



REVIEW of an MA diploma thesis

Author of the work: Bc. Jitka Křivohlavá

Name of work: Impoliteness as a Means of Comedy in the TV Series The Nanny

Supervisor: Mgr. Markéta Janebová, Ph.D.

Opponent: Mgr. Michaela Čakányová

Author of this review: Mgr. Markéta Janebová, Ph.D.

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Points /results (for each section & proposed classification)

<i>excellent</i>	5	A
<i>very good</i>	4	B
<i>good</i>	3	C

<i>acceptable</i>	2	D
<i>weak/sufficient</i>	1	E
<i>insufficient</i>	0	F

In the following paragraphs fill in the numeric value. You can also add a short NOTE (comment) - alternatively you can write concluding remarks in the summary at the end.

	Points
1. <i>Originality and new contribution to the field, up-to-date presentation of the problem.</i> The topics covered are up-to-date: both politeness and increasingly also impoliteness are popular topics in pragmatics. The other area of research which the thesis covers, humour, is also an important topic, not only in pragmatics, but also in other linguistic disciplines such as translation studies. I was really looking forward to reading the thesis.	3
2. <i>Awareness of treatments in the field (literature).</i> The literature review is very good. The sources used in the work are adequate and sufficient, the major contributions to the field are mentioned, even though it is not clearly explained how they were selected ("for the purpose of the thesis I have selected the theories and concepts that are considered to be the base of politeness theories" (p. 9)). The passage on banter reads very well. Overall, however, the literature review could be somewhat more systematic. The author uses, correctly, the most recent editions of the sources, but that also means that the treatment is ahistorical: the interaction between the individual theories presented in the introduction is not clearly explained, nor is it clear how the theories were influenced by one another and to what extent they reflect critically other theories. For example, Leech's definition of politeness is criticised by both Brown and Levinson and Culpeper, which is not mentioned in the thesis. Some of the formulations are somewhat simplistic: "In other words, the politeness principle helps us understand the language with respect to politeness." (p. 10) In some passages, the author seems to be contradicting herself, or the formulation is not clear: at one place, it is argued that Culpeper regards intentionality as a parameter of impoliteness ("Culpeper suggests that what matters more is whether the hearer understands the communicative behaviour as being intentionally impolite", p. 17), but then the author goes on to say that he does not ("Even though, [sic] some may argue that the communicative behaviour is impolite only when it is intended to be so, I must agree with Culpeper;" p. 17). As for banter, however, the author (drawing on Terrior and Ashworth 2002) argues that "no intention to offend" is crucial (p. 28), and the same is argued about	4

sarcasm (p. 38). The author concludes (p. 38) that “all of these devices must be intentional. Although, [sic] they can be misunderstood as impolite.” This would deserve more attention because the author analyses a sitcom, i.e. a genre where all reactions are part of the script. As for sarcasm, it is not clear why exactly the author prefers the term over Leech’s “irony” (and it is misleading to say that Leech defines “the sarcasm principle” when he actually uses the term “irony”; p. 30). Chapter 3 becomes repetitive with respect to the previous two (e.g the passage around example (12)).	
3. <i>Clarity of the topic, research question(s), hypotheses</i> The research questions are rather vague: “The aim of this thesis is, firstly, to provide a brief account of politeness and impoliteness theories with respect to what is considered mock politeness and mock impoliteness. Secondly, to analyse the use of mock politeness (sarcasm) as well as mock impoliteness (banter and sarcastic banter) in the American television series <i>The Nanny</i> (1993-1999)”; p. 6). Hypotheses (if they are meant to be hypotheses) are not further elaborated on: on p. 6, it is argued that the author expects “the ratio of banter, sarcastic banter, and sarcasm to be higher in sitcoms than in real life as all of the concepts can be considered to have a comic effect in conversation. From a brief look at the series I expect to find both mock impoliteness and mock politeness equally distributed throughout the sitcom.” It is not explained why she expects that.	2
4. <i>Methodology.</i> In the thesis, examples of mock politeness and mock impoliteness are analysed. The examples are nice and funny, but according to the author, the episodes were chosen randomly (p. 8), which is a drawback. Sometimes one example appears in several places in the thesis even though the series offers enough material to avoid repetition. What might be important for the analysis, however, is the fact that the relationships between the protagonists develop, as the author herself mentions. For example, the exchange between Niles and Miss Babcock (3) is interpreted as banter. How would it be qualified if it took place before they started a relationship? The author focuses on sarcasm and banter, but many of the examples provided by the author seem to me arguable, and I think impoliteness and the concepts of rudeness or insult (for example, Culpeper (2005) makes a distinction between sarcasm and off-record insult, which does not show any politeness) should have been studied more extensively.	2
5. <i>Argumentation, discussion, interpretation of the results, summary.</i> Overall, the theoretical part is better than the practical part, mainly because the examples from the series have been selected randomly. In some cases, it is not clear why certain examples were analysed in a particular way, viz my comment regarding insults. Among others: Ex. 6 (p. 33) and 8 (40) are interpreted differently, one as sarcastic banter, one as sarcasm, but the distinction is not clear. Do ex. (9) on p. 40, (11) on p. 41, (15) and (16) on p. 49 qualify as sarcasm in the sense that the form is polite? P. 61 (ex. 29) I am not sure to what extent this was meant as banter – since there is an employer – employee relationship involved, it might be argued that Mr Sheffield expects Niles to put up with everything, even his employer’s rudeness.	2-3
6. <i>Formal aspects of the work: format, graphics, bibliography formatting.</i> Formatting and bibliography are good.	4
7. <i>English (language correctness, style)</i> Occasionally, there are superfluous commas (“Both, politeness and impoliteness, are concepts (p. 6)”, “Although, the ways of expressing politeness can be different in every language.” (p. 11)) and missing articles (“The abbreviations mark specific episode” (p. 4), “Adding, that the emphasis in the sentence is put on the word afternoon: “<i>Good AFTERNOON, Sue.</i>” (p. 31)). Stylistically inappropriate sentences appear occasionally: “Leech in his <i>Pragmatics of Politeness</i> (2014) gives to define what politeness means, an example of a violinist” (p. 9), “it concentrates on what Leech terms mock politeness and mock impoliteness mean” (p. 21).	3

Ungrammatical agreement: “when the audience claps and it gives high value to the violinist and it lower the audience” (p. 12), “I like it, they make [the dress makes] your ass look nice” (p. 17) Incomplete sentences: “The following example shows this kind of failed impoliteness, the reason the impoliteness goes unnoticed by the hearer is probably that the form of the impoliteness” (p. 18), “Non-verbal cues, similar to those that signal banter and that were mentioned previously, are used to avoid any misunderstandings where sarcasm – e.g. special look, singsong voice, change of intonation and other types of non-verbal communication.” (p. 32)	
8. <i>For the supervisor (if not applicable, write " Not applicable ")</i> Unfortunately, there was not much interaction between me and the supervisee, which is a pity because I was looking forward to the discussion.	1

Summary: Overall evaluation, other comments:

(5-15 lines for BA, 10-30 lines for MA thesis)

This is a solid thesis whose strength lies mainly in the theoretical part. The data analysis is more problematic for the reasons specified above. More attention should have been given to impoliteness and rudeness as a face-threatening as opposed to sarcasm and banter. See also the comments above.

Topics / Questions for the defence:

(2-4 specific questions which should be answered at the defence)

Some questions are already raised above.

For the purpose of the defence, could the author say something about the difference between an insult and sarcasm?

On p. 23, the author says that “banter goes against the idea of positive politeness as presented by Brown and Levinson (1999). Their idea of positive politeness is that in communication we always try to avoid disagreement.” Is the idea of banter really incompatible with Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness?

The author finds it surprising that there was not much banter (p. 63). However, is it really so surprising if banter is an in-group marker? To what extent are the characters “group members”?

On p. 35, the author argues that “sarcastic banter belongs into the category of mock impoliteness together with banter as the final interpretation has polite meaning.” In his *Pragmatics of Politeness*, Leech makes a distinction between politeness and nonimpoliteness. To what extent it can be claimed that sarcastic banter is polite?

The thesis passed the plagiarism check.

I recommend the work for the defence **YES / NO**

Proposed classification:¹ **C**

Date: 14. 1. 2018

Name (and signature): Mgr. Markéta Janebová, Ph.D.

¹ The itemized number evaluations above do **NOT** provide automatically the final evaluation - some weaknesses are more crucial than others and some cannot be compensated at all. The proposed classification is therefore independent on these statistics. It is the complex evaluation of the presented written work and it can be still modified during the defence to become the result of the defence.