

# 1. Introduction

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## 1. (Im)politeness

While (im)politeness research is a relatively young academic field, interest in issues of “politeness”, “propriety” and so on have long been discussed in social and philosophical works. The earliest writings about politeness stretch back to the civilisations of Ancient Egypt, Greece, India and China more than two and a half thousand years ago (Pan and Kádár, 2011; Terkourafi 2011). Interest in “proper” ways of behaving has continued unabated across speakers of different languages and cultures since then. This ongoing interest in such matters is perhaps inevitable. Humans are social beings, and so a keen interest in how we are treated by others is only to be expected. Yet despite there being widespread interest in such issues, theorists have not gravitated towards a common conceptual framework.

Politeness first garnered serious academic attention in the 1970s with work of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1977), and Brown and Levinson (1978) sparking interest in systematically examining how we maintain good relations and avoid interpersonal conflict through the use of different linguistic forms and strategies. While academic views of politeness, and subsequently impoliteness, have proliferated since then, these early understandings of politeness have continued to provide a touchstone for the field. In many approaches, (im)politeness is defined through the lens of a particular theoretical framework. For instance, Brown and Levinson (1978) define politeness as attending to the face wants of others, that is, their desire to be approved of (positive face) and their desire to be unimpeded in their actions (negative face). In other approaches, the definition of (im)politeness more closely mirrors the understandings of lay users of that language. For instance, Spencer-Oatey (2005) suggests that we

take (im)politeness to be an umbrella term that covers all kinds of evaluative meanings (e.g., warm, friendly, considerate, respectful, deferential, insolent, aggressive, rude). These meanings can have positive, negative or neutral connotations, and the judgments can impact upon people’s perceptions of their social relations and the rapport or (dis)harmony that exists between them. (Spencer-Oatey, 2005: 97)

The diverse ways in which (im)politeness is defined, theorised and analysed ultimately reflects the different agendas of researchers (Locher, 2015). There is no one-size-fits-all definition of politeness or impoliteness for the simple reason that the research questions that drive the field are diverse, encompassing a whole range of different theoretical and methodological stances. (Im)politeness research is an

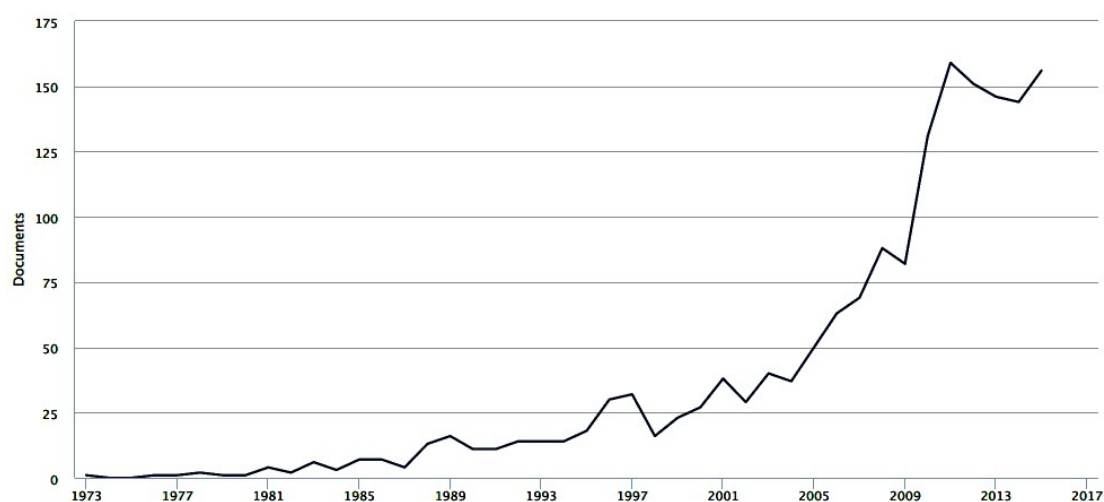
increasingly multidisciplinary endeavor (Kádár and Haugh, 2013), and the contributions to this volume have been purposefully selected to reflect that wide diversity.

## 2. Why this handbook now?

There are quantitative and qualitative answers to this question. Let us begin our answer by examining the frequencies of the terms *politeness*, *impoliteness* and *(im)politeness* as they appear in journal article titles, abstracts or keywords over the period 1970 to 2015, as retrieved by the database and program SCOPUS. It must be stressed that the upcoming Figures display the quantities of journal articles published in the relevant period that contain those terms. This excludes the important role that books and chapters in books have had in this field. Nevertheless, although the individual frequencies are misleading with respect to the whole field, the differences between them, we believe, are indicative of broad trends.

Figure 1 displays the frequency of the term *politeness* over the period 1970-2015.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. The frequency of the term *politeness* in journal article titles, abstracts or keywords, 1970-2015 (extracted by SCOPUS)**



Despite the so-called classic politeness works having their early incarnations back in the 1970s (Brown and Levinson 1978; Lakoff 1973; Leech 1977), there was no dramatic explosion of scholarship, but rather a slowly increasing over the 1990s that eventually took off in the 2000s. Many of those studies in the 1990s were applying the politeness theories to varying datasets; in other words, they lent insights into those datasets, rather than offering theoretical insights. As we approach and enter the 2000s, we see the publication of alternative accounts. Most notable here is the work of Richard J. Watts, which reached fruition in terms of a book length study published in 2003. Other emerging accounts include Arundale (e.g. 1999), Mills (e.g. 2003), Terkourafi (e.g. 2001) and Spencer-Oatey (2000). Such works generated debate, and hence more publications and more citations. Furthermore, a key factor in the rapid

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<sup>1</sup> We also examined the combined frequencies of all three terms, *politeness*, *impoliteness* and *(im)politeness*. The overall pattern follows that of *politeness*, because instances of *impoliteness* and *(im)politeness* are relatively few.

increase seen in Figure 1 after 2005 is the establishment of the *Journal Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*, a journal which acted as a focal point for research and also lent more visibility to the field.

A similar trend can be seen in a search of the occurrence of “politeness” in the titles of academic works appearing in Google Scholar, which includes not only journal articles, but books, book chapters and conference proceedings. Starting from just five academic works in the period 1970-1974, the number has increased exponentially over the past four decades, with 1,540 works featuring “politeness” in the title in the period 2010-2014. These figures are reported in five year increments in Table 1 below.<sup>2</sup>

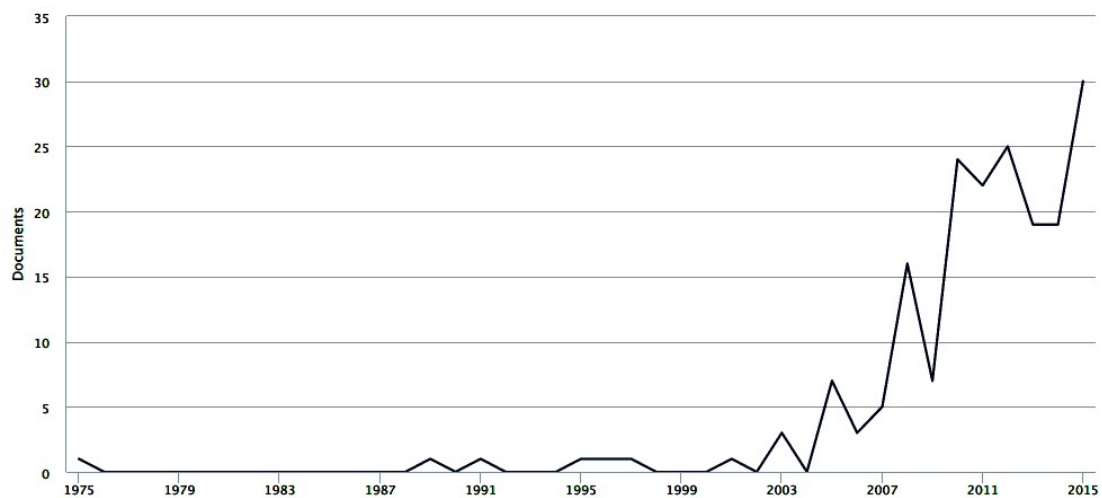
**Table 1. The frequency of the term *politeness* in titles appearing in Google Scholar, 1970-2014**

Time	Frequency
1970-1974	5
1975-1979	65
1980-1984	85
1985-1989	230
1990-1994	351
1995-1999	485
2000-2004	765
2005-2009	1,260
2010-2014	1,540

While steadily growing in number during the 1980s and 1990s, the number of academic studies of politeness increased markedly from the beginning of the 2000s as an increasing number of alternative approaches to the analysis and theorisation of politeness emerged.

Figure 2 displays the frequency of the term *impoliteness* over the period 1970-2015.

**Figure 2. The frequency of the term *impoliteness* in journal article titles, abstracts or keywords, 1970-2015 (extracted by SCOPUS)**

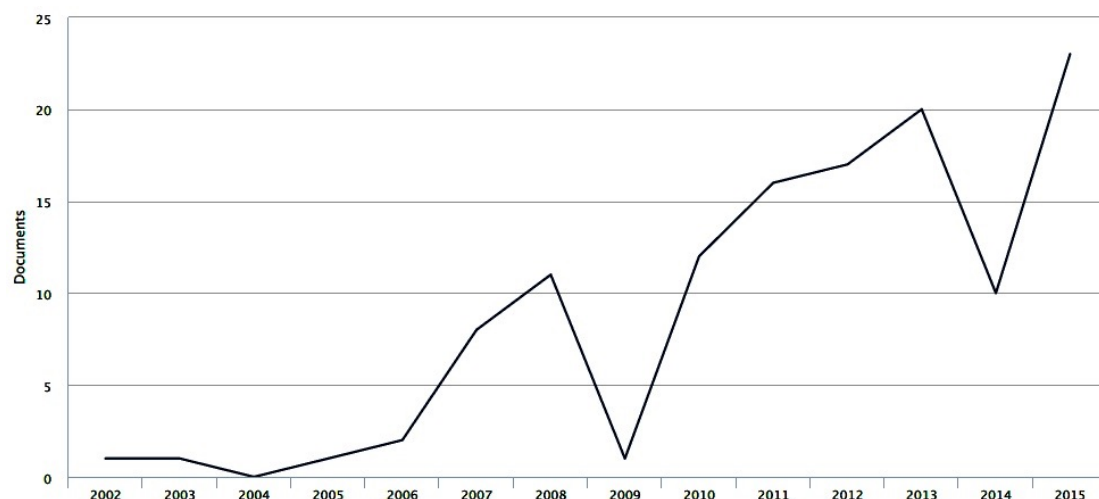


<sup>2</sup> In some cases, works may be reported more than once, although this is more noticeable for earlier works. These figures should thus be only considered as indicative of publishing trends.

As can be seen, many of the early years return a result of zero. Culpeper (1996), subsequently much cited, hardly produces a ripple in the following five years. But then, as we enter the 2000s, we see a rapid rise. Compared with *politeness*, *impoliteness* is a relatively minor affair (note the scales of these Figures are different; for instance, the *y* axis of Figure 2 runs from 0 to 35, whereas for Figure 1 it runs from 0 to 175). However, a closer inspection of the frequencies suggests that this situation may be changing. Comparing the frequency of *politeness* between 2005 and 2009 (i.e. 352 instances) with that between 2010 and 2015 (i.e. 887 instances), we find two and a half times the quantity in the latter. Comparing the frequency of *impoliteness* between 2005 and 2009 (i.e. 30 instances) with that between 2010 and 2015 (i.e. 139 instances), we find over four and a half times the quantity in the latter. The spike seen for 2008 is not surprising, as a number of key works on impoliteness were published in that year (see Culpeper and Hardaker, this volume).

Figure 3 displays the frequency of the term (*im*)*politeness* over the period 1970-2015.

**Figure 3. The frequency of the term (*im*)*politeness* in journal article titles, abstracts or keywords, 1970-2015 (extracted by SCOPUS)**



The term (*im*)*politeness* only becomes noteworthy in the 2000's. After 2006 it begins to steadily increase, although it has a couple of dips three years 2009 and 2014 (dips and spikes are more salient, of course, when the overall quantity of data is low, as in the case here). This period of increase parallels that for *impoliteness*, which hints that the use of (*im*)*politeness* may be partly driven by the increasing visibility of impoliteness, and the idea, which we fully support, that both politeness and impoliteness should be encompassed within treatments of interpersonal interaction.

What all three Figures and the accompanying Table illustrate is a massive growth in work over the last 10 years, and especially in the last five. However, the result of this seems to be a jungle. There is a proliferation of models, approaches and applications. The job for the newcomer to the area is daunting – where does one start? Whilst the classic models are still important, there is a chorus of critique, yet there is no clear single alternative. A negative way of looking at this is that there is fragmentation of effort: scholars pursuing different, almost contradictory, endeavours. A positive way of looking at this is that there has been a paradigm shift, or, more accurately, a widening of the paradigm. (Im)politeness is now a thoroughly multidisciplinary affair, spreading from its original home in pragmatics and

interactional sociolinguistics to management, health research, legal research, politics, humour studies and many other fields. The boundaries of (im)politeness have moved away from relatively narrow considerations, such as the pursuit of politeness universals, to include the local and the dynamic. This does not mean that the pursuit of universals is necessarily “bad” or that the pursuit of the “local” is necessarily good. They are simply different research questions. Concomitant with this expansion, we have seen an increasingly diverse array of methods. Like Locher (2015), we view the shift in the paradigm boundaries as something that is potentially exciting, offering new possibilities. Nevertheless, navigating an apparent jungle without a map is challenging. This is what we hope this handbook will offer.

### **3. What is in it?**

Including this introduction, the volume contains 30 chapters. A distinctive feature of those chapters is that they are mostly authored by two scholars. We made the decision to construct the volume's chapters in this way for three reasons: (1) we could put together scholars with complementary strengths, (2) interesting synergies might emerge, and (3) we could include a greater number of scholars who are engaged in (im)politeness research.

We have grouped the chapters into four broad sections. The first part is labelled “Foundations”. As the label suggests, these chapters are in some sense foundational – they focus on areas that have been enduring and important strands in (im)politeness research for at least 20 years. They cover the role played by pragmatic theory, socio-cultural approaches, ideology, face, power, solidarity, indexicality, convention and ritual. The second part is labeled “Developments”. As one might guess, chapters here relate to more recent developments, or at least aspects of (im)politeness research that have become salient in recent times. They cover the role played by impoliteness, identity, rationality, emotion, mixed messages, prosody and gesture, experimental approaches, and developments in methodology more generally. The remaining two parts focus on (im)politeness in context. The third part is labeled “(Im)politeness and variation”. Here, chapters tackle some of the classic aspects of variation, including both diachronic and synchronic forms of variation. The former includes historical (im)politeness more generally, language socialisation, and the learning and teaching of (im)politeness, while the latter encompasses variation across gender, region, and culture (including both cultural and intercultural variation). The fourth and final part is labeled “(Im)politeness in specific contexts”. Chapters in this part are characterised by their focus on particular constellations of situational features. They cover the workplace, service counters, health settings, legal settings, political settings, fictional texts and digital communication.

As we indicated at the end of the first section, readers should not expect to find a single theoretical approach running throughout all these chapters. However, what they all have in common is a concern with interpersonal interaction, and, more specifically, with how language interacts with contexts in the mediation of attitudes, identities and emotions.

### **4. Looking forward**

No book can include everything. (Im)politeness research is a dynamic and growing field. Emerging areas of interest that we regretfully have not been able to adequately cover here in this volume include research into (im)politeness in the context of

television, especially reality TV, where it seems to be especially important (see, for example, Lorenzo-Dus and Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2013). And although we have a chapter on prosody and gesture, the area of multimodality is, quite rightly, gaining in importance, and (im)politeness researchers are likely to increasingly shift their attention to multimodal aspects of (im)politeness. Finally, while language aggression and conflict has recently received significant attention, including the launching of a new journal, there is still much to be done to better understand the intersection between work in (im)politeness and language aggression and conflict more generally. Nevertheless, we hope that we have captured the main facets of the field at this point of time, and, moreover, introduced them to readers in a palatable and useful fashion.

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