The Grammar of Impoliteness

Organizers

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Keynote speaker

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Initial submissions

If you are interested, please send **an abstract of 300 words** (not including references) as a Word document **to Marta Andersson** (marta.andersson@umu.se) by no later than **November 7, 2022.**

Description

This workshop focuses on the grammatical side of **impoliteness**, a pragmatic notion involving **negatively evaluated (linguistic) behaviors that have (often intentional) offensive effects** (see Culpeper 2011: 23) and encompassing phenomena such as insults, threats, curses, condescensions and reproaches.

(Im)politeness has been studied in fields as diverse as psychology, sociology and neuroscience. The dominant view in linguistics, especially since the "discursive turn" of the research on the topic (e.g. Mills 2003, Locher 2006), is that (im)politeness is an essentially socio-pragmatic phenomenon related to the negotiation of societal norms. It is seen as not intrinsic to language but as arising from a situational assessment by the speech participants. As a result, issues of linguistic form have not received much attention in the field so far. It would obviously be absurd to claim that context plays no part in (im)polite linguistic behavior (e.g. in banter, *you bastard!* may serve to strengthen rather than challenge the rapport between friends). Still, scholars like Terkourafi (2005) and Culpeper (2011) have argued that no account of (im)politeness can be complete without a thorough understanding of the role of actual linguistic form in it and that there do exist words as well as more complex **structures that are, to varying degrees, conventionally associated with (im)politeness**. In other words, (im)politeness is not merely of a socio-pragmatic nature in their view: it also has **a purely linguistic component and perhaps even its own grammar.** This position has been somewhat overlooked in the literature.

The present workshop seeks to help redress this neglect, **by inviting papers dealing with the grammatical** rather than purely lexical **expression of impoliteness in particular**. Our focus is thus not on discursive aspects of impoliteness or on individual words like Dutch *eikel* 'dickhead' or ready-made multi-word lexemes like English *son of a bitch*. However, a structure such as French *espèce de NP!* (lit. 'species of NP!') would be of interest to us, since it appears to have the potential to create novel insults (e.g. *espèce de linguiste!* 'you linguist!'; Van Olmen & Grass in prep.).

Although the grammatical expression of impoliteness merits more attention in our view, it is, of course, not entirely uncharted territory. Still, much of the existing literature consists of isolated studies of specific structures in individual languages – which are also hardly diverse,

being mostly European and East Asian (e.g. Mel'čuk & Milićević 2011 on Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, Hudson 2018 on Japanese, Mattiello 2022 on English). Few attempts have been made thus far to draw together the research for a more comprehensive picture of grammatical impoliteness and bring it to bear on issues of wider/theoretical significance (e.g. can particular forms in different languages be understood as instantiations of a more general grammatical category of impoliteness or subdistinction thereof?). Giomi & Van Oers (2022) is a recent exception, with their cross-linguistic survey of structures expressly reserved for direct insults and their conclusion that several languages across the world distinguish insults as a clause type in its own right. More such research is required to address the many questions that have largely gone unanswered. We therefore **especially welcome submissions** that examine grammatical expressions of impoliteness in **under-documented languages** or adopt a **comparative/typological approach**.

The more specific – and interrelated – aims of the workshop include but are not limited to:

(i)   how do we establish **methodologically** that a grammatical expression is conventionalized for impoliteness? Cross-linguistic research may (almost inevitably) have to build on a limited number of native speakers' intuitions, whose reliability is far from guaranteed. The Russian optative expression with *čtob* 'so that' (e.g. *čtob ty sdox!* 'drop dead!'), for one, is often assumed to be maledictive only. Yet, rare benedictive examples can be found in corpora (Dobrushina 2022). The question arises whether such data disqualifies the expression as one of impoliteness or whether the sheer frequency of impolite cases in cotext is sufficient to regard an expression as (at least partially) conventionalized for impoliteness (cf. Terkourafi 2005: 231). It may also be useful/necessary to consider questionnaire data (e.g. with judgments of how, in light of the existence of both *you beauty!* and *you moron!*, instances with pseudowords such as *you boiton!* are interpreted; Jain 2022) or more experimental evidence (e.g. Jiang & Zhou 2015).

(ii)   do (different types of) grammatical expressions of impoliteness have **shared formal features** across languages and, if so, which ones and why? Giomi & Van Oers (2022), for example, observe that insultives often exhibit marking usually associated with possession (e.g. possessive second person singular *-'u* 'your' in Tukang Besi *pai'i-'u la* 'you stupid!'; Donohue 1999: 455). Similarly, this type of expression frequently includes an overt reference to the addressee(s) in European languages (e.g. *ty* 'you' in Polish *ty idioto!* 'you idiot!'; Van Olmen, Andersson & Culpeper in prep.), which could be a reflection of "pragmatic explicitness" (Culpeper & Haugh 2014: 170) and thus directness.

(iii)   are there any **recurrent grammatical and/or lexical sources** for (different types of) grammatical expressions of impoliteness? English *don't you dare V!*, for instance, clearly derives from a negative imperative (*you* cannot be omitted here, though) and Dutch *had gebeld!* 'you should have called!' (lit. 'had called!') can be traced back to an insubordinated protasis (Van Olmen 2018). But it remains to be seen how common such origins are for expressions of threat and reproach and what other sources exist cross-linguistically. Likewise, while Guillaume (2018), for instance, argues that Tacana's depreciative suffixes derive from lexical items meaning 'bad' and 'be wrong', such negatively evaluative lexemes are clearly not the only source for grammatical expressions of impoliteness (e.g. expressions with 'piece' in several European languages).

(iv)   how do (different types of) grammatical expressions of impoliteness **emerge and develop over time**? For example, the Spanish insultive expression *so NP!* (e.g. *so cabrón!* 'you bastard!') arguably comes from a politeness strategy: *so* stems from *señor* 'sir/mister' (Giomi & Van Oers 2022). Moreover, from the Turkic languages (Dobrushina 2022), we know that neutral optatives may become maledictive and maledictive ones neutral.

Questions that arise are: whether any cross-linguistic tendencies can be observed in such changes (e.g. how frequently do grammatical expressions of politeness evolve into ones of impoliteness or vice versa?); if so, how they can be explained; and which mechanisms of change are involved in such developments (e.g. what are suitable bridging contexts, is there any reanalysis?).

We kindly invite papers that (directly or indirectly) address any of the above questions and are also very interested in any research that looks at any of these issues for **multiple grammatical expressions of impoliteness in the same language** and their potential interactions.

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