

The use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships: the case of the “almighty” House M.D.

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1 Introduction

Interpersonal relationships represent an important asset for every human being functioning in the society. As social beings, humans are in various ways dependent on their relationships with other humans, be it in terms of basic human needs, such as the need not to feel alone, to feel loved, or more sophisticated needs, such as financial security or the fulfillment of one's ambitions and desires. Navigating interpersonal relationships, including their continuous construction in each communicative situation, relies heavily on the use of language and linguistic behavior. The present paper examines the pragmatic role of a particular type of linguistic behavior, namely impoliteness, in the negotiation and for the construction of interpersonal relationships, as exemplified in the American TV series titled House M.D. The paper proceeds from providing an overview of the key works associated with (im)politeness research, through describing the research methodology and data, to the qualitative analysis of situated conversational interactions from the aforementioned TV series.

2 Literature review

The focus of the present research is on the use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relations, characterized as mutual social connections amongst people that are mediated by interaction, are of primary concern for interpersonal pragmatics (Culpeper – Haugh, 2014, p. 197). Therefore, interpersonal pragmatics is the scientific tradition in which the present research is grounded. Interpersonal pragmatics research is generally focused on the study of (im)politeness. Following is a brief overview of the development of (im)politeness research.

Meta-research on (im)politeness generally reports that (im)politeness research has so far developed in three stages, or ‘waves’ (see Kádár, 2017; Culpeper – Hardaker, 2017). The evolution of (im)politeness research started with considering politeness as a “category to be defined, explained and operationalised in a rational theory of human behaviour” (Watts, 2010, p. 55), which was typical for the so-called classical modernist ‘first wave’ approaches (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown – Levinson, 1987). In other words, these were pragmatic models which viewed politeness as „an objectively definable entity to be used in a rational predictive theory of how to perform politely (Watts, 2010, p. 56).“

The dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the pragmatic modelling of politeness led to one of the most radical changes in politeness research, namely the shift to considering politeness as a “quality of emergent social practice in a constructionist theory of human behaviour [...] assigned to interactants involved in that practice by co-interactants” (Watts, 2010, p. 55). This was typical for the post-pragmatic, or post-modernist ‘second wave’ approaches, which include ‘politeness as a discursive struggle’ (Watts, 2003; Locher – Watts, 2005), or the relational ‘rapport management framework’ (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). The major difference between the

modernist and the post-modernist approaches is the latter's assertion that what is or is not perceived as (im)polite is constructed discursively, in emergent interaction, not objectively definable (Watts, 2010, p. 56).

Although the post-modernist approaches are regarded as a significant improvement compared to the modernist approaches, the 'third wave' of politeness research, politeness seen as a social practice (Kádár – Haugh, 2013), has recently emerged (see Culpeper, 2011; Kádár, 2017). The key claim which distinguishes this approach from the aforementioned approaches is that user (cf. politeness1) and observer (cf. politeness2) perspectives on politeness are both equally important, so we very often have to deal with multiple understandings of behaviour vis-à-vis (im)politeness (Culpeper – Haugh, 2014, p. 229).

3 Research methodology and data

Considering the nature of the material analyzed in the present paper, at least two research approaches to (im)politeness can be adopted. Since the analyzed situations contain multi-party interactions, multiple understandings of (im)politeness are taken into consideration. The present paper thus partly adopts the approach of 'politeness as a social practice' (Kádár – Haugh, 2013). The application of this approach could be associated with the investigation of identity construction. However, the aim of the paper is to demonstrate the purposeful use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, one of the relational approaches to (im)politeness, namely the rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), is the main methodological apparatus employed in the paper. The metalanguage and concepts provided by this framework are most apt for identifying the source of impoliteness in the analyzed discursive situations. Furthermore, the framework can be considered as designed for the investigation of "the relational aspect of language in use, i.e. [...] how persons engaged in interactional discourse use language to shape social relationships in situated encounters" (Ferenčík, 2020, p. 166).

The data for the analysis were collected from available online sources and include transcripts of situated conversational interactions of Dr. House in two episodes of the TV series *House M.D.*, complemented by hypertextual links to online sources with the audio-visual forms of the interactions. The linguistic behavior is examined for instances of impoliteness and the source of impoliteness is located. The impolite acts are qualitatively interpreted, from the viewpoint of interpersonal relationships between the characters, as pragmatically serving in a particular way in the process of the negotiation and for the construction of the interpersonal relationships.

4 Analysis

The focus of the analysis is the social behavior of the main character in the series, namely the head of the diagnostics team Dr. Gregory House. Working as a doctor in a hospital, his job involves maintaining interpersonal relationships with other doctors, patients, their relatives, as well as with his boss, the Dean of Medicine and the hospital administrator Dr. Lisa Cuddy. The analysis involves the demonstration of House pragmatically deploying impoliteness to construct his interpersonal relationships in the particular situations, namely those relationships in which he is by default in a subordinate position in terms of institutional power, i.e. his interpersonal relationships with patients, their relatives, and his boss, Dr. Cuddy.

In the interpersonal relationship between a doctor and a patient, in which the patient is a client, and the one between a doctor and the administrator of a hospital, in which the administrator is the doctor's boss, the doctor is inherently in a subordinate position in terms of institutional power. In the character of Dr. House, however, we encounter a doctor with an extraordinary value to the hospital he is working in, for his unprecedented expertise as a diagnostician. Being aware of his inviolable position, House repeatedly exploits it throughout

the series by indulging in generally unacceptable impolite social behavior. This, as we argue here, is intentional and pragmatic for his constructing of the interpersonal relationships in which he is by default in a subordinate position in terms of institutional power, asserting himself as the one who in reality holds greater power in those relationships, within the particular institution (the hospital).

The demonstration of this tendency is exemplified on two pieces of discourse enclosed below in the form of transcripts. The transcripts selected for the analysis can be considered faithful to the original audio-visual material, accurately reporting both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the interactions, including pauses (literally stated) and interruptions (indicated by a long dash at the end of the interrupted utterance). Other conversational phenomena such as overlaps, dysfluencies, or false starts do not occur in the analyzed interactions. Both utterances and descriptions of characters' behavior are ordered according to the order in which they occur in the original material. The descriptions of behavior include comments on the manner in which the actions are performed as well as on the emotions expressed non-verbally, visible in the audio-visual material. These can also be considered accurate.

The analysis proceeds from identifying the source of impoliteness in House's behavior, applying the concepts of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management, to commenting on the impact of impoliteness on interpersonal relationships.

4.1 The source of impoliteness in scene 1

In the analyzed discursive situations, the source of impoliteness can be located by drawing on the concept of face offered by the rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This relational approach to (im)politeness draws on Goffman's concept of face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Spencer-Oatey (2008) claims through her framework that harmonious relations can be maintained by preserving three types of face (quality face, relational face, and social identity face), and by respecting two types of sociality rights (equity rights and association rights). Damaging any type of face or disrespecting any sociality right, in turn, disrupts the harmony of the relationship and can be evaluated as inappropriate (impolite) behavior.

In the first analyzed situation, we see an encounter between House and his colleague and best friend Wilson, which occurs after House's several unsuccessful attempts at making his boss, Dr. Cuddy, angry. This is followed by House publicly disclosing intimate personal information that involves him and Cuddy, and their subsequent conversation.

Scene 1 – House M.D. – Season 5 Episode 24¹ – 07:18 – 09:22:

[Cut to Wilson's office. House sits down]

(1) House: What do I do?

(2) Wilson: You make her angry.

(3) House: You really think that was the best time to mock me?

(4) Wilson: I'm as surprised as you, but I think I'm serious. Communication can't start unless you both —

(5) House: I've been trying to make her angry for —

(6) Wilson: No, you haven't. Come on! Poo? Strippers? It's routine stuff. You've been pulling your punches. You're scared. You should be. [House thinks then stands up.] Now go terrorize her.

[Cut to the balcony. House bangs his cane loudly on the railing four times.]

¹ Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnTV7sCrOIk>> [Cit. 2021-02-24.]

(7) House: Attention! I have an announcement. As you go about your day, I would like you to be aware of the fact that I slept with Lisa Cuddy.

[Everyone in the lobby stares up at him. The clinic doors open and Cuddy marches out. She talks to one of the nurses then looks up at House. She's mad. House stares back then rings for the elevator, leaving her staring.]

[Cut to a hallway. House is walking away, down the hall. Cuddy's voice bellows out as she catches up with him.]

(8) Cuddy: This is beyond ass-hood! You have the luxury of not caring about your image. I do not! I can permit a lot of crap, but an employee shouting about his sexual exploits with me — no! That is zero tolerance! So congratulations, House. I am angry.

(9) House: I was wondering if we should move in together.

(10) Cuddy: [laughs, humorlessly] You're fired. [She leaves.]

In this scene, it is the relational face that is crucial for locating the source of impoliteness in House's behavior. The central part of the situation is the one that surrounds turn 7, specifically Dr. House above the entrance hall of the hospital shouting that he had sex with Dr. Cuddy. Turn 7 contains the linguistic behavior which is the core of impoliteness in the situation. The content of Cuddy's response (turn 8) to House's behavior very directly reveals her evaluation of his act and also provides justification for the evaluation, which can be explained by applying the concepts provided by the rapport management framework of Spencer-Oatey (2008).

(8) Cuddy: This is beyond ass-hood! You have the luxury of not caring about your image. I do not! I can permit a lot of crap, but an employee shouting about his sexual exploits with me — no! That is zero tolerance! So congratulations, House. I am angry.

Cuddy's evaluation of House's behavior is apparent from the first sentence of her response: "This is beyond ass-hood!". This can be considered an example of what Watts (2003) calls classificatory politeness, for it is a comment made by a participant of the interaction, which classifies the other participant's behavior in terms of (im)politeness. It reveals that Cuddy evaluates what House did as negative and more serious than an innocent prank and, therefore, considers it as impolite and unacceptable behavior. Furthermore, by using the word "ass-hood", which can be considered as offensive language, Cuddy herself is explicitly producing impolite behavior as a reaction to House's behavior. The comment she makes can thus also be viewed as an example of expressive impoliteness (Watts, 2003).

Cuddy then hints at the reason of her negative evaluation of House's behavior, saying: "You have the luxury of not caring about your image. I do not!." The inference here is that unlike House, she is in a position where her value depends on her image, i.e. the way she is viewed by other people, which is what House may have negatively influenced by his behavior. The very word "image" and what it refers to can be substituted by the politeness-related term "relational face" provided by Spencer-Oatey (2008). What Cuddy means here is that the positive social value of being a good administrator of the hospital, which she claims, "entails a relational component that is intrinsic to the evaluation" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 15). It presupposes having purely professional relationships at the workplace, which secures being respected and considered objective in her judgments by the staff as well as patients. This is what House threatened by his behavior, which, considering her response, is recognized by Cuddy. This analogy thus proves that Cuddy considers House's behavior impolite, for she perceives it as damaging her relational face.

Cuddy's evaluation of House's behavior as impolite is apparent also from several additional linguistic, paralinguistic as well as non-linguistic aspects of her reaction, namely her facial expression upon being informed about House's act (referred to in the transcript via the

metapragmatic comment “She’s mad.”), raised voice (“Cuddy’s voice bellows out”), vulgar language (“This is beyond ass-hood!”), and tears in her eyes (visible in the audio-visual form of the scene), which reveal the great extent to which she feels damaged by House’s behavior. We see an emotional reaction from Cuddy which can be interpreted as being dominated by anger. According to Culpeper and Haugh (2014, p. 223), “anger is one of the most frequent emotional reactions associated with impoliteness, particularly when a social norm or right is perceived to have been infringed.” The characteristics of Cuddy’s reaction prove her evaluation of House’s behavior as impolite, reveal the reason being her perceived damage to her relational face, but also suggest that his misconduct involved a violation of a social norm. Cuddy in fact confirms this by specifically naming the violation of a norm that caused the damage, when she refers to House’s act saying: “an employee shouting about his sexual exploits with me.” From this part of her response, the social norm itself can be inferred and formulated as follows: it is a norm not to publicly disclose intimate personal information which might compromise a person’s public image if the person’s perceived value is dependent on the public image. House’s public disclosing of the information about her sexual involvement with him as one of the employees, in front of the staff and patients, damages Cuddy’s image and makes her claimed positive social value as a good hospital administrator questionable because of potentially being biased towards him as an employee due to their sexual involvement. Being biased towards an employee is a trait that hinders claiming the status of a good hospital administrator.

4.2 The impact of impoliteness on interpersonal relationships in scene 1

Now that the source of impoliteness in House’s behavior has been pinpointed, we may proceed to the interpretation of the situation from his point of view, i.e. to the discussion of the purpose as well as consequences of his behavior. Considering House’s position as that of an employee in a hospital, a regular employee’s socially inappropriate behavior towards his boss would have serious consequences for the employee in question. This is due to an employee normally being in a subordinate position in terms of institutional power vis-à-vis his boss. The fact that House has dared to commit such an impolite act towards his boss suggests that he is not concerned about it having serious consequences for his professional life. This can apply only if the professional interpersonal relationship between him as an employee and his boss is reversed in terms of power. Assumingly, House is aware that his unmatched medical expertise presents such a valuable asset for the hospital that even the socially unacceptable behavior towards his boss will in the end be tolerated. This leaves him free of any social constraints that otherwise virtually bind people in social interactions at their workplace. We might say that one of the primary aspects of his character in the whole series is his exploitation of this status in pursuit of fulfilling his individual desires and needs, whether personal or professional. The analyzed impolite act is nothing out of ordinary in the series. House in fact often exploits his power at the workplace by an unprecedented violation or even disregard of politeness maxims, i.e. by being impolite. His power and its exploitation stretches as far as allowing him to break the law without serious ramifications for him at the workplace, e.g. he makes his team break into patients’ homes, which may also be considered impolite, albeit non-linguistic, social behavior.

House commits the impolite act after a discussion with Wilson (turns 1-6), following Cuddy’s refusal to properly discuss their sexual encounter. The discussion with Wilson ends with an agreement that House needs to make Cuddy angry, presumably in order to make her admit feelings for him (turn 4: “Communication can’t start unless..”) (feelings only presupposed by both Wilson and House due to the sexual encounter claimed by House). House opted for this act aiming to make Cuddy angry, which means he was aware of it breaking a social norm, and thus being an impolite act. However, the impolite act can be further analyzed from the viewpoint of their interpersonal relationship.

House is able to behave so inappropriately towards his boss because the professional dimension of their interpersonal relationship is basically reversed in terms of the institutional power in the hospital. Cuddy's position as the administrator of the hospital is the source of her power within the institution. House's institutional position of a doctor, i.e. an employee, makes him hold by default a subordinate position in terms of power within the institution. In practice, however, House's invaluable medical expertise is such a strong source of power that he is able to establish in communicative situations that his and Cuddy's positions in terms of power within the institution (the hospital) are reversed. This is affirmed by Cuddy herself in turn 8, when she says: "You have the luxury of not caring about your image. I do not!" House's working position as a doctor also involves a relational component and a regular doctor might lose his job for having an intimate relationship with the administrator of the hospital. Cuddy's utterance can be interpreted as implicating that House is in such a powerful position in the hospital, despite being just an employee, that their leaked sexual involvement cannot endanger him professionally, while it is vice versa for her, despite being in a higher institutional position than him (Although Cuddy is the boss to House, she is subordinate to a board of directors who can fire her.). This practically means a reversed position in terms of power at the workplace within their professional interpersonal relationship. The aforementioned Cuddy's utterance might suggest that this reversed power status has already been established in their relationship prior to the situation at hand, perhaps by House's countless previous disrespectful acts towards her, which would prove the pragmatic role of impoliteness in the construction of interpersonal relationships. However, building on the constructionist approach within interpersonal pragmatics, we understand construction as an unfinished, ongoing, dynamic process subjected to negotiation in each communicative situation. House commits the analyzed impolite act publicly, in the hospital lobby full of people including the staff as well as patients, at least some of whom arguably were in the hospital for the first time or might not have been aware of House's powerful position in the hospital. We want to argue here that each House's impolite act towards Cuddy, including this one, is pragmatic for the construction of the professional dimension of their interpersonal relationship in the particular context where the act is committed, establishing their reversed positions in terms of power in the hospital and potentially even reinforcing the previous instances of such construction of their relationship.

If we consider the context of House's impolite act, it is obvious that the construction of the professional dimension of his interpersonal relationship with Cuddy in the particular situation is not the sole purpose of the impolite act. From the scene preceding the balcony scene (turns 1-6), we know that House's purpose in committing the impolite act is to make Cuddy angry, i.e. to elicit an emotional response from her. This, however, arguably is not the ultimate purpose of the act. The reason of House wanting to make Cuddy angry (emotional) is because she refused to admit feelings for him after their intimate encounter and opted to keep their interpersonal relationship solely professional (revealed earlier in the episode, visible at the beginning of the enclosed audio-visual material). Thus, House's ultimate goal in being impolite is to achieve the literal negotiation of the personal dimension of their interpersonal relationship with Cuddy, aiming to construct love relationship with her. This is revealed firstly in turn 4, when Wilson says: "Communication can't start unless you both —", from which an inference can be drawn that by communication he refers to House and Cuddy talking about their personal relationship. Secondly, it can be inferred from turn 9, which contains House's immediate response to Cuddy revealing she is angry (turn 8): "I was wondering if we should move in together." This proves that besides pragmatically serving for the construction of the professional dimension of the interpersonal relationship in the particular context, impoliteness is purposefully used also to achieve the negotiation and construction of the personal dimension of the interpersonal relationship between House and Cuddy.

Considering all the participants of the interaction, by committing an impolite act towards his boss, which involved disclosing their sexual encounter, in front of the staff and patients, House has arguably achieved the construction of both professional and personal dimension of his interpersonal relationship with Cuddy, in the eyes of the other participants. However, he has not managed to achieve the latter in reality. His ultimate goal of the construction of love relationship with Cuddy, i.e. the desired construction of the personal dimension of their interpersonal relationship, is not achieved. Cuddy recognizes the partial purpose of the impolite act House has committed towards her (turn 8 – “So congratulations House, I’m angry.”). Reaching the partial goal of the impolite act, House flouts Grice’s relevance maxim (1975) in turn 9 by suddenly suggesting they move in together, thus purposefully not reflecting Cuddy’s previous utterance in his utterance. This may be interpreted as an attempt to initiate the negotiation of the personal dimension of the interpersonal relationship between House and Cuddy, which is considered to be House’s personal agenda in the whole discursive situation from the beginning. Furthermore, by using negative politeness strategy (Brown – Levinson, 1987), House contrasts his response (turn 9) to Cuddy’s sharp response in turn 8, possibly attempting to create a humorous effect in order to ease the heated situation, break the ice, get Cuddy on his side, and achieve her compliance with his desire to negotiate their personal relationship and construct love relationship between them. However, when in turn 9 he reveals the true purpose of making her angry, i.e. getting her to discuss their personal relationship, she refuses to cooperate and follows his flouting of relevance maxim by flouting the same maxim, keeping the conversation within the professional dimension of their relationship. This is revealed in turn 10, which contains Cuddy’s response to House’s proposal for them to move in together: Cuddy: [laughs, humorlessly] You’re fired. [She leaves.]. If House’s purpose in the way he phrases his response in turn 9 is to ease the situation and break the ice, Cuddy’s reaction, namely laughter, might seem as a success. However, as the transcript reveals, Cuddy’s laughter is humorless, i.e. not genuine, hence sarcastic. According to Culpeper and Haugh (2014, p. 228), with sarcasm, the message conveyed is partially mixed: some aspects suggest politeness (such as the fact that Cuddy reacts with laughter); other aspects suggest impoliteness (such as the humorless manner of the laughter), and in all such cases, the overall assessment must be weighted towards aspects suggesting impoliteness. Cuddy’s humorless laughter and her final remark (“You’re fired.”) can be interpreted as her negative evaluation of House’s effort and reveal House’s failure to achieve his apparent interactional goal of constructing love relationship between them. Nevertheless, by the end of the situation, both characters seem to show their awareness of the pragmatic function and true purpose of House’s impolite act. However, the degree of offence Cuddy takes from the impolite act eventually prevents House from achieving his interactional goal and leads into Cuddy keeping the interaction within the professional dimension of their interpersonal relationship. Cuddy’s final remark (“You’re fired.”) might seem as disproving the reversed positions of House and Cuddy in terms of power claimed above. However, Cuddy’s act of dismissing House from the hospital is revealed as insincere, for House in reality does not get fired after this incident.

Returning to the framework applied in the analysis, Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 32) presents 4 orientations of rapport management. The analyzed situation, particularly House’s behavior, might be interpreted as involving two intertwined orientations of rapport management, namely rapport challenge and rapport enhancement. House’s impolite behavior negatively affects the professional dimension of his interpersonal relationship with Cuddy and thus might be considered rapport challenge. However, it is performed with the desire to positively affect the personal dimension of their interpersonal relationship, and thus it might also be considered an effort to achieve rapport enhancement. In other words, in his impoliteness, House attempts to impair his professional relationship with Cuddy in order to initiate a conversation which, he hopes, will enhance their personal relationship.

Relational frameworks, including that of rapport management, are models of interpersonal relations rather than models of politeness or impoliteness themselves (Culpeper – Haugh, 2014, p. 223). It comes as no surprise then that the analyzed impolite behavior, which can be explained applying a relational approach, might have an impact on House’s interpersonal relationships and be purposefully used to achieve their construction in a particular way.

4.3 The source of impoliteness in scene 2

In the second analyzed situation, House arguably deploys impoliteness towards his boss, the patient as well as towards the patient’s relative. The analysis is focused on the means of impoliteness, the source of impoliteness, and the participants’ evaluations of House’s behavior as impolite firstly in the case of House’s behavior towards the patient and the relative, and then in the case of his behavior towards the boss.

Scene 2 – House M.D. – Season 3 Episode 10² – 00:00 – 01:12:

[In the clinic, Cuddy is examining Abigail, a 15-yr-old dwarf girl.]

(1) Cuddy: Well the stitches are healing nicely, there's no sign of infection.

(2) House: [bursts in through the door. Cuddy, the patient and Maddy (the mother) are startled] Woah. Sorry. Just need her for a *tiny* moment. *Small* favour. [Cuddy gives him a look] Pills.

(3) Maddy: Who's the wit?

(4) Cuddy: Doctor. Don't worry, I'll be firing him soon. Wait in my office.

(5) House: Incision looks just big enough for chest tube. Collapsed lung? Someone mistake you for a piñata?

(6) Maddy: Delightful, usually we just get the elf jokes this time of year.

(7) House: "No" on trauma. [Looks at her forearm to find a clear patch of skin where a circle has been marked out in black] Negative PPD. What flavour dwarfs are you guys?

(8) Maddy: My daughter and I both have cartilage hair hypoplasia; think you can make a pun out of that?

(9) House: Yes, but I don't want to be insensitive. [Turns to Cuddy and indicates at Maddy] She's got a bit of a *short* fuse, hasn't she?

(10) Cuddy: It's a bleb, wait in my office.

(11) House: Bleb's not a diagnosis, it's an evasion.

(12) Cuddy: We'll schedule an MRI to make sure, but a certain number of these cases are idiopathic.

(13) House: Let me translate that into Tolkien for you guys - means Doctor Cuddy's got no idea why your daughter's lung suddenly popped like a balloon.

(14) Maddy: You think you do?

(15) House: Give me her chart, and my pills.

In this scene, we have an encounter between House, Cuddy, a dwarf patient, and the patient’s mother, who has the same condition. Upon bursting in unannounced, over the course of several turns, House produces a series of comments wherein he alludes to the two dwarves’ physical appearance, more specifically to their small stature. In turn 2, he does so by purposefully employing terms that can be used to describe their stature (“tiny”, “small”), while explaining why he entered the room. House reveals his intention to allude to the two dwarves’ stature by emphasizing the two terms in pronunciation (indicated in the transcript by the italics), thus flouting the cooperative principle’s maxim of manner (Grice, 1975). He repeats this in turn 9, emphasizing the word “short”, while providing his account of why the patient’s mother reacts to his comments angrily, attributing it to her short temper.

² Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osOLmUaL6ck>> [Cit. 2021-02-24.]

House indirectly refers to their small stature in two more turns (5 and 13). In turn 5, by comparing the patient to a piñata³, House is arguably implicating that due to her small stature, someone might have confused her with this vessel filled with candy often used at children's parties and might have pierced her as is customary to do, hence her wound and collapsed lung. In turn 13 then, using the term "Tolkien", House refers to the writer of the Lord of the Rings, a fictional story in which some of the main characters are dwarfs. By this, House is again alluding to their small stature caused by dwarfism, implicating that they probably do not understand what Cuddy just said and need to have it translated into their own, simple language, namely the language of dwarfs.

As in the previously analyzed situation, the source of impoliteness in House's behavior in this situation can be located by drawing on the concept of face offered by the rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Out of the three types of face proposed by this relational approach to politeness, it is the quality face that is crucial for locating the source of impoliteness in his behavior towards the patient and her mother. Repeatedly alluding to their small stature, House commits a kind of ridicule of the patient and her mother due to their unusual physical appearance. Through such allusions, House damages their quality face (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), which is related to the self as an individual and defined as "a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities, e.g. our confidence, abilities, appearance, etc" (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, p. 540, in: Culpeper – Haugh, 2014, p. 220). By constantly producing indirect references to their small stature, House is drawing attention to the fact that their physical appearance is out of ordinary. Openly being considered different, especially in association with one's appearance, may be interpreted as rather negative evaluation of one's personal qualities, a perceived inadequacy, hence damage to the quality face.

The fact that the participants of the interaction, including the targets (the patient and her mother) and the ratified hearer⁴ (Cuddy), interpret House's remarks as negative evaluations of the targets' personal qualities and consider his linguistic behavior face-damaging, hence impolite, is reflected in their reactions. Especially the patient's mother and Cuddy produce reactions that can be interpreted as negative evaluations of House's linguistic behavior. Reacting to House's first ridiculing allusions to the dwarves' small stature (turn 2), the patient's mother asks Cuddy who this person is, saying "Who's the wit?" (turn 3). Referring to someone as a wit might on the surface appear as a positive evaluation of the person. In this instance, however, it is arguably meant as a sarcasm rather than a sincere appreciation and can thus be interpreted as a negative evaluation of House's behavior. As Culpeper and Haugh (2014, pp. 222–223) explain, sarcasm trades off politeness and thus a compliment uttered by somebody to whom a great disfavor has been done, reminds hearers of the distance between an act that normally earns its author such a positive evaluation and the evaluated disfavoring act, such as the arguably insensitive remarks produced by House in this instance. Referring to House as a wit, following his preceding utterance, can be interpreted as her evaluating House's alluding remarks as smart, yet impolite. The patient's mother reacts to House's linguistic behavior in a similar way repeatedly throughout the situation. Using sarcasm also in turn 6, she arguably implicates that she evaluates House's remark in turn 5 as a joke at her daughter's expense. Turn 8 can be interpreted as her implicating that she considers his previous remarks as intended puns⁵, hence again producing an evaluation of his behavior which is negative rather than positive, as puns often have ridiculing effect similar to jokes. To summarize, the analysis shows

³ See the definition at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pi%C3%B1ata>> [Cit. 2021-02-24.]

⁴ The term "ratified hearer" was adopted from Dynel, 2012.

⁵ See the definition at: <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pun>> [Cit. 2021-02-24.]

that at least in three separate turns (3, 6, and 8) the patient's mother produces negative evaluations of House's linguistic behavior towards her and her daughter, thus revealing she considers his behavior impolite.

Regarding the last participant of the interaction, i.e. Cuddy, House produces his utterances addressed and targeted at the patient and the mother well aware that Cuddy hears them and arguably meaning her to hear them. Therefore, when House addresses the other two participants, Cuddy holds the role of a ratified hearer. From this position, she reveals her negative evaluation of House's behavior towards the other two participants in turn 4. Arguably inferring the implication of the mother's question in turn 3, Cuddy not only reveals who House is, but also tries to reassure the mother that his behavior will have negative consequences for him. By adding "Don't worry. I'll be firing him soon", Cuddy reveals her negative evaluation of House's behavior, considering it inappropriate to the extent of deserving him a dismissal from his position in the hospital. House's behavior towards the patient and her mother is thus evaluated as impolite by the targets of the behavior as well as by Cuddy as the ratified hearer of the interaction.

In addition to the behavior towards the patient and her mother, the analyzed scene also contains instances of House's behavior where the targeted person is Cuddy, which are also worth considering (turn 11 and 13). Turn 11 contains House's reaction to Cuddy's diagnosis of the patient's issues. House is implicating here that he considers Cuddy's diagnosis not the true cause of the patient's health issues but rather an attempt at a comfortable dismissal of the case. House's disagreement with Cuddy's medical opinion, complemented by the accusation that asserting this diagnosis, she is really just trying to avoid the case, can be considered a face-threatening act. The manner in which he expresses this, which is very direct, makes it a bald on-record performance of a face-threatening act, without redressive action (based on Brown – Levinson, 1987). In turn 12, Cuddy to an extent reveals her evaluation of House's utterance in turn 11 as a face threat by defensively explaining why she believes her diagnosis is correct. Addressing the other two participants, House subsequently in turn 13 expresses his interpretation of Cuddy's explanation as a sign that she does not really know the cause of the patient's health problem. Directly stating that in reality Cuddy does not know the true diagnosis, after her explaining what makes her diagnosis right, House arguably commits the same kind of a face-threatening act as in turn 11. This time, Cuddy does not produce a specific evaluation of House's utterance, except for staring at House unbelievably with her jaw half-dropped (visible in the audio-visual form of the scene).

There is perhaps no conclusive evidence that Cuddy evaluates the aforementioned House's utterances targeted at her as impolite. However, by directly disagreeing with her medical opinions in front of her patient and the patient's relative, House might be undermining her abilities as a doctor in their eyes, and thus potentially threatening her quality face (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This interpretation is supported by turn 14 where, reacting to House's dismissal of Cuddy's medical opinions, the patient's mother asks House instead of Cuddy whether he knows what caused her daughter's health issues. Hence, even in the case of House's behavior towards Cuddy in this scene, the source of impoliteness may be located by applying the concepts provided by Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework.

As Dynel (2012, p. 176) aptly remarks, "while inferring House's intended impoliteness is usually unproblematic, determining whether hearers do or do not take offence at his abrupt utterances tends to pose more difficulty." This analogy shows that certain House's utterances targeted at Cuddy in this situation might be interpreted as impolite due to lack of mitigation of face-threatening acts, albeit Cuddy arguably does not confirm this, for she does not provide direct evaluations of House's linguistic behavior towards her as impolite.

4.4 The impact of impoliteness on interpersonal relationships in scene 2

Having located the source of impoliteness in this situation, it is necessary to comment on the impact of House's impoliteness on his interpersonal relationships with the participants of the interaction. As mentioned above, House holds the position of a doctor in a hospital. A regular doctor's impolite behavior towards a patient, the patient's relative, or his boss would have serious professional consequences for the doctor, as a regular doctor is in terms of institutional power in a hospital by default in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the people with one of the aforementioned statuses. However, as illustrated above, in the analyzed situation Dr. House repeatedly indulges in impolite or unmitigated face-threatening behavior towards all the aforementioned types of people.

Regarding a patient and a patient's relative, they are in terms of institutional power in a hospital by default in a superior position vis-à-vis a doctor, for a patient is a client of the hospital providing the hospital with money and a patient's relative is ordinarily a person important for the patient, i.e. the client. When the negotiation of the interpersonal relationship between House, the patient, and the relative proceeds, the patient and the relative arguably expect the negotiation to develop in line with the state of their interpersonal relationship as determined by default by their statuses. This is revealed especially in the mother's reactions to House's impolite remarks (turns 3, 6, and 8), which provide her evaluation of his behavior as impolite. Apparently, she considers herself and the patient to be in a position that predetermines House as a doctor to act politely towards them. We want to argue here that by repeatedly acting impolitely towards them in front of another person, his boss no less, House in the particular situation constructs his interpersonal relationship with the patient and her relative contrary to the expectations, shifting the relationship from its default state where he is in a subordinate position, to a state in which he practically holds a superior position in terms of the institutional power in the hospital.

Through his behavior, House's interpersonal relationship with Cuddy is arguably constructed in the same manner in this situation. In addition to committing unmitigated face-threatening linguistic acts towards her in front of a patient and the patient's relative, the construction of their interpersonal relationship and the establishment of his superior position over her in terms of power in the hospital is also aided by the very fact that he dares to be impolite to a patient in front of her as his boss, and even continues being impolite after she threatens to fire him. The combination of House's impolite behavior targeted at Cuddy, committed in front of the patient and the relative, and his impolite behavior targeted at the patient and the relative, committed in front of Cuddy, arguably undermines her institutional power over him in the eyes of the other participants of the interaction. House thus also constructs his interpersonal relationship with Cuddy to the contrary of its default state determined by their respective institutional statuses, establishing that he is the one who holds the position of greater power in the hospital in reality, even though Cuddy is his boss.

The analogy demonstrates that the behavior of Dr. House in this situation can also be considered an example of the purposeful use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships, whereby House swaps from his by default subordinate position to a superior position in terms of power in the hospital in the relationship with each of the participants of the interaction. We also want to argue here that House's possibility to deploy impoliteness in his behavior towards people who would normally have institutional power over him as a doctor, stems from his unparalleled expertise as a diagnostician and the inviolable position in the hospital resulting from that, which he exploits through his impolite behavior. House asserts his inherently claimed medical and intellectual superiority even directly in the situation, namely by open disagreement with Cuddy's diagnosis, and by proving the ability to produce indirect witty allusions as a means of impoliteness.

5 Conclusion

The present paper provides an in-depth analysis of social behavior of the main character, Dr. Gregory House, in the American TV series titled *House M.D.*, focusing on his impoliteness and its effect on his interpersonal relationships. The purposeful use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships in the particular situations is illustrated on two situated conversational interactions of Dr. House. In each case, the first part of the analysis demonstrates that the source of impoliteness of the analyzed behavior can be located applying one of the relational approaches to (im)politeness, namely Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework. Impoliteness is identified as arising from the damage to the relational face or the quality face of the targets of House's behavior. The second part of the analysis of each situation demonstrates that impoliteness is deployed purposefully and serves House for constructing interpersonal relationships in the particular situation. The analysis shows that House deploys impoliteness to establish himself in a superior position in terms of power in the hospital in the interpersonal relationships in which he is by default in an institutionally subordinate position, namely in his relationship with his boss, a patient, and a patient's relative. The analysis also demonstrates that in the first situation House deploys impoliteness not only to construct his professional relationships, but also as an attempt to construct a personal relationship. Moreover, the paper points out that it is House's unparalleled medical expertise that he capitalizes on as a source of his inviolable position at his workplace, which he exploits by deploying impoliteness in his linguistic behavior without having to face serious professional consequences.

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Summary

The use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships: the case of the “almighty” House M.D.

The present research paper describes the workings of impoliteness exemplified in film discourse, namely in the TV series called House M.D. The focus is placed on locating the source of impoliteness in the linguistic behavior of the main character in the series, the infamous Dr. House, as well as on pinpointing the impact of impoliteness on his interpersonal relationships. Qualitative analysis is performed on two transcripts of conversations of Dr. House with various types of people he encounters at his workplace. The source of impoliteness is located by applying the concepts of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate the use of impoliteness for the construction of interpersonal relationships. The study thus operates within the paradigm of interpersonal pragmatics. The paper shows that Dr. House purposefully deploys impoliteness to establish himself in a superior position in terms of power at his workplace in the interpersonal relationships in which he is by default in an institutionally subordinate position. The analysis demonstrates House's use of impoliteness not only to construct his professional relationships, but also as an attempt to construct a personal relationship.