1 Introduction

1.1 Politeness, Impoliteness, and Ritual: An Interface Area

Two Opening Anecdotes

This book explores the interface area that exists between politeness, impoliteness, and ritual. Politeness and impoliteness play a fundamental role in interpersonal interaction, as the extensive research that has been done on (im)politeness phenomena in the past three decades demonstrates.[1] The intriguing nature of (im)politeness resides, in my view, in that it helps researchers capture the way in which interpersonal relationships are worked out via a wide range of pragmatic phenomena, spanning friendly small talk, through instances of socialising humour, to deference, and in a variety of situated interactions. Examining the management of interpersonal relationships – aka (im)politeness – implies that the research on (im)politeness involves the study of phenomena beyond what counts as 'obviously' polite or impolite in a popular sense, and, similarly important, the study of phenomena that have complex relationships with (im)politeness. Consequently, politeness research has intrinsic interfaces with the research of other interactional phenomena, and there is a need to examine such interface areas, and face the challenges that their study imposes on politeness theory.[2] Many such interface phenomena are too complex and ambiguous to be captured as (im)politeness per se, without the risk of oversimplifying our analytic model(s), but they are clearly related to (im)politeness behaviour and so cannot be ignored either. In particular, many interactions are ritual by nature – a phenomenon which is at the centre of this study. The reader will have to bear with me for some pages until I provide a detailed definition of ritual. Let us contend here that ritual is an interactionally salient action, which transforms and/or reinforces interpersonal relationships.

The following two anecdotes illustrate the complexity that surrounds some polite and impolite interactions. British universities have a traditional and invisible border between 'academics' and 'admin people' – this is the status quo in that most administrators are friendly to academic staff and go far to help them; academics also tend to treat administrators with the respect due to their

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status as professionals. As a result of the status quo, it can be difficult to create personal relationships in the 'other camp'. A few years ago, an administrative colleague whom academics particularly liked as a person retired, and a short farewell gathering had been organised, at which the gift which had been bought for the retiring colleague would be presented. It was tacitly understood that this was to be a gathering of admin staff only. Yet, a British friend and colleague of mine – having had many dealings with this particular administrator and having contributed to the gift – decided to attend the event. When he went into the office where the gathering was taking place, he found himself standing in the back row of two rows of assembled people while someone in the middle of the room was giving a speech. Immediately, one of the more senior administrators present approached him and discretely asked if she could help. As my friend explained, while this question was made in a most friendly tone, and people in the room were clearly not hostile, it made him feel uneasy as it implicitly communicated the assumption that his visit could only have an official purpose; that is, it indirectly animated the belief that the purpose of his visit, as a member of the other camp, may not have been to attend the party. Rites of greeting can hurt, sometimes even unwittingly, as they 'frame' the participants' statuses and roles,[3] to use Goffman's (1974) term, and reinstate the underlying 'moral order' of the participants and the normative flow of the event if there is a perception that this order has been violated.

Let us consider exactly what happened here. The administrative person's ritual greeting conveyed a particular morality: that normally administrators party together, and outsiders just should not be there, and that my friend somehow violated this normal state – aka moral order – of things. I use 'moral order' in the social anthropologists Mary Douglas's (1999) and Robert Whutnow's (1989) sense (see more later) to describe how we assign and keep things in their place, occasionally even without explicitly recognising the values that we re-enact through maintaining this order. As Douglas (1999: 299) argues, 'people all over the world contrive to incorporate nature into the moral order'; in terms of interaction, this implies that any individual is surrounded by a cluster of perceived moral orders and uses language according to the moral order that he[4] perceives to be triggered by a given context or interpersonal relationship. Moral order counts as 'common sense' from the perspective of the language user: one may not even consciously 'accept' a moral order, in the respect that we tend to be socialised into many of our social value systems (Hofstede 2001),[5] which are behind our moral orders in particular settings, and which define how we see ourselves and others. For example, in the anecdote, the notion that 'admin party is for admin people' may not have been this administrator's individual decision, but rather she may have acquired this order of things as she worked with others in the office. Moral orders are 'moral' in the most common sense of the word: if someone violates

the moral order, this violation triggers the feeling that something is inappropri-ate, and this sense of inappropriateness tends to be voiced. As Douglas (1999: 158) notes, 'in the modern industrial world the categories of social life do not embrace the physical universe in a single moral order. If there is a social offence, there are moral implications such as cruelty, impiety, corruption of the innocent, and so on.' People can violate moral orders unwillingly, in particular if one happens to be an outsider to a given moral order: while in my colleague's case, this 'social offence' was not explicit or even intentional, his behaviour allegedly violated the situated order of things within the group of administrators, and as such it triggered some form of retribution, or, at least, a corrective action. Such retributions/corrective actions most often take place in the form of ritual (see Douglas 1999). In addition, following Whutnow's (1989: 132) argument that 'rituals can just as well heighten value conflicts as promote consensus over common values', it is clear that this ritual interaction in my colleague's case created a conflict between the moral orders of different interactants: my colleague did not perceive the moral order of the event as others did, and consequently his view and evaluation of the situation repre-sented his outsider (etic) perspective that contradicted with that of network insider (emic) views.

But ritual is not only corrective – often the moral orders of the participants of a ritual action coincide; to show this point, let me refer to another anecdote here. As a doctoral student, I greatly admired (and continue to admire) my supervisor. When we started working together, he used to be formal during our supervision sessions, and my overall impression of him was that he was an 'academic' person who was difficult to approach on the personal level. This situation changed, however, when he took me to an international conference where I delivered my first presentation; during the conference, we went out to pubs together and he started to engage in 'matey' conversations with me, and these conversations were often followed by verbal duels. Being involved in such verbal duels with him made me feel flattered and proud, even though we exchanged playful insults. Rites of passage – which create a young adult's new moral order as a ratified member of a community – are important in a young person's life, and this was my rite of passage as an academic. It created my new moral order in two interrelated respects. First, in the renowned anthropologist Victor Turner's sense, it was a ritual 'social drama', which represented a 'disturbance to the normative [relational, author's insertion] order caused by human transgression' (Lewis 2008: 43) – by symbolically upsetting the pre-existing relationship that existed between us, my supervisor built up a new relationship between ourselves, in order to reflect the change of my status as an academic. Second, in a pragmatic sense he transgressed our pre-existing inter-actional style – which was 'immanent' (Davids and Harré 1990) in our previous relationship – with the goal of building a new normative interactional style

between us. Thus, this ritual brought a new relational and interactional reality
to life: this reality represented our new moral order, that is, the ways in which
we perceived the normative expectations (and the implicit moral rules under-
lying these expectations) in our interpersonal relationship.

Why Is Ritual Interesting?

Such anecdotes reflect that in ritual interactions, there is a strong underlying
interpersonal implication behind the words uttered, even if some ritual prac-
tices – such as the ones presented – do not follow clear 'scripts' (unlike, for
example, a rite of marriage). A ritual is a 'social action' (Goodwin 2000), which
embodies a social group's practice, and as such, the speaker who is entitled to
perform a ritual action animates his perceived moral order, in order to bench-
mark and/or (trans)form the interpersonal relationship between himself and the
recipient(s) of the ritual. Ritual is thus a key form to reinforce and/or create
moral order(s) in both relational and interactional senses (i.e. a ritual sets down
a relationship, which affords/necessitates a particular interactional style).
The performance of a ritual is either a *restorative/reinforcing*[6] social action
by means of which the moral order is reinstated, as in the case of the first
anecdote, or a *transgressive* social action by means of which the moral order is
symbolically upset and altered in order to be redesigned and reset, as in the case
of the second anecdote. Furthermore, if a ritual is performed to establish an
interpersonal relationship, it fulfils a *creative* function, which can be seen as
both a transgressive and a restorative function at the same time.[7] Restoration/
reinforcement and transgression are complementary relational functions: while
some rituals are predominantly transgressive or reinforcing/restorative,[8] many
ritual practices might be transgressive from one participant's perspective and
restorative from another's. For example, the ritual action in the first anecdote
was restorative only from the perspective of the performer/community, while it
was transgressive for my colleague. When it comes to categorising ritual
actions in the form of such etic constructs, I take their communal function
into account – for example, I categorise the ritual action in the first anecdote as
restorative, following its communal function.[9]

The moral order animated by a ritual includes situated values of the ritual
performer's 'moral universe' as Schwartz (2007) puts it. It is this situated
character of the moral order, which makes it an interesting phenomenon to
study from an interactional point of view. In the first anecdote, the moral
universes of my colleague and the administrative person might not have been
significantly different, as both of them are middle-class British persons with
progressive views; yet, there was an obvious clash between their situated moral
orders in the interaction. This clash becomes logical if one considers that the
moral order is always bound to the social structure in which an interaction takes

place, and it includes the perceived order of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour both in first-time encounters and in pre-existing interpersonal relationships with relational histories. People have their situated perceptions of moral orders even in first-time encounters with others, as their awareness of (situated) moral orders is aggregated through previous experiences, as part of their habitus (to use Bourdieu's 1977 expression). As Haidt (2012) points out, while humans like to believe that they follow higher-order moral values in their actions, it is often the case that they follow their perceptions of the moral order of a situation, and their moral instincts tend to follow social goals, such as being aligned with their peers, or simply occur as those of a decent person. Yet, if there is a need, interactants rationalise their actions that follow their situational moral instincts through higher-order moral principles that root in their moral universe. For example, had an open conflict been aroused between the administrative person and my friend (which would have never happened, as my friend is a calm person), it might have animated rather similar workplace-related universal values, such as representing the other's action as improper through the lens of 'workplace harmony'. By doing this, they would have used a higher-order moral principle to rationalise their gut feelings for the clash between their moral orders of how this university party should have unfolded.

Ritual is a salient action, as it creates new moral orders and reinforces/transgresses existing ones. It is thus not surprising that it has an intrinsic relationship with (im)politeness: since rites create good or bad feelings, the way in which interactants treat each other in ritual settings is salient for them. Also, as politeness is a moral value itself (Schwartz 2007), people often refer to it as a higher-order value as they rationalise their feelings about the nature of a ritual interaction.[10]

Irrespective of the intrinsic relationship between ritual, moral order(s), and (im)politeness, animating perceived moral order(s) is not unique to ritual action at all. Moral orders are conveyed by any social action and (im)polite intention/evaluation situated in these actions: when humans attempt to get things done with language, and try to be nice or not nice with each other in these attempts, or evaluate others' tries, there are moral orders for them as benchmarks. As Haugh (2015: 159) argues, 'evaluations in interpersonal settings . . . involve the casting of persons and relationships into particular valenced (i.e., positive-neutral-negative) categories according to some kind of perceived normative scale or frame.' The notion of valenced categories, which plays a key role in the politeness theory of Kádár and Haugh (2013), reveals that (im)politeness as a situated interactional phenomenon cannot exist in a 'vacuum'; its operation presupposes the existence of some common ground between the interactants as regards the nature of the moral order of the interaction. On the operational level, valenced evaluations of (im)politeness *index* the interactants' perceptions of their relationship with other interactant(s), in a reflection of the benchmark

of moral orders. Such valenced perceptions are thus socially indexical, as Agha (2007: 14) describes: 'We may speak, in particular, of *social indexicality* [original emphasis] when the contextual features indexed by speech and accompanying signs are understood as attributes of, or relationships between, social persons.' Thus, the indexing of moral order underlies the operation of social actions and the evaluations of interpersonal (im)politeness situated in these actions, rather than being unique to ritual. In addition, not every type of ritual reflects situated *interpersonal* moral orders (or has a direct relationship with [im]politeness): for example, an ad hoc prayer performed in private may not clearly index valenced *interpersonal* perceptions, provided that we limit our definition of 'interpersonal' to the visible world.[11] The question then emerges: What is the difference between politeness situated in the social action of ritual and other types of social actions?

I believe that the answer to this question resides partly in the previously discussed restorative/reinforcing and transgressive functions of ritual, and partly in that these functions are *liminal* (Turner 1982) by nature. In the anthropological literature (see van Gennep 1909[1960]), 'liminal' – which comes from the Latin *limen* ('threshold') – means that participants of a ritual action cross a certain border between what is perceived as 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' behaviour, and this act of crossing benchmarks a potential relational turning point (see Hopper and Drummond 1990). A standard example for liminality is the transgressive rite of marriage in tribal societies, which separates the bride from her paternal family and assimilates her into the new family of her husband. Liminality is also present in the restorative and transgressive ritual anecdotes described earlier: the rites of greeting and passage benchmarked a major potential turning point in the *assumed* interpersonal relationships between the participants. The word 'assumed' (rather than 'presumed') should be used here because the restorative ritual action in the first anecdote represented a change of interpersonal relationships only from the perspective of my colleague who took an assumptive interactional stance by joining the party, while from the ritual performer's perspective the turning point represented by the ritual action only remained a potentiality as the ritual upheld the pre-existing relationship between the interactants. Thus, relationally reinforcing ritual actions, which do not change but rather reinforce the interpersonal relationship of the participants, are also liminal by nature, as in such interactions the ritual act of reinforcement liminally 'sticks out' from the ordinary flow of events. The participants cross a threshold between what are perceived as 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' forms of interpersonal behaviour. It is worth noting that, as this book aims to contribute to pragmatics and interaction studies, I use 'liminal' in a broader sense than anthropologists who often apply this notion to capture ritual events of celebration (see e.g. Metcalf and Huntington 1991): in the present framework, 'liminality' describes ritual as

a relational target-oriented action, which sticks out from what is regarded as the 'ordinary flow' of interaction as 'salient' from the participants' point of view. This liminal salience, which is either relationally transgressive or restorative/ reinforcing, is different from ordinary interactions, and so if there is such a thing as 'ritual(ised) (im)politeness' – although I argue that this phenomenon should rather be described as (im)politeness situated in/triggered by ritual action – it can only represent a specific albeit important domain of interpersonal (im)politeness.

As a result of the liminal relational target-oriented nature of ritual behaviour, both academic and popular accounts tend to describe ritual situated in interaction as a *rite of something*, such as a 'rite of greeting' and so on. (Im)Politeness as a social practice (Kádár and Haugh 2013) may or may not be explicitly target oriented and contextually salient. Interactants are sometimes just nice to each other for the sake of being nice, which is a goal but not necessarily a target. Furthermore, speech acts such as requests are clearly target oriented – although their target is not necessarily relational in a strict sense and can gain salience in certain contexts[12] – but unless they are ritualistic, they might not be liminal, and it cannot be taken for granted that they gain any significant transgressive or restorative/reinforcing relational function. In addition, 'politeness' in a technical sense is a social practice that may be constantly present in interpersonal interaction: it is a form of behaviour by means of which we make others believe that we care for their feelings. Politeness can be defined as follows:

Politeness is a key means by which humans work out and maintain interpersonal relationships. Many of us have been educated how to behave politely since childhood; we only have to think about parents prescribing to their children when and how to apologise, to say 'please' and 'thank you' (at least in English), or to call (*jiao*) people by familial titles when greeting them (at least in Chinese). However, politeness is not limited to conventional acts of linguistic etiquette like formal apologies, so-called 'polite' language and address terms, even though it includes all of these acts. Rather it covers something much broader, encompassing all types of interpersonal behaviour through which we take into account the feelings of others as to how they think they should be treated in working out and maintaining our sense of personhood as well as our interpersonal relationships with others. (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 1)

This definition illustrates the importance of politeness in our daily lives: we are often polite to each other in a technical sense without noticing it. This *perpetual* characteristic of politeness per se is thus different from cases of liminal and relational target-oriented ritualised interactions that trigger polite inferences, which are *temporal* and interactionally salient by nature.[13]

Impoliteness – a form of behaviour by means of which we offend others, and the evaluation of actions as offensive (Culpeper 2011) – is different from politeness in the sense that it tends to trigger salience by default. However,

this does not imply that ritual is in a more straightforward relationship with impoliteness than with politeness, since impoliteness behaviour that triggers impolite inferences is not necessarily liminal: impoliteness can be perpetual, and as such it may not be salient at all. A typical example to illustrate this point might be certain interaction types in computer-mediated communication (CMC), in which impoliteness represents ordinary rather than extraordinary behaviour (see Locher 2010).

One should point out that the complicated nature of the relationship between (im)politeness and ritual resides not only in liminality but also in the inter-personal operation of these phenomena. If the essence of politeness is to take others' feelings of how they think they should be treated into account, and impoliteness is the opposite of this, it is clear that (im)politeness operates – at least partly – as an *evaluative phenomenon* (Eelen 2001). That is, both polite-ness and impoliteness come into existence as the hearer (or other participants of the interaction) evaluate a certain utterance as (im)polite. As a matter of course, the speaker's intention can be highly important, as, for example, when an utterance is produced with the anticipation that it will have an (im)polite effect, or when a debate emerges regarding the (im)politeness value/intentionality of an utterance (see e.g. Terkourafi 2008). However, even intentionally designed and highly conventional utterances can be (re)interpreted as (im)polite in an interaction vis-à-vis the interactants' evaluative moments. The operation of ritual is *productional* (see Kádár 2013): as the opening anecdotes of this book have already illustrated, ritual is a communal action, which is meant to happen under certain conditions – for example, when an unratified person enters a party, or when a student becomes a researcher. Being observant of the recipient of the ritual plays only a secondary (albeit very important) role in ritual interactions, as the subsequent chapters of this book will also illustrate. This is because the primary goal of such interactions is the performance of the rite to fulfil the expectations of the social structure that brings the ritual alive, such as a workplace or an academic community; that is, 'evaluation' has a different scope in ritual from the realm of (im)politeness. Ritual action, because of its liminal nature, will define, alter (transgress), or reinforce/restore the relationship between the interactants, hence animating the underlying beliefs of the performer and the social grouping that the performer is 'ratified' to represent (Goffman 1967). From the recipient's perspective, the interperso-nal effect of a ritual can thus be relationally constructive or destructive, which influences its (im)polite evaluations. In the first anecdote, the liminal restora-tive ritual action contradicts what the recipient would regard as a preferred response, whereas in the second transgressive case it coincides with the other's expectation. Creating coincidences between ritual action and (im)polite eva-luations may be intentional in many cases (or 'strategic', as Brown and Levinson 1987 put it in their seminal work on politeness, although this term

is not used in this book because of various reasons explained in Chapter 3). There are, however, two reasons why it is problematic to describe relationally constructive rituals as polite, and relationally destructive ones as impolite by nature, and the two opening anecdotes represent these reasons. In the first anecdote, my colleague was given the respect he is entitled to as a professional, and (as he told me) he did not notice any bad intention behind the words. Yet, the fact that the 'welcoming' words animated the very belief he wanted to challenge ('administrative staff as a distinct entity, with a distant relationship with academics') put him at unease. He most probably perceived the ambiguity of the situation: Could the administrator be genuinely polite if she failed to take his feelings into account by treating him as an 'outsider'? Yet, could she be genuinely impolite if her intention was not to offend him and she did what she thought was the correct and helpful form of behaviour to greet group outsiders? The ritual destructed the relationship he wanted to build up, but in a sense, this destructive process only restored the normative relational order between my colleague and the administrators. To sum up, some relation-ally destructive ritual actions are necessary to establish or restore the moral order and the normative flow of an interactional event, but on the evaluative level, they might not be clearly impolite. In the second case, what made me intrigued at that time is that, as I perceived this event, my supervisor did not want to be 'polite' to me at all, at least in the popular sense of 'politeness' as being deferential or socially harmonious, and initiating verbal duels can hardly be defined within the traditional boundaries of politeness – if anything, a verbal duel is challenging.[14] But can one not feel flattered when a respected person signals his intention to treat him as an equal whatever form this alleged intention takes? That is, some ritual actions are relationally constructive but may not be unanimously evaluated as 'polite'.

Defining Ritual

The complexities that surround the anecdotes of ritual interaction illustrate that a framework of ritual and (im)politeness needs to take various factors into account, including the relational function of a given ritual action, the perceived moral order that triggers the performance of a ritual, the way in which the performer of the ritual formulates the action in prospect to its reception, and so on. The subsequent chapters of this book aim to elaborate a model of ritual and (im)politeness by taking such factors into account, and it is sufficient at this point to summarise the preceding discussion with the following: ritual actions tend to trigger feelings that reflect the interactants' perception of how the liminal action of ritual affects them and relates to their moral orders, and these perceptions are centred on (im)politeness. It is pertinent to note that the opening anecdotes of this chapter were chosen to reflect the significant

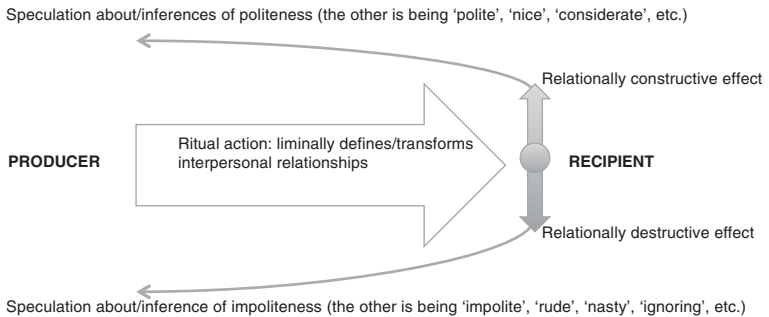Speculation about/inferences of politeness (the other is being 'polite', 'nice', 'considerate', etc.)

Figure 1.1 A simple model of the relationship between ritual and (im)politeness

interactional ambiguity that ritual actions can trigger. Yet, many ritual actions such as rites of 'scripted' award ceremonies may straightforwardly be voiced in terms of politeness (e.g. participating in the given ritual 'makes one feel honoured'). Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between (im)politeness and ritual phenomena that exists in such simple cases.

Reinforcing ritual action can have a 'stasis' effect on the recipient; that is, it can involve 'routine means of attending to face [i.e. a person's public self image] following the default interpreting principle' (Arundale 1999: 145). For example, an in-group rite of banter between friends can be both liminal and relationally stasis maintaining (Kádár 2013), as it may bring the participants into an altered state (of mind) and at the same time it may be expected as part of the group's normative practice to maintain the friendly relationship. Yet, stasis is an abstract value, which may not clearly exist in those ritual practices that recur within the relational history of a group: it can be argued that ritual actions by means of which people uphold their relationship may eventually become practices that have either a constructive or destructive relational effect. While stasis then is an abstract value on a scale, it is still a practical category for analysis, as it is important to be able to distinguish the relational effect of reinforcing ritual practices that do not immediately change interpersonal relationships from restorative and transgressive ones that cause immediate changes. Also, certain one-off ritual actions (see e.g. example [2.5] in Chapter 2) may have a stasis function: we perform a ritual practice upon meeting with someone for a first and supposedly last time in our lives, the given ritual practice may simply serve the goal of 'civility' (hence animating a broader moral order; cf. Smith et al. 2010). This stasis mode is denoted by the circle at the tip of the scalar arrow in the figure. The two-headed arrow indicates the relationally con/destructive effect of ritual action – cases when the effect of