

# **(Im)politeness and (im)morality: Insights from intervention<sup>1</sup>**

Dániel Z. Kádár

Centre for Intercultural Politeness Research, The University of Huddersfield

E-Mail: [d.z.kadar@hud.ac.uk](mailto:d.z.kadar@hud.ac.uk)

Rosina Marquez-Reiter

University of Surrey

E-Mail: [r.marquez-reiter@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:r.marquez-reiter@surrey.ac.uk)

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## **Abstract**

In this study we offer a socio-pragmatic examination of instances of what is generally known in social psychology as “bystander intervention,” i.e. the social action by which a bystander steps in and attempts to prevent a wrongdoer from abusing a victim. We explore the relationship between (im)politeness and participants’ perceptions and understandings of moral principles as evidenced by their metacommunicative voicing. Our analysis concentrates on cases of bystander intervention in the US by analysing data drawn from a reality show. Bystander intervention is a noteworthy phenomenon to examine for, at least, two reasons. First, it is a type of aggressive social action as it poses an uninvited and open challenge to the wrongdoer in public. Second, bystander intervention challenges conventional behavioural norms. It aims to reinstate what the intervener regards as morally appropriate behaviour. This study aims to contribute to current research on (im)politeness by offering a yet unexplored dimension: that of the interface between metapragmatics, (im)politeness and (im)morality in the interactional arena of bystander intervention.

## **1. Introduction**

In this study we offer a socio-pragmatic examination of instances of what is generally known in social psychology as bystander intervention (e.g. Darley and Latané 1968) where we explore the relationship between (im)politeness and participants’ perceptions and understandings<sup>2</sup> of moral principles as evidenced by their metacommunicative voicing. In so doing, we address a key knowledge gap in the field of (im)politeness research.

Our analysis concentrates on cases of bystander intervention in the US by analysing data drawn from a reality show (see Section 1.2). Bystander intervention comes into existence as a bystander (or a group) decides to interrupt an on-going act of injustice performed in a public domain – in the present case, a scene of verbal abuse, in order to protect the victim, by giving voice to what the intervener regards as the opinion of the public, and potentially recruiting others. The “line” (Goffman 1967) the intervener takes in this social situation is indicative of her or his point of view, and as we argue in this paper, what he or she regards as immoral. In those cases, when other bystanders are recruited and their actions “align” (Goffman 1974: 496) with that of the intervener, the intervention itself as well as the intervener’s public face

(Bargiela-Chiappini 2003) is endorsed.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, misaligned actions from recruited bystanders run the risk of putting the intervener “out of face” (Goffman 1955).

Bystander intervention is a ritual action. Rituals represent performances, which (re)enact the normative beliefs or values of a relational network or a broader social group such as singing a national anthem or retelling a joke (Kádár 2013). In the context of bystander intervention, “the ritual of outspokenness refers to the expected dramatic action of stepping up against the committer – or group of committers – of a seemingly immoral action” (Kádár and de La Cruz, in press). If one takes an analyst view on participation in acts of intervention via outspokenness, it can be argued that through outspokenness an unratiſed “bystander” or a group of bystanders are transformed into ratiſed “side-participant(s).” Note that we adopt these concepts of “unratiſed bystander” and “ratiſed side-participants” by following the framework presented in Kádár and Haugh (2013: 89), which present participant statuses differently from Goffman (1967). Due to its expected nature, outspokenness reinforces the situated moral expectations (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000) of other bystanders (and prospective lay observers of the event as far as it is recorded) in as much as it represents a symbolically reparative performance of socially unacceptable behaviour. Experimental studies in social psychology have demonstrated that bystanders and observers of abuse often hope that there will be someone courageous enough to take action and feel shame if they fail to intervene (see, for example, Darley and Latané 1968; Fischer et al. 2006). This, we argue, is because the majority perceives the wrongdoer’s action as morally inadmissible. The examination of the ritual of outspokenness, therefore, helps us to explore the relationship between (im)morality, (im)politeness and metapragmatics.

Bystander intervention is a reactive form of action, which has a clear relationship with morality as it comes into existence through what social psychologists describe as “moral judgement” (see, for example, Colby 1987; Haidt and Baron 1996; Piaget 1997, Feinberg and Willer 2012). Essentially, moral judgement refers to the moral evaluation of an on-going act. In this sense, bystander intervention is not an objective evaluative process. It emerges from the intervener’s initial reaction and intuitive emotion that something is “right” or “wrong” based on her or his culture, personal background and psyche, and its subsequent reappraisal, that is, the process by which the initial emotion is framed as evidenced in the interpretation of the event i.e. the voicing of moral concern, which in the case of the examples presented here is metacommunicatively articulated.

A moral judgement may be followed by an action; such actions are morally loaded not only because they are preceded by a moral judgement, but also because others tend to perceive them (by morally judging the social action of moral judgement) through moral lenses (Bauman 1991). It is important to draw a distinction between a broader set of morally loaded actions (e.g. telling one’s child dos and don’ts) and bystander intervention, as the latter takes place in a) the public domain and b) from an unratiſed position in as much as the wrongdoer and the victim display conventional forms of relatedness (e.g. Duck 1994, 1996; Kaplan 2005; Knobloch and Solomon 2003) and the intervener is not part of that relationship. Bystander intervention is different from the broader semantic category of “intervention” as the latter involves a wide variety of interpersonal scenes, with different power relationships, moral judgements, and so on.

Bystander intervention is a noteworthy phenomenon to study for the (im)politeness researcher. This is because it is a type of aggressive social action

which, on the one hand, challenges the conventional norm of being non-conflictive with others, and on the other hand, aims to reinstate what the intervener regards as morally appropriate behaviour. In other words, in bystander intervention, conventional norms which are regarded as “social oughts” (Culpeper 2011) are challenged by “moral oughts” as the intervener butts into an interaction between people who are unrelated to her or him, but related to each other. Although bystander interventions may take place between two strangers fighting with each other, the examples addressed in this article comprise instances of a bystander’s intervention in someone else’s (presumably) intimate relationship (i.e. friends, boyfriend and girlfriend, family unit) as conventionally understood in the culture where the data come from.

The seeming immorality of the wrongdoer’s action runs contrary to normative behavioural expectations in the public domain,<sup>4</sup> thus leading the intervener to interfere in someone else’s private domain (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 73). The wrongdoer appears to be intimately related to the victim while the intervener is a complete stranger. Notwithstanding this, the wrongdoer, the victim and the intervener – as well as other bystanders – share for a fleeting moment the same space. In this sense, the intervener could, in theory, justify the bystander intervention by appealing to an infringement of her or his personal space in a public domain.<sup>5</sup> This is because the intervener has the right to move freely in public spaces –such as the ones where our data come from –without having to witness acts which run contrary to the customary rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies (see, for example, Bicchieri 2006).

The intervener, however, legitimises her or his action by invoking the morality principle (i.e. “moral oughts”) while the wrongdoer delegitimises the intervener’s action by invoking notions of politeness (i.e. “social oughts”).<sup>6</sup> The articulation of these principles within the “ritual of outspokenness” (Kádár 2013; see Section 2) provides us with a lens from which to explore the intersectionality between (im)politeness, morality and metapragmatics. The notion of “(im)politeness” used in this article draws on Culpeper’s (2011) concept of “moral oughts” – and the metapragmatic voicing of these oughts, in particular the assumed right of being undisturbed in one’s private space. Following Kádár and Haugh (2013), in those cases where, we contrast the (im)polite metapragmatic appeals of the wrongdoer and the (im)moral appeals of the intervening bystander, we argue that politeness is not necessarily at play. This is because these types of events would inherently disqualify its actors from their entitlement to be treated politely. Such a view would reflect the understanding of many bystanders (and possibly that of the analyst, too) but not that of the wrongdoer, as illustrated by his or her metaappeals to politeness. Thus, in line with Kádár and Haugh (2013), we contend that any framework of (im)politeness should bring together various understandings of politeness, hence making it unnecessary to solely look into the evaluations made by wrongdoers. As we maintain in Section 6, this analytic perspective reveals an important aspect of politeness norms, namely that references to (im)politeness can operate as an interactional resource for a wrongdoer in certain interpersonal settings.

In sum, our study aims to contribute to current research on (im)politeness by offering a yet unexplored dimension: that of the interface between metapragmatics (Lucy 2004), (im)politeness and (im)morality in the interactional arena of outspokenness (Kádár 2013).

## **2. Previous research on (im)politeness and (im)morality**

Since Eelen's (2001) seminal study, research into (im)politeness has strived to bring together different accounts on politeness – such culture-insider v. culture-outsider and more general theoretical accounts – with various degrees of success (see, for example, Watts 2003; Mills 2003; Linguistic Politeness Research Group ed. 2011). Indeed, the role of metapragmatics to help to disentangle this distinction and provide the analyst with a potentially robust epistemological account of (im)politeness has been voiced by Culpeper (2011) and, more recently, by Kádár and Haugh (2013) and Haugh (2013), the latter with particular regard to the relationship between morality and (im)politeness, albeit without foregrounding the role played by metapragmatics in this interrelationship, something that we aim to do here.<sup>7</sup>

Our paper brings together a first and second order analysis by drawing on theoretical conceptualisations of ritual, (im)politeness and (im)morality (see also Kádár and Haugh 2013) and participants' metacommunicative orientations to (im)politeness and (im)morality. This is because the participants' behaviour and, in particular that of the main protagonists – the intervener and the alleged wrongdoer – constitute metapragmatic verbal behaviour<sup>8</sup> as evidenced by the action of intervening itself and the way in which it is articulated.

Our examination of the relationship between (im)politeness and (im)morality seeks to contribute to previous research in this area. Recent studies by Arundale (2013) and Haugh (2013) have drawn attention to the importance of morality for research on (im)politeness. Although from slightly different theoretical perspectives, the authors maintain that morality has been overlooked despite the fact that (im)politeness is, after all, a matter of evaluation (Eelen 2001) and, evaluations of (im)politeness often revolve around issues of morality. Haugh (2013) has recently argued that an evaluation of (im)politeness should be seen not only as situated within social practices, but also “as a form of social practice in and of itself” (p. 54). Morality (and immorality) emerges through the participants' social practice-based expectations as to how interactions should unfold, and it influences the evaluative practice without the participants necessarily noticing it. Put simply, an improper flow of events may emerge as “immoral” from a participant's point of view, without the participant necessarily defining the event as such. We agree with Haugh that evaluations of (im)politeness come into existence through such situated expectations; however, we contend that morality, in the interactional environment we examine here, intersects with (im)politeness also in a different respect.<sup>9</sup> That is, morality as we examine it appears on the level of metapragmatics: this is because evaluations of (im)politeness often involve a folk-theoretical/philosophical understanding of morality that is, in such evaluations morality itself is visibly voiced. Such moral evaluations are recurrent and so they constitute a practice in the conversation analytic sense. Our data show that outspokenness is triggered by what the intervener –and possibly other bystanders, too – see as the impermissible violation of the victim's rights, and thus what is considered to be tolerable in interpersonal relationships according to a given culture's or group's moral norms. In sum, then, we aim to contribute to on-going research by emphasising the importance of studying moral principles as they are understood in a lay/philosophical-second order sense, within the evaluative action.

In order to illustrate the type of (im)moral perceptions/evaluations examined in this paper, let us consider an interaction from our database:

(1)

Dog left inside a hot car

*A dog is left in the back seat of car on a very hot day and barks loudly as people pass by. It is illegal to leave a pet in a car in New Jersey.*

1. *Female*: It's just so hot in there. [...] But, the police are coming right now.
2. *Dog owner*: You called the cops? How is any of that your concern?
3. *Female*: The dog is in there panting and could die. That's our concern. Not you.

Our examples demonstrate that the intervener rests her or his case on moral principles that are so basic they can be invoked without having to consider the broader context i.e. the intervener, a bystander who becomes an interactional side-participant, albeit unratified by the wrongdoer,<sup>10</sup> is interfering in someone else's intimate relationship (e.g. the relationship of "ownership" in the case of example 1). The bystander intervention makes manifest the intervener's reflexive evaluation –and possibly that of other bystanders, too – of what is going on in someone else's private realm. Such metapragmatic assessment is primordial moral in that it brings to the fore the inadmissibility of the observed behaviour in as much as it violates basic personal rights (Jarvis Thomson 1990).<sup>11</sup> The notion of "basic personal rights" in our interpretation covers a cluster of moral perception centered on the beliefs that human beings (and other living creatures such as the dog in example 1) are entitled to not to be abused.

The intervener – as presumably many of the other bystanders who decide not to intervene (Kent 2011) – tends to see the alleged violation as part of the public's business despite the fact that the behaviour that is being contested may well form part of private life. In example (1), a clear metacomment that evidences this fact is the utterance "That's our [i.e. the company of the intervener (with whom she has probably been muttering about the wrongdoer's behaviour), and, by extension, the public's] concern." (line 3).<sup>12</sup> The wrongdoer's action coupled with the victim's reaction (or lack of) seem to the intervener as encroaching on the "normative condition of what is permitted to be done to persons, what persons are permitted to do, [and] what sorts of justifications are required for preventing them from doing what they want" (Nagel 1995: 85). In other words, the wrongdoer's behaviour violates "the kind of place that should be occupied by individuals in a moral system – how their lives, actions, and interests should be recognized by the system of justification and authorization that constitutes a morality" (Nagel 1995: 85).

It then follows, that morality – as we approach it in this paper at least, as a folk-theoretical and philosophical rather than a practice-based interactional notion – is not always contingent on social practice. It is for this very reason that morality takes precedence over other considerations such as (im)politeness or relatedness, as metacommunicatively voiced by the interveners in our examples. In this sense, the ritual of outspokenness provides us with a prime interactional environment in which to examine the interrelationship between (im)politeness, (im)morality and metapragmatics as foregrounded by the participants themselves. With this in mind, our study brings metapragmatics into the fold and addresses a current concern about the future development of (im)politeness research.

When examining the wrongdoer's behaviour (see Section 3), metalexical elements such as "You're being rude" are often absent.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the wrongdoer refers to the impolite/inappropriate nature of bystander intervention through metacommunicative comments related to non-debatable "personal rights" (e.g. "this is my girlfriend" – see

example 2). The intervener, on the other hand, makes metacommunicative appeals to morality (e.g. “[i]t’s completely inappropriate,” see example 3)<sup>14</sup> (see also Section 5).

Our examples feature cases where the intervener legitimises her or his intervention by invoking the morality that ought to exist in displays of intimacy in the public domain as observed in the way in which the intervention is formulated. Specifically, the intervener mobilises appeals to moral principles by directly addressing the wrongdoer and the victim while attempting to recruit other bystanders (see Section 1). As argued elsewhere (Kádár 2013), in this scene it is possible for bystanders to get involved and support the wrongdoer rather than the intervener. In these cases an alternative morality principle is interactionally observed, namely one that is aligned with that of the wrongdoer rather than with the victim. Although this is possible given that personal rights, at least in the US, are not self-evident (Jarvis Thomson 1990; Nagel 1995) in that they are often subjected to challenges and (meta)debated – the examples examined in this paper do not contain any instances of this.

In our data the alleged abuser reacts by invoking politeness (and impoliteness) grounds as he or she appeals to infringements of what Brown and Levinson (1987) would define as “negative face,” i.e. reference to the abuser’s right to be left undisturbed in her or his private space.<sup>15</sup> Theoretically speaking, the moral grounds invoked by the intervener ought to be more prevalent than grounds of politeness as evidenced by the fact that she or he intervened despite the difficulty that entering into others’ personal spaces implies (see, for example, Kent 2011). The seeming immorality of the abuser’s action is rooted in the fact that the wrongdoer is intimately related to the victim so the abuser acts contrary to normative behavioural expectations in public (also in the sense that one is expected to be non-conflictive in such settings). Put differently, in the public domain the morality principle is mobilised to do what one should not possibly do otherwise (e.g. instructing an unknown dog owner about the norms of pet keeping, as in example 1). This is congruent with the ritual nature of bystander intervention: as ritual anthropologists and psychologists argue that in ritual actions the individual often challenges conventional behavioural constraints.

As Koster (2003: 219) notes, ritual produces “a temporary destruction of awareness of the wider meaningful relations of one’s individuality and the reduction of self to the immediate physical experience of the here and now.” Relatedly, Kádár and de La Cruz (in press) note that the ritual of outspokenness (re)enacts normative moral expectations, and so it reinforces the behavioural norms “moral order” that ought to underlie human relations (Whutnow 1989). Therefore, in this ritual action the intervener voices what he or she understands as the public concern. Our examples show that the moral order should be observed in public even when the relationship between the wrongdoer and the victim is an intimate one. In these scenes, therefore, outspokenness is usually interpreted (at least, by the intervener) as a justified form of intervention (Drummond 1989) – which is immoral on the surface due to its violative nature but open to be reinterpreted as moral.

### **3. Data**

The interactions we examine come from *Primetime: What Would You Do?* (henceforth WWYD),<sup>16</sup> a United States television programme dedicated to featuring cases of outspokenness within bystander intervention (see Kádár and de La Cruz in press for more information on the programme).<sup>17</sup> WWYD is a docu-drama or a fly on the wall documentary made with the help of secret cameras (see, for example, Livingstone 1999).

WWYD, hosted by the reporter John Quiñones, premiered on ABC's television channel in the US in 2008. The theme behind the show is that actors act out scenes in which some type of conflict or illegal activity occurs; there are hidden cameras that record the event, and the focus is on whether bystanders intervene as side-participants or not. Bystanders are unaware that they are being observed. This is important when considering that not performing rituals of outspokenness often occasions shame (Darley and Latané 1968) and anticipation of an audience triggered by "double articulation", that is, the awareness that someone's behaviour is being broadcast on the television (see, for example, Livingstone 2007) – does not necessarily influence the behaviour of the bystanders.<sup>18</sup> The programme features follow up interviews where Quiñones queries those who intervened and those who do not. This, in turn, offers the analyst a window into the (non)interveners' reflections on their own behaviours.

In this paper we analyse four interactions from a database of 117 video recordings of 2-3 minutes in length. This database of 117 recordings features cases of an intervener interfering in someone else's intimate relationship and thus infringing on their private space (Brown and Levinson 1987) as conventionally understood in US public settings (see, for example, Nelson 2002). The particular examples examined have been selected due to the clarity of metapragmatic voicing (i.e. the metapragmatic articulation of moral principles) that can be observed in the interactions. Importantly, these examples offer us a window into the intersection of (im)politeness and (im)morality via the participants' metacommunicative privileging of one over the other. As such, metacommunicative voicing is the interactional mechanism that enables us to shed light on the dynamics of social versus moral oughts within intervention.

The analysis we present is discourse analytic in the broad sense. It draws on notions from the field of (im)politeness research including Goffmanian concepts such as "(dis)alignment," "footing" and "face" and, integrates conceptualisations of bystander intervention and morality from social psychology and philosophy respectively.

#### 4. Analysis

Example (2), below, illustrates the tension between moral and social oughts. The intervener privileges the former while the abuser brings to the fore what he considers to be the prevalence of the latter.

(2)

##### Abusive boyfriend

*A couple is arguing in the park. Bystanders overhear the argument but seem conflicted over intervention. An elderly female bystander decides to intervene.*

1. *Boyfriend*: Stop crying. Shut up!
2. *Elderly female*: Hey buddy! Cool it!
3. *Boyfriend*: Ma'am, can you just let us do our own thing? It's my girlfriend. Can you just leave us alone?
4. *Elderly female*: No. That's not how you treat someone. How about I call the cops?

Here the intervener, an elderly woman, draws the attention of the wrongdoer with "Hey buddy! Cool it!" The inclusion of "buddy" with an accentuated and ironic prosody is clearly conflictive in that it conveys the opposite of its literal meaning: the

person addressed is not a friend of the intervener. Whilst “buddy” is not necessarily used to belittle, it is pragmatically appropriate to signal disagreement or opposition, and this meaning is even stronger in this interaction due to the emotive context and also to the age gap between the wrongdoer and the intervening person. Thus, the presence of “buddy” indicates a lack of alignment with the activity of the wrongdoer and paves the way for the alternative behaviour suggested by the intervener. Importantly, the alleged wrongdoer challenges the intervention by appealing to rights to privacy. He does this by adopting a routine footing (Zimmerman 1998) typically used when addressing elderly strangers in the U.S. (i.e. Ma’am). In so doing, he signals the respect and/or distance (Marquez Reiter and Placencia 2004) that ought to exist between complete strangers followed by a conventionally indirect request in which he constructs the intervener as an outsider. The wrongdoer does this by addressing the intervener as an interferer in as much as he treats her as an unrati ed participant in the argument. This is illustrated by the possessive second person plural (i.e. “our”), which emphasises the illegitimacy of the intervener’s action. Further support for his appeal to privacy is offered by his subsequent justification (“It’s my girlfriend”) followed by an appeal to the intervener to stop interfering the in-group conversation. The intervener, however, rejects being constructed as an interferer by invoking morality grounds and threatening to call the relevant authority unless the wrongdoer stops. Specifically, the intervener brings to the fore the morality that should permeate human relationships – the notion of the proper treatment of others, which has been a key communal concept in philosophy and religion since antiquity (Graham and Haidt 2010). In so doing, the intervener makes evident a case where morality principles take precedence over politeness ones, if we accept that respecting others’ personal spaces is polite.

Example (3), below, represents another case of a bystander intervening in someone else’s personal relationship. In this example, the intervener directly addresses both the abuser and then the victim as a result of the abuser’s initial dismissal of the bystander’s intervention.

(3)

Abusive boyfriend

*A couple is arguing in the park. Bystanders overhear the argument but seem conflicted over intervention. A young female., who is with a couple of friends, decides to intervene.*

- 1. *Boyfriend:* Natalie sit down and listen to me. [pushes Natalie]
- 2. *Young female:* I could see you from up there. You do not push a woman out in public. That is complete bullshit.
- 3. *Young female:* [turning to Natalie] Seriously, do you need a ride home?
- 4. *Boyfriend:* Natalie, sit down. This is my girlfriend.
- 5. *Young female:* Wait. Who are you talking to? She is not a dog. You are just a little punk-ass kid and getting on my last nerve.

Unlike (2), in this example, the intervener turns to the victim to offer her a lift home. This alignment attempt seems to boost the disalignment from the wrongdoer – which takes place in the form of the negatively-loaded taboo items “bullshit” (to refer to the situation) and “little punk-ass kid” (a person reference term) to characterise the abuser. As discussed elsewhere (Kádár and de La Cruz, in press), this example demonstrates how alignment situated in intervention has a clear disaligning



metamessage (Jaworski 1993). In this case, the intervener seems to justify her action by invoking normative behavioural expectations in public spaces rather than articulating the weightiness of the morality principle over the politeness one.

Yet, whilst the claim that “You do not push a woman out in public” not only indexes the wrongdoer’s infringement of the intervener’s right not to be exposed to such a disturbing scene in public,<sup>19</sup> more importantly, it is a moral appeal. That is, “being gentle with women” is a chivalrous Judeo-Christian moral heritage, which is deeply rooted in Western societies (often despite many of these societies defining themselves as secular), and which has been integrated into (and reinterpreted within) the modern moral concept of gender equality (Visher 1983). Moreover, there might be an additional moral element in this utterance to justify the intervention – if boyfriend can treat her so badly *in public*, there is a suspicion that he treats her even worse in private.

Example 4, below, illustrates yet another instance of immorality versus politeness in action.

(3)

Lesbian parents verbally abused

*Lesbian couple eating breakfast with their two kids at a restaurant in Texas. The server berates and humiliates the lesbian couple. Several customers overhear the server.*

1. *Server:* You’re gay and you have kids? It’s bad enough that you are lesbians but that they don’t have a father. .... I think that is kind of bad. You don’t feel uncomfortable – people *watching* you? Isn’t it bad for the kids? I think it’s terrible!
2. [Lesbian couple does not answer and looks very embarrassed.]
3. *Young male:* Sorry, but you are just being rude. It’s completely inappropriate when someone comes into a restaurant to have a breakfast with their family that you question their life choices.
4. *Server:* I just think I am entitled to my own opinion.
5. *Young male:* You are entitled to your opinion but this is not the place to voice your opinion.
6. *Server:* Is it just me that’s upset? [looks to different directions in the restaurant]

In (4), a waitress steps out of her institutional role. She adopts a non-instrumental footing (Goffman 1979) and verbally attacks some customers (i.e. a lesbian couple with children). While the victims react by remaining silent, thus apparently dismissing the waitress’s action, a bystander (i.e. another customer) intervenes. He challenges the waitress by explicitly accusing her of being impolite.<sup>20</sup> He does this by bringing to the fore the responsibilities that an incumbent of the waiter/ess category should abide by (cf. Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005) in the workplace, by indirectly drawing attention to the server’s role (“when someone comes into a restaurant to have a breakfast”). The waitress reacts by making a (counter-) appeal to the bystanders’ morality to validate her action and repair damage to face. In return, the intervener responds by foregrounding the normative behaviour that she is expected to observe in a public space, perhaps particularly as an incumbent of the service provider category. This example shows the general perceived moral importance of fulfilling the responsibilities associated with given institutional roles in their respective institutional

settings and the extent to which any violations of the normative behaviour regarding role responsibilities, particularly when these are seen to infringe on the rights of others (i.e. customers), are deemed impugnable.<sup>21</sup>

Our final example, (5) below, shows the intervener's appeal to morality based on the non-self-evidence of personal rights (Jarvis Thomson 1990; Nagel 1995, see Section 1) rather than on the tension that in the previous examples was shown between (im)politeness and (im)morality.

(5)

Gay athlete comes out to his friends

*A group of male friends are at a busy shopping centre. One of the group has started to intimate to the others that he is gay. His friends start to tease him and utter homophobic slurs. A female overhears the teasing and steps in immediately and says the friends should not tease the gay person and they should not be so hard on him. Line 1 below takes place after the "friends" of the gay athlete have already started to comprehend the situation, and the athlete makes the actual coming out.*

1. *Gay person:* I have something to tell you guys.
  2. *Friend:* Stop playing bro! You are gay? G-A-Y? [starts laughing and backs away from gay athlete]
  3. *Gay person:* Yes.
  4. *Friend:* You really don't like females? You don't like girls? You know what we call males that like men?
  5. *Young female:* Ya'll wrong. I heard the conversation. Ya'll ain't right. That's your friend?
  6. *Friend:* That was my friend.
  7. *Young female:* What do you mean was? That shouldn't stop you guys from being friends.
- [...]

In this example, the young female who intervenes does so by initially appealing to morality through increased negative assessments ("Ya'll wrong," "Ya'll ain't right"). Specifically, she defends the right of the victim to have his personal choices respected, especially among friends, by questioning the abuser's behaviour ("That's your friend?") and offering a reflective evaluation of the morality that should permeate this form of relatedness ("That shouldn't stop you guys from being friends"). In other words, she proffers her understanding of the way in which friends should behave towards one another (i.e. social oughts). Unlike our previous examples, (5) illustrates that in certain situations social and moral oughts do not necessarily clash with each other but are dependent on each other (cf. Haugh 2013). That is, the young female approaches the group of friends in a friendly way, rather than intervening aggressively, but still manages to reinstate what the public regards as morally right. As Kádár and De La Cruz (forthcoming) argue, such a joint operation of politeness and morality is largely subject to contextual factors, such as the ongoing power dynamics, the age and gender of the intervener, and so on.

## 5. Discussion

The data studied indicates that a juxtaposition can take place between politeness - in our case, the right of in-group interactants to be undisturbed – and morality when an act of injustice triggers intervention and, that in other situations such as the one depicted in example (5) (im)politeness and (im)morality interact with each other in mutually beneficial ways. The conventional norm of avoiding conflict and not entering into others' private spaces is overwritten by the moral need for intervention. Bystander intervention is expected by other bystanders, and as such it is a performance that fulfils moral needs (see Section 1).

It is interesting to observe the metapragmatics of bystander intervention from both the intervener's and the wrongdoer's perspectives. In the intervener's case, not surprisingly, moral issues are at the centre of the metacommunicative articulation observed. Utterances such as "That's not how you treat someone" (example 2) and "Who are you talking to? She is not a dog!" (example 3) represent appeals to expected moral behaviour in that such behaviour contravenes personal rights – and the moral principles that these rights entail. These appeals are metacommunicative. They describe the moral norms behind the intervener's action, rather than making use of an explicit moral lexicon ("immoral," "evil," etc.).

The situation seems to be different in the case of the wrongdoer who usually makes an appeal to the impolite nature of the intervention via metacommunicative references to her or his rights (e.g. "Ma'am, can you just let us do our own thing? It's my girlfriend. Can you just leave us alone?" in example 2). This is self-evident, considering that bystander intervention takes place in a scene of aggression, and the aggressor (the wrongdoer) cannot really make direct appeals to broader normative behaviour, but rather he or she has to refer to personal rights which presuppose that the act of bystander intervention contravene/are at odds with these broader norms.

It is important again to emphasise that we do not intend to claim that the metacommunicative comments from the intervener and wrongdoer always follow an immorality versus impoliteness schema. Here we should refer to the fact that bystander intervention is a ritual, and as such it is a performance. Exactly because of this, the *raison d'être* of its operation is that the intervener – and potentially the wrongdoer – attempts to align with other bystanders. That is, if the wrongdoer takes up a counter-offensive position, she or he may refer to moral norms as a counter-appeal; we could observe this in example 4, in which the wrongdoer makes such an appeal to her moral "obligation" to denounce the lesbian couple ("Is it just me that's upset?"). We should note, however, that in our dataset of 117 video recordings there are only 5 of such cases which illustrate that the debate between the intervener and the wrongdoer revolve around moral obligations and conventional rights.

The metacommunicative analysis of such clashes and symbiotic dependence (i.e. example 4) is not only useful because it shows the importance of morality, but also because it reveals a potential characteristic of (im)politeness, which is rarely discussed in the field, namely that appeals to appropriate behaviour and references to the other's impoliteness can actually become discursive resources utilised by wrongdoers to legitimise their actions and challenge those of others.

The following figure illustrates the operation of metacommunicative juxtapositions in scenes of interruption.

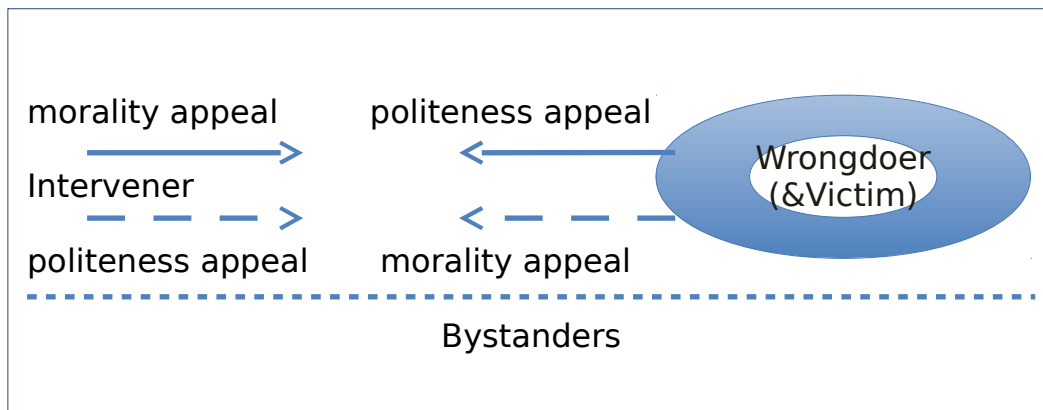


Figure 1: The Metacommunicative Operationalisation of (Im)Morality and (Im)Politeness

The circle around the wrongdoer and the victim represents the intimacy of their relationship, which is threatened by the act of bystander intervention; the victim is denoted in brackets, since she or he tends to be a passive participant of the event.<sup>22</sup> The arrows represent the appeals made by the intervener and the wrongdoer; the arrow of the wrongdoer's morality appeal and the intervener's politeness is dashed, in order to denote that 1) these types of conversational patterns are less typical, and 2) that they can jointly operate with the default appeal and counter-appeal of the intervener and the wrongdoer. The dotted line above bystanders indicates that bystanders can take sides and join the flow of events as supporters (see Kádár and De La Cruz in press), and that the ritual of outspokenness, and the wrongdoer's counter-action, represent a struggle to align with bystanders.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present paper we have inquired into a neglected aspect of the relationship between (im)politeness and (im)morality, by looking into participants' understandings and perceptions of moral and/or polite values as evidenced by their metacommunicative voicing. We have argued that morality is not always contingent on social practice as a phenomenon "unseen" for the participants and not necessarily a social practice in and of itself – but rather a phenomenon that people perceive and define. This is because first order interactant perceptions of morality include personal rights (see the discussion in Section 1 on Nagel 1995, Jarvis Thomson 1990, and Bicchieri 2006), and second order folk-theoretical/philosophical meta-accounts of morality include definitions of these rights. By examining this topic, we have relied on conceptualisations drawn from social psychology and philosophy, and we integrated these conceptualisations into politeness research. By doing so, we have continued the work of scholars such as Holtgraves (2005) and Spencer-Oatey (2007) who laid down the foundations of social psychological inquiries into (im)politeness phenomena; considering that this article is written for the anniversary issue of the *Journal of Politeness Research*, we feel that it is important for us to draw attention to the importance of investing energy into this research area.

Due to its limited scope, this study has only made some initial inquiry into the intersection of (im)morality and (im)politeness. The phenomenon of morality needs to be further studied both within and outside of the bystander intervention arena. For example, a key phenomenon to address is the cross-cultural aspect of moral judgements. As the preliminary results of an on-going research (see Kádár forthcoming) seem to indicate, there are noteworthy cross-cultural differences in the ways in which the act of help is moralised across cultures; also there are cultural

differences between the normative cultural perceptions of the appropriateness of certain types of bystander intervention. It would also be useful for future studies to explore the extent to which metacommunication is operationalised differently across cultures, based on different understandings of personal rights and what is deemed socially acceptable behaviour. For example, personal rights are not self evident in the normative US cultural context but, as Ting-Toomey's (2012: 112–116) study convincingly pointed out, this situation might be different in other cultures. Such differences are likely to manifest themselves in differences between the ways in which metacommunication is operationalised when it comes to violations of rights. Finally, by examining an array of interactional contexts, including everyday, institutional and ritual interaction across cultures, we could further unravel the demonstrated intersectionality between (im)politeness, (im)morality and metapragmatics with a view to strengthening the methodological apparatus with which we work.

## **Notes**

1. We would like to express our gratitude to Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini for her insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. We are also indebted to Liz Marsden for checking the style of this work. Our thank you goes to Karen Grainger and Isabelle van der Bom. Last but not least, we are thankful to the anonymous Referees for their feedback on the manuscript of this paper. Needless to say that all the remaining errors belong to us.
2. It is important to draw a distinction between the participants' first order perceptions and second order understandings of an interactional phenomenon. When it comes to the metapragmatics of morality and moral judgments (Section 1), an act is perceived as (im)moral when metacomments on it reflect the participants' folk-theoretical/philosophical understandings of it (see Kádár and Haugh 2013).
3. It is pertinent to note that forms of endorsement span hardly noticeable non-verbal signs, through to cheering and verbal attacks on the wrongdoer (see Kádár and De La Cruz, in press).
4. And possibly in private, too. This, however, is not demonstrable on the basis of our data.
5. For example, when a member of the public is engrossed in reading on a park bench and a couple sits on the bench and starts arguing thus disturbing the reader's personal space, resulting in her or him butting in.
6. We use "principle" in the non-Leechian (1983) sense. By principle we refer here to a mental and emotional motivation that is primordial and offers both the wrongdoer and the intervener a starting point to argue in favour or against each other's behaviour.
7. See also Pizziconi's (2012) yet unpublished inquiry into the metapragmatics of morality in Japanese.
8. Non-verbal metacommunicative behaviour is also observable in interactional gaps, silences and other forms of dispreferred responses through which participants project their disalignment with respect to a prior action. They thus indicate their interpretation of their interlocutor's agenda and their (own) positioning. Non-verbal communicative behaviour may also entail a physical response without any verbal articulation (e.g. an intervener removing a victim from a scene of injustice without any verbal voicing Kádár and De La Cruz, in press).
9. Note that this argument is explored in detail using Chinese and Japanese data in the forthcoming monograph of Haugh and Kádár (2015).
10. In a sense, it would be possible to argue that the dog owner ratifies the intervener's participation by engaging in a conversation with her. However, the comment "[h]ow is any of that your concern?" indicates that the owner's view is that the intervener is acting beyond her status as a passive bystander, i.e. her status is unratified from the wrongdoer's point of view.
11. It is important to emphasise that our notion of morality is not contradictory with how Haugh approaches this concept (2013). As Kádár and De La Cruz (in press) argue, actions that are regarded as immoral can also upset interactional expectations, i.e. there is an important interface between interactional and folk-theoretical/philosophical definitions of morality.
12. Note that "Not you" in this line can be interpreted two ways: as a put-down (you horrible person, you, unlike the dog, are not worth being concerned about), and also as a reassurance about the absence of hostile interpersonal intentions (the intention in calling the police is not to get you into trouble but to save the dog). The prosody of the utterance seems to indicate to us that the case is the former.
13. This is, however, not a "rule." Note that in our data metalexemes seem to gain more importance in the intervener's rather than in the wrongdoer's metapragmatic behaviour – for example, when the intervener combines metacommunicative appeals to morality with claims that the wrongdoer's behaviour is also socially inappropriate; in such cases, metalexical elements such as "You're being rude" are relatively common (see e.g. extract 3). This difference between the metapragmatic behaviours of the wrongdoer and the intervener presumably comes from their different roles (see more in Section 5).
14. In our data we also observed a few metacommunicative appeals that were metalexical by nature, although such examples were rare. More specifically, Kádár and De La Cruz (in press) discuss cases when interveners use citations of religious origin, such as "Don't judge!" (after the intervener explicitly advises the wrongdoer to read the Bible). Whilst such citations are not metalexemes in a strict sense, they are on the border between metalexicon and metacommunication due to their formulaic nature.
15. We use the Brown and Levinsonian term here as a default one, simply because in our American English data this notion seems applicable. However, it is important to emphasise that the ritual of outspokenness exists in cultures, such as Chinese and Japanese, in which the validity of the Brown and Levinsonian framework has received severe criticism (see, for example, Ide (1989); Kádár (forthcoming) on outspokenness in Sino-Japanese data.)
16. See: <<http://abc.go.com/shows/what-would-you-do>>

17. It is pertinent to note that WWYD is not the first of such shows – in a sense it can be regarded as an “inheritor” of the British series *Candid Camera* and its later versions in different countries. However, a unique feature of WWYD, as far as we are aware, is that it focuses on social problems and abuse in particular.

18. It is worth adding, however, that as these events occur in a public space bystanders are potentially observable by other bystanders, and that once they intervene they may well become the focus of these bystanders’ attention – and so there is a sense of being (potentially) observed in such interactions, but this is presumably different from the sense of being under surveillance all the time, as in the case of double-articulated TV shows. Although the study of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible that the prospect of being observed by other bystanders is, for some people, a deterrent to intervening when otherwise they would have done so.

19. It is pertinent to note that while it is equally intolerable to push a woman in private, in our data we often encounter appeals to the public nature of an abuse, as in the case of example (3). This is because, as we argued earlier, engaging in an illegal-disturbing action in public is, in a sense, an intrusion into the private spaces of the bystanders who are forced to watch the scene.

20. Here we follow Culpeper’s (2011) suggestion to categorise metalexemes such as “rude” under the technical notion of impoliteness.

21. Note that the importance of institutional role in this case reflects only our reading of the interaction. Yet, there are certain evidences within the interaction that point to the fact that from the intervening person’s perspective the server’s institutional role is important: he uses both the verb “comes into” (as opposed to ‘is’) and the indefinite article before ‘breakfast’ as indexing the position of the server (the latter because only service providers deal with countable breakfasts – ordinary people just have non-count breakfast).

22. As Kádár and De La Cruz (in press) note, the passivity of the victim is a key factor for intervention to operate.

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