one of the three approaches, as discussed in Attardo (1994: 49).

²¹ Although, as Venour et al. (2011: 127) note, the concept of incongruity in humor studies has rarely been formalised into models.

detail in Venour et al. 2011). To take an example, Snell (2006) analyses the way that humor in the sketch show 'Little Britain' relies on opposing different scripts. For instance, in one scene that she analyses the main character, Vicky Pollard, is in a courtroom but rather than following the COURTROOM script she continually reverts to a GOSSIP script thus creating humour for the audience. Thus we can see that the theorisation of mismatch in the SSTH draws on the same resources of scripts, frames and schemata (Shank and Abelson 1975, 1977; Bartlett 1932; Minsky 1975) as some theorisation of context for im/politeness (most fully elaborated in Terkourafi's frame-based model of im/politeness, 2005a). Where the two differ is in the focus of attention on the outcomes of switching scripts.

A highly relevant structure of incongruity humor is the garden path mechanism which involves activating and then switching scripts. For instance, the structure 'my motto is: I'm a light eater. I start eating as soon as it gets light' (cited in Dynel 2009: 14) relies on ambiguity, in which the first part appears unambiguous (*I'm a light eater*) until the second part is delivered (*I start eating as soon as it gets light*). The second part therefore demands a re-processing of the first in order to reconcile the incongruity created by the pun. Following Mey (1991), Dynel (2009) suggests that the cognitive mechanism is one where 'the hearer willingly follows the path of least effort and makes inferences of his/her own accord, given that there is no contextual, specifically co-textual, information to the contrary' (2009: 21). In this definition, we can see the parallels with mock politeness, where the extra processing effort required by the mismatch is assumed to lead to some cognitive reward (in the sense of Sperber & Wilson's [1986] relevance theory, discussed in Chapter 2). The kind of mock politeness which uses this garden path structure is that where the im/politeness mismatch is located in the co-text, as for instance in the somewhat conventionalised

'you're amazing, amazingly dreadful' (Cowell 2006). In this case, the mock politeness hinges on the activation of ambiguity for *amazing* as (1) a favourable adjective and (2) the first two syllables of the intensifier *amazingly* (this kind of co-textual mismatch is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3).

3.2.2 *Mismatch in irony studies.*

Irony studies too have focussed on mismatch to a great extent and all the major models hypothesise that mismatch is involved in some way (e.g. Grice 1975; Clark & Gerrig 1984; Sperber & Wilson 1981; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Partington 2007). As will be seen in the following chapter, much academic discussion/disagreement about irony centres around what type of mismatch is involved. For instance, is irony simply a mismatch of truth values, as is often suggested in non-academic descriptions, illustrated in the following dictionary definition?

Irony: The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the *opposite*, typically for humorous or emphatic effect: 'Don't go overboard with the gratitude,' he rejoined with heavy irony.

Oxford Dictionaries Online (my italics)

Another area of great discussion regarding mismatch in irony is whether the mismatch may *constitute* irony or whether it is just a *contextualisation cue* (in the sense of Gumperz 1992) for irony, for instance a shift to a different tone might convey the ironic intent. This too is addressed in Chapter 4, but we can see how central the notion of mismatch is to the understanding and description of irony, and thus, why it is so important for understanding the structures of mock politeness.

3.2.3 Mismatch in im/politeness studies

Within im/politeness studies there has traditionally been rather less research into the precise structures of mismatch compared to irony and humor studies, although there has of course been a great deal of attention paid to the concept of indirectness.

The first theorisation of mismatch within im/politeness is probably Leech's Irony and Banter principles (1983, discussed further below). The former, as the name states, overlaps considerably with the work in irony studies. In this principle, Leech (1983) represents irony as dependent on the Principle of Politeness, and usually coming about when the linguistic form is too polite for the occasion i.e. when there is a contextual *mismatch*. In parallel, the banter principle is expressed as 'in order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to *h*' (1983: 144, italics in original). Thus we can see how the two forms of mismatch are designed to mirror one another.

The most detailed discussion of mismatch for impoliteness is Culpeper (2011a) in his model of *implicational impoliteness* (as discussed above), which is defined as 'an impoliteness understanding that does not *match* the surface form or semantics of the utterance or the symbolic meaning of the behaviour' (2011a: 17, my italics). As can be seen, the whole model of implicational impoliteness centres on mismatch, once again showing the importance of this kind of structure.

Having briefly introduced the three principle fields in which pragmatic mismatch has been discussed, I now narrow down the focus to im/politeness mismatch.

3.3 Functions of im/politeness mismatch

In the following two sections, I focus more specifically on potential im/politeness mismatch and examine the possible functions that may be realised through the co-

occurrence of conventional im/politeness markers and im/polite behaviours. In this section, I start by identifying those functions that do *not* realise mock politeness in order to illustrate the range of im/politeness mismatch, and to support the analysis in Chapter 9 where I discuss the range of behaviours which are labelled with potential mock politeness metapragmatic labels. As so often occurs, these functions may overlap and are not mutually exclusive.

The first of these groups is the co-occurrence of conventional politeness markers with face attack where the conventionally polite forms act to mitigate the face threat (classic politeness in the Brown and Levinson sense). In the second group, conventional politeness markers are used to ‘get away’ with aggression. In the third, politeness is employed in order to mask an attack, where the intention is not to *mitigate* the FTA which is carried out, but to *deceive* the hearer as to the existence of the FTA. In the fourth, the im/politeness mismatch involves the use of conventionally impolite moves in order to trigger an implicature of politeness.

3.3.1 Politeness to avoid face attack / to facilitate face attack

The area of politeness ‘mismatch’ which has, to date, received the greatest attention is, of course, politeness understood as mitigation. Brown and Levinson introduce their seminal work stating that ‘in the case of linguistic pragmatics, a great deal of *mismatch* between what is said and what is implicated can be attributed to politeness’ (1987: 2, my italics). However, this is not necessarily a mismatch *of* politeness, which is the focus in this study, but refers to indirectness more broadly. Such mismatch may occur at the co-textual level, for instance, in the strategy of apologising there may be an admission of impingement followed by the FTA for which the speaker has just apologised. However, typically, such ‘mismatch’ is accounted for by the expressed

desire to mitigate the FTA and no implicature or re-processing is required by the hearer. As illustrated in (1), the polite move (apology) encompasses the impolite move (criticism).

(1) Sorry to say this about your best friend, but she sounds very selfish and lacking in imagination. (mumsnet corpus)

Therefore, these are not the kinds of im/politeness mismatch which will be considered in the analysis here.

3.3.2 Politeness to facilitate face attack

This second kind of mismatch has most frequently been studied in institutional contexts in which the interactants are explicitly hostile to one another (e.g. Harris 2001; Perez de Ayala 2001; Mullany 2002; Ilie 2004; Piirainen-Marsh 2005; Taylor 2011). In such contexts, politeness does not just ‘make possible communication between *potentially* aggressive parties’ (Brown and Levinson 1987: 1, my italics), but actually constitutes part of aggressive communication. For instance, in one of the earliest studies Harris (2001) highlights the way in which ‘systematic impoliteness is not only sanctioned in Prime Minister’s Question Time but is rewarded in accordance with the expectations of the Members of the House (and the overhearing audience)’ (2001: 466), and notes the regular co-occurrence of intentional face threats and negative politeness features in this discourse type. This is illustrated in (2), where the deferential titles accompany the face attack (emphasised by the register shift towards the end).

(2) now that we have faction of the cabinet – the Trade Secretary – the Foreign Secretary – the Agriculture minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary – who want the Government to campaign for joining the Euro – and

now another faction – the Chancellor – the Home Secretary – and the Education and Employment Secretary – who want to keep it quiet and join by stealth – when will the Prime Minister get a grip –end the Cabinet confusion – and stop his Cabinet ministers fighting like ferrets in a sack

Example from Harris (2001: 465)

Similarly, Mullany (2002: online) found that the public nature of the interaction (a political broadcast interview) resulted in the use of polite forms where the aim was demonstrably not the mitigation of the FTA for the interlocutor, but the enhancement of the speaker's own face. Although this type may well be closely associated with mock politeness, the mismatch does not trigger an implicature of impoliteness.

3.3.3 Deception

In the case of deception too, there may be an im/politeness mismatch between the speaker's intent and self-presentation. This kind of mismatch is discussed in Paternoster (2012) under the heading 'over polite' which she uses to describe a range of behaviours, including instances where the speaker is hiding insincerity in order to manipulate the hearer (or some other recipient). This deceit aspect has also been explicitly linked to irony by Louw in his corpus linguistic work on semantic prosody (discussed in Chapter 4), in particular his 1993 paper titled 'Irony in the text or insincerity in the writer?'. In this paper, he proposes that (evaluative) collocational clashes 'if they are not intended as ironic, may mark the speaker's real attitude even where s/he is at pains to conceal it' (1993: 157). Thus, he suggests, when the Director of the British Council describes establishing international networks as being 'symptomatic' of the University of Zimbabwe, we are faced with a collocational clash because, as he illustrates, *symptomatic* is usually followed by unfavourably evaluated items. Louw goes onto interpret this as an indication of the Director's negative stance

towards the university which is at odds with the more overt positive content in the rest of the utterance/interaction.

In order to distinguish between im/politeness mismatch which realises deceit and mock politeness, there are three aspects which may be considered. First, is the role of intention, which Haiman (1998: 21) touches upon in characterising sarcasm, noting that '[u]nlike the liar, the sarcast has no wish to deceive; sarcasm differs from falsehood in the presence of the honest metamessage'.

Second, and closely related, is the communication of intention. For instance, in Grice's model ([1975] 1989), when a speaker performs irony s/he does so by *flouting* a maxim, thus there is an overt transgression as s/he blatantly fails to fulfil it. In contrast, deceit would involve *violating* a maxim, because there is no communication of the failure to fulfil the maxim, it is performed 'quietly and unostentatiously' (Grice ([1975] 1989: 30). While in Goffman's terms (1974), sarcasm is keyed and contrasts with fabrications (as noted in Haiman 1998 :21). In *keying*, the participants knowingly shift to another mode of interaction which is patterned onto the primary framework. *Fabrication* similarly involves the transformation of an activity but in this case not all participants collaborate in the switch, that is 'one or more individuals manage [the] activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on' (Goffman 1974: 83).

Similarly, in models of mock im/politeness, there has been an emphasis on the overtness of the mismatch. For instance, Leech's banter principle is expressed as 'in order to show solidarity with h, say something which is (i) *obviously untrue*, and (ii) *obviously impolite* to h' (1983: 144, my italics). Likewise, Culpeper (1996), defined mock politeness (equated with sarcasm) as occurring when 'the FTA is performed

with the use of politeness strategies that are *obviously* insincere, and thus remain surface realisations' (1996: 356, my italics) and mock impoliteness (equated with banter) as 'impoliteness that remains on the surface, since *it is understood* that it is not intended to cause offence' (1996: 352, my italics). From an analytic perspective, the identification or measurement of the 'obviousness' is problematic if carried out by a non-participant (the analyst) and we must look to the participant evaluation for more information.

The third means of differentiating between mock politeness and deception lies in the point in the interaction at which the mismatch occurs / is perceived. In mock politeness, the mismatch is generally perceived within the same interaction, while in the case of deceit, many years could pass before the mismatch is perceived.

3.3.4 Mock impoliteness

Mock impoliteness, often discussed under the labels *banter* and *teasing*, has received considerably more attention than mock politeness, perhaps reflecting the way in which politeness has generally attracted more attention than impoliteness (as described Locher & Bousfield 2008, for example). In many ways, mock impoliteness has been seen as a counterpart to mock politeness, described as its 'unmistakeable flipside' (Bousfield 2008: 136), and it is for this reason that research in this area may be relevant for the study of mock politeness.²² Areas in which similarities may be noted are: the struggle over naming and perceived relationship to im/politeness; the sub-

²² Although, highlighting the problem with second-order labels, Gibbs (2000) considers banter to be a sub-type of irony. This approach has recently been criticised in Wilson (2013).

types, such as teasing; the cues to the mock intent; the ambiguity caused by the mismatch. These are all briefly discussed below.

Naming mock impoliteness

Rather like mock politeness, mock impoliteness has also been subject to a struggle over the terminology and definitions, and the relationship between mock impoliteness and banter holds many of the same problems as the relationship between mock politeness and irony. Following Leech (1983), the label of *mock impoliteness* has been adopted by Bousfield (2008) and Haugh and Bousfield (2012) to refer to the superordinate, for which *jocular mockery* and *jocular abuse* are two sub-types. Following this pattern, Sinkeviciute (2014) refers mainly to *impolite jocular behaviour* or jocular FTAs (face-threatening acts) reserving *mock impoliteness* for the evaluation of these activities. Another possibility that has been proposed is *non-authentic impoliteness* (Bernal 2008, also referred to as *non-genuine impoliteness* in the same article, both referred to as *descortesía no auténtica* in the Spanish version of the same paper). Following a somewhat different track, Zimmerman's (2003) study of banter among young Spanish people employed the term *anticortesía*, in order to emphasise the way in which the people were resisting adult norms, that is engaging in *actividad antinormativa* [anti-normative activity].

Other researchers have criticised the use of 'impoliteness' in the label, for instance Eelen (2001: 181-183) argued against the use of the term *mock impoliteness* as it is not impolite at all for the participants, and therefore the label impoliteness might imply a 'morally involved point of reference' (2001:181) for the analyst. Similarly avoiding the 'impolite' label, Mugford (2013) refers to *anti-normative politeness*, adapting Zimmerman (2003). However, this term does not resolve the problem because even the example on which Mugford focuses, *güey*, is clearly highly

conventionalised in its usage as a vulgar term that serves to enhance group solidarity and therefore does politeness work following a recognised norm in Mexican society.

This struggle over naming choices for the phenomena shows that a recurring aspect of the debate around mock impoliteness is its position with regard to im/politeness.

Bousfield & Haugh (2012) go further and argue that mock impoliteness should be analysed as an evaluation in its own right, rather than as a variant form of politeness on the basis that such behaviours always remain open to evaluation by some participants as being impolite. By extension, this argument could also apply to mock politeness, but it would be dependent on an assumption that participants need to share an evaluation of mock politeness, which is not the way that it has been operationalised in this study (see Chapter 2).

Types of mock impoliteness

The sub-types of mock impoliteness may also be seen to overlap with those of mock politeness. According to Haugh & Bousfield (2012) research into mock impoliteness has covered teasing, mocking, jocular abuse/insults and self-deprecatory humour.

Mocking is clearly salient for mock politeness too, and as will be seen in Chapter 7, self-deprecating humour is frequent in behaviours labelled as IRONICO. We may understand this overlap by seeing mock politeness and mock impoliteness as referring to the perception and evaluation of a given interaction, while behaviours such as mocking or being ironic may realise either kind of face effect and therefore cut horizontally across the two macro-structures (see also Haugh & Bousfield 2012: 1101 on the difficulties or confusion caused by conflation of evaluations and practices).

This is similar to the distinction that Rose (1993: 87) makes on how an ironist may employ parody and vice-versa.

Cues of mock impoliteness

Also, in parallel with mock politeness, researchers into mock impoliteness have identified a series of cues that help to direct the hearer/s towards the desired interpretation, according to Haugh (2010: 2108) these include: lexical exaggeration, formulaicity, topic shift markers, contrastiveness, prosodic cues, inviting laughter, facial/gestural cues. Many of these are the same as those identified for irony and humour, and, given overlap with humour too, we can hypothesise that these cues do not so much signal a particular behaviour as the movement to a pretense mode (or keying a frame shift in Goffman's 1974 terms).

Functions of mock impoliteness

One area of contrast, relates, of course, to the im/politeness function because a key function of mock impoliteness is face-enhancement rather than face-saving or face-attacking. For instance, according to Brown (2013: 163), mock impoliteness promotes intimacy through demonstrating that the conventional norms need not be followed and, frequently, by drawing on shared knowledge of a history of such practices. However, as Haugh & Bousfield (2012) emphasise, mock impoliteness should not be conflated with solidarity as it performs a range of additional functions. For instance, mock impoliteness may involve 'cloaked coercion', in which the apparently humorous frame serves to 'minimally disguise the oppressive intent' (Holmes 2000:176). A third function, which overlaps with research on verisimilitude irony in particular, is the truth-telling potential of banter which allows a participant to communicate their true feelings under the cover of play (e.g. Mills 2003) and this may be part of the conflict-management function discussed in Partington (2006: 180). And finally, as with mock politeness, there is an entertainment function.

Many of these functions stem from the ambiguity of the language practice which gives rise to this evaluation. This results in deniability and the dualistic nature of the interaction, made explicit in work such as Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997) which sees teasing behaviours as running along a continuum from bonding to biting. This dualistic nature is shared with mock politeness and is often discussed in literature on irony and sarcasm (see Chapter 4).

3.4 Patronizing and condescending

In this last section, I return to potential labels for mock politeness and address research which has employed the second-order terms *patronizing* or *condescending*. Most studies in this area have fallen outside the field of im/politeness and have been carried out within social psychology (discussed further below). Furthermore, where *patronizing* or *condescending* have been addressed within impoliteness studies, they have not been linked to mock politeness. In this section, I survey the previous research to form a base for the analysis in Chapters 9 and 10 and explain why, subject to the results of the empirical analysis in Chapters 9 and 10, I feel it should be included within mock politeness.

Starting with work within the im/politeness field, in Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework, designed to be parallel but opposite to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness (1996: 249), the second of the negative impoliteness output strategies is as follows:

Condescend, scorn or ridicule - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous.

Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).

Culpeper (1996: 358)

This category is subsequently applied in Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010b) and Blas-Arroyo (2013) *inter alia*, where it is found to be one of the frequent output strategies in the contexts of on English language comments youtube videos and Spanish language reality TV shows. Thus we can see the salience of the behaviour for impoliteness study.

More recently, Culpeper's (2011a) first order investigation of metalinguistic labels for reported impoliteness events yielded PATRONISING as a dominant domain. Lexical items which were subsumed into this domain included: *patronising/patronised, arrogant, condescending, put down, snobby, belittling, disrespectful, abuse of power, bossy, authoritarian, superiority, showing off, authority, take the piss* (Culpeper 2011a: 94). As he notes, this category has received little attention within impoliteness studies, and yet the behaviour holds great impact. He goes on to explain this noting that '[b]eing patronized involves a kind of "double whammy": your face is devalued in some way, but it is also devalued in a particular relational context that does not licence the "patroniser" to do so' (2011a: 95). This makes clear both the impolite impact that is made available through patronising and also highlights the existence of mismatch; a kind of abuse of power.

Although these discussions of patronising or condescending behaviour within impoliteness studies make clear why they are important to the realisation of impoliteness, and show how mismatch is involved, they do not make a case for considering these as types of mock politeness. For that, I will move on to discuss the social psychology studies where they made explicit that the behaviours labelled as 'patronizing' were also open to interpretation as 'helpful', in other words, the superiority may be shown through a display of helpfulness, which is face-threatening because it presupposes a lack of ability on the part of the hearer.

Research in social psychology has predominately been carried out in two main areas: intergenerational interactions (e.g. Ytsma & Giles 1997; Giles et al. 2003; Hehman et al. 2012) and gender relations (e.g. Vescio et al. 2005; Gervaise & Vescio 2012), in particular so-called ‘benevolent sexism’ (Glick & Fiske 1997). In these conceptualisations, mismatch is given a central role because both areas assume that the patronizing speaker is under-estimating the competence of the hearer. Thus, in terms of politeness, we might expect it to correspond to an attack on sociality rights, relating to fair treatment and respect.

Where research in this area diverges from that into sarcasm, for instance, regards the intentionality of the speaker because the assumption is often that the mismatch is a result of social stereotypes rather than the accomplishment of local, interpersonal impoliteness goals. For instance, according to Hummert & Ryan (2001: 263), in the context of intergenerational interactions, ‘communicators do not appear to have the production of patronizing communication as their goal [...] [i]ronically, those who give patronizing messages may be trying to be effective communicators’. Similarly, the reception of patronizing behaviour has not been found to be universally negative, for instance Ytsma & Giles (1997: 259) report that behaviour labelled by others as ‘patronizing’ or ‘condescending’ may be viewed as helpful or comforting by more frail or dependent participants. Intention is also explicitly referenced in Haiman’s discussion of sarcasm, where he states that ‘[w]hat is essential to sarcasm is that it is overt irony *intentionally* used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression, and it may thus be contrasted with other aggressive speech acts, among them the put-on, direct insults, curses, vituperation, nagging, and *condescension*’ (Haiman 1998: 20, my italics).

The focus on patronizing behaviour within these two research areas has tended to lead to a concentration on institutional behaviours and there is less understanding of how it operates in informal environments, such as the internet forums studied here. Hummert & Ryan (2001: 262) report that their literature review found it was most likely to occur 'between strangers or acquaintances when there are distinct differences in the group identities of the conversants, and the group identity of one conversant is associated with negative stereotypes of incompetence and dependence', and this claim will be addressed in Chapter 10.

One area where it has been researched with reference to non-institutional contexts is work on intimate gender relations. For instance, Buss (1989) identified 147 sources of upset (impoliteness) that men perform on women and vice-versa. One of these factors was labelled as 'condescending', and described as involving 'belittling the other, placing self on a superior plane, and an element of sexism' (1989: 737). As might be expected given the salience of power roles, this was found to be a factor that was more frequently complained about by women with regard to men than vice-versa.

3.5 Conclusions

One of the challenges of analysing mock politeness is that relevant research comes from various academic fields and, as a result, sometimes employs different terms to refer to the same / overlapping phenomena. Conversely, in some cases, the same terms are employed to refer to different phenomena. Therefore, in this chapter I have briefly surveyed literature relating to mismatch within the three main fields of humor, irony and im/politeness studies, and touched on work into mock politeness within social psychology. The survey has highlighted significant interconnection between the effects of mismatch in different domains and consideration of other 'non-literal'

interpretation processes may be relevant for understanding the effects of mock politeness. I have also tried to place mock politeness within a wider frame of im/politeness mismatch, both in order to see how they differ (as, for instance, with deception) and how they are related (as, for instance, in the case of mock impoliteness).

In the following chapter, I will focus more specifically on the work that has been carried out under the headings of irony and sarcasm, which will allow me show how this work overlaps significantly with mock politeness.

CHAPTER 4 IRONY AND SARCASM

In the previous chapter, I introduced the topic of mismatch and, more specifically, im/politeness mismatch. In this chapter, I focus on research into behaviours described as irony or sarcasm. As noted in the previous chapter, there is substantial overlap between mock politeness, the topic of this study, and irony and sarcasm. However, as irony and sarcasm have been studied extensively from a range of perspectives, it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive overview. Therefore I will only comment on studies of *verbal irony*, because this necessarily involves language and, as such, is the most relevant.²³

I start this chapter by discussing two important limitations in current research into irony and sarcasm because these factors affect almost all the subsequent discussion. As will be seen, one of the principle difficulties in studying irony is that the second-order metalanguage is not shared or standardised. In the following section, I continue the work of the previous chapter by discussing the centrality of mismatch for theories of irony. I also develop this theme by reporting on the theories regarding the processing of irony as they may inform understanding of mock politeness more generally. I then move to survey current thinking on the facework functions of irony as this clearly relates very closely to mock politeness. I end this section by summarising the differences and similarities that have been identified between irony and sarcasm. I then address two important aspects of irony which are shared with

²³ Although not all studies mentioned below make this distinction and some use *irony* to encompass *situational* or *dramatic irony* too. As discussed, this variation in use of the second-order metalanguage is one of the difficulties in irony studies.

mock politeness more generally: deniability and the importance of point of view.

Finally, I examine research into the users of irony and sarcasm with reference to culture and gender.

Throughout the analysis, I will comment on the implications for the study of mock politeness and the findings reported here will be tested against the empirical analysis of first-order use of *IRONICO/ironic* and *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* in Chapters 7 and 8.

4.1 Challenges in investigating irony and sarcasm

From the perspective of this project, there are two principle limitations to current research. The first is that there is surprisingly little agreement over what the terms irony and sarcasm may include. Fundamentally, as Attardo (2000a:795) states, ‘[t]here is no consensus on whether irony and sarcasm are essentially the same thing [...] or if they differ significantly.’ The second is that there has been limited analysis of naturally-occurring data in the development of the principle irony theories (discussed below).

4.1.2 Little second-order agreement on what ‘irony’ and ‘sarcasm’ refer to

The lack of agreement has led to three main approaches, in the first, the two are ‘conflated’ (in Cheang & Pell’s 2008 terms), as for instance in Attardo et al. (2003), who state that they use ‘the terms “irony” and “sarcasm” interchangeably [...] in part, because there seems to be no way of differentiating reliably between the two phenomena’ (2003: 243). Similarly, Pexman & Olineck (2002) state that they ‘use the term *irony* to refer to the form of verbal irony that involves saying something that is obviously false and is often referred to as sarcasm’ (2002: 200). Coming from a somewhat different perspective, Brown (2013) argues in favour of such conflation on the basis that ‘rather than developing “sarcasm” as a separate concept, politeness

researchers may be best advised to align it with “irony”, and thus facilitate dialogue with the growing field of “irony research” (2013: 165). However, as Cresuere (1999) points out, the result is that ‘consequently, the constructs being investigated are often not clearly defined’ (1999: 257). Indeed, Kreuz (2000) cites this conceptual ambiguity as one of three simplifying assumptions in the field that should be challenged (see also Marchetti, Masaro & Valle 2007).

In the second approach, the two terms and/or concepts are considered to be distinct and related in a co-hyponymous relationship, for instance Lee and Katz (1998) see them as sub-types of figurative language.²⁴ This appears to be the approach taken in Kreuz and Glucksberg’s influential paper, where they discuss *sarcastic irony*, noting that ‘[p]eople can use verbal irony without being sarcastic and can also be sarcastic without being ironic’ (1989: 374).

In the third approach (often flagged by the preference of the term *sarcastic irony*), which seems to be dominant in irony research coming from the field of psychology, the two terms/concepts are seen as being related in a hypernym/hyponym relationship. For instance, Alba-Juez & Attardo (2014) define sarcasm as *negative irony*, that is ‘where an apparently positive comment expresses a negative criticism or judgment of a person, a thing or a situation’ (2014: 100) and Clift (1999) hypothesises a similar relationship. Gibbs (2000) also considers sarcasm to be one of five sub-types of irony, but in this case the others are: jocular, rhetorical questions, hyperbole,

²⁴ However, in many instances, e.g. Querini & Lubrani (2004), the shared superordinate is not specified.

understatement).²⁵ This potential variation in the breadth of features covered by the term ‘irony’ presents real problems in terms of interpreting research findings. For instance, when we see that Gibbs (2000) estimates that 8% of utterances examined are ironic and Whalen et al. (2013) similarly find that 7.4% are ironic in his dataset it is highly relevant to know that both are using the broad meaning of irony, encompassing all features such as understatement and hyperbole.

An additional difficulty, according to Attardo (2013) relates to meaning change in first-order usage. He claims that ‘we are witnessing a shift, in American English, in which the meaning of the word “sarcasm” has taken over the meaning previously occupied by the word “irony”. “Irony” has shifted to mean something unfortunate’ (2013: 40), which lends weight to the need to investigate first and second order understandings. As will be discussed in the next section, the second challenge is a precisely a lack of analysis of first-order usage.

4.1.2 Little analysis of lay perspectives and use

Another shortcoming in the research available is the limited analysis of naturally occurring data (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). This means that while there is clear disagreement in the second-order discussions of irony and sarcasm, as seen above, there has been very little work into what first-order descriptions have to say. This is despite the fact that there is some recognition of the differences, as suggested in Creusere’s (1999) interpretation of Kreuz and Glucksberg’s (1989) findings:

²⁵ Although that kind of broad conceptualisation of irony has recently been challenged in Wilson (2013) who argues for a more narrow understanding.

Whereas linguists tend to define ironic speech acts as intentionally counterfactual verbal expressions, laypeople appear to reserve the characteristics of intention, counterfact, and verbal expression to instances of sarcasm. Irony and sarcasm are both considered by linguists as communicative devices. In contrast, laypeople seem to perceive sarcasm as a linguistic device (i.e., something people do) and irony as a matter of fate (i.e., unexpected or surprising events that happen to people).

Creusere (1999: 219, italics in original)

Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 5, such an approach is dismissed in some work on the basis that the researcher's definition is superior (e.g. Burgers et al. 2011). For these reasons, in this study, the starting point for analysis will be what participants themselves have evaluated as *sarcastic* or *ironic* (Chapter 7).

Having established these two limitations in irony research, in the rest of this chapter I will discuss the key literature on mismatch and facework in relation to irony/sarcasm to see how this may cast light on mock politeness.

4.2 Mismatch in irony studies

As noted in the previous chapter, irony studies too have focussed on mismatch to a great extent. I start by looking at theories of the cognitive structure of irony, all of which include mismatch, then move on to the categories that have been proposed for the type of linguistic mismatch that may be identified in the ironic utterance. I then briefly discuss the work on mismatch as a cue for ironic interpretation. In the last two sections, I discuss the location of mismatch, and the implications of mismatch on processing of irony utterances.

4.2.1 Mismatch in the cognitive structure of irony

A range of descriptions for the operation and processing of irony/sarcasm have been presented and tested, sometimes with contradictory findings, but united by the notion of there being a mismatch between what is said (the dictum) and what is meant (the implicatum).

4.2.1a Propositional mismatch

The explanation which is closest to that given in dictionaries and many lay definitions rely on a mismatch at the level of propositional values, as illustrated in the following dictionary definition

Irony. [uncountable] a form of humour in which you use words to express the *opposite* of what the words really mean

Macmillan Dictionary Online (italics added)

Irony. The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the *opposite*, typically for humorous or emphatic effect:

Oxford Dictionaries Online (my italics)

As can be seen, both definitions state that the ironist says the *opposite* of what s/he means, and this type of definition is also found recent academic second-order theorisation. For instance, Colebrook's (2004) textbook on irony claimed that irony was the result of saying the opposite to what was meant, and so the mismatch is one of direct reversal of propositional content. However, this reversal is so under-defined that it encompasses many features of non-literal language, indeed Colebrook (2004: 1) accepts that, as a result, irony 'by the very simplicity of its definition becomes curiously undefinable'.

This model was developed in Grice (1967/1975), in which he identifies irony as involving mismatch at the propositional level, but more specifically as an instance of flouting the maxim of quality, leading to a mismatch of truth values. However, this still leaves the definition open enough to encompass many other non-literal language uses (such as some metaphor) and even deceit (discussed in the previous chapter), and most subsequent models have moved away from this perspective.²⁶

4.2.1b Making as if to say

In one of the most influential developments, Sperber and Wilson (1991/1981) present a strong alternative with the echoic mention theory. This posited that the hearer must first recognise that the irony is an echo of a (potential) previous utterance or ‘the thought of a certain kind of person, or of people in general’ (1986: 238). Once that criterion has been established, then the hearer may derive meaning through standard implicature. In this case, the mismatch occurs as the speaker ‘makes as if to say’ but does not sincerely commit to that speech act. Sperber and Wilson (1986: 239) illustrate this with the following:

Peter: It’s a lovely day for a picnic

[They go for a picnic and it rains]

Mary: (sarcastically): It’s a lovely day for a picnic indeed.

Mary’s utterance directly echoes that of Peter, but Peter would see that she rejects it, given the mismatch between their situational context and the content of the utterance.

²⁶ Though see Dynel (2013) for a neo-Gricean account of irony and the GRIALE Group’s model (Ruiz Gurillo & Padilla, Eds. 2009). Also, although distinct in many other respects, the indirect negation view (Giora 1995) also locates irony in the direct mismatch between what is said and what is being described.

An important feature of this model is the assumption that the cognitive processing requires a *shared cognitive environment*, in Sperber and Wilson's (1986) terms, among participants, which means that the participants are expected to have access to the same or similar sets of assumptions in order to calculate mismatch.

Several features of the echoic mention model are shared by theories such as the *pretense theory* (in Clark & Gerrig 1984; Clark 1996), subsequently elaborated as the *allusional pretense theory* (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995) which sees irony as conveying pragmatic meaning by alluding to failed expectations and usually achieved by violating the maxim of quality.

4.2.1c Evaluative mismatch

Evaluation is a core feature of irony in many models, for instance Kumon-Nakamura et al. conclude that 'irony is used primarily to express a speaker's attitude toward the referent of the ironic utterance' (1995: 3). However, evaluative *mismatch* lies at the core of irony for another set of theorists. For instance, Partington (2006, 2007) argues for understanding irony as the reversal of evaluative meaning of an utterance, and so the mismatch is located in the two differing evaluations of the dictum and implicatum. To take another dictionary definition, in 1538 Elyot defined irony as follows:

Ironia, is a fygure in speakynge, whanne a man dissemblyth in speche that whyche he thynketh not: as in scoffyng or bourdyng, callynge that fayre, whyche is fowle in dede, that good, whiche is yl, that eloquent, which is barbarous. Semblably reasoning contrary to that I thinke, to the intente to mocke hym, with whome I doo dyspute or reason.

Thomas Elyot's *The Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot* (1538, cited in Williams 2012: no page)

In *callynge that fayre, whyche is fowle*, the speaker is saying the ‘opposite’, as in the propositional reversal model, but, more specifically, the mismatch is between reversal of evaluations: *fayre* and *fowle* and *eloquent* and *barbarous*. Similarly, Burgers et al. (2011: 190) operationalise irony as ‘an utterance with a literal evaluation that is implicitly contrary to its intended evaluation’. While Alba-Juez and Attardo’s (2014) model combines evaluative mismatch with ‘the *contradiction* between an expected state of affairs and an observed one’ (2014: 102, italics in original). Thus, they combine two approaches, the mismatch of expectations/reality (Attardo’s [2000] theory of relevant inappropriateness) and evaluative mismatch.

Thus we can see that mismatch is hypothesised to take different forms and models tend to either combine models, as in Alba-Juez and Attardo (2014), which was just mentioned, or, to try and identify a single underlying shared feature: mismatch. For instance, Garmendia (2014: 648) states that ‘instead of trying to accommodate the strong notions of echo, opposition, and pretence into the vast variety of ironic examples, let us accept that what ties together all instances of irony is something more basic – an overt clash between contents’.

4.2.2 Levels of mismatch

In this section, I discuss theories which have attempted to identify and group different levels of mismatch. Following Attardo (2000), Alba-Juez & Attardo (2014) see the basic mismatch between expected/observed state of affairs as potentially located at a range of levels:

- a) *Propositional*: as discussed above
- b) *Illocutionary*: intended as a contradiction of speech acts. The example provided is ‘come on, keep walking barefoot’ where the locution appears

to be a command but the intended illocutionary meaning is that of a reprimand²⁷

- c) *Presupposition*: they give the example of the utterance ‘I now realize what a bad actor you are’ (2014: 103) said to an award-winner, and so the contradiction is between the (evaluative) embedded presupposition (you are a bad actor) and the context (you are a good actor).

Other authors too have adopted a combined approach, for instance, Camp (2011: 814) defines sarcasm as involving ‘a unified operation of meaning inversion, which is manifested in distinct ways by four different subspecies of sarcasm’.²⁸ Camp (2011) includes propositional and illocutionary mismatch, like Alba-Juez and Attardo (2014), but in place of presupposition, contains two additional suggestions:

- d) *Lexical*: the example provided is ‘Because George has turned out to be such a diplomat, we’ve decided to transfer him to Payroll, where he’ll do less damage’, this is considered a more semantic kind of sarcasm and the mismatch lies in the reversal of evaluation of a single expression or phrase, the proposition of the whole utterance is not rejected.
- e) *‘Like’-prefixed*: the example provided is ‘Like that’s a good idea’ or ‘Like she’s coming to your party’, in which the entire proposition is rejected, similar to propositional irony.

²⁷ Although the example given could also be interpreted as a simple propositional reversal of ‘keep on’ / ‘do not keep on’ in the command.

²⁸ Camp’s study of sarcasm has been included in this section under the heading of irony, because she claims that her analysis of sarcasm can account for most if not all instances of verbal irony.

The lexical classification is essentially a more highly specified kind of propositional mismatch, but the *'like'-prefixed* category is distinctive, primarily because it is clearly very language and culture specific. What the author seems to be identifying here is not a level of mismatch, but a conventionalised cue, and these are discussed in the next section.

4.2.3 Mismatch as a cue to irony

The models discussed so far have largely focussed on mismatch as a *constitutive* element in irony or sarcasm, in other words they are considered to be the characteristic feature of irony. However, other studies have discussed mismatch more in the sense of a contextualisation cue, something which aids the comprehension of the utterance as possessing a sarcastic/ironic intent. In the terms of Burgers et al. (2012) we may distinguish between *irony factors*, the elements that make an utterance ironic and *irony markers*, which are the meta-communicative cues. Frequently discussed irony markers or cues include the following:

- *Prosodic contrast* is perhaps the category that has been most extensively discussed (see for example Kreuz & Roberts 1995, Attardo 2000b) and yet the consensus seems to be that, as Gibbs (2000) noted, there is no single pattern accounting for all uses. As Wilson (2013: 45) notes, this may be realised by a range of features, such as ‘a flat or deadpan intonation, slower tempo, lower pitch level and greater intensity’. Evidence for variation in the realisation is also apparent in Cheang & Pell (2011) who tested claims for a universal prosody of irony, similar to the universal features noted for emotions, and found that participants were not able to identify ironic or sarcastic utterances in an unknown language.

- *Facial movements* are another para-linguistic features which have been discussed, for instance in Attardo (2000b) and Caucci & Kreuz (2012)
- *Over-statement* also indicates a kind of cueing mismatch, and has been discussed in terms of *exaggeration* (Leech 1983), *intensification* (Seto 1998), *hyperbole* (Kreuz et al. 1995; Kreuz & Roberts 1995; Partington 2006).²⁹
- *Understatement* or litotes, which is closely related to over-statement through antonymy, is noted for instance in Leech (1983) and Partington (2006)

Thus we can see that even when focussing on just the most frequently identified cues, phonological, lexical and paralinguistic features are all covered, indicating the range of modes for cueing irony/sarcasm.³⁰ Other features that have been discussed include register switching and quoting (Haiman 1998), pointing towards the salience of the echoic mention theory.

However, one of the problems with the two categories of *irony factors* and *irony markers* is the amount of overlap between the two. As Attardo (2001:118) points out ‘[t]here has been some confusion between ironical markers and ironical utterances, if not entirely explicitly, at least in the practice of some scholars who come to identify irony with irony that is explicitly marked as such by some ironical indicator’. He goes on to assert that ‘[a]n irony marker/indicator alerts the reader to the fact that a sentence is ironical. The sentence would, however, be ironical even without the

²⁹ Although, as mentioned above, it should be noticed that hyperbole is also considered a type of irony in some models.

³⁰ In a mode comparison, Hancock (2004) found that the cues in face-to-face and online interactions were mainly paralinguistic. In the face-to-face interactions these were laughter, prosody, amplifiers, facial expressions and gestures while in the computer-mediated interactions they were punctuation, ellipsis, amplifiers, non-verbal communication and emoticons (listed in order of frequency).

marker'. However, Attardo does not, in this same chapter, provide an explanation of what constitutes an ironical factor (which is opposed to 'marker') and so the border remains fuzzy. This fuzziness is addressed with reference to mismatch in the use of honorifics by Okamoto (2002: 122), who acknowledges that 'it is not certain as to whether overpolite honorifics are simply accompaniments of an ironic utterance [i.e., contextualization cues that make the irony more salient] or whether they themselves generate the force of the irony'.³¹

Having considered the forms that mismatch in irony may take, in the following section I discuss how the mismatch in irony may be processed as this may help understand the processing of mock politeness more generally.

4.2.4 Processing mismatch

One of the theories accounting for processing of irony that has withstood robust empirical testing is Giora's (2003) indirect negation view, which is complemented by the graded salience hypothesis. According to the graded salience hypothesis, the more salient (conventional) meanings should be activated first. These theories have been tested and given weight through a series of experiments (e.g. Giora et al. 2007, Giora 2011), which reported that literal meanings are not blocked or cancelled by non-literal meanings, even when there is strong contextual information to indicate that the utterance will be ironical. In Giora. (2011), even when participants were provided

³¹ This is further investigated in Brown (2013) whose analysis of Korean TV dramas concludes that they can do both, in some cases the honorific constitutes the irony, in others it cues the non-sincere intention.

with very explicit information, as in the following dialogue, they took longer to read and process the ironic meaning than in the equivalent non-ironic dialogues.

Sagi: Yesterday I started working as a security guard at Ayalon shopping mall.

Yafit: Irit indeed told me she had seen you there.

Sagi (desperate): It turned out it's quite a tough job, being on your feet all day.

Yafit: I hope that at least the pay is worth the effort.

Sagi: At the moment I get 18 shekels per hour.

Yafit (mocking): Great salary you're getting.

Sagi: I know that's not enough but they promised a raise soon.

Yafit: And how much will you actually get after the raise?

Sagi: In two weeks from now I'll get 20 shekels per hour.

Yafit (still mocking): Wow, a highly significant raise.

Giora (2011: 24, italics in original)

For the analysis of mock politeness, this has two important implications. First, as anticipated by the pragmatic models of im/politeness discussed in Chapter 2, that processing an ironic utterance appears to consistently require additional cognitive effort. Second, that both literal and non-literal meanings are identified and retained. The first point is particularly relevant because the additional processing could help to explain the weight of the offensiveness in mock politeness; if a target has invested greater cognitive effort in interpreting the utterance, the impoliteness may be intensified, while for the over-hearing audience, there is potential for the extra cognitive investment or effort to add to the humorous value (see, for example, works on the intersection between impoliteness and entertainment such as Culpeper 2005; Lorenzo-Dus 2009; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al. 2013). The second is important

because the retention of both literal and non-literal meanings allows for ‘play’ between those meanings (e.g. as discussed in Partington 2003).

In the following section, I look in more detail at the im/politeness effects of irony / sarcasm by focussing on the facework functions.

4.3 Facework functions of irony and sarcasm

Both irony and sarcasm have frequently been discussed in terms of facework and im/politeness and the effects on face have also been posited as a means of differentiating irony and sarcasm (discussed further below). Although, as will be seen below, there is considerable variation in the findings with reference to the kind of facework that is accomplished, the majority of theorists start from the assumption that irony and sarcasm involve the expression of negative evaluation (e.g. Barbe 1993; Sperber & Wilson 2012; Garmendia 2014; Dynel 2014, *inter alia*). In this, they follow on from Grice who stated that ‘I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt’ ([1967], 1978: 124). This assumption underlies the work discussed in the first three sections below, those considering the face-saving and face-threatening functions of irony and sarcasm. Challenges to this notion are presented in the third section which addresses the face-enhancement potential of irony and sarcasm.

4.3.1 Face-saving: Hearer-focussed

Starting with those theorists who have focused on the face-saving functions, both Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) viewed irony as (potentially) a face-saving strategy by allowing the hearer to arrive at the offensive point indirectly, thus mitigating the FTA and this has also been an assumption within irony studies (e.g.

Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995). In Leech's model of politeness, discussed in the previous chapter, the Irony Principle is defined as:

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 implicature

Leech (1983: 82)

In his definition then, the choice of irony for the expression of an impolite belief serves to reduce the impolite force of the utterance and '[permits] aggression to manifest itself in a less dangerous verbal form than by direct criticism, insults, threats, etc.' (1983: 143-144), a point which has since been challenged, as seen below. This is close to Brown and Levinson's positioning of irony as a potential off-record strategy for mitigating face-threat (1987: 221).

By saying the opposite of what he means, again a violation of Quality, S can indirectly convey his intended meaning, if there are clues that his intended meaning is being conveyed indirectly. Such clues may be prosodic (e.g. nasality), kinesic (e.g. a smirk), or simply contextual.

Brown & Levinson (1987:221-222)

Similarly, Mills (2003: 234) notes how irony, along with banter, mockery and joking (which, incidentally, are all largely phenomena which operate through mismatch) were used within the group she was analysing in order to resolve conflict, where conflict is understood as a misunderstanding with potential for face loss. This face-saving function almost certainly relates to the indirectness or deniability that is attributed to the features (discussed further below). Further evidence for the face-saving function also comes from Dews et al. (1995) who carried out three experiments and found that their subjects rated ironic criticisms as less harsh than direct criticism

(interestingly, they also found that ironic criticisms were rated as more amusing in two separate experiments).

4.3.2 Face-saving: Speaker-focussed

The next set of research also focusses on the face-saving nature, but includes explicit consideration of the face-saving potential for the speaker. For instance, Jorgensen (1996) addressed specifically the face-saving functions of *sarcastic irony* and notes that (1) it is likely to be used to express critical thoughts (hence the need for face-saving), (2) that it is less likely to be taken seriously than an on-record comment (see deniability below) and (3) that it is less likely to result in negative feelings towards the speaker. Therefore, we can see that the face-saving scope is of benefit to the speaker too. In this regard, Jorgensen also hypothesises that the trivial nature of the complaints that were expressed through sarcastic irony may mean that there was actually a greater potential threat to the speaker's face than the hearer's.

In a similar vein, Dews et al. (1995) identified speaker face-saving functions in irony use and they concluded that it functioned to show the speaker was exerting self-control (by not reacting with a bald on record response). Nuolijarvi and Tiittula (2011) also associate irony with speaker face-saving, in this case used as a defensive function in political debates. They claim that

a typical environment for the irony-implicative statement in the Finnish political election debates is a point where the position of one interactant is threatened: it can be a face-threatening question or some type of boasting in the opponent's prior turn or an unfavourable distribution of talking rights. Ironising the opponent can thus be a means to improve one's own position.

Nuolijarvi and Tiittula (2011: 584)

This research points towards face-saving effects for both speaker and hearer and suggests this is one reason that irony or sarcasm may be preferred to a literal, on-record criticism.

4.3.3 Face-enhancement

In addition to face-saving, as described above, another reported function of irony/sarcasm use is that of face-enhancement. For instance, Leech (2014: 235) notes that ‘irony tends to be more complex, ingenious, witty and/or entertaining than a straight piece of impoliteness. An advantage of this is that it boosts the face of the ironist while attacking the face of the target’. The potential for speaker self-enhancement through humour has been identified in previous work (e.g. Norrick 1994; Ducharme 1994; Dewes 1995; Jorgensen 1996), also discussed below in the section on point of view. Similarly, Giora et al. (2005) suggest that the use of irony may enable the speaker to show sophistication and Partington (2006) notes that the usage may add interest.

In the findings of Lee and Katz (2000) there is also scope for seeing irony as involving speaker face-enhancement through the strategy of self-deprecation. Dewes et al. (1995: 365) comment on this more explicitly, stating that ‘when people make comments about unpleasant situations that are out of their control, the payoffs [...] for commenting ironically were that the remark is perceived as humorous and it has a less negative impact on the speaker-hearer relationship’. Furthermore, they report that impact was more positive for the ironic variant than for literal remarks because such formulations ‘made light’ of the situation, rather than ‘bringing down’ the mood of the addressee.

Irony and sarcasm may also be used for other face-enhancement, as for instance in ironic compliments or asteism. This function is referred to as ‘positively evaluative irony’ in Dynel (2013), although as she notes, it is less frequent than its counterpart ‘negatively evaluative irony’.³² Similarly, Gibbs’s (2000) study of conversation found that ironic compliments are less frequent. This higher frequency of the critical use is referred to as the *normative bias* in Wilson & Sperber (2012) and Wilson (2013), who explain it by claiming that

[n]orms, in the sense of socially shared ideas about how things *should* be, are always available to be ironically echoed when they are not satisfied [...] On the other hand, it takes special circumstances to be able to say ironically ‘She is so impolite!’ when someone is being polite, [...] For irony to succeed in [this case], the thought that the person in question might behave impolitely [...] must have been entertained or, even better, expressed. Only then is there some identifiable thought that can be ironically echoed

Wilson & Sperber (2012: 142, my italics)

Another important aspect of face-enhancement is the potential signalling of common ground and alignment between participants, thus enhancing face of both speaker and hearer. The creation of solidarity (Haiman 1998) may occur in one of two ways. In the first, there is bonding over a particular target, as Gibbs suggests ‘a good deal of ironic language enables speakers to bond together through their disparagement of some other person’ (Gibbs 2000: 7). This shared criticism is also noted as a function of humor in

³² The terms ‘positive irony’ and ‘negative irony’ for enhancement/attack functions are used in Alba-Juez (1994).

Holmes (2000) and this would seem to be anticipated by the ‘disposition theory of humor’ (Zillmann and Cantor 1976, cited in Drucker et al. 2014) according to which our appreciation of a humorous encounter in which one person derides another, depends on our dispositional attitude towards these parties. In the second, solidarity is achieved through banter, for instance Alvarado Ortega’s (2013) analysis of naturally occurring interactions in conversational peninsular Spanish concludes that irony primarily fulfils a solidarity function, acting as mock impoliteness (mock mock politeness in Bousfield’s [2008] terms). In support of the importance of this function, Brown (2013) found that roughly one third of the sarcastic honorifics analysed in a dataset of Korean TV dramas were used to attack face, while two-thirds were used as mock impoliteness. Thus we see how certain features may be embedded or nested in levels of im/politeness. In addition, Brown (2013) notes the use of sarcasm for both face-attack and face-enhancement, and states that these can be distinguished in the following way:

In the case of ‘genuine’ impoliteness, the ‘victim’ of the sarcastic/ironic remark will feel the need to defend him/herself in order to preserve ‘face’ and will thus frequently respond to what is implicated (the ‘implicatum’) (Kotthoff 2003). In the case of mock impoliteness, ‘victims’ tend to ‘play along’ with irony by responding to what is literally said (the ‘dictum’) and acting out the fantasy narrative/persona that the ironic remark constructs around them.

Brown (2013: 164)

4.3.4 Face-attack

As noted in the introduction to this section, irony and sarcasm are strongly associated with the expression of negative evaluation and therefore a function of face-attack may

be predicted. For instance, Lee and Katz (2000) found that utterances were more strongly rated as both ironic and sarcastic if the utterance was an echoic reminder of a past mistake, in other words if it involved drawing attention to loss of face. In addition to expression of critical attitude (e.g. Nuolijarvi & Tiitula 2011; Dews et al. 1995; Garmendia 2010 on irony; Haiman 1998 on sarcasm), other face-attack functions that have been identified are expression of aggression (Dews et al. 1995) and venting frustration (Ducharme 1994).

Furthermore, the assumption that the function of irony is to lessen offence or avoid committing an FTA has been challenged in more recent research. For instance, Colston (1997) found that in instances of *ironic criticism* (his term), irony enhances the perceived criticism. With reference to impoliteness more generally, Culpeper et al. (2003: 1549) address this issue noting that Leech (1983) allows for indirect utterances to be more impolite than their bald on record counterparts. More recently, Culpeper (2011) has again noted the potential for exacerbated impoliteness in implicational impoliteness compared to conventionalised impoliteness formulae and called for systematic research in this area (2011:178).³³

4.4 Accounting for contradictory findings on the effects of irony / sarcasm on face

Given the diverse findings that emerge from the discussion of facework, I briefly consider here some possible explanations that have been proposed.

³³ The example provided in Leech is 'Haven't you something to declare' as opposed to a yes-no question (1983: 171), but in this case, the indirect utterance is also more coercive because it is a negative interrogative (see Heritage 2002). The example from Culpeper et al. (2003) is 'You have shit for brains' as opposed 'You Fool', but as they note, the potential impoliteness also comes from the taboo language as well as the requirement of implicature for understanding.

4.4.1 Acceptable aggression

In an attempt to reconcile the contradictory findings about the effects of irony/sarcasm use on face, Pexman & Olineck (2002) set up an experiment to investigate whether different findings in previous studies could be attributed to the variable of whether the raters were asked to focus on ‘speaker intent’ (i.e. is the speaker being sarcastic?) or ‘social impression’ (i.e. ‘is the speaker saying something polite?’) (2002: 203). Using invented stimuli, they found that ‘[i]ronic insults were rated as more polite and more positive than more direct insults, and yet ironic insults were rated as more mocking and more sarcastic than more direct insults’ (2002: 214-215). This conflicting finding suggests that participants were making a distinction between politeness as social appropriacy and effects on face. This may also reflect the association of sarcastic expression or criticism with *control*, as mentioned above, because the speaker performs the face attack without violating general social norms. These findings are largely confirmed by Boylan and Katz (2013) whose research into (hypothetical) conversations between friends found ‘that sarcastic irony simultaneously mutes (by being perceived as being more positive and polite) and enhances (by being perceived as more sarcastic and mocking) the negative comment’ (2013: 203).

4.4.2 Participation role

As has been seen from the previous discussion, there are often conflicting kinds of facework being performed by irony / sarcasm and it is likely that this is partly due to the differing perspectives from participants in different roles. That is to say that the emotional response may be very different depending on whether the hearer is the target of an ironic/sarcastic utterance or simply an observer (discussed in Jorgensen 1996; Nuolijarvi & Tiitula 2011; Partington 2006), and perception will differ between speaker and addressee (Bowes & Katz 2011). This means that participation role will

affect the effect of the irony and, furthermore, that the ironic/sarcastic behaviour may be exacerbated by the presence of an audience (Jorgensen 1996; Toplak & Katz 2000). Similarly, Van Mulken et al. (2010) suggest that the irony is appreciated by the addressee if s/he agrees with the sentiment that it expresses and is not the target. Thus we can see that the interpretation will depend on whether the participants share common ground (evaluations), and if one participant is the target of a critical utterance, this is unlikely.

However, as Toplak & Katz (2000: 1468) highlight ‘[p]oint-of-view in sarcasm has received little attention, and needs to be addressed more in-depth in order to advance current theories of sarcasm’.

4.4.3 Deniability

Another key feature of irony and sarcasm is deniability and this too may account for the multiple kinds of facework which can be accomplished. If we go back to Goffman, he states that:

When a speaker employs conventional brackets to warn us that what he [sic] is saying is meant to be taken in jest, or as mere repeating of words by someone else, then it is clear that he means to stand in a relation of reduced personal responsibility for what he is saying. He splits himself off from the content of the words by expressing that their speaker is not he himself or not he himself in a serious way.

Goffman (1974:512)

In the references to *jest* or *mere repeating of words*, we can see the connection to mock polite behaviours, and irony in particular if we consider the echoic theory. Thus it is seen for a way for the speaker to absolve him/herself from responsibility.

The (potential) deniability of irony comes about because of the mismatch between what is said and what is meant. Irony is described as inherently ambiguous in Whalen et al. (2013), and this ambiguity lies at the heart of the complex interactional work that it is used to perform. An important function of such deniability is highlighted in Mills (2003: 124), who proposes that irony also allows the speaker to express their true feelings in a form that may be denied (such verisimilar irony is particularly interesting with reference to facework).³⁴ Attardo (2001, following Berrendonner 1981) discusses this in terms of *retractability*, and notes the similarities with humor in terms of the lack of commitment. The speaker may make an assertion, speech or evaluation which, if badly received, may be denied or retracted. Although, this may not always work as a strategy, for instance Billig (2005) discussed Berlusconi's insult in the European Parliament in which he addressed a German MEP saying 'Mr Schulz, I know there is in Italy a man producing a film on the Nazi concentration camps. I would like to suggest you for the role of leader. You'd be perfect'³⁵. In the ensuing outcry Berlusconi claimed that his remark had been said 'with irony' but this did not diminish the criticism he received.

On a similar note Partington (2006: 221) states that 'irony and sarcasm [...] permit speakers to perform face moves indirectly', and Barbe (1995) sees deniability as a distinguishing feature between irony and sarcasm (irony being off-record and sarcasm

³⁴ This kind of function must, therefore, assume that in the processing of irony, the first meaning (dictum) is retained alongside the second meaning (implicatum).

³⁵ This was the most frequent translation I came across, the original was 'Signor Schultz in Italia c'è un produttore che sta preparando un film sui campi di concentramento nazisti, la propongo per il ruolo di kapò'.

on-record in her argument). However, the on/off record nature of such utterances is not clear cut. For instance, Brown and Levinson state that ‘where the irony is disambiguated in form, it may be the output of an on-record strategy’ (1987: 263) and they note that this is common in Tzeltal (1987: 222). Pexman & Olineck (2010: 215) similarly claim that ‘[t]he face-saving function operates when a listener is not aware, or is unsure, of the speaker’s true opinion’, in other words, once the utterance is disambiguated and put on-record, it cannot function to save face.

4.4.4 Other factors

It may also be that off-recordness is not the most appropriate variable, for instance Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995) note that *insincerity* rather than *literalness* is especially salient in determining whether an utterance is reported as ironic. Another significant variable could be the kind of irony that is being investigated, if we recall that for some researchers the term irony covers a wide range of features such as all occurrences of hyperbole. For instance, Leggit & Gibbs (2000:21) found that ‘nonironic statements were perceived to be more negative than some types of irony (e.g., satire and nonpersonal irony), more positive than others (e.g., sarcasm and rhetorical questions), and approximately the same as some (e.g., overstatement and understatement)’. Finally, an important variable in evaluations is likely to be that of the conventionalisation (as discussed in Chapter 2) of the ironic or sarcastic utterance.

4.5 Shared and distinguishing features of irony and sarcasm

Even in this discussion of just the facework that may be accomplished by irony and sarcasm, several differences between conceptualisations of the two constructs have emerged, such as the tendency to associate sarcasm with *face-attack*, as for instance in Querini & Lubrani (2004: 85), who define sarcasm in terms of the inclusion of

negative elements that are absent from irony (this definition, from an Italian psychological study, also illustrates the similarities in conceptualisation across second-order work in English and Italian). The focus on face-threatening and face-saving functions has also served as a means for distinguishing between irony and sarcasm for some researchers, for instance Barbe (1995) hypothesises that in sarcasm:

- (i) the utterance is more personal, and (ii) its sarcastic potential is immediately obvious to all participants in a situation, i.e. shared experience and knowledge is not a necessary factor. (iii) nevertheless the utterance still has a face-saving capacity, but only for the hearer and not for the speaker, that is a hearer can decide to ignore the sarcasm

Barbe (1995: 28)

Similarly, Partington (2006: 217) concludes that ‘irony tends to reside in the mouth of the speaker, sarcasm in the ear of the unfortunate victim’. Culpeper (1996: 357) also notes that, in his model, the term ‘sarcasm’ was preferred to ‘irony’, even though the concept was borrowed from Leech, because irony has a more positive set of associations. This difference is also acknowledged in Attardo although, problematically, he concludes that ‘for all practical purposes they cannot be reliably differentiated’ (2013: 40).

Another potentially distinguishing feature is the presence of a ‘target’ for the utterance, and most research in this area has focussed on the differences between irony and sarcasm. Lee and Katz (1998) found a stronger identification with sarcasm if the target of the echoic reminder was not the speaker her/himself, and essentially suggest that while both sarcasm and irony draw on loss of face, sarcasm involves laughing *at* rather than *with* the target. Wilson & Sperber (2012: 141) also highlight the importance of a target and state that ‘[i]rony is directly targeted at attributed thoughts,

and may be indirectly targeted, particularly in sarcasm, at the people, or type of people, who entertain such thoughts or take them seriously'. Although this difference of a human target vs situation appears to be salient in comparisons of sarcasm and irony, Gibbs (2000) still found that sarcasm was more likely to refer to the current situation (31% of occurrences) or past event (14%) than an addressee (21%) other person (13%) or overhearer (3%).³⁶

Some researchers have also identified the overtness of the expression as a distinguishing factor. For instance, in the citation from Barbe (1995) above we might note the emphasis on sarcasm being 'immediately obvious'. Thus she considers sarcasm to be on-record and not deniable, in contrast to irony which is off-record (and therefore face-saving).

In addition, differences have been identified in terms of whether they: perform *different communicative functions* (e.g. Kreuz, Long and Church 1991, Lee and Katz 1998, Roberts & Kreuz 1994); evoke *different emotional responses* (e.g. Leggitt and Gibbs 2000); or relate differently to theories of *processing* (e.g. Lee and Katz 1998, Gibbs 2000). Finally, Schaffer (1982) suggests that irony and sarcasm will have *different cues*.

In one of the very few first-order analyses, Dress et al. (2008) elicited definitions of irony and sarcasm from North-American subjects and found that irony tended to be described in terms of *situational irony*, while sarcasm was described as a verbal phenomenon involving mismatch of dictum and implicatum which involved negative

³⁶ In this case, sarcasm was classified as utterances 'where speakers spoke positively to convey a more negative intent' Gibbs (2000:12).

emotion and humour (2008: 79). Indeed the salience of situational irony seems to have coloured many second-order definitions.

However, it is also clear there is considerable overlap between sarcasm and irony; first and foremost, the role of *mismatch*, their use of *indirectness* leading to *deniability*; the *evaluative* function (discussed in detail in Dynel 2013); and the dependence on situation or *context* (e.g. Brown 2013). A final important shared feature is their propensity towards *conventionalisation*, discussed in Chapter 2.

4.6 Users of irony / sarcasm

The lack of analysis of naturally-occurring interactions, as discussed in Section 4.1.2, also means that there is little information available about the users of sarcasm and irony. Although there have been calls for more work in this area, such as Eisterhold et al. (2006: 1254), who state that ‘[u]ltimately, it is obvious that in order to understand fully such a heavily context-dependent phenomenon as irony studies, we will have to focus on the situational context of the ironical/sarcastic utterance’.

4.6.1 Culture

With reference to culture, a variable that is particularly important for this study, there has been little investigation to date, and what investigations there have been into mock politeness have all addressed irony or sarcasm. At a macro-level approach, Rockwell & Theriot (2001) gave participants a conversation task designed to elicit sarcasm and found that those from ‘individualistic’ cultures were more likely to use sarcasm than those from collectivist cultures (as determined by nationality). However, this is problematic both in terms of the essentialist approach to culture and the methodology. They measured sarcasm in terms of how likely participants were to self-describe using the label ‘sarcastic’, or to describe their conversation partner using the same

metapragmatic label, which is not the same as measuring actual sarcasm use (as discussed in Chapter 5). Interestingly, Barbe (1995: 185) suggests in a footnote that Germans consider their irony to be more like sarcasm than that produced by speakers from the USA. However, her analysis of German data found that irony was used for face-saving purposes and therefore she hypothesises that the assumptions were driven by more general stereotypes about German behaviour.

Cultural variation is not confined to national or language cultures of course, and Dress et al. (2008) investigated use of irony and sarcasm by participants from northern and southern states of the USA. They found that usage differed, with those from northern states producing more sarcastic utterances in a discourse completion test and describing themselves as sarcastic in a self-rating test. Moreover, they found that this difference in use corresponded to a difference in conceptualisation of irony and sarcasm. As Dress et al. report:

When asked to provide definitions for irony and sarcasm, the two groups produced very similar responses for irony, equating it with situational irony (as described by Lucariello, 1994). However, when asked to define sarcasm, revealing differences emerged between the two groups. Specifically, the Northern participants were significantly more likely to mention the characteristic of humor than the Southern participants.

Dress et al. (2008:81)

Thus their research suggests that it is both conceptualisation and usage which differs in the two cultures, and this would need to be accounted for in any second order theory.

4.6.2 Gender

Where irony research has addressed sociocultural variables, it has tended to focus on a binary concept of gender. For instance, Gibbs (2000) analysed conversational interactions among students and found that sarcasm was used more frequently by men (64% of occurrences) than women. This appears to be supported by self-assessments of usage in studies by Dress et al. (2008) and Bowes & Katz (2011) but not by actual production of sarcasm in these two studies. As Dress et al. commented

The male participants in our study reported using sarcasm more often than the females (according to the Sarcasm Self-Report Scale), a finding consistent with that of Ivanko et al. (2004). However, the male participants were no more likely to provide sarcastic completions than females in the free response task, and they did not choose ironic completions more often in the forced choice task.

Dress et al. (2008: 81-82)

Thus, there seems to be a mismatch of expectations and actual usage of sarcasm by men and women in the contexts which have been examined so far.³⁷

4.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have continued the work of the previous chapter by discussing mismatch in relation to studies of irony and sarcasm. This survey has shown that mismatch as a structure is essential to theories of irony both in terms of how irony is understood, and with reference to cues to an ironic intention. In the previous chapter, I

³⁷ Although Brown (1995) reports observing a greater usage of irony amongst women in her study of Tzeltal

discussed two principle types of mismatch for mock politeness: internal and external (following Culpeper 2011). As has been seen above, the focus in irony studies has tended to be on the mismatch which becomes relevant with reference to context, but actually the research on cues suggests that co-textual features are significant too.

I then focussed on the facework functions of irony and sarcasm in order to link the mismatch and im/politeness aspects. The literature review here showed that irony and sarcasm have been found to have a wide range of functions, from face-enhancement to face-attack. I also discussed the possible reasons for the lack of agreement amongst second-order theorists.

The literature review has also shown the considerable confusion and disagreement over what irony is, and, more specifically, the relationship between irony and sarcasm. This lack of agreement makes the need for a first-order examination of lay usage particularly important. We have also seen that the majority of research reported in international journals has tended to examine English-speaking cultures. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness of this cultural, lay influence on the second-order theorisation. By way of example, Utsumi (2000) proposes a new theory of irony, and justifies it by stating that:

Verbal irony is fundamentally implicit, not explicitly expressed. As Haverkate (1990, p. 79) pointed out, verbal irony cannot be expressed by referential expressions like ‘I ironically inform you that...’ or ‘It is ironic that...’, and it may be empirically inferred from the fact that there does not exist a verb like ‘ironize’

Utsumi (2000: 1778)

However, there is certainly a verb for ‘ironise/ironize’ in Italian (‘ironizzare’) and presumably many other languages.³⁸ Therefore, in Chapters 7 and 8 I will focus specifically on the use of irony and sarcasm, examining how they are used and what kinds of behaviours are designated as ironic and sarcastic.

³⁸ Including, arguably English. It is listed in the OED with a first attested use dating back to 1638.

CHAPTER 5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO IM/POLITENESS

MISMATCH

In this chapter I survey the different methods which have been employed in research into (potential) mock politeness, and then discuss previous applications of corpus linguistics to im/politeness study in more detail. My aim in this chapter is to show the range of approaches that are available and to demonstrate why I have chosen to take a metalinguistic approach which employs corpus linguistics.

5.1 Types of investigation

The main focus of analysis in mock politeness, and related areas such as irony studies, are the formal description of the structure of mock politeness, description of reception and perception, sociolinguistic information about the users, and cognitive information about processing. In Table 5.1, I present the results of a literature review regarding the main approaches used for such investigations. I have attempted to distinguish between the different types of investigation and the different kinds of texts which are employed. I have also differentiated between the focus of the studies in order to highlight that much of what I am discussing actually went under the label ‘irony’ or ‘sarcasm’ (discussed in the previous chapter). After presenting the table, I briefly describe each approach and note strengths and weaknesses. As the suitability of any given method is dependent on the specific research question, and the ways that it may be combined with other approaches, my aim is not to identify a single ‘best’ approach but to identify the most suitable for my project.

Table 5.1 Summary of types of investigation into mock politeness³⁹

	Text analysis	Elicitation	Reactions to texts (experimental methods)	Self-assessment
text type	Fiction	DCT / roleplay	Naturally occurring	Naturally occurring
irony / sarcasm	Naturally occurring	Participants' previous experiences	Invented	
	<p>Altardo et al. 2003; Brown 2013; Ducharme 1994; Dynel 2014; Kapogianni 2014; Muecke 1978</p> <p>Ducharme 1994; Simpson 1998; Kotthoff 2003; Whalen et al. 2013; Nuolijarvi & Tiittula 2010; Barbe 1993; Eisterhold et al. 2006; Alvarado Ortega 2013; Recchia et al. 2010; Partington 2007; Clift 1999; Ruiz 2009; Wang 2013; Gibbs 2000; González-Ibáñez et al. 2011; Kovaz et al. 2013; Sanders 2013</p>	<p>Bowes & Katz 2011; Dress et al. 2008; Hancock 2004</p> <p>Jorgensen 1996</p>	<p>Burgers et al. 2012</p> <p>Kim 2013; Shively et al. 2008</p> <p>Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014; Averbach & Hample 2008; Boylan & Katz 2013; Colston & Lee 2004; Colston & O'Brien 2000; Colston 1997; Drucker et al. 2014; Filippova 2014; Glenwright & Pexman 2010; Harris & Pexman 2003; Kowatch et al. 2013; Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995; Lee & Katz 1998; Leggit & Gibbs 2000; van Mulken et al. 2010; Pexman & Olineck 2002; Slugoski & Turnbull 1988; Toplak & Katz 2000;</p> <p>Becker et al. 2011; Gervais & Veschio; Giles et al. 2004</p>	<p>Dress et al. 2008; Ivanko et al. 2004; Rockwell & Theriot 2001</p>
patronizing		<p>Hehman et al. 2012; Veschio et al. 2005</p>		
other MP	<p>Aydinoğlu 2013;</p> <p>Culpeper 2009; Suzuki 2001; Taylor 2011</p>	<p>Culpeper et al. 2010</p>		

³⁹ Some items are listed more than once because they used more than one method or text type.

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5.1.1 Text analysis

As might be expected, this is the method that has been most frequently employed by those approaching mock politeness from a linguistic perspective. Table 5.1 shows that two main divisions: those using naturally occurring data, such as Gibbs (2000) and those using fictional data, such as Attardo et al. (2003). Many researchers, such as Partington (2007), have argued that most previous work on irony has been based on single utterances and made up examples. For instance, Nuolijarvi & Tiittula (2011) state that the data discussed ‘have typically been context-free sentences and/or artificial examples’ (2011: 572). These criticisms echo those made about first-wave politeness theories, as discussed in Chapter 2, and while this certainly does apply to earlier work (and even more recent theoretical papers such as Wilson 2013 and Gibbs et al. 2014), there appears to have been a movement towards more empirical studies, as Table 5.1 illustrates.

The disadvantages of the text analysis type of investigation are that it is more difficult to conduct (Kreuz 2000: 101) and large bodies of data may be required in order to retrieve sufficient information. As Culpeper et al. (2010: 600) note, ‘naturally occurring impoliteness is relatively rare in “everyday” contexts’.

5.1.2 Data elicitation

The second category which is listed in Table 5.1 is that of data elicitation, which may take two principle forms. The first involves the use of instruments like the Discourse Completion Test in which the researcher aims to elicit particular speech acts and/or

types of language. By way of illustration, the following was used as a free response scenario in Dress et al. (2008) in their study of regional variation in sarcasm use.⁴⁰

Bill and Ann had decided to go bowling. "I'm feeling pretty lucky tonight," said Bill. A few minutes later, they began their game, and Bill threw several gutter balls in a row. As Bill returned to his seat, Ann called over to him:

<two lines for the participants' response>

Dress et al. (2008: 83, adapted from Kreuz & Glucksberg 1989)

While this kind of focussed elicitation has the advantage of allowing the researcher to concentrate very precisely on particular contexts and to restrict variables, the risk is that the participants are being pushed in a particular direction and alternatives which have not been foreseen by the researcher are excluded. Furthermore, as Aston (1985: 62) argues, the DCT 'tells us what the informants think they would do in a hypothetical context rather than what they actually do in real ones' (see also Leech 2011: 166). The dilemma is summed up in Rockwell & Theriot (2001) who note that:

[s]ome researchers contend that if a concept of interest, such as sarcasm, is specifically requested from speakers, it will bias speakers' natural responses by forcing them to 'act' their responses (Bugental, 1974). Unfortunately, if the behavior is not requested and speakers are allowed to converse naturally, the behavior of interest may never be produced

Rockwell & Theriot (2001: 47)

⁴⁰ They anticipated that the mismatch of what was said and what occurred would prime the respondents towards a sarcastic completion.

This dilemma is partially addressed in the second kind of elicitation technique, which is much more open and may consist of oral interviews (e.g. Mills 2003) or written elicitation tasks. To take an example of the latter, Jorgensen (1996) employed the following procedure:

Subjects were asked to write a definition of sarcasm and to say how confident they were that they knew what sarcasm was. They were then asked to recall instances when they made sarcastic remarks and to describe the most typical instance they could clearly remember, including setting and context, who was present, to whom the remark was addressed, an approximate quotation of the remark, a description of the emotions that led them to make the remark, a description of the feelings they had afterwards, and a description of the reactions of the other person or persons present.

Jorgensen (1996: 617)

However, there are drawbacks to this approach too, in the Jorgensen examples the terms ‘sarcasm’ and ‘sarcastic’ are themselves being used, which may encourage participants to only focus on certain types of behaviour. As will be discussed in the analysis chapters of this thesis, these terms are used in sociolinguistically specific ways and therefore some people may fail to identify with a particular label. In addition, it is likely that there are potential differences in lay and academic uses of the terms, as observed by Creusere (1999).

This problem is addressed in Culpeper et al. (2010: 601) who note that they avoided using ‘labels such as “impolite,” “rude,” “abusive,” “aggressive” — because the choice of a particular label may have biased our results toward particular behaviours and, moreover, we wished to see what labels the informants would choose (this is the

subject of a future study)’. Thus they retrieved a much greater range of behaviours, which could then be classified in a data-driven way.

Some limitations still remain, however, namely that recall may not be precise enough to allow for a linguistic study and that recruiting participants can be difficult. The latter point means that numbers may be small and the (sociocultural) range of potential participants may be limited. In the Jorgensen (1996) study, participants were undergraduate students who were given extra course credit for participating. The Culpeper et al. (2010) study also used undergraduate students, but perhaps as there was no credit incentive, they found that in the UK context over 1,000 report forms had to be given out in order to get 100 returned forms.

5.1.3 Experimental investigations

The third kind of approach is experimental investigations in which, like the controlled elicitation techniques, the researcher retains a great degree of control over the language produced. This technique is most commonly used in irony studies situated within the discipline of psychology, and researchers often request the participants to evaluate and judge language that they think contains the target feature (see below for more on this aspect). We may distinguish between three kinds of text: those invented by the researchers for the purpose of the experiment; pre-existing fictional texts; and naturally occurring.

As shown in Table 5.1, the most frequently used text type is invented by the researchers. For instance, Lee and Katz (1998) gave participants scenarios containing dialogues which were manipulated for features such as whether an erroneous prediction was made or not, and then participants were asked to rate the passages

according to whether they considered them to be ‘good examples’ of sarcasm or irony.

A ‘bad example’ scenario is shown below:

The lecture. John and Steve were walking across campus to their Monday morning economics class. As they entered the lecture hall, Steve said, ‘I’ve read over the assignment and I’ll bet this is going to be a boring lecture.’ The professor gave a very dry and boring presentation of the material. As they left the lecture hall, Steve said to John, ‘A boring lecture, wasn’t it?’

Lee and Katz (1998: 11)

The principle advantage to this approach is that the researcher does not need to invest large amounts of time looking for examples, and can ensure they include very specific features and variations. In the use of fictional texts, such as sitcoms, researchers have justified the choice by noting that the features may be intensified and therefore easier to identify (e.g. Attardo et al. 2003; Kim 2013). However, if the aim of the researcher is to generalise about the use of mock politeness in naturally occurring language, then the choice of invented / fictional text type is problematic.

Overall, there are a number of limitations to this experimental approach. First, there is a strong assumption that laboratory tasks tap the same types of interpretive processes used in understanding everyday discourse (see, for instance, Ivanko et al. 2004: 247-248). However, the experimental environment usually involves a loss of context (Katz 2009) and passivity is forced on to the participants. As Kotthoff notes

[t]he greatest differences between lab situations and natural conversations are that in the former, the irony recipients (a) are not affected by the ironic act, and (b) have no opportunity to continue the interaction and thus to shape and co-construct it

Kotthoff (2003: 1388)

In addition, like some of the examples of data elicitation, there is the problem of using the metalanguage of mock politeness.

5.1.4 Self-reported usage

This was the least frequently used approach, and, with one exception (Rockwell & Theriot 2001), it was used in conjunction with other methods as a form of methodological triangulation. If the aim is to compare first order use with second order perceptions, then it can be an effective tool. But used independently, it can tell us very little about actual practice, as sociolinguistics has long been aware (cf. Trudgill 1974), so conclusions such as ‘[m]en were found to be more sarcastic than women’ (Rockwell & Theriot 2001:49) are clearly problematic when not supported by any empirical data regarding actual usage.⁴¹

5.2 Identifying the object of study

Perhaps the most challenging component of any analysis of mock politeness is identifying what is/not mock politeness in order to study it. This is a requirement in all the types of investigation described above. Either the researcher needs to decide on an operationalization of the construct in order to create stimuli containing these features in the case of experiments, or s/he needs to identify what will be considered mock politeness in the analysis of naturally occurring, fictional or elicited texts. In Table 5.2, drawing on the same literature discussed above, I survey the methods used for

⁴¹ What is particularly unusual about the Rockwell & Theriot (2001) study is that they recorded the interactions, but then did not compare the reported use of sarcasm with the actual data.

identifying the mock polite language. As previously, it should be noted that the majority of studies listed here focussed more specifically on irony or sarcasm.

Table 5.2 Summary of means of identification of mock politeness

Metalanguage	Researcher decides	Participants decide / 'naive' interpretation	
	Identification based on their previous research / existing theory	Description provided but not explicitly linked to research or theory	
		No description provided	
irony / sarcasm	Barbe 1993; Partington 2007 Simpson 1998; Wang 2013; González-Ibáñez et al. 2011; Kovaz et al. 2013	Ducharme 1994; Whalen et al. 2013; Eisterhold et al. 2006; Leggit & Gibbs 2000; Mulken et al. 2011; Kowatch et al. 2013; Kumon- Nakamura 1995; Kotthoff 2003; Muecke 1978; Ducharme 1994; Brown 2013; Kruez & Glucksberg 1989; Toplak & Katz 2000 Giles et al. 2004	Averback & Hample 2008; Shively et al. 2008; Boylan & Katz 2013; Colston & Lee 2004; Colston & O'Brien 2000; Filippova 2014; Harris & Pexman 2010; Nuolijarvi & Tiittula 2010; Alvarado Ortega 2013; Clift 1999; Attardo et al. 2003; Slugoski & Turnbull 1988; Sanders 2013; Bowes & Katz 2011; Lee & Katz 1998; Glenwright & Pexman 2010; Ivanko et al. 2004; Drucker et al 2014; Becker et al 2011
patronizing	Vescio et al. 2008; Gervais & Vescio		Rockwell & Theriot 2001; Jorgensen 1996; Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014; Colston 1997; Kim 2013; Pexman & Olineck 2002
other	Culpeper 2009; Williams 2012		Paternoster 2012; Suzuki 2001

5.2.1 *Metalinguage/metapragmatic studies of mock politeness*

As can be seen from Table 5.2, this is one of the less frequently employed approaches. The main advantage to the metalinguage / metapragmatic approach is that it allows the researcher to step back from the data and allows the evidence to emerge from lay perspectives. Thus it is better suited to implementing the call for first-order informed studies discussed in Chapter 2. Williams (2012) also notes potential time-saving benefits offered by this approach.

However, there are also a number of requirements for this type of study. First of all, given that, as mentioned above, impoliteness is actually relatively infrequent, it is difficult to see how an approach like this could be carried out without access to corpora and corpus interrogation tools. To take an example, when Partington (2006) expanded his study of *irony/ironic* from a newspaper corpus to a corpus of White House press briefings he found just nine metacomments in the six million word corpus (2006: 193). Not only is the relative infrequency of impoliteness a factor, but it is, of course, not the case that each occurrence of mock politeness will be explicitly labelled as such. Furthermore, certain behaviours may be labelled more frequently than others, for instance Dynel (2014) and Burgers et al. (2011) suggest that a metalinguistic approach is more likely to retrieve situational irony rather than verbal irony. There is also a risk that by selecting certain search terms, the researcher is delimiting the area of study. This becomes particularly salient in the case of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies because of the need to identify comparable metapragmatic comments (see, for example, Terkourafi 2005b).

Other criticisms which have been levelled at this approach are less convincing because they start from an assumption that lay perspectives are not worthy of analysis. For

instance, Dynel (2014: 620) rejects the metalanguage approach on the basis that ‘this strategy relies on lay language users’ perception of irony, which may be divergent from the scholarly perspective and which need not involve the trope’. Similarly, Burgers et al. (2011: 187) criticise such approaches on the basis that ‘the word “irony” can mean different things to different people [which] means that an utterance that one speaker calls “ironic” may not necessarily adhere to the definition of irony that a researcher has’. In both instances, the assumption is that the researcher’s definition is accurate and the lay understandings and usages are deviant. However, this stance is not compatible with a commitment to a participant first order understanding of im/politeness (as discussed in Chapter 2).

5.2.2 Researcher decides a priori

The most frequently applied method of identifying what to analyse as mock politeness involves the researcher deciding what constitutes the object of study and then locating occurrences which match that definition. As seen in Table 5.2., in many instances the researcher provides no account of how s/he made these decisions and therefore the study cannot be evaluated in any meaningful way and certainly cannot be replicated (see also Burgers et al. 2011 for criticism of this lack of transparency).

In more robust descriptions, the researcher provides an account of how s/he decided what to characterise as the object of study and explains that choice with reference to previous research and theory. For instance, Partington (2006) states that irony is identified by ‘localizing laughter episodes where speakers employ some form of reversal’ (2006: 203), and sarcasm as ‘laughter episodes in which one speaker appears to reformulate another speaker’s move’ (2006: 214). This kind of specification leaves the definitions open to challenge (as occurs in Burgers et al. 2011) and the data

findings open to (para)replication. Although, such response-turn based interpretations may be challenging because of a lack of data, for instance Hay (2001: 66) notes that irony is often unsupported (and support does not seem to be expected). Similarly Nuolijarvi & Tiitula (2011) expressed concern that the analyst may not see that irony was perceived by some interactants. Burgers et al. (2011) perhaps constitutes the most detailed attempt to create a replicable irony identification technique with the Verbal Irony Procedure (described across 2011:193 – 195), which mirrors the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP; Pragglejaz Group 2007).

The principle limitation to this kind of approach is that the researcher restricts the analysis to what s/he already knows. The potential viewing area of the researcher is limited because, as Kreuz (2000) puts it:

this methodology will only allow researchers to find (or fail to find) what they are looking for. For example, if a researcher assumes that ironic statements must be counterfactual, then he or she will not bother to collect or analyse irony ratings of veridical statements. By defining a phenomenon beforehand, researchers run the risk of creating myopic theories that do not do justice to the richness of their subject.

Kreuz (2000:101)

Another potential limitation is the subjectivity that may be introduced in making such decisions a priori, as even Tannen (1984: 130) notes. Gibbs (2000) also identifies this as a problem but does not explain how the potential subjectivity was overcome. In many of the articles reviewed here, the authors are careful to note that inter-rater reliability was tested (e.g. Whalen et al. 2013), but this does not necessarily affect the validity of whether the chosen method was comprehensive and accurate.

5.2.3 'Naïve' approach

The final method of identification is described as a naïve approach in Cheang & Pell (2008). In their study, lay participants were presented with a forced choice task where they were required to classify a series of utterances as conveying sarcasm, humour, sincerity, or neutrality.

The advantage of this kind of approach is that it may access lay perceptions or theories of what constitutes sarcasm etc. but it still fails to capture first order *use* and therefore is prone to similar limitations to the elicitation tasks discussed above.

5.3 Corpus linguistics and im/politeness

In this project, the starting point is a metapragmatic approach and, therefore, as large bodies of data are required, corpus linguistics is employed. In this section I briefly explain what I mean by corpus linguistics and survey the ways in which corpus linguistics and im/politeness can interact. I then clarify the methods and concepts that will be employed here. The corpus itself and the annotation procedures are discussed in the following chapter.

The approach to corpus linguistics used in this study falls within the area described as corpus pragmatics (see, for example, Aijmer & Rühlemann 2015 for a recent overview) and corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS, coined in Partington 2004; see, for example, Partington et al. 2013 for a recent overview). CADS, as used here, is an umbrella term, designed to capture 'that set of studies into the form and/or function of language as *communicative discourse* which incorporates the use of computerised corpora in their analysis' (Partington et al. 2013: 10, italics in original). Thus, it is a wide enough approach to encompass this kind of pragmatic study.

5.3.1 Combining corpus linguistics and im/politeness: An overview⁴²

Despite the potential for interaction, to date, the contact between im/politeness and corpus linguistics has been somewhat one-directional. For instance, at the time of writing there are no articles which have been published in the last four editions of the *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* with ‘im/politeness’ or ‘facework’ in the title or abstract, while there are at least four articles from the last two years in the *Journal of Politeness Research* which mention corpora. This perhaps suggests that corpus linguistics currently forms a ‘support’ to the study of im/politeness and that corpus pragmatics proper is still in a relatively early stage of development.

Furthermore, where corpora are mentioned in im/politeness studies, it does not necessarily mean that the full range of corpus linguistics tools and methodologies are employed. To take a recent example, the abstract to Schneider (2012: 1022) opens by stating that ‘[c]orpus evidence is presented which suggests that from a first-order perspective “appropriateness” and “inappropriateness” are more salient notions than “politeness” and impoliteness or rudeness’. However, the actual extent of this analysis is information about how frequently the lexical items *impolite*, *rude*, *polite*, *appropriate* and *inappropriate* occur (not co-occur) as Google hits and in frequency lists for CoCA (Davies 2008). Assuming this is typical, the interaction between im/politeness and corpus linguistics is probably lower than might be suggested from a co-occurrence of the terms in abstracts and keywords.

⁴² If similarities are noted between the following section and the first edition of Diani (2014) it should be noted that both draw on Taylor (2011), but this was unfortunately not referenced in Diani’s (2014) chapter. This has been corrected in a second edition.

However, although relatively infrequent and unequal, the theoretical framework of im/politeness has been used in combination with corpus linguistics for a range of purposes and at a variety of stages in the research process. The principal intersections between im/politeness and corpus linguistics are outlined below:

- 1) The theory of im/politeness may be applied to the data to account for the findings of a study, for instance, in the discussion and interpretation of keywords obtained from comparing two different corpora or sections from corpora.
- 2) Alternatively, a corpus may be marked up with the specific aim of testing an im/politeness hypothesis. For instance, García (2014) annotated a corpus of social network interactions for both politeness strategies (following the Brown and Levinson model) and appraisal categories (following an elaborated version of Martin and White's 2005) model. This then allowed for a detailed analysis of how evaluation and politeness interact and overlap (see also Ginsberg, forthcoming). In this kind of analysis, the annotation may be very time-consuming, but it also forms an integral part of the interpretation of the data.
- 3) The corpus may be used to enable a metalinguistic and metapragmatic approaches to the analysis of im/politeness (see, for example, Culpeper 2009; Hardaker 2010).
- 4) Most frequently, the corpus is used as a resource or bank for retrieving examples of a given im/politeness feature, and research using this combination of im/politeness and corpus linguistics ranges from Kohnen's (2008) study of Anglo-Saxon address terms to Beeching's (2006) study of *quoi* in contemporary French. This is the category that tends to exploit corpus linguistics the least, although there is considerable variation.

This categorisation aims to show the range of possible intersections available between corpus work and im/politeness, starting from the most corpus-linguistic driven to the

more im/politeness-driven. In reality, of course, there is likely to be some overlap between these groupings and the extent to which the full scope and potential of corpus linguistic methodologies are applied varies greatly.

5.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to combining corpus linguistics and im/politeness

In terms of what a corpus approach can offer im/politeness study, the first area would be that it allows the researcher to access a larger number of texts. This is acknowledged in Haugh (2014: 83), who notes that the employment of corpora allows access to a ‘wide range of different kinds of mundane everyday interactions beyond what a single researcher might realistically collect’. This is particularly important in a relatively niche area like mock politeness, and the potential paucity of data is also why I chose to use a search-term corpus rather than a general corpus (as discussed in the following chapter). Furthermore, the corpus approach can give the researcher a new perspective on the data, as Sinclair says, ‘the language looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once’ (Sinclair 1991:100). This is particularly so when the data can be presented in an entirely new format, as for instance in the visualisation of collocational networks used in Chapter 10.

Second, as mentioned above, a corpus approach offers a means of addressing both first and second order notions of im/politeness (the importance of this is discussed in Chapter 2).

Third, a corpus approach provides the researcher with frequency information which may complement the contextualised, discursive analysis of a particular phraseology or formulation by allowing us to see whether this was a rare or characteristic occurrence.

Fourth, a diachronic corpus approach enables research into the processes of conventionalisation of politeness forms, and pragmatic meaning shifts.

Fifth, there is a strong tradition within corpus linguistics (though it is by no means exclusive to corpus linguistics) of *total accountability*, that is to say ‘there is no prior selection of data which we are meant to be accounting for and data we have decided to ignore are irrelevant as to our theory’ (Leech 1992: 112). This is particularly important in enabling the reader to understand the basis on which examples are presented. By way of illustration, in a recent interesting article, Paternoster (2012), discusses impoliteness and over politeness in English and Italian novels featuring two well-known detectives. These are both popular series with 17 and 18 full-length novels respectively. In the article, the author presents six and eight instances of impoliteness / over politeness from the two series but the reader has no way of knowing if these are the sum of all such events or, if not, how they have been selected as representative. Similarly, Alvarado Ortega (2013) analyses 200 instances of humour/irony, but only three interactions are contained in the analysis and unfortunately she omits to mention how the 200 occurrences were extracted from the data, i.e. how she decided that they were irony/humour. This makes it very difficult to interpret the findings because clearly the process of extraction will have a great impact on the type of irony/humour that is found.

Clearly, corpus linguistics is not the only way to provide such information, but the practice of exhaustiveness is part of the methodological procedure and so may enhance the research (though see also McEnery and Hardie 2012 on the difficulties of implementing total accountability).

However, there are, naturally, some limitations and potential pitfalls in taking a corpus approach to im/politeness study, as outlined below.

First, there is the risk that the context may be neglected. As researchers we need to be able to retrieve information about the situational context and to be able to examine the utterance in its wider co-text. In the case of this research project, using forum data meant that these factors were retained and, as an analyst, I had access to the same contextual information as most readers and participants (some participants may, of course, have had previous interactions of which I, and most readers, would be unaware).

The second limitation relates specifically to the construction of such multimodal and/or highly annotated corpora – like any spoken corpus, there are not very many available and they are highly time consuming to construct.

The third limitation is similar in that, as Kádár & Haugh (2013: 192) point out, access to corpora or data for building corpora may be limited in some languages / language varieties. Indeed, if we consider the area of Williams (2012) discussed above, the choice to look at fictional texts was largely driven by necessity because of the availability of historical material for the corpus.

The next possible pitfall relates more to the analytical process, it is important to recall that a cherry picked example from a corpus is still a cherry picked example. Unless all instances are accounted for (the total accountability mentioned above) so that the representativeness of the example can be assured, or, unless instances are selected on a replicable random-like basis, it is not possible to generalise about how a particular feature is used.

Finally, another limitation raised by Kádár & Haugh (2013: 192) is that ‘corpus analysis does not necessarily allow for in-depth analysis of the conceptual underpinnings of [politeness] metalanguage’. Although it may be that the use of more heavily annotated corpora (e.g. with annotation for semantic fields, as performed by Wmatrix [Rayson 2008]) and collocational networks could assist here. Another limitation which can be partially overcome by annotation is the tendency for corpus analysis to focus on language at the lexical level - although this is not a necessary result of using corpus methods, it is a frequent outcome.

As a general methodological point, we might say that the use of a corpus cannot and does not in itself confer any scientific value or rigour to the research. The value of the analysis depends on many variables: the corpus employed, the questions asked, the amount of interpretation, the transparency of the interpretive processes, the extent of the generalisations drawn and so on.

5.3.3 Key notions from corpus linguistics

In this section I briefly introduce some key concepts from corpus linguistics which will be used in the analysis chapters of this study.

5.3.3a Collocation

Collocation is a fundamental notion within corpus linguistics, and is perhaps best summed up by Firth (1957: 11) who famously stated that ‘you shall judge a word by the company it keeps’. The Firth quote is important because it sums up not *how* we define collocation, but *why* corpus linguists are interested in collocation. In other words, knowing the collocates of a word, can tell us more about the contextual meanings (including evaluations) of that item. The role of corpus linguistics here is in allowing us to look at a greater number of instances than would be feasible by manual

analysis, and in giving us information about significance of collocation. To address the last point, we might want to go back to defining collocation. According to Stubbs a collocate is

a word-form or lemma which co-occurs with a node in a corpus. Usually it is frequent co-occurrences which are of interest, and corpus linguistics is based on the assumption that events which are frequent are significant.

Stubbs (2001a: 29)

As he notes, this is a statistical definition of collocation, although these days, the statistical measure is more likely to include information about strength of collocation, which takes into account the overall frequency of the items (see Barnbrook et al. 2013 and Baker 2014a for discussion of the different measures of significance and effects this has on the collocates). The topic of each of the following sub-sections is derived from collocation analysis, showing the centrality of this concept to corpus linguistics.

5.3.3b Formulaicity

One of the central concerns of corpus linguistics, accessed through collocation analysis, has been the occurrence and patterning of formulaicity in language. Wray (2002: 9) lists over 40 different terms for formulaic language such as *multiword expressions*, *phrasemes*, *prefabricated language/prefabs* and *schemata* (e.g. Stubbs 2001b). Indeed, for Sinclair (1987, 1996, 2004), the occurrence of formulaic language was one of the principles of language use itself. The theorisation and prominence given to formulaic language is essential to understanding conventionalisation of pragmatic meaning. As such, it overlaps considerably with work discussed in Chapter 2, such as Terkourafi (2005a, 2005b) on frame-based approaches to im/politeness and Culpeper (2010, 2011a) on formulaic impoliteness. Some of the most interesting work

on formulaic language, for the purposes of this thesis, is concerned with the expression of evaluation.

5.3.3c *Evaluation*

Within corpus linguistics, the area that I am referring to as *evaluation* has also been addressed under the names *stance* (e.g. Conrad and Biber 2000) and *appraisal* (e.g. Bednarek 2008, following Martin, summarised in Martin 2000, Martin and White 2005). In this thesis, I will follow Thompson and Hunston (2000) / Hunston (2011) in using the term *evaluation*, because the term *stance* is too speaker-orientated for my purposes, while *appraisal*, because of how the appraisal system is structured, carries with it a set of assumptions about the need for detailed classification of individual word items which are not relevant for this study. Drawing on earlier work, in Hunston (2011), *evaluation* is defined as:

that language which indexes the act of evaluation or the act of stance-taking (Du Bois 2007). It expresses an attitude towards a person, situation or other entity and is both subjective and located within a societal value-system (Hunston 1994: 210)

Hunston (2011: 1)

From this succinct definition, we can see the overlap with *im/politeness*, as described above, both in terms of the focus on the expression of attitude and the importance of context, thus showing the relevance of this body of work to the present study.

Analyses of evaluation in formulaic language have operated at the level of the single item, the ‘aura’ that the item may throw over its surrounding co-text (often discussed under the heading ‘semantic prosody’), and at the level of local grammars, and the first these will be briefly discussed below.

At the level of the individual lexical item, we can consider the evaluative meaning as residing at some point along a cline, where, at one end the evaluative meaning *is* the central meaning, as for instance in the term *cunt* where it is used as a term of abuse, or, to take a familiar item, the term *terrorist*. The unfavourable meaning, or negative connotation, is absolutely apparent to the fluent speaker and not in any sense peripheral or hidden. At the other end of the spectrum, there may be items which are less obviously evaluative in function. Another way of expressing this is through the image of prototypical meaning, as in Figure 5.1 which displays some lexical items which have been discussed in the literature on semantic prosody.

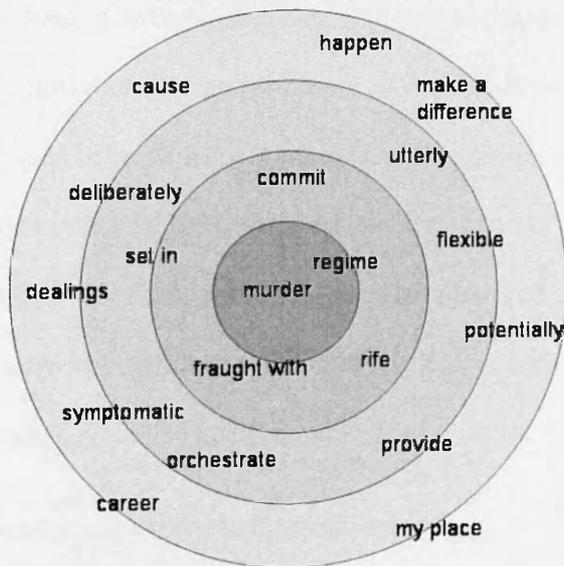


Figure 5.1 A visual portrayal of evaluative meanings based on prototypicality representations⁴³

⁴³ Devised by the author of this paper, first published in Morley & Partington (2009)

The image is a visual representation of how evaluative meaning is more or less accessible to speakers at a conscious level, with those in the centre most obviously evaluative and those in the outer circles least obviously evaluative. The circles are not based on a mathematical algorithm, the lexical items in the three outer circles are all instances which have been discussed and analysed in the literature under the labels *semantic prosody* or *discourse prosody* (there is considerable disagreement about the choice and scope of the terms) and it was this previous research which determined the positioning in the circles. .. So, for instance, if we take an item close to the centre such as *commit* (discussed in Stewart 2009; Berber-Sardinha 2000; Bublitz 1995; Ellis et al. 2009), most proficient speakers of English would be able to intuitively identify it as carrying some kind of unfavourable meaning, indeed corpus analysis shows that it is predominately unfavourable acts which are *committed*. However, the type of item that has excited corpus linguists more are those closer to the periphery, such as *happen* (first discussed in Sinclair 1991 and subsequently in Stubbs 1995, Bublitz 1995, Berber-Sardinha 2000, Partington 2004). Sinclair observed that *happen*, while not obviously/intuitively possessing a particular evaluative orientation tends to co-occur with unfavourably evaluated items, in other words bad things tend to *happen*.

The importance of evaluative connotations to mock politeness and irony in particular is driven by the work of Louw (1993), as discussed in Chapter 4, whose seminal article discussed semantic prosody as ‘Irony in the text or insincerity in the writer?’. The link between corpus linguistic understandings of evaluation and irony is also explored in the evaluation-driven explanations for irony (e.g. Partington 2007; Alba-Juez & Attardo 2014, discussed in Chapter 4). Moreover, Channell (2000: 55) makes explicit the need to link (corpus understandings of) evaluation to im/politeness stating that ‘the whole area of evaluation language seems to require tying up with the notion

of ‘facework’ employed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their explanation of politeness’. In turn, im/politeness has been looking towards evaluation as advocated by Eelen (2001), so that im/politeness is understood not to be communicated directly through language but through the evaluations of that language.

5.3.3d Lexical priming

One of the most ambitious theories to come out of corpus linguistics is Hoey’s (2005) theory of lexical priming, which he described, in the sub-title to the book, as ‘a new theory of words and language’. The theory of lexical priming centres on the collocation, which he defines as ‘a psychological association between words (rather than lemmas) up to four words apart and is evidenced by their occurrence together in corpora more often than is explicable in terms of random distribution’ (2005: 5). He then goes on to search for an explanation for the pervasiveness of collocation and concludes that the psychological notion of (semantic) *priming* is best suited for explaining collocation which he asserts is a psychological construct. Sinclair similarly draws on *primed frames* in order to explain how the reader of a text builds up a mental representation of that text (2004: 14), but Hoey’s account is much more wide-reaching; he claims that every word is primed for collocation use and that primings account for other language behaviours too. He proposes ten hypotheses regarding priming, of which the most relevant to this study is the third, which states: ‘Every word is primed to occur in association with particular pragmatic functions; these are its pragmatic associations’ (Hoey 2005: 13). Although the hypothesis is expressed using the ‘shorthand’ of *a word* being primed, what is clearly intended is that every speaker is primed to expect certain words (or phraseologies – discussed under in terms of *nesting*) to occur in association with particular pragmatic functions. What Hoey seems to be talking about here is conventionalisation of meaning as discussed in

Chapter 2 with reference to im/politeness. Hoey's model also relates to the issue that Culpeper (2011) raises of how members of a speech community have knowledge of impoliteness formulae that cannot be explained by frequency of direct experience alone. Hoey argues for recognising the importance of texts that goes beyond frequency alone, proposing that

our mental concordance is tagged for the importance of the text in which a word or word sequence is encountered. Thus the claimed greatness of a literary work or the centrality of a religious text may ensure that an encounter with a word in such writings has a bigger impact on the priming than a similar encounter with the word in a less valued work. The same may be true of words encountered in conversation; words spoken by a close friend are likely to affect our primings more directly than those spoken by someone to whom we are indifferent.

Hoey (2005: 12)

Similarly, language which is used with a particular force, in this case the expression of impoliteness, is likely to be more salient for any hearers (and therefore more likely to be discussed subsequently), thus leading to the development of primings for language which the user may not have experience themselves.

Thus it appears that lexical priming may help to explain the processes by which a user develops expectations or norms of usage, including the conventionalisation of certain phraseologies. Based on these primings, a hearer may then draw particular implicatures and so it complements the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have surveyed the most commonly used methods for investigating (potential) mock politeness and identified some strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. In this thesis, I combine corpus linguistics and im/politeness at both theoretical and methodological levels.

I take two approaches to the analysis of mock politeness: the first is a metalinguistic approach where I analyse participant evaluations, such as *sarcastic*. In this phase, the corpus linguistic notion of collocation is particularly important. In the second, I retrieve the speech events which had been labelled with those metapragmatic comments and identify and annotate those which are classified as mock polite according to the definition applied here. Thus, there is a shift from the first phase being more heavily influenced by corpus linguistics and the second more driven by im/politeness theory.

In employing corpus linguistics, I aim to make the process more transparent and robust but I am not claiming that all subjectivity is removed from the process and indeed the detailed annotation of the second stage (discussed in the next chapter) is highly interpretative. Following Leech (2011: 60), I assume that corpus linguistics uses both corpus data and intuition, that is the ‘implicit, operational knowledge of what the language is like’ and ‘the explicit, analytic knowledge of a language that an analyst has’.

CHAPTER 6 DESCRIPTION OF CORPUS CONSTRUCTION, ANNOTATION AND TOOLS

In the previous chapter, I discussed methodological approaches to im/politeness mismatch. There are three main stages to the methodological process in this study. In a preliminary stage, terms which could potentially indicate mock politeness in English and Italian were identified. In the second stage, these key mock politeness indicators were used in order to compile corpora from the target discourse types. In the third stage, these corpora were analysed in order to describe mock politeness from a first order perspective and the events or behaviours which were discussed in the corpora were identified and analysed. In this chapter, I focus more specifically on the data and corpus software that I used for this research project: I briefly present the two forums which were used as sources for the corpus compilation and then describe the corpus software which were employed in this study, how the corpus was constructed, and how it was annotated.

6.1 The data sources: mumsnet and alfeemminile

The sources used for collection of first-order lay descriptions are two online forums. These were selected because they allow access to ‘everyday’ or ‘conversational’ comments on mock politeness. It was anticipated that the comments would relate both to ongoing interaction in the forum, and to events which had occurred in other, non-computer mediated, interactions. Another important consideration was that collecting texts from written computer-mediated communication would allow me to retain more of the context than would be possible in transcripts of spoken interactions, thus addressing the twin problems of the ‘impoverishment’ of contextual and co-textual

features (Rühlemann 2010: 289) for which the use of corpora in pragmatic study is criticised and the impossible task of ‘transcribing infinity’ (Cook 1990).

The main criteria for selecting forums to analyse in this project were that they should contain discussion of other people’s behaviour and interactions which went beyond a first poster > responses to first poster structure and be sufficiently large and active to enable collection of sufficient data. This therefore excluded existing corpora and many forums. A number of forums, such as the UK-based DigitalSpy, and the English language Italian-based ExpatsinItaly (now defunct) were considered and tested for the project, but the difficulty of identifying comparable forums for the two countries reduced the possible candidates.

The forums which were eventually chosen were the English-language, UK-based forum *mumsnet.com* and the Italian-language forum *alfemminile.com* [femininely].⁴⁴ Both forums are relatively large and productive although mumsnet is certainly more active than *alfemminile*. There is little comparable data available from the websites’ own descriptions, but, by way of illustration of the size, mumsnet has approximately 1.6 million members (as of December 2011) and on the same date there had been approximately 46 million posts on *alfemminile*, so it possible at least to conclude that they are highly popular.

In addition to popularity, what the forums have in common is that they were both initially driven by discussions about the experience of being pregnant and having children. However, they have both expanded beyond this remit and both have sections

⁴⁴ The Italian site *alfemminile.com* now belongs to the same company as the UK forum *sofeminine.com*.

dedicated to the discussion of a wide range of topics, including judgements of behaviour. For instance, mumsnet has a dedicated section entitled *Am I being unreasonable?* in which members ask for opinions on their behaviour/interpretations of others' behaviours. Alfemminile has a section with a similar function titled *Discussioni: Odio o Adoro ? Pro o Contro ? Le vostre reazioni* [Debates: Love it or hate it? For or against? Your reactions] which seems to similarly elicit debates about behaviours of which the poster disapproves.

With reference to the topics covered in each forum, mumsnet includes sub-sections on the talk-boards dedicated to: *becoming a parent; being a parent; body and soul; book club; childcare and work; classified; education; feed the world; feminism; fun and games; health; homes and gardens; in the club; legal and money; mumsnet stuff; other stuff; special needs; pets; products; product tests and surveys; travel; mumsnet local; for sale / wanted*. Each of these sub-sections has several talk-boards dedicated to different aspects of the topic. alfemminile also divides the forums into macro-topics, in order of popularity, they cover: *gravidanza* [pregnancy]; *bebè* [baby]; *amore* [love]; *sessualità* [sexuality]; *bellezza* [beauty]; *matrimonio* [marriage]; *astrologia* [astrology]; *salute* [health]; *hobby, tempo libero* [free time]; *psicologia* [psychology]; *moda* [fashion]; *cucina* [cooking]; *società* [society]; *lavoro* [work]; *viaggi* [travel]; *casa, Fai da te, Arredamento, Giardinaggio* [home, DIY, decorating, gardening]; *bambini, Adolescenti, Famiglia* [children, adolescents, family]; *annunci* [classified ads]; *cinema, TV, star, people, musica* [entertainment]; *proibito ai più di 20 anni* [no over 20s]; *animali* [pets]; *star, people* [celebrities]; *giochi* [games].

Screenshots of the talk sections of the websites are shown in Figures 6.1 and 6 .2.

Mumsnet Talk

[ADVANCED SEARCH](#)

Talk: [Customise](#) | [Unanswered messages](#) | [Getting started](#) | [Acronyms](#) | [FAQs](#)
 Threads: [Active](#) | [I'm on](#) | [I'm watching](#) | [I started](#) | [Last 15 minutes](#) | [Last hour](#) | [Last Day](#)

[Welcome](#) | [Our philosophy & rules](#) | [Media requests](#) | [Advertising](#)

Welcome to Mumsnet. We've selected some topics below we think you might want to discuss but you're free to talk on any subject you like. You need to be a member of Mumsnet and have a Talk nickname to use the board. Please be aware this is a public forum and your postings are open for all to see. Please note that Mumsnet has non-exclusive copyright in all submissions to Mumsnet Talk, and reserves the right to edit and re-publish these in print form.

- [Join](#) | [Your registration](#) | [Getting started](#) | [Accessibility policy](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)

Talk topics [Show all](#) | [Topics A-Z](#)

- [Becoming a Parent](#) | [Pregnancy](#) | [Baby names](#) | [Conception](#) | [Childbirth](#) | [more...](#)
- [Adoptions](#) | [Antenatal tests/choices](#) | [Baby names](#) | [Childbirth](#) | [Fostering](#) | [Pregnancy](#)
- [Ante-natal clubs](#) | [Antenatal/postnatal depression](#) | [Birth announcements](#) | [Conception](#) | [Infertility](#)
- [Being a Parent](#) | [Behaviour/development](#) | [Lone parents](#) | [Parenting](#) | [Potty training](#) | [more...](#)
- [Behaviour/development](#) | [Language/bilingualism](#) | [Lesbian/Gay Parents](#) | [Lone parents](#) | [Multiple births](#) | [Parenting](#)
- [Child internet safety](#) | [Larger families](#) | [LGBT children](#) | [Multicultural families](#) | [One-child families](#) | [Post-natal clubs](#)

Mumsnet Talk

"The country's most popular meeting point for parents" *The Times*

Discussions of the day | [Most active](#)

- [Peace on earth - or Xmas freakout?](#)
- [The NHS - how would you fix it?](#)
- [After the birth - how do you feel?](#)
- [Telly - could you live without it?](#)
- [Round robins - got any crackers?](#)

[Topics](#) | [Active](#) | [Search](#)

Mumsnet Latest

- [Christmas TV highlights: festive telly treats](#)
- [Q&A about skincare: issues with Dr Chris](#)

Figure 6.1 Screenshot of the mumsnet talk section



NEWS BELLEZZA IN FORMA MODA LUSO STAR DONNE DI OGGI CUCINA CASA FAMMA COPPIA

Album | Messaggi | Test & Psiche | Oroscopo | Cognomi | Club

Home > Forum alfemminile.com

Forum | Profilo | I miei messaggi | Aiuto

Inizia una nuova discuss

Ricerca

Forum	Messaggi	Ultimo messaggio
• Gravidanza	10 655 461	11:54
• Ebbè	6 172 452	11:54
• Amore	5 055 656	11:55
• Sessualità	3 745 124	11:54
• Bellezza	3 635 255	11:55
• Matrimonio	3 234 625	11:45
• Astrologia	2 871 657	11:53
• Salute	2 625 742	11:52
• Hobby, Tempo libero	2 077 352	11:52
• Psicologia	1 354 623	11:55
• Moda	1 277 567	11:45
• Cucina	656 772	10:26
• Società	530 274	11:55

facebook ¹³ M. piace

Diventa fan di **alfemminile.com**

Da scoprire su **alfemminile.com**

Figure 6.2 Screenshot of alfemminile forum topics

As can be seen, the forums are comparable in terms of topics covered, they are both active in terms of member participation and are well-defined. Furthermore, they are both predominately populated by people presenting as women, which means that the discussion of mock politeness in this study is biased towards female interpretation. However, there are some differences; in particular, as mentioned above, the UK forum is more active and larger. Although various candidates were considered for the collection of the Italian data, it was not possible to find anything as popular or active as the English language forum, partly because of different ‘traditions’ in terms of using the internet. This also means that there are some issues of comparability in terms of users of these two forum; from extensive reading of material in the two forums I would suggest that the posters to mumsnet are probably older and more middle-class than those in alfemminile, but this is an impressionistic observation

which cannot be supported through text analysis alone. There is questionnaire data available for mumsnet, and the 2009 mumsnet census stated that the majority of users (63%) are between 31-40 years old and 75% were educated to at least degree level and only 10% had an average household income of less than £20,000 per annum (mumsnet census 2009). However, there is no comparable dataset for alfemminile.

The size and influence of mumsnet also means that it has attracted academic interest, while I was not able to find any studies carried out in the alfemminile data (language is also likely to be an issue here). Since the corpora for this project were collected, the mumsnet talk forums have been used in language/discourse research into the relationship between the personal and political in online discourse (Gambles 2010); the construction of gender identities online (Pederson & Smithson 2013), and is the subject of a dissertation project on the construction of motherhood (Mackenzie 2014). Of particular relevance to this project, Pederson & Smithson claim that '[m]any posters on mumsnet openly celebrate the site for being out of the norm for parenting communities, evidencing both its feminist discussion and a more combative style of posting' (2013: 103). Some evidence for this may be seen in the forum guidelines, for instance, swearing is permitted within mumsnet but is not allowed in alfemminile and therefore posters wishing to use conventionalised formulaic impoliteness (Culpeper 2011a) have to be more creative, for instance *troi@* for *troia* [*whore/bitch*].

In all cases where I have included text from the corpus, I have presented it as it appeared, including this kind of creative swearing, non-standard spelling or typography (for instance, omitting spaces between words). I have also included emoticons when they occurred in the original text.

6.2 Ethics and online data

One of the major issues when it comes to analysing online data, is that of ethics. As Page et al. (2014: 60) recently stated, ‘there is no single, international set of regulations which govern the choices made by a researcher who wants to explore social media interactions’. Therefore the researcher has to work on a no-harm and fair-use principle and assess each project individually. At the start of this project, following Pace and Livingstone’s (2005: 38) guidelines on internet research (adapted from Bruckman 2002), I evaluated the forums that I intended to use on the basis of whether:

1. The material is publicly archived and readily available.
2. No password is required to access the material.
3. The material is not sensitive in nature.
4. No stated site policy prohibits the use of the material.

For the two forums that I am using, I felt that points 1, 2 and 4 applied. Point 3 is somewhat less clear, as Bryman (2012:149) notes, because it requires interpretation of what counts as sensitive material. Mumsnet does not allow the sensitive talk areas such as the bereavement forum to be searched by internet search engines, and therefore this seemed a good measure of protection for the participants. There was no information about anything similar for *alfemminile*, but in both cases I monitored the postings during the annotation process for any particularly sensitive or identifying material (none was noted). Regarding the right to anonymity, I have protected the identity of the forum users by replacing usernames at the start of posts with ‘Poster + first letter of username’, and usernames within posts with simply [NAME] to indicate where the name was used. However, as with all data that is publicly archived, it is

possible to take chunks of quotes and search for the full thread online (as I often had to do in order to get more context) and there is no easy way to deal with this situation. Some factors which mitigate any potential threat to participants are that the participants themselves are not my object of study, although this is, of course, a fine line, as discussed in Page et al. (2014: 59-60). This is very different from the other studies mentioned above, which focus on how the members represent themselves, or from a critical discourse studies investigation where I might be analysing the participant's ideological stance in way that they would find face-threatening. It is also the case, that as a result of working towards this thesis on a part-time basis, the data was collected three years prior to submission and therefore the events reported are no longer likely to be sensitive. Finally, this is, of course, an unpublished thesis and therefore has a limited readership.

6.3 Corpus tools

There are two main suites of tools that can be used in corpus linguistics, the first type is for building (and possibly annotating) the corpora and the second is for analysing the data in the corpora.

6.3.1 Tools used for corpus building and editing

The tool used for collecting the web-based corpora is the free software BootCaT which was developed by a team of researchers from the Universities of Trento and Bologna (Forlì) in Italy (see Baroni and Bernardini [2004] for more information on the development). BootCaT can be used to gather text from the web which is returned in a plain text format. The search is driven by the use of seeds (search words) specified by the user. The version of the interface (0.6) used here employs the Bing search engine to then identify web pages which contain the search terms. The user can

specify if only certain domains should be searched and can also block domains or remove webpages before creating the corpus. This makes it particularly useful for retrieving text from a given domain, for instance in this study for only collecting text from specific forums. Because the process is partially automated it is much more efficient in terms of researcher-time (although the downloading can be time-consuming). However, it is naturally less comprehensive and accurate than manual searching would be.

The data in this project is highly annotated and ideally I would have used annotation software such as UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell 2008) for annotation, which would have improved the possibilities for comparing patterns across sets. However, initial tests proved that the corpus was too large for such packages at that time.

6.3.2 Tools used for corpus analysis

For the analysis of the corpora, the main tools used were Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2008) and Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2004), with the Collocational Network Explorer (Gullick and Lancaster University 2010) tool also being used for collocational displays. The main features of these tools and reasons for choosing them are explained below.

6.3.2a Sketch Engine

Sketch Engine is one of the fourth generation concordancers according to McEnery and Hardie's (2012) classification, and is a set of corpus analysis tools. For the purposes of this study, Sketch Engine has four main advantages over other software packages. First, when the corpora are uploaded, the Onion software (Pomikálek 2011) can be used to remove duplicates. This was particularly important for this study because the size of each corpus was such that they had to be collected in several

stages, which inevitably lead to some duplication in the pages that were returned. Second, the upload stage allows for the corpora to be lemmatised and POS-tagged. This information can then be used in the analyses, for instance in the distributional thesaurus tool. This function identifies words which occur in similar lexical environments to the search term (see Rychlý and Kilgarriff, 2007, for more detail on the algorithm used). The third advantage to using this particular software is that it is hosted on powerful web-based servers, and this means that it can process large amounts of data at a faster speed than would be possible on the author's own computer. Another advantage that is exploited in this study is the inclusion of access to several very large corpora with the software package which can be used as reference corpora. However, there are also some drawbacks to this particular choice, the most significant being that because the corpora have to be uploaded onto the Sketch Engine software there are cost and time limitations on the size of the corpora that can be collected and used.

6.2.3b Wordsmith Tools

Wordsmith Tools was used for the detailed analysis of the concordance lines prior to extracting them to Excel because it allows the user to assign concordance lines to particular sets which is very useful when categorising items.

6.2.3c Collocational Network Explorer

The Collocational Network Explorer (CONE) was used to visually display the collocational networks (see Chapter 9). The concept of collocational networks originates with Phillips (1985) and has since been developed for application in discourse studies (e.g. McEnery 2005; Baker 2005, 2006, 2014b). The importance of the collocational network is that it allows us to see the company that a word is keeping (Firth 1957) but, crucially, it places that company in context. Furthermore, because the

collocation. So, in the Figure 6.3, the lexical items which collocate most strongly with women are *fiction*, *bitchy* and *cliquey* and therefore these are shown closest to the node word, *women* and displayed with fatter lines.

The corpora used in this study were too large for CONE to handle and so a modified set of concordance corpora were created for this stage (following Taylor 2010; Marchi 2010). To create the concordance corpora, the concordance lines of all the metapragmatic labels were saved with 600 characters of co-text in a plain text format and the metapragmatic labels were manually lemmatised, for instance *bitchy*, *bitchier* and *bitchiest* (including upper and lower case variants) were replaced with BITCHY. This was done to enable the software to capture as many occurrences as possible. It was also useful because CONE is case-sensitive, and so, again, it meant that the visualisation captured the maximum number of occurrences.

The case-sensitivity is one of the drawbacks to the CONE programme, because this cannot be determined by the user. A second methodological drawback is that the direction of the collocation is not indicated. From a practical perspective, a further difficulty was that the visualisations cannot be saved within the programme, and, because the programme is somewhat unstable and crashes if the memory is overloaded, the processes had to be repeated several times.

6.4 Building the corpus

The corpus used in this study is a search-term specific or *topical* corpus, which is to say that only webpages that contained selected search terms are included in the corpus. This kind of corpus may be contrasted with a *discourse-complete* corpus in which the entirety of the discourse type is contained in the corpus, or a *sample* corpus in which a representative sample of the discourse under study is extracted for the

corpus analysis. The topical approach was considered more appropriate for this project because the discourse-complete model was impossible given the size of the forums and the risk with the sample approach is that there would not have been sufficient occurrences of the metapragmatic markers.

6.4.1 Identifying mock politeness terms

In order to collect the corpora which contained references to mock politeness, it was, of course, necessary to identify possible search terms. This stage was extremely important in the process because the corpora which are collected will naturally determine the findings and therefore the range needed to be as wide as possible, while still avoiding too much irrelevant material which would be distracting and make the download process impractical. This phase was iterative and items were added as they emerged from the data analysis and the corpora were re-created. The approach was driven by the assumption that, at this stage, it would be preferable to collect too much data, rather than risk missing sections of relevant material.

In the initial stage, references to meta-politeness terms such as *polite* and *impolite* were listed, in addition to items which might be used refer to mock politeness, such as *sarcastic*, *sarcasm*, *sarcastically*, *irony*, *ironic*, *ironically* and the term *mock* itself. These initial items were based on expressions used in the im/politeness literature.

In the second stage, the collocates of these second-order labels items were analysed in the web corpora provided with Sketch Engine, ukWaC and itWaC, in order to see what other items occurred in similar environments (using the thesaurus and word sketch tools). The WaC corpora were chosen for this stage because they represent a large general sample of computer-mediated communication, and therefore are closer to the type of discourse in the online forums. ukWac contains c. 1.3 billion words and

itWaC contains c. 1.5 billion words (see Ferraresi et al. 2008 for more information on the construction of ukWaC; Baroni 2006 for more on itWac).⁴⁵

In addition, smaller sample corpora from the target forums, *mumsnet.com/talk* and *alfemminile.com/forum* were also created and analysed in the same way. These ad-hoc corpora were produced because there was a possibility that certain uses might be idiolectal to the forums under analysis and therefore would not be picked up from the analysis of the two general web corpora. BootCaT (described above) was used to collect these corpora.

6.4.2 Identifying dummy seeds for BootCaT

BootCaT works by using seeds (search terms) to search webpages. More specifically it has been designed to work with tuples, that is groups of three words. For the purposes of this study it was therefore necessary to identify some ‘dummy seeds’ that could be used in the tuples. Without this, each webpage would have had to contain three metapragmatic labels, which would reduce the number of hits and perhaps skew the corpus towards discussion of the terms rather than usage.

BootCaT does not work with function words because search engines discount them, therefore I needed a set of lexical words that I could expect to occur on most pages in the forums. For this reason, I decided to use the most frequent lexical nouns. I chose these based on work into general nouns (for instance Mahlberg 2005) which suggests that these high frequency items perform a textual function and in many ways lie on the

⁴⁵ These corpora have since been superseded by the TenTen family (see Jakubíček et al. 2013), but the Italian version did not exist at this stage of the methodological process.

lexical-functional divide.⁴⁶ In order to identify the most frequent nouns in each forum, I first created a corpus for each forum using the most frequent nouns from UkWaC and ItWaC, and these search terms are shown in Table 6.1. As can be seen, although the test corpora from the forums under investigation were constructed using the most frequent nouns from the WaC corpora, they produced a different set of most frequent nouns, thus validating the process. This stage also served as a pilot for the collection of the mock politeness corpora.

Table 6.1 Details of test corpora compiled for identification of mock politeness terms⁴⁷

	References to im/politeness	20 most frequent nouns from WaC corpus	10 most frequent nouns from test corpus
Italian test corpus (alfeminile)	antipatica [disagreeable-FS], antipaticamente [disagreeably], antipatiche [disagreeable-FP], antipatici [disagreeable-MP], antipatico [disagreeable-MS], cortese [kind-S], cortesemente [kindly], cortesi [kind-P], gentile [kind-S], gentili [kind-P], gentilmente [kindly], maleducata [rude-FS], maleducatamente [rudely], maleducate [rude-FP], maleducati [rude-MP],	parte [part], anni [years], legge [read], lavoro [work], fatto [done], articolo [article], altri [others], comma [comma], tempo [time], attività [activity], quella [that-F], anno [year], altro [other], caso [case], modo [way], Italia [Italy], vita [life], mondo [world], cosa [thing],	cosa [thing], anni [years], casa [house/home], cose [things], lavoro [work], persone [people], parte [part], volte [times], modo [way], tempo [time]

⁴⁶ I am not suggesting that the nouns used here are all general nouns, that would involve much more analysis.

⁴⁷ The translations of the metapragmatic comments should not be interpreted as functional translation equivalents because that information can only emerge as a result of the study. For these gloss translations I took the first item listed in the Oxford Paravia bilingual dictionary. F=feminine, M=masculine, S=singular, P=plural

	maleducato [rude-MS], scortese [rude-S], scortesemente [rudely], scortesi [rude-P], sgarbata [impolite-FS], sgarbatamente [impolitely], sgarbate [impolite-FP], sgarbati [impolite-MP], sgarbato [impolite-MS]	primo [first]	
English test corpus (mumsnet)	rude, ruder, rudest, rudeness, rudely, impoliteness, impolitely, impolite, politeness, politely, polite, politest, politer	years, year, way, UK, day, part, number, world, place, London, life, site, University, service, children, system, research, course, development, services	message, poster, report, people, time, thread, school, post children, work

The resulting corpora therefore contained meta-discussion of im/polite behaviour and were then analysed using the range of Sketch Engine tools (Word Sketch and Thesaurus in particular) in order to identify any lexical items that might indicate discussion more specifically of mock politeness which should then be included in the next stage of corpus construction. Therefore, as can be seen, the identification of the search terms was a cyclical process.

6.4.3 The search terms

The full list of search terms for possible mock politeness is presented in Table 6.2. These terms were then added to the frequent nouns used to construct the test corpora in order to generate the tuples which are required for BootCaT to collect the data. The larger number of items for the Italian data reflects the fact that BootCat does not work with lemmas and Italian is more highly inflected than English. In the English column, spelling variants have also been included because pilot studies showed that these items were frequently misspelled. The items which did not occur at all in the corpora, e.g. *impoliteness*, have been removed from the list.

Table 6.2 Search terms potentially signalling discussion of mock politeness.⁴⁸

English search terms	Italian search terms
<p>impolite, politeness, politely, polite, politest, politer, rude, ruder, rudest, rudeness, rudely, kind, kindness, friendly, friendliness</p>	<p>antipatica [disagreeable-FS], antipatiche [disagreeable-FP], antipatici [disagreeable-MP], antipaticissima [disagreeable-SUP-FS], antipaticissime [disagreeable-SUP-FP], antipaticissimi [disagreeable-SUP-MP], antipaticissimo [disagreeable-SUP-MS], antipatico [disagreeable-FS], antipatia [dislike-S], antipatie [dislike-P], cortese [kind-S], cortesemente [kindly], cortesi [kind-P], cortesia [kindness-S], cortesie [kindness-P], cortesissima [kind-SUP-SF], cortesissime [kind-SUP-FP], cortesissimo [kind-SUP-MS], cortesissimi [kind-SUP-MP], garbata [polite-FS], garbate [polite-FP], garbati [polite-MP], garbato [polite-MS], garbo [politeness], gentile [kind-S], gentilezze [kindness-P], gentili [kind-P], gentililezza [kindness-S], gentilissima [kind-SUP-FS], gentilissime [kind-SUP-FP], gentilissimi [kind-SUP-MP], gentilissimo [kind-SUP-MS], gentilmente [kindly], maleducata [rude-FS], maleducatamente [rudely], maleducate [rude-FP], maleducati [rude-MP], maleducatisima [rude-SUP-FS], maleducatisime [rude-SUP-FP], maleducatisimi [rude-SUP-MP], maleducatisimo [rude-SUP-MS], maleducato [rude-FS], maleducazione [rudeness], scortese [rude-S], scortesemente [rudely], scortesi [rude-P], scortesia [rudeness], scortesissima [rude-SUP-FS], scortesissime [rude-SUP-FP], scortesissimo [rude-SUP-MS], scortessisimi [rude-SUP-MP], sgarbata [impolite-FS], sgarbatamente [impolitely], sgarbate [impolite-FP], sgarbati [impolite-MP], sgarbatissima [impolite-SUP-FS], sgarbatissime [impolite-SUP-FP], sgarbatissimo [impolite-SUP-MS], sgarbatissimi [impolite-SUP-MP], sgarbato [impolite-MS]</p>
<p>ironic, ironical, ironically, irony, sarcasm, sarcastic, sarcastically, sarky</p>	<p>Ironia [irony], ironica [ironic/ironical-FS], ironicamente [ironically], ironiche [ironic/ironical-FP], ironici [ironic/ironical-MP], ironico [ironic/ironical-MS], ironie [ironies], ironizza [ironise], ironizzando [ironising], ironizzano [ironise], ironizzare [ironise], ironizzato [ironise], ironizzava [ironise], ironizzi [ironise], ironizziamo</p>

⁴⁸ Translations provided as in Table 6.1. SUP=superlative adjective, DIM=diminutive.

	[ironise], ironizzo [ironise], sarcasmi [sarcasms], sarcasmo [sarcasm], sarcastica [sarcastic-FS], sarcasticamente [sarcastically], sarcastiche [sarcastic-FP], sarcastici [sarcastic-MP], sarcastico [sarcastic-MS]
laugh at, laughed at, laughing at, laughs at, mimic, mimicked, mimicking, mimicry, mimics, mock, mocked, mockers, mockery, mocking, mockingly, mocks, parodied, parodies, parody, parodying, tease, teased, teaser, teases, teasing	beffa [hoax] , beffare [mock], beffeggiare [mock], canzona [tease], canzonare [tease], canzonava [tease], deride [laugh at], deridendo [laugh at], deriderci [laugh at], deridere [laugh at], deriderla [laugh at], deriderlo [laugh at], deridermi [laugh at], deriderti [laugh at], derideva [laugh at], deridevano [laugh at], prende in giro [make fun of], prendendo in giro [make fun of], prendere in giro [make fun of], prendeva in giro [make fun of], prendiamo in giro [make fun of], presa in giro [make fun of], preso in giro [make fun of], scimmiottando [ape], scimmiottare [ape]
bitch, bitched, bitchfest, bitchier, bitchiest, bitchiness, bitching, bitchy, catty, condescending, condescendingly, passive aggressive, passive aggressive, passive aggressively, passive aggressive, patronise, patronised, patronises, patronising	commentini [comments-P-DIM], commentino [comments-S-DIM], condiscendente [condescending-S], condiscendenti [condescending-P], condiscendenza [condescendingness], maligna [spiteful-FS], malignamente [spitefully], maligne [spiteful-FP], maligni [spiteful -MP], maligno [spiteful -MS], paternalismi [paternalism-MP], paternalismo [paternalism-MS], paternalista [paternalistic-FS], paternalistiche [paternalistic-MP], paternalistico [paternalistic-MS], paternalisitici [MP]
put down, put downs, biting, cutting, caustic	Pungente [biting-S], pungenti [biting-P], sadismo [sadism], sadistico [sadistic-MS], sadistica [sadistic-FS], sadistiche [sadistic-FP], sadistici [sadistic-MP], tagliente [cutting-S], taglienti [cutting-P]

The items in the table have been presented in groups of semantic similarity for ease of reading but do not represent analytic distinctions at this stage. These groupings are also the sets that were used for collecting the corpora because BooTCaT could not handle the size of the corpora that would be generated if all search terms were used at once. The categories are intended to be broad in order to capture as many references to mock politeness as possible. This is important because there is a risk that mock politeness which depends on a contextual or external clash is more commonly described than instances where the mismatch occurs in the co-text or through internal

mismatch, since a narrator has to provide that extra-textual information in order for the listener to understand the offence.

6.4.4 Testing the data collection techniques

In order to test the possible variations in the data collection process, three different methods were used on the UK data and the results are reported in Table 6.3. As noted above, BootCaT works by using groups of three search terms to trawl the Internet for webpages including those terms. The user can then specify how many tuples should be generated from the search terms and how many webpages should be identified for each tuple. At this stage, the researcher has to find a balance between trying to make the corpus as large and therefore as comprehensive as possible on the one hand, and, on the other hand ensuring that the data processing requests are not so large that they fail, which was a recurrent problem when testing this process.

Table 6.3 Comparison of data returned using four different sets of parameters for the data collection

	mumsnet Test 1	mumsnet Test 2	mumsnet Test 3	mumsnet Test 4
Number of search terms in tuple	1	3	3	3
Max. number of tuples generated	Unlimited	10,000	unlimited	10,000
Max. number of URLs retrieved per tuple	50	1000	50	50

Size ⁴⁹	502,602		14,112,841		1,325,635		38,895,272	
<i>rude</i> (raw freq / ptw ⁵⁰)	104	0.207	2200	0.156	117	0.088	4227	0.109
<i>impolite</i> (raw freq / ptw)	1	0.002	38	0.003	1	0.001	42	0.001
<i>polite</i> (raw freq / ptw)	39	0.078	872	0.062	41	0.031	1786	0.046

In Table 6.3 I have reported the total size of the corpus that was retrieved using each set of parameters, but also, as a rough measure of relevant data returned, I have indicated how many times some key search terms occurred in the final data with reference to both raw frequencies and, as a measure of relevance, relative frequency. The method which generated the corpus with the most relevant items was the second. However, there were some problems with this method because the software did not consistently maintain the stated maximum of 10,000 but reconfigured this to 10. Therefore, the method used was the fourth. Although the overall relevance of the corpus was lower, the raw frequencies were higher and given that duplicates were eliminated prior to use of the corpus this is not substantial methodological disadvantage, other than in terms of time taken for downloading.

6.4.5 Description of the corpus

Following the testing process described above, the mock politeness discussion corpora were built from the two forums using BootCaT and the search words listed in Table 6.2 were used in addition to the forum specific (general) nouns listed in Table 6.1. As

⁴⁹ Tokens used for Wordlist in Wordsmith Tools.

⁵⁰ Per thousand words.

noted, for each forum up to 10,000 tuples (sets of three search terms) were generated, and for each tuple up to 50 pages were identified. The size of the resulting corpora are shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Corpus size

	mumsnet	alfemminile
Total URLs identified	1,012,921	458,698
Total number of tokens	143,222,992	93,989,066
Number of tokens after duplicates were removed	61,070,714	35,120,041

As the corpora were uploaded to Sketch Engine, they were POS-tagged. The English language corpora were part-of-speech tagged using English Penn TB-TreeTagger 2.0 and the Italian language corpora were part-of-speech tagged using TreeTagger for Italian (Schmid 1994).

6.4.6 Methodological limitations to the corpus construction

There are several limitations to the methodology applied for the creation of the metacomment corpus. First, it should be noted that the data collection process is quite subjective insofar as I decided on the search terms by combining findings from im/politeness literature with preliminary corpus analyses. However the terms used are fully detailed and as such the process is open to *para-replication* (Stubbs 2001a: 124; Partington 2009: 293-294), that is where the research process is repeated with one variable changed.⁵¹

⁵¹ I specify *para-replication* because the time gap means it is likely that different sets of URLs would be identified by BootCat if the process were repeated now.

Second, not every webpage included in the corpus will contain metapragmatic comment relating to politeness, for two reasons. One reason is that the tuples also included combinations only of the general nouns. This could have been avoided had each tuple been manually checked before collecting the data, but preliminary trials showed that doing this for 30,000 tuples was not feasible within the time constraints. However, as the same issue exists for both sets of corpora it should not affect the data comparison. In addition, some of the search terms are polysemous e.g. *put down*.

The third limitation is that the processes of capturing the data with BootCaT and subsequently uploading the data to Sketch Engine were very time-consuming. This is mainly a limitation for future research because the extensive time periods required make modifications and ad hoc creations less feasible.

This also leads to the fourth limitation, which was that the size of the corpora had to be capped because very large requests (for instance with unlimited tuples and unlimited URLs) repeatedly failed. There were also size restrictions due to the fact that Sketch Engine charges the user according to how many million words may be uploaded to the interface.

Finally, because I am only looking at two forums, there are some restrictions in terms of generalizability, and so the findings should be interpreted in terms of how the English and Italia datasets differ, not all English and Italian interactions.

6.5 Annotating the corpora

Leech (2011: 165) argues that without rich mark-up and annotation, many of the most challenging areas of investigation will be ignored. However, he also notes that such enrichment of the corpus can involve ‘a great deal of tedious work with little reward’. An additional difficulty in this project, as noted above, was that it was not possible to

use corpus annotation software and so the data was annotated using Excel (following al Hejin 2012), as illustrated in Figure 6.5. The features chosen for annotation were drawn from the literature discussed in Chapters 2 to 5.

Use of label	Comment	behaviour	response to fta?	intention	target	mismatch?	facework mismatch?	mismatch type	mismatch location	reported reception	reaction text	echoic?	who initiates the repair?	site
past event	... she'd con		0 no	H-oriented FTA	about - celebri	0	0	0	0	0 getting liked by face	0	0	0	
past event	09.16 I like to clapping an no			criticism - no audi	about - celebri	y	imp	prop/eval	context	0	0	n	0	
past event	ter silverfroj	0 Y - no em		criticism / elicit r	to - retail com	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
past event	knob if he th "have you e ?			fta - criticism	to - in face	y?	rhetori	y - imp	fta context general	0	0	n	0	
past event	stealthsqulg	0 Y - no em		fta - elicit respon?	retail compa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
past event	Usually, saw	my pleasure	Y - ignore	fta - draw attentio	to - stranger	y	y - imp	y - imp	prop/eval context	0	0	n	0	
past event	What about	0 no	?	?	dp	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
past event	At an outpat replied thar y - sugges			fta	to - stranger	y	y - imp	y - imp	prop/eval context	0	0	n	0	
past event	etc). I am ve no problem Y - ignor			criticism / draw a	to - stranger	y	y - imp	y - imp	prop/eval context	0	0	n	0	
past event/typical	Me - Erm...	Gosh, are y	y	generi	fta (defend)	to - stranger	y - rhetori	y - imp	eval/ill context	0	0	n	0	
past event	redfoxy	With a cold y?		fta	? Colleague	?	?	?	??	0	0	0	0	
metaref	Dingle Fri	Dingle Fri	slight	express criticism	about - teachig	y - echoic	n (about)	prop/eval	specific context &	0	0	y - mimicry		http://ww
metaref	1 amongst bit amongst bir			aff & criticise	about - bigols	y - echoic	n (about)	?	recontext general & cotext	0	0	y		http://ww
metaref	3 ch yes. # t 3 ch yes. # t 3 slight			fta criticise	to - forum posty	y - rhetori	y - imp	prop/eval?		0	0	y - mimicry		http://ww
metaref	g only now t. Very generi			affiliate & criticise	about - Ops ery	y - echoic	n (about)	prop/eval context & cotext	agreement with: implicatum	0	0	y		http://ww

Figure 6.4 Screenshot of information added to each occurrence of a metapragmatic label

Features for which the *metapragmatic labels* were annotated included:

- who the label describes, for instance whether it is the speaker themselves, an interlocutor in the interaction or a third person
- whether the speaker distances themselves from the behaviour or whether they express approval of the behaviour (or in the case of first person uses, whether they accept the label for their own behaviour without explicit disapproval)

Features for which the *behaviours* indicated by the metapragmatic label, were annotated included:

- expression of negative evaluation
- presence of mismatch of any type
- location of mismatch (external or internal, as discussed in Chapter 3)
- type of facework (described further below)
- presence of a human target for the behaviour, and if so, what participation role this person filled (e.g. addressee)

- relationship between the person describing the behaviour and the performer.
- reactions to the behaviour
- context of use of the metapragmatic label (e.g. to describe a past event, to describe an ongoing interaction)

An important point to note here is that the method allowed me to identify both behaviours which occurred within the forum, and behaviours which had occurred to the participants outside the forum. Therefore the analysis is not limited to computer-mediated acts of mock politeness. It should also be noted that not all the described behaviours were traceable, for instance where a user had subsequently deleted all their posts (discussed further in Chapter 8).

6.5.1 Annotating im/politeness mismatch

The annotation of the im/politeness mismatch was one of the most challenging aspects because it is a complex area and at this stage I was not able to rely entirely on the participant views. This shift towards a second-order approach places greater responsibility on the researcher and I was concerned about both the validity (was I identifying the treatment of face and sociality rights accurately?) and reliability (would I classify it the same way if I revisited the data?) of my categorisations. This is an issue that other researchers have struggled with of course, for instance Culpeper et al. (2010:614) noted that ‘applying Spencer-Oatey’s categories to impoliteness events for offense type is difficult, because of ambiguities and indeterminacies’. To try and respond to these difficulties, I applied the same set of questions for identifying different aspects of face and sociality rights as these researchers (Culpeper et al. 2010). I have listed these in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Questions designed to aid classification of facework and sociality rights, adapted from Culpeper et al. (2010: 606-613)

Face: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a positive attribute (or attributes) that a participant claims not only to have but to be assumed by other participant(s) as having?

Quality face: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters positive values that a participant claims not only to have as a specific individual but to be assumed by other participant(s) as having?

Social identity face: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters positive values that a participant claims not only to have in common with all other members in a particular group, but to be assumed by other participant(s) as having?

Relational face: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters positive values about the relations that a participant claims not only to have with a significant other or others but to be assumed by that/those significant other(s) and/or other participant(s) as having?

Sociality rights: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a state of affairs that a participant considers to be considerate and just?

Equity rights: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a state of affairs in which a participant considers that they are not unduly exploited, disadvantaged, unfairly dealt with, controlled, or imposed upon?

Association rights: Does the interaction evoke an understanding that something counters a state of affairs in which a participant considers that they have an appropriate level of behavioral involvement and sharing of concerns, feelings and interests with others and are accorded an appropriate level of respect?

The most important questions were the two macro questions, more specifically, deciding which was the primary aspect that was attacked in mock polite occurrences proved challenging. This is partly because the nature of mock politeness is that it frequently attacks both face and sociality rights (as discussed in Chapter 3).

6.5.2 Limitations to the annotation process

One difficulty in this phase was that sometimes the behaviour was missing in the corpus, for instance where a thread had run over more than one page on the forum. In these cases, I then searched the internet for the webpage. This was more successful for mumsnet than alfemmnile because on alfemminile users can delete their own posts.

A limitation to this interpretative analysis is that is necessarily *interpretative* and therefore subjective. In order to try and counter possible bias, within the constraints of a PhD project, I revisited the annotation after a period of at least two months to test whether I would have still assigned them to same categories. In the majority of cases, the category remained the same and so the reliability of the categorisation was considered to be sound, in a small number it was changed and then these were revisited a second time. Secondly, where I was unsure how to categorise particular occurrences, I decided to err on the side of caution and included an ‘unsure/not clear’ role for all categories. This reduces the total number of occurrences, but improves reliability.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have described how the corpus was constructed using BootCaT, annotated manually and interrogated using Sketch Engine, Wordsmith Tools and CONE. As a researcher, my greatest preoccupation relates to the reliability and validity of my work. In order to increase the reliability of the work, I repeated the

most subjective analyses to test my consistency of categorisation. To address the validity factor, I based my analytic categories for the annotation stage on key factors which emerged from the preceding literature review chapters. Finally, I have aimed to make the procedures as transparent as possible so that the work is open to (para)-replication.

CHAPTER 7 EVALUATION AND USE OF THE METAPRAGMATIC LABELS

IRONY AND SARCASM

7.1 Introduction

Out of the various metalinguistic terms which are described in this project, irony and sarcasm are the ones that have attracted the greatest amount of academic theorising and which have been most closely equated with im/politeness mismatch. However, as noted in Chapter 3, although the (academic) concepts of verbal irony and sarcasm overlap with mock politeness, they cannot be equated with these phenomena because they may also perform mock *im*politeness and may exclude other behaviours which perform mock politeness (such as those labelled as *patronising*). Furthermore, as seen in Chapter 4, there is substantial disagreement over the terms themselves.

In this chapter, I investigate how these metapragmatic terms are actually used by participants in the two online forums and in the following chapter I examine what kinds of behaviours they describe. More specifically, the research questions which I address here are:

1. How do the labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* relate to one another within and across the (British) English and Italian corpora?
2. What is the relationship between the first-order (participant) uses of *ironic* and *sarcastic* and the second order (academic) descriptions?

7.2 A collocational approach to evaluation of irony and sarcasm

In this section, I start by examining co-occurrences of *irony/ironic* and *sarcasm/sarcastic* to see what kind of relationship is foregrounded by the forum users and how this relates to the second order theorisation. I then examine co-occurrences

with explicit im/politeness markers such as *rude* and *polite*, and subsequently I investigate which lexical items are used in similar textual environments to *ironic* and *sarcastic*. In this section, I use a ten-word span for co-occurrence instead of the more traditional four (Jones & Sinclair 1974) or five-word span (McEnery & Hardie 2012: 129) because the aim is to capture as many co-occurrences as possible, while excluding those which are not positioned in a grammatical relationship to the node. As each co-occurrence is manually examined at the concordance line, there are fewer problems if the wider span introduces some irrelevance and this was considered to be a more inclusive approach.

7.2.1 Co-occurrences of irony/ironic and sarcasm/sarcastic

The relationship between irony and sarcasm was the subject of meta-discussion in the forums, although there were just six co-occurrences within the ten-word span in the English data and twenty-three co-occurrences in the Italian data.

The six co-occurrences in the English data all treated *irony/ironic* and *sarcasm/sarcastic* as similar features and they appeared as instances of co-ordinated synonymy (Storjohann 2010): linked through coordinating conjunctions, presentation in lists, or graphologically by a slash or virgule, as illustrated in (1).^{52 53}

⁵² This does not, of course, mean that the two items were never placed in opposition in the English site used here, but that it does not occur in this corpus. To check the representativeness of the corpus (as discussed in Chapter 6), the search was extended to the whole website; only two occurrences of opposition were found within the first ten results pages for *ironic* and *sarcastic* and none were found for *irony* and *sarcasm*, which indicates that the distinction is not frequently made in the forum discourse, as suggested by the corpus findings. This process of checking the corpus against the discourse which it claims to represent is an important stage in the analysis and was repeated throughout the investigation, particularly where small numbers were present.

(1) is there not a sense of **sarcasm/irony**/whatever it's called in it?

Similarly, the co-occurrences of IRONIA/IRONICO and SARCASMO/SARCASTICO in the Italian data were also most frequently presented as near synonyms, either through coordinating conjunctions, as part of a list, or linked by a hyphen or slash/virgule, as shown in example (2).

(2) Mesà che sei una di quelle persone simili a me che quando stanno giù o stanno incavolate cacciano la loro parte più **ironica e sarcastica** 😊 grazie per il sorriso regalatomi 😊 [I think that you are one of those people like me who when they feeling down bring our their most ironic and sarcastic side 😊 thanks for making me smile 😊]

There were just three instances in which IRONIA/IRONICO and SARCASMO/SARCASTICO were opposed and treated as having contrasting meanings, as illustrated in (3).

(3) Ma un conto sono le battute **ironiche**, un altro quelle **sarcastiche**, che potrei definirle di **ironia-cattiva**, mirante a distruggere. [Ironic asides are one thing, but sarcastic ones are something else, that I could describe as bitchy-irony, designed to destroy]

In the second-order discussion of irony and sarcasm presented in Chapter 4, it was clear that there was much debate about whether they are essentially the same phenomena, (e.g. Attardo 2000a). However, in the dominant pattern present in both the English and Italian data there is little sense of contrast; they are treated as

⁵³ As noted in Chapter 5, all examples are reproduced faithfully, including non-standard spelling and so on.

practically synonymous.⁵⁴ This is unexpected given the differences in actual usage (discussed below), and may be indicative of the distance between people's knowledge/assumptions about language as compared to their usage.⁵⁵

7.2.2 *Ironic/sarcastic and co-occurrence with explicit im/politeness labels*

In the next stage, I explore lay discussions of irony and sarcasm and their relationship to im/politeness by concordancing co-occurrences of *irony/ironic* and *sarcasm/sarcastic* with metapragmatic im/politeness comments (within a ten word span, in the same sentence).⁵⁶

In the English language data, *sarcas** does not co-occur with *impolite**, which is probably a reflection of the very low frequency for the latter term, but co-occurs with *rude** seventeen times.⁵⁷ Of these seventeen occurrences, the two concepts seemed to be considered similar in thirteen instances (where they were connected through lists and coordinating conjunctions, lines 1-14 in Figure 7.1) and contrasting in just two examples (lines 15 and 16). This suggests that these users conceive of sarcasm as part of impoliteness, as might have been expected from second-order descriptions (e.g. Culpeper's 1996 model of impoliteness; Barbe's 1995 description of irony and sarcasm).

⁵⁴ Although the fact that they are both listed indicates that each word is considered to add something to overall meaning (cf Aitchison 2004) and therefore they are best considered to be presented as *near synonyms*.

⁵⁵ I have anecdotal reports of this from discussions with UK undergraduate students who, when asked to provide a definition of sarcasm or irony, often rely on the definition that they were taught in English classes at secondary school.

⁵⁶ The more colloquial form *sarky* (and spelling variant *sarcy*) was also queried but there were no co-occurrences with im/politeness labels.

⁵⁷ The asterisk indicates a wild-card so *rude** includes both inflections and derivations.

1 I will reply. I can't without being a bit **sarcastic** or **rude**. I'll simply photocopy and submit to tribu
2 ce to me - I mean if they were being **sarcastic** or **rude**, I think I would have noticed, and SIL wa
3 don't wish to come across as **rude**, **sarcastic** or condescending. It does make you wonder wh
4 ed someone who is hotheaded **rude** **sarcastic** tactless wont give an inch etc All your words It v
5 ns about using punishment-shouting, **sarcasm**, **rudeness**, impatience and so on. It is endemic e
6 ssages etc become more and more **sarcastic**, **rude**, whatever, until I respond. He's with somec
7 helpful (words like **rude**, abusive and **sarcastic** keep cropping up when people deal with them) ii
8 hat comes out of her mouth is **rude**, **sarcastic** and downright mean it's hard to cope. I just hope
9 ot talk to his db with out being **rude**, **sarcastic** and unpleasant. eg this morning he tips all my t
10 a & demonstrative and hateful, **rude**, **sarcastic** and aggressive. I have very little support from otl
11 ght her for music and she was **rude**, **sarcastic** and didn?t want to do anything she couldn't
12 customer service was very **rude** and **sarcastic**. Finally we had enough and said we wanted a fu
13 ng **rude** (although a small amount of **sarcasm** may be open to interpretation) With this woman
14 g friendly. Giving them an acerbic or **sarcastic** response is **rude** unless they were snarling in yc
15 it sound **rude** but I'm meaning it in a **sarcastic** or jokey way. It's hard to get tone of "voice" acrc
16 -Nov-11 12:31:06 fleur are you being **sarcastic** with that comment, cos if not that is really **rude**
17 iins mark... Anyway. Sorry for being **sarcastic** but I find what you wrote really insensitive & acti

Figure 7.1 Concordances of *sarcas and *rude****

*Sarcas** co-occurred twelve times with *polite**, *kind**, *friend** but there was not such a clear pattern as for the references to impoliteness. Closer reading of the expanded concordance lines showed that two instances referred to the use of im/politeness mismatch (lines 1, 2 and 11), three presented them as having contrasting meanings (3-5) while two showed them as being similar (6-7) (the remaining instances were unique occurrences).

1 pelling Wed 11-May-11 11:25:22 be **sarcastically polite**? Add message | Report | Message
2 ings that've been wrong with him and **sarcastically** suggest **kindly** that he see a professional
3 ith and ask again. When she asked **sarcastically** she was told "that was not **polite**" and not
4 d with just a hint of real or imagined **sarcasm** not **kind**. Add message | Report | Message poster
5 but i was too **polite** to say anything **sarcastic**) Just because something is about race - doesn't
6 ls understand that someone can be **sarcastic** in a funny way as a **friendly** joke etc. We don't
7 06 I was aiming for the **polite** side of **sarcastic**, thanks for the confirmation I got it right, eglu
8 ars ago My xh had become critical, **sarcastic** and cold towards me too and domineering is a
9 ive, he was **friendly** and funny, even **sarcastic** at times, so I thought that the prof's comments
10 doing well at school. He doesn't get **sarcasm**, often doesn't get people in general, but is so **kind**,
11 e doesn't thank me to be honest - a **sarcastic** "no problem" might remind them to be **polite** next
12 rity as they are my dh. So quit your **sarcasm** and bitching and **kindly** fuck off Add message |

Figure 7.2 Concordances of *sarcas and *polit**, *friend**, *kind****

In the instances that refer to im/politeness mismatch, the sarcastic behaviour is presented as a (defensive) strategy for dealing with face-attack (discussed in more detail in the following chapter). Overall, the co-occurrences with im/politeness terms corroborated the association of being *sarcastic* with the performance of impolite behaviour.

In the Italian data, there was only one co-occurrence of SARCASTICO with an impoliteness label, shown in (4). In this case, being *sarcastico* is presented as a counter strategy for dealing with impolite (*maleducato*) behaviour. This is similar to the strategic mismatch seen in the English data, although in this case there is no clear indication that the speaker wants their insincerity, and therefore face attack, to be recognised. What is foregrounded is the importance of maintaining or showing 'control', as seen in Mullany's (2002) discussion of politeness strategies in hostile political interviews.

(4) Chi mi conosce, sa che contengo le mie reazioni con un certo controllo e anche di fronte al carattere più indisponente e **maleducato**, rispondo con un sorriso, ovviamente **sarcastico** [People who know me, know that I am quite self-controlled and even when faced with the most annoying and rude person, I respond with a smile, sarcastic of course]

SARCASTICO co-occurred with metapragmatic politeness labels just three times, and in each case the two were considered to have contrasting or opposing facework meanings, as illustrated in (5).

(5) Lei non mi pare sia stata **cortese**...ha voluto fare le sue solite battute **sarcastiche** e ti ci metti anche tu facendole degli pseudocomplimenti.... [I don't think she was being

polite...[she wanted to make her usual sarcastic quips and you do the same, paying her pseudo-compliments]

Moving on to *ironic* / IRONICO, in the English data *ironic* did not occur in a relationship with markers of either politeness or impoliteness. This would seem to indicate that, unlike *sarcastic*, it is not seen as being embedded in such a strong relationship with im/politeness, and this is something which is explored further below.

In the Italian data, IRONICO occurred just four times with impoliteness terms: IRONICO was set up in opposition to being impolite (with the lexical items *maleducata*, *antipatica*) in two instances, and is seen as co-existing in one (with *antipatici*).⁵⁸ Thus it is not possible to draw conclusions about tendencies.

IRONICO co-occurred with politeness markers thirteen times. In the ten instances where the concepts were being related, three set them in opposition (with GENTILE and GARBATO) and six presented them as being equal in some way (with GENTILE and CORTESE). In the latter, and more populous group, they were listed as co-existing characteristics in the object of some positive evaluation, frequently describing a potential, desirable partner as shown in example (6).

(6) Lui mi e' sempre voluto stare vicino, **gentilissimo**, brillante, **ironico** e divertente, sorrisi, complimenti, doppi sensi, carezze. [He wanted to stay close with me all the time, very kind, bright, 'ironic' and funny, smiles, compliments, innuendos, caresses.]

The analysis of the co-occurrences shows favourable politeness-related evaluations of being IRONICO in the Italian data, while it appears that being *ironic* in the English data

⁵⁸ The remaining occurrence did not link the two evaluations.

is not associated explicitly with im/politeness evaluations. With reference to being *sarcastic*, there was a stronger unfavourable evaluation in both datasets, and it was interesting to note the mentions of strategic use of sarcasm in response to a face threat in both sets of data, a point which is explored further below and in the following chapter.

7.2.3 Ironic/sarcastic in the distributional thesaurus

In the next stage, the wider range of evaluations that may surround the terms *ironic* and *sarcastic* were explored using collocational analysis. Using the Sketch Engine thesaurus function, it is possible to use the collocates, i.e. those items that relate to the node in a syntagmatic relationship, to identify items which potentially relate to the node paradigmatically. The items listed are those which occur within similar lexical environments to *ironic* or *sarcastic* and so are considered to be potential substitutes in this distributional thesaurus.⁵⁹ The results are shown in Table 7.1, lexical items with a favourable evaluation have been underlined and items with an unfavourable evaluation are emphasised in bold.

It is particularly revealing that *ironic* and *sarcastic* do not appear as possible substitutes for one another in the English data whereas they are the items that behave in the most similar way for the Italian data (and therefore are placed at the top of the table). This contrasts with the aforementioned finding that in meta-discussion of sarcasm and irony, the UK users tended to equate them. The two are clearly

⁵⁹ The default setting of minimum similarity was used, the first twenty as ranked by statistical significance are shown here. Full details are available in Rychlý and Kilgarriff (2007).

conceptually related for the users of the British forum, but are not actually *used* in related ways.

Table 7.1 Thesaurus results for ironic and sarcastic

ironic	Ironico	sarcastic	sarcastico
relieved	sarcastico [sarcastic]	uncalled	ironico [ironic]
off-putting	<u>simpatico</u> [nice, friendly]	dismissive	<u>scherzoso</u> [joking]
flippant	<u>intelligente</u> [intelligent]	flippant	offensivo [offensive]
derogatory	<u>scherzoso</u> [joking]	bitchy	aggressivo [aggressive]
disappointing	<u>sincere</u> [sincere]	snide	<u>spiritoso</u> [witty, funny]
peculiar	<u>interessante</u> [interesting]	<u>tattful</u>	pungente [cutting]
alarming	<u>dolce</u> [sweet]	condescending	ossessivo [obsessive]
tenuous	<u>gentile</u> [kind, polite]	tactless	standard
ambivalent	<u>carino</u> [cute, kind]	nosey	acido [acidic]
astonishing	<u>divertente</u> [funny, amusing]	soppy	<u>divertente</u> [funny, amusing]
lacking	<u>delicato</u> [delicate]	thoughtless	imbarazzante [embarrassing]
frightening	<u>brillante</u> [brilliant]	hopeful	provocante [provocative]
tricksy	offensivo [offensive]	intrusive	stupido [stupid]
erm	<u>socievole</u> [sociable]	unkind	<u>rispettoso</u> [respectful]
daunting	stupido [stupid]	judgemental	violento [violent]
restrictive	<u>aperto</u> [open]	uncooperative	capriccioso [fickle, unpredictable]
HE	<u>rispettoso</u> [respectful]	manipulative	solito [usual]
insistent	sensibile [sensitive]	unhelpful	categoriale [categorical]
confrontational	<u>competente</u> [competente]	unprofessional	razzista [racist]
unconventional	<u>comprensivo</u> [understanding]	vulgar	malizioso [crafty, mischievous]

As can be seen from Table 7.1., the thesaurus entries show a greater number of unfavourable items in the columns for *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO as compared to *ironic* / IRONICO for both languages. However, there were differences across languages. First, it is noticeable that in the English data there are very few favourable items (underlined in the table) in the *ironic* list, other than *relieved*. This is in contrast to the Italian data where there were many favourable items in the list for IRONICO, such as *simpatico* [*friendly/nice*], *intelligente* [*intelligent*] and so on. Second, in the Italian data there were two clearly favourable items in the list for SARCASTICO: *scherzoso* [*joking/ly*] and *divertente* [*funny*]. Third, *divertente* [*entertaining*] occurs for both IRONICO and SARCASTICO, while there was nothing similar in the English data.

Regarding mismatch, in both sets of thesaurus lists for the English data, many items seem to refer to a mismatch of some kind, for instance *flippant* suggests a less serious response than might have been expected, *uncalled (for)* suggests a more threatening act than the speaker felt the situation warranted. However, it is only in the possible substitutions for *sarcastic* that we see items which have been identified in this study as possible candidates for marking im/politeness mismatch, e.g. *bitchy* and *condescending* (discussed in Chapters 9 and 10). Lexical items containing a semantic feature of mismatch were less evident in the thesaurus entries for the Italian data; one possible mismatch candidate is ACIDO [*acid, sharp*], which may indicate a particular tone of voice which could increase the potential interpretation of an ostensibly polite

utterance as impolite.⁶⁰ The lexical item PUNGENTE [*cutting/biting*] is the only item that was also identified for analysis in Chapter 9.

From this initial overview of the terms that occur in similar co-texts, both corpora show that *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO behaviour is more strongly associated with negativity. However, there were differences between the English and Italian data. In the English data, both *ironic* and *sarcastic* are less likely to be associated with favourable evaluations and more likely to be associated with performance of mismatch. There also appears to be a sharper distinction between *ironic* and *sarcastic* in the English data than the equivalents in the Italian data. In the Italian data, they are both associated with more favourable behaviours especially in the case of IRONICO.

7.3 Evaluation, functions and participation roles

In this section I analyse each individual reference to *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO. I have chosen to concentrate on the adjectival forms as a way of managing the quantity of data and because I am primarily interested in retrieving the representation and evaluation of verbal behaviours and thus modifiers were a more appropriate choice⁶¹. The instances where a speaker was describing a behaviour as *not sarcastic/ironic* were also included in the analysis because the specification of what a behaviour is *not*, can tell us about the expectations and evaluations surrounding that label. In total, 790 metapragmatic labels were analysed.

⁶⁰ More detailed analysis showed that ACIDO was most frequently used to describe women's behaviour but it was not very productive for identifying mock polite behaviours, partly because it tended to collocate with RISPOSTA [REPLY] and the content was not specified.

⁶¹ *Irony* was preferred over *ironical* because it is used more frequently (*ironic* occurs with a frequency of 4.6 per million words (pmw) compared to 0.2pmw in EnTenTen).

7.3.1 Evaluation and participation role

In order to investigate the evaluative usage of the labels in more detail, each occurrence of *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO was classified and annotated first according to whether it was used to describe the speaker him/herself or some other person and, second, whether the metapragmatic label was accepted by the speaker to describe their own behaviour and evaluated positively in discussions of other speakers (Figures 7.1 and 7.2) or, in contrast if the speaker was distancing themselves from the label and evaluating such behaviour negatively.

The reason for distinguishing between the participants to whom the label was applied and also the evaluation that was offered was to try and understand to what extent it could be an ‘in-group’ term, used to describe the speaker and those with whom s/he affiliates, or whether it was primarily used as an ‘out-group’ term (also referred to as an ‘over-the-fence’ term in Partington 1998). The relevance to impoliteness is seen in Culpeper’s (2011) mapping of impoliteness labels in conceptual space which incorporates in-group and out-group as one of the dimensions. This analysis is important because this choice will contribute to the evaluative function of the lexical item but it may not be an aspect which is also accessible through collocation analysis.

The results for both *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO are displayed in Figure 7.3.

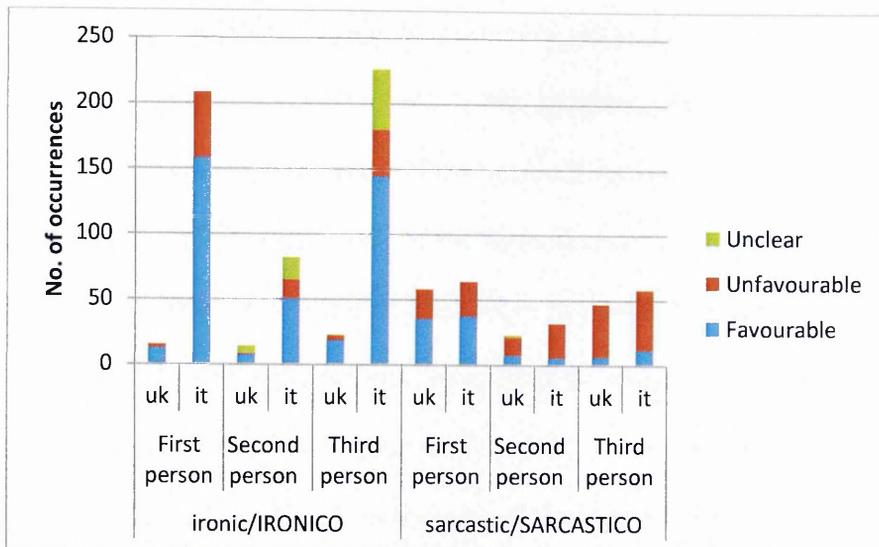


Figure 7.3 Who is evaluated as being *sarcastic/ironic* and how are they evaluated?

Perhaps the first point to note here that speakers comment on their own behaviour in first order evaluations in both datasets, contrasting with Partington’s claim (based on a corpus of newspaper language) that speakers are not likely to self-identify as *sarcastic*, preferring the label *ironic* for the same behaviour (2006: 217). Indeed, Figure 7.3. shows that speakers more frequently self-identify as *sarcastic* than *ironic* in the English data.

Figure 7.3 also highlights the difference in frequency for *ironic* and IRONICO, and much greater difference between the British English and Italian usage emerges in these items. In the English language data, only a small proportion of the occurrences involved labelling a person’s behaviour as *ironic*, which is why it is so sparsely represented in Figure 7.3. Most occurrences (68%) in the initial search labelled a situation as *ironic*, for instance in the patterns *it BE [quantifier] ironic, the ironic thing, how ironic, FIND it ironic*. In such instances, the realisation of the irony is located much more explicitly with the speaker who projects irony on to a situation through the act of labelling it as *ironic* (typical of the examples discussed in Partington’s 2006

metalinguage analysis of irony). In this we can see evidence of the sarcastic/ironic distinction made by Haiman (1998: 20), among others, that ‘situations may be ironic, but only people can be sarcastic’. However, the same weighting was not found in the concordances for the Italian data, where fewer than 3% of the occurrences involved describing a situation as IRONICO. This points towards a difference between the Italian data and the second-order descriptions of irony as ‘a matter of fate’ and not ‘something that people do’ (Creusere 1999: 219). The situational instances have been excluded from Figure 7.3 which focusses on the person whose behaviour is evaluated as *ironic*.

The remaining occurrences, those which referred to human behaviours, were distributed quite evenly amongst first, second and third person in the English data, although the numbers are so low it is not possible to make generalisations extending from the corpus to the discourse. In the Italian data, references to IRONICO in describing behaviours occurred much more frequently and they were most likely to be used in the first and third person evaluations. Furthermore, as can be seen from Figure 7.3, the majority of evaluations were favourable. The favourable evaluation was also dominant in the English data, although the low frequency makes the pattern less easy to identify and less reliable. These findings appear to be consonant with those from the corpus study and previous research and are further investigated in Section 7.3.

The distribution for *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO, shown in Figure 7.3, is very similar; in both languages it is most frequently used to refer to the speaker and least frequently to refer to an interlocutor. The evaluations for the different languages are also similar; the speaker was most likely to favourably appraise being *sarcastic* when it referred to their own behaviour, while the majority of references to other participants involved a negative evaluation. This illustrates how the participation role affects the evaluation of

the behaviour, as hypothesised by Bowes & Katz (2011) from elicited evaluations of scripted sarcastic utterances. This kind of insight is something that can only become clear at this level of granularity and clearly ties in to the dualistic nature of sarcasm (discussed in Chapter 4).

7.3.2 Functions of mentions

The occurrences of *ironic/sarcastic* were subsequently classified in terms of how they were used in the interaction, as displayed in Figure 7.4. This further classification served to highlight how the evaluation was linked to the context of use.

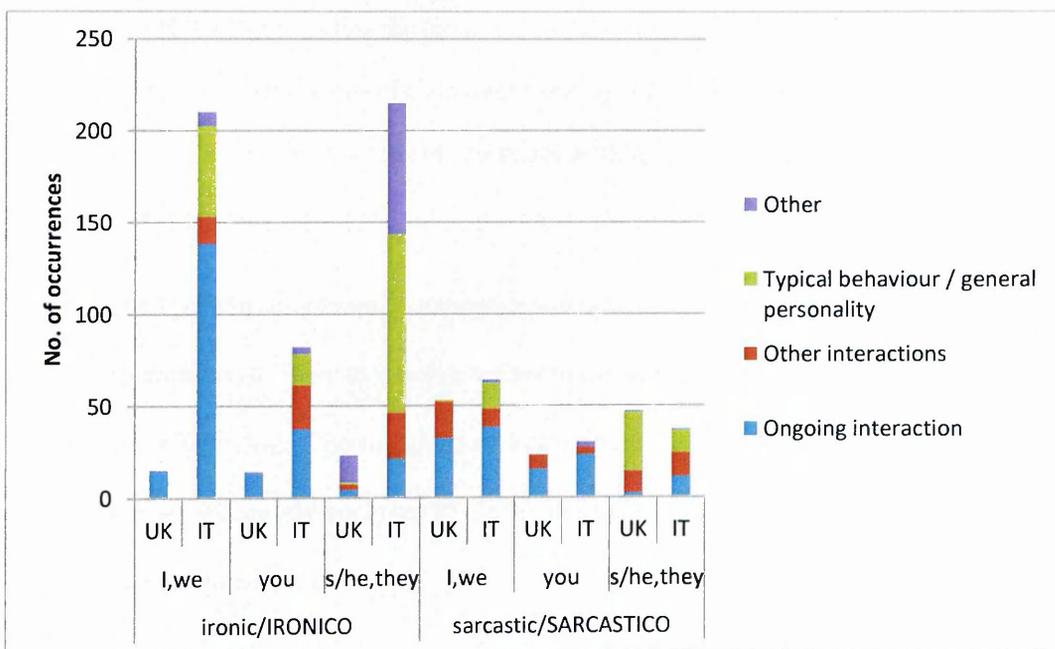


Figure 7.4 Context within which the labels *ironic/sarcastic* are used

7.3.2a Referring to the ongoing interaction

As can be seen from Figure 7.4, the most frequent context in which the terms *sarcastic* and *ironic* were used was with reference to the ongoing interaction within the forum and this primarily involved conversational repair (in the sense of Schegloff et al. 1977). This was a particularly strong pattern in the first person references, and

such repair involved both speaker-initiated repair within the same turn, though sometimes different transmission units (Baron 2010), and other-initiated repair. The latter form is illustrated in (7) where the echoic and critical use of *whilst of course not working* is not perceived by Poster M.

(7) Poster A: [...] Yes we are doing [foster care] out of choice and it's for the love of doing it , but unfortunately without money how can we all survive. It's an idealistic point of view some have that we can take children in and fund them ourselves whilst of course not working as we need to be a constant in their lives. It is impossible for a large majority as we are not financially set in life to afford that luxury.

Poster M: I've been visiting the forum for a while, but not posted, but wanted to query the above statement 'whilst of course not working'. i don't think that that is a give. [..]

Poster A: The statement 'whilst of course not working' you query was meant in a **sarcastic** phrase [...]

In the second person references, the mentions of *sarcastic*/ SARCASTICO in the ongoing interaction were most likely to involve unfavourable metapragmatic comment on the interlocutor's behaviour. The mentions of *ironic* in the English data with reference to the interlocutor frequently occurred to clarify or query meaning in the repair sequences, illustrated in (8).

(8) Poster B: It's not just the memory of Thatcher. It's the thought of Cameron and Osborne and what they might do with our wonderful country.

Poster G: Wonderful country B? **You're being ironic right?**

Poster B: I do think we live in a wonderful country, and full of potential too - think of your own children for starters [...]

Poster G: I think the country would be more wonderful without the stifling influence of Gordon Brown.

As in (8), in many instances the repair initiation appears to be superficial/insincere; the speaker highlights a potential mismatch between their own views and the addressee's views and checks the *ironic* status either sincerely or insincerely as a coercive face attack. This also occurred with IRONICO but there was a higher proportion of uses where it served to explicitly evaluate the speaker's behaviour (favourably and unfavourably) in the Italian data. The high frequency of occurrences in repair sequences is interesting because it reveals both the extent to which these behaviours are indeed the subject of a discursive struggle (what is/is not *sarcastic*?) and also the central role of ambiguity (is person A being *sarcastic* when s/he says x?).

7.3.2b Describing behaviours outside the ongoing interaction

Figure 7.4 also shows that another frequent context of mentions of *ironic/sarcastic* was with reference to behaviours outside the current interaction, and therefore usually outside computer-mediated discourse. These other interactions were predominantly past events, but there were also references to future and hypothetical events, for instance in the second person references for *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO in English and Italian and in the occurrences of IRONICO in the Italian data, the speaker was frequently advising the hearer to perform sarcasm/irony, and thus favourably evaluating the performance of those behaviours. This is briefly illustrated in (9).

(9) Come up with a **sarcastic** comment back - something to do with male ballet dancers might shut them up, or simply a "well I'll let him decide on his hobbies thank you!"

These uses confirm the (favourably evaluated) strategic use of *sarcastic* behaviours which was emerging in the collocation analysis above (and further discussed in Chapter 8). They also highlight the importance of going beyond a semantic description into a pragmatic one; being *sarcastic* is not imbued with a favourable

evaluation, but it can be favourably appraised when aggression is required by the context.

7.3.2c *General description of character / typical behaviour*

The description of third person behaviour was the most productive topic in terms of identifying explicit evaluation, and the appraisal of a person's general character or typical behaviour was the most frequent context within this group. In the English and Italian data, most evaluations of other people being *sarcastic* were unfavourable, as seen in Figure 7.4. In the more frequent negative evaluations, *sarcastic* co-occurred with other unfavourable adjectives such as *passive aggressive*, *snidey*, *bitchy*, *stroppy*, *negative*, *hurtful*, *cruel*, *critical* and *rude*. It was also associated with *imitating* and non-verbal behaviours such as *eye-rolling*, particularly with reference to children.

In the Italian data, the proportion of unfavourable evaluations of SARCASTICO was similar to the UK data, but there were a higher number of favourable evaluations of third person attributes, illustrated in (10). However, in these occurrences it should be noted that the appraiser was not the target of any behaviour, again pointing to the importance of the participation role.

- (10) E' arrogante, ma è Liam anche per questo! A me **fa morire dal ridere** quando lancia le sue battute **sarcastiche** [He is arrogant, but that is what makes him [am] die laughing when he fires off his sarcastic comments]

In the unfavourable evaluations in the Italian data, the speaker was most frequently evaluating SARCASTICO behaviours for which s/he considered her/himself to be the target, which provides further support for the importance of participation role for the evaluation.

Moving on to *ironic* / IRONICO, in the English data, *ironic* was not used for describing the character or typical behaviour of a third person, as noted above it was primarily used in discussion of ambiguity of intention. This absence suggests that *ironic* has a weaker relationship with identity than *sarcastic* which parallels the weak relationship with im/politeness seen above. The stronger correlation of *sarcastic* with impoliteness and identity echoes Culpeper's discussion of the different applications of *rude* and *impolite* (2011: 83).

In contrast, in the Italian sub-corpus, personality description was the most frequent context for mentions of IRONICO. Where being IRONICO is favourably evaluated (57% of all third person occurrences) it most frequently occurred within lists of several favourable adjectives in a similar structure to the first person usage described above (this is discussed further below with reference to gender). In contrast, where the behaviour was evaluated negatively, IRONICO did not occur so frequently within a list of other evaluative adjectives.

With reference to objects produced by the third person, such as books, the specified function was mostly likely to be one of entertaining, indicating the humorous potential of being IRONICO. This usage was not matched in the English data, even when I checked outside the corpus by identifying books which were labelled as IRONICO in the corpus and then retrieving English language reviews. In the English reviews, the most frequent adjective was *funny*, followed by *witty*, *humorous*, *amusing* and so on (*sarcastic* also occurred in more than one review, although with a lower frequency than those indicating comic value).

7.2.3d Sexually-charged behaviour

The last significant context, or rather environment, which only applied to the Italian data, was in discussing sexually-charged behaviour (grouped in ‘other’ in Figure 7.1). When used in this sense, SARCASTICO was used to describe an interlocutor, occurring in the phrase *sorriso/sorrisetto sarcastico* [*sarcastic smile/little smile*].⁶² This points towards a use of SARCASTICO which is not paralleled in the English data, perhaps crossing into the English semantic space of *sardonic* or *enigmatic*, with a shared feature of ambiguity.⁶³ IRONICO was also similarly used to refer to sexually-charged behaviour, mainly in the context of flirting, and this usage occurred in both general descriptions and accounts of other interactions for IRONICO and SARCASTICO.⁶⁴

7.3.3 Evaluation and gender

The analysis also showed that evaluation around these metapragmatic labels correlated with gender of the person being described. The person who was being described as *sarcastic* was male twice as frequently as female, and the two most frequent male relationships between the evaluator and person described were mother-son (22% of occurrences, shown in example 11) and (ex)partners (24% of occurrences). This high concentration suggests that, in this dataset, evaluating face-threatening male child

⁶² *Sorrisino* and *sorrisetto* are both diminutive forms which occur with similar frequencies in ItTenTen (ten and eighteen occurrences respectively), they are used in similar contexts and appear to evaluate unfavourably. *Sorrisetto* has a stronger correlation than *sorrisino* with *ironico*.

⁶³ *Sorriso sarcastico* and *sardonic smile* occur with similar frequencies in the enTenTen and the ItTenTen corpora (119 instances, 0.039pmw and 160 instances, 0.012 pmw respectively). They also share lexical items referring to the body in the most salient collocates suggesting that they may be used in similar ways (in the first fifteen collocates of *sardonic smile*: *lips, mouth, face*; *sorriso sardonico*: *lips, shoulders, face*).

⁶⁴ This association between impoliteness labels and references to sexually charged or lewd behaviour is seen in English with other labels, for instance *rude*.

behaviour as *sarcastic* is roughly equivalent to labelling female child behaviour as *bitchy* (discussed in Chapter 9).

(11) my son is 11, an only child and in turns **loving, affectionate & demonstrative and hateful, rude, sarcastic and aggressive**. [...] Like your son, he also has problems with peers/friends and is very argumentative with all but the most placid of children! On the other hand he is very intelligent, articulate and in new social situations very shy and inhibited..so people who don't know him very well only see his meek/quietly spoken/timid side. Being so verbally articulate means **he can be very cruel & sarcastic** too, which really hurts me.

In the Italian dataset, there were more favourable evaluations of SARCASTICO behaviour when describing a third person, and in these cases the person was always male, as shown in (10) above and also in (12).

(12) Non riesco a cancellarlo dalla mia vita: stessa solfa, dolce, attento, premuroso, tenero, l'unico uomo con cui mi sia sempre sentita bene, completamente a mio agio...è **sarcastico, divertente, di cuore molto buono e disponibile..** [I can't forget about him: same old story, sweet, attentive, caring, tender, the only man that I've always felt comfortable with, completely at ease... he's sarcastic, funny, kind and helpful...]

It could be hypothesised that this variation is connected to the more general pattern for SARCASTICO to occur in reference to flirting/sexual behaviours, and (12) clearly involves the favourable evaluation of an ex-partner. However, this was not evident throughout the examples, as seen in (10) the speaker seemed to be appreciate the *sarcastic comments* that are directed at others. It could also be that the forum is dominated by posters who present themselves as heterosexual women and, as such, adult males are more frequently discussed in general but this is not supported by the

analysis in Chapter 9 which highlights how other labels such as *vipera* [viper] are predominately used to refer to female behaviour.

In the unfavourable evaluations in the Italian data, both male and female participants were described and the people who were labelled as *SARCASTICO* were most likely to be male (ex) partners (28% of all disapproving evaluations) or (mostly female) forum posters (20%).

A gendered weighting towards description of male participants was found in the Italian occurrences of *IRONICO* as a favourable evaluation of general character / typical behaviour. These were most frequently applied to a partner (twelve occurrences), fantasy / perfect partner (ten occurrences) or a person being discussed as a potential partner (five instances). The person discussed as a (possible/ideal/actual) partner was usually male, similar to the *SARCASTICO* data, and example (13) is typical of this type of occurrence.

(13) Thread title: Amo il mio ragazzo...ma... il mio professore

Ecco questo dannatissimo "ma"... come appunto dicevo, ho un problema che a me sembra a dir poco tragico... per farla breve... io sono una studentessa e nella mia scuola c'è un certo PROFESSORE... ha trent'anni, è **bello, simpatico, spiritoso, ironico, sensuale...** (non il solito prof vecchiaccio hihi)

[I love my boyfriend...but...my teacher

So here is the dreaded 'but'... as I said, I have a problem that seems pretty tragic to me... to be brief, I'm a student and in my school there is a certain TEACHER... he is thirty, good-looking, nice, funny, ironic, sensual... (not the usual old teacher haha)]

From this we can see that both *sarcastic* and *SARCASTICO* have a semantic preference (in the sense of Stubbs 2001a) for describing male participants, but in the Italian data

this weighting is more specifically associated with favourable evaluation of adult males.

7.4 Summary

As anticipated by the literature discussed in Chapter 4, the evaluations clustering around the metapragmatic labels *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO were more unfavourable than those for *ironic*/ IRONICO. Although it should be noted that in both language corpora, the speakers were willing to describe themselves as *sarcastic* and to favourably appraise such behaviour, showing the value that is attributed to impolite behaviour. Furthermore, in general, the Italian collocates and uses were more favourable.

Through separating out the functions and the person to whom the label was applied, it has been possible to understand why a combination of favourable and unfavourable adjectives occurred in the collocates (discussed in Section 7.2). This brief analysis highlights the way in which the participation role affects the evaluation of the behaviour: where the person evaluating the behaviour was a target, they tend to evaluate unfavourably; where they were in an over-hearing role, they are more likely to evaluate favourably. This confirms the importance of identifying participation role, as called for in Toplak & Katz (2000).

The analysis of functions also reveals the importance of these metapragmatic labels to managing the ongoing interaction, both in repair sequences (whether sincere or coercive) and to evaluate an interlocutor's behaviour. Furthermore, the first person analysis demonstrates the extent to which people are involved in making metapragmatic comment on their own behaviour, not just that of other participants in an interaction.

From the third person analysis, it is clear that *sarcastic* is more likely to indicate male behaviour in both forums, and more specifically, in the Italian data only male participants were evaluated favourably for being SARCASTICO as a personality trait. In the Italian data, this gender-based correlation also applies to being IRONICO, and is strongest when the appraisal of the behaviour is positive. This bias towards male behaviour reflects previous findings such as Gibbs (2000) and Dress et al. (2008), but what is not yet clear is whether the pattern is that males are more likely to use sarcasm (intended in a theoretical second order sense) or whether their behaviours are more likely to be described/evaluated (by the mostly female forum participants) using the *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO label rather than the metapragmatic labels discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

CHAPTER 8 EXAMINING THE BEHAVIOURS LABELLED AS *IRONIC* AND

SARCASTIC

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I continue to focus on irony and sarcasm and investigate to what extent these labels refer to mock polite behaviours and how they relate to the second order descriptions. In the first phase of the analysis, the evaluation and use of the metapragmatic labels (790 instances) was investigated, as reported in Chapter 7. Therefore, I was primarily investigating how mock politeness is discussed and evaluated in those discussions. In the second phase, where they were available, I traced and retrieved the actual behaviours or acts which had been labelled as (*not*) *IRONICO/ironic* or *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* (191 instances) and analysed what kind of evaluation was communicated, what facework was accomplished and whether they involved mismatch (in particular im/politeness mismatch), and this is described in Sections 8.2 and 8.3 respectively.⁶⁵ In performing these two stages, I am assuming that the meaning of *ironic* / *IRONICO* and *sarcastic* / *SARCASTICO* is made up of both how those metapragmatic labels are used and what kind of behaviours they refer to. This kind of analysis represents a response both to calls for more contextualised analyses of sarcasm and irony (e.g. Eisterhold et al. 2006) and to calls for first-order driven studies of im/politeness (e.g. Locher & Watts 2005).

Through this analysis, I aim to cast light on the following research questions:

⁶⁵ Where the behaviours were not available it was either because they had not been specified, e.g. the speaker says *I've left a series of increasingly sarcastic messages* without describing the content, or because the preceding post described as *sarcastic* etc. had been deleted. The latter was a problem with the Italian forum in particular.

1. Are the metapragmatic labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?
2. How do the behaviours described as *ironic* and *sarcastic* relate to one another within and across the (British) English and Italian corpora?
3. What is the relationship between the first-order (participant) uses of *ironic* and *sarcastic* and the second order (academic) descriptions?

8.2 Evaluation in the behaviours described as IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic*

In the previous chapter I focussed on how the performance of ironic and sarcastic behaviours was evaluated by participants, but, at that metalanguage level, I could not address what evaluation was performed *by* those behaviours. That is to say, there are two different levels of evaluation: in the first, a speaker labels a particular behaviour as *ironic* or *sarcastic* and evaluates that behaviour either favourably or unfavourably, and this is what was discussed in the previous chapter. In the second, a speaker performs a behaviour (subsequently labelled as *ironic* or *sarcastic*) and in performing that behaviour, expresses an evaluation of some other person or entity, and this is what I intend to discuss in this chapter. As predicted by previous research into irony and sarcasm (discussed in Chapter 4), evaluation is central to both the first category, the mentions of IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* (discussed in Chapter 7), and to the behaviours that were labelled as IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic*, the second category.

In the English data, the verbal behaviours which were subsequently described as *ironic* and *sarcastic* always involved the expression of some negative evaluation, as illustrated in (1).

(1) I usually say a **sarcastic** "my pleasure" or somesuch when people ignore the door-holding etc. But I still have the (intensely petty overreaction) of wanting to dismember them with a rusty spoon.

That is not to say that they always had the primary function of face attack, in fact, as seen below, the criticism may also serve face-enhancement functions through establishing common values, but all occurrences involved criticism of some behaviour, idea etc., thus strongly demonstrating the *characteristic attitude* posited in Wilson & Sperber (2012) and Wilson (2013).

In the Italian data, the picture was less straightforward; a similar pattern was found for the verbal behaviours evaluated as SARCASTICO in that they all involved expression of negative emotion (although for non-verbal behaviours that accompanied speech such as *sorriso sarcastico*, this was not the case). While, in the case of IRONICO, 80 behaviours expressed negative evaluation but 22 did not (ambiguous examples or those with insufficient context have been omitted here). Those behaviours which did not involve the expression of any negative emotion mainly referred to flirting and sexually charged behaviours, shown in (2), or, less frequently, to instances where the IRONICO label simply seemed to mark a non-serious aspect to the behaviour, shown in (3).

(2) Buongiorno Ing. X dico con **un tocco molto ironico** sottolineando il titolo

Ing. Buongiorno a lei mi risponde con **un tono altrettanto ironico** a dimostrare l'inutile formalità che ho voluto creare, visto che ci davamo del tu già dal primo incontro [Good morning Dr. x I say with a very ironic tone emphasising the title Dr. Good morning to you he answers with an equally ironic tone showing the needless formality that I had created, seeing as we had been using the informal 'tu' since our first meeting]

(3) Thread title: Aiuto....:che tableau per un matrimonio [Help... what seating chart for a wedding]

...vedo che questo è un vecchio post, ma leggendolo mi sono venute alcune idee: tipi di rose (meiland, canina etc.) giardini famosi; regine...oppure per una soluzione più **ironica**, autrici di romanzi rosa(Liala, Barbara Cartland, Georgette Heyer) o grandi magazzini celebri nel mondo, un p effetto I love shopping...

[...I see that this is an old post, but reading it I had some ideas: types of roses (peace rose, dog rose etc.) famous gardens; queens... or a more ironic option, authors of romantic novels(Liala, Barbara Cartland, Georgette Heyer) or internationally famous stores, an 'I love shopping' kind of thing]

As can be seen, in (2) and (3) there is no clear expression of negative attitude in either the overly-formal greeting or the suggestion of a romantic novel theme. In each case the ironic element serves to create some distance from sincerity and to mark a non-serious aspect to the behaviour. This centrality of (pragmatic) insincerity can be described more precisely with the allusional-pretence theory of irony (Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995), for which insincerity is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition.

8.3 Facework in the behaviours indicated as ironic and sarcastic

In this section, I focus on the kinds of facework which are performed by verbal behaviours labelled as *IRONICO/ironic* and *SARCASTICO/sarcastic*. As a means of providing an overview of the facework involved, the references to the ongoing interaction and the (past, future and hypothetical) behaviours outside the forum, were classified according to the type of facework that the speaker seemed to be prioritising and the findings are summarised in Figure 8.1.

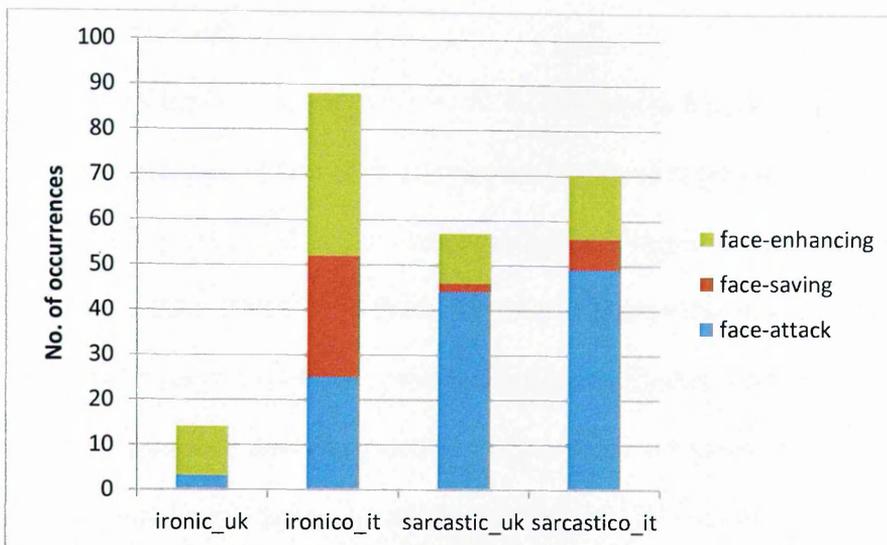


Figure 8.1: Facework prioritised in descriptions of behaviours

Figure 8.1 immediately reveals that ironic verbal behaviours were much more frequent in the Italian corpus than in the English corpus, at a ratio of 7:1. This was predicted by the analysis in the previous chapter, but contrasts with cultural assumptions regarding the association between irony use and British identity, namely that irony is a peculiarly British trait (discussed in Chapter 2).

Focussing more specifically on the facework that is performed, Figure 8.1 shows that there is a greater perception of face-attack in the behaviours described as *sarcastic* or SARCASTICO, but face-attack is also present for *ironic* and IRONICO. It is also noticeable that face-saving, a major function according to second-order politeness theory (e.g. Leech 1983; Brown & Levinson 1987), is not the dominant function for either *ironic* or IRONICO.

The three broad categories of facework (face attack, face saving and face enhancement) are discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

8.3.1 Face-attack

As seen in Chapter 4, much comment on the differences between sarcasm and irony centres on the kind of facework that they are perceived to perform, a common theme being the importance of an unfavourably appraised ‘target’ for sarcastic utterances (e.g. Lee & Katz 1998; Camp 2011). In order to explore this face dimension further, the verbal behaviours were annotated according to whether there was a human target for the utterance. In previous research, such as those just mentioned, it was not clear how the authors decided what constituted a ‘target’. To improve internal reliability and replicability, in this study, the ‘target’ was operationalised in the following terms: Is the utterance perceived to threaten face? If so, the person whose face is threatened is then equated with ‘target’. This means there are three possible ‘targets’ or people whose face is attacked: the person who performs the behaviour, the person to whom they are talking, or a third person.⁶⁶ In those instances where a target was identified, the utterances were further categorised according to whether that behaviour was subsequently evaluated in a favourable or unfavourable way.

The results are reported in Figures 8.2 and 8.3 for SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* and Figures 8.4 and 8.5 for IRONICO/*ironic*.⁶⁷ The figures also distinguish between the participation roles of the person describing the behaviour. This allows us to see, for instance, whether targeting an addressee is consistently evaluated unfavourably, no matter what the role of the ‘evaluator’. The main pattern was that *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO were used in similar ways in the English and Italian forums and corresponded more closely

⁶⁶ It should be noted that this approach means that the numbers are quite low because ambiguous occurrences were all omitted and therefore caution should be taken in interpreting the results.

⁶⁷ The same scale has been used for both sets of charts to facilitate visual comparison.

to the second-order definitions, while *ironic* and IRONICO diverge both from each other and from the second-order descriptions.

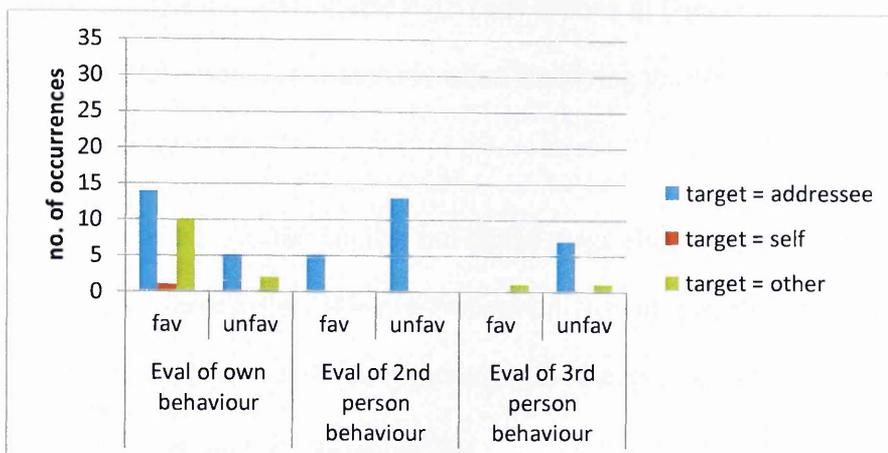


Figure 8.2 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as *sarcastic*

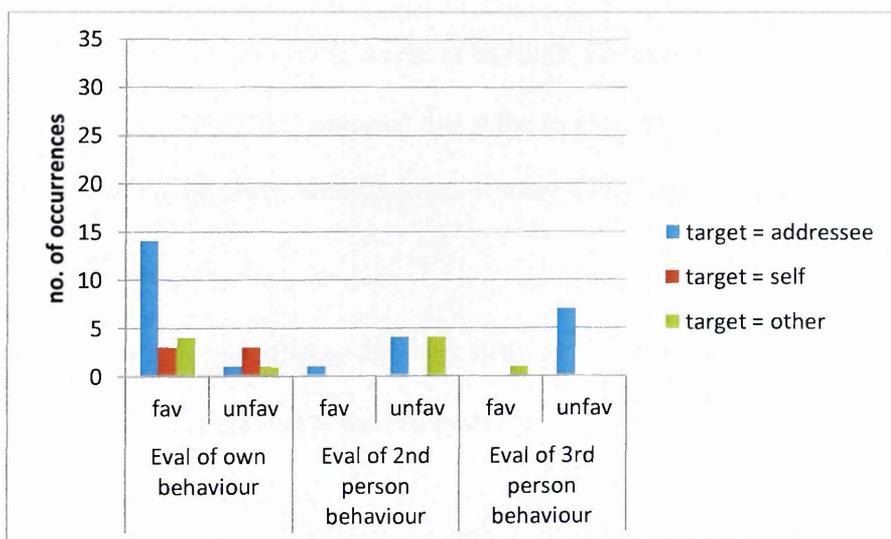


Figure 8.3 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as SARCASTICO

As can be seen, for both the English and Italian data, there is a pattern of association between the use of the metapragmatic comment SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* and utterances which involve targeting an addressee (the blue bars in the figures) thus reflecting cohesion between first and second order conceptualisations (cf. Kreuz & Glucksberg

1989; Lee & Katz 1998). The influence of the participation role is obvious once again as the targeting of an addressee is evaluated exclusively in negative terms in when performed by a third person (the right-hand column in Figures 8.2 and 8.3) and predominately evaluated negatively when describing the behaviour of a second person (the centre column).⁶⁸

A difference between the English and Italian usage also emerges in the targeting of the speaker him/herself (the red bar in the figures). In both sets, this self-deprecation is never noted in others, and is only present when the speaker is describing his/her own behaviour. The English and Italian data differs in that self-targeting is more frequent in the Italian dataset and is also evaluated unfavourably (discussed further below). This again points towards the extent to which the second-order theorisation has depended on an anglocentric model or baseline. For example, it contrasts with Sperber & Wilson's (1991/1981) proposal that if the target is the speaker, then the trope is more likely to be irony, while sarcasm is more likely to involve echoing another's utterance.

The next two figures display the same analysis for *ironic* and IRONICO (as above, the same scale is maintained to aid comparison).

⁶⁸ Those instances in which it is evaluated favourably with reference to an interlocutor are instances of advice-giving rather than metacomment on performed behaviours.

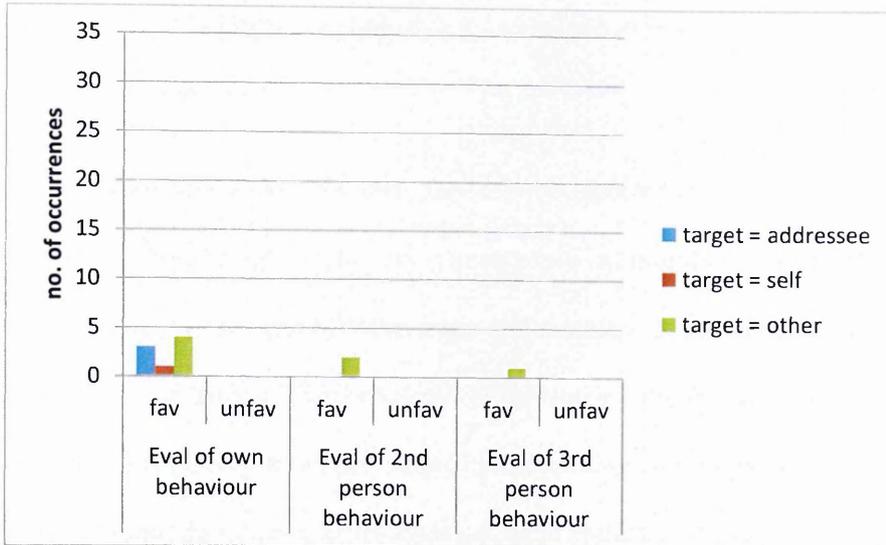


Figure 8.4 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as *ironic*

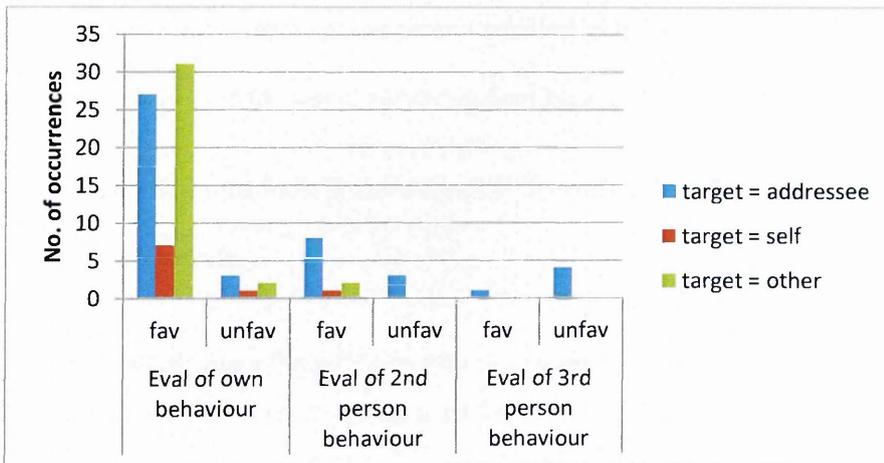


Figure 8.5 The (perceived) target of utterances labelled as **IRONICO**

The patterns in the behaviours labelled as *ironic* are less clear for the UK data because there were so few recoverable behaviours. In the first person there were a small number of occurrences in which the target was an addressee, but, overall, the target was more likely to be some other person, thus meeting the expectations of the second-

order theory. We might also note that performance of irony is never evaluated unfavourably in this context.

In the Italian data, as already seen, the IRONICO label was used much more frequently than *ironic* in the English data and, contrary to what might be expected from the second-order distinctions between irony and sarcasm, there is still a pattern of targeting an addressee. This behaviour of threatening the face of an addressee is evaluated favourably when performed by the speaker and negatively when performed by some other participant, as for both *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO, showing the importance of the participation role. This reflects findings from the previous chapter that the Italian metapragmatic labels IRONICO / SARCASTICO share more characteristics than the English equivalents. As in the data above for SARCASTICO, there is a stronger pattern in the Italian data for the person labelled as IRONICO to target themselves and this self-mockery is discussed further in Section 8.3.

In this section, I now look in more detail at the use of the labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* to indicate face-attack.

8.3.1a Strategic use of irony / sarcasm in response to face-attack

In the instances of *sarcastic* being used to describe the speaker's own past behaviour, s/he primarily (66% of instances) presented being *sarcastic* as an offensive counter strategy (Bousfield 2007), thus reflecting the findings from the previous chapter. This usage is illustrated in (4).

(4) I've found the best thing to do is to keep my family and issues to myself and not talk about anything really and bite my lip - although sometimes I give a **sarcastic** reply back when she says something **hurtful** and that seems to hit home.

As can be seen, the speaker positions the *sarcastic* reply as a reaction to another participant's *hurtful* behaviour. This pattern was also evident where the addressee was advised to be *sarcastic*, as for instance in (5), which occurred in a thread titled '*Opinions needed - dh who make jokes at my expense to get cheap laughs- when we are out with friends*'. As seen in (5), the use of sarcasm is recommended as a strategy in response to face attack, again marked by the reference to being *hurt*.

(5) My advice, such as it is:

1. It is abuse and you'll help your own self-pride by recognising it as such.

2. DH is supposed to care about your feelings. When **you're hurt**, don't laugh it off, show it.

3. Perfect your 🙄 stare, accompany it with a **sarcastic** "Thanks for that" - and use it, every single time he does this in company. Your friends will soon pick up on it ... and stop laughing..

In these occurrences, the speaker's use of *sarcastic* behaviour is presented as a counter-strategy which is triggered by face attack. This reciprocation of impoliteness is in line with expectations from previous work on impoliteness routines (e.g. Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2007, as discussed in Chapter 2) and the sequential nature of irony in particular (e.g. Nuolijarvi & Tiitula 2011; Gibbs 2000). Furthermore, the speaker presents their aggressive behaviour as being superior, more skilful or refined, than the *hurtful*, *cheap* face attack of their target.

However, in the instances of *sarcastic* behaviours that occurred within the ongoing action, there was no evidence that the *sarcastic* utterance was actually produced in response to an overt face attack for which the speaker was a target. In the majority of *sarcastic* behaviours that occurred within the ongoing action, the *sarcastic* utterance was triggered by a forum member expressing an opinion with which the speaker did

not agree, and so, in some sense, they elected themselves to a footing which allowed for offence to be taken (cf. Haugh 2013b). This can be seen from the fact that often the *sarcastic* behaviour occurs in the speaker's first contribution to the thread and so there is no evidence of ongoing conflict at a personal level. This discrepancy between declared first person usage and actual usage may occur because the speaker is more likely to emphasise the threat when narrating past events, or to only recount those where there was a clear threat, in order to justify their *sarcastic* behaviour.

Alternatively, it suggests that the speaker's perception of events is significantly different from that of the observer/researcher because targets self-select as such to some extent, for instance interpreting an utterance as an attack on social identity face (as discussed in the following section).

In the Italian data, the references to past events labelled as SARCASTICO similarly involved the narration of a trigger which was face attack targeted at the speaker and there was one instance of advice that followed the same pattern. The pattern for the behaviours in the ongoing interaction was more mixed; unlike the English data, some clearly responded to face threats, as illustrated in (6). In the interaction sampled in (6), Poster M replied to a thread asking for advice on hair removal; Poster P subsequently replies in a way that challenges Poster M's sociality rights in particular (e.g. *But if you are talking without knowing what you are talking about, because just negative comments from people who haven't direct experience are useless*) and this leads to Poster M responding in a way that is subsequently evaluated by Poster P as *sarcastico*, in particular the use of the term *saputella* [*know it all*] is criticised.

(6) Poster M: Che certe cose si devono fare in centri specializzati, con persone che ti seguono.. Ok che si vuole risparmiare, ma si rischia di non ottenere risultati decenti..

Questo è quello che penso [This kind of thing should be done in specialised centres, where people know what they're doing / look after you properly... Trying to save is fine, but you might not get decent results...]

Poster P: e invece guarda un po', io sto usando lo stesso apparecchio e i risultati li sto ottenendo. [...]

Tu per caso parli così perchè hai usato un apparecchio simile al me di homedics?

Perchè se è questo il motivo allora ok, fai bene a portare qui la tua esperienza. Ma se parli senza sapere di che stai parlando sbagli, perchè certi commenti disfattisti di persone che non hanno esperienze dirette, non servono a niente. [And instead, look here, I've been using the same device and I'm getting good results. [...]

Have you actually used anything similar to homedics? Because if that's why then ok, you're right to give your experience. But if you are talking without knowing what you are talking about then you are wrong, because just negative comments from people who haven't direct experience are useless.]

Poster M: Guarda.. Intanto quella era la mia opinione nata da un sacco di fattori.. Per esempio [...] Non c'è da scherzarci con questi tipi di apparecchi.. Per l'amor di dio c'è chi nasce imparato e **saputello** come te, chi invece (come me) è un pochino più "imbranato" e certe cose rimangono più complicate farle da sole.. Sarà lecito dire la mia idea?! [...] [I look... First of all, my opinion was based on a lot of factors. For example [...]] You can't mess around with these kinds of things.. For the love of God, there are those who are born know-it-alls like you, and those who (like me) are a bit more "clumsy" and some things are just a bit difficult to do by yourself.. I can say what I think?! [...]

Poster P. [...] Tra l'altro, credo che termini come "**saputella**" e "**sua maestà**", soprattutto se usati con tono **sarcastico** come hai fatto tu, siano offensivi eccome! [...] Apart from anything, I think that terms like "know-it-all" and "your majesty", especially if used with a sarcastic tone like you did, are offensive and then some!! [bold added]

In the descriptions of *ironic* / IRONICO behaviour in both the English and Italian data there was less emphasis on the use of the behaviour as a counter strategy. However, the behaviours labelled as *ironic* / IRONICO were used for face attack in both data sets, as seen in Figure 8.5 and illustrated in (7) from the Italian corpus.

(7) Poster H: 🙄 ragazza.....fatti una camomilla.....non ho davvero altro da aggiungere!!!

questo è un forum pubblico e la gente ci scrive le proprie storie e vicende senza dover esser etichettata da una personcina a modo tale e quale a te..... come fake??? ma sei fuori???

per favore, non leggere e rispondere più ai miei post.....così non ti scandalizza....**baci e abbracci!!** 🙄 girl.....get yourself a chamomile.... I really have nothing else to add!!!

This is a public forum and people write about their own experiences without having to be labelled by someone like you..... what do you mean fake??? Are you out of it???

Do me a favour, don't read or respond any more to my posts.... That way you won't be scandalized...kisses and hugs!!]

Poster F: 🙄👉 [NAME] non sono una lei. la camomilla la bevo già. qua, come dici tu è un forum pubblico, per cui ci posto. non mi scandalizza quel che dici. solo che dici falsità e voglio che mio pensiero sia fatto pervenire ai forumini e forumine oneste che navigano sul "al femminile".

Baci e abbracci le rimando al mittente. [[NAME] I'm not a she. I already drink chamomille. Like you say, this is a public forum, so I post. I'm not scandalized by what you write. Just that you write lies and I want my ideas to get through to the honest forum members who use "al femminile"

Kisses and hugs I return to sender]

Poster H: 🙄 adesso hai stufato.....

posta dove ti pare, ma non nel mio post.....o se proprio vuoi farlo esprimi un parere o

non un giudizio!!!

scusa...in base a cosa ritieni che le mie parole siano falsità???

se non l'avessi capito...il **baci e abbracci era ben più che ironico**..... 😊 | 😡 now you are getting really annoying... post where you want but not in my thread... or if you must do it, express an opinion not a judgement!!! Sorry... but on what grounds do you think I was lying???? If you didn't get it... the kisses and hugs was more than ironic..... 😊 |

In (7), we see that the repair involves the first speaker re-asserting the face-attack by drawing attention to the non-sincere status of the *baci e abbracci* (*kisses and hugs*). Thus we can conclude that the element of face attack was a salient part of the IRONICO utterance.

8.3.1b Responding to attack on social identity face

One potentially interesting aspect of difference between the UK and Italian forums with reference to third person performance of sarcasm relates to the importance of social identity face in responding to face attack. Although the data is limited, there is a more distinct pattern in the Italian data of the speaker unfavourably evaluating a previous *sarcastic* comment because s/he feels implicated in the criticism through association with the target, as shown in (8).

(8) Poster A: Lo conosco io. Io lo conosco molto bene. Se è come il padre, l'esimio, non ti metterà in lista per il trattamento nella struttura pubblica finchè non ti avrà spennato prima nel suo studio privato. So anche come ha vinto il concorso di ricercatore: la sua era l'unica domanda presentata, strano, no? [I know him. I know him very well. If he is like his esteemed father, he won't put you on the state waiting list until he has fleeced you in his private practice. I know how he managed to get the post of lecturer too: his was the only application. strange, eh?]

Poster N: Io probabilmente più di te **caro/a** [Poster A] [...] per quanto riguarda il padre **(quello che tu chiami sarcasticamente "l'esimio")**, ti consiglierei di portare più rispetto per persone che negli anni e grazie al duro lavoro hanno raggiunto vette che altri sognano la notte.... [And I probably [know him] more than you dear [Poster A] [...] and as for his father (who you sarcastically call 'esteemed'). I'd advise you to have more respect for people who over time, and thanks to hard work, have reached heights that others can only dream about....

Esimio, used in the first line, is partially conventionalised for non-sincere use, for instance Sabatini Colletti (2011) dictionary gives the following definition:

Che eccelle su gli altri; anche con valore antifrastico: *un e. imbecille* [One who excels over others; also used antiphrastically/ironically: *he's an e. idiot.*]

and the fifth sense given in the Sansoni English-Italian Dictionary (2010) is

5 (iron [ironic]) real, thorough, out-and-out: *un esimio mascalzone* a real scoundrel.

The target of the *sarcastic* behaviour is a doctor, and his face is threatened primarily in his institutional role, but his quality face is also threatened through the suggestion of dishonesty. Poster N, presents him/herself as someone close to the target (although, in the anonymous online environment it is also entirely possible of course that the author is actually the target). S/he criticises the *sarcastic* verbal behaviour on the basis that s/he has superior knowledge of the person and attempts to repair the threat through other-oriented face enhancement strategies. It is interesting to note the use of mock polite features in the criticism of the *sarcastic* behaviour, for instance the mismatch in the use of *cara/o* [*dear*]. Thus we can see how mock politeness becomes a

mode of aggressive interaction into which both participants shift, as hypothesised by Attardo's (2001) ironical mode adoption theory.⁶⁹

8.3.1c Denying sarcastic / ironic intent

The relevance of the face-attacking function also emerges in the 66 instances of negation of IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* intent because the denial generally acknowledges the potential for face attack. In rejecting any sarcastic or ironic intent, the speaker is often trying to repair face relations. In the example given here, the trigger for repair is the evaluative comment *mi eri sembrata un po' sarcastica* [*I thought you seemed a bit sarcastic*].

(9) Poster B: Oh no...mi dispiace! 😊

io non sono mai stata sarcastica nel forum ma sempre accogliente e gentile!!! infatti quando ti ho detto dell'utero stavo ridendo e scherzando e forse mi è uscito male!! non sempre il senso di ci che si dice si riesce ad esprimere scrivendo!!!! [...]

[Oh no...I'm sorry! 😊

i have never been sarcastic in the forum but always welcoming and kind!!! Actually when I said about the uterus I was laughing and joking and maybe it didn't come out right!! It's not always possible to get across the meaning of what you say when writing!!!]

In (9) the speaker uses a variety of means to distance herself from the SARCASTICO label: explicitly stating that she is never *sarcastica*, thus generalising the behaviour beyond this interaction; asserting a more favourable evaluation of her general

⁶⁹ Gibbs (2000: 18) found that 33% of responses to sarcasm used irony, but his definition of irony was very loose (discussed in Chapter 4) so it is difficult to interpret this finding.

behaviour (*welcoming and kind*); using emoticons and multiple exclamation marks for emphasis and to suggest a closer relationship; apologising (in a salient textual position); offering an explanation in which she sacrifices some aspect of competency face for affective face (Partington 2006); and asserting a general rule about the difficulties of communication. All of which combines to make the rejection of the metapragmatic label more forceful.

To sum up, the analysis shows that the face attacking function, which accounted for over 70% of behaviours labelled as *SARCASTICO/sarcastic*, was primarily presented as defence, although this self-reported justification was not consistently evident in the interactions. It is also clear that *IRONICO* and to a lesser extent, *ironic*, can refer to face-attacking behaviours. We have also seen differences emerging between the English and Italian uses regarding the importance of social identity face.

8.3.2 Face-saving

In this section, I focus on the behaviours which were classified as face-saving. As Figure 8.1 showed, these were a minority group. However, it should also be noted that the use of sarcasm to attack face as a counter strategy (as discussed in the previous section) demonstrates how the face-attack and face-saving functions may move in unison; in protecting his/her own face, the participant attacks that of the interlocutor. These defensive instances are not re-presented in this section, but are clearly an important component to the face-saving repertoire.

8.3.2a The less threatening option

A focus on face-saving was also seen in the set of occurrences where being *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* or *IRONICO/ironic* was presented as a less-threatening means of committing face attack. From the literature surveyed in Chapter 4 (e.g. Leech 1993;

Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995), we might have expected this to be a primary use of ironic and, to a lesser extent, sarcastic behaviour. However, we have already seen from Figure 8.1 that even at its most frequent, in the behaviours denoted by the Italian IRONICO, this function only accounts for 31% of the speech events.

Starting with SARCASTICO/*sarcastic*, in the data examined here, there was little evidence that these behaviours involved mitigating face attack, as anticipated from the second order theorisation. There were just two instances of *sarcastic* in the UK data where face-saving was mentioned, and in both, the focus was to save the face of the person performing the *sarcastic* behaviour. In (10), the use of sarcasm is recommended by the writer because it will allow the speaker to save face by appearing more in *control* (see, for instance, Duguid 2011; Partington et. al 2013 on the importance of control for evaluation).

(10) Always sounds more **sarcastic** and don't mess with me if you can avoid shouting - shows you are in control and she hasn't ruffled you. Losing your temper will probably induce eye-rolling and not necessarily make her stop.

As seen in the previous chapter, sarcasm is evaluated as a means of expressing aggression while maintaining control and this is what makes im/politeness mismatch so central to institutional and public discourse types such as political interviews (Mullany 2002), parliamentary discourse (Pirainen-Marsh 2005; Ilie 2004) and courtroom discourse (Harris 2011; Taylor 2011). However, as we see here, this function carries over into everyday conversational contexts and this was also noted for the Italian data.

In the Italian data, there were seven instances in which the person describing the SARCASTICO behaviour acknowledges some mitigation; five referred to indirectness in

behaviour (shown in example 11) and two of these referred more specifically to indirectness in the expression of jealousy.

(11) una famosa neurologa di un famoso centro cefalee un giorno mi ha detto che secondo lei ero io che esageravo (con dieci crisi di seguito ooooo!) che alla fine si tratta di un banale mal di testa, che dovevi prima risolvere i miei problemi esistenziali e POI avrei risolto anche le crisi... la tentazione iniziale è stata quella di spaccarle la testa col martelletto per i riflessi... tutto quello che ho fatto è stato alzarmi, dirle "vabbè, le far sapere come sto dopo la psicoterapia" **col mio migliore tono sarcastico** e andare via....

[a well-known neurologist in a well-known migraine specialist centre once told me that she thought I was exaggerating with 10 attacks a day! that in the end it was just a normal headache, that I need to sort out my existential problems and THEN I would have solved the attacks... my first reaction was to hit her over the head with the hammer for testing reflexes... all I did was get up, say 'Fine I will let you know how I am after the psychotherapy' with my most sarcastic tone and leave.]

While the behaviour described in (11) is less face-attacking than the 'desired' behaviour which involves physical aggression, in line with Dews et al. (1995) and Boylan & Katz (2013), once again the scope is presented as primarily the protection of the speaker's face. As in the English data, the person performing the behaviour is showing that she can handle the situation and behave in socially acceptable ways, in other words maintaining *control*.

There was only one instance of SARCASTICO behaviour which was presented as hearer-face-saving, and it is the speaker who gives it that evaluation, as seen in (12). The speaker classifies their previous post as a *modo scherzoso* [joking way] of committing the face attack and part of the category of *critiche scherzose* [light-hearted criticisms].

(12) forse ti è sfuggito qualcosa, ma il mio primo commento era dalla prima all'ultima parola **sarcastico**. era un modo scherzoso per farvi notare quanto fossero ridicoli i vostri commenti...tu avresti potuto prenderla con un sorriso, come ha fatto [NAME], ma non è stato così...al che io mi sono adattato al vostro modo di fare e cioè quello di **denigrare le persone piuttosto che accettare critiche scherzose**.

[maybe you [S] have missed something, but my first comment was sarcastic from the beginning to the end, it was a joking way to show you [PL] how ridiculous your [PL] comments were... you [S] could have taken it with a smile, like [NAME], but you didn't, so I adapted to your [PL] way of doing things, that is to insult people rather than accept light-hearted joking criticisms]

Despite the face-saving claim, as can be seen, in the 'repair' the speaker re-asserts the face attack very directly, labelling the other participants' comments as *ridiculous*. The speaker also intensifies the face attack by moving from a plural second person to the singular and unfavourably evaluates the addressee's response with reference to that of other participants.

This superficial face-saving use was reflected in the use of **IRONICO** to refer to the speaker's own behaviour, as illustrated in (13).

(13) Certe volte date delle risposte davvero cretine!!!!

Tanto valeva che stavi zitto!!! P.S. non te la prendere è **detto in modo ironico**...anche se nn mi è di nessun aiuto quello che hai detto..

[Sometimes you [PL] give the most stupid answers!!!!]

You [SING] might as well have said nothing!!! P.S. don't get offended [SING], I'm being ironic...even though what you [SING] said is no use to me]

As can be seen, the speaker asserts the face attack in a bald on-record manner, initially addressing multiple forum users and then more specifically one user (this is seen in

the shift from the plural to singular 'you' form again), thus intensifying the threat through the strategy of personalisation. The response may be seen to threaten both quality face and relational face, by suggesting that those who had answered were not valuable participants in their interactions (e.g. *you give the most stupid answers*). This is then followed by the apparent mitigation which asks the addressees not to be offended and asserts the ironic intention. However, the face attack is then re-asserted, albeit more mildly in the final section. Therefore, once again the mitigation does not appear to be primarily directed at saving face for the target, but that of the speaker (presentation as the kind of forum contributor who does not seriously attack other members), perhaps with reference to some overhearing audience who may be future interactants.

In the English occurrences of *ironic* there were no instances where the speakers reference face-saving as a main reason for using irony in past, future or hypothetical behaviours. This may be part of the pattern we have already observed in which *ironic* behaviour is not evaluated within an im/polite frame to the same extent as *sarcastic* or *IRONICO*. However, as noted above, there were very few occurrences in the English data and so caution should be taken in interpreting the results.

In the Italian data, there was a stronger pattern of mitigation (18% of all behaviours), as illustrated in (14), which is more in line with expectations from the literature discussed in Chapter 4, although many instances of face-saving were clearly speaker-oriented (as already seen in 13).

(14) Thread title: Sono troppo gelosa e sto rovinando tutto, per favore aiutatemi... [I'm too jealous and I'm ruining everything: please help me...]

Poster F: siccome io sono nella tua stessa barca , ti consiglio di dosarti... cioè sbotta solo per i casi necessari , cioè quando una è sospetta , non a priori ..e poi **prova ad**

essere ironica , cioè **sdrammatizza** sul tuo "difetto" magari buttandola sul ridere , cioè lo dici ma simpaticamente.. vedrai che alleggerenzo la prende meglio. [as I'm in the same situation, I advise you to control yourself... like speak up only when needed, like when there is something suspicious, not a priori, and then try to be ironic, like try to play down your 'defect' maybe making him laugh, like you say it but in a funny way... you'll see that lightening up he'll take it better]

Example (14) also shows the similarity between SARCASTICO and IRONICO behaviours as the speaker is here negotiating expression of jealousy, in which the speaker is constrained by the need to criticise the other person's quality and relational face (representing them as the kind of person / partner who is potentially unfaithful) without damaging their own face and threatening the rapport. In (14), the recommended tool for negotiating this tension is irony, used to play down the speaker's jealousy, and this 'playing down' aspect is important in the Italian data, as discussed further below.

8.3.2b The importance of light-heartedness

In the Italian data, there was a pattern of emphasis on 'light-heartedness' and the use of IRONICO behaviours as way to *sdrammatizzare* [to play down], as seen in (14) and also in the collocates of IRONICO discussed in the previous chapter. This is part of the speaker-oriented face-saving usage, and is further illustrated in the concordance lines in Figure 8.6.

e poi prova ad essere **ironica**, cioè **sdrammatizza** sul tuo "difetto" magari buttandola sul cintura, **di qualcosa di ironico**, per **sdrammatizzare** e forse vedendo il sorriso dei tuoi vicini ai bisogna essere **un po ironici e autoironici** nella vita **per non drammatizzare**.

io ho fatto **una battuta ironica** paragonando anche con la C., era un modo per **sdrammatizzare** che inutile dire il **suo modo ironico** di scrivere[...]una risata di **sdrammatizzare**. in questo ti avverto molto. **Magari sdrammatizzano**, attraverso le **battute ironiche**, cercano di animare il gruppo di colleghi.

and then try to be ironic, like play down your 'defect' maybe going for
 , say something ironic, to play it down and maybe seeing the smile of your
 need to be a bit ironic and self-ironic in life to avoid being melodramatic
 I made a n ironic joke comparing with C too, it was a way of playing down
 goes without saying his ironic way of writing [...] a joke to play things down in this I feel that
 maybe they are playing it down, through the ironic jokes, they're trying to enliven the group

Figure 8.6 Concordance lines showing co-occurrences of IRONICO [ironic] and SDRAMMATIZZARE/DRAMMATIZZARE [play down/be melodramatic]

This association also appears to extend outside the specific realm of the *alfemminile* corpus. For instance in the *ItTenTen* corpus, SDRAMMATIZZARE [*to play down*] occurs as one of the most salient verb collocates of IRONICO, as shown in Table 8.1

Table 8.1 Most salient verb collocates of IRONICO in ItTenTen

Collocata	Freq	logDice
dissacrare [desecrate/be irreverent]	327	7.889
pungere [sting]	88	5.849
sorridere [smile]	196	5.516
sdrammatizzare [play down]	52	5.25
spiazzare [throw/catch off guard]	50	4.875
divertire [entertain]	155	4.871
graffiare [scratch]	38	4.75
rivisitare [revise]	44	4.737
condire [season/flavour]	52	4.666
brillare [shine]	54	4.564

The importance of downplaying and maintaining a light-hearted approach was also lexicalised in other ways, as shown in (15) in which the speaker is giving advice about saving face.

(15) Anch' io sono in realta' timidissima, e con gli anni, ho imparato a camuffare bene questo "handicap". [...] Usare molto humor e ridere assieme agli altri delle proprie gaffe. **Essere ironici, e non prendere le cose troppo sul serio**, insomma. [In reality I've very shy too, and over time, I've learnt how to hide this 'handicap' well. [...] Use a lot of humour and laugh along with others about your own mistakes. Be ironic, and don't take things too seriously, basically]

In this pattern of usage we can see correspondences with the importance of 'not taking yourself too seriously' which has been highlighted as key to interactions in Australian English (e.g. Goddard 2009) and hypothesised for British English (Haugh & Bousfield 2012). The fact that this is not reflected in the British English data analysed here probably points towards cultural differences at a sub-national level as the participants in the Haugh & Bousfield study were males from the north-West of England.

8.3.2c Self-targetted sarcasm and irony

This focus on being 'light-hearted' was also relevant to another important category of face-saving that emerged from the analysis of IRONICO and SARCASTICO; those in which the speaker targeted him/herself. This was mainly seen in the instances where the speaker was evaluating their own behaviour and applied to both IRONICO and SARCASTICO in the Italian data. The frequency was illustrated in Figures 8.3 and 8.5 which showed that it was more common in the Italian data studied here (14% of

SARCASTICO utterances and 10% of IRONICO utterances) than the data from Gibbs (2000: 16).⁷⁰ This use is illustrated in (16).

(16) Ho già fatto 2 cicli di chemio, perso i capelli e messo il catetere centrale.....uno spasso!!! (**in modo sarcastico**). [I have already had two courses of treatment, lost my hair and had a catheter fitted... what fun!! (meant sarcastically)]

In these instances, the ‘target’ of the sarcasm is the speaker or some difficult situation in which the speaker finds him/herself (rather like situational irony). Although drawing attention to this could have a face-attacking effect, the cumulative effect is one of face-saving by allowing the speaker to express dissatisfaction with their situation while limiting risk to their face which may emerge from the act of complaining. The effect of this indirect style of evaluation or appraisal of their situation may be to lighten the effect of the ‘complaining’ as a form of self-presentation, and the ideal/actual mismatch may additionally emphasise the difficulties they face. This function has previously been discussed with reference to irony, for instance, Dews et al. (1995) hypothesise that it manages threat to relational face by placing less strain on the speaker-hearer relationship (see also Lee & Katz 2000; Brown 1995). Furthermore, research into ‘self-mockery’ (e.g. Yu 2013) suggests that it has a face-enhancement function by bringing amusement to the interaction (a positive politeness strategy in Brown & Levinson’s terms).

This association of sarcasm with situational targets in the Italian data is particularly interesting because the absence of a human target for the SARCASTICO behaviour

⁷⁰ And this is despite the broad definition of irony that Gibbs was employing.

contrasts with previous reports that sarcasm is more likely to have an addressee and involve laughing *at* (for instance Lee and Katz 1998). This may point towards a different first-order conception of sarcasm in the Italian data. The presence of similar patterns in the Italian IRONICO data, as seen in example (17) below, suggest that, once again, we are seeing evidence of a less distinct boundary in first-order understandings of sarcasm and irony in Italian.

(17) E non e' stato umiliante quando poco dopo l'operazione (quando mi hanno tolto il catetere) dovevo andare in bagno e mio marito mi ha dovuto pulire il didietro e cambiarmi il pannolino x le perdite perche' io non ci riuscivo (**con forte tono ironico!**)!!!

[and no it wasn't at all humiliating when not long after the operation (when they took the catheter out) I had to go to the toilet and my husband had to clean me behind and change my nappy for the leaks because I couldn't do it (with a highly ironic tone!!!!)]

Here too, the speaker uses the IRONICO behaviour to convey the discomfort and humiliation of the situation which has potential for loss of face while concurrently distancing themselves from the narrative through the irony, thus trying to protect their own face. This usage again shows the overlaps in functions of ironic behaviour with humor, which is 'often used in troubles-talk as a means of coping with a difficult situation, or to deprecate oneself to protect from anticipated deprecations by others' (Hay 2001: 74).

8.3.2d Deniability and face-saving

Other means of face-saving played on the deniability of *ironic* and *sarcastic* behaviour, as might be predicted by the Brown and Levinson (1987) models of off-record strategies, and noted in the previous chapter. For instance, in the second person references there was a pattern of the metapragmatic labels being used coercively. In

such instances, typically a hearer disagrees with a speaker and s/he therefore offers a sarcastic or ironic interpretation to allow the speaker to distance themselves from the (perceived) face-attack. This is illustrated in (18) which is also representative in that the face-saving 'opt out' of a sarcastic/ironic intention was frequently declined. Indeed, in (18), the speaker both declines the sarcastic interpretation and re-asserts the face attack.

(18) Poster A: [...] Is [Poster B] being **sarcastic**, sorry, wasn't sure?

Poster C: I'm not sure if it [Poster B] was being serious either. [...]

Poster B. **Am amazed that people thought I was being sarcastic!** I am yet to hear a single acceptable reason why it's fair on anyone - employer, fellow employee's, the general workforce - that the system is abused in this manner. [...]

To summarise, despite the expectations from the second-order theory, face-saving was a minor type of facework and even when it did apply, the speakers were generally focussing saving their own face, not that of the hearer. Surprisingly, this applied to IRONICO as well as *sarcastic*/ SARCASTICO.

8.3.3 *Face-enhancing*

The final function considered here is that of face-enhancement which, as shown in Figure 8.1, was a significant category of *ironic* (55% of all behaviours) and IRONICO (24% of all behaviours). Clearly, there is overlap with the previous category of face-saving, but the practices that are considered in this section do not work around an unavoidable face attack.

The main scope for face-enhancement in the data considered here lies in the mechanism of contextual mismatch, as Booth states 'ironic reconstructions depend on an appeal to assumptions, often unstated, that ironists and readers share' (1974: 33).

Thus, in order for addressees or other beneficiaries to interpret an utterance as ironic or sarcastic, they need to share some set of knowledge with the speaker, and then appreciation of the irony or sarcasm will also imply some shared (critical) evaluation. This means that the appreciation of an utterance as ironic or sarcastic holds potential for face enhancement because the speaker and hearer are claiming and recognising common ground. Again, we may see connections with humour theory. For instance, Hay (2001) claims that there are four implicatures associated with signalling appreciation of humour: recognition of a humorous frame, understanding the humour, appreciating the humour, and agreeing with any message associated with it. Thus, understanding the contextual mismatch and subsequent appreciation of both humour and irony/sarcasm can be seen to perform supportive facework by raising and emphasising the common ground.

The most common practice for face enhancement in the two forums was through shared criticism and this occurred in both language sets for both *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* and *IRONICO/ironic*. This shared disparagement (Gibbs 2000) partly explains how it is that all behaviours labelled as *SARCASTICO*, *sarcastic* or *ironic* involved the expression of negative opinion and yet the range of facework was much more varied (as seen in Figure 8.1). In some instances, the alignment with a hearer was made explicit through metacomment within the initial turn, as for instance in (19) where the speaker places her criticism on record in the sentences either side of the sarcastic utterance.

(19) they're not exactly trying to help you much are they! can't believe they just expect you to keep going only now take all your marking home. Very generous to 'consider' taking you off your duty (said in **sarcastic** way!). Urgh, they're really not making much of an effort to try and get you to stay on to work are they - surely they realise if they

don't help you out now you'll just end out being too ill to work and they'll have to pay for someone else.

In other instances, the sarcastic or ironic intent was not marked within the initial utterance and the *sarcastic/ironic* label occurred in repair sequences, as in (20), because the alignment had not been recognised.

(20) Poster G: [**Poster K**], at least your DH [dear husband] has long holidays and a **huge** pension to look forward to. [*bold in original text*]

Poster K: Really? another person who has brought into the holidays shite. As for pension, he didn't start teaching until he was 35. He has a very poor pension.

when I first opened this I thought it said huge penis. He does.

Poster G: [Poster K] I was being **ironic**. Apols for winding you up.

Poster C: I thought [Poster G] was being heavily **ironic**, I really did.

The use of bold on *huge* in the original message acts as a cue for the ironic intention (intensification), but the communication mainly relies on a shared cognitive environment, and for this reason it initially fails with the addressee (although it is recognised by other participants). There is, therefore, some risk, and so potential self-face threat, inherent in assuming common ground, thus leading to greater relational rewards when the ironic or sarcastic intent is recognised.

8.4 Mismatch in the behaviours labelled as ironic and sarcastic

Having outlined the facework functions, in this section I focus on mismatch, in order to see to what extent the behaviours labelled as SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* or IRONICO/*ironic* perform 'mockness', that is constitute the insincere part of mock politeness. The first stage of analysis was to identify whether the behaviours actually involved mismatch, and then, more specifically, if they involved im/politeness

mismatch. Where im/politeness mismatch was identified, this was sub-divided into occurrences according to whether the effect on the addressee was politeness or impoliteness, and whether the im/politeness was targeted at someone other than the addressee (e.g. the speaker themselves or a third person). This data is presented in Figure 8.7; the sections relating to mismatch are coloured in brown/orange shades (according to the sub-categories outlined above) and the section indicating no mismatch is coloured in green for contrast.⁷¹

⁷¹ Occurrences which were unclear have been omitted, the raw figures are included in Appendix 1.

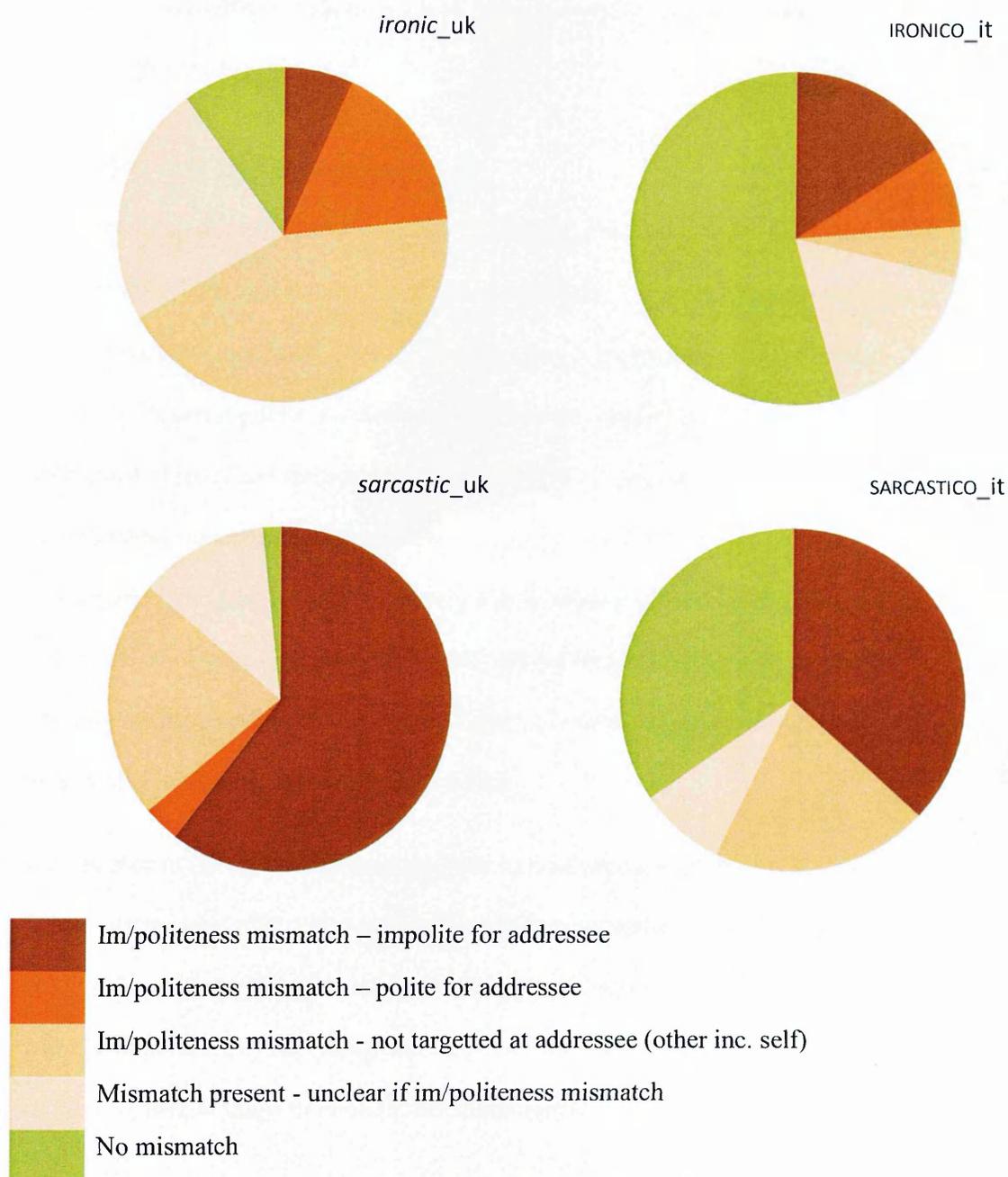


Figure 8.7 Frequency of mismatch in behaviours described as ironic / sarcastic

As can be seen from Figure 8.7., behaviours which are labelled as *sarcastic* and *ironic* in the English language forum much more frequently contain mismatch than the counterparts of SARCASTICO and IRONICO in the Italian language forum. In terms of similarities across the two languages, the mismatch was more pronounced for

sarcastic / SARCASTICO than *ironic* / IRONICO in both datasets. These findings are discussed further below.

8.4.1 Absence of im/politeness mismatch

Before moving on to the consideration of mismatch, I wish to briefly consider what is happening in those verbal behaviours which are labelled as *ironic* or *sarcastic* and where there is *no* mismatch, because the frequency is highly surprising in light of second-order assumptions. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, mismatch is central to definitions of irony and sarcasm from both the field of irony studies itself and from im/politeness studies and yet the first order analysis from Italian strongly challenges this. As seen in Figure 8.7, approximately a third of the occurrences of SARCASTICO and over half of the occurrences of IRONICO did not involve any kind of mismatch. Thus we again see evidence that the description of irony and sarcasm, although presented as universal, is strongly anglocentric.

The absence of mismatch was most frequent in evaluations of others for both labels. Frequently the uses of IRONICO to describe a behaviour without mismatch, and more specifically, without im/politeness mismatch, indexed a non-serious behaviour, in line with the importance of not taking one's self too seriously and being *autorionico* [lit. *self-ironic, able to laugh at oneself*], discussed above.

In the first person, the label of IRONICO served to lower the intensity of the criticism, as we saw in example (13) above. In that instance, the speaker addressed the other participants, stating that they gave *risposte davvero cretine* [*the most stupid answers*] and that they might as well have not replied, before attempting to mitigate the threat with *non te la prendere è detto in modo ironico* [*don't get offended*] / *SINGI*, *I'm being ironic*]. There is no clear mismatch between what is said and what is intended (in both

cases: your advice was not good / appreciated), and the only possible mismatch is one of intensity. In such instances, it is more likely that the speaker is exploiting the deniability of the structures of sarcasm/irony and by claiming ironic/sarcastic intent aims to save face. This is further illustrated in (21) where the speaker claims a sarcastic intent. In this case, Poster B opened a thread in which she criticises an actress's physical appearance and links to photos which show pictures of the actress in different clothing styles. There are no contextualising cues that this is intended to be taken non-sincerely, nor do the responses suggest that any other participant saw a reversal of evaluation. After a period of time, the thread is re-activated with several posters attacking the face of Poster B by disaffiliating from her opinions and interests. Poster B then returns to the thread asserting that the original post was intended sarcastically, as seen below.

(21) Ah ah ah

ma da dove l'hanno ripescato questo post? Sara' di TRE anni fa!!

Ma dai, scherzavo! **Il tutto era sarcastico**. Figuriamoci se io mi metto a criticare il fisico delle persone

Just... relax!

[Ha ha ha

Where have they found this post? It must be THREE years old!!

Come on, I was joking! It was all sarcastic. There's no way I would start criticising other people's bodies

Just... relax!]

In the case of SARCASTICO, half of the occurrences in the third person category were apparently mild, bald on-record face attack such as *non mi piacciono i capelli....* [*I don't like your hair*] and telling someone that *sembrava una contadinella* [*she looked*

like a peasant]. It would then appear that the main semantic feature which is accessed is that of face-attack and not that of mismatch.

Moving to the category indicated in the lightest orange shade in Figure 8.7, there were two features which accounted for some mismatch but did not realise im/politeness mismatch and these were hyperbole (mismatch of strength of evaluation) and rhetorical questions (illocutionary mismatch), both of which are listed as sub-types of irony, alongside sarcasm, in Gibbs (2000) and both of which are considered cues for irony/sarcasm (as discussed in Chapter 4). As shown in (22) below, these instances, particularly rhetorical questions, could perform impoliteness, but did not necessarily involve im/politeness mismatch. Example (22) comes from a long exchange in which Poster E started a thread praising a particular method of encouraging babies to sleep, the responses showed that several forum posters thought she was a sales person and, as such not respecting the norms of their community. In response to this perceived threat, they replied attacking her sociality rights as well as face. The following exchange then ensued:

(22) Poster E: Sono il marito di [NAME].... ho una semplice domanda....ma tuo figlio/a dorme????? [I'm [NAME]'s husband... I have a simple question... does your baby sleep?????]

Poster S: [...] Mi spiace tra l'altro che intervenga tuo marito chiedendo ad una forummina se il figlio dorme... cosa vorrebbe dire con questa domanda? tra le righe ci leggo una punta di impertinenza... come per dire:"tuo figlio dorme??? No??? e allora che parli a fare?". [...] [...] [I also didn't like your husband coming in and asking a poster if her baby sleeps... what was he getting at with that question? Between the lines I read some rudeness... as if to say "your baby doesn't sleep??? No??? so what are you talking about?"]

Poster E: [...]Termino dicendoti che mio marito è intervenuto **non per essere impertinente o sarcastico**, ma semplicemente perchè leggendo questi post, non credeva ai suoi occhi [...]. I'll finish by saying that my husband didn't come on to be rude or sarcastic, but simply because reading these posts, he couldn't believe his eyes [...].

The behaviour which is described by Poster E as *not* being SARCASTICO is evaluated by Poster S as conveying the meaning indirectly (*between the lines*) through implicature. However, the only possible mismatch is illocutionary, assuming that the question is rhetorical and the speaker is *making as if* to show interest in her baby in order to threaten her quality (competence) face and right to participate. Thus the mismatch would lie between the apparent expression of interest and the presupposition of lack of knowledge. Thus, what emerges is a picture of IRONICO holding a strong core sense of non-serious and SARCASTICO as holding the core sense of implicational impoliteness, which in some cases overlaps with mock politeness.

8.4.2 Location of im/politeness mismatch

Previous research into irony and sarcasm has hypothesised that, as well as being more aggressive, sarcasm is more overt and more likely to be on-record (e.g. Barbe 1995). Therefore, in the next stage of the analysis, the behaviours labelled as SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* and IRONICO/*ironic* were categorised in terms of where the mismatch occurred; whether it was present in the co-text (internal mismatch in

Culpeper's 2011 terms) or whether it was located in the context and shared knowledge of the participants (external mismatch).⁷² The results are reported in Figure 8.8.

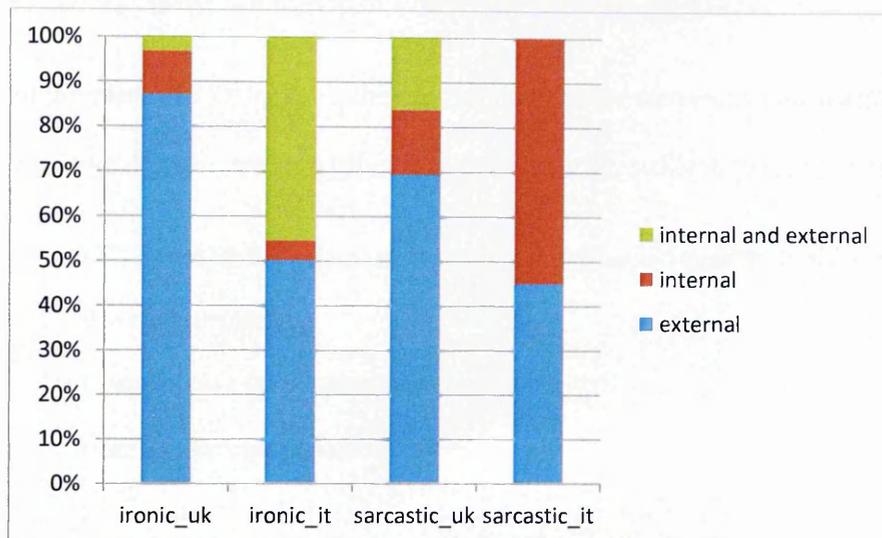


Figure 8.8 Location of mismatch

The findings shown in Figure 8.8 indicate that there is no clear correlation between the location of the mismatch and whether the behaviour is labelled as SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* and IRONICO/*ironic*. A more distinct similarity in Figure 8.8 is between the mismatch location and language set, as internal mismatch was more common for both Italian items IRONICO and SARCASTICO. The frequency of internal mismatch would, therefore, seem to challenge the assumption that irony is more likely to be deniable than sarcasm because when the mismatch lies in the co-text it is overt. Furthermore, it would seem to challenge assertions that irony cannot be stated, for instance according to Attardo (2001: 111) 'the ironical meaning needs to be inferred,

⁷² This is not to simply equate internal/external mismatch with on/off recordness because the explicitness of the co-textual mismatch will be scalar, but it provides a starting point for testing whether *sarcastic/ironic* behaviour may be differentiated with reference to the kind of mismatch.

it is never “said” (in Grice’s sense), i.e. found in the text itself” (see also Dynel 2013). This may, once again, point towards a higher salience of insincerity than off-recordness in the description of a behaviour as IRONICO / SARCASTICO.

In the cases of SARCASTICO, the mismatch was more frequently constructed using a garden-path type structure (discussed in Chapter 3), as illustrated in example (23).

(23) Poster M: Io ed il mio ex ragazzo ci siamo lasciati qualche giorno fa ma ora siamo diventati scopamici!

Come faccio a farlo innamorare di nuovo?!

Grazie in anticipo popolo 😊

[Poster M: Me and my ex split up a few days ago but now we have become fuck-buddies!

How do I make him fall in love with me again?!

TIA people 😊]

Poster N: E che cavolo di senos ha?

[What the hell is the point?]

Poster M: Molto utile il tuo consiglio devo dire... **sono sarcastica al 100%!**

[Very helpful advice I have to say... I am being 100% sarcastic!]

In example (23), Poster M self-describes as *sarcastica* so that the previous utterance, apparently showing appreciation for Poster N’s contribution is necessarily (re)interpreted as insincere and therefore an attack on Poster N’s face. Thus the metapragmatic comment itself makes the mismatch internal to the utterance. The attack was somewhat stronger in the original format because the speaker exploited the multimodal affordances of the forum which is structured so that only the first part would have been visible initially, shown in Figure 8.9, thus potentially creating a garden path structure, moving from apparent face-enhancement to face-attack.

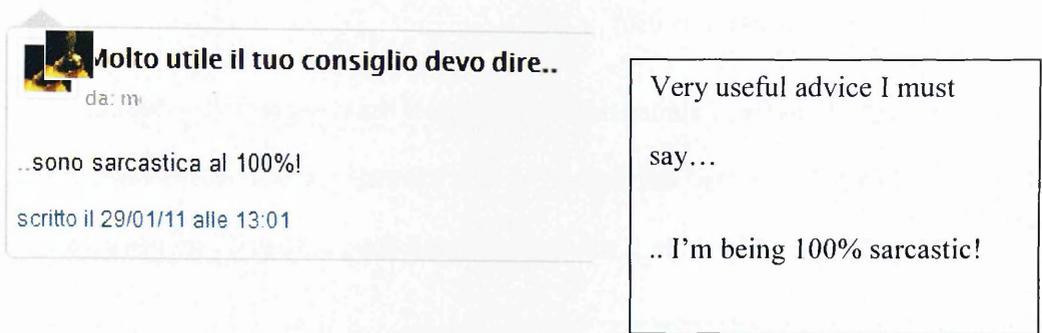


Figure 8.9 Screenshot showing structure of forum messages in the Italian forum (example 23)

However, as the previous poster did not actually offer any advice, it appears that there was little likelihood for the mock politeness in the title (*Very useful advice I must say...*) to have been interpreted as politeness. Instead, the contextual (external) mismatch in the mock appreciation draws attention to Poster N's inappropriate behaviour (from Poster M's perspective) in that s/he does not offer advice as might be expected, thus attacking relational face by presenting him/her as a poor forum member. The co-textual (internal) mismatch, stating the sarcastic intent, subsequently puts the face attack on-record for all hearers and thus reinforces the resulting face attack. According to research by Afifi & Burgoon (2000) this type of garden-path structure may enhance potential face-attack on the basis that:⁷³⁷⁴

if individuals choose to move from initial behavior that is consistent with the social expectation to behavior that violates social norms, then uncertainty may increase. Observers are less able to discount the socially violative behavior, because it appears to be a conscious move away from the socially expected behavior initially displayed

⁷³ Spellings as in original.

⁷⁴ Although it should be noted that they are focussing on deviations from an expected behaviour and expressly note that in some circumstances the expected behaviour would be 'disdain' (2000: 226).

Similar garden-path features were found in other behaviours in which the speaker self-identified as SARCASTICO, for instance with one poster leaving a very large blank space between the ostensible politeness and face attack, shown Figure 8.10.

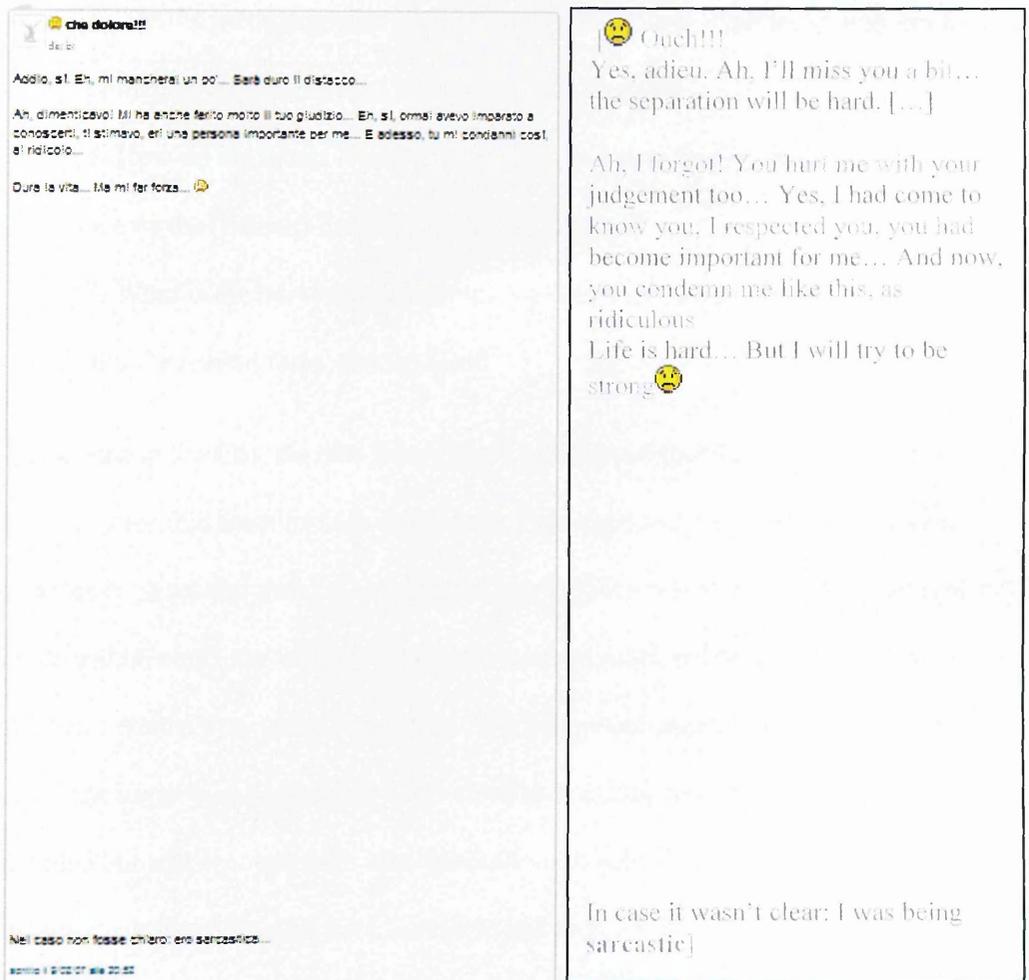


Figure 8.10 Screenshot showing use of space in sarcastic utterances

In both cases, the speaker was responding to previous face attack in the forum and the target and addressee of the sarcasm is the forum user who performed that attack. This strategic defence use was characteristic of these overt examples where the statement 'I am being sarcastic' constitutes the co-textual mismatch.

8.5 Summary

In this chapter I have analysed the behaviours to which the metapragmatic labels SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* and IRONICO/*ironic* refer and so I now return to the three questions posed at the beginning of this chapter:

1. Are the metapragmatic labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?
2. How do the labels *ironic* and *sarcastic* relate to one another within and across the (British) English and Italian corpora?
3. What is the relationship between the first-order uses of *ironic* and *sarcastic* and the second order descriptions?

In response to the first, the data from Figure 8.7 showed that they are used less frequently for this function than might have been expected given the dominance of these terms in second-order discussions of mock polite behaviours. In the instances of *ironic* and IRONICO, the behaviours which involved mock politeness directed at an addressee were a very small proportion. This proportion increased when instances where the target was the speaker him/herself or someone outside the interaction were included but still accounted for less than half of all behaviours in the Italian data and just over half in the English data. *Sarcastic* and SARCASTICO were used more frequently to describe behaviours which performed mock politeness (60% and 37% respectively), but a substantial proportion of utterances did not perform this function.

With reference to the second question, the uses of *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO in the English and Italian datasets were more closely matched than those of *ironic* and IRONICO. Both *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO involved mismatch more frequently than *ironic* / IRONICO and they involved the expression of negative opinion in all instances,

although this did not always equal negative facework. The uses of *ironic* and IRONICO differed more substantially and they related to *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO in different ways, as was also evident from the findings in the previous chapter. In the English data we saw that *ironic* and *sarcastic* are perceived as distinct behaviours; *ironic* rarely referred to impolite behaviours and appeared to have a weaker association with identity than *sarcastic* in the English data. Furthermore, the number of occurrences of *ironic* referring to verbal behaviours was low, possibly indicating that the semantic shift mentioned in Attardo (2013) is also occurring in British English, although this would be a separate study requiring diachronic comparison. In the Italian data, IRONICO seemed to accomplish similar work to SARCASTICO and indeed the two items appeared to have a more fluid relationship in the Italian forum data. However, IRONICO also performed additional work, for instance, describing non-serious behaviours, and the presence of the lexical item *autoironico* [literally *self-irony, not taking one self too seriously*] indicates the importance of this function. IRONICO and SARCASTICO were also used in the Italian data to refer to flirting and sexually-charged behaviours, a pattern which was not evident in the English data.

Moving on to the third question, it is clear that neither *sarcastic* nor SARCASTICO can be directly equated with mock politeness. As has already occurred for banter and teasing, the social actions need to be differentiated from the (potential) evaluation.

Given that there is a little consensus in the second-order literature, it is inevitable that some features seem to fit and others contrast. The significant differences in usage between *ironic* and *sarcastic* in the English data would suggest that it is problematic to equate them (e.g. as in Attardo et al. 2003; Pexman & Olineck 2002) and more work is required in this area. Furthermore, the differences between usage in the English and Italian data also suggest that features of ‘irony’ in a universal sense, as

discussed in the literature, are actually more language/culture specific and more analysis is required in order to identify the shared features and to move away from 'the all too frequent practice of using data in English as an unmarked or unspoken baseline' (Haugh 2012: 113). In both sets of data, there was greater cohesion between the first and second order conceptualisations of *sarcastic* behaviour and greater divergence with reference to *ironic* behaviour. Interestingly, Partington (2006) suggests that Sperber & Wilson's (1981) echoic mention theory may be more accurately described as a theory of echoic sarcasm and this appears to be a more general finding: first order irony is just more much more diverse.

CHAPTER 9 METAPRAGMATIC LABELS AND MOCK POLITENESS

9.1 Introduction

One of the difficulties raised in the previous chapters is that the terms *ironic* and *sarcastic* dominate the academic discussion of those behaviours that I am referring to as mock politeness, but this is not necessarily reflected in the first order, lay usage of these terms. This then presents us with a new question, namely, what terms *are* used to refer to mock politeness? In this chapter, I attempt to answer this question by examining a range of terms that *could* indicate mock politeness and investigating how these terms are used and what kind of behaviours they refer to. Thus, this chapter is about both what terms *do* refer to mock polite behaviours, and which do *not*. In this analysis, I use first-order descriptions of im/politeness mismatch to develop our second-order understanding of this phenomenon, in a similar way to the previous chapters focussing on irony and sarcasm. As discussed in Chapter 5, this methodology of starting with participant labels follows in the footsteps of work such as Culpeper (2009, 2011a) and Partington (2007), and essentially draws on corpus-based lexical semantics as pioneered by Stubbs (2001a).

The main research questions which are addressed through the analysis in this chapter are the following:

1. What metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?
2. How do these labels relate to one another within and across languages?

In response to the first question, I start by identifying items that could refer to mock politeness through concordancing politeness metapragmatic comments such as *polite* and examining their collocates for any reference to mismatch (section 9.2). I also

investigate the 29 possible metapragmatic mock politeness labels used in the corpus compilation (section 9.3). In responding to the second question, I combine a collocational approach with more qualitative categorisation. As in the previous chapter, I examine in particular the evaluative weight of the label; what kind of facework is enacted; whether the behaviour is considered direct or indirect; and whether the behaviour involves echoic mention. These key characteristics are taken from the literature reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4 and provide a means of understanding how it is that these lexical items cluster together even though they do not all refer to mock polite behaviours.

9.2 References to insincerity in meta-politeness labels

In order to identify potential reference to mismatch in the politeness expressions, all the modifiers of POLITE, *politeness*, KIND, *kindness*, FRIENDLY, *friendliness*, GENTILE [KIND], GENTILISSIMO [KIND-superlative], GENTILEZZA [KINDNESS], CORTESE [KIND], CORTESIA [KINDNESS] and GARBATO [POLITE] were identified and grouped according to the kind of modification that they indicated.⁷⁵ These collocates were not ranked by salience because all collocates were considered. This comprehensive approach was taken because of the possibility that low frequency items which cumulatively form a set could be missed (for more on the need to group low frequency items in order to perceive patterns see, for example, Baker 2006). The results are summarised in Table 9.1, with the frequency given in brackets next to each lexical item. The collocates are

⁷⁵ The metapragmatic labels of impoliteness such as *rude*, *impolite* and so on were also concordanced, but did not yield discussion of mock politeness and therefore are not reported here.

presented in semantic groupings which emerged from clustering similar items together and then identifying the functions which that group fulfilled⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Although the categories emerged from the data, I am not suggesting that those categorisations are somehow untainted by the hand of the researcher, as discussed in Baker et al. (2013).

Table 9.1 Summary of modifying collocates of *polite/cortese* etc.⁷⁷

Node	Quantity: Excess	Quantity: Large amount	Quantity: Sufficiency	Quantity: Insufficiency	Quality	Consistency
polite	too (64), overly (5), excessively (1), over (1)	very (99), really (16), extremely (7), terribly (4), totally (4), super (3), incredibly (2), particularly (2), uber (1)	only (25), just (12), quite (4), rather (3), pretty (2), perfectly (9)		British (2),	always (15), generally (5), unfailingly (2)
politeness			just (5), basic (2), general (2)			
kind	too (19)	very (154), really (36), extremely (6), incredibly (2), most (2), unbelievably (2), especially (1), wonderfully (1), particularly (1)	fairly (2), pretty (2)		genuinely (4)	always (5), still (3), generally (1)
kindness		great (4), much (2), enormous (1), extra (1), incredible (1)	general (3)	little (1)	human (7), gentle (2)	
friendly	too (5), over (9), overly (4)	very (193), really (54), particularly (7), extremely (5), incredibly (4), most (4), especially (3), definitely (2), v (1), ridiculously (2)	pretty (3), fairly (2), reasonably (1), relatively (1), perfectly (2),		genuinely (2), apparently (1), obviously (1)	generally (6), usually (3)
friendliness		major (1)				
gentile/i [kind]	troppo (50)	molto [very] (738), davvero [really] (99), veramente [truly] (34), tanto [so]	abbastanza [enough] (6), piuttosto [quite] (1), solo	niente [nothing] (2), nulla	finte [artificial] (1), fintamente	sempre [always]

⁷⁷ The judgements regarding excess were based on reading the concordance lines.

	(25), super (10), proprio [really] (8), estremamente [extremely] (17), eccessivamente [excessively] (2), mooolto [very – spelling variant] (2), particolarmente [particularly] (2), taaaanto [so spelling variant] (2), davvero [really] (1), mooolto [very – spelling variant] (1), mooolto [very – spelling variant] (1), parecchio (1)	[only](4)	[nothing] (1), poco [little] (28), affatto [at all] (1), mai [never] (1)	[artificially] (73) (1), realmente [truly] (1)
gentilissim*[kind – superlative] gentilezza [kindness] L1 & R1	assolutamente [absolutely] (2), proprio [really] (4), davvero [really] (84), veramente [truly] (1) incredibile [incredible] (1), estrema [extreme] (1)		poco [little] (2)	sempre [always] (107) unica [unique] (9), innata [innate] (2), squisita [exquisite] (1)
cortese/I [kind] cortesia L1 & R1[kindness]	davvero [really] (2), molto [very] (83), tanto [so] (5), veramente [truly] (2), estremamente [extremely] (2) Massima [maximum] (1), grande [great] (8), molta [very] (7), massima [maximum] (4), tanta [so] (4), grossa [great] (3), grandissima (2) [great], ottima (2) [best], estrema [extreme] (2)	abbastanza [enough] (1), solo [only] (2) solo [only] (1), soltanto [only] (1)	niente [nothing] (4), poco [little] (2) nessuna [nothing] (1), niente [nothing] (1), zero (3), poca [little] (2)	sempre [always] (9) pura [pure] (5), unica [unique] (5)
garbata/o/e/i [polite] garbo [politeness]	molto [very] (25), tanto [so] (2), davvero [really] (2) tanto [so] (2), molto [very] (11)	abbastanza [enough] (1)	mai (3), poco [little] (4) senza (2), poco [little] (1)	sempre [always] (2) gelidamente [icy] (1)

First of all, we might note that *mock polite/politeness* itself did not occur in the English corpus and even when the search was extended from the corpus to the whole forum on the website there were no occurrences. In some ways, this makes the use of the term *mock politeness* in this research project somewhat less problematic given that it is not actually used as a first order descriptor (see Culpeper 2011a: 72 on using the label ‘impoliteness’ for similar reasons). To the best of my knowledge, there is no clear equivalent to ‘mock politeness’ as a second-order descriptor in Italian and therefore this could not be searched. However, compared to Italian, there is a much larger body of politeness study published in Spanish,⁷⁸ and the term *descortesía encubierta* [*hidden impoliteness*] is employed to refer to what is termed *mock politeness* in English (e.g. in Alba-Juez 2008).⁷⁹ Therefore, the Italian forum was searched for cognates, but there were no results, as with the English data.

Indeed, as can be seen from Table 9.1, only a small proportion of the collocates (marked in bold) show potential for describing mock politeness. The analysis showed that many of the excess markers simply intensified the favourable evaluation of another’s polite behaviour, for instance *too kind* when expressing gratitude. This intensification function was also seen in the modifiers relating to sincerity; *realmente* [*really*], *veramente* [*really, truly*] and *genuinely*. Therefore, in the following section, I focus on the references to excess where there was some mismatch.

⁷⁸ See for example the events and publications from the Programa EDICE [Estudios sobre el Discurso de la Cortesía en Español]; and Placencia (2007) for an overview.

⁷⁹ Although this is potentially a polysemous item because its counterpart, *cortesía encubierta*, is the standard term used to refer to *off-record impoliteness*.

9.2.1 *Mock politeness*

The only phraseology which showed potential for predicting mock polite behaviours was *overly polite*, which is discussed as negatively-marked relational behaviour in Locher & Watts (2005). Three of the five instances indicated a strategic im/politeness mismatch, in response to a face attack, as shown in (1) which was a reply to a post asking for advice on how to handle a clique.

(1) Just ignore them right back or alternatively be **overly polite and friendly**. That usually makes em feel really silly.

In this case, we can see that the speaker is advising the use of politeness, not with the intention of mitigating some FTA or enhancing an addressee's face but in order to *make em feel really silly*, in other words in order to perform face attack. In each of the instances, the stated intent is face attack and the means of achieving the impolite goal is to use politeness. *Overly-polite*, like *over-polite* in Culpeper's (2008) empirical analysis of Locher & Watts (2005) classification, indicates the deployment of excess politeness as a strategy for realising sarcasm (Culpeper 2008: 28).

9.2.2 *Mock politeness or deceit?*

A closely related group refers to markers of insincerity, in the co-occurrences of FINTO [*fake, pretend*] + GENTILE, and *apparently friendly*. Insincerity as an outcome of im/politeness mismatch was discussed in Chapter 3, and we can see from the data that these referred to behaviours which the speaker perceived as involving the use of politeness to cover malicious intent, as for instance in (2).

(2) in certi momenti diventa **gentilissimo** (per **finta**) ed io non riesco ad aggredirlo è come una serpe che scivola lenta per poi morderti [at times he is so kind (pretends to be) and I can't get angry he's like a snake that moves slowly to then bite you]

In (2) we can see that the mismatch is perceived, by the speaker, as being part of a deception in which the contrast is not intended to be revealed; this is made explicit by the analogy to a *snake*. Somewhat confusingly, this type of deception behaviour is discussed in Paternoster (2012) under the heading of ‘over polite’ behaviour, thus demonstrating the need for second order labels to draw on first order usage.

A similar pattern of reference to (long-term) deceit occurred with ‘FARE *finta* [*pretend*] + GENTILE’. To see if there was a similar pattern in the English data, which was not lexicalised in the same way, the search was extended out to co-occurrences of meta-politeness markers with the verbs ACT and PRETEND (in a 5L/R span). The number of instances was quite low but a distinction appeared to be that ‘ACT + politeness label’ (5 instances) tended to refer to behaviour performed by the speaker, or some other favourably evaluated party, in order to protect their own face and without intent to threaten a hearer’s face. In contrast, ‘PRETEND + politeness label’ (2 instances) was attributed to some other unfavourably evaluated party. These two patterns are illustrated in the representative examples below:⁸⁰

(3) The school run lasts no longer than 20 minutes per day. You should **act friendly** and if you feel awkward give the impression you are rushing somewhere.

(4) He was being excluded in football games, boys were **pretending** to be **friendly** with him, then running off with his football, he was regularly left out in groups.

In this case, ‘PRETEND *to be friendly*’ could be interpreted as mock politeness, given that in the example the boys initially include the target, paying attention to his

⁸⁰ MAKE OUT was also concordanced but there were no co-occurrences.

sociality rights and flattering his social identity face, then subsequently both reject him and remove his belongings. Thus, the 'reveal' of the im/politeness mismatch occurs within the same event.

9.2.3 *Politeness as an institutional requirement*

In contrast, other markers of insincerity from Table 9.1, such as 'FALSO + GENTILE' and *gelidamente garbata*, mainly described behaviours where the politeness was a requirement of an institutional role, similar to the *pseudo-deception* of Brown's (1995) levels of reflective reasoning. In such instances, there was no indication that the speakers felt the insincere politeness was intended to attack face, as illustrated in (5). This usage appears closest to the use of im/politeness mismatch as a means of facilitating potentially face-threatening communication, as discussed in Chapter 2.

(5) Poi mi ha detto che molto spesso ricevono richieste di riparazioni su borse false.

In quel caso la risposta è **gelidamente garbata**: "mi dispiace, ma non è di nostra produzione". [Then she told me that they often get requests to repair fake bags. In those cases the answer is feily polite: "I'm sorry, it's not one of ours."]

9.2.4 *Excess politeness*

It was also found that the phraseologies that indicated excess were not used to refer to mock polite behaviours. *Over friendly* and *overly friendly* represented an unfavourable interpretation of some other's behaviour, but it was not presented as a surface expression of politeness like *overly-polite*. It was more frequently used to indicate behaviour which attacked the speaker's equity rights, as illustrated in (6).

(6) As for unhelpful kitchen places, what about the **over friendly** ones? I filled in a brochure request on the website of Kitchens Direct. Within a couple of hours I had a phone call telling me they had a sale on and did I want a rep to come out the next day to

give me a quote! I said “No thanks, just send the brochure first please” the lady tried to persist **and in the end I was quite annoyed.**

This suggests similarity with Culpeper’s (2008) findings regarding negatively-marked over-politeness, in particular that the excess relates to doing politeness too frequently.

The phraseologies *too polite* and *troppo garbato* also represent excess, but they were not used to represent a negative evaluation of another’s behaviour; they described conflict avoidance by the speaker, which also reflects Culpeper’s (2011: 100-103) findings from the Oxford English Corpus that *too polite* was used to describe a strategy of ‘do not perform FTA’. In example (7) the politeness is contrasted with (face-threatening) sincerity:

(7) Oh, I’m sure she’s far **too polite** to give me an **honest** answer. She’s not British, but her manners absolutely are. (Unlike mine!)

The set containing *too kind*, *too friendly*, *troppo gentile* also tended to refer to the speaker themselves (or someone closely associated) and in this case the politeness is presented as excessive due to the lack of merit on the part of the addressee/target, as illustrated in (8).

(8) ds [dear son] is nice kind and polite and a joy to have in the class – according to his teacher, he is a little gentleman and opens doors for girls/women, I do worry sometimes that he is **too kind** and gentle, and well maybe taken advantage of sometimes.

9.2.5 Summary

From this brief overview of references to polite behaviour, we have seen the full range of possible types of im/politeness mismatch discussed in Chapter 2. Where a mismatch between linguistic expression and the speaker’s feelings leading to a perception of impoliteness, this is most likely to refer to the deliberate and continued

masking of negative intent (for instance *finta + gentile*). As discussed in Chapter 2, this deceit kind of im/politeness mismatch is not included within the category of mock politeness because the mismatch is not recognised (nor intended to be recognised) and the polite and impolite behaviours are not contemporaneously evident.

In a smaller number of instances, the polite and impolite moves occur within the same speech event, as in *overly polite*, and possibly PRETEND + *friendly*, thus leading to a realisation of mock politeness as understood here. It is striking that no items referring to mock politeness were identified in the Italian data. This contrasts with the much higher frequency for IRONICO found in the previous chapter.

9.3 Which metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness?

In this section, I expand the search for metapragmatic labels of mock politeness by examining a range of potential markers beyond those referring to *polite*, *kind* and so on. As described in Chapter 6, these items were identified through an iterative process which was intended to be wide-ranging and capture a variety of types of mock politeness. I am not claiming that this list is exhaustive; additional terms would almost certainly emerge from analysis of different speech communities and indeed there are some other terms that could have been analysed here, such as the use of the diminutive suffix (*-ino*) in other Italian nouns, following the pattern of *commentino* [*little comment*]. Despite these limitations, this approach can allow us to see the breadth of labels that are used for discussing mock polite behaviours and the ways in which different labels allow us to access different kinds of mock polite behaviours.

As previously stated, mock politeness, as understood in this study, occurs when there is an im/politeness mismatch leading to an implicature of impoliteness. This was operationalised in the analysis by considering behaviours to constitute mock

politeness if the behaviour had been analysed and annotated as a) containing im/politeness mismatch and b) were evaluated as impolite.⁸¹ This is illustrated in (9) where the doctor's utterance could have been interpreted as empathetic (paying attention to sociality rights) and performing supportive facework, but instead was interpreted as an attack on sociality rights by belittling the problem (from the speaker's perspective). The poster's negative response to the behaviour labelled as *patronising* is expressed in the angry face emoticon and paralinguistic *grrrrrr*.

(9) i did the same as you...waking up in the middle of the night,heart racing,sweating,panicking that i was dying of some undiagnosed problem...ex called the doc out several times(really took its toll on relationship) and the doc **patronisingly** gave me diazepam and said "calm down...everything is fine., maybe we ned to review some anti depressants..grrrrrr 🤬

This process of identification and classification of verbal behaviours was repeated for all the labels and the results are presented in Figures 9.1 and 9.3, which show the percentage of behaviours which could be classified as mock politeness. To aid comparison, I have also included the data for *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO, discussed in the previous chapters. For transparency, I have presented the same information both in percentages (Figures 9.1. and 9.3) and in raw numbers (Figures 9.2 and 9.4) because, as can be seen, the number of behaviours that could be retrieved for each label varied greatly. In both sets of figures, the metapragmatic labels are ordered from left to right according to the percentage of behaviours

⁸¹ Here and elsewhere, when I talk about the evaluation or perceived effect, I am referring to the perception of the participant who described the behaviour.

featuring mock politeness. Approximate translations of the Italian items are provided in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Translation of the Italian items displayed in Figures 9.3 and 9.4

Italian item	Approximate translation
paternalis*	paternalis*/patronis*
sadis*	sadis*
prend*/pres* in giro	ma* fun
sarcastic*	sarcastic*
viperis*	viper*
subdol*	underhand
deride*	laugh* at
beffa*	mock*
ironic*	ironic*
pungent*	biting
parodia*	parod*
scimmiotta*	ap*
commentin*	little comment*
condiscenden*	condescend*
malign*	spiteful*
taglient*	cutting
canzon*	teas*

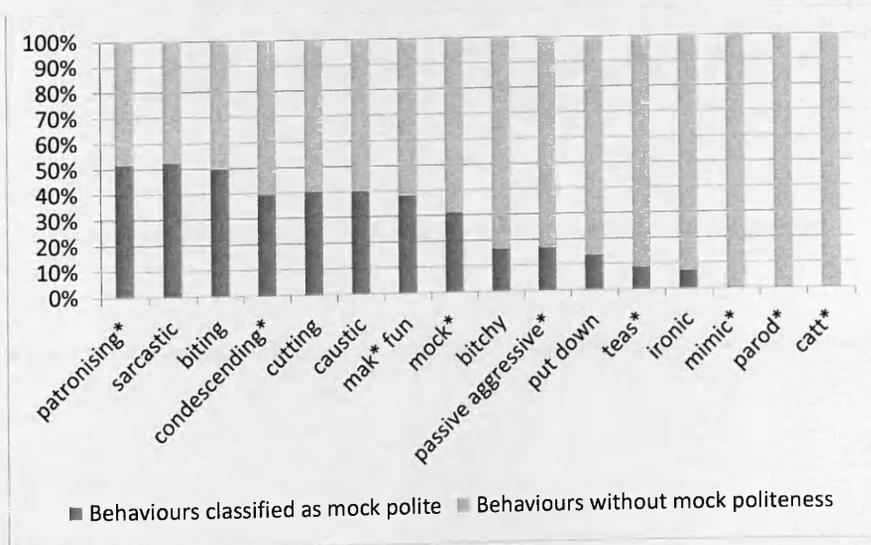


Figure 9.1 Percentage of behaviours which performed mock politeness: UK data

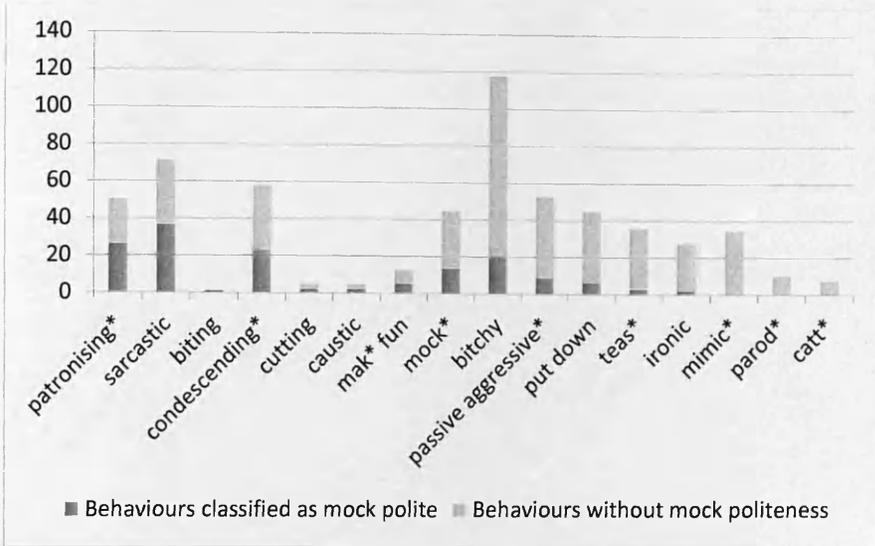


Figure 9.2 Number of behaviours which performed mock politeness: UK data

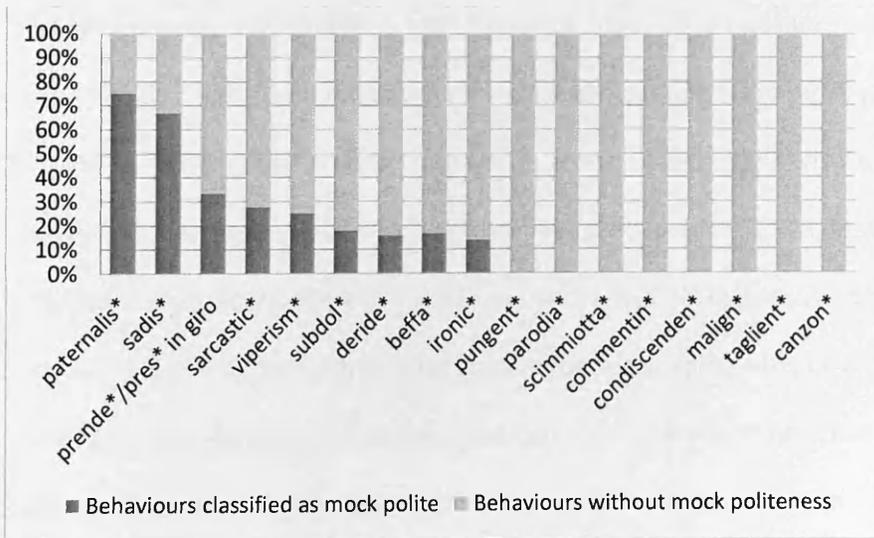


Figure 9.3 Percentage of behaviours which performed mock politeness: Italian data

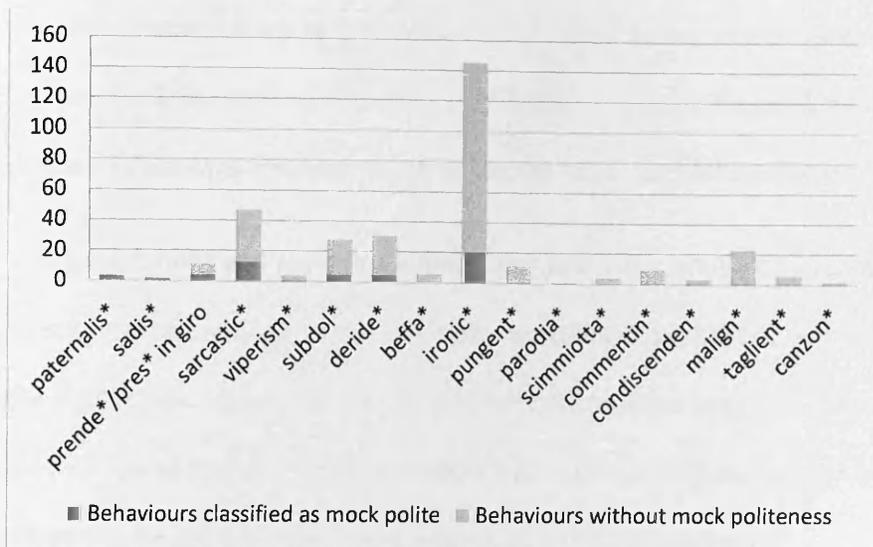


Figure 9.4 Number of behaviours which performed mock politeness: Italian data

Perhaps the most striking feature from Figures 9.1 and 9.3 is that there were several labels in both English and Italian which were found not to refer to mock polite behaviours. For the English data these were: CATTY, MIMIC and PARODY and for the Italian data they were: CANZONARE, COMMENTINO, CONDISCENDENTE, MALIGNO, PARODIARE, PUNGENTE, SCIMMIOTTARE, and TAGLIENTE. Therefore, in the following discussion, I will try to illustrate what features these metapragmatic labels share with those that do indicate mock politeness and thus account for their presence in similar environments. Overall, the number of metapragmatic labels which refer to mock politeness is lower for the Italian data, reflecting the findings from Section 9.2. This is almost certainly a consequence of the smaller corpus size, but may also indicate some cross-cultural differences, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

The second key finding is that the labels did not consistently refer to mock politeness, the highest percentage was found in the Italian PATERNALISTICO/PATERNALISMO [*patronising, condescending*] for which three out of four behaviours involved mock politeness. Thus, it would seem that im/politeness mismatch is not the central

semantic feature for any of these terms; more salient features of the labels appeared to be face attack and indirectness, both of which are important for mock politeness but do not on their own constitute mock politeness (discussed further below).

Third, the figures also show that although the first order labels of *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO are strongly present as indicators of mock politeness, they do not have the highest percentage of mock polite behaviours in either language. This underlines the problem of equating mock politeness with sarcasm, as discussed in Chapter 3, and illustrates the importance of using a range of first-order markers.

Furthermore, the lower positions of CONDISENDETE and PATERNALISTICO/PATERNALISMO in the ranking for the Italian data points towards differences between these items and their apparent translation equivalents (*condescending* and *patronising*).

In the following sections, I employ two approaches to the analysis of these labels: the detailed analysis and annotation of the behaviours to which they refer and collocation networks of the metapragmatic labels. As described in Chapter 6, the Collocation Network Explorer (CONE) software was used to investigate which items co-occurred and shared collocates, and the main advantage of this software is that it allows a visual representation of the collocational patterns, placing the relationships with one node in the context of other nodes and relationships.

9.4 Facework (and deniability) in the behaviours

In this section, I examine in more detail the kind of facework (the ‘politeness’ aspect) that is represented with these metapragmatic labels and the extent to which the facework is performed indirectly (part of the ‘mock’ aspect).

9.4.1 The 'impolite' element: *Expression of negative attitude*

The first distinction that can be made is whether the behaviours indicated with these metapragmatic labels tend to express a negative attitude, as expected from second-order theories of irony/sarcasm (e.g. Grice 1989; Wilson 2013) and patronising behaviour (e.g. Hummert & Ryan 2001). It was found that the majority of behaviours did express a negative attitude and this is one of the strong clustering factors that links them. In some cases, the proportion of negative attitude was varied because of polysemy in the lexical items, as for instance in TEASE which can refer to both mock politeness and mock impoliteness, and CONDISCENDENTE which possesses both a favourably evaluated sense of being compliant or indulgent as well as an unfavourably evaluated sense of mock politeness.⁸²

Two exceptions which consistently did not contain negative attitude were the behaviours which were labelled with MIMIC and SCIMMIOTTARE, and so these metapragmatic labels did not refer to mock politeness. What links them to other items in the set of potential markers, is the use of echoic mention (hypothesised as the defining feature of irony in Sperber & Wilson 1981) and therefore they share a feature of 'mockness'. This is illustrated in examples (10) and (11).

(10) His receptive language seems to have caught up a bit. He understands a lot but just doesn't seem to **mimic** well or repeat sounds which is more typical apparently at this age

⁸² As in the now archaic sense of *condescending*, described in the OED as '2. fig. To come or bend down, so far as a particular action is concerned, from one's position of dignity or pride; to stoop voluntarily and graciously; to deign'.

(11) Ogni cosa ha il suo tempo fortunatamente togliti l'idea di essere una tro...ja o di essere scema non cercare di essere più grande e **scimmiottare** ciò che si vede in tv sii te stessa.. [Everything has its time fortunately, get rid of the idea of being a who...re or being stupid don't try to be older than you are or ape what you see in tv be yourself]

As can be seen, in (10), although there is echoic mention, the person who performs the mimicking is not presented as doing so in order to attack face or sociality rights.

Mimicry as an act would be considered part of form-driven implicational impoliteness in Culpeper's (2011 model), but we can see here that the first-order use of MIMIC in this dataset does not reflect this. Further research into *mimicry* could be interesting in this regard.

This is similar in the use of SCIMMIOTTARE, although this label differs from MIMIC because the evaluation of the attempt to echo was consistently unfavourable.

However, the behaviour itself does not express unfavourable evaluation, in fact it is the opposite, and for this reason, I have chosen *ape* for the translation above, rather than *mimic* or *mock* (the three translations provided by the Oxford Paravia Dictionary).

9.4.2 The 'mock' element: Mismatch and indirectness

Having used the criterion of negative attitude to verify whether the metapragmatic labels indicated mock politeness, I move on to considering whether the remaining behaviours involve any kind of mismatch, as this too is a key component of mock politeness. Where mismatch was identified, I then investigated whether it constituted mock politeness. For instance, if we look at *catty*, which Figure 9.1 showed did not perform mock politeness, it typically referred to instances like (12).

(12) Thread title: Am I being unreasonable... to be very annoyed that DH has spent the best part of £200 on himself TWICE in a month?

Poster C: [name], it's not difficult to understand that he has spent £400

What is difficult to understand is why you are being such a martyr about it and why he seems not to care if you all have no money for the rest of the month I cannot decide if you are being plain jealous or upset....and whether the upset is justified or not.

<shrugs>

Poster S: Oh well [name] I give up explaining it to you as you are deliberately being obtuse and downright **catty** it seems. I'm not interested in your opinion of my character.

Thanks to those that replied constructively and not **cattily**. I am **STILL** very annoyed with DH, and will be treating myself later today or tomorrow.

In (12), the behaviour which is labelled *catty* involved Poster C describing the addressee / target as *a martyr*, and potentially *jealous*, thus attacking quality face, and finishes with <*shrugs*> which suggests a lack of interest, attacking association rights. Although there is an element of indirectness, insofar as the impolite beliefs are asserted within presuppositions and therefore less open to a direct challenge, the face attack is not deniable, there is no apparent insincerity and there is no im/politeness mismatch in the behaviour.

Similar analysis showed that several items from the original set rarely referred to mock polite behaviours but shared a capacity to express aggression in a relatively socially acceptable way. In this, they share features with the category of im/politeness mismatch discussed in Chapter 3 in which the mismatch allows the speaker to 'get away' with the face attack.

The items which frequently indicated behaviours falling into this category were BITCHY, CATTY, *cutting* and PUT DOWN from the English data, in addition to COMMENTINO, TAGLIENTE, PUNGENTE, and MALIGNO and, to some extent, CONDISCENDENTE from the Italian data. We can see this socially acceptable aggression in the following two examples from the UK and Italian corpora in which *tagliente* [*cutting*] is opposed to being *maleducata* [*rude*], and *cutting* is opposed to *swearing*:

(13) io non riesco a mordermi la lingua (si è visto anche qui 🗨️) e il più delle volte rispondo, non **maleducata**, ma **tagliente**, quello sì, sono responsabile di uno studio notarile e, qui, per carità le **porcate** non si dicono, ma le **cattiverie** sì

[I'm no good at biting my tongue (as you've seen here 🗨️) and I usually respond, not in a rude way, but cutting, yes I do that

I'm the manager for a notary's office and here, you can't be vulgar, but mean, oh yes.]

(14) But if your H is not in a rage but coolly abusive and very **cutting** rather than just **swearing** etc than he's likely to be calculating the effect on you (really **nasty** - such people wouldn't go into therapy as they enjoy doing it

In the behaviours labelled with these terms, we may observe a closer alignment with another form of implicational impoliteness (following Culpeper's 2011a model), where the mismatch which triggers the implicature is form-driven. In a similar way to the findings from the previous chapters, we see that these impolite behaviours are associated with maintaining *control* in the expression of aggression (for more on the importance of control to evaluation see Duguid 2011; Partington et. al 2013).

An exception to this pattern of controlled expressions of aggression was MALIGNO [*spiteful, malicious*] which generally referred to other people interpreting events in the

worst possible way, with the possible effect of face attack on the target/s, as shown in (15).

(15) Mia mamma, forse un po' **malignamente**, sostiene che la mia parrucchiera ha tutto l'interesse a farmi il colore "per intero" perchè così spendo di più [My mum, perhaps a bit cattily, says that it's in my hairdresser's interest to do me a full colour because that way I spend more]

But **MALIGNO** rarely referred to actual interactions between potentially hostile interactants and was more likely to occur in gossip sequences (e.g. as discussed in Eggins and Slade 1997).

Two more items which were rarely found to refer to mock politeness were **PARODY** and **PARODIARE**. However, they occurred so rarely with reference to verbal behaviour that it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the behaviours they described. The terms usually referred to an entertainment product such as a book or television programme, as in (16).

(16) **JACK & ALICE - Austen (8)**: Va di moda pubblicare raccontini cortissimi ripescati dai bauli ammuffiti e semidimenticati dei grandi autori e farli pagare come gioielli, o sbaglio?

Scherzi a parte, il raccontino è una bella **parodia**, davvero, si prende gioco di un po' di stereotipi. [**JACK & ALICE - Austen (8)**: It seems fashionable at the moment to publish very short stories pulled out of some old trunk and half-forgotten by classic authors and price them like jewels, doesn't it? Joking aside, the short story is a nice parody, it really is, it makes fun of a few stereotypes]

In these cases, although there was both the mismatch of echoic mention, and an expression of negative attitude, there was little evidence of im/politeness mismatch.

This reflects second-order discussion, for instance Rossen-Knill & Henry (1997: 723) hypothesise that:

[i]n every occurrence of verbal parody, the speaker conventionally makes use of four essential acts: (1) the *intentional verbal re-presentation* of the object of parody. (2) the *flaunting* of the verbal re-presentation, (3) the *critical act*, and (4) the *comic act*

Rossen-Knill & Henry (1997: 723, italics in original)

In this description of verbal parody, we see overlap with other kinds of mismatch such as the echoic mention of irony and a comic element. However, in both the first-order data and the second-order description, it is not clear how the polite and impolite moves would be open to evaluation as polite and impolite by the same participant. The impoliteness could presumably occur in the re-presentation and is most likely to be open to interpretation as impolite by the target. In contrast, the entertainment function, the comic act, is more likely to be evaluated favourably by some other set of participants.⁸³

9.4.3 Identifying mock politeness: a brief summary

In this section, we have seen that the metapragmatic labels which do not refer to mock polite behaviours either lack the expression of negative attitude in the behaviour (MIMIC, SCIMMIOTTARE) or lack im/politeness mismatch (*catty*, COMMENTINO, TAGLIENTE, MALIGNO PARODY, PARODIARE, and, to some extent, CONDISCENDENTE and

⁸³ Unless, the function is one of mock impoliteness, in which case the im/politeness mismatch would lie between the apparent impolite re-presentation and the politeness of the supportive / bonding function.

BITCHY). The relationship between the metapragmatic labels studies here are summarised in Figure 9.5.

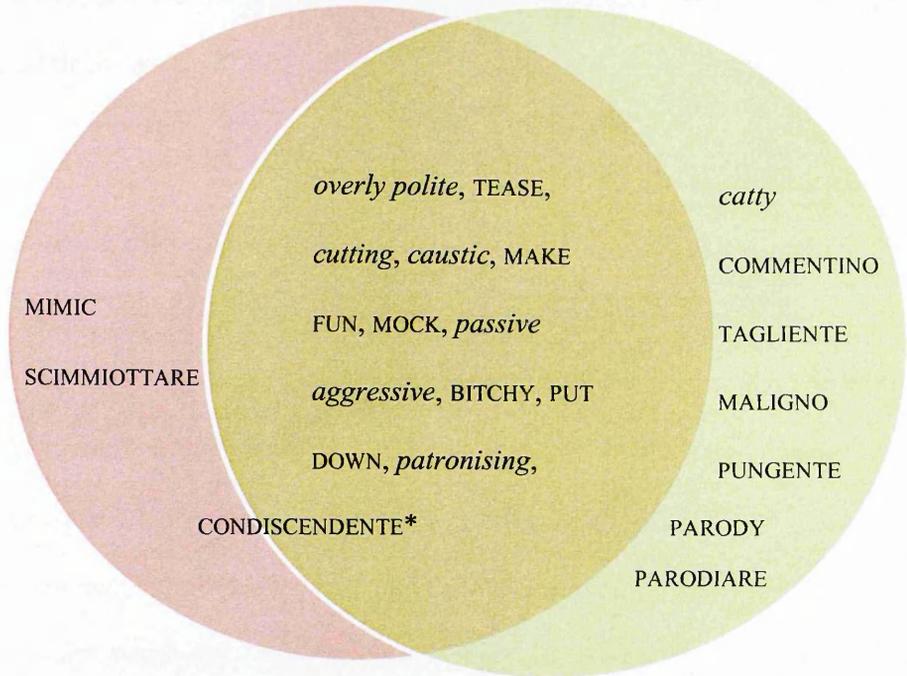


Figure 9.5 Venn diagram showing the overlap of mismatch (pink) and expression of negative evaluation (green)⁸⁴

Those metapragmatic comments in the two outer edges do not perform mock politeness, while those in the centre of the diagram appear to be more likely to express mock politeness and will form the focus of the following sections.

9.5 How are the mock polite behaviours evaluated?

Having established which metapragmatic labels can refer to mock polite behaviours, and what links those which do not, in this section, I now focus more specifically on

⁸⁴ *Condiscendente* is positioned across two sections because it is polysemous, as noted in footnote 83.

the former. I describe how these lexical items are evaluated with reference to whether they are used to self- or other-describe; whether the behaviour is evaluated favourably or unfavourably; and, what kind of evaluative language is found in the collocates. This section parallels the analysis of *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO in Chapter 7.

9.5.1 Participation roles and evaluation

Figures 9.6 and 9.7 display who the speaker was describing when s/he used the metapragmatic label; whether it was the speaker him/herself, the interlocutor or a third person. A key finding from Figures 9.6 and 9.7, echoing that from Chapter 7, is that these metapragmatic labels are not just other-describing. People are also self-evaluating their own behaviours in these ways, and this is an aspect that has been missed in research which has tended to focus on interview or questionnaire data (discussed in Chapter 5).

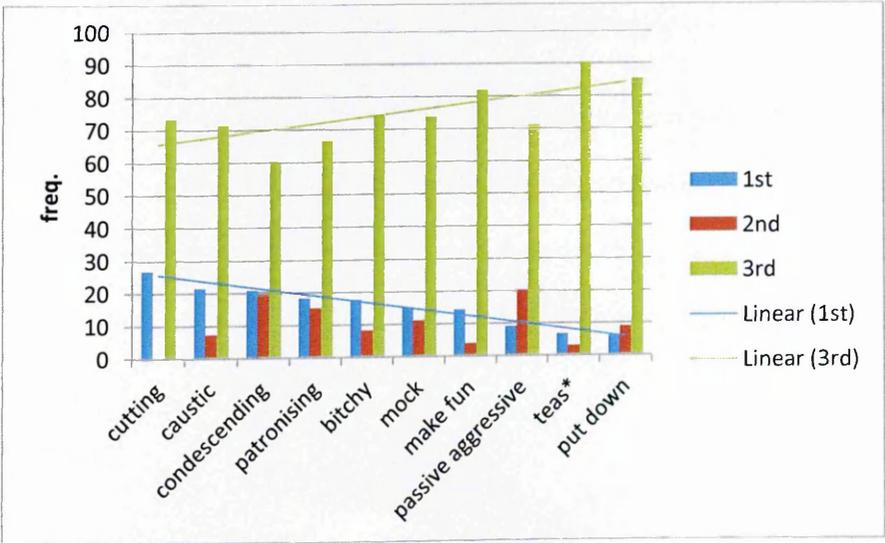


Figure 9.6 Who performs the behaviour: UK data

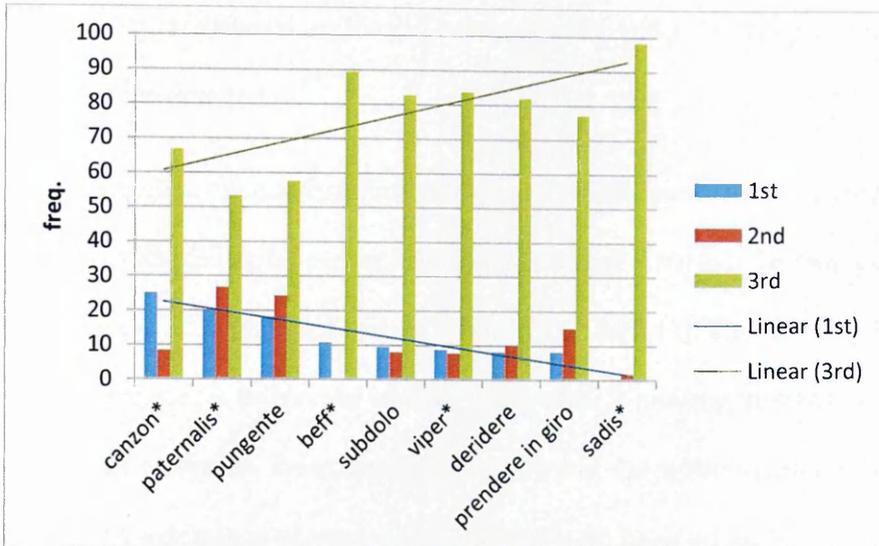


Figure 9.7 Who performs the behaviour: Italian data

The trendlines in Figures 9.6 and 9.7 also show how the tendency to describe the self with a given label runs in inverse proportion to descriptions of a third person (there is no relationship with descriptions of the interlocutor). As the metapragmatic labels have been ordered from left to right according to the proportion of first person description, the figures represent a continuum from *self*-describing to *other*-describing labels.

The most extreme of these is perhaps *sadis** in the Italian data, where the item was never used to refer to the first person and only once used to describe an interlocutor (this was also the single favourable occurrence and it referred to a mock polite behaviour). In other instances, the ranking position is perhaps less intuitively

predictable: for instance we see that *condescending* and *patronising* are more likely to self-describe than TEASE.⁸⁵

To unpack these relationships further, the next set of figures show the first person references divided up by evaluation (Figures 9.8 and 9.10) and the third person references divided up by evaluation (Figures 9.9 and 9.11). The aim of this more detailed analysis is to uncover whether the speaker is praising their own behaviour or expressing contrition, for example. In both figures, the metapragmatic labels are ordered by percentage of approving occurrences, so those on the left are most favourably appraised and those on the right the least. However, the chart type is based on raw frequency because it is important to note that the frequency of use of the labels varies considerably.

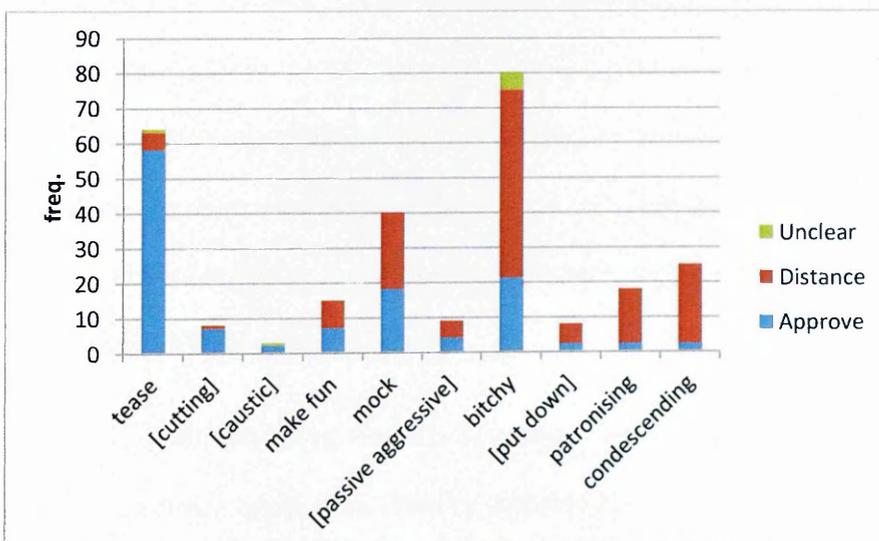


Figure 9.8 Evaluation of first person behaviours: UK data

⁸⁵ Evidence for the expectation of *patronise* as other-describing may be found in the definition provided in the Macmillan Online Dictionary: ‘*showing disapproval* to behave or talk in a way that shows you think you are more intelligent or important than someone else’ (my italics).

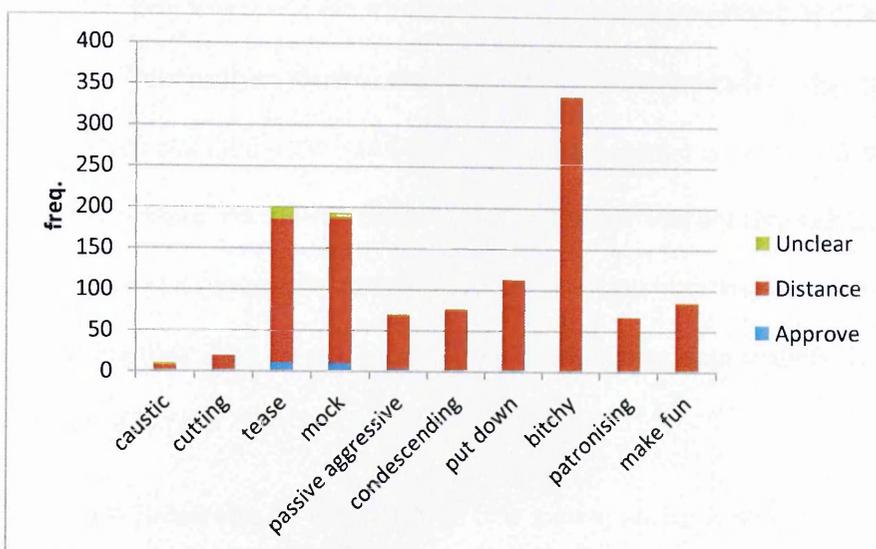


Figure 9.9 Evaluation of third person behaviours: UK data

Starting with the UK data, Figures 9.8 and 9.9 show that, as in the data for *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO, favourable evaluations are more likely to occur in the first person references overall. We might have anticipated this preference for favourable self-representation, but this also indicates that the entertainment value placed on impolite behaviours performed by a third person is less salient than the offence value for this set of interactants.

In Figure 9.8, we see that *patronising* and *condescending* are now positioned towards the right-hand side of the chart, showing that although they are proportionately more frequently used to self-describe (Figure 9.6), that usage is not praised. This is in line with the research into patronising behaviour which assumes that the label is applied when the observer disapproves of the communication style (e.g. Hummert & Ryan 2001). In the rare occasions where it is praised, the speaker is using the behaviour as a response to a preceding face attack, mirroring the trend seen for sarcastic utterances in the previous chapters.

The label which changed ranking between the first and third person graphs more than any other item was MAKE *fun* which was never evaluated positively in the third person. Closer analysis showed that it was used to refer to similar kinds of behaviours in both first and third person and therefore the explanation is not to be found in polysemy. More specifically, the described behaviour was not responding to a participant in a serious manner and therefore attacking both their sociality rights (not respecting their role), as well as quality face (not sharing their values). This is illustrated in (17).

(17) Thread title: To wonder why, if pole dancing and lap dancing and being a bunny girl are so empowering, Tony Blair, Pope Benedict, David Cameron, Sarkozy etc., don't do it? [...]

Poster T: In all fairness and a spirit of pure flippancy - because it's unlikely anyone would pay to see them do it; no economic benefit = no job.

[...]

Poster T: My point was, I guess, that it would have made more sense TO ME and invited more serious debate if she had put powerful women in the title - rather than discussing them in the op - because the obvious response to the title is to **make fun**, rather than debate, as has been shown by the majority of the responses, my first one included.

Thus we can see that the difference in evaluation is mainly dependent on participation role rather than an indication of a different behaviour.⁸⁶ In many ways, this kind of

⁸⁶ Although, in the first person it was also used to describe self-deprecating behaviours, which, as seen in the previous chapters, tend to be favourably evaluated, and this was not found for the third person instances where the target was consistently some other person.

favourable evaluation highlights the pragmatic/semantic distinction, where the behaviour is not in itself considered favourably, yet can be used in strategic ways which are positively evaluated.

In contrast, if we look at TEASE, which was the item that was most positively evaluated in the first person, the first and third person uses do represent different behaviours, illustrating the prosocial and antisocial functions for this behaviour (the ‘bonding’ and ‘biting’ in Boxer & Cortés Conde’s [2008] terms). In the first person, the speaker used the term to refer to (often failed) attempts at mock impoliteness or banter, as illustrated in (18):

(18) Poster s: I love this thread. 🤔

BTW, [NAME], you have crap taste in lamps.

<hides from [NAME]> 🤔

Poster V: Oh dear - another person who hasn't yet learnt how to be kind when other peoples' taste isn't the same as your own.

Luckily, I'm am self-assured enough not to care whether you actually like the lamps I commented on. 🤔

Poster S: I was just **teasing** you. Which is why I put a 🤔

Sorry for offending you.

The thread had made me laugh - especially at [NAME] but clearly my tone was all wrong.

Example (18) also shows the weight that is given to conventionalised cues such as the 🤔 emoticon. Where TEASE referred to mock politeness (a minority pattern, as seen in Figure 9.1)) the function involved face-saving, that is the teasing response to a trigger was less aggressive than a more direct one. This function of TEASE is reported in the

second order theorisation by Drew (1987), but the third person evidence seems to conflict with Dynel's (2008) assertion that teasing is characterised by orientation towards solidarity. In the third person, TEASE was most likely to refer to face-attack behaviours performed by children (or, more accurately, behaviours that adult posters thought children would perform), most frequently with reference to people's names that were perceived to deviate from some norm. It may be that the teaser intended the function to be one of solidarity, but this was certainly not the perception of the observers/addressees and the importance of participant perspective seems to be missing from much current theorisation.

Moving on to the Italian data, Figures 9.10 and 9.11 present the same kinds of information about the evaluation and producer of the behaviour indicated by the metapragmatic labels. The number of columns is different in the two charts because the overall number of behaviours was much lower, as mentioned above, and in some cases there was not sufficient data to include in a quantitative summary.

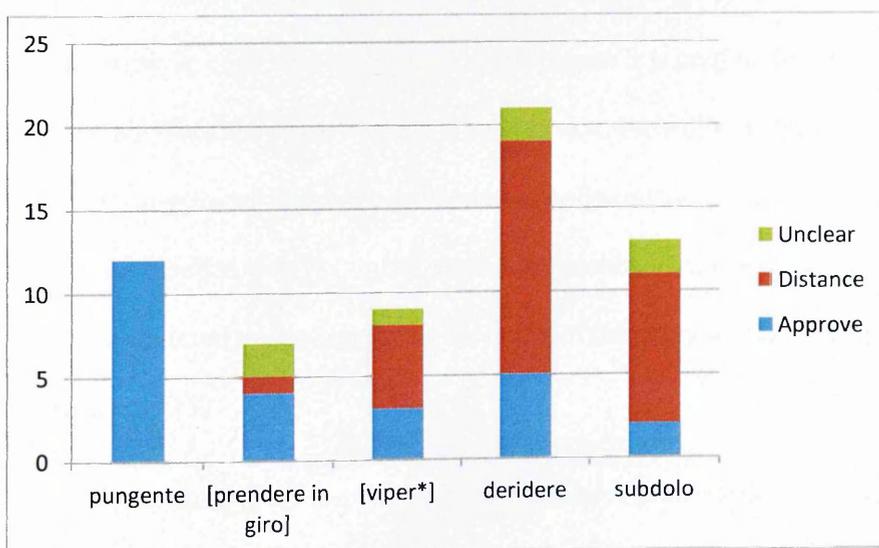


Figure 9.10 Evaluation of first person behaviours: Italian data [Italian items: cutting/make fun/viper/laugh at/underhand]

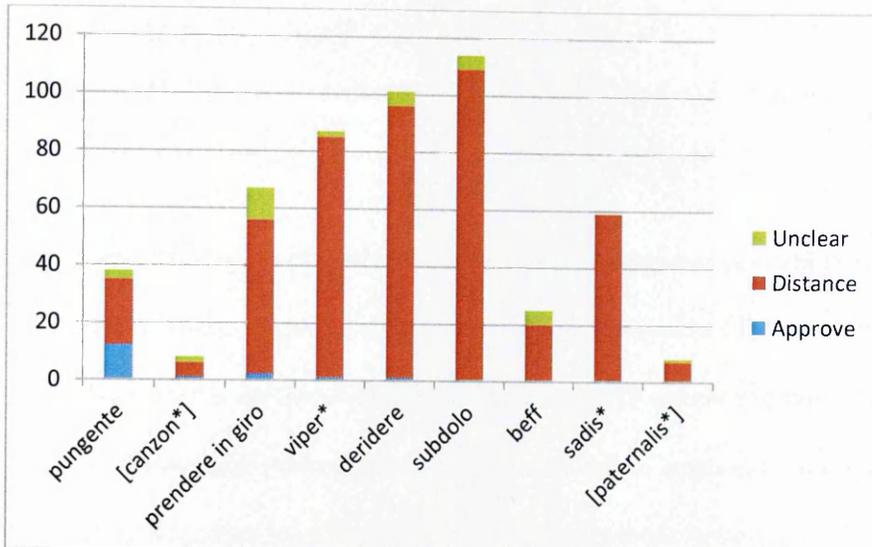


Figure 9.11 Evaluation of third person behaviours: Italian data [Italian items: biting/tease/make fun/viper*/laugh at/underhand/mock/sadis*/paternalis*/patronising]

Overall, unlike the English chart, in Figures 9.10 and 9.11 the evaluative ranking of the items is the same in both charts. However, we still see a shift from the first to third person evaluations.

This was particularly marked in the case of *PRENDERE in giro*; the speaker favourably evaluates this in over 50% of the occurrences where it is used to describe the self and in less than 3% of the cases where it is used to describe a third person. In the case of *PRENDERE in giro*, we also have a situation of polysemy, as seen for *TEASE*. The behaviours labelled with *PRENDERE in giro* to describe a third person's behaviours frequently referred to deceit behaviours, included infidelity in relationships, as illustrated in (19).

(19) Per esempio (un esempio banale) se oggi lui si comporta da innamorato io gli credo e mi aspetto la stessa cosa il giorno dopo, ma invece lui magari sparisce!
Ovviamente io son portata a pensare che mi abbia **presa in giro** perché per me i sentimenti devono essere costanti e vado in tilt! [For example (a banal example) if

today he acts as though he is in love I believe him and I expect it will be the same the day after, but instead he disappears! Obviously I start thinking that he has been making fun of me because for me emotions have to be constant and so I go crazy]

9.5.2 Evaluation of mock politeness labels: A collocational network perspective

In the next section, I explore how the collocational networks (discussed in Chapter 6) can further inform our understanding of the evaluative weight and colouring of these items, and how these items relate to one another within languages. In Figures 9.12 and 9.13, the collocations have been edited, so that only those items relating to evaluation appear. The items in red are the search terms which were entered, that is possible candidates for mock politeness labels. The positioning on the page of the red nodes is not meaningful, the search terms can be moved around and here they have simply been spaced out to reduce overlap and improve readability. The size of font for the red nodes is not meaningful either. This is because some were so small they could not be read on the page and therefore these items had to be enlarged. The use of capitals indicates where a lemma was used. The main function is to visualise how these items inter-relate with one another. It is not possible to add translations to the visualisations, but these are included in the subsequent discussion.

In the English data, the items which collocate directly with other metapragmatic labels investigated here are *ironic* and *sarcastic*; MOCK and TEASE; PATRONISE and *passive aggressive*, PATRONISE and CONDESCEND. *Passive aggressive* also collocates with EA [emotionally abusive] and close reading of the forums showed that posters often saw passive aggressive behaviour as a hyponym of emotionally abusive behaviour. With reference to metapragmatic terms for politeness more generally, it is interesting to note that CONDESCEND and PATRONISE both collocate with *rude*, confirming the negative appraisal transmitted with these labels.

In the Italian data, the items that collocate with one another are: *sarcas**, *ironi** and *pungent** [*cutting, stinging*]; and *pungent** [*cutting, stinging*] and PRENDERE IN GIRO [*MAKE fun*].

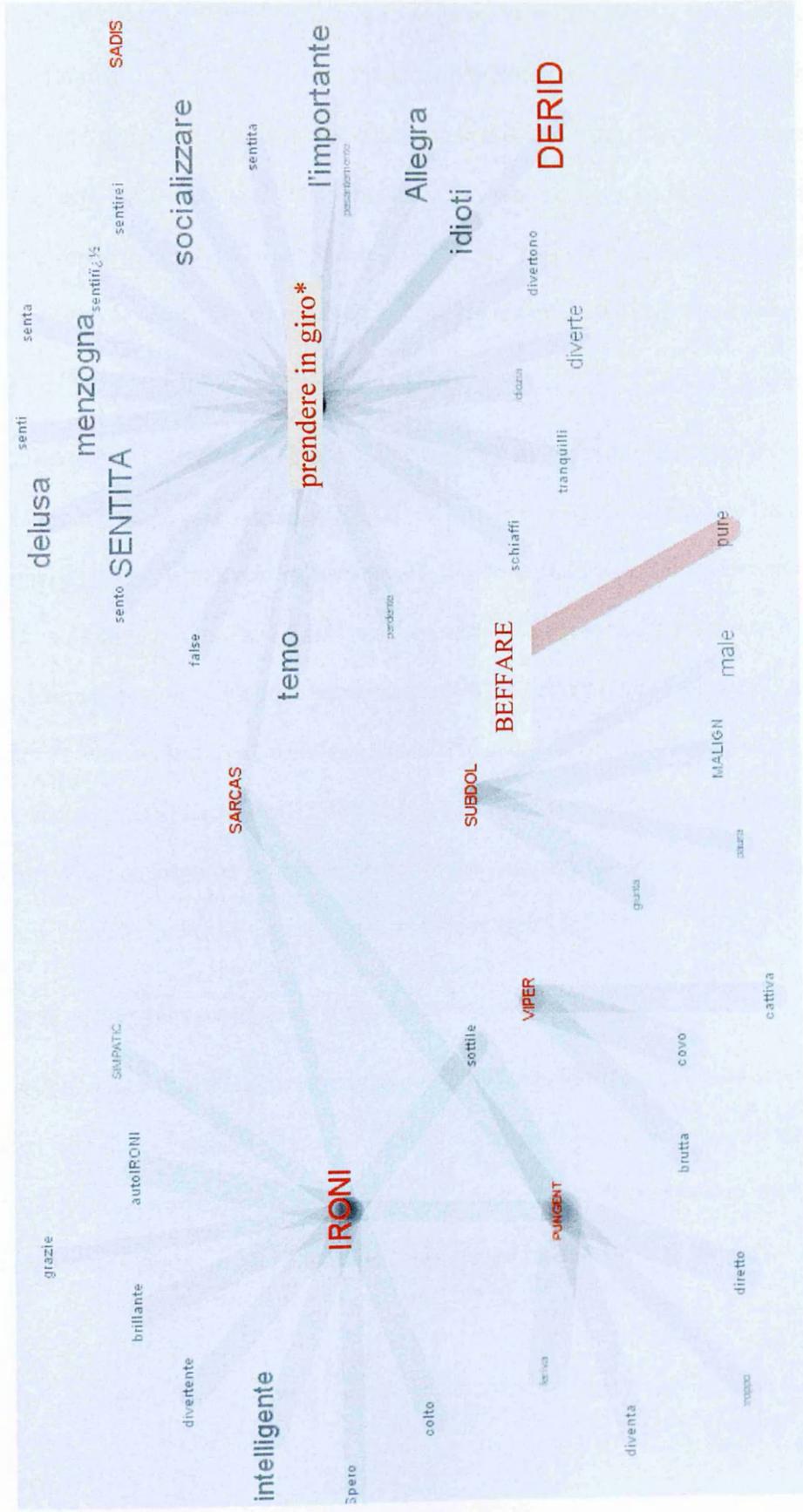


Figure 9.13 Collocational display showing evaluative items (up to 100 collocates per node)

The evaluations shown in the collocations also point towards the differing kinds of facework that are performed. Collocates of PATRONISE include *belittled*, *helpful* and *insulting*, the first two items highlighting the importance of mismatch to this behaviour. TEASE collocates with *terrible* and *suffered*, perhaps indicating that the behaviour is often seen from the perspective of a less powerful participant (as in the case of bullying). This contrasts with the shared collocates of BITCHY and *passive aggressive* which are *manipulative* and *competitive*, indicating a more equal power relationship.

In the Italian networks, shown in Figure 9.13, we see the more favourable collocates of IRONICO (e.g. *simpatico* [*nice, amusing*], *brillante* [*brilliant, bright*], *intelligente* [*intelligent*], *colto* [*sophisticated*]), which corroborates the observations discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, PRENDERE *in giro* [MAKE *fun*] contains more references to entertainment such as *diverte* [*amuse/entertain*], *divertono* [*amuse/entertain*] and *socializzare* [*socialise*]. Although this contrasts with evidence of a different perspective in collocates like *idiotic* [*idiots*], *idiozia* [*idiocy*], and *delusa* [*disappointed*]. *Falsa* [*false*] also occurs as a collocate of PRENDERE *in giro* [MAKE *fun*] and provides further evidence for the tendency for this term to refer to deceit behaviours, indeed another of the collocates was *menzogna* [*lie*].

9.6 Targets and producers of mock polite behaviours

Other ways in which this set of items overlapped in different clusters, was in terms of who is associated with the behaviours. This is illustrated in Figures 9.14 and 9.15 which represent the collocational networks once again, but in this case, they have been edited to show the lexical items that refer to people (e.g. *mums*) or places of interaction (e.g. *school*).

Starting with age groupings, in the English data, shown in Figure 9.14, we can see that the collocates of TEASE are dominated by references to school, both primary (*playtime*) and secondary (*teenagers*). MOCK is linked to TEASE through a collocational cluster made up of *children* and *kids*. *Kids* is also a collocate of MAKE FUN which includes *boys* too amongst its collocates. BITCHY is also connected to TEASE through *school*, and other collocates indicating this age range includes *schools* and *girls*. In the Italian data, only PRENDERE IN GIRO [MAKE fun] contains references to children, such as *all'asilo* [at nursery], *ragazzini* [small children], thus occupying a similar space to TEASE in this sense. These age-related associations are likely to be a function of the dataset in which the participants frequently talk about issues relating to their children but it is still the case that certain labels can be seen to co-occur with particular age groups more strongly than others.

With reference to gender, we see that PATRONISE collocates with items referring to male and female participants (*bloke, git, man* and *cow, girl*), as does MOCK (*women, DH* [dear husband]) and TEASE (*sister, DS2* [dear son 2, i.e. second oldest], *Girls, GD* [granddaughter or goddaughter]), while BITCHY collocates only with female participants (*mum, mums, girls, MIL* [mother-in-law]).

To further investigate the use of the label BITCHY, a sample of 200 occurrences were concordanced and it was found that 47% of the producers of BITCHY behaviours were school-age female children. Thus we start to see a correspondence with the use of *sarcastic*, discussed in Chapter 7, given that the most frequent relationship that features in labelling of *sarcastic* was a mother describing her son's behaviour. Where the terms differ, however, is that BITCHY is not used to describe the child's behaviour towards a parent, it is apparently too much of an outsider term to be used to refer to the in-group of immediate family members.

Another way to investigate the gender bias of the terms is by reversing the collocational direction, as illustrated in Figure 9.16 which shows collocates of *girls* and *boys*. From this figure, we can see how TEASE is a shared collocate (as is LAUGH AT) while BITCHY collocates more strongly with *girls* (as does CATTY) and MAKE FUN (and MIMIC) collocate more strongly with *boys*.

In the Italian data shown in Figure 9.15, we can see that SUBDOLO collocates only with reference to male participants (*uomo, uomini* [man, men]). Like BITCHY from the English data, *viper** collocates with only female participants (*donne, suocera* [women, mother-in-law]). As in the English data, the presence of references to *mother-in-law* in both sets shows how these terms are used to describe conflict in close relationships, and in this case, where the participants occupy similar roles e.g. ‘wife’, ‘mother’, ‘carer’.

9.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have aimed to identify which metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock polite behaviours and found that the following labels did so: *overly polite*, TEASE, *cutting*, *caustic*, MAKE FUN, MOCK, *passive aggressive*, *bitchy*, *put down*, *patronising* and *condescending* for English, and PRENDERE IN GIRO, *viperis**, DERIDERE, SUBDOLO, PUNGENTE, CANZONARE, BEFFARE, *sadis**, *patenalis** for Italian. However, the behaviours which were labelled using these lexical items did not consistently involve mock politeness and therefore it appears this was not the key semantic feature that unites them. Rather, mock politeness appears to be one means of performing impoliteness using indirect methods and the semantic conceptualisation is focussed on the implicational nature of the impoliteness.

The second question that I asked was how the labels relate to one another, within and across languages. All the labels tended to share a feature of impoliteness (although TEASE and PRENDERE IN GIRO also referred to mock impolite behaviours) and a feature of mismatch (although not necessarily im/politeness mismatch) but not all indicated mock politeness. In contrast with the findings for *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO from the previous chapters, a different kind of im/politeness mismatch

emerged from the analysis here: deceit (as discussed in Chapter 3). In this case, the polite and impolite moves were not contemporaneously evident to the addressee. This was much more characteristic of the Italian data than the English forum.

Metapragmatic labels which referred to this kind of behaviour included *apparently friendly*, FINTO + GENTILE, FARE FINTO + GENTILE, PRENDERE IN GIRO and SUBDOLO.

Focussing more specifically on those metapragmatic labels which did, on at least some occasions, indicate mock polite behaviours, in comparison across languages, the analysis showed that there was a greater range and number of labels in the English data compared to the Italian. This is discussed further in the following chapter.

As in the occurrences of *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO, the analysis showed that these labels were used to self-describe in both languages. Also, as seen in the previous chapter, there was a pattern of favourably evaluating a mock polite behaviour when performed by the speaker as a reaction to a previous FTA, and mock polite behaviours were also advised for these purposes. However, the same behaviours were unfavourably evaluated when the speaker was positioned in a different participation role, showing the importance of maintaining the participant distinction. This indicates that Toplak & Katz's assertion that '[p]oint-of-view in sarcasm has received little attention, and needs to be addressed more in-depth in order to advance current theories of sarcasm' (2000: 1468) applies also to these other forms of mock politeness.

The analysis also showed that the labels indicating mock politeness were used to describe different groups of participants, with some collocating more strongly with particular age groups and genders. What this is starting to show is how it is not the

behaviour alone which determines the label but the set of context features, including participation role and social identities.

In the next chapter, I will focus more narrowly on the mock polite behaviours to which these labels have been applied, and describe how those impolite events are structured in terms of the kind of attack which is made (to face or rights) and the location of the mismatch (internal or external).

CHAPTER 10 THE SHAPE OF MOCK POLITE BEHAVIOURS

10.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I found that the following metapragmatic labels were used to refer to mock polite behaviours at least once: *patronising**, *biting*, MAKE FUN, *condescending*, *cutting*, *caustic*, MOCK, BITCHY, TEASE, *passive aggressive*, *put down*, *overly polite*, for English, and *paternalis** [*paternalistic/patronising*], *sadis** [*sadism/sadistic*], SUBDOLO [*underhand*], PRENDERE IN GIRO [*MAKE fun*], *viperis** [*viper*], DERIDERE [LAUGH AT], BEFFARE [MOCK] for Italian.⁸⁷ These are in addition to the metapragmatic labels IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* which were discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 and which also labelled mock polite behaviours on some occasions.

In this chapter, I focus only on the subset of behaviours, described by these labels, in which mock politeness occurs. In so doing, I further address my second and third research questions:

- How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another within (and across) languages?
- What is the relationship between the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels, and the behaviours which they describe, and the second order descriptions?

⁸⁷ Listed in order or percentage of behaviours which performed mock politeness, as discussed in Section 9.3 of the previous chapter.

In order to address these questions, I investigate the behaviours in terms of the type of facework which is performed with reference to Spencer-Oatey's (2002, 2008) model of face and sociality rights, and I analyse whether the mismatch is internal or external (following Culpeper 2011a), as discussed in Chapter 2. To answer the question relating to second order descriptions, I will be drawing on discussion of mock politeness from the fields of impoliteness, irony studies and social psychology discussions of patronizing behaviours, as reported in Chapters 3 and 4. In answering the question regarding the way that these metapragmatic labels relate to one another, I will focus more on the intra-lingual factor because the data from the Italian corpus is insufficient to allow for broad generalisations.

10.2 Types of im/politeness mismatch

As previously noted, mock politeness, as understood in this study, occurs when there is a im/politeness mismatch leading to an implicature of impoliteness. In this section, I analyse how that im/politeness mismatch is structured. In order to do so, I categorised the utterances according to the following two questions:

- What kind of face / sociality rights are ostensibly flattered or upheld?
- What kind of face / sociality rights are attacked or violated?

These categorisations were made according to Spencer-Oatey's (2008) model of face and sociality rights, and by applying the questions crafted for Culpeper et al. (2010), as described in Chapter 6.

If we consider that mock politeness has been equated with sarcasm (following Culpeper's 1996 early model) and irony (following Leech 1983) and that, in their most basic form these two tropes are described in terms of propositional mismatch (e.g. Grice 1975, and, following Grice, Dynel 2013, 2014), then the expectation might

be that im/politeness mismatch would involve a direct reversal of politeness. From one of the metacomments from the corpus, this would appear to be the participant's expectation too:

(1) L'ironico usa parole o espressioni che, per il tono con cui sono dette, dovrebbero permettere di cogliere un significato contrario a quello che propriamente hanno, per esempio: ma che bravo! Ci hai proprio azzeccato... allora che la persona si è sbagliata in pieno! Quello che dice quindi ha il sapore di una beffa e spesso è derisione. [An ironic person uses words or expressions that, because of the tone with which they are said, should allow someone to pick up on a meaning that is opposite to what they actually have, for example: oh very good! You've got it just right... then that person definitely got it totally wrong! So, what they say has a taste of making fun and often it's mockery]⁸⁸

In this instance, we can see that the speaker describes the behaviour with reference to three metapragmatic terms which have been shown in the previous chapter to correlate with mock polite behaviours: *ironico* [*ironic*], *beffa* [*mockery*] and *derisione* [*mockery/scorn*]. If we examine the hypothetical speech event of saying *ma che bravo! Ci hai proprio azzeccato* [*oh very good! You've got it just right...*], while intending to express criticism, it clearly flouts the maxim of quality through these ostensible compliments, in the way described in Grice (1975). The speaker appears to pay attention to quality face but that favourable evaluation is precisely reversed through internal mismatch (the reference to the *tone*) and the pragmatic outcome is an attack on quality face.

⁸⁸ The three Italian metapragmatic terms are translated approximately – this should not be interpreted as assuming that the items are functionally equivalent.

However, this kind of matched reversal of face evaluation, where the same aspect of face (in this case quality face) is first flattered and then attacked, actually accounted for a small proportion of the observed mock polite behaviours, as will be shown. The fact that the speaker in (1) perceives this to be a typical example of mock polite behaviour, serves to underline the extent to which, in this context, people's perceptions of mock politeness contrast with their usage. Additionally, it shows how lay (second-order) perceptions are more likely to match academic (second-order) theory. This has been previously noted in the contrast between lay and academic perceptions of similarity between irony and sarcasm, and the actual first-order usage, in Chapter 7. The similarity is not altogether surprising given that academic second order theory is often informed by lay/folk (second order) expectations, but it is clearly problematic at the level of validity of the theory.

In total, four main kinds of mismatch were identified, and these were:

- mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and attack on face
- mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and violation of sociality rights
- mismatch of upholding sociality rights and violation of sociality rights
- mismatch of upholding sociality rights and attack on face

Each of these types is illustrated in the following section. It should be noted that, in many instances, the attack involved *both* a threat to face and sociality rights, but I have maintained the four categories based on the aspect which seemed to be the primary locus of attack. As previously, occurrences which could not be classified were marked as unclear and have been omitted from the charts that follow (there were 21 such instances in total). Figure 10.1 summarises the frequency of each mismatch type.

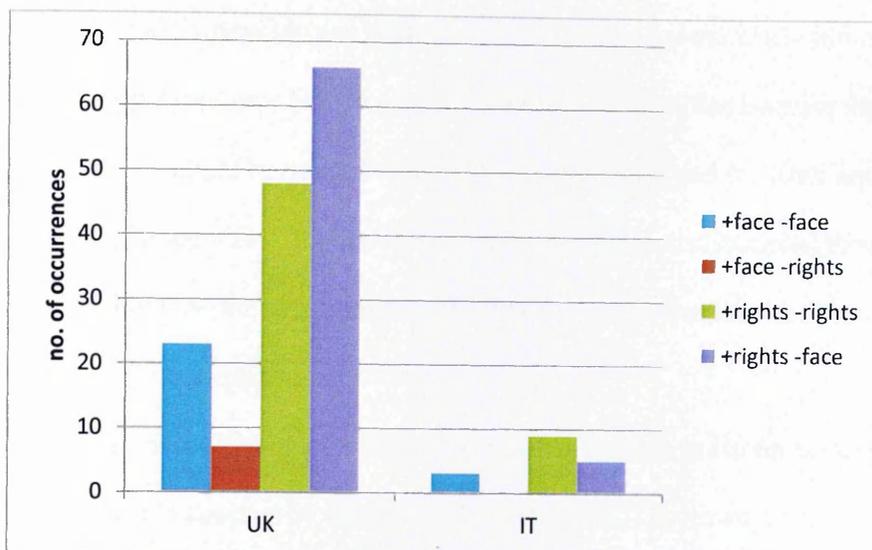


Figure 10.1Types of im/politeness mismatch in mock polite behaviours

The first feature that we might note from Figure 10.1 is the difference in number of mock polite behaviours which were retrieved from the English and Italian sub-corpora. For this reason, I will avoid comparing the two in this section or trying to generalise about the Italian data. This difference in frequency also reflects the findings from the previous chapter. Although the Italian corpus is smaller than the English corpus, it is not clear why there is such disparity in the number of mock polite behaviours. I note three possible hypotheses, but further research would be required to test them:

- a) this actually represents a lower frequency of mock politeness in Italian, as assumed by lay and academic stereotypes discussed in Chapter 2. However this hypothesis is weakened by the findings from Chapter 8 where we saw that IRONICO retrieved many more behaviours than the English *ironic* and the number labelled with SARCASTICO was comparable to *sarcastic*;
- b) the process of identifying metapragmatic comment was flawed and failed to identify the most productive terms for descriptions of mock politeness. It is

certainly possible that some terms were omitted, particularly informal, multiword expressions were less likely to be identified because the former items might be omitted in a traditional thesaurus, and the latter are less likely to be identified through the computer-generated distributional thesaurus. However, the consistency of the findings makes this less likely as the overarching explanation;

- c) the range of terms for describing mock politeness in Italian is more limited and mainly covered by IRONICO and SARCASTICO. These two items account for a much larger proportion of the overall mock polite utterances in the Italian data, than their cognates in the English data.

The second feature which stands out in Figure 10.1 is that the most frequent mismatch in the UK data does not involve simple reversal of the same aspect of politeness (e.g. flattering of quality face followed by attack on quality face), but involves ostensibly upholding sociality rights alongside/ followed by an attack on face. This may be the result of the data in two ways. First, that I am analysing naturally occurring data means that the mock polite behaviours occur within extended sequences. This kind of data has been somewhat neglected in previous studies of irony and sarcasm (as seen in Chapter 5) and therefore differences are to be expected. Second, that participation in an online forum involves entry to a community and therefore concerns of sociality rights may be particularly salient (although not all the behaviours occur online). However, there were some differences between the English and Italian datasets in this regard as 75% of the Italian occurrences involved reversal of the same aspect compared to 49% in the English data. This would suggest that, structurally, the occurrences from the Italian forum are closer to the second order expectations.

The third feature to be noted from Figure 10.1 is that, for both datasets, the aspect which is ostensibly addressed is not *face* (the red and blue bars), as might be predicted from classic models of sarcasm, but *sociality rights* (the green and purple bars). In the English sub-corpus, 78% of occurrences ostensibly upheld sociality rights, and in the Italian sub-corpus 82% did so. In contrast, regarding the impolite move, face attack was more frequent than violation of sociality rights in the English data (62% of occurrences). In the Italian data the type of attack was equal (50%) overall, although as will be seen, this varied across the metapragmatic labels. As will be seen in the discussion below, the stronger weighting towards initial or superficial upholding of sociality rights is partly because these utterances occur within sequences of interaction; they are not usually isolated or invented utterances, of the type that is often discussed in the literature (e.g. 'I love children who keep their rooms clean, said by a mother to her untidy son', first cited in Gibbs and O'Brien 1991; subsequently discussed in Hamamoto 1998; Sperber and Wilson 1998; Partington 2006, *inter alia*).

In the following sub-sections, I illustrate each kind of mismatch and note which metapragmatic labels were most closely associated with the different types.

10.2.1 Mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and attack on face

Alba-Juez & Attardo (2014) define sarcasm as negative irony, that is 'where an apparently positive comment expresses a negative criticism or judgment of a person, a thing or a situation' (2014: 100). This would clearly describe this particular kind of im/politeness mismatch, and this first type is closest to second order descriptions, even though it was far from being the most frequent, as seen in Figure 10.1.

In (2), we see that the speaker describes a past interaction, labelled as BITCHY, in which a friend flatters her quality face by showing appreciation for her appearance

(those trousers are so much better for you) while almost simultaneously attacking the same aspect of face through an unfavourable comparison with her usual appearance.

(2) Thread title: Are cropped trousers for short people really a no no

Poster C: Yes I have watched Trinny and Susanna and Gok and I know the rules.

However I still have cropped trousers as part of my wardrobe and do wear them with heels and also with flat sandals.

However my new gay friend who is a lovely guy said to me this week when I was wearing ankle length trousers (which I actually don't like tbh) I do like bootflares though

ooh [NAME] those trousers are so much better for you than crops.

[...]

I've decided I don't really care that much, I will carry on wearing them and that my Gok friend was feeling a bit bitchy that day.

This was the most frequent mismatch type for behaviours labelled as IRONICO and equal highest for SARCASTICO. Thus, in terms of type of mismatch, we get a sense of the behaviours from the Italian corpus conforming most closely to the second order expectations.

10.2.3 Mismatch of favourable evaluation of face and violation of sociality rights

In the second kind of mismatch, face is still the aspect which is apparently being flattered, but the impoliteness is oriented towards the target's sociality rights. As can be seen from (3) the speaker (a cat, as voiced by a participant in the form), is ostensibly evaluated favourably in terms of its abilities, a key component of quality face, and it considers this a violation of its sociality rights:

(3) Today I decapitated a mouse and dropped its headless body at their feet. I had hoped this would strike fear into their hearts, since it clearly demonstrates my capabilities.

However, they merely made **condescending** comments about what a "good little hunter" I am. B*st@rds!

As seen in Figure 10.1, this was the least frequent kind of mismatch and did not occur at all in the Italian data.

10.2.3 Mismatch of upholding sociality rights and violation of sociality rights

The third category involved apparent attention to and attack of the same aspect, in this case some type of sociality rights. The most frequent kind of sociality rights to be upheld in the polite move was association, and often it related to the feature of 'involvement' because the attacks occurred within sequences of interaction.

Therefore, the attack often ostensibly appeared to be a preferred response within some adjacency pair (as seen in the discussion of group mock politeness in Section 10.3). In (4), we see that the *patronising* utterance, made by someone in a position of power, involves ostensibly upholding sociality rights (involvement and empathy) whilst also violating those sociality rights by not taking the problem seriously or respecting the target's concerns.

(4) The following morning, a different urologist visited.. and told us it's perfectly normal for this to be happening, and he was ordering an u/sound on bladder and kidneys to check for stones!!! When the ultrasound showed healthy bladder and kidneys (Duh!), he told me, rather **patronisingly**, "**isn't that a relief, mummy?**" and was quite happy to send us away. [...] So now I'm feeling that there is a problem and it's being ignored.

This was the most frequent mismatch type for behaviours labelled as TEASE and MOCK. It was also the equal highest for *condescending*, PRENDERE IN GIRO, *paternalis** and equal highest for SARCASTICO.

What the examples shown in (3) and (4) also share is a lack of mention of intentionality on the part of the producer of the mock polite behaviour. The mismatch then also lies in the apparent intention and actual reception, as anticipated from literature on patronising and condescending behaviour which claims that patronisers may not be aware of the negative reception of their behaviours (e.g. as proposed in Hummert & Ryan 1996 with regard to intergenerational communication).

10.2.4 Mismatch of upholding sociality rights and attack on face

The fourth type of mismatch was the most frequent and involved ostensibly upholding sociality rights, as in the type above, but the attack then primarily focusses on some aspect of face, as shown in (5). In (5), the speaker responds to the forum poster who started the thread, voicing concerns regarding violation of her sociality rights ‘why so many mums harbour jealousy and blank you during school run?’. The poster offers some possible reasons, thus completing the adjacency pair and showing involvement. However, the reasons that are offered attack the addressee’s quality face and the poster goes on to offer unsolicited advice, which further violates sociality rights and attacks face. She then finishes with the use of a smiling emoticon, returning to the persona of one attending to sociality rights.

(5) Poster G: Perhaps they have picked up on the fact that you and your DH regard them as 'provincials'.

Never met a woman who blanked another mother out of jealousy of their child's attractiveness 😊

You sound like you are overthinking things a bit. Perhaps get a job, or a hobby. 😊

[...]

Poster G: <gasp> I just came on to apologise for my earlier **bitchy** comment, but now feel VINDICATED

This was the most frequent type of mismatch for behaviours labelled as BITCHY, *patronising*, *sarcastic*, PUT DOWN, and *passive aggressive* and equal highest for *condescending*.

To sum up, in this section we have seen that actual examples of mock politeness are more varied in terms of im/politeness mismatch than might be predicted from the second order theory. The mock politeness cannot be explained by a direct reversal of face evaluation and, in the English data, the aspect which was flattered in the polite move was most frequently different from the aspect which was threatened in the attack move. Having provided an overview of the four main types of im/politeness mismatch, in the following section I go on to consider in more detail how the metapragmatic labels relate to these variables.

10.2.5 Metapragmatic labels and types of im/politeness mismatch

As seen from the discussion above, the identification of types of mismatch also provides a way of distinguishing between the various metapragmatic labels and therefore addressing the question of how they relate to one another within languages. In this section, I explore this aspect further by examining how frequently the metapragmatic labels referred to behaviours which involved flattering face or upholding sociality rights in the polite move, and attacking face or violating sociality face in the impolite move.

Figures 10.2 and 10.3 represent the data from Figure 10.1, but an additional layer of detail has been added as they now show which metapragmatic labels were used to describe the behaviours. In both figures, the columns have been ordered from left to right in terms of decreasing percentage referring to sociality rights but the figure uses raw frequency to avoid over-interpretation of low frequencies. So for instance, TEASE

in Figure 10.2 involved ostensibly upholding sociality rights in 100% of occurrences.⁸⁹

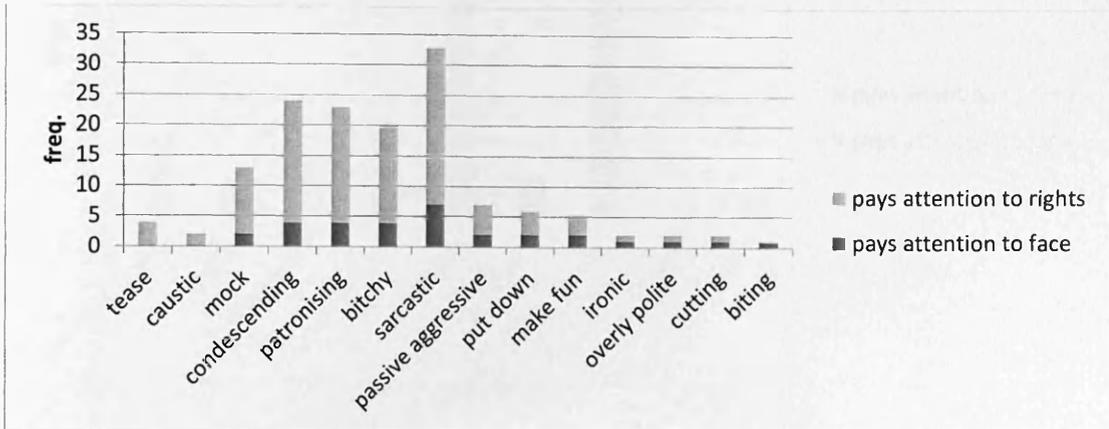


Figure 10.2 Mock polite behaviours classified according to surface politeness: UK data

⁸⁹ The raw frequency format was maintained to allow for the differences in frequency of individual metapragmatic labels to be noted. For instance, it would be misleading to present biting in a percentage column because there is only one occurrence and so we cannot comment on the pattern of usage.

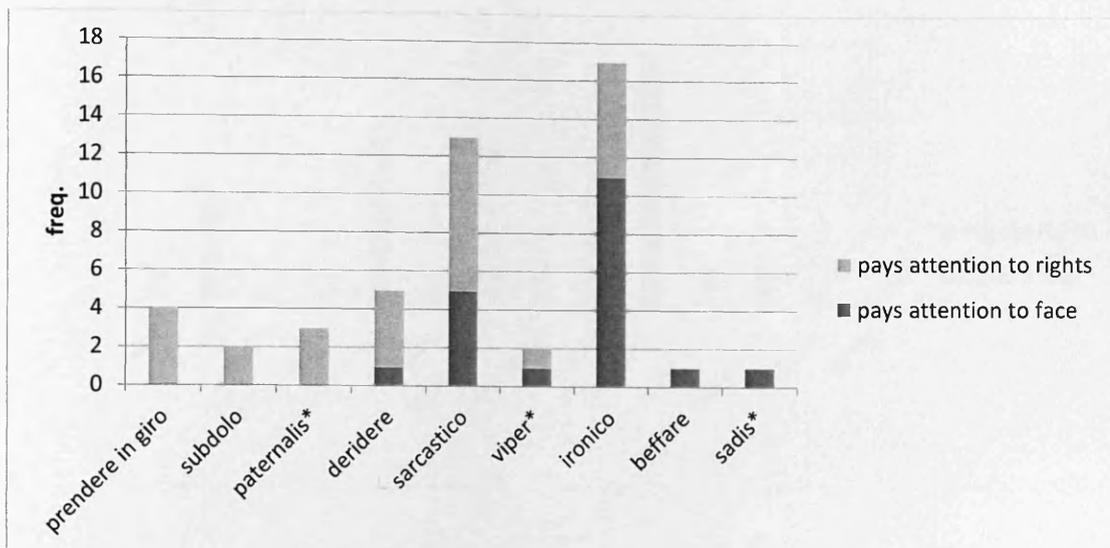


Figure 10.3 Mock polite behaviours classified according to surface politeness: Italian data [Italian items: MAKE fun, underhand, paternalis*/patronis*, LAUGH at, sarcastic, viper*, ironic, MOCK, sadis*]

In both the English and Italian charts, we see that *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO are located in quite central positions in the figures, indicating similar relative usage. TEASE and PRENDERE IN GIRO also occupy similar positions (to the left of the chart) with all occurrences flattering rights in the polite move. However, in the Italian data, *paternalis** is distinct from SARCASTICO, while in the English data, *patronising* and *condescending* seem to cluster quite close to *sarcastic* and they cannot be distinguished from BITCHY according to this variable either.

Moving onto the aspect which is attacked in the impolite move, Figures 10.4 and 10.5 show the frequency of utterances which violated sociality rights or attacked face. As in the previous two figures, the bars are arranged by percentage referring to rights, with the highest percentage referring to sociality rights on the left.

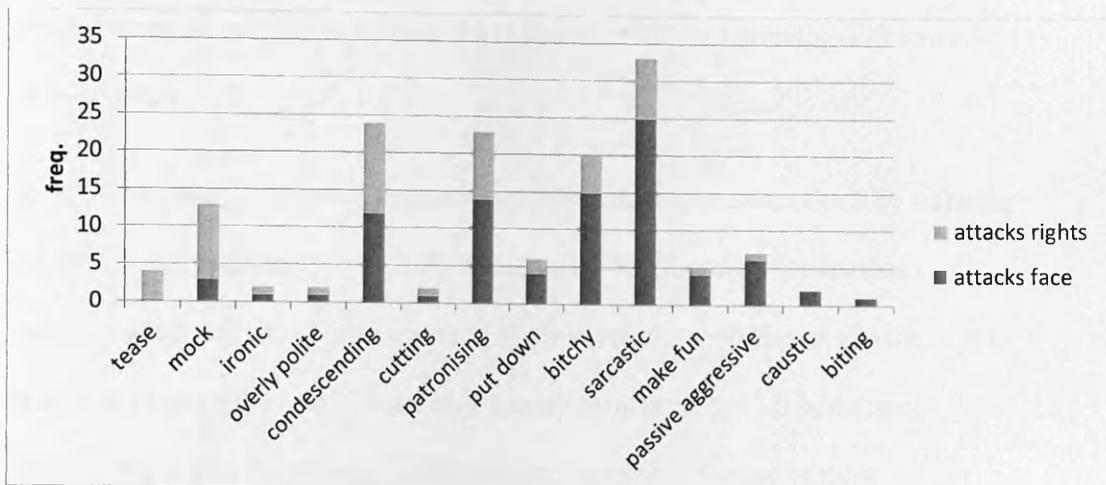


Figure 10.4 Mock polite behaviours classified according to aspect attacked: UK data

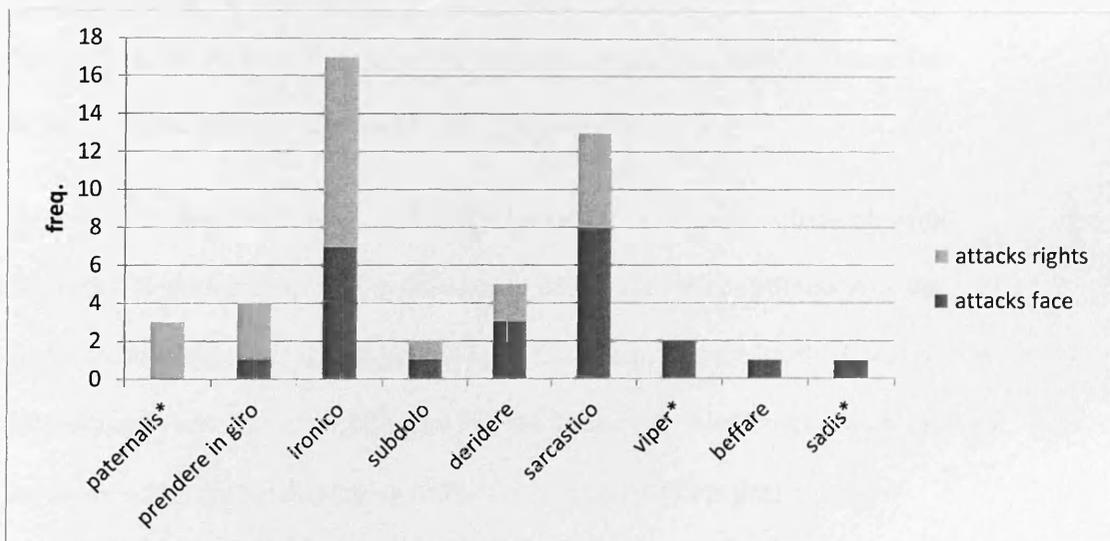


Figure 10.5 Mock polite behaviours classified according to aspect attacked: Italian data [Italian items: *paternalis**/*patronis**, MAKE fun, *ironic*, *underhand*, LAUGH at, *sarcastic*, *viper**, MOCK, *sadis**]

In both the English and Italian datasets, we see that behaviours labelled as *sarcastic* or SARCASTICO tend to be placed towards the right-hand side of the figure thus showing how these mock polite behaviours are more likely to involve attacking face, rather than violation of sociality rights. This shows why it is important to expand the range of metapragmatic labels beyond simply *sarcastic* or SARCASTICO if the aim is to

investigate mock politeness, because the different labels are retrieving different kinds of behaviours.

In the Italian data, *paternalis** maintains its distinction from SARCASTICO by referring to sociality rights rather than face. Similarly, in the English data, we see that *condescending* and *patronising* are more likely to refer to violation of sociality rights than BITCHY or *sarcastic* which are very closely associated here. It is, therefore, in the impolite move that we can start to differentiate between the usage of these items.

There is also a distinction between the behaviours labelled with MOCK and TEASE and the other metapragmatic labels, as they are more strongly associated with violation of sociality rights. At the other end of the scale, MAKE FUN and *passive aggressive* behaviours are strongly associated with attacks on face.

From the analysis here, we can see that although these behaviours have all been identified as performing mock politeness, in many cases the construction of the im/politeness mismatch differs according to the metapragmatic label. However, it is interesting to note in the English data that the behaviours labelled as *patronising* and *condescending* are not displaying distinctly different patterns from the other behaviours, even though they have not previously been included in discussion of mock politeness (as discussed in Chapter 3). Perhaps a stronger distinction relates to the importance of attributed intention and this could be investigated in further studies.

10.2.4 Mock politeness and mismatch of addressee

There is another, minor, category of mismatch which has been kept separate from the preceding discussion because it does not involve a mismatch of evaluation with reference to the target, but rather a mismatch of illocutionary targets or ‘audience-centred indirectness’ (Haugh 2014: 35). This is illustrated in example (7).

(7) Ora, io potrei anche zittirmi e arrendermi alla voce dell'esperienza, se non fosse per quella frase che lei aggiunge rivolgendosi **subdolamente** al bambino (non a me, per evitare il confronto diretto, è chiaro!) e sibilandola a mezza voce tra i denti: "Non piangere, Paolino, tanto la nonna, quando la mamma non c'è, te lo da lo stesso il succhiotto col miele"... [Now, I could shut up and give in to the voice of experience, if it weren't for what she says next, passively-aggressively turning to baby (not me, to avoid a direct confrontation, of course!) and whispering "Don't cry Pauly, because grandma, when mummy isn't here, will give you the dummy with honey anyway"...]

In (7), the producer of the behaviour ostensibly addresses her grandchild, but (according to the speaker in the example) the person who the discourse is *for* (the 'beneficiary' in Partington's 2003 terms) is the speaker, the producer's daughter-in-law.⁹⁰

In each case, with one exception, the apparent addressee was a child while the actual beneficiary was an overhearing adult. As such, the illocutionary mismatch involved ostensibly upholding the child's sociality rights (involvement) in order to criticise another participant (usually attack on quality face).

The behaviours which involved this kind of mismatch were labelled as *passive aggressive* in the English data and *SUBDOLO* in the Italian data, although additional metapragmatic comments such as *sarky* and *snide* were also found in the English data. Interestingly, although *passive aggressive* and *SUBDOLO* were the only labels that described this kind of mismatch, they were used in distinctly gender-specific ways in

⁹⁰ Partington (2003: 56-58) adds the hearer role of beneficiary to the account for the participant that constitutes the reason why the discourse is enacted in the first place.

the two corpora: in these instances, and more generally, *passive aggressive* was used to label a woman's behaviour, while SUBDOLO, as noted in the previous chapter, was predominately used to label a man's behaviour.

This kind of mismatch once again shows the range of types which are present and that the simple mismatch of propositional values is not sufficient to account for im/politeness mismatch (discussed in Chapter 4).

10.3 Mock politeness as a group activity

Another behaviour type which was not found in the behaviours labelled as *sarcastic* or *ironic* was the use of mock politeness as a group activity and nor has this been much discussed in the academic literature on mock politeness, with the exception of Ducharme (1994) on sarcasm as a form of group-exerted social control. This kind of group activity has been more extensively addressed as mock *impoliteness* under the labels 'teasing' (e.g. Boxer & Cortés Conde 1997; Geyer 2010) and 'put-down humour' (e.g. Terrion & Ashworth 2002). However, as Haugh & Bousfield (2012: 1101-1102) point out, these are *social actions / interactional practices* rather than *evaluations*, and, as such, there is no reason to assume they primarily perform politeness or even that all participants will agree on the same evaluation of im/politeness.

In twelve behaviours (11% of the mock polite behaviours, excluding those labelled as *sarcastic* or *ironic*) in the UK data, the mock politeness involved several participants, as illustrated in (6) which has been edited to show a sample of the mock polite responses.

(6) Thread title: boys name to go with Honey and Devon?

Poster L: Cream

Scone

Poster F: Given the names of your other two, I would go with the bakery theme:

Doughnut

Bun

Eccles

Bap

or

Pastie

Poster R: Rice

Pudding

Jam

Poster A: Cor - some of you are being cunts.

Why would you **mock** the names of someone's children?

I was about to start my own thread about baby names but I'm totally scared off now.

Poster S: [NAME] bit ott don't you think? People will often make jokes related to people's names. If they are more unusual that is more likely that will happen.

And on message boards you have to take the good comments with the bad!

In (6) we can see how the mock politeness becomes a group activity with at least three participants entering the jocular frame and contributing mock polite posts which use the same kind of im/politeness mismatch: offering help while criticising the poster's choice of names (upholding sociality rights and face attack).⁹¹ The person who started the thread commented unfavourably on the mock polite behaviour, although she was less overt in her unfavourable evaluation than the speaker in (6), labelling the other

⁹¹ The presentation is also similar in that no emoticons or other cues are used.

participants as ‘jokers’. In this case, the mock politeness appears to serve a face-enhancing function of building group cohesion, alongside the face-attacking function.

In fact, in approximately half of these instances some participants commented favourably on the mock politeness for instance through a metacomment such as ‘hilarious’ or paralinguistic representation such as ‘haha’. In this humorous (for *some* participants and observers) co-constructed mock politeness, we can see a similar function to that of the ‘humorous fantasy sequences’ discussed in Hay (1995). The appreciation for the mock politeness further illustrates the importance of this group activity to building a social identity and its function as a form of social management, as hypothesised for teasing (e.g. Boxer & Cortés Conde 1997). For instance, in the example above, the mock politeness is used to indicate that this kind of non-traditional name is not part of the community’s norms.

Perhaps not surprisingly, only once was the favourable evaluation made by the target of the mock polite behaviour. In that instance, she was subsequently complimented by other participants for being ‘a good sport’ and having ‘a good sense of humour’ and thus her interpretation of the behaviour as *mock* mock polite ensured her acceptance within the group (other participants in the thread did not identify the same behaviour in the same favourable way). From this we can see how the behaviour is likely to overlap with those covered in the literature on mock impoliteness because the im/politeness evaluation is one of participation role.

The metapragmatic labels which were applied to this kind of group mock politeness were MOCK (7), BITCHY (2), MAKE FUN (2), TEASE (2), *caustic* (1). The frequencies are quite low, but it seems to be most strongly associated with MOCK as half the occurrences involved this kind of group mock politeness.

The identification of this shared activity shows the importance of going beyond the individual utterance to examination of the broader co-text. It may be that such features have not been discussed previously with reference to mock politeness either because research has focussed on single utterances, or because the wider range of metapragmatic comments were not used.

10.4 Mock politeness and gender

In order to further explore the gender patterns that appeared in the collocational networks, discussed in Chapter 9, the behaviours which performed mock politeness were also annotated according to whether the producer was presented as male or female.⁹² The Italian data is not reported here because the number of occurrences were too few, as seen in the summary data in Figure 10.1. The English data is presented in Figure 10.6. Figure 10.6 only shows the data from third person behaviours to avoid skewing the gender balance given that the forum is dominated by female users and therefore metacomment referring to the first and second person are more likely to describe interactions in the forum and therefore female participants.

⁹² Male or female is assigned on the basis of the gender identity that the speaker claims for themselves in references to the first or second person or is assigned by the speaker in the case of third person descriptions of mock polite behaviours. This was facilitated in the Italian data because gender is marked in much description (e.g. adjectives and some nouns).

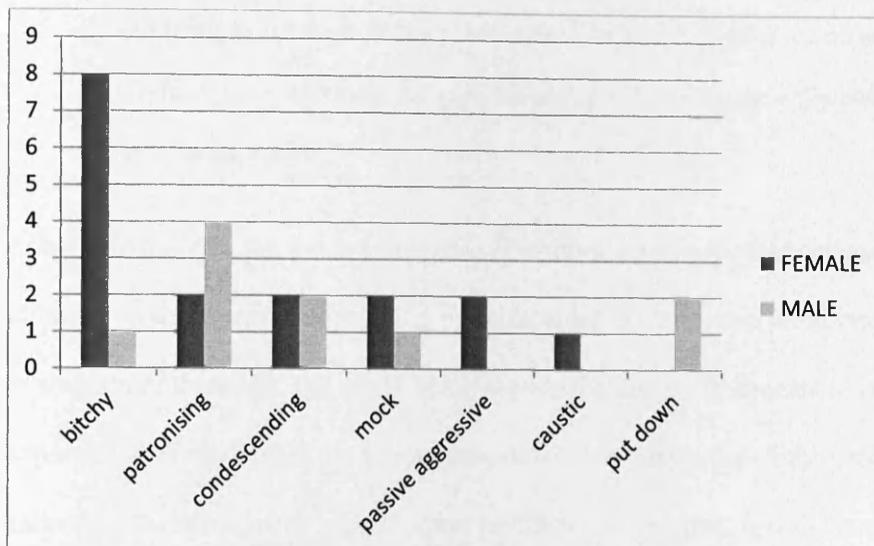


Figure 10.6 Distribution of third person mock polite behaviours by label and gender

The most visible pattern, as might be expected, was that BITCHY was used to refer to female speakers, with just one exception (example 2 above, in which the participant is labelled as *my gay friend* and *my Gok friend*, suggesting that the speaker was also commenting on some aspect of gender / sexual identity). This parallels the gender bias seen in Chapter 8 regarding the use of *sarcastic* for describing male behaviours in third person descriptions. If we compare the mock behaviours that were labelled as BITCHY and *sarcastic*, as already seen from Figures 10.4 and 10.2, they were similarly positioned in terms of which aspects were flattered/attacked. The similarities are also apparent if we take two examples, such as (8) and (9):

- (8) course, i ended up telling a couple of **bitchy** customers, because I was lying down on the floor because I felt sick as shit, and this random woman came in and snottily said "oh! having a lie-down are we?"
- "yes, I replied, I'm pregnant and feel sick".

(9) DH is happy for me to happy at home BUT he moans at me if the house isn't tidy or I get behind. He is **sarcastic** and says things like "I know you're really busy" or "if you could spare the time"....

In both (8) and (9), the mock polite behaviour involves the speaker ostensibly paying attention to some aspect of sociality rights in order to express an unfavourable evaluation of the target and attack some aspect of face. There appears to be little that separates or distinguishes the behaviours, other than the gender of the producer.⁹³ Indeed, in three instances in the corpus, performing bitchiness and sarcasm were equated, as illustrated in (10) and each time with reference to a female speaker.

(10) then the same stupid **bitch** who finally came to see how dilated I was walked in saying 'oh having a bloody baby are we' **sarcasm** dripping from her voice.

This would seem to support earlier research from Dress et al. (2008), who found that although:

male participants in our study reported using sarcasm more often than the females (according to the Sarcasm Self-Report Scale), [...] the male participants were no more likely to provide sarcastic completions than females in the free response task, and they did not choose ironic completions more often in the forced choice task

Dress et al. (2008: 81-82)

⁹³ In future research this could be tested by manipulating the gender of the mock polite speaker in these occurrences gathered from the corpus and asking participants to apply a metapragmatic comment to the interaction.

In other words, there is, once again, a mismatch between perception and usage. In this case, the discrepancy lies in the association of males with production of sarcastic behaviour and the actual language usage.

10.5 Mismatch location

Following the analysis in Chapter 8 for the behaviours labelled IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic*, the utterances were also coded according to the location of the mismatch. As discussed in Chapter 3, mismatch was considered to be internal when ‘the context projected by a part of the behaviour mismatches that projected by another part’ (Culpeper 2011a:155), illustrated in example (11).

(11) Poster S: [Name]....you really do not know what you are talking about. Lucky you.

Poster D: [Name]- you have no idea what I do and don't know. **Patronising** to assume you know a thing about me or my situation.

Conversely, mismatch was considered to be external when ‘the context projected by a behaviour mismatches the context of use’ (Culpeper 2011a: 155), as shown in (12).

(12) Blimey, that's organised and impressive, seriously. I'm not **mocking**- it shows forethought and **planning**!

In (11) we can see that the Poster S primarily attacks Poster D's quality face in the first part by asserting her lack of competence, and this too violates her sociality rights by questioning her right to participate in the discussion. In the second part, *lucky you*, the speaker ostensibly shows some empathy and interest in the addressee's state. In contrast, in (12), there are no verbal, oral or visual elements (Culpeper 2011a:169) which indicate mismatch. However, we see the poster feels the need to clarify his/her intentions by adding *I am not mocking*, because she was concerned that the display of attention towards quality face could be interpreted as insincere in the context.

The proportion of mismatch types are summarised in Figure 10.7.

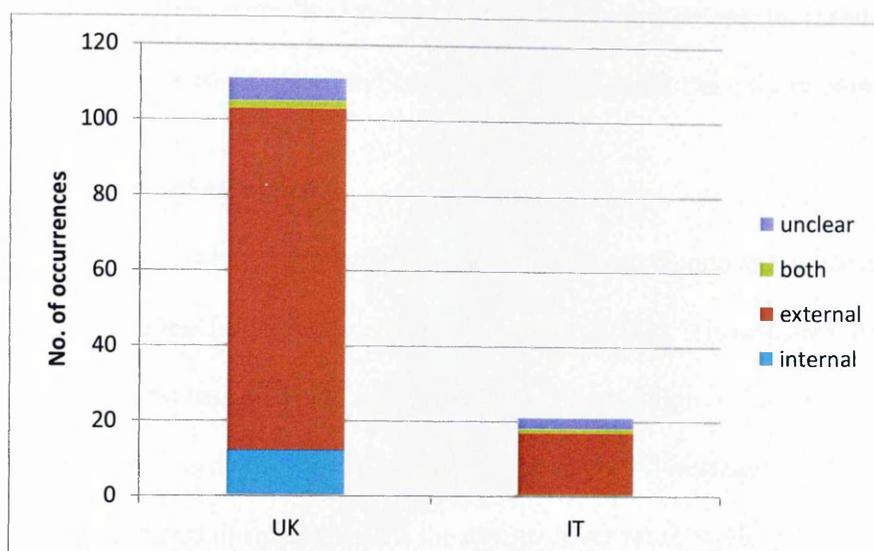


Figure 10.7: Type of mismatch in the mock polite utterances

As can be seen from Figure 10.7, there were no instances of internal mismatch in the Italian data. This contrasts with the findings for *IRONICO* and *SARCASTICO*, discussed in Chapter 9, for which internal mismatch made up at least 50% of occurrences and was more characteristic of the Italian data than that from the British forum. This difference may be a result of the low quantity of data, but in that case it is surprising there were no occurrences at all. Alternatively, it may point towards a different set of behaviours being identified by the different metapragmatic labels, that is to say that *IRONICO* and *SARCASTICO* are more distinct from the other labels of mock politeness, than is the case for *ironic* and *sarcastic*. The fact that only *IRONICO* and *SARCASTICO* are used as metareferences (I am being...) is also influential but the direction of the correlation is not clear.

As Figure 10.6 shows, in the UK data, there were instances of internal mismatch but these were much lower than the occurrences making use of external mismatch. The proportion is also lower than that reported for behaviours labelled as *sarcastic* (over

50%). However, the fact that such usages occur shows how the reality of mock politeness differs from the dominant second-order expectations, for instance most work on irony, as discussed in Chapter 4, assumes that it can only be contextual.

10.5.1 Internal mismatch

As this aspect is less frequently included in relation to second order discussions of mock politeness (with the exception of Culpeper 2011a), it is discussed in more detail here. The first feature which is analysed is the organisation of the mismatched components. As discussed in Chapter 3, Haiman (1998) distinguishes between two kinds of internal mismatch: in one the mismatch is verbal, while in the second the clash lies in the verbal/non-verbal components. In the UK data analysed here, the former was the most dominant, accounting for ten out of fourteen instances.

Regarding the order of the im/polite components, in half the occurrences (seven out of fourteen) the speaker moved from apparent politeness to impoliteness, that is following the garden-path mechanism as discussed in Dynel (2009), and this is illustrated in (13).

(13) The best was when I got married, the comments ranged from "well your dress was nice considering it was from the high street", to "well that restaurant is ok for you but it's not Michelin starred is it. I wouldn't eat there" and "your flowers were good considering you did them yourself". At the time I just dismissed them but as time has gone on there have been so many **bitchy** comments that I could write a book!

In such instances, the sudden reversal of evaluation means that the target and hearer is forced to re-process the initial politeness in light of the subsequent impoliteness, thus increasing the cognitive load, as discussed in Chapter 2. In such instances, it may be hypothesised that the impoliteness will have greater impact because of this

investment. If the reward for such processing in humour is pleasurable, in this case it is the opposite. In this, the mechanism appears similar to that hypothesised for external mismatch which also requires multiple processing and the extra investment required helps to answer the question of why a speaker chooses mock politeness rather than direct face attack (as asked in Leech 2014: 234).

However, in approximately a quarter of occurrences (four out of fourteen) the mismatch involved a shift from expressing impoliteness to politeness, as shown in (14) (also in example 11 above).

(14) Poster F. [NAME] People who go to University, can still be idiots as we see by the above post, and yours! 😄 [up own arse comes to mind! 😄).

[...]

Please correct any spelling grammatical errors one may have made, oh, and I shall also stay behind for six of the best and detention! 😄

Poster S. [NAME], (may I call you that?) If you want to do **passive-aggressive**, 😊😊 works much better than 😄😄😄

HTH 😊

In (14) we see that the first speaker is responding to a previous utterance and combines the face attack of calling the hearer an *idiot*, together a grinning / wide smile emoticon. This is evaluated as *passive aggressive* by another participant who also

performs mock politeness in the form of a polite move offering advice on emoticon choice.⁹⁴

In the impolite to polite mismatch it appears unlikely that the clash will lead to the kind of cognitive ‘oscillation’ between possible interpretations hypothesised for humour (Koestler 1964). Instead, it would appear that the addition of the insincere politeness adds to the weight of the impoliteness by compounding the attack, frequently adding a violation of sociality rights (expectations to be treated with respect). Thus, we may hypothesise that the order of the mismatched elements has a different processing and, perhaps, a different weightiness for the target, which could be an interesting area for future research.

In the remaining three instances of internal mismatch, the second of the two kinds of mismatch from Haiman (1998), the order could not be separated because it was communicated through tone and visual features, as illustrated in (15).⁹⁵

(15) just laugh at her **patronisingly** and tell her shes being an idiot but she'll learn.

And roll your eyes a bit and smile pityingly at her.

And then kindly tell her 'Not to worry, I was as silly with mine before I knew better too'

(16) I'd say, "gosh, that was a while ago, now, wasn't it? I'm glad I took steps to get

myself back to the calm, sorted person you see before you! But are you alright?? You

⁹⁴ As discussed in Chapter 8, Attardo (2001) hypothesises an ‘ironical mode adoption’, but the data here shows a more general ‘mock politeness mode adoption’. The target of an attack does not just counter with attack, but with the same form of impoliteness. This constitutes an area for further investigation as current findings are conflictive with Eisterhold et al. (2006) finding this to be an infrequent response to irony, in contrast to Gibbs (2000) and Norrick (1993).

⁹⁵ In the behaviours which were labelled as *patronising* and *condescending*, there were often references to tone, in particular SOUND was a frequent collocate but in the majority of cases SOUND was being used with the sense of ‘appear’ or ‘seem’.

seem a bit pre-occupied with this topic- is there anything I can help you with?" (said with fake concern and a ~~patronising tone~~)

Example (16) also serves to highlight the fuzzy border between utterances which could be classified as functioning through external mismatch with contextualisation cues (in the sense of Gumperz 1992) and those which function through internal mismatch. This lack of clarity was seen in the second order discussion presented in Chapter 3 and may, in part, be a result of conventionalisation; where an item has become conventionalised for mock politeness, the classification would be internal mismatch, while when the item is not conventionalised, it functions as a cue towards the mismatch. If we take the example of (18), the lexical item *blimey* acts as a cue towards the non-sincere interpretation because its use is somewhat marked as an interjection.⁹⁶

(18) Poster M: yes what website was that?

Poster S: Oh just take a look at any of a million websites which are male dominated. I don't think anyone is about to give them any oxygen of publicity Midnight.

Poster P: Shirley do you mean male dominated websites are generally filled with hundreds of men threatening to rape to death 15 year old girls? Blimey.

Poster S: <rolls eyes>

Yeah, that's what I meant.

Poster P: Sorry Shirley that was a bit dickish and **passive aggressive** of me! I know that's not what you meant.

⁹⁶ It was also used in example (12), which may partly account for the speaker's feeling the need to repair within the same turn and transmission unit.

And that link was quite an eye opener - naive as it may sound I am gobsmacked that people on what looks like quite a normal forum could be so monstrous.

In terms of how the metapragmatic labels relate to one another, we might note that the label which most frequently indicated internal mismatch was BITCHY and in these instances the mismatch was always verbal (i.e. not visual or in tone). In this sense, BITCHY behaviours are more overt and therefore less deniable than those which rely on tone for internal mismatch, or on context for an impolite interpretation. However, as the total numbers are relatively low, more research would be required in this area.

In contrast to the findings for *sarcastic* and *ironic*, the internal mismatch in these behaviours was never made up by the use of the metapragmatic label itself, for instance in the structure of 'compliment'+ *I am being sarcastic*. This would then appear to be unique to the IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* metapragmatic labels.

10.6 Conventionalisation: The case of HTH

Another feature of the mock polite behaviours was the extent to which mock politeness can be conventionalised (discussed in Chapter 2). Conventionalisation was observed both from the analysis of negation of mock polite intent and through analysis of the actual behaviours labelled as mock polite. To illustrate this feature, I take the

example of *HTH/hth* (hope that helps) which appeared to be conventionalised both diachronically and synchronically.⁹⁷

Starting with the snapshot from the corpus, there were 1911 occurrences of *HTH*, the majority of which acted as a closing device in a post offering advice or sharing experiences, as illustrated in (19).

(19) The second twin didnt want to come out and I thought oh no c section here I come. However 20 minutes later he emerged with the help of ventouse. He was blue and needed oxygen but has been absolutely fine. This was 6 years ago, I dont know if recommendations have changed since then **HTH**. xx

In contrast, in a small proportion of cases (28 instances), *HTH* closed a contribution which involved a direct face attack, thus constituting mock politeness with internal mismatch. This is illustrated in Figure 10.9.

N	Concordance
1	but you did come across as a bit of a twunt. HTH Add message Report Message poster
2	That gem alone screams Fucking Bullshit. HTH Add message Report Message poster
3	Tue 31-Jan-12 12:48:23 you are being a nob hth Add message Report Message poster
4	loud grand-parenting and think you're a twat, hth . Sorry apparently I needed to vent that, can
5	, are often described as twattish, or a bit of a tit. hth . Add message Report Message poster
6	women don't like you is because you're a twat. HTH . Add message Report Message poster
7	10:02:31 Your right it does sound twattish. HTH Add message Report Message poster
8	get why she insisted. You both sound mad. HTH Add message Report Message poster
9	. So, to surmise: You are talking utter bollocks. HTH . Add message Report Message poster
10	chibi Sun 06-Nov-11 14:13:38 i utterly disagree hth Add message Report Message poster

⁹⁷ Although I have taken *HTH* as an illustration, it should be noted that usage of emoticons in both datasets was also highly regulated in this regard. In addition to acting as contextualisation cues, they also constituted a paralinguistic marker of internal mismatch.

Figure 10.8 Selection of 10 concordance lines showing HTH accompanying bald on record face attack⁹⁸

The repeated use in these environments suggested conventionalisation, and moreover that this applies, in particular, to certain forum topics. To support the latter observation, 67% of the mock polite occurrences came from the same forum topic, ‘am I being unreasonable’ (AIBU), which is the most combative forum on the website because, as the title suggests, it invites appropriacy judgements. The remainder were from nine different forums.

In order to explore this further, 100 occurrences of *HTH* were taken from threads started in 2013 (a year which was not included in the corpus). Of these 100 occurrences, 85 were used sincerely, eleven were used as mock politeness, and four were unclassified. Once again, the mock polite instances were more likely to occur in the AIBU forum – six of the eleven mock polite instances were from AIBU (and out of eight total occurrences from AIBU in the sample, 6 involved mock politeness).

The shared understanding of the conventionalised nature of *HTH* was also evident in meta-discussions, for instance where mock politeness was being recommended as a counter strategy (also from the AIBU forum), as illustrated in (20), and in responding to queries about forum conventions, as in (21).⁹⁹

(20) Yes, start off with a gentle bitch and work your way up to a full on sarcastic **HTH**

(21) Thread title: Snarky thread: Some common MN phrases helpfully translated

⁹⁸ The concordance lines are those with the insult in L1 position to facilitate reading of the concordance.

⁹⁹ Example (21) is taken from the additional 2013 data.

Poster P: **HTH** - 'YABU. And a twat'

Poster M: **HTH** = hope this helps you realise that you're a twat.

Poster N: **HTH**= I have just said something really nasty and want to end on an amusing note = I am a twat

Poster K: **HTH** = I'm a passive aggressive twat

Poster T: **HTH** 😊

I am giving you the literal answer to an obviously wrong interpretation of your question because I feel like it.

However, as seen from the summary above, alongside this conventionalised usage within certain forums, there is consistent non-mock polite usage running alongside it and this is still the dominant usage overall for the website.

With regards to the diachronic processes, a sample of 100 occurrences of *HTH* was collected from 2004-2005 threads and no occurrences of mock polite behaviours were found. Thus we may hypothesise that it is somewhere between these two time periods that the item becomes primed for the mock polite usage within the more aggressive areas of the website. Once it has reached this point, as (22) shows, speakers feel the need to clarify the non mock-polite intent when posting within those forum, areas.

(22) If you go in with an attitude of 'you'll refuse me / you're all shit' then this will take valuable time away from your concern being heard.

Hope this helps (not a **sarcastic HTH** either)

Furthermore, as (23) shows, the non-sincere usage is recognised and challenged.

(24) And you can keep your **passive aggressive HTH** because no, it helps nobody at all.

10.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have focussed on the behaviours which performed mock politeness, as identified through the metapragmatic labels *patronising**, *biting*, MAKE FUN, *condescending*, *cutting*, *caustic*, MOCK, BITCHY, TEASE, *passive aggressive*, *put down*, *overly polite*, for English, and *paternalis**, *sadis**, SUBDOLO, PRENDERE IN GIRO, *viperis**, DERIDERE, BEFFARE, for Italian. In analysing these behaviours, I have attempted to answer two of my research questions:

- What is the relationship between the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels and the behaviours which they describe, and the second order descriptions?
- How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another within and across languages?

Regarding the first question, the comparison of academic second-order and first-order usage from the forums is less straightforward here than in the analysis of IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* because most research goes under those labels. While the classic models of sarcasm might anticipate a tendency towards reversal of face evaluation in the im/politeness mismatch, the analysis showed that the range of mismatch was far more complex than this and that politeness addressed towards upholding sociality rights was actually more common. I have hypothesised that, in part, this may be because I am analysing naturally occurring data rather than invented examples or one-line witticisms (e.g. Dynel 2013). Unlike the isolated examples which are often discussed in second order theorisations, they do not take place in a vacuum; the utterances which are labelled as *patronising* etc. most often occur in response to some other utterance and therefore sociality rights becomes much

more salient. There may also be an element of deniability in the use of the superficial response to sociality rights. The importance of the interactional context confirms previous research on naturally-occurring contexts, such as Nuolijarvi & Tiittula (2010) who found that all their instances of irony occurred in response turns.

With reference to the types of mismatch proposed in irony studies, like propositional mismatch, illocutionary mismatch was also found in the data, but it was a minority pattern. Evaluative mismatch, given that all examples involve im/politeness mismatch, was present in all instances of mock politeness.

Regarding previous research into *patronising* and *condescending* behaviour, the behaviours labelled by these two metapragmatic comments did appear to behave in very similar ways which justifies the tendency to subsume the two (e.g. Ytsma & Giles 1997). However, this does not apply to PATERNISTICO and CONDISCENDENTE, where CONDISCENDENTE behaves polysemously and holds a more favourable evaluation. There was also some variation in terms of the aspect which was attacked, with the behaviours labelled PATERNISTICO violating sociality rights while those labelled *patronising* and *condescending* were more strongly associated with attacking face. In the conversational data analysed here, the behaviours primarily involved the speaker asserting superiority for themselves as anticipated by the theoretical discussion (e.g. Buss 1989), and this is reflected in the way that the attack was more likely to involve ostensibly upholding some aspect of sociality rights. However, there was limited evidence that this label was more strongly associated with stereotypes of dependence (Hummert & Ryan 2001) in this conversational data. In the references to interactions outside the forum, they involved institutional contexts in the majority of cases (e.g. interactions with medical or teaching staff), but in online occurrences, where the label was being used with reference to another forum participant, there was

no indication that the patroniser was also claiming a socially or institutionally more powerful position. This discrepancy may relate to the kind of behaviour which is considered worth reporting (impolite behaviour by those in a position of authority), or could be a characteristic of the forum/computer-mediated interaction itself.

With reference to the second research question, I found that the number of behaviours retrieved from the Italian forum was much more limited than the English data. It was also much more limited than the number of behaviours retrieved using the metapragmatic labels *IRONICO* and *SARCASTICO*, and therefore size of the corpus is not sufficient to account for the low number of behaviours.

The analysis showed that broadening the range of metapragmatic labels beyond *IRONICO/ironic* and *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* allows for a wider range of mock polite behaviours to be retrieved and that there were some differences in the kinds of behaviours indexed with different metapragmatic labels. For instance, only *IRONICO/ironic* and *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* are used as meta-references within the mock impolite utterance in order to create the mismatch. I also found that, in contrast with *ironic* and *sarcastic*, using *MOCK* as a metapragmatic label, I was able to retrieve instances of multiple-authored mock politeness, although this was not visible in the Italian data. Furthermore, conventionalisation of the mock polite usage was also found in the datasets, as illustrated by *HTH*.

However, the analysis of different metapragmatic labels did not only yield difference, I also found that the proportion of mismatch types were similar in the English data for *sarcastic* and the other labels discussed in this chapter (it is not possible to comment on irony in English and the Italian data in this chapter because of the low number of occurrences). This similarity in type of behaviour indicated is also important in

justifying the inclusion of *patronising* and *condescending* within the category of mock politeness despite the fact that previous academic research has tended to group them separately from sarcasm.

CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSIONS

11.1 Overview

In this thesis, I have investigated which metapragmatic labels refer to mock politeness, how mock politeness is evaluated and structured, the ways in which different labels represent different structures and contexts, and how the actual usage corresponds to the second order theorisation. In order to do so, I constructed a corpus of c.96 million tokens and investigated 790 occurrences of *IRONICO/ironic* and *SARCASTICO/sarcastic* and the retrievable 191 behaviours which were indicated through these labels; in addition, I analysed 2769 occurrences of other metapragmatic labels, and the 632 behaviours which could be retrieved from these mentions. The research showed that there are no metapragmatic labels which consistently refer to mock politeness, but many that do so on at least some occasions; that the evaluation of mock polite behaviours is closely tied to the participation role and contextual features; and that the structures of mock behaviours are far more creative and varied than anticipated from second-order academic models.

In this last chapter, I revisit my research questions as set out in Chapter 1 and summarise the principle findings, as reported in Chapters 7-10. I then go on to consider the limitations of this project and finally look forward to future developments.

11.2 Findings

In this section, I address each of the research questions in turn. I have split the second question into two components to aid the presentation of the findings. There are, inevitably, some overlaps between the research questions, particularly between the second and third because variations between the two sub-corpora will also correspond

to variation in how they relate to the second order theory. To avoid repetition, I have, therefore, focussed more on the last question.

11.2.1 What metapragmatic labels are used to refer to mock politeness in the (British) English and Italian data?

The analysis in Chapters 8 and 9 showed that there were no metapragmatic labels of mock politeness in the sense that none of the examined labels referred consistently to mock polite behaviours. Those which referred to mock polite behaviours on at least some occasions were *patronising**, *biting*, MAKE FUN, *condescending*, *cutting*, *caustic*, MOCK, BITCHY, TEASE, *passive aggressive*, *put down*, *overly polite*, in the English forum, and *paternalis**, *sadis**, SUBDOLO, PRENDERE IN GIRO, *viperis**, DERIDERE, BEFFARE in the Italian forum. These are in addition to the metapragmatic labels IRONICO/*ironic* and SARCASTICO/*sarcastic* which were examined in Chapters 7 and 8. Although the bulk of research into mock politeness has used the latter as the second-order labels, these were not the labels with the highest percentage of mock polite behaviours. Those with the highest percentage of mock polite behaviours were actually *patronising** and *paternalis** which have not previously been grouped within mock politeness.

The research also showed that many of the examined metapragmatic labels did not refer to mock politeness. For instance, the analysis of collocates of politeness metacommentary, such as *kind*, retrieved no references to mock politeness in the Italian data. Of the additional labels which were examined in Chapter 9, those which did not refer to mock politeness either lacked a critical attitude (MIMIC, SCIMMIOTTARE, CONDISCENDENTE*), referred to implicational impoliteness without constituting mock

politeness (CATTY, CANZONARE, COMMENTINO, MALIGNO, PUNGENTE, TAGLIENTE) or did not refer to conversational interactions (PARODY, PARODIARE).

To sum up, the research in response to this question has challenged the equation of mock politeness and sarcasm and enhanced our understanding of mock politeness by showing how many different labels refer to this type of behaviour. It is also hoped that the identification of metapragmatic labels which identify mock politeness in these datasets may be of use to future research.

11.2.2 How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another within languages?

The analysis showed that an approach which uses multiple metapragmatic labels is able to retrieve a broader range of behaviours and orientations towards those behaviours. We may consider the behaviours as varying on three key aspects: structure, evaluation and contextual features, and I will summarise the findings for these in turn.

With regards to structure, this may refer to how the labels relate to one another with reference to the location of the mismatch (internal or external) and the kind of mismatch (e.g. from ostensible attention paid to face to face attack). Starting with the mismatch elements, the findings distinguish between behaviours such as TEASE and MOCK which primarily violate sociality rights, and *passive aggressive*, *caustic* and *biting* which primarily attack face. Similarly, in the Italian data, PRENDERE IN GIRO and PATERNISLITICO/PARTERNIASMO orient towards violation of sociality rights, while VIPERA, BEFFARE, SADISMO/SADISTICO attack face.

Regarding location of the mismatch, both sets of data showed that overt internal mismatch was employed in mock polite behaviours referred to with a range of metapragmatic labels. This challenges the (second order, academic) assumption that

irony cannot be overt. However, this was less frequent than external mismatch, which shows the importance of a shared set of knowledge among participants for the understanding of an utterance as mock polite.

Evaluation is inherently tied to the factor of contextual features because it was found to be highly dependent on the participation role of the person evaluating the behaviour. The analysis showed that participation role is central to the evaluation which is offered. For instance, labels which were used to self-describe were proportionately less likely to other-describe and vice-versa.

Regarding the contextual features, gender also emerged from the analysis as a salient factor, which affected both the choice of label and the evaluation. Men were much more likely to be labelled as *sarcastic* in the English data, although there was no clear structural difference in the male mock polite behaviours labelled as *sarcastic* and those performed by women and labelled as *bitchy*. IRONICO in the Italian data was also more likely to label male behaviours, and, furthermore, men who were described as SARCASTICO in the Italian data were more likely to be favourably evaluated for doing so than women.

With reference to irony and sarcasm more specifically, the analysis showed that the second-order stance of equating them as indistinguishable was not reflected in the first order usage, and especially for the UK data. While *sarcastic* is evaluated in terms of im/politeness, *ironic* was not; it appears to be outside the frame of im/politeness. It primarily referred to situational irony, rather than performance of any kind of behaviours.

11.2.3 How do these labels and behaviours relate to one another across languages?

The findings across the two sub-corpora varied considerably for both the functions and structures of mock politeness and frequency. The analysis of *ironic* / IRONICO and *sarcastic* / SARCASTICO showed that, contrary to cultural stereotypes (Taylor 2015), behaviours labelled as *ironic*/ IRONICO were much more frequent in the Italian forum than the English one. Furthermore, they fulfilled a wider range of functions and showed greater variation in the location of mismatch. However, when it came to the metapragmatic labels analysed in Chapters 9 and 10, there were far fewer mock polite interactions in the Italian data and the range of labels which referred to mock politeness was lower (seven additional labels compared to twelve). Noting what is absent may be a salient finding (Taylor 2012; Partington 2014), but it also means that the scope for comparison across languages was somewhat limited and I will comment here mainly on variation in *ironic*/IRONICO and *sarcastic*/SARCASTICO.

Overall, the Italian terms SARCASTICO and IRONICO appeared more interchangeable and referred to very similar concepts. In contrast, as mentioned above, in the English data *ironic* and *sarcastic* appeared to refer to quite distinct concepts. Regarding perceptions, the analysis showed that *ironic* and *sarcastic* behaviours were more likely to be favourably evaluated in the Italian data.

There were also some aspects of variation relating to usage of the labels, for instance SARCASTICO and IRONICO referred to sexually charged interactions in a way that was not found in the English data. Regarding differences in the behaviours, social identity appeared more salient as a factor for face attack in the Italian data, while the English forum data showed the group performance of mock politeness. Another important feature in the Italian data was the self-targetting with mock politeness and the emphasis on not taking things too seriously / being lighthearted.

In contrast with the higher frequency and range of functions in the Italian data, in terms of structure, the behaviours from the Italian forum were more ‘canonical’. For instance, the metapragmatic label which was most likely to involve a mismatch of attention to face followed by face attack was IRONICO and this was the equal highest kind of mismatch for SARCASTICO.

11.2.4 What is the relationship between the English and Italian first-order uses of these metapragmatic labels, and the behaviours which they describe, and the second order descriptions?

One aim of this thesis was to investigate the relationship between sarcasm and mock politeness. This was done in two ways, first by investigating the metapragmatic labels *ironic*/IRONICO and *sarcastic*/SARCASTICO (Chapters 7 and 8) and, second, by investigating other metapragmatic labels. This two-pronged approach highlighted a number of problems with equating sarcasm and mock politeness, because sarcastic behaviours perform functions other than mock politeness, and other metapragmatic labels refer to mock politeness even more frequently. At this point, following the lead which has been set for *mock impoliteness* and *banter* (Haugh & Bousfield 2012), *mock politeness* and *sarcasm* need to be detached, and the latter recognised as a social activity which may be used in accomplishing the former.

Overall, the findings from analysing *ironic* /IRONICO and *sarcastic* /SARCASTICO indicate that the second order theory more fully accounts for usage of *sarcastic* /SARCASTICO in both languages. The findings also provide some evidence of the second order academic descriptions providing a description which fits irony and sarcasm in the British data, more than that in the Italian data. Burgers (2010) provides an overview of approaches to irony and distinguishes a number of features in ironic

utterances that need to be included in an operational definition of irony. These include references to the implicit and evaluative nature of irony and the presence of opposition. If we consider the first of these, the analysis challenged the (Gricean) assumptions of implicitness, that irony can never be said (e.g. Attardo 2001; Dynel 2013) by showing that overt co-textual mismatch was found in behaviours labelled as *ironic* and *sarcastic* in both the English and Italian forums. This was an even stronger pattern in the Italian data which frequently made use of garden path structures.

Regarding the second feature, the evaluative nature of irony, the analysis showed that *ironic*, *sarcastic* and SARCASTICO did indeed consistently express a critical attitude, as expected by the second order theory (Barbe 1993; Sperber & Wilson 2012; Garmendia 2014; Dynel 2014). However, this was not the case for IRONICO, which labelled a wider range of functions. With reference to the third feature, that of mismatch, again the Italian data showed greater variation with a large proportion of behaviours labelled as IRONICO not including any identifiable mismatch.

Support for the second order concepts was found in both the English and Italian data regarding the differences between sarcasm and irony. In both datasets *sarcastic*/SARCASTICO behaviour was more likely to be unfavourably evaluated than *ironic*/IRONICO behaviours (although it should be noted that this was stronger for the British data). In line with the second-order theory (Jorgensen 1996; Toplak & Katz 2000), participants were also less likely to favourably evaluate a behaviour if they were a target.

However, there were many aspects in which the observed first order usage differed from the second order expectations. First, the second order theory, as mentioned above, does not take into account the participation role. The analysis showed that participants self-describe as mock polite, and favourably evaluate their own

performance of mock politeness. Contrary to second-order expectations (e.g. Partington 2006), this also applied to self-labelling as *sarcastic*. Similarly, the participants show their favourable evaluation of impolite behaviours by advising others to perform mock politeness. In the first-order discussions, mock politeness is valued for its ability to attack face of another while retaining an attitude of control. Intuitively, as people who interact with others, we might have expected this salience of participation role, but the weight of the participation role has been neglected in research so far, with the analyst more frequently attributing a single evaluation to the whole interaction.

Regarding functions of mock politeness, the range of facework was shown to be more varied than previously hypothesised. It was also found that behaviours labelled as IRONICO referred to actions, and there was no net distinction between SARCASTICO referring to things that people do and IRONICO referring to situational targets in the Italian data (e.g. Lee and Katz 1998).

Similarly, the range of mismatch was more varied than anticipated. While the second order theory has often focussed on propositional mismatch (Grice 1975; Dynel 2013, 2014; Colebrook 2004) this was a minor pattern in the data. It was found that those performing mock politeness were most likely to ostensibly uphold sociality rights in the polite move and attack face in the impolite move. It is hypothesised that this finding may be the result of investigating mock politeness as it occurs within interactions, 'moving beyond the single utterance' as called for by Gibbs & Colston (2007: 587-588). However, the co-textual, garden path structures remained a minority, particularly in the British data.

Regarding *patronising*, the analysis showed that the behaviours labelled in this way had much in common with other mock polite behaviours, thus suggesting that they should be incorporated into mock politeness. The actual usage also extends and challenges the existing research by showing that these behaviours do occur in informal contexts, and that they do not necessarily involve institutional or social power roles.

When I started this project, I expected to find a closer match between the first order use of metapragmatic labels in the English data and the second order description. However, this proved to be only partially true. In the research into the labels *ironic* and *sarcastic*, overall there was a closer match between the English data and the second order theory, pointing towards an anglocentric bias in the second order descriptions. However, regarding the structure of the mock politeness, it appeared that the behaviours from the Italian forum were more canonical and closer to the expectations from second order theory.

11.2.5 Methodological contributions

In this project, I have sought to design and develop a new methodological approach to im/politeness study, moving from first order metapragmatic comment to the analysis of the evaluated behaviour. This two-stage process means that the analysis is tied to participant perspectives from the outset and has allowed me to view mock politeness work from a new angle. The methodological process has also combined the descriptive potential of corpus linguistics methods and approaches with the interpretative power of im/politeness theory.

11.3 Limitations

Limitations have been touched on through the thesis, and so here I will try to summarise what I feel are the main points. I will start by addressing the general

limitations as a result of the chosen methodology, and then move to the more specific limitations which are particular to this study.

I have suggested that the use of a first-order driven metalanguage study is one of the strengths of this study because it brings new insight to the second-order heavy field of irony studies. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, this approach also has its weaknesses. First, it is certainly the case that not all mock politeness metapragmatic comment will use these labels, or indeed any similarly conveniently packaged labels. Second, it may be that searching for metapragmatic labels restricts the kind of interaction which is retrieved. For instance, they may be used to indicate less successful attempts at those behaviours, the references to *ironic* / IRONICO and *patronising/condescending* showed that they were often mentioned in repair sequences. Alternatively, it may be that the instances which are considered worth reporting are least everyday and typical. However, in this study the fact the fact that the analysis retrieved both references to interactions outside the forum, and inside the forum offers some buffer against that.

There were some additional limitations which apply more specifically to this study, and I shall start with the constraints imposed by the tools available. First, and counterintuitively, the size of the corpus meant that the corpus methods could not be fully exploited because it was not possible to use annotation software and therefore the annotation is not searchable within the corpus. This also limits the reusability of the corpus. If I were to repeat the project, I would either change the data collection methods to reduce the size of the corpus, or make use of manual XML annotation. However, it also true that annotation tools have developed considerably since this corpus was built and they may now be better suited to large corpora. A second limitation relating to the tools is that both the corpus building software and the

collocation visualisation software were unstable, and I would research the availability of other tools if starting a similar project now.

Other constraints relate to the processes, one aspect which required considerable attention was the analysis and classification of types of mismatch because this kind of interpretive work is highly subjective. I tried to address my concerns by ensuring that the classifications were internally reliable, by revisiting the data, but in future projects greater reliability could be gained by having multiple coders. Although this would still not address the validity of the assigned classifications.

An unexpected limitation was the small number of behaviours which could be identified for some metapragmatic labels. The difficulties of taking a metapragmatic approach have been documented (e.g. Eisterhold et al. 2006), but I had anticipated that using a c.96 million word corpus would be sufficient to counter this issue. However, as discussed in Chapter 10, there was insufficient data for some Italian metapragmatic labels. This means that the low frequency items may need more investigation in future research to see if the same results are obtained. In future work, I would reconsider the collection method, but it is also the case that the low number of occurrences tells us something about the Italian use of mock politeness, and a more targeted collection method (e.g. retrieve x number of each type) would obscure this dimension.

11.4 Future research

This exploration of mock politeness with reference to its second order descriptions and first order uses has revealed many potential avenues for future research. At this point, any researcher has two options, to mine the existing data in more depth or to expand the dataset and methodological reach.

For instance, in terms of expansion, additional metapragmatic labels could be identified and explored. Some possible candidates which emerged from the analysis here were *snide*, *snidey*, *sneer*, *aside* for the British forum, and diminutives (+*ino*) such as FRECCIATINE [darts / little arrows], PRENDERE PER I FONDELLI / PER IL CULO [to pull somebody's leg / to take the piss] from the Italian forum. Alternatively, to aid the evaluation of the second order theories, more cultures and languages could be investigated.

However, at this point, what interests me most is the opportunity to delve deeper into the data. For instance, so far I have only touched upon the the conventionalisation of mock politeness and the use of mock politeness in response to mock politeness where it becomes a mode of interaction. But I would like to briefly discuss two further possibilities here, those which struck me most as I worked on the project.

One area of particular interest is the 'weight' of mock politeness. As Culpeper (2011a: 160) notes that 'off-recordness in contexts where the impoliteness interpretation is clear seems not to mollify the offence: if anything, it might exacerbate it' (also Leech 1983; Culpeper et al. 2003; Haugh 2014). This potential for offence was clearly seen in my analysis, but the comparative nature has not been addressed. Future research could apply Bousfield's (1997) classification of response types and compare patterns across the internal and external mismatch types of mock politeness. Comparisons of responses could then be made with other kinds of implicational impoliteness and bald on-record impoliteness. However, to fully explore this aspect it seems likely that the methodology would need to be enriched and triangulated. One possible way forward would be to take the attested interactions from the corpus and create stimuli which participants could evaluate in terms of offence.

The second area relates to an aspect which recurred throughout the data analysis and this was the extent to which expectations (from lay discussion as well as academic researchers) were consistently at odds with the observed interactions. This was seen in the gender and national culture associations, but also at the level of how people reported using mock politeness (in response turns as a counter strategy) and how they actually used it (in opening turns as an offensive strategy). A fascinating line of research would be to track this more extensively. For instance, with reference to associations of gender and mock politeness, a similar kind of experimental methodology to that described above could also offer a way of investigating to what extent the choice of metapragmatic label (e.g. *sarcastic* or *bitchy*) is dependent on the perceived gender of the person described.

To sum up, as this thesis represents one of the first comprehensive investigations into mock politeness, it suggests a wealth of opportunities for further research. And this is, I believe, one of the great virtues of research, that it constantly leads forwards to new expeditions and explorations.

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APPENDIX 1: FREQUENCY OF MISMATCH IN BEHAVIOURS DESCRIBED AS

IRONIC / SARCASTIC

	ironic_u k	ironico_i t	sarcastic_u k	sarcastico_i t
Politeness mismatch - effect of impoliteness	2	16	35	18
Politeness mismatch - effect of politeness	5	8	2	0
Politeness mismatch - about/self	13	5	13	10
Unclear if im/politeness mismatch	7	17	7	4
No mismatch	3	55	1	17