Chapter 8 Convention and Ritual (Im)politeness

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1. Introduction

'Convention' and 'ritual' are extensively used concepts in the field (Terkourafi 2015a)—at the same time, convention and ritual are often used in vague and interchangeable ways,[1] making it necessary to carefully define these concepts and consider the main differences between them. Convention and ritual differ in a number of ways, briefly summarised below (see also Kádár 2016a):

- Audience: Convention is primarily carried out for the benefit of the interactants, while the raison d'être for ritual is to be carried out in front of an audience other than the interactants themselves; that is why ritual is a performance (Bax 2010a; see also Section 2) which constitutes one's face for either a real or imaginary audience.
- Salience: Conventions tend to be salient (or 'marked') only for those who are outside of the group/culture in which the convention operates. Rituals, on the other hand, are salient primarily to those who perform them or take part in them as an audience (Kádár 2013), whilst culture/group-outsiders may or may not perceive their salience.
- Time and place: Conventions are only loosely constrained by context, while rituals can only take place at certain times and places. In addition, a ritual interaction has limitations of length, as it triggers intense emotions and affect. Consequently, conventions operate within a 'minimal context' (Terkourafi 2009), i.e. they are latently present in any interaction, whereas rituals require 'maximal' (or enriched) contexts (Kádár 2016b), i.e. they can only operate in specific interactions and for a restricted period of time.
- 'Ratification': Usually, ratification (in the sense of Goffman 1979) is not an issue when it comes to convention, as it occurs implicitly when all interactants follow situated conventional practices (and there are no formal consequences when it does not). Ritual, on the other hand, can only be operationalised by ratified personae, and non-ratified performance of a ritual tends to be sanctioned (Bell 1997).

In sum, we take convention to be a recurrent and schematic practice, which provides a ready-made solution to a frequently encountered problem; conventions are normative, in that by acting in conventional ways interactants meet contextual expectations and their behaviour is positively evaluated as a result. We take ritual, on the other hand, to be a recurrent action, which re-enacts the ideologies or ethos of a relational network or broader social group as a 'performance', and generates intense emotions and affect (relational emotions) (cf. Kertzer 1988:67). To provide a simple example, singing the national anthem can mean more to many people than simply an interactional convention: it has the potential to be a ritual because by singing it the group of performers are re-enacting their national identities; as with any ritual, this singing event operates for the benefit of a specific audience, it is noticed,[2] emotionally invested, and occurs at a specific time and place.

The boundary between convention and ritual is nevertheless blurred by a number of shared characteristics, including:

[1] For more on this problem see Kádár (2013).

2. Alternatively, abstaining from signing the national anthem in a context where this is expected would also be noticed.

- Recurrence: Both convention and ritual are recurrent practices.
- Normativity: Both carry penalties in case of non-compliance or defective performance; these penalties can range from negative evaluation to more serious ones.
- Formality/sequentiality: Both convention and ritual have certain formal and sequential properties, which make them recognizable and differentiate them from other practices.

Due to these shared characteristics, convention and ritual play a key role in relational language use at both the paralinguistic and linguistic levels (Hall 1993). Moreover, while both can be interactionally (co-)constructed and are subject to variability and contestation (e.g. Watts 2003), importantly, they represent the 'normative' aspect of interpersonal politeness (Kasper 2008).

2. Key concepts and theories

2.1. Convention

In a sense, all language is conventional. Outside of cases of onomatopoeia (and perhaps iconicity more generally; Meir & Tkachman 2014), there is no causal relationship between the forms (sounds or gestures)[3] that humans employ to communicate with each other and the meanings conveyed by them. Instead, the relationship between the two is based on consensus among a group of language users rather than found in nature independently of such a group. It follows that the meanings of linguistic expressions cannot be universal but rather are attached to a particular group at a particular time and place. This idea goes back to Plato's *Cratylus* and has been a tenet of modern linguistics at least since Saussure (1916/1983) used it to characterize the relationship between the two parts of the linguistic sign, the signifier (*signifiant*) and what is thereby signified (*signifié*), as a fundamentally *arbitrary* one.

This weak sense of convention is not the one we are concerned with in this chapter, although it is not unrelated to it. The notion of convention of interest here contrasts perhaps most strongly with the notion of intention that lies at the heart of Grice's account of speaker's meaning (non-natural meaning or meaning-nn, for short; Grice 1957). In explicating this, Grice was careful to distinguish it from what is more narrowly understood as conventionality in language (1957:379), pointing out that the crucial determinant of meaning-nn is the speaker's intention: it is in virtue of recognizing the speaker's intention, not by an appeal to convention, that the audience is supposed to produce the particular response that the speaker is aiming to secure. By making the speaker's intention primary, Grice was seen by some as ignoring the role of conventionality in language altogether (Searle 1965). However, although perhaps he did not emphasize it enough, Grice was clearly not oblivious to it (Grice 1957:368, 1975:50, 58): outside of language phylogenesis, about which only speculation is possible, the speaker's intention in producing an utterance of a sentence[4] is never completely unconstrained by convention, since, to be understood by the addressee, the speaker must draw from the range of expressions available in the language. Thus, in the case of linguistic communication, the speaker's intention is not free to create meaning at will but operates within the limits of convention in the weak sense that we saw above.

It is, then, possible to distinguish between two types of convention: conventions in a weak sense are, at their most basic, necessary for sequences of sounds to become meaningful, that is, to become signifiers in the first place; conventions in a strong sense, on the other

[3] Note, however, that sign languages tend to be more iconic than spoken ones (Meir & Tkachman 2014).

[4] Grice saw linguistic utterances as only a special case of meaning-nn. Non-linguistic behaviours can also be cases of meaning-nn and those (e.g. some gestures) "may not be conventional at all" (Grice 1957:379).

hand, invest linguistic expressions with additional meaning based on how speakers use them in conversation. It is conventions in this second sense that are most relevant to im/politeness, as we shall see below.

This distinction is not new. Strawson touched on it in his seminal article on "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts" (Strawson 1964: 442-443), and Morgan took it up in "Two Types of Convention in Indirect Speech Acts" (Morgan 1978/1991). Calling the former "conventions of language" and the latter "conventions of usage," Morgan argued that conventions of language are "arbitrary, a matter of knowledge of the language" (1991:246), while conventions of usage are "a matter of culture (manners, religion, law …)" and come about as a result of a conjunction of three elements—occasion, purpose, and means (1991: 247). However, the two types of convention are not mutually exclusive: "as the connections between purpose and means become obscured, […] the convention of usage is reinterpreted as a convention of the language" (1991:247). In other words, conventions of usage are the 'lifeline' of conventions of the language – a fact capitalized upon by scholars of language change to propose pragmatically motivated accounts of semantic change (Traugott 1999). But if conventions of the language and conventions of usage are thus related, the latter are also at no more than one remove from the speaker's intention. For, as Grice himself noted, there can be a close relationship between conversational implicatures (to which recognition of the speaker's intention is key)[5] and conventional ones, and "it may not be impossible for what starts life as a conversational implicature to become conventionalized" (1975:58). In this way, conventions of the language, conventions of usage, and the speaker's intention, although analytically distinct, are mutually interdependent and interact in generating meaning through language.

Yet, while the relevant notion of intention has been formalized in Grice's analysis of meaning-nn (1957, 1969), the notion of convention remains a matter of some controversy. Philosophers have identified various sources for conventions – agreement (which can be explicit but is more commonly tacit), salience, and precedent – yet there is no widely accepted view about which of these are necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the emergence of a convention. One prevalent account is that of Lewis (1969), who analyzed social conventions (of which language conventions are one type) as solutions to recurring coordination problems. Casting his analysis in game-theoretic terms, Lewis emphasized how conventions can emerge out of rational calculation of payoffs, bringing them closer to the deliberative end of language use. Lewis gives the following definition of a convention:

"A regularity R in the behavior of members of a population P when they are agents in a recurrent situation S is a *convention* if and only if, in any instance of S among members of P,

> (1) everyone conforms to R;
> (2) everyone expects everyone else to conform to R;
> (3) everyone prefers to conform to R on condition that the others do, since S is a coordination problem and uniform conformity to R is a proper coordination equilibrium of S." (Lewis 1969: 42)

As phrased, this definition is rather strong, applying to perfect cases of convention, that is, cases where everyone without exception follows the convention. Since perfect cases of convention are hard to come about in the real world, Lewis eventually settled on a revised definition that allowed exceptions and made application of the convention a matter of degree, thereby opening the possibility of degrees of conventionality (1969:78-79).

[5] Grice distinguished particularized from generalized conversational implicatures, which arise in "normal circumstances" (1975:37). Developing a theory of the latter, Levinson (1995, 2000) explains that recognition of the speaker's intention is circumvented in this case by the regularity of use.

Critics have challenged various aspects of Lewis's definition. Of special interest to us here are objections that not all conventions arise in response to coordination problems and that Lewis ignored the normative aspect of social conventions. With respect to the first objection, critics (e.g., Davis 2003; Marmor 2009) have pointed out that conventions in the sense of regularities of behavior can also arise in competitive situations but such regularities (despite being equilibria in game-theoretic terms) would not qualify as conventions in Lewis's sense. Moreover, Lewis is said to have overlooked a type of convention that does not involve coordinating one's actions with those of other players but rather "constitutes" a social practice, in the sense of helping to define what the practice is and how to engage in it correctly. This latter type of constitutive convention would seem to be especially pertinent in the case of im/politeness, as it can respond to self-presentational concerns such as, e.g., tipping one's hat in greeting, or using cutlery vs. chopsticks to eat. If such examples do not seem to involve explicit (linguistic) communication (although they are clearly part of social etiquette), consider the practice of "ritual insults" first described by Labov (1972). Communicators who engage in this practice do so on the expectation that the other will respond—what is more, the more competent the response, the more the prestige of the party that manages to counter it will be raised, so it is in the interest of both communicators that the other be a worthy opponent—but the goals of the two parties in this case are clearly at odds (one is trying to outdo the other). Therefore, although this practice gives rise to a regularity in the behavior of members of a population, this regularity would not qualify as a convention in Lewis's sense since it does not arise in response to a coordination problem.

With respect to the second objection, it has been pointed out that Lewis's definition cannot account for conventions honored in the breach. For instance, Gilbert (1989) argues that sending thank-you notes after a dinner party is a convention in some circles, although few people abide by it these days. By making convention a matter of people's actual behavior (clause (1) of his definition above), Lewis must deny that sending thank-you notes is a convention, contrary to many critics' intuition (cf. Davis 2003; Millikan 2005). If in the case of thank-you notes (and, generally, conventions that seem to be falling out of fashion) the consequences of non-compliance are negligible, the opposite is true of conventions that are in full effect, such as waiting for one's turn to be served at a food stall: here, non-compliance can lead to serious consequences, ranging from negative evaluation to tangible forms of punishment or exclusion. In both cases, the problem seems to be that, by tying convention to precedent, Lewis is ignoring another important source of enforcement of existing conventions, namely sanction from other people. Conventions aren't just about how people actually behave; they also set the standard for how people *should* behave. In this, conventions are normative and it is precisely this normative aspect that Lewis is thought to have overlooked. This aspect could be captured in a game-theoretic account by attaching payoffs to conforming behavior directly (or, conversely, making non-conforming behavior a deterrent) and this seems to be the direction in which Lewis himself was inclined (1969:97-100). Yet, he was also keen to distinguish conventions from norms and that is why he did not build evaluative judgments into his definition from the start. However, while this solution addresses the normativity of existing conventions, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the inherent normativity of conventions, according to some critics.

At the heart of the matter seems to lie a third problem: that of determining the population P that an agent is a member of. By taking this to be given from the outset, Lewis appears to be ignoring another possibility: that convention-conforming behavior can itself become grounds *for claiming* membership into a population or group. In other words, what population P an agent belongs to may not be objectively assigned once and for all prior to interaction. Instead, it may dynamically emerge through the convention-conforming behavior, an outcome of this behavior rather than input to it.[6]

This possibility is captured in sociolinguistic constructs such as Le Page & Tabouret-Keller's notion of Acts of Identity (1985:182) and underlies Terkourafi's proposal that conventionalization can be the optimal solution to the dual problem of constructing identity and constituting face at one and the same time (Terkourafi 2002, 2015b; see below). On this view, the normativity of conventions becomes the *raison d'être* of conventions themselves: behaving as others do is not only a way of securing their positive judgment but also of being seen to be one of them. And since the impetus for group-belonging is one of the most important determinants of human behavior, we have here an important reason for humans' tendency to form conventions in the first place. Moreover, what is positively evaluated within a group may be negatively evaluated outside of it. In other words, the conventions of different populations may be in conflict and an agent may have to choose between them. An agent's preferences will then depend on which population the agent wants to be seen to be a member of for the purposes of the current action. In a game-theoretic account where "the various presumptive reasons why an action ought or ought not to be done are balanced off against each other" (Lewis 1969:98), when an agent has a choice of catering to different populations, which population the agent wants to be seen to be a member of will be an additional reason to build into the payoff matrix of the act at hand. One objection that might be raised at this point concerns the effort involved in all this: if seen as a psychological model of actual speakers' behavior, the resulting reasoning process appears to be impossibly taxing. Yet, a consideration of how the population P that an agent is a member of is determined would seem to bring Lewis's account closer to the facts on the ground – and it is required to explain how conventions change over time, a point which, in current accounts, whether they emphasize normativity or not, remains moot.

2.2. Ritual

Ritual has been studied in anthropological research since the 19th century, but in sociology and linguistic studies it has gained prominence following Goffman's (e.g. 1967, 1971) groundbreaking research. Goffman aimed to translate traditional ethnographic concepts of ritual research "to grasp some aspects of urban secular living" (Goffman 1967:95). Importantly, Goffman uses ritual in an abstract and scientific sense, and this notion covers all types of interpersonal interactions that involve facework. Goffman argues that, as our faces are sacred (just like deities in tribal societies), in modern societies "[w]hat remains are brief rituals one individual performs for or to another, attesting to civility and good will on the performer's part and to the recipient's possession of a small patrimony of sacredness" (Goffman 1971:63). This interpretation of 'ritual' is adopted by Brown and Levinson (1987:43), who describe their framework as a "model or prototype" for politeness. It is worth noting that unlike in Goffman's case, the notion of 'ritual' does not seem to be applied as an integral analytic category in Brown and Levinson's work. In addition, whilst in Goffman's work ritual comes into existence in interaction, as an effect, Brown and Levinson's model is not interactional and it focuses on production rather than interactional effects. It is thus not surprising that ritual has remained relatively marginal in research inspired by Brown and Levinson's theory (see Bargiela-Chiappini 2003).

[6] It is important to clarify here that in this case the speaker's and the hearer's perspectives would come apart: while a knowledge of the population that the speaker wants to be seen to be a member of may be guiding the speaker's behavior and in this sense be an input into this process on the speaker's side, it will not be fixed in advance for the hearer who will have to use the evidence of the speaker's convention-conforming behavior to determine the population that the speaker wants to be seen to be a member of.

On the other hand, ritual in its popular/anthropological sense has been thoroughly studied. Ferguson published an article on the ritual use of politeness formulas as early as in 1976. Ritual has played an important role in two areas of politeness research, in particular: cross-cultural and historical politeness research. As regards the former, a considerable number of studies have explored ritualistic politeness in areas that are relatively 'less studied' in Anglophone academia, such as Arabic (Farghal and Al Khatib 2001), Persian (Koutlaki 2002; Eslami-Rasekh 2005; Bucar 2012), Japanese (Ide 1998; Ohashi 2008), and Chinese (e.g. Pan 2000; Pan and Kádár 2012). In addition, ritual politeness has been a topic of study in historical politeness research (e.g. Bax and Streekstra 2003; Held 2010; Kádár and Culpeper 2010). This latter interest is due to the fact that certain forms of historical pragmatic data are highly ritualistic, and also that the above formalised and sequential features (see Section 1) facilitate the reconstruction of ritual in historical data, compared to other interactional politeness phenomena.

Key concepts that ritual research has brought into the field of politeness in particular include *performance*, *recurrence*, and *ratification.* As regards 'performance', Bax (2004; 2010a; 2010b) points out in a series of insightful articles that the essence of ritual is that it follows formal and/or sequential features, which are associated with 'etiquette', as a 'liminal' performance (hence its above-mentioned characteristic of operating with an audience in mind; see Section 1). For example, when two medieval knights challenge each other with courteous words, or when ritual compliments are exchanged, the interactants follow ritualistic patterns, somewhat like actors in a staged play. Liminality here means that once participation in the performance is accepted the interactants enter into a specific interactional status, as they are supposed to follow what is associated with the performance (Kádár 2016b). If this does not happen, the interaction becomes idiosyncratic, as the following extract from the film *Bridget Jones II* illustrates:

(1)

Mark Darcy: Would you step outside please?
Daniel Cleaver: I'm afraid it's not possible.
Mark Darcy: Look, are you gonna step outside or do I have to drag you?
Daniel Cleaver: I think you're gonna have to drag me.

(*Bridget Jones II*, 2004; cited in Kádár and Haugh 2013:158)

This interaction represents a contemporary gentlemanly challenge made by Mark Darcy for the honour of a 'lady', the protagonist Bridget Jones. The source of humour is that this challenge is refused in a clearly cowardly tone by Daniel Cleaver who knows that Darcy is stronger than him, i.e. he fails to follow the formal and sequential patterns (accept the challenge) that is associated with the ritual performance of a duel.

The term 'recurrence' describes two characteristics of the ritual phenomenon: a) ritual is recognisable to the participants as it follows recurrent formal and sequential characteristics (Section 1), and b) in certain cases ritual triggers impact as it occurs repeatedly within a relational network. This latter characteristic becomes particularly salient in ritualistic impoliteness: as Kádár (2013:150) points out, an offence gains a ritual character if it occurs repeatedly. For example, if a person is ignored repeatedly, i.e. the normative and anticipated action of acknowledging their action does not take place several times in a row, this action of 'recurrent non-acting' transforms into a ritual and highly offensive pattern. Importantly, recurrence operates differently in the case of rituals and conventions: whilst recurrent conventional practices are usually not salient for the participants, ritual practices are salient due to their above discussed performance characteristics (see also Section 1).

The previously mentioned notion of 'ratification' becomes important when researchers look into interactions with complex participation statuses. As ritual operates as a performance, those who participate in it are usually ratified to do so. Once an unratified (or self-ratified) participant steps on stage, their actions are likely to trigger metapragmatic comments (and retrospective discourses) on its appropriateness (see more in Kádár and Marquez-Reiter 2015).

3. Critical overview of research

3.1. Conventionality and im/politeness

As was mentioned in section 2 above, the conventions that are most relevant to im/politeness are conventions of usage, since conventions in this strong sense involve already meaningful linguistic expressions acquiring additional meaning that can then be put to the service of im/politeness. Conventions in this strong sense, as Strawson pointed out, are "statable conventions, relating to the circumstances of utterance, such that an utterance with a certain meaning, pronounced by the appropriate person in the appropriate circumstances, has the force it has as conforming to those conventions" (1964:443). Examples are not limited to social institutions or rule-governed activities but can be found in all aspects of social life; according to Strawson, introducing someone and surrendering are two such acts.

As presaged in these observations, the notion of conventionally indirect speech acts has a considerable history in pragmatics, as it raises interesting questions regarding the assignment of illocutionary force to utterances. Specifically, an account of them as idioms has been wheeled in to support the Literal Force Hypothesis – roughly, the assumption that illocutionary force is either lexicalized in a performative verb or else grammaticalized via sentence type (Levinson 1983:268-270). However, it wasn't until Brown and Levinson analysed conventional indirectness as effectuating a compromise between the want to DO THE FTA ON RECORD and the want NOT TO COERCE THE ADDRESSEE (1987:132ff.) that an explicit link between conventional indirectness and im/politeness was drawn. Brown and Levinson attribute this link to the fact that conventionally indirect speech acts tend to satisfy wants motivated by negative face (1987:135-6), making conventional indirectness the most populous output strategy under their negative politeness super-strategy. And although they repeatedly emphasized that different indirect speech acts will become conventionalized in different communities, their focus is on the universal motivation for conventionally indirect speech acts rather than their culturally varying realisations (1987:140-142). They also claimed — by assuming that they will be chosen for acts of lower face-threat as illustrated in their hierarchy of strategies (1987:60) — that conventionally indirect speech acts are less polite than off-record ones, a claim which turned out not to always be true.

The first to put this claim to the test was Blum-Kulka (1987). Drawing on questionnaire data from English and Hebrew, she found that conventionally indirect requests were judged most polite across the board but judgments about the politeness of hints (off-record indirectness) varied: whereas English speakers consistently ranked them second only to conventional indirectness, Hebrew speakers ranked them quite low. She accounted for this by surmising that the amount of inferential work the listener must do to extract politeness from the speaker's utterance constitutes a separate imposition on the hearer's cognitive resources that can subtract from the politeness of the utterance. This inferential work and the corresponding imposition can be reduced if the speaker chooses an expression already conventionalized for this purpose, thereby boosting the politeness of *pro forma* indirect utterances. Others have obtained similar results. Comparing American English with Korean requests, Holtgraves and Yang (1990) found that, while English speakers ranked hints second after conventional indirectness, Korean speakers preferred them for small requests resorting to conventional indirectness for larger ones—a finding that goes directly against prediction, since we have *less* indirectness with *greater* face-threat. What these findings suggest is that the ambiguity inherent in hints does not always get resolved in favor of politeness. When the speaker wants to implicate politeness she is on safer grounds doing so using an expression already established for this purpose rather than an illocutionarily ambiguous one.

Findings from studies of corpus, L1 and L2 acquisition, and impoliteness data support this line of reasoning (Terkourafi 2015a), cementing the belief that it is the property of being conventional rather than the property of being indirect that is important to im/politeness. Based on these, Terkourafi (2001, 2012, 2015a) forwarded an account of politeness as conventionalization, where conventionalization is understood as a three-way relationship between an expression, a context, and a speaker. On this view, an expression is conventionalized for some use relative to a context for a speaker if it is used frequently enough in that context to achieve a particular illocutionary goal to that speaker's experience. "Expression" in this context refers to a form of words, including their prosodic contour, that tend to be used together to achieve a particular illocutionary goal. Expressions can have some of their parts fixed and others being open variables, making them akin to constructions in the sense of Goldberg (2006). "Context," on the other hand, refers to the situational context which, by a process of abstraction over real-world contexts, comes to be stored in memory as a schematic combination of extra-linguistic features that include, but are not limited to, the age, gender, and social class of the interlocutors, the relationship between them, and the setting of the exchange – what Terkourafi (2009) calls a "minimal context." Finally, since conventionalization is a matter of experience, the degree to which an expression is conventionalized relative to a context will depend on who the speaker is and can vary for different speakers, as well as for the same speaker over time. The central claim, then, is that conventionalized expressions (whenever available for a situation to a speaker) are used *all else being equal*, irrespective of the degree of face-threat. They can be adapted to a wide range of frequently experienced situations with minimal effort and, while they are the most expedient means of achieving politeness, departing from conventionalized expression is also possible and may be associated with either increasing politeness or increasing impoliteness.

A comparison between this definition and that of Brown and Levinson reveals some important differences, chief among them their assumption that the conventionalized meaning of an expression and its literal one will be different. That assumption is not made here. Because the current definition is frequency-based and the polite evaluation falls out from the association of the expression with the context directly, any expression (not only negatively polite ones) can be conventionalized and it is perfectly possible for an expression's literal meaning (if we admit of such a notion)[7] and its conventionalized one to coincide. This accounts for a host of empirical studies that found that not only negatively polite strategies, but also positively polite ones (requests stating a future course of action in Ojibwa; Rhodes 1989), off-record ones (irony used by women in informal settings in Tzeltal; Brown 1995), and even bald-on-record ones (bare imperatives as requests in Cypriot Greek; Terkourafi 2001) can be the most frequent realizations of speech acts in particular contexts, making the speaker's goal illocutionarily transparent to the addressee and her utterance polite at one and the same time. On this view of conventionalization (which contrasts starkly with the semantic one in the rest of the literature), the listener who receives, say, an imperative in Cypriot Greek in a context where imperatives are the normal way of requesting (which is most contexts in this variety of Greek, including employee to boss and seller to customer), will not

[7] Criticisms of literal meaning range from the well-known weaknesses of the Literal Force Hypothesis (Levinson 1983) to more recent contextualist critiques (Récanati 2003).

only likely[8] interpret it as a request but will also be aware that this is the most common way of performing requests in this context. Conventionalization consists precisely in having this kind of meta-knowledge about not *what* expressions mean but *how often* they mean that. This meta-knowledge is crucial to politeness: using what is in the listener's experience the most common way of requesting in this context serves as a token of the speaker's familiarity with the norms governing the current exchange and, assuming the speaker and hearer agree on what these norms are, by using it the speaker has done what is 'right' (positively evaluated by the hearer) in this context.

However, as Culpeper (2011:130-132) has pointed out, information about norms doesn't just come from direct observation but also from im/politeness metadiscourse; that is, discourse *about* politeness and impoliteness. This is especially important in the case of *im*politeness, which is less available to be directly observed in everyday life and generally marked. He therefore extends the frequency-based account presented above to include "mentions rather than uses" (Culpeper 2011:131), such as characterizations of specific behaviors as 'impolite' or 'rude', which are also part of a speaker's experience about the use of a particular expression in context. Indeed, given its psychological salience, such mentions are bound to be much more frequent in the case of impoliteness. This move makes it possible to respond to critiques of Lewis's notion of convention as inadequate if based solely on precedent (section 2 above), which otherwise apply to the account of conventionalization proposed here as well. By incorporating im/politeness metadiscourse alongside frequency into our definition of conventionalization we capture more transparently the fact that another reason for conforming with convention is because doing so is evaluated as 'good' and not doing so is evaluated as 'bad.'

This in turn highlights another central property of conventionalization: the fact that it is *inherently evaluative*. When we learn, through exposure or mention, that "this is the way to do some thing", what we are implicitly learning is that this is the *right* way of doing this thing in this type of context. That is, the polite evaluation is part and parcel of conventionalization and politeness falls out as a by-product of uttering the expression in this context rather than being communicated as a separate message of the speaker's utterance. At the same time, the evaluative link between expression and context to the speaker's experience renders the use of other expressions in this context marked to various degrees for this speaker, requiring extra steps to decide whether they are polite or not. This habit-based concept of politeness is in stark contrast with the rationality-based one championed by previous work. It is also clearly a second-order concept, unrestricted by first-order understandings of politeness, which are tied to particular cultural settings and groups.

3.2. Ritual

In terms of politeness, ritual has two important and interrelated characteristics to be discussed: 1) its interactionally situated nature, and 2) its complex relationship with (im)politeness.

Interactional situatedness

This chapter has already noted the interactional characteristic of ritual (see Section 2). This characteristic not only implies that the complex operation of ritual cannot be captured by focusing on the utterance level, but also that rituals are constructed in the discourses of a wide variety of social units, and consequently the 'normative' character of certain ritual practices is relative and potentially contested. For example, Bax and Kádár (2013) identify

[8] Since the proposed account does not take the Literal Force Hypothesis as a starting point, interpretations of illocutionary force are probabilistic and no semantic expression has privileged relationship with a particular illocutionary force.

‘in-group’ ritual practices that are specific to the language use of a certain relational network, and which are often unintelligible to group-outsiders. Thus, as far as we define ‘politeness’ in a broad sense – as a collective term for practices by means of which interactants manage to get on with each other – it is clear that certain ritual practices count as normative and ‘polite’ within certain groups but not necessarily in language use situated outside of these groups.

This situated approach to ritual contrasts to some extent with the bulk of previous research: the majority of studies dedicated to ritual and (im)politeness describe ritual as a social-level phenomenon (e.g. Rash 2004; Zhu 2005; Traverso 2006). This view follows from a narrow interpretation of rituals as phenomena that are, of necessity, recognised by the whole of a society, or at least substantial groupings within a society, in order to qualify as rituals. This criterion of ‘public recognition’ can be encountered, for example, in the work of historians such as Norbert Elias (1994 [2000]). Defining rituality from a social-constitutive perspective also occurs, quite interestingly, in ritual theories such as Bell’s (1997: 43-46), who argues the need for rethinking the elusive notion of society in the context of ritual studies. Furthermore, the restricted perspective can be encountered in perceptive studies on ritual language use too; Labov (1972), for one, has analysed ritual formats as widely used macro-level linguistic forms with ‘local’ (re-)interpretations and modifications.

This narrow interpretation of rituals creates a methodological problem: limiting one’s focus on what is accepted as ‘normative’ implies that one cannot capture a wide range of ritual phenomena (Collins 2004), and, in terms of politeness ritual, research focuses only on ‘etiquette’ (Kádár and Mills 2013). However, the properties discussed in our definition of ‘ritual’ (Section 1), which are widely accepted in the field, clearly allow ritual research to go beyond ‘society’ (or ‘culture’, cf. Eelen 2001) as the only applicable social unit of analysis. With this problem in mind, Kádár (2013) proposed the following ritual typology:

- Covert rituals: Concealed and usually clinical (medically problematic) ritual practices of the individual, which count as normative and compulsory for the individual but are evaluated negatively by others;
- Personal rituals: Ritual practices formed by the individual, which are accepted by others;
- In-group rituals: Ritual practices that count as normative within certain relational networks but are not part of the social norms.
- Social rituals: Rituals that count as socially normative (but not necessarily normative in the interaction of certain relational networks).

Kádár (2013) approaches these ritual types via the observer/participant concepts of ‘transparency’ and ‘accessibility’. Regarding transparency, obviously, covert ritual is the least and social ritual is the most transparent from an observer perspective. Accessibility means that, in terms of ratification, others are the least likely to be ratified (Section 2) to participate in a covert ritual practice, and the most likely to be allowed to participate in a social ritual practice. An advantage of this typology is that it helps connect pragmatic research on rituals with other disciplines such as clinical linguistics and psychology (e.g. Marks 1987; Rapoport 1989; Ciarocchi 1995), education studies (e.g. Sears and Sears 2005), and anthropology (e.g. Turner 1967).

Politeness and ritual

This typology draws attention to the above-mentioned complex relationship between politeness and ritual. As ritual manifests itself in the interactional practices of different social units, it is clear that studies that use ‘ritual politeness’ as an umbrella term for socially normative politeness or etiquette only represent a segment of the ritual politeness phenomena.

In the politeness literature, social rituals have gained interest after the high-impact publication of Ide (1989) who describes Japanese ritualistic behaviour as 'discernment' and contrasts it with the alleged 'volitional' behaviour of 'Western cultures'. Ide basically argues that in Japanese one's behaviour tends to be judged as polite when one discerns the appropriate interactional norm that applies in the situation, and this overrides individual rationality. This differs from dominant Western models of politeness, which operate through the means-ends reasoning of individuals. Whilst Ide (1989) did not explicitly venture into ritual theory, she used ritualistic examples to illustrate 'discernment', and in a large body of research that applies 'discernment' as an analytic concept for politeness – such as Watts (2005), Jucker (2010), Bax (2011) – 'discernment politeness' is used to capture social rituals. This view has been recently revisited by Kádár (2013) who argues, in light of previous arguments in the area (e.g. Pizziconi 2003, 2007) that 'discernment' can be retained in cross-cultural pragmatics, provided that it is used clearly as a descriptor for cultures in which social ritual plays a salient role in the metapragmatics of politeness.

In addition to the discernment–volition debate, the approach to rituals as interactionally situated practices helps politeness research draw a distinction between (im)politeness and rituals. Arguably, ritual and politeness phenomena have a large interface; nevertheless, as soon as one goes beyond social etiquette, it becomes evident that there are a wide variety of ritual practices with no direct relationship to (im)politeness. For example, practices of ritual abuse (Muir 2005), which do not count as socially normative, might function as a way of reinforcing in-group relationships from the perspective of the abusers, whilst from the victim's perspective such practices are certainly impolite. In scenes of heckling (Kádár 2014) – which is another situated ritual – the heckler often argues that it is a 'moral duty' to interrupt the public speaker, i.e. from the heckler's perspective interruption is not genuinely impolite. Or, to refer to a more politeness-related example, according to Collins (2004) seemingly 'polite' dating rituals tend to be interpreted as an early part or 'foreplay' within a sexual relationship, and as such they differ from ordinary 'politeness' as it is broadly understood.

4. Case studies

4.1. From urban streetball to academia and beyond: the emergence of an interactional convention

As was mentioned earlier, conventionalization is a matter of degree: an expression can be conventionalized for two people, for members of a group (e.g., a sports team), for a social category (e.g., men), or for an entire language variety/culture (e.g., American English). An example will make this clearer. The expression "my bad!" is described as "an American idiom … made popular by basketball players in playground games in the 1970s and 1980s. It usually means "my fault", "my mistake", "I apologize" or "mea culpa". It gained popularity with urban players of streetball and then spread into mainstream popularity."[9] Pullum (2005) relates how he heard it used "by an assistant professor of philosophy from Princeton giving a lecture in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard." At that point, we can say that the expression 'my bad!' had gone through all the stages of conventionalization described above, going from a "convention of usage" to a "convention of the language" (Morgan 1978).

The first time a basketball player said 'my bad!' to another to apologize, the listener would have had to derive the meaning of apology as a Particularized Conversational Implicature (Grice 1975) from what is, after all, an elliptical expression in conjunction with

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_bad; accessed June 1, 2015

the real-world context – and to decide whether that was a polite way of apologizing drawing on the available contextual clues (body language etc.). However, once other basketball players started using ‘my bad!’ to apologize, it became less and less necessary to go through the full process of implicature derivation: exposure to repeated uses of it *as an apology* in that *type* of context would be enough to ensure prompt identification of its illocutionary force by group members. ‘My bad!’ would then be understood as an apology via an I-type Generalized Conversational Implicature (Levinson 2000) associated with the minimal context of being basketball players on the court (the stereotypical way of apologizing in that minimal context, an $_{mc}$GCI; Terkourafi 2009).

At the same time, by virtue of being stereotypical for apologies in that context, ‘my bad!’ would be understood as *polite in that context*: per the definition of politeness in section 3 above, it evidences the speaker’s familiarity with the norms of urban streetball and constitutes the speaker’s face (“claims a positive value” Goffman 1955:213) on account of that. As the expression spread beyond basketball courts, its gradual detachment from context progressed further, and more and more of the meaning of apology with associated evaluation as polite that was originally bolstered by context began to “rub off” on the expression itself becoming part of its default (presumed) meaning irrespective of context (a GCI; Levinson 2000). By the time Pullum heard it at Harvard in the mid-2000’s, ‘my bad!’ could be considered conventionalized for apologies in AmE as a whole (although possibly still associated with young males), and it has since spread to other varieties of English as well (M. Haugh and J. Culpeper, personal communication).

Importantly, compared with alternative apology realizations and given its particular trajectory (its origins in urban streetball), this way of conveying an apology indexes (in the sense of Silverstein 2003; see also Eckert 2008) a laid-back attitude of cool-ness and relaxed acceptance of one’s mistake. It is, then, this indexical meaning which has enabled its spread to situational and cultural contexts further afield, making it characteristic not so much of a particular variety or speech event but rather of a social persona that may be found across localities and speech events. Returning to the features listed at the outset, this makes this a case of convention rather than ritual, since this use is only loosely constrained by time and place, can be performed by pretty much anyone who wishes to present themself in a certain way (or at least no *formal* consequences follow its performance by non-ratified participants, except perhaps laughter and disbelief if, e.g., a child uttered it), and is salient only to those unfamiliar with this practice.

The following example represents a case of in-group ritual, i.e. a ritual practice specific to a smaller community’s language use. The analysis of this example reveals a key difference between conventional and ritual (im)politeness: ritual, unlike convention, is a highly salient interactional event. The main difficulty to studying ritual (im)politeness is that ritual practices, which are not socially codified, can be difficult to recognise for the out-group observer. In order to capture such ritual practices, the researcher first needs to identify recurrent phenomena in interaction, and then study whether these phenomena show the various features of ritual that have been discussed in Section 1. The following case study, drawn from Hungarian interactional data, illustrates the operation of ritual. For the sake of clarity, the previously discussed features of rituals are underlined in the analysis following the extract.

(2)

1. A: belegondolva lehetséges= anyád
   B: =lenne bunkókám (.) ha (.) felfogtad volna időben hogy

2. A: (hhh)

B: női társaságban az ember nem (.) viselkedik bunkó módon mint aki nem tudja

1. A: thinking about it it might be= your mother is
   B: =could be yokel (.) should (.) you have realised in time that

2. A: (hhh)
   B: in female company you don't (.) behave in such a yokel-like way as one who doesn't know

(Cited from Kádár 2013:12)

This short fragment occurs in a longer recording belonging to a set of recordings of interactions between A and B, two males in their thirties, which was provided by one of the participants (B). As the recordings reveal, A and B used a Hungarian rude form of endearment, *bunkókám* (lit. my little yokel, trans. yokel), in order to tease each other in an amiable way. This is a ritualised/formalised language use between these two people. As B disclosed in the course of a post-event interview, this in-group use of the offensive term *bunkókám* originates in secondary school where he and A were classmates. This form occurs in example (no.) in which B reproaches A for repeatedly failing to secure a date with a girl he wanted to go out with. Importantly, *bunkókám* is not an invention of this group as it is a conventional Hungarian swearword (cf. Culpeper 2011 on conventional impoliteness); what *is* the in-group 'invention' of A and B is the adoption of *bunkókám* as ritual teasing.

Bunkókám can be evaluated as a ritual term due to the following interrelated characteristics. Firstly, it is a recurrent form with a specific relational function: in the approximately 4 hour and 30 minute-long recordings that B provided, this word occurs 42 times, in contexts in which A and B negotiate (predominantly dating-related) life strategies, that is, it seems to serve as a tool to facilitate the in-group discussion of certain issues. Secondly, it operates as an affective action (cf. González et al. 1998), which becomes obvious from its contextual usage. In an already challenging context (the other's dating skills are questioned) a deprecatory word such as *bunkókám* would normally further increase the imposition, and so the most plausible explanation for its usage resides in its positive affective value (see this expression in Grabenhorst et al. 2008). The 'harmless' affective function of *bunkókám* is illustrated by its interactional effect. Although in line 1, A reacts to this word by using the mild swearword *anyád* (your mother [is a bitch]…)[10] as a ritualistic counter-challenge, *bunkókám* is not visibly evaluated by the interlocutor. And after the very short counter-challenge, A does not attempt to re-take the 'floor': *bunkókám* seems to create an affective ritual 'frame', which allows B to freely advise his listener. The affective function of this term seems to originate in the interactants' relational history, i.e. it was previously a term used in banter when the interactants were secondary school students. Consequently, the use (or, more precisely, reactivation) of this form is bound to an in-group ethos (A and B's school days); its 'harmlessness' resides in its association with a performance: by using *bunkókám* B not so much speaks as an individual, but rather he animates the voice of a historical group of school children. The difference between the usage of this ritual form and any other non-ritualised form which the members of a relational network used in the past is that *bunkókám* is a common 'property' of A and B.

5. Summary and future directions

10. In Hungarian *anyád* can either function as a reference to the other's mother or as a swearword, and one needs to rely on contextual and prosodic clues to properly interpret this form.

In this chapter we discussed the main characteristics of the philosophical concepts of 'convention' and 'ritual' as they apply to im/politeness phenomena. Section 1 provided brief definitions of the two phenomena as well as brief lists of their differences and points of contact. Section 2 distinguished conventions of language from conventions of usage, and elaborated on the latter as social conventions that emerge out of rational calculation of payoffs but are also inherently normative. It also examined the concepts of 'performance', 'recurrence', and 'ratification', which are key to an analysis of ritual and bring new insights into politeness research. Section 3 further elaborated on the relationship between conventionality and im/politeness, putting forward an account of the latter in terms of the former. Moreover, it discussed the situated nature of ritual, by arguing that ritual politeness is not limited to etiquette (social rituals), but rather encompasses a variety of 'local' ritual practices, which are not necessarily 'transparent' from the outsider observer's perspective and 'accessible' to out-group participants. Finally, in section 4, we provided an example of each phenomenon to illustrate their application to real-world data.

Looking forward, an important challenge for research on conventionalization lies in devising methodologically sound ways of identifying conventions in conversational data. Two such ways were discussed in the present chapter: frequency counts and im/politeness metadiscourse. While both of these are potentially useful, they must clearly be further refined before they can be applied, ideally semi-automatically, to large bodies of naturally occurring conversations. Turning to ritual, the most significant areas for future research include cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatic inquiry. There has been little research done on these areas (but see Kádár and Ran 2015), in spite of the fact that ritual practices, in particular those that are normativised below the social level, tend to cause interactional difficulties in intercultural interactions and/or cross-cultural accounts to members of another culture. It is hoped that future research will pursue interest in this area, by exploring ritual practices in a wide variety of languages and interaction types.

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