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# Impoliteness and Conversational Joking: On Relational Politics

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## 0. Abstract

In this article the attempt is made to conceptualize politeness as a processual interaction phenomenon whose power to define social relationships is observable in humorous exchanges. Politeness and face-work are differentiated; I distinguish between marked positive and negative politeness and other forms of relational work. On the basis of conversational data I show specific socially indicative potentials of humorous communication. Humor can definitely be used to cushion face-threats and to communicate polite non-imposition or polite approval. However, good friends are especially likely to overstep the boundaries of politeness. In most models of politeness humorous activities are counted as forms of positive politeness, which is equated with familiarity and solidarity. Humorous communication in fact plays a role in the conversational constitution of familiarity and informality — but familiarity and informality should not be confused with politeness. Despite clear impoliteness, many humorous provocations (teasing, ribbing, making fun of someone, pulling someone's leg) still have a relationship-affirming character. An internal differentiation among the activities listed by Brown and Levinson under the rubric of positive politeness enables us to go beyond the two-step model of distance (off record, negative politeness) and solidarity (positive politeness).<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction: Humor as Positive Politeness

Linguists have been studying politeness for quite some time (e.g. Lakoff 1973, Brown & Levinson 1978/1987, Fraser & Nolen 1981, Leech 1983). The above-named authors have offered various models for the analysis of politeness. The most-discussed model is probably that developed by Brown and Levinson.<sup>2</sup>

Since humorous communication breaks various societal norms, among them that of politeness, it makes sense to devote attention to the relation between humor and politeness.

Joking is discussed by Brown and Levinson on the whole as a strategy of "positive politeness":

Since jokes are based on mutual shared background knowledge and values, jokes may be used to stress that shared background or those shared values. Joking is a basic positive-politeness technique, for putting H 'at ease' — for example in response to a *faux pas* of H's,

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S may joke [...] Jokes may be used as an exploitation of politeness strategies as well, in attempts to redefine the size of the FTA (face threatening act). (1987:124)

The view of humor as positive politeness has been adopted by many linguists (e.g. Norrick 1993, Zajdman 1995).

Brown and Levinson's discussion of joking gives the impression that jokes always have this function. I shall argue instead that we should not reduce the very diverse relations between humor and politeness to this least common denominator of communicating positive politeness or "off record" strategies (e.g. they consider irony to be an "off record" strategy).

I first discuss characteristics of conversational humor; then I introduce the problems which will be dealt with in this article on the basis of datum 1. Presenting additional data, I will argue that humorous communication has a potential for diagnosing social relationships which can be better used analytically if one adopts a narrower concept of politeness than that of Brown & Levinson. By equating politeness with face-work, Brown & Levinson and other linguists pass up the chance to use politeness for a more differentiated linguistic analysis of social relationships.

*Negative politeness is in many cultures an index for greater distance and positive politeness for less distance. Humorous violation of the rules of politeness is an index for a greater degree of interpersonal intimacy which can be referred to as familiarity.*

Humor communicates a multifunctional social orientation which has complex relations with the demands of politeness.

## 2. Conversational Humor

In everyday usage humor is not limited to the genre of standardized jokes, even if the written joke is the form most often dealt with in linguistics (Marfurt 1977, Raskin 1985, Attardo & Chabanne 1992). Comicality can, however, be discovered and conversationally created almost anywhere.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to jokes, comicality does not depend on a punchline. Speakers often leave the degree of communicated seriousness indeterminate (Mulkay 1988) by using playful elements within messages to which one can also attribute serious aspects. Communication thus acquires an ambiguity which it owes to the allusiveness of the humorous. This polyvalence can be employed strategically.

The ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974) takes into account the "keying" in which speech events take place. Pathos, exaggeration or humor can be regarded as examples of 'keying' (also Goffman 1974). In the literature this is also called "interaction modality" (Schütte 1991, Müller 1992, Kallmeyer & Keim in this volume). Interaction modalities play a role in the creation of a spe-

cific textual understanding. They represent a subgroup of framing procedures which regulate specific claims to reality, truthfulness and coherence. In humor the degree of realism and truth is reduced and special inferential efforts are required to create "sense in nonsense", to use Freud's expression (1905/1985). Utterances are made comical through special contextualization or framing procedures (in the sense of Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz 1976).

In humor research it has long been known that humor can affirm not only social convergence, but also divergence. Already Dupréel (1928) distinguished between inclusive and exclusive laughter. Humor can strengthen group solidarity, which is affirmed by inclusive laughter; but it can also exclude people. Brown and Levinson point out that humor and laughter can constitute "in-group", but they do not consider the simultaneous possibility of creating "out-group".

Humor is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Such different activities as jokes, comedy, satire, irony, caricature, fun, wordplay, self-irony, kidding, teasing, practical joking, parody, hoaxing and many others are included. The following attributes characterize humorous activities:

- Laughter can contextualize an utterance as humorous and can also serve as a reaction to it (but does not necessarily do so). (Jefferson 1979, Mulkay 1988).

- Institutionalized meanings are played with (Zijderveld 1976).<sup>4</sup>

- Ambiguity, bisociation, and interpretive variety are components of humorous activities (Fry 1963, Koestler 1964, Preisendanz 1976).

- Humor operates on the basis of shared knowledge (of whatever sort).

- Fantasy, play modalities and creativity play an important role (Bateson 1954):

Cues for the negotiation of a humorous interaction modality can be lexico-semantic, syntactic, stylistic, prosodic, kinetic, mimic or purely contextual.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. A Humorous Episode

The data which I employ for this analysis of the pragmatics of conversational humor consist of twenty tape recordings of informal gatherings of friends and acquaintances which took place in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Seventeen recordings stem from a post-graduate academic milieu, one was made at a student gathering, and two were recorded at social gatherings after sports exercises (judo and riding) in South Germany.<sup>6</sup>

The following episode was recorded in 1995 in a Viennese circle of good friends. All those present have known each other for many years. The activities carried out are humorously provocative:



## Datum 1 Conversation 20 Episode 6

Conrad (C), Elisa (E), Gerda (G), Lilo (L), Martin (M), Peter (P),  
Sabine (S)

- 1 P: is des Servus- Wein? hast den kauft?  
is that Servus wine? did you buy it?
- 2 L: na, gstohlen. HE[HEHE  
no, stole it.
- 3 S: [HEHE
- 4 P: nein, nein, [sowas kriegt ma oft gschenkt. HEHE  
no, no, [such things are often gotten as presents.
- 5 M: [des macht ma net.  
[one doesn't do that.
- 6 S: HEHEHE
- 7 G: also Lilo, [das Preispickerl net runtergenommen, des is  
well Lilo, [not removing the price sticker, that is  
peinlich.=  
embarrassing.
- 8 M: [so böse Menschen gibts doch net. HEHEHE  
[such mean people don't exist.
- 9 G: =HEHEHEHEHEHE
- 10 E: was is peinlich?  
what is embarrassing?
- 11 L: ich habs Preispickerl übersehn.  
I didn't notice the price sticker.
- 12 (-)
- 13 E: wieso, Du hostn ja net hergschenkt, oder?  
why, you haven't given it to anyone as a present, have you?
- 14 M: hättst mim Kuli an Anser dazugschriebn. [(? ?)  
you could have added a one with a ball-point pen.
- 15 P: [Du, Lilo, wenn  
[hey, Lilo, if
- 16 da ganz groß [Servus draufsteht, glauben wir nicht,  
Servus is printed in big letters on the label, we don't believe
- 17 glauben wir nicht,=  
we don't believe,
- 18 E: [(?  
[?  
HEHEHE
- 19 P: =daß Du jetzt in der Vinothek [à la Gault Millau  
that you have just been in a posh liquor store
- 20 gewesen bist. oder sonstwo  
à la Gault Millau. or someplace like that
- 21 L: [ICH ich weiß nicht, ich  
[I I don't know, I
- 22 hab das Etikett so hübsch gfuHUHunden. HEHEHE  
thought the label looked so nice.
- 23 E: [na ich hätt nämlich gsagt, vielleicht hastn gschenkt  
[no I would have guessed that you got it as a present,  
kriegt,
- 24 G: i wollt nämlich sch sagn, des is a Frechheit,  
I wanted to say, that is an insult,
- 25 [wenn ma so an Wein gschenkt kriegt.  
[to be given such a wine.
- 26 L: [HEHE weißt jetzt, warum ich gsagt hab,  
[now you know why I said,
- 27 IHI::r soHollts deHn WeiHn kHaufen.  
you ought to buy the wine.
- 28 C: ja HAHAA[HA  
yes
- 29 S: [ich kauf den Wein auch immer nachm Etikett.  
[I always buy wine judging from the label.

- 30 M: bitte, des is auch nicht wahr, Lilo. der Servus-Wein  
please, that isn't really true, Lilo. Servus wine
- 31 verkauft sich zum Beispiel in Deutschland relativ gut  
for example, sells fairly well in Germany
- 32 jetzt. als [österreichischer Dingbums-Wein.  
now. as [Austrian whatyamacallit wine.
- 33 C: [ja das is ja eben daHas Problem. [HEHEHEHE  
[yes that's exactly the problem.
- 34 M: [NEIN, NEIN,  
[NO, NO,
- 35 der is ja wirklich trinkbar, ne? [also =  
it is really drinkable, eh? [well then =
- 36 E: [er verkauft sich in  
[it apparently
- 37 [Österreich angeblich auch nicht so schlecht.  
[doesn't sell so badly in Austria either.
- 38 M: [= grad der hat kan schlechten Namen dort.  
[= this one particularly has a pretty good name there.
- 39 L: DEN hab ich nämlich der Elisa schon des öfteren  
I have often served it to Elisa
- 40 serviert und [sie hat nie wirklich  
and [she has never really
- 41 P: [des is ka schlechter [Wein.  
[it is not a bad [wine.
- 42 M: [seids froh daß kein  
[be glad that no
- 43 [Tetrapack-Wein am Tisch steht. ne?  
[paper carton wine is on the table. eh?
- 44 L: [sie hat nie am nächsten Tag anrufen und gsagt, Lilo,  
[she has never called the next day and said, Lilo,
- 45 der Fusel, HAHABA  
the pop wine,
- 46 ((mehrere durcheinander))  
((several persons at once))
- 47 C: weil sie konnte [nicht anrufen. HEHEHEHE  
because she could [not call.
- 48 G: [na, die Elisa ist gut erzogen. HEHE  
[no, Elisa is too well-bred.
- 49 L: HEHE sie hat ihn ganz brav vernichtet im allgeHEmeinen.  
she downed it like a good girl in general.
- 50 P: des is ka schlechter Wein, kann ma net sagen. net so wie  
that is not a bad wine, one can't say that. not like
- 51 der weiße Musketier oder so was im Doppler beim Billa.  
the white Musketier or something of the sort sold in jugs at Billa.
- 52 [des is a ziemliches Gschlotter.  
[that is something of a rotgut.
- 53 E: [na  
[no
- 54 L: gell, kann man mir nix vorwerfen.  
don't you agree, no one can blame me.
- 55 E: na, das würd ich nicht.  
no, I wouldn't do that.
- 56 G: was is denn ein Cuvée?  
what is a Cuvée then?

Peter's questions in line 1 are, taken literally, quite unremarkable. However, Lilo's answer suggests that Peter's question is foolish. Lilo and Sabine laugh. Peter, in line 4, provides the background of his question. Martin's *one doesn't do that* elicits more laughter from Sabine. Peter utters a typically parental comment. He plays with reported speech, which, however, is not introduced as such. Tannen

(1984) has shown that in informal discourse unmarked insertions of others' voices into one's own speech are often regarded as amusing.<sup>7</sup> Goffman (1981a:144) uses the term "animated speech" for cases where speakers perform other persons' words within their own speech. Animation represents a possibility for playing down one's own responsibility for what is said. The animator becomes a "sounding box".

In line 7 Gerda makes explicit what *one doesn't do* that is *embarrassing*. Lilo, the hostess, did not remove the *price sticker*. Martin's comment in line 8 is presumably to be understood as an intensification of the teasing attack directed at Lilo. Lilo has served her guests cheap wine, and by means of teasing they are rubbing it in. She has not even attempted to conceal the price. Martin and Gerda laugh. It is amusing that Lilo is being teased for having failed to remove the price sticker, not because the wine does not taste good. Elisa seems not to have understood what is *embarrassing* (10), and Lilo explains this to her in a serious tone. A very short pause occurs. Lilo's reaction needs interpretation; she does not tease back. One almost has the impression that she accepts the reproach that she has committed a social impropriety. The pause indicates irritation. One can, of course, also understand Lilo's reaction in line 11 as a downplaying which implies that the "social impropriety" is not worth mentioning. Elisa, at any rate, rushes to Lilo's aid. According to the reasoning offered by Elisa, it would obviously have been a greater *faux pas* to *have made a gift* of the wine. Martin, Lilo's friend, gives her a tip which amounts to pulling the group's leg. Adding *a one with a ball-point pen* means to nominally increase the price of the wine written on the sticker by a hundred Schilling (about \$ 10). Martin also rushes to Lilo's assistance. Peter, however, makes it clear that the brandname *Servus* would at any rate never be mistaken for *wine from the Vinothek à la Gault Millau*. He would not have fallen for that trick. Peter thus ranks the *Servus* wine at one end of a scale on whose opposite end *Gault Millau* is located. This extreme comparison is also amusing. Lilo defends herself laughingly. She bought the wine on the basis of aesthetic criteria. Laughter signals that these criteria are somewhat comical; they do not correspond to the conventional ones. Elisa again attempts to defend Lilo. Gerda reinforces the critical perspective on the wine (24, 25); she considers a gift of such wine to be an *insult*. Lilo laughingly admits that she knows nothing of wine. Her remark in lines 26/27 can be understood as meaning: You yourself are to blame if you let me buy the wine. The self-attribution of having no idea about wine is at any rate less reprehensible than that of having knowingly served her friends a cheap wine. Conrad accepts this with a chuckle. Sabine admits that in buying wine she uses the same criteria as Lilo (*label*). Martin then begins to defend the *Servus* wine. Conrad does not accept this defense. His remark in line 33



can be understood to mean that Germans know nothing about wine. Martin and Elisa continue to defend the wine. Lilo begins in line 39 to recount how she has *often served* her friend Elisa the same wine. Peter now also agrees that it *is not a bad wine*. Martin cautions the group members to modesty and reminds them that still worse wines are sold in supermarkets (*carton wines*). Lilo continues by saying that Elisa *has never called up the next day* to complain about the wine. Now a new round of teasing commences. Conrad's *she could not call* implies that Elisa became too sick after drinking the cheap wine to be able to complain. This dramatizes the negative consequences of drinking the wine. Gerda offers a different reason for Elisa's not calling. Lilo counters with positive recollections (49). Peter again defends the wine by comparing it with other varieties. Lilo finally pleads for absolution (54), which is granted her. Gerda then begins posing serious questions about wines.

It is after all only imaginable among good friends that people would mockingly challenge the hostess for her serving an inexpensive wine and neglecting to conceal the fact. The teasing is also quickly defused, because Lilo, as we have seen, responds seriously in line 11. She reacts rather defensively and is immediately defended by her friends Elisa and Martin. Above all Martin's proposal in line 14 definitely has aspects of counter-teasing, since he insinuates that the group would not have noticed whether they were drinking a wine worth a hundred Schilling more or less. Peter, however, doesn't stand for this. Lilo accepts with a chuckle that she has committed a social impropriety (26, 27) as charged. In lines 42/43 Martin again attacks the group. Martin, Sabine, and Elisa ally themselves with Lilo. Lilo reaffirms her alliance with Elisa by recounting that the latter has always been satisfied with her wine. This is used by Conrad and Gerda for the next round of teasing, which is directed at Lilo and Elisa. Elisa is supposedly *too well bred* to complain. Lilo defends her impression that Elisa found the wine acceptable. Elisa agrees with her in line 55. After that the humorous modality is temporarily abandoned again.

One can scarcely imagine a culture in which it would be regarded as polite to draw a hostess's attention to the fact that she has served cheap refreshments.

#### 4. Humorous Provocations

In familiar conversations we find various forms of humorous provocations. There is a rich literature on this, e.g. on provocative, ritualized joking relationships (Radcliffe-Brown 1952) and teasing (Drew 1987, Schütte 1991, Straehle 1993, Eder 1993, Günthner 1996, Boxer & Cortés-Conde forthcoming).

In works on the topic of "teasing" (ribbing, making fun of, pulling someone's leg, mock challenges) it has also been shown that these activities can be not only



solidarity (bonding) rituals, but also ones in which attackers solidarize against their teasing victim. In the latter case social inclusion and exclusion take place simultaneously. The persons teased can react seriously, as can be seen in the examples discussed by Drew (1987). They can laugh, "strike back" or defend themselves humorously (Eder 1993, Günthner 1996). They can also be defended by others or wittily trivialize their "social impropriety", as in data 1 above.

It is doubtful that teasing should be regarded as an activity of positive politeness merely because it does not endanger relationships and in a certain way communicates solidarity. To the contrary: through violating the niveau of politeness it is indexed that a relationship has such a firm foundation that it is no longer dependent on politeness or courtesy. Not all solidarizing activities are polite. Besides this, the boundaries with unfriendly jokes are fluid.

*The humorous can be located at all points on a scale from politeness to impoliteness.*

Open impoliteness or rudeness is the case in joking when people amuse themselves at the cost of other persons. In such cases there are important differences in the degree to which the person who is made the object of humor enjoys the joke. The least polite cases are humorous activities which are not at all entertaining to the object of the humor, but merely threatening or wounding. At any rate one should assume individual differences in this regard.

Humorous communication can be used to develop a scale of relationship indicators. Politeness and other forms of face-work should be seen as context-dependent interactional processes. I will use a narrower concept of politeness (in the sense of marked politeness) and not equate it with face-work in Goffman's sense (face-work was anyway never equated with politeness by Goffman himself).<sup>8</sup>

## 5. Politeness

Not only Lakoff (1973, 1979), but also Leech (1983) and Brown & Levinson (1978/1987) (after this B&L) stretched the concept of politeness so far that finally all relationship-affirming activities were declared to be polite. Thus compliments, joke-telling, slang, and the employment of pet names end up sharing a single plane, as strategies of positive politeness. Thereby B&L move away from ethnoconceptions of politeness, for members of society do not necessarily consider persons who employ group jargon or nick- and pet names as especially polite.

I suggest returning to Goffman's conception of interactional rituality, an essentially more flexible concept of the interaction order — but at the same time adopting a concept of politeness as a system of marked conventions.

The static aspect of B&L's model has already been frequently criticized (summarized in Held 1995). B&L offer three independent and culture-sensitive variables which influence the degree of politeness (1987:74 ff.):

- (i) the social distance (D) of speaker and hearer,
- (ii) the relative power (P) of speaker and hearer,
- (iii) the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture.

The shorter the distance or the smaller the status gap between persons, the more they would avoid negative politeness and the more often they would perform positive politeness. Politeness levels are locatable not only on the dominance-subordination axis, but also on the distance-intimacy axis.

Kasper (1990:203) criticizes, drawing on other authors, the unidirectional effect of social factors on the degree of politeness in B&L, which does not do justice to the dialectics of pre-communicative social givens and communicative negotiations of relationships.<sup>9</sup>

In their preface to the 1987 edition B&L themselves offer a few reservations which they have developed in the meantime concerning the work, first published in 1978.

They write that their theory of politeness is formulated in the classical form of an "hypothetico-deductive method" (p. 11). It is true that the analytic apparatus in B&L was already developed deductively before conversational material was analyzed. The language material was then chosen to substantiate the predefined categories. They write that they incorrectly relied on intuitive "means-ends" relationships between utterance types and goals. One must also agree with this self-criticism. Their types-goals relationships are too one-sidedly conceived. It was further assumed that the factors of rank, distance and weight of imposition are already extra-situationally determined.

B&L write that one could only speak of "off record" if in the context two or more interpretations are possible and one of them is face threatening. They list various strategies of "off record", from "give hints" to "be ironic" to "be incomplete". It must be doubted that irony always represents an "off record" strategy in the service of politeness; irony can also fulfill other (even opposite) functions. Interestingly Leech (1983) treats irony as an impolite mode of behavior, since it always includes an aggressive act. This mode of thought is more in accord with most theories of irony (Lapp 1992).

Brown and Levinson overgeneralize various verbal strategies as forms of politeness. Many of the strategies they name can also have a very impolite effect. They offer no criteria for distinguishing between polite and impolite modes of expression. These would likewise only be specifiable in the sequential context of the conversation and within the interaction history, which they do not study. The

"be ironic" strategy is of particular interest in connection with humorous communication.

Instead of attributing supra-situational meaning to isolated acts from a research perspective, here the attempt will be made to understand social meanings (and thereby also degrees of politeness) as the result of interactional negotiations. One must concede that it was not Brown & Levinson's aim to study concrete relational negotiations in context and to show which politeness strategies are involved. Their aim was, on the basis of three languages (English, Mexican Tzeltal and Indian Tamil), to broadly delineate the phenomenal domain of politeness. It remains the task of other studies to show how the phenomena they describe can be interactively employed for relational politics. The integration of politeness phenomena in sequential analyses could be first understood as an application of Brown & Levinsonian concepts, but it quickly leads to a revised understanding.

Since I do not wish to equate relational politics and politeness, here I will deal briefly with conceptions which distinguish politeness from other types of "relational work" and do not understand every form of informality and intimacy as a strategy of positive politeness.

The frame of politeness can very well be overstepped without abandoning relational work. Politeness is, e.g., abandoned when informal therapeutic aims gain the upper hand in an interaction.<sup>10</sup> If amusement and entertainment clearly perform important functions for all participants in a conversation, the frame of politeness can likewise be left, not only in a relationship-affirming, but also in a relationship-threatening regard.

Watts (1989:136) and Janney & Arndt (1992) are among the linguists who distinguish between highly-conventionalized, marked politeness and other forms of relational work. Watts characterizes his much narrower concept of marked polite behavior as follows:

...explicitly marked, conventionally interpretable subset of politic verbal behavior responsible for the smooth functioning of socio-communicative interaction and the consequent production of well-formed discourse within open social groups characterized by elaborated speech codes. It will thus include highly ritualized, formulaic behavior, indirect speech strategies and conventionalized linguistic strategies for saving and maintaining face.

Janney & Arndt (1992) also differentiate between conventional "social politeness" and less conventional "tact".<sup>11</sup> For them as well the process of behaving in the sense of social politeness consists in following specific conventions, e.g. conversational routines (Coulmas 1981), repeating polite formulae (Ferguson 1976), observing norms of address (Ide 1989), downplaying and moderating specific conversational activities (Blum-Kulka 1989; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989), maximizing compliments and expressions of thanks (Held 1988). To



communicate social politeness, we can rely on standardized strategies which all members of a society know. Precisely because these strategies belong to the stable stocks of common knowledge, we can also play with them to achieve a specific situational definition. What these authors call "politic verbal behaviors" or "tact" represent forms of relational work which are much more generally defined than politeness, e.g. as the "fabric of interpersonal relationships within the group" (Watts 1989:137).

Goffman's concept of "face-work" includes conventionally polite, unconventional, and other forms of ritualized relational activities.

## 6. Playing With Standardized Politeness

Humor can be polite in the sense of marked politeness, if it helps to mitigate potential face threats. One can criticize jokingly and thereby actually save the face of the criticized, who is given discretion in deciding how seriously to interpret the criticism. One can report on personal success jokingly and thereby ambiguate self-praise, which is equivalent to positively saving one's own face.

Humor can be non-polite or impolite, but nevertheless relationship-affirming, if it attacks in a joking manner or plays with politeness. It then playfully violates behavioral conventions. Humorous provocation corresponds to the playful bite which is not intended as a bite — as Bateson (1954/1972) observed among primates. These observations formed the foundations of his play theory; humor presupposes playfulness. Conversational humor can, however, also be at the expense of other people and temporarily or permanently threaten relationships.

The examples of humorous face threats discussed in the following two subsections are so interpreted by the hearers that the humor is viewed as a politeness strategy.

### 6.1 *Humor as Playing With Negative Politeness*

If humor is interpreted in such a way that a potential threat to the action space of the other person (e.g. a challenge) is cushioned, one can take it in the sense of B&L as a strategy of negative politeness. However, we do not attribute a context-free meaning to an isolated act, but orient ourselves to the perception and reaction of the listener.

In the following datum Helena pressures Anton to eat the pudding she has made, although he does not wish to.

*Datum 2 Conversation 3 Episode 3*

Anton (A), Helena (H), Margaritta (M), Rudolf (R)

Helena places her pudding on the table. Anton mimes rejection. Then the transcript begins.

- 1 H: *es wiHird gegeHessen, was aufn Tisch kommt. HEHEHE*  
here you eat what is put on the table.
- 2 A: *ich schenk meinen Margarittchen.*  
I am giving mine to Margie.
- 3 H: *nein, Du, (? ?)*  
no, you
- 4 *Du wirst doch meinen Pudding nicht verschmähen.*  
you surely don't want to scorn my pudding.
- 5 *was solln denn dann die Gäste denken.*  
what are the guests supposed to think.
- 6 A: *ich schenk ihn Margarittchen.*  
I am giving it to Margie.

First, Anton's rejection of the dessert is strictly speaking already impolite. Helena reacts by laughingly quoting a typical parental admonishing formula from the repertoire of authoritarian education (1). She plays with "a different voice" in the sense of Voloshinov (1978, 1986); this cannot be directly attributed to any particular person, but rather to a social type familiar to everyone. It is still more impolite to pressure someone to eat, which, strictly speaking, Helena is doing. With the utterance of a formula Helena is, of course, here only an animator in Goffman's terminology (1981a); in datum 1 we have already discussed an example of such a strategy. The responsibility implied by such formulae lies in another world, which is alluded to. An act of impoliteness (rejection) provokes a further playful one (putting pressure). Anton justifies his rejection with a gallant gesture toward another guest, Margaritta, who is famous for her love of pudding. Thereby the face-threatening act of rejection is cushioned; by transforming the pudding into a present, Anton makes up for the disparagement inherent in rejecting the pudding. He shows an understanding of Helena's formula-like utterance, which co-receives the serious dimension of the challenge to do honor to the pudding. After Helena mutters something unintelligible which does not refer to Anton, in line 4 she makes a statement with such a formal level of diction (*verschmähen=scorn*) that it is likewise identifiable as a quote from a not more specifically characterized text source. Use of citations is a major humor strategy. The following question of *what the guests are supposed to think*, spoken affectedly, is also part of the formulary repertoire of people who behave very correctly and wish to demonstrate perfect etiquette before guests. This milieu of polite etiquette shows up allusively in her speech. In this group people assume a high-level shared knowledge of such social milieus. Through animated citations, partly emphasized by laugh particles, Helena possibly communicates a contrary identity

for herself. And yet she can also express displeasure about Anton's rejection of her pudding. All potential "face threats" were playfully dealt with. Margaritta then accepted the pudding with enthusiasm (not in transcript). The face threats, insofar as they were present,<sup>12</sup> were thus neutralized.

*Laughter particles, atypical lexics, cliché prosody and such formulae function as indicators of the contextualization of a humorous modality. Speakers adopt a theater frame.* In all these data we encounter laughter as a cue which evokes humorous understanding possibilities.

The formulae are used in datum 2 with almost ironic distance. According to Stempel (1976), irony is a form of imitation, which he understands in a very broad sense as adopting an implied perspective; in irony speakers employ in exaggerated form action figures and evaluations which they attribute to others. The utterance can take the perspective of a more or less well-known source (e.g. "everyone"). Giora (1995:239) points out that irony involves processing both the negated and implicated messages, so that the difference between them is computed. In everyday conversation irony is often integrated into other activities.

## 6.2 *Humor as Play With Positive Politeness*

I would like to present an example here of activities which play with conventions of positive politeness by deviating from them, but still uphold the speech activity of positive affirmation. Such examples are found in each conversation in my corpus; they are not at all threatening.

### *Datum 3 Conversation 4 Episode 6*

H: Helena, U: Uta, (the others are already in the room)

- 1 H: **herzlichen Glückwunsch.** ((gibt ihr ein Geschenk))  
congratulations on your birthday. ((she gives her  
a present))
- 2 U: **vielen Dank** [Helena.  
thank you very much [Helena.
- 3 H: [alles Gute für die Gegenwart, die Zukunft,  
[ all the best for the present, the future,
- 4 **das nächste Leben.**  
the next life.
- 5 U: **HEHEHE** [HE
- 6 H: [HEHEHE

In this episode Helena deforms the birthday greeting formula. This is a harmless, fanciful game which is responded to with laughter. My observations indicate that formulae-deformations occur frequently in the German-speaking areas. Strict use of formulae appears on the whole not to be especially highly regarded; it is viewed as unimaginative. Using formulae associated with standardized rituals makes people seem dull and not especially interesting.<sup>13</sup> The individual presumably experiences him/herself thereby as a robot-like reproducer of behavior



patterns. Making variations in formulae, to the contrary, is regarded as expressing personal individuality.

The more informal the discourse, the sooner the individual emerges from a positional identity. In formal situations positional identities tend to be related to following patterns and structures (Irvine 1978). Personal identities can be evoked by pattern violation. Attention is thereby steered to the individual. It is no accident that in intimate circles entirely different identity categories are negotiated than in public.

### 7. Not Polite but Still not Threatening

In Datum 4 Annette expresses a deformed compliment whose complimentariness she has clearly weakened; nor is it received as a compliment, but rather as a critical remark.

#### *Datum 4 Conversation 12 Episode 2*

Friederike (F), Annette (A), Martin (M), Lars (L), Bernd (B)

Bernd gives some friends a guided tour of his new apartment.

- 1 A: **seHEhr übersichtlich. doch. schön**  
**unübersichtlich.HE**  
very clearly arranged. really. beautifully arranged.
- 2 B: **ja::: HA so kann mans auch sagen. also bald steht**  
yeah::: HA that's another way to put it. soon there will be
- 3 **hiern größerer Tisch...**  
a larger table here...

Annette laughingly utters the adjective *übersichtlich* (*clearly arranged*), which can have a positive connotation, but in this context does not. Her laughter underlines the incongruity between situative expectation and ambiguous diction. Bernd chuckles at the ambiguous comment and then explains what is still to be done in the apartment. *Clearly arranged* is intertextual; it alludes to a scene in a film by Lorient. In a restaurant Lorient and his date have ordered a nouvelle cuisine dish and are served a large plate containing nothing more than a bit of fish and two pea pods. Lorient thereupon utters the comment "sehr übersichtlich".

A little later something very similar occurs. Lars responds to a critical remark with compliment formulae from a different register than his own.

#### *Datum 5 Conversation 12 Episode 4*

Friederike (F), Annette (A), Martin (M), Lars (L), Bernd (B)

- 1 F: **hier hats ja nur ein Fenster.**  
there is only one window.
- 2 L: **is aber doch schön fürn jungen Herrn. weischt.**  
but it is really nice for a young gentleman. you know.

- 3 A: ja das reiHHHcht fürn jungen Mann.  
yes, it suffices for a young man.  
4 L: fürn jungen Herrn, sagt Deine Mutter immer.  
for a young gentleman, your mother always says.

Friederike notes that Bernd's kitchen has only one window and will accordingly be dimly lit during the daytime. Thereupon Lars delivers a phrase from the repertoire of elderly women. Annette agrees with him and raises the level of playful impoliteness. Bernd is defined as a *young gentleman* who needs no brightly illuminated kitchen. This activity integrates dimensions of a mock challenge. In line 4 Lars makes the source of the flowery phrase explicit, Annette's mother. The attribution of domains and objects to gentlemen and ladies is found equally absurd in this circle. It is unclear whether *really nice for a young gentleman* is still understood as a compliment or only as being ironic. Being ironic does not usually make speech activities more polite.

Conventional formulae for offering food are deformed by taking them literally, as in the example below:

*Datum 6 Conversation 14 Episode 5*

Maria (M), Johannes (J), Inge (I), David (D), Katharina (K), Rudolph (R), Ernst (E)

- 1 K: wolln wir mal die wunderbare Vorspeise rumgehen lassen?  
how about passing around the wonderful appetizers?  
2 M: ja ja  
yes yes  
3 J: nur rumgehen lassen?  
just pass them around?  
4 D: mhm.  
5 R: nur mal draufgucken [jeder=  
just take a look at them [everyone=  
[HEHEHE  
6 D:  
7 R: =und mal n [Duft nehmen.  
=and then [take a sniff.  
[HAHAHAHAHAHA  
8 K:  
9 R: dann kommt se aber wieder weg.  
but then they will be taken away again.  
10 D: HE[HEHEHE  
11 m: [HEHEHEHEHE  
12 R: die wird immer nur rausgeholt wenn Besuch kommt.  
they are only brought out when visitors come.  
13 m: HAHAAHAHAHAHA [HAHA  
14 D: [(? ?)  
15 K: Du kennst uns ja schon seit längerer Zeit.  
you have known us for a long time now.

Katharina would like to have the appetizers which Maria brought passed around. Johannes takes the expression *passed around* literally in his following question. Rudolph elaborates on the implication of taking the expression literally in lines 5, 7 and 9. He fictionalizes that Katharina passes one and the same plate of appetizers around several times for guests. A comical situation is evoked. Those present

Marja (M), Johannes (J), Inge (I), David (D), Katharina (K), Rudolph (R), Ernst (E), several persons at once (m)

In the next datum the theater frame is opened in the first line by the inappropriate combination of *opulent* and *social life*.

- 1 M: Du hasch grad son opulentes Sozialleben.  
 2 D: total was los grad, weil ich nämlich initiativ  
 3 geworden bin jetzt.  
 4 M: [HAAAAAAAAAAAA  
 5 K: [hab ich schon erzählt. HAAAAAAAAAA  
 6 M: [as I have already said. [HAAAAAAAA  
 7 E: [was sagt er, er freut sich schon auf  
 8 weihnachten und Sylvester.  
 9 a: forward to Christmas and New Years Eve. HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
 10 E: [munkelt man. munkelt man.  
 11 D: entweder. oder. [hab ich angeragt.  
 12 M: either. or. [I have hinted. HENHENHENHENHENH  
 13 K: wenn nichts los sei, weihnachten und Sylvester, dann  
 14 würde er verreisen. hat er gesagt.  
 15 D: he would like to go abroad. he has said. [then he flies  
 16 E: in die Karibik. HENHENE HENHENE  
 17 M: to the Caribbean.  
 18 M: HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA  
 19 M: HENHENHENH

The dinner takes place at Katharina and David's. Maria addresses David's *social life*. She selects an elevated and inappropriate formulation (*opulent social life*), whereby a playful modality arises. The reason is that David prefers a quiet life. Recently, however, he has been involved in numerous social events. David reacts very ironically to Maria's remark. Above all the formulation *taken the initiative* is quoted from his wife, Katharina, who also immediately reacts affirmatively to this and laughs. Maria also laughs, since she knows how the topic of *social life* is negotiated between Katharina and David; she knows that Katharina's view that David normally *does not take the initiative* is absolutely not his own. David's



self-irony thus draws its potential from Katharina. The others also know about this conflict point. In line 6 several persons laugh. In lines 7 and 8 Ernst alludes to Christmas and New Years Eve, which further intensifies the topic. The background is that Katharina had invited numerous guests not only for Christmas, but also for New Years Eve, among others those present, and that this was definitely too much for David. He had resigned himself good-naturedly to his fate. Everyone laughs at the teasing jest that he was looking forward to Christmas and New Years Eve, which also implies that then there will again be many more invitations to events. In line 11 David seriously reports what he has indicated as his preference. Everyone laughs again. Starting at line 13 Katharina connects David's distaste for an *opulent social life* with his disinclination to travel. David starts to take part in the teasing himself (15). Ernst intensifies this again by citing a destination (the Caribbean), about which David himself has recently joked, on the occasion of a flight by Ernst to this area. Again the participants laugh. David's "leg is pulled".

Through his self-irony in lines 2 and 3 David signals that he is able to enjoy being teased; when his distaste for travel is brought up, he also participates in this, as e.g. in line 15. David here shows the ability to laugh at himself.

David is spoken about in the third person, which is typical of the activity type of teasing.<sup>14</sup> Teasing activities are being carried out here, which everyone present finds amusing. People communicate knowledge of one another in this way and thereby affirm their identity as part of the in-group. Within the in-group differences can be dealt with playfully and thereby receive acceptance. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to claim that politeness is being expressed toward David. The participants leave the domain of official face politics and playfully work on personal dimensions of the faces of those present.

The activities discussed in this subsection play with the rules of politeness. Their impoliteness potentials are, however, weak. Activities with a stronger potential for impoliteness are presented in the following subsection. However, the boundaries between politeness and impoliteness are fluid and vary individually and culturally.

## 8. Stronger Impoliteness Potentials

### *Datum 8 Conversation 9 Episode 1*

Helena (H), Anton (A), Sylvia (S), Fritz (F), Kilian (K), Beate (B), all participants at once (a)

Beate recounts that she has just found a new apartment in a house where Sylvia and Kilian Spörer (S, K) live, a couple also present in the group.

- 1 A: auf der (?        ??)  
on the (?        ??)
- 2 B: ('H) nee. Blaueggstraße, weißt Du, im Haus von (-) Spörers.  
( 'H) no. Blaueggstraße, you know, in the (-) Spörers' house.
- 3 K: ja zieh nur bei uns ein, dann=  
yes just move in with us, then=
- 4 S: =haben wir ein Babysitter (?    ?) schon.  
=do we have a babysitter (?    ?) already.
- 5 F: [HAHAHAHAHAHA]
- 6 H: [HAHAHAHAHAHA]
- 7 K: dann können wir auch  
then we can also
- 8        [mal abends ausgehen. HEHEHE  
[go out evenings sometimes.
- 9 S: [wir zahlen auch, wir zahlen auch über Tarif.  
[we also pay, we also pay more than the standard rate.
- 10 a: HEHEHEHEHEHE
- 11 K: ja genau.  
yes exactly.
- 12 F: nicht so wie in der Apotheke.  
not like at the pharmacy.
- 13 a: HAHAAHAHAHAHA
- 14 K: kannst die Arbeit auch mit heim nehmen.  
you can also take work home with you.
- 15 a: HAHAAHA [HAHAHA]
- 16 F:        [(?    ?) das Kind mit in die Apotheke nehmen.  
         [(?    ?) take the baby with you to the pharmacy.
- 17 a: HAHAAHAHA

Anton has not understood where Beate has found an apartment, and she explains this to him in line 2. Kilian then demands that she move in right away, and Sylvia immediately completes the justification of this demand. The couple expresses its interests in a duet. Their motives (obtaining a baby-sitter) are openly self-interested. The impoliteness consists precisely in this. Two persons laugh. The fact that Beate will soon live in their building is at once openly exploited by Kilian and Sylvia for their own interest. Kilian further clarifies their reason for wanting Beate to move into their house in lines 7 and 8 and thereby also increases the impoliteness. They apparently only look forward to Beate's moving in because they can then take advantage of her as a baby-sitter. Sylvia makes an offer in line 9 which is amusing because there is no *standard rate* of pay for baby-sitting. Above all line 12 evokes drawn-out laughter. Fritz now contrasts the mock-generous offer made by Sylvia to Beate with the usual practice at the pharmacy, which is thereby implied to be less than generous. The pharmacy belongs to Anton, and Beate works there part-time. Everyone laughs. Fritz makes a suggestion in line 16 which is far from being in Anton's interest. Anton is thereby included in the teasing. Even if the teasers and their objects change, the genre can still remain stable.

## 9. Threatening Jokes

Humorous activities, such as, e.g. "making fun of someone" or "teasing", as well as humorous sorties or sarcasm can be so impolite as to be experienced as unpleasant.

In Occidental philosophy a viewpoint has predominated according to which humor and laughter are regarded as expressions of aggression and superiority. Plato indicated in *Philebus* that laughter is usually evoked at the cost of others and has a malicious character (Piddington 1963:152). This view was also shared by Hobbes, who held that laughter expresses a sense of triumph over the weakness of another person. Finally, Freudian joke analysis also belongs to this tradition, for according to Freud, besides feelings of pleasure jokes also create feelings of superiority. In the joke, aggression can be disguised and thus circumvent the censoring super-ego. Although we do not accept this general view, occasionally examples are found which do tend to support such explanations.

In the next datum jokes are made at the cost of one person, whose brief reaction is ambiguous.

### *Datum 9 Conversation 16 Episode 2*

Alfred (A), Erika (E), Fritz (F), Gisela (G), Helmut (H), Nadine (N), Oskar (O), Susanne (S), Willi (W), all participants at the same time  
(a)

- 1 H: und eh da sehen wir dann (-) mit Spannung  
and we then see (-) with excited anticipation
- 2 a: HEHE[HEHEHEHE
- 3 H: [den Suser,<sup>15</sup> (-) wir haben jemanden der den  
[the new wine, (-) we have someone who
- 4 für die Erika mitbringen will, das haben wir  
wants to bring it along for Erika, we have
- 5 schon geklärt,  
already gone over that,
- 6 a: HEHEHEHEHEHEHE
- 7 H: den Suser, und den Zwiebelkuchen, [(? ?)=  
the new wine, and the onion cake, [(? ?)=
- 8 ? : [eh
- 9 H: =(den nehmen wir?) halt (1.0) entgegen.  
=(we take it?) simply (1.0).
- 10 S: tja. (0.5) hm.  
well. hm.
- 11 H: die Erika braucht nächste Woche gar nicht da zu  
Erika doesn't necessarily need to be there next week
- 12 sein unbedingt, wenn sie nicht will,  
at all, if she doesn't want to,
- 13 a: HEHE[HEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEHE
- 14 W: [(Hauptsache?) der Suser.  
[(main thing?) the new wine.

Helmut is arranging for people to bring refreshments to the next gathering following judo. He speaks in a festive modality (*and we then see with excited anticipation the new wine*) which has a comic effect created by formality expressed in an



informal context. The group laughs already after the word *Spannung* (*excited anticipation*). They see a provocative potential in Helmut's comments. Helmut announces that someone has offered to bring the new wine for Erika and that this has already been arranged. Everyone laughs. Erika knows nothing of these negotiations. She is thereby expected to pay for the new wine and onion cake which someone else is going to bring. This is so impertinent that it could be interpreted as extremely aggressive. In the group everyone is required to pay for the refreshments when their turn comes. Helmut has on his own initiative now singled out Erika as the one whose "turn" comes at the next get-together. As well here Erika, who is in fact present, is spoken of in the third person. In line 10 she reacts quite reservedly. Boisterous laughter breaks out after Helmut, in lines 11 and 12, announces that Erika *doesn't necessarily need to be there next week at all*. The impertinence is thereby increased. Willi nudges the impoliteness to a new peak: *main thing the new wine will be there* (14).

The group is being defined as one whose members are only concerned about eating and drinking. The participation of those who bear the costs is subordinated to this aim, an impoliteness which is, however, obviously regarded as amusing. Is the group laughing because it expects to benefit at the expense of Erika, who has been chosen as the target of aggression? If we had only this single episode, we might reach the interpretation that Erika is here the victim of malicious humor. In the context of the other humorous activities and the rest of the evening's entertainment, however, it is rather improbable that group members are laughing at Erika. They laugh at the pretended desire to take advantage of her. An important reason why the impertinent remarks are interpreted as playful is that the level of reality is often clearly departed from. But the jokes are certainly not polite to Erika. Erika's not protesting permits no inferences as to whether she is amused or simply does not want to show that she feels threatened by the mock challenge. By also laughing she displays openly that she can take Helmut's mockery "in stride". Whether this accords with her actual feelings cannot be determined by analyzing the conversational surface. Erika has stated on other occasions that she often finds Helmut's and Fritz' jokes too bold.

Here I would like to present a further datum only episodically. In datum 10 from conversation 17 (episode 3)<sup>16</sup> the proprietor (Charly) of a riding club bar amuses himself at the expense of a horse-groom (Benno). The former is seated at a table outside the premises with a few riding school students (Anne, Gertrud, Doris) and an acquaintance (Erwin), when he points out that not only he, but also Anne is out of cigarettes. Benno is a customer seated at the bar inside the establishment. Charly roars out Benno's name and demands that he bring him two packs of cigarettes. Benno mumbles an inaudible reply, and the owner repeats his

request. Benno then replies that he has understood. The owner repeats his demand, and Benno declines, using the word *ungern* (*not especially*), which provokes laughter from several of those present. Anne repeats Benno's term with an amused laugh. Charly pesters Benno a bit more, Gertrud also laughs, and Benno finally capitulates and brings the cigarettes. Everyone finds it amusing that the proprietor has made a customer serve him. Benno presumably does not find it amusing, however; no laughter is to be heard from him. Benno is a low man on the totem pole at the riding stall; the owner of the riding club bar is considerably higher in status. Conversely, it can hardly be imagined that in the presence of riding school students and acquaintances Benno would demand that Charly bring him a horse or anything else related to his work. The ethnographic background of the participants' social positions must be taken into account in any interpretation. This incident confirms Coser's (1960) finding that jokes and laughter reaffirm the status order, insofar as one is present.

A few minutes later the joke is elaborated on. Charly calls out again, assuming the manner of a customer, to Benno inside the bar, announcing that he, the owner, would like to have Benno pour him a vodka. Benno pretends not to understand and Charly orders him to *come here*. Gertrud takes pity on Benno, but also laughs. Doris then explains to Benno that Charly still wants a drink. Charly begins to formulate his wishes, but Benno adamantly refuses. Charly pesters him again. Benno asks what he is going to do about it, and Erich lets him know that he will get a kick in the balls (*eine in die Eier*) if he does not fetch the vodka at once. Several bystanders laugh. The remark is thereby defined as humorous, which, however, does not obviate the humiliating dimension. Benno responds nonchalantly (*that is just my bad luck — dann hab i halt Pech gehabt*). Everyone laughs at this. Charly then specifies precisely how many glasses he would like. Gertrud announces that she doesn't want any vodka for herself.

The exchange with Benno continues. The owner now demands the bottle of blood-orange vodka (*the red stuff — des rote Zeug*). Benno protests that *no one drinks it*. Erwin comments that he doesn't want any vodka either. Charly re-emphasizes that he still wants the bottle brought to him. Gertrud repeats that only four glasses are needed. Erwin laughs. Benno then gives in and fetches the vodka. Several persons laugh. He brings back a nearly empty bottle and says that *only two glasses are left* (*da bloß no zwei Stück drin sind*). Now Charly further expands the role reversal by demanding that Benno also fetch a fresh bottle from the walk-in cooler. Loud laughter ensues. Benno then yields, goes back inside, returns with the requested bottle, and the owner treats everyone to a glass of vodka on the house.



From this datum the feelings of the participants cannot be inferred. It is certainly false to evaluate laughter as always a sign of good will and acceptance. Gertrud's utterance makes it clear that everyone knew Benno was being made the butt of the joke here. Charly exploits his status superiority for comic effect throughout the episode. He gets away with this by doing it under the mantle of generosity. He wants after all to treat everyone, Benno included, to a glass of vodka. If he had only ordered Benno around for his sole personal benefit, his behavior would perhaps instead have provoked criticism. Benno plays along reluctantly. Perhaps he simply doesn't want to be regarded as a spoilsport.

#### 10. Concluding Remarks on Humorous Activities

The above-analyzed humorous activities are for the most part not polite, but rather to some extent even clearly impolite. Nevertheless the activities in data 1-8 seem not to threaten the relationships, but rather, to the contrary, to affirm and develop their informality and familiarity (even if at least temporarily sometimes unpleasant feelings can be expected). Politeness can be viewed in the sense of Zijdervelt as "institutionalized meaning". In humorous playing with institutionalized meanings a relational politics is pursued for which degrees of symmetry/asymmetry, sympathy/antipathy, formality/informality and person-orientation/position-orientation are significant. Playful use of negative and positive politeness, as we have seen in data 2 and 3, is also conceivable in formal relationships, whereas the humorous activities of data 4-8 are not. Interesting as well is that the threatening activities in data 9-10 are again conceivable in formal relationships, provided they are asymmetrical ones. Humorous impertinence tends to come from higher status persons.

Depending on the social relationship, impolite humorous utterances, whether teasing or ironic or even sarcastic, are received quite differently. Tannen (1993) has pointed to the dynamics of communicating power and solidarity. For example, in some contexts unsoftened expressions of will indicate the presence of a power differential, but in other contexts social relationships of equality and solidarity. The dynamics of power and solidarity, of symmetry and asymmetry and of formality/informality are important in humorous communication. In familiar, symmetrical relationships a departure from conventional politeness patterns communicates on a meta-level that the relationship is not dependent on demonstrated harmony and can also integrate differences. Norrick (1993) also points out that direct face threats among friends are usually automatically received as amusing, and not as awkward.

The comical impolitenesses in data 1 and 4-8 appear to create fun; they index reliance on sympathy, symmetry and person-orientation. In shared mirth the group



reacts as a group and thereby reproduces itself. Humorous communication is a form of "phatic communion" in Malinowski's sense (1923) or, formulated differently, Jakobson's "phatic function" of communication plays a role. Phaticity is indexical, since it always refers to relational values and is to this degree socially diagnostic.

Especially in datum 10 the proprietor, Charly, jokes at the cost of the subordinate riding stall employee, Benno. Adherents of a formal conversation analysis could only see this episode as proof that the "victim" ratifies the joke. I assert to the contrary that in the conversational data we are merely observing the cultural expectation that even in the case of aggressive jokes people will react good-naturedly. We can find forms of emotion-management in which emotions are possibly very well concealed.

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#### Notes

- 1 Thanks to James Stuart Brice for helping me with the English.
- 2 Because of space limits, familiarity with the work of Brown and Levinson must be assumed here. A critical discussion of the four models is found in Fraser (1990) and Held (1995).
- 3 Comicality is above all a product of reception (Jauß 1977), whereas humor has both a productive and receptive aspect. One can respond to almost anything as comical, as Freud already indicated in 1905. Once comicality is intentionally communicated, the boundaries between comicality and humor are blurred.
- 4 In sociology institutionalizations are all behavioral solidifications which make possible anticipative orientation.
- 5 See also Haiman (1990) for an excellent analysis of contextualization cues of irony, humor, and sarcasm as theater framings; unfortunately, he views all strategies of theater framing as sarcasm; I consider this reduction to be unjustified.
- 6 Kotthoff (1996b) provides an overview of the data. Each conversation of the corpus is numbered and also each humorous episode within every conversation. For the article, I use the same numbering to allow an identification of the episodes.
- 7 For Voloshinov (1926/1978) the textual incorporation of others' voices shows the polyphonic nature of texts. The sound of various voices of different protagonists is created by the speaker/author. See for animating others' voices in conversational parody Kotthoff (1996a).
- 8 Goffman's concept of interactional rituality is discussed in Kotthoff (1996b).
- 9 Robin Lakoff's early works (1973, 1976, 1979) show a similarly undialectical view of politeness. She formulated "rules of rapport" which she contrasted with the Gricean maxims, above all the clarity maxim (1979). This shows a far too norm-oriented understanding of the Gricean maxims. Lakoff developed all her theses introspectively and not on the basis of conversational data. She identified three styles of politeness to which she attributed effects (don't impose = distance; give options = deference; be friendly = camaraderie). Whether these styles can be

found in pure form remains an open question, and these effect attributions are very speculative. More recent works by Lakoff (1989) indicate a more flexible view of politeness phenomena.

- 10 Impolite relational work can occur, for example, when friends confront one another with a helpful intention. Friendships, at least according to our Western (German?) ideology, involve not just exchanges of ritual pleasantries, but as well integrate problem conversations, disputes and critique. Lakoff (1989) discusses court interactions and therapeutic discourse as examples of impoliteness. Therapeutic discourse, however, is not as restricted to institutions as Lakoff implies. Everyday conversations among friends can assume therapeutic features if, e.g., the image of a person is not confirmed by her/his friends, because this image has proved to be a dangerous construction which is harmful for the friend. Honesty can be globally relationship affirming and simultaneously locally impolite and wounding. Great cultural differences are certainly the case here. In the course of the conversations in my corpus I find various such phases of open confrontations of problems in the sense of therapeutic interventions.
- 11 I find the term "tact" problematic for general relational work, since ethnosemantically it is too close to the concept of "politeness". The term "politic behavior" also implies a high degree of conventionalization and is therefore likewise unsuitable (it could be confused with "diplomatic behavior"). I prefer the concepts of "face-work", "relational work" and "relational politics" as opposed to politeness.
- 12 Lavandera (1988:1201) criticizes the "tyranny of conflict" inherent in B&L's notion of politeness which is only applicable when there is a threat; see also Held 1995 on this critique.
- 13 See also Haiman (1990) on this phenomenon.
- 14 See on this phenomenon of lateral address Strachle (1993) and Günthner (1996).
- 15 A local expression for "new wine".
- 16 The transcript can be found in Kotthoff (1996b).

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