An Analysis of Impoliteness in Speech Acts in *Glee*

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Introduction

The word, politeness, generally refers to courtesy in people's behavior, but in the studies of politeness, it refers to a more abstract concept, or a concern for maintaining relationships between participants in a conversation. In order to capture the language behaviors concerned with it, there have been developed a variety of theories and concepts, among which notable studies are Brown and Levinson's (hereafter referred to as B&L) politeness model (1987) and Geoffrey Leech's politeness principles (1987 / 2014). Their discussion has enhanced the studies of impoliteness which is considered to be the opposite of politeness. Jonathan Culpeper, a pioneer in this field, investigated rude behaviors which can be regarded just as "failed politeness," and proposed a comprehensive definition of impoliteness based on empirical studies (2005: 37-38). In the incipient stage of the impoliteness studies, the strategy and the concept discussed in those of politeness were employed without reconsideration, but now researchers including Culpeper refine the methodology to analyze impolite language behaviors precisely, the result being that the studies of impoliteness are taking a new direction. Jeong-Il Ha (2014), for example, argues that close observation of the social value of the participants in a conversation enables the researchers to analyze more types of rude behaviors.

This present paper gives examples of rude utterances from American TV series, *Glee* (2009) as material for analysis, and identifies social values in the example scenes. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to explore the impact social values have on when an utterance is perceived as offensive and (2) to consider what social values should be taken into consideration in the analysis of impoliteness. While the importance of social values has received more attention in the studies of impoliteness, the concept of face as people's desire is still notably helpful to interpret how speech is perceived as impolite. The following section focuses on the conceptual outline of face and how it is framed in the studies of impoliteness, and then discusses that much consideration of social values are of importance in this field. The sections 2 and 3 analyze the example utterances from *Glee* to identify the social values in each scene.

1. Previous Studies and Their Defects

The concept of face was proposed as an aspect of human nature by Erving Goffman, an American sociologist in 1967. B&L applied it as a key concept into their politeness theory, explaining face as a factor that people consider to make polite remarks. They proposed the

two faces which people want to preserve as follows:

> **negative face**: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others.
>
> **positive face**: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

<div align="right">(B&L 1987: 62)</div>

Every member of society knows that each one has such faces. While respecting each other, one composes sentences, picking out words, phrases, and collocations to create a speech. For example, Masato Takiura cites indirect expressions and apologies as negative politeness to maintain a negative face, and moreover indicates direct expressions and compliments as positive politeness to maintain a positive face (2008: 18). Some speech acts inevitably hurt the listener's face, which B&L call face-threatening acts (hereafter referred to as FTAs). They devised a politeness strategy; how to reduce the degree of threat to the face in speech acts.

B&L's politeness theory promoted not only the studies of politeness which they aimed for, but also those of impoliteness. Numerous pioneering researchers in the field of impoliteness adopted their theory and the notion of face elements to establish a theory for offensive language behavior. Jonathan Culpeper is one of them. Developing some features of B&L's theory, he has incorporated them into his work, and finally has proposed five impoliteness strategies: "Bald on record impoliteness," "Positive impoliteness," "Negative impoliteness," "Sarcasm or mock politeness," and "Withhold politeness" (1996: 356-57). One of his contributions to this area is that he has given an inclusive definition of impoliteness behavior as follows:

> Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).

<div align="right">（Culpeper 2005: 38）</div>

While B&L's theory focuses on speakers and lacks the listener's view point, Culpeper's investigation reveals that impolite behavior is perceived in the interaction between speakers and listeners. Culpeper pointed out that there are two aspects in speakers' impolite speech: intentional rude behavior to damage listeners' face, and unintentional rude behavior. This recognition leads the researchers to identifying not only rude behavior by which speakers intend to do face-attack on listeners, but also behavior by which listeners feel offended by the speakers' genuine intention.

Culpeper and other researchers of the same field have deconstructed the established concept of face and modified it by adding some factors that have not received enough attention. Jeong-Il Ha is one of them, pointing out that the studies of impoliteness have

ignored people's social values while admiring faces as a desire. He emphasizes that whether an act is polite or impolite, the social values of an individual are the motivation for the act, and especially that impolite behavior is a conflict for the acquisition of social values. The studies of impoliteness need to focus on people's social values and redefine face as a social value. For example, boasting is to give a high value to the speaker's status; to talk with excessive pride makes the listener's status inferior to that of the speaker, which leads to the clash between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, the social value that people possess supports their face; it can also be said that social values are a medium to attack their face.

However, the questions remain as to what exactly is *society* in this context, and whether or not there is any group other than society where people care about their position. Society, namely, the place where the values are created, has yet to be precisely defined. For instance, Ha argues that lying and threatening are not always concerned as impolite behavior as far as their acts antisocial. The following sections handle this question, identifying the specific social values seen in the cited examples.

2. Social Values in the Workplace

Social values that people expect are profoundly related to face. One of the examples of a social value is one's position in society, or the power one has in it. In a conversation, the power imbalance between the participants indicates mental distance between them. In Example (1) cited below, a conversation between a sports club coach and the school principal, the coach intentionally attacks the authority of her boss as a principal to damage his face.

The expression seen in Example (1), "I beg your pardon," has three usages, and is used to show respect for others or to do the opposite. The first one is "a polite way of saying 'I am sorry' or 'Could you repeat what you just said?'" ("Beg"), which is a request to ask others what they have just said when the speaker of "I beg your pardon" is unable to understand. In this case of "polite request," this expression seems to be suitable to demonstrate one's politeness. The next usage is interpreted as "used to show that someone has said something that offends you" ("Pardon"). When the speakers feel somehow uncomfortable or upset, they use this expression as "suggestion of discomfort" to ask what the other wanted to say or meant by it. Furthermore, it can occasionally be "a way of showing that you are angry about something that someone has just said" ("Beg"). Moreover, it could be used to say, "Are you serious?" or "Did you really mean that?". When it is used to show the utterer's "suggestion of anger," participants in the conversation may end up hurting each other's face. Eventually, it might sometimes result in a quarrel. These two usages are similar in that they both express the utterer's discomfort, but they differ in the degree of the utterer's

anger. Especially, in the latter usage, it is presumed that the addressed intentionally communicates face attack the addresser. These two usages appear in Example (1) below:

Example (1)

Figgins: Sue! Sit down! Sue, as of today, you are no longer coach of the Cheerios.

Sue: I beg your pardon? [hereafter referred to as *Pardon 1*]

Figgins: As of today, you are no longer coach of the Cheerios.

Sue: *(gasps) I beg your pardon!* [hereafter referred to as *Pardon 2*]

Figgins: All this time, I thought…

Sue: I beg your pardon?! [hereafter referred to as *Pardon 3*]

Figgins: All this time, I thought Mr. Schuester was overreacting.

（*Glee*. Episode 13, 'Sectionals.'）

This is the scene where Sue Sylvester, the coach of the cheerleading squad "Cheerios," is blamed by Figgins, the principal of her school, William McKinley High School, because of the ruckus caused by her supposed leaking the songs the glee club was going to perform at the district competition to the rival schools. While he is dismissing her from the job as a coach, she resists his decision and repeatedly says "I beg your pardon" three times.

Figgins and Sue do not have equal authority over the school they both belong to: Figgins is the principal of the school which Sue works for, and Sue is one of his subordinates. Obviously, Figgins has greater authority. For example, Figgins fires a coach of the glee club but Sue cannot fire her rival, William Schuester, no matter how much she hates him. In Example (1), this social value is ignored.

In Example (1), Sue shows her rudeness more and more clearly by repeating "I beg your pardon." She utters the first "I beg your pardon" (hereafter referred to as *Pardon 1*) with one of her ears slightly turned toward Principal Figgins. As in the Japanese subtitles, it is translated into "Nan desu tte? [What did you say? / What do you mean?]," which overlaps the usage of "I beg your pardon" stated above as "polite request." It is assumed that she is rehearing it, and it does not seem to do much harm to Figgins's face.

Later, however, when the question is repeated twice after that, her hostility towards the principal becomes clearer and stronger; she enunciates each word of the second "I beg your pardon" (hereafter referred to as *Pardon 2*), as this can be seen on the script where the expression is italicized with an exclamation mark. The Japanese subtitles describe *Pardon 2* as "nan datte?," and unlike those of *Pardon 1*, they omit honorifics for people in a higher status than the speaker. At this moment, Figgins repeats what he has said before *Pardon 1* is asked. Thus, when Sue asks *Pardon 2*, he must know that she has already understood that he decided to remove her from her position. Because of this, Figgins perceives that Sue does not

repeat what he just said, and that something which has not been said is requested for. This communicates her discomfort to Figgins. Similarly, the third "I beg your pardon" (hereafter referred to as *Pardon 3*) has the same effect. Moreover, when it is uttered, Sue interrupts Figgins loudly. Thus, *Pardon 3* conveys her idea that she is not going to listen to him. This indicates her rebellious attitude and disregard of Figgins's position as her boss.

Figgins's negative face that he does not want others to get mentally distanced is based here on his social position as the schoolmaster. Therefore, Sue's rejection of his order to take her job from her means her disregard of it and leads to the violation of his negative face.

The same phenomenon can be seen in other situations, and the following scene is one of the examples:

Example (2)

Cut To Figgins Office where Sue stands in front of Figgins, who is seated at his desk.

Sue: I'm instating a new policy whereby we play Madonna's Greatest Hits over the P.A. system, quite loudly, throughout the entire school day. [throws the CD on his desk]

Figgins: But blasting her delicious hooks would make it impossible for the students to concentrate.

Sue: Ah, who cares? Madonna never finished college. She hopped a cab for the bright lights of New York City with 35 bucks in her pocket. And I think we should encourage our pupils to do the same. You say the word, and I will provide you a list of the students I believe should be rounded up and shipped off immediately.

Figgins: I am sorry, Sue. This is insanity!

(*Glee*. Episode 15, 'The Power of Madonna.')

Sue is an admirer of Madonna, an American pop singer known as the Queen of pop. In Example (2), Sue insists that Principal Figgins should play Madonna's hit songs throughout the day at school to make her a role model for the students. Figgins, of course, refuses such an outlandish request, but she persists in it, explaining how great Madonna is.

What Sue is doing here is giving an order to Principal Figgins, which restricts the listener's (in this case, Figgins's) act. As Geoffrey Leech points out that orders are one of the impolite behaviors (2014: 221), this action is an FTA which infringes on his negative face. As seen in Example (1), there is a difference in the balance of power between Figgins and Sue: Figgins, as the principal at his school, is expected to have more power than Sue. In general, those who are higher in social rank may give orders to those who are lower, but not vice versa. If they want their superiors to do something for them, they have to ask for it in a more polite way. However, in the quotation above, Sue is ignoring the social power balance and

expectations. Thus, by breaking Figgins's socially established status in Example (2), she is attacking the negative face of Principal Figgins.

3. Social Value in Family Members

Social value which supports one's face mentioned so far is the status or value one has established in a certain group. Although the relationship between a boss and their subordinate in a workplace tends to be thought to be formed in a large group and public group, small private groups such as family and friends can also be of social value, which people's face is based on. The example of this can be seen in the following Example (3):

Example (3)

Sue : […] Do you not understand the blackmail process and how it works?

Flashback To Figgins Bedroom where Figgins and Sue are in bed together. FIGGINS, naked, is startled to see her there. Sue, still wearing her tracksuit, whips out a camera.

Sue *(taking a picture of them)* :   Smile.

Cut Back To Figgins' Office

Sue : I have your wife's phone number on speed dial. To recap, you will be playing those Madonna hits throughout the day at an earsplitting volume. Understood?

（*Glee*. Episode 15, 'The Power of Madonna.'）

When Sue invited Figgins to go out for dinner, she mixed a sleeping pill in his drink and kidnapped him. Then she put him naked in the bed in a hotel room, lay herself down beside him, and took a picture with him. Since he was unconscious, he got tricked into believing they slept together. In Example (3), Sue is pressing Figgins, who is married, on this story. She implies that she will reveal it to his wife, saying "Do you not understand the blackmail process and how it works?" and "I have your wife's phone number on speed dial." So to speak, she allows him no other choice than to do what she demands.

For Figgins, a married man, his identity in his family, or his relationship with his wife, is one of the values he should hold on to. He wishes to be desirable to his wife, and this supports his positive face. If the photograph Sue used to blackmail him in Example (3) is leaked out to his wife, Figgins's reputation would be ruined. Therefore, the violation of value leads to an attack on his positive face. Thus, being an important person as a husband in a family is also the basis of one's face as one of people's social values. This is one of the elements to determine whether an act is perceived as impolite or not.

Another point to be noted concerning the misbehavior in Example (3) is that Sue uses other impolite language behavior to carry out her demand. For example, she reminds

him of it with the line, "To recap, you will be playing those Madonna hits throughout the day at an earsplitting volume." By placing it at the end of the conversation, she forces Figgins to confront it. She also adds the declarative question, "Understood?" A declarative question has an expected answer: as explained "Positive declarative questions have an epistemic bias towards a positive answer, negative ones towards a negative answer" (Huddleston and Geoffrey, et al. 2002: 881). The meaning of the question in Example (3) could be as follows: whether or not Figgins understands, Sue demands that Madonna's hits be played at their school and that Figgins comply with her request. Consequently, the expected answer could be to do as she wants. Therefore, the policy pressed by Sue in Example (2) is made more compelling by these utterances.

As explained in the previous section, in the case of Example (2), disrespecting the social value of Figgins's position as her boss leads to an attack on Figgins's face. However, from the analysis of discourse in Example (3), it can be pointed out that Sue's attack on Figgins to be considered as a kind of a tactic leads to an extreme loss of credibility for his value in his family. Moreover, Sue restricts Figgins's action by restating her demands and using a declarative question. Although strategies to reduce the degree of face loss have been established in politeness research, Sue commits the opposite in these scenes, therefore her actions in Example (2) result in causing more face loss. This indicates that utterances can become more impolite depending on the surrounding context.

Conclusion

The following conclusion will be drawn from the above discussion about two purposes proposed in Introduction. First of all, the social value common to Examples 1, 2, and 3 is the relationship between Figgins and Sue, the boss and his subordinate in the workplace. Examples 1 and 2 demonstrate that Figgins has the established position as a schoolmaster, which supports his negative face: he wants others to keep an appropriate distance. Example 3 also shows that although the participants in the conversation and their social relationships are the same as in the two preceding examples, threatening Figgins's position in the small group of family members leads to an attack on his positive face.

When we say "society," it is generally liable to be associated with a public place such as a country, a cultural sphere, and a company. However, "society" could be also found in our private relationship. Therefore, the social values, which play a crucial role in understanding impoliteness behaviors, can be, in other words, defined as the values that are created through mutual relationship between people. In this respect, such values are diverse, and people have several values in multiple relationships. Moreover, they are not fixed, but rather they are changed and renovated in society and sometimes new values or standards are

created as society changes. For instance, women's empowerment cast doubt on the old-fashioned social system such as authoritarian relationships between a boss and his subordinates. In order to identify exactly how they have an impact on face-attack, the studies of impoliteness have to be carried out through a close research for the shift in diversified social values.

While this paper focuses on a few aspects of social values, there are other features that are worth noting when studying impoliteness. People live according to certain rules shared in the society they are in. For example, the cause for which Sue is blamed in Example (1), i.e., leaking the glee club's set list to their rivals, is against such rules. This rule is, so to speak, a norm or a standard that people should respect in their own society. Culpeper suggests that such social norms and practices are often associated with recognition of impoliteness (2014: 35-36). Therefore, more systematic investigation based on the general and at the same time new norms in society is needed.

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