

5. Interpersonal relations II

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.229.07ch5>

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(In)Appropriate Online Behavior: A pragmatic analysis of message board relations

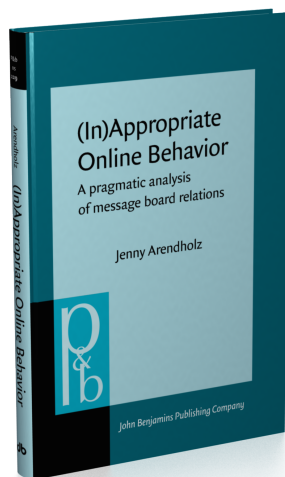
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[Pragmatics & Beyond New Series, 229] 2013. xiii, 285 pp.

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Interpersonal relations II

Putting (*im*)politeness in an integrative perspective

5.1 Introduction

Still in search for a viable definition and way of approaching the notion of *politeness*, this chapter delves into present-day discussions of politeness, thereby focusing on the so-called postmodern approaches. More importantly, though, it aims to see the bigger picture of interpersonal relations by treating politeness for what it is, namely as one ingredient of a comprehensive framework of several related phenomena. In feeling out said framework, this chapter will also lead us to the “dark side” (Austin 1990) of interpersonal relations and to the realm of impoliteness.

Admittedly defined rather vaguely, *postmodernism* is used as an umbrella term for those approaches which are “grounded in a broadly constructionist position on the nature of reality” (Haugh 2007: 297), including, of course, the dynamic endeavor of creating meaning. It is thus out of the question to perceive language use and especially politeness in terms of the infamous conduit metaphor (cf. Reddy 1979), where ready-made linguistic end products are encoded by the speaker, transported and decoded by the hearer. As human communication is far more complex than that, there can be no such thing as ready-made end products, which are transported mechanically and unambiguously to our interlocutors, especially not when it comes to the construction of meaning (cf. Arundale 2006: 195; Bublitz 2009: 40ff.). Viewed from a postmodern perspective, advocated by pragmaticians such as Eelen (2001), O’Driscoll (2001), Watts (2003, 2005), Locher (2004, 2006a, b), Locher/Watts (2005, 2008) as well as by Spencer-Oatey (1993, 2002, 2005, 2007), politeness is apprehended as evolving and emerging dynamically during interaction. As the following example illustrates, all conversational action is – as Arundale (2006, 2010) calls it – “conjointly co-constituted”:

[A]ssume a first speaker utters “That’s a nice jumper”. If the second utters “You can’t borrow it”, the two together interactively achieve operative interpretations of the first utterance as a request. If the second speaker were to say “Thanks”, the two would conjointly co-constitute operative interpretations of the first utterance as a compliment. (2006: 196)

In the following, politeness as well as impoliteness are put in perspective, this time, however, from an integrative and discursive point of view. In order to do so, Locher/Watts' (2005) framework of relational work will be at the center of attention.

5.2 A working definition of *politeness*

Nothing will ever fix the reference of "politeness" to human behavior once and for all. (Sell ²2005: 113)

Why should one select a statement as daunting and as discouraging as Sell's introductory quote as the starting point for a chapter which intends to do just the seemingly impossible, finding a definition for a quality of interaction which is subject to change through time and across cultural space? The answer is rather simple: because he is right. As will be shown in the following, the search for a consensual definition of a term as complex as politeness is bound to fail, which is why we can at most find a tailor-made, approximate working definition³⁹ to serve as a basis for the targeted analysis of interpersonal relations in the online message board at hand.

The search for a definition of politeness is intertwined with a major methodological decision: Either we approach the notion of politeness with a purely abstract model in mind, hoping for the emergence of some universally valid mechanisms, which can be applied to each and every particular instance. In the worst case, however, such an abstract model yields findings that are so general that they will only be of a limited informative value. Alternatively, we dispense with a heightened degree of abstraction in favor of an investigation of a reduced set of individual cases. Although findings are far from universally valid, they are still significant and informative, at least for the limited scope of investigation. It is indeed the latter course of action that will be picked for the empirical analysis of this study.

This methodological predicament is partly mirrored, and most of all named, in Watts et al.'s (²2005) differentiation between *first-order politeness* and *second-order politeness* – a dichotomy which was later taken up by Eelen (2001), who termed it *politeness₁* and *politeness₂*. Watts et al. explain that the "pursuit of universals will necessarily involve us in second-order concepts, whereas the investigation into politeness in individual cultural frameworks will almost inevitably involve

39. See Watts (2003: 51f.) for an interesting discussion concerned with the definition of politeness based on an exhaustive compilation of numerous previous definitions.

first-order concepts” (2005: 4). Accordingly, first-order politeness focuses on a common-sense, folk, or lay understanding and evaluation of social behavior as politeness and deals with questions such as “How do members of the community perceive and classify action in terms of politeness?” (Kasper 1997: 375). Second-order politeness, on the other hand, is an abstract, theoretical construct within a top-down model of language usage (Watts et al. 2005: 3). Note that only the latter direction involves claims of universality.

In pursuing a first-order approach to politeness, researchers can only hope to find sporadic testimony of interlocutors’ individual, atomistic, group-specific evaluative snapshots in current situations on which to base their theorizing. As only those basic tendencies are in fact tangible and hence suitable starting points for investigations, I agree with Watts,⁴⁰ who points out that “investigating first-order politeness is the only valid means of developing a social theory of politeness [because] second-order politeness should concern itself with the discursive struggle over first-order politeness” (2003: 9). In this sense, observations from the domain of first-order politeness can at least give some indication of the concept of second-order politeness. Only this way can social scientists avoid lifting the term *politeness* out of the realm of everyday discourse and elevate it to the status of a theoretical concept. Based on some evaluative specimens, researchers still tried – and failed – to abstract away from them in search of a second-order grip on politeness. This failure can be chalked up to the fact that

the first thing we would have to do is to find ways of isolating across cultures all those strategies, verbal as well as nonverbal, that construct, regulate and reproduce forms of cooperative social interaction – an obviously impossible task.

(Watts 2003: 49)

For this reason, the focus of research must be and has always been, consciously or not, on first-order politeness because the only thing we can actually do is to study how individuals evaluate and struggle over first-order politeness. In so doing, native speakers rely very much on the “feel for the game” (Watts 2003: 75), which they develop continuously through the participation in a wide variety of interactions. Clearly, this kind of culturally determined experience evades being wrapped into rules.

Following Locher/Watts’ advice “to take native speaker assessments of politeness seriously and to make them the basis of a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness” (2005: 16), a first explorative analysis of the corpus material at hand (cf. Section 7.2) proves insightful in terms of participants’ explicit

40. In this context, Watts makes it perfectly clear that his 2003 monograph is to be understood as a “radical rejection of politeness,” (2003: 11).

first-order conceptions of politeness. In addition to the code of conduct described in Section 3.3.2, this procedure provides the second clue to message board users' understanding of this particular term – or at least to some of the evaluative snapshots mentioned above. It is, however, hardly surprising that lexemes such as *polite* or *impolite* are very rarely if ever explicitly used for evaluations of interactants' behavior (cf. Watts 2003:218). Indeed, only six instances of users mentioning the lexemes *polite* or *politeness* at all in the entire corpus (my emphasis) could be found:

- (1) [...] a massive change from the kind-hearted, polite boy he was when I knew him not so long ago [...] (cpj1987, thread #10: post 47)
- (2) [...] If I walk past someone in the street and we make eye contact then I smile out of politeness, regardless of their gender – its jsut a friendly gesture. (doodle7, thread #14: post 5)
- (3) [...] i think if there are two people walking past each other on a lonely street its awkward *not* to smile or look at each other! so usually its just out of politeness or being friendly id say. (Jdizzle09, thread #14: post 44)
- (4) [...] The guy at Chicago was perfectly polite, if a little fed up (but who wouldn't be doing that job?). [...] The guy at LAX when I went in 2005 was really polite, so it's a mixed bag in that respect. [...] (JSS16, thread #26: post 81)
- (5) [...] I'm not insecure, I don't even know who you are, I just don't really see any reason why I need to be especially polite or civil towards you. [...] (bete noire, thread #42: post 58)
- (6) [...] After months of me waiting to get a reply I emailed them asking what was taking so long (fairly politely) only to be told that [...] (LastLordofTime, thread #47: post 25)

In most of these examples, the search terms are used to describe actions (example (6)) or persons (examples (1) and (4)) within a user's narration of events – unfortunately without letting us know, why these actions and persons deserved the label *polite*. Since examples (2) and (3) give at least one instance of politeness (smiling when walking past someone on the street), we learn about these users' assessments of these specific situations. The third and the fifth example are interesting insofar as *polite* is mentioned in the same breath as *being friendly* and *civil*. The author of example five even explicitly doubts the necessity of the two qualities for Internet exchanges.

As predicted, we cannot learn nearly enough from these scarce examples to deduce a first-order definition of politeness in this CoP. Two conclusions must be

drawn from this first empirical endeavor, which are also mirrored in the analytical setup in Chapter 8. (1) More often than not, we are lacking explicit participants' evaluations, which is why we need to take the dyad of the communicating partners as the minimum unit of analysis and focus on complete series of moves and counter-moves. Only this way can we hope to witness a discursive struggle over (first-order) politeness and related phenomena. Although we will definitely keep our eyes open for explicit evaluations, interlocutors' implicit reactions will be assigned a prominent, since hopefully expressive role in this process. (2) For those cases, in which hearer reactions are not as revealing as expected, we should take back-up measures and pursue a second-order line of argumentation for a consistent evaluation of politeness from an outside perspective. To avoid entering the empirical analysis empty-handedly, I propose the following second-order working definition of politeness, which tries to capture this opaque phenomenon the best way possible:

From the speaker's perspective, politeness is rational because purposeful (non-) linguistic behavior, which (un)consciously aims at maintaining social order by showing consideration for others. Based on experience, it exhibits an individualistic and mental nature. From a social perspective, it is negotiated collaboratively in concrete interaction. Strongly dependent on contextual factors, politeness must be considered an evaluative and instable notion.

In a nutshell, being polite means reciprocally showing "consideration for others, often at the expense of one's own interests" (Watts 2003:31), but always with a view to successful present, sometimes even future interaction. Thus, for the time of the actual exchange, participants pursue a common (communicative) goal. They do so either unconsciously by means of ritualized, fixed expressions, or, alternatively, by deploying politeness creatively and idiosyncratically, often in a deliberate and goal-oriented fashion. In any scenario, politeness can be transmitted through a wide range of communication channels, with language being only one such channel.

5.3 Locher/Watts' comprehensive framework of interpersonal relations

In fact, politeness is not the only discursively constructed entity, which arises out of actual interaction. The same holds true for related notions such as *impoliteness*, *over-politeness* and the like, which is why Locher/Watts (2005) propose a comprehensive framework of what they call *relational work*. It incorporates the entire spectrum of interpersonal relations, yet tries to set its components apart from each other. Before we can, however, delve into the inner make-up of this

framework, the very notion of *relational work* needs defining. According to Locher/Watts, it is

the ‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others. Human beings rely crucially on others to be able to realize their life goals and aspirations, and as social beings they will naturally orient themselves towards others in pursuing these goals. (2005: 10)

Three years later, Locher/Watts specify their initial definition insofar as relational work includes “all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice” (2008: 96). It is no coincidence that this definition is reminiscent of Goffman’s notion of facework. In fact, Locher/Watts are very clear about the fact that Goffman’s work in general and his idea of face in particular (see Section 4.3.2) is the driving force behind their own approach.⁴¹ Locher even goes as far as using the terms *relational work* and *facework* synonymously, claiming that the “process of defining relationships in interaction is called *face-work or relational work*” (Locher 2004: 51). In this regard, I beg to differ. Though it is certainly true that both notions are dependent on negotiation processes, are always present in any form of socio-communicative encounter and are definitely intertwined, they still differ in terms of their focal point. In retrospect to Goffman’s original definition of facework as “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face” (1967: 12), interlocutors orient to each others’ faces and negotiate face claims. Then again relational work, true to its name, foregrounds the negotiation of present and future relationships between individuals (cf. O’Driscoll 2011 for the related differentiation between *face* and *politeness*).

Among the string of nouns used in their second definition to relational work, one strikes as particularly characteristic of Locher/Watts’ integrative approach. As a matter of fact, the noun *transformation* hints to the fact that relational work is not only oriented to the maintenance of harmony, cooperation, and social equilibrium (2005: 11). Quite to the contrary relational work also touches on the flip side of the coin, as it “comprises the entire continuum of verbal behavior from direct, impolite, rude or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction, encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate forms of social behavior” (Locher 2004: 51). While Brown/Levinson distinguish between polite and impolite behavior, the umbrella term *relational work* clearly subsumes a much wider panoply of

41. Although Locher/Watts (2008: 96) mention that they also include Brown/Levinson’s perspective on face in their understanding of relational work, they do not give any detail on how they understand these two concepts of face to be actually united (but see Section 4.4).

Table 5. Framework of *relational work* (Locher/Watts 2005: 12, adapted)

Relational work			
negatively marked	unmarked	positively marked	negatively marked
impolite	non-polite	polite	over-polite
inappropriate	appropriate ⁴²	appropriate	inappropriate

forms of negotiating interpersonal relations. The focus is thus widened far beyond the fuzzy limitations of politeness, which is now seen as one cog in the wheel within the larger framework of relational work as outlined in Table 5. As indicated in the first horizontal row, Locher/Watts differentiate between unmarked and (positively or negatively) marked behavior. It is marked negatively in those cases where it appears to be inappropriate in the eyes of the interlocutors (see last horizontal row). Participants can come to this negative evaluation when they perceive their interlocutor's behavior to be downright impolite (see the first column) or over-polite (see the last column).⁴³ On the other hand, positively marked behavior, as displayed in the black-rimmed column, strikes as being distinctly polite and hence appropriate. Locher/Watts (2005: 14), however, distinguish very carefully between this type of appropriate behavior and a second one: As indicated in the second column, unmarked behavior also counts as appropriate, although non-polite behavior. To illustrate this distinction, Watts (2003: 257) invokes the following scenario:

Imagine that you have booked two tickets to see a play and that they are numbered P51 and P52. Twenty minutes before the play is due to begin you locate row P and move along it to seats 51 and 52 only to find that someone else is already sitting there. What is the appropriate mode of behaviour in this situation?

Watts (*ibid.*) lists several options for verbally calling attention to the fact that those sitting in seats P51 and P52 must have made a mistake:

42. As a synonym for the term *appropriate*, Watts (2003: 19) proposes the term *politic* to label interlocutor's evaluations of "[I]nguistic behavior which is perceived to be appropriate to the social constraints of the ongoing interaction, i.e. as non-salient". Although he sees an advantage in this second-order concept "precisely because it is not in common usage and indexes a wide variety of forms of social behavior that include but are broader than what might be referred to in lay terms as POLITE" (2005: xlii), the notion will be rejected for this study.

43. Since both of these two types of relational work have the same effect in terms of the interlocutor's evaluation, Watts (2005: xliii) represents the same content in a circular shape in which both ends of Table 5 actually meet. The advantage of this form of representation is obvious: Impolite and over-polite behavior appear right next to each other, indicating their relatedness.

Excuse me. I think you're sitting in our seats.
 Excuse me but those are our seats.
 I'm sorry. I think there must be some mistake.
 I'm sorry, but are you sure you've got the right seats?

All of these four statements seem to be appropriate to resolve this situation. Whether one or all of them can also be considered polite, is, however, totally open to discussion. In this case, I side with Watts, who argues that we are dealing with cases of unmarked, non-polite/appropriate behavior which "can be expected in this type of situation [since] there's not much else you *can* say in" (Watts 2003: 257, original emphasis). Let us not forget, though, that all kinds of indirect speech acts, such as "How strange, you seem to have the same tickets as we." offer lots of creative alternatives to Watts' utterances.

A differentiation between these two types of appropriate behavior is called for, since a great deal of relational work actually is of an unmarked nature and goes largely unnoticed (Locher/Watts 2005: 11). Non-polite behavior thus encompasses all those instances of appropriate behavior which do not excel through being explicitly polite. As a consequence, the scope of politeness is limited considerably. Summarizing the most important insight of their distinction, Locher/Watts affirm that "polite behavior is always [appropriate] while [appropriate] behavior can also be non-polite" (2005: 12). In other words, not everything that is appropriate in a certain situation necessarily earns the label *polite*. For an utterance to be estimated as *polite*, there must be a certain excess or surplus, which lets it stand out positively in contrast to other appropriate utterances and which encompasses behavior that is perceived to be more than is socially required. For obvious reasons, this perspective has been termed the *surplus approach to politeness* repeatedly (cf. Kasper 1990; Locher 2004; Watts ²2005).

Viewed from this perspective, many of Brown/Levinson's strategies of positive and negative politeness need to be assigned to the category of non-polite/appropriate rather than polite/appropriate behavior. This includes the use of terms of address, honorifics, indirect speech acts and many other forms of ritualized expressions, which are a fixed part of conversations and are thus routinely expected by participants. Since this canonical and institutionalized behavior does not constitute a conversational surplus, it should not count as explicitly polite either – even if that means breaking with traditional evaluations.

Despite their seemingly clear-cut distinction of types of relational work, the two authors do not leave unstated the fact that "there can be no objectively definable boundaries between these categories" (2005: 12), and

[t]he points at which speakers perceive [appropriate] behavior to be 'polite' may, and certainly do, vary considerably from speaker to speaker, from community

of practice to community of practice and even from one situational context to another in the case of individual speakers. (Watts 2005: xliii)

This holds, of course, also true for the differentiation between other neighboring – or even distant – concepts within Locher/Watts' chart, such as the one between polite and over-polite behavior. Watts et al. (2005:8) elucidate this particular distinction with a rather unambiguous and hence convenient example of a request: While an utterance such as "Would you please close the window?" clearly minimizes a potential FTA, the utterance "Do you think I could possibly prevail upon you to close the window?" does not minimize the FTA any further, as one might expect, but, on the contrary, begins to have the opposite effect. In this case, less is clearly more, which is why "[o]ver-politeness is often perceived as negative exactly because it exceeds the boundary between appropriateness and inappropriateness" (Locher 2004: 90). Although these two context-deprived utterances can serve as examples for polite vs. over-polite behavior respectively, this does not eliminate the possibility for the exact same utterances to be evaluated differently in another context by other participants. This means that predicting evaluations, even those of close friends, is virtually impossible since they are based on norms and standards, which have been accumulated individually in a lifelong process.

Then how come that communication – despite potential evaluative gaps between interlocutors' perceptions of interpersonal behavior – can still work out smoothly at all? Apparently, the intersection between interlocutors' evaluations, i.e. their common ground, must be big enough to avoid communicative breakdowns – at least in regular, everyday encounters, with exceptions surely proving the rule. Obviously, when judging the appropriateness of utterances, we seem to possess similar expectations, not only as receivers of (non)verbal behavior but also as their producers. In this regard, we can anticipate which reactions, i.e. evaluations, are expected from us (as receivers) and which reactions, i.e. evaluations, we can expect (as producers) (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007). These two directions of the cognitive interplay between expectations and evaluations are depicted in Figure 14. Although this deductive process theoretically works for both producing and receiving participants, postmodern approaches stress the primacy of the hearer. In Figure 14, this is indicated through the diverging intensities of the two arrows, suggesting the preferred (right) reading path.

The similarity of our expectations, or rather the willingness to counterbalance diverging expectations, can be ascribed to interlocutors' basic human needs of association (see Section 4.3.1), which prompt them to behave in such a way that they are liked and considered as rightful members of their peer group. As a consequence, we can assume that communities of practice must possess certain norms for appropriate behavior, among them the code of conduct of TSR (see

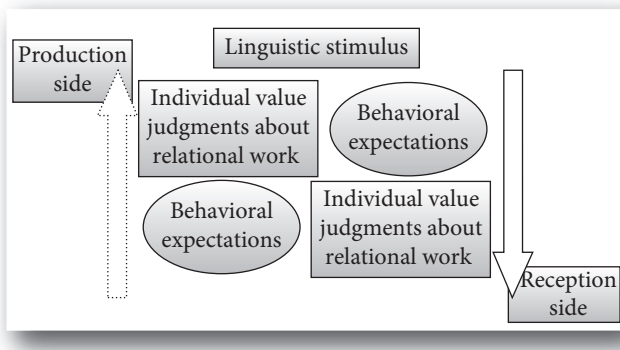


Figure 14. Cognitive processes of individual value judgments about relational work

Section 3.3.2), which members knowingly and willingly follow. This adherence to group specific norms, which mirrors the desire to conform to the expectations of a particular reference group, “engenders a structure and predictability which results in a considerable saving of energy in everyday life and can be viewed as serving the goal of something akin to social harmony and perhaps even survival” (Meier 1995: 352).

As underlying frames of knowledge and social norms re-enter the scope of scientific interest concerning interpersonal relations, the social norm view (see Section 4.2) celebrates a comeback – at least to some extent. Werkhöfer sees a need in coupling postmodern approaches with prepragmatic ones when he explains that

the modern view is biased towards a one-sided individualism [with] difficulties arising [...] from the corresponding neglect of social dimensions [which] tend to be overlooked or grossly underestimated by the adherents of this view. [A]ll versions of this view either neglect social realities completely or, adopting a remarkably simplistic, traditional approach, reduce them to only a small set of vaguely defined dimensions which are then relegated to a secondary status [...].

(²2005: 157)

He concludes that while “neither of them [traditional and modern approach] can completely be rejected, neither of them is also fully acceptable” (ibid.). Thus, both perspectives should not be considered as rivaling alternatives but as complementing each other. To this end, Chapter 6 will fathom contextual factors, which may be influential for message board users’ expectations and evaluations.

5.4 Impoliteness: The neglected stepbrother of politeness

To completely cover Locher/Watts' framework, we still need to have a close look at the other half of the model of relational work, which encompasses types of negatively marked and thus inappropriate behavior, labeled *over-politeness* and *impoliteness*. Since over-polite behavior is usually regarded as "a less than optimal application of politeness patterns which in principle are perfectly acceptable in a given language or culture" (Kienpointner 1997:257), it is clearly of a different quality than impolite behavior *per se*. The latter needs to be dealt with in more detail, especially so since it is part of a regular terminological jumble which is used to designate various types of inappropriate behavior. While Culpeper (1996) uses the term *impoliteness*, we can also find *rudeness* (Kienpointner 1997), *aggravating language* (Lachenicht 1980), *face attack acts* (Austin 1990) and, in the field of CMC, *flaming*, in scientific discourse.

For a long time, research in the field of impoliteness⁴⁴ seemed to have been overshadowed by the omnipresent notion of politeness; in fact, it almost appeared to be treated as its neglected stepbrother (cf. Locher 2011). Although impoliteness is mentioned every now and then in most of the leading approaches to politeness, the focus was nevertheless on the more popular of the two siblings, politeness. Culpeper et al. summarize a common rationale to explain this lack of attention by stating that "an impoliteness framework is unnecessary, since Brown/Levinson's (1987) politeness framework already postulates a category, bald on record, which accommodates 'impolite' phenomena" (2003: 1547). But as there are what Culpeper et al. call "maximally offensive examples" (2003: 1548) that fall outside the specific contexts of bald on record strategies, the idea that Brown/Levinson's category could adequately encompass all kinds of impoliteness phenomena needs to be rejected.

This sustained lack of interest for impoliteness is also astonishing considering the fact that negatively marked behavior was always assumed to be easier to detect than behavior which conforms to politeness norms (cf. Mills 2002; Watts 2003). Still, merely a handful of approaches primarily dealing with impoliteness (and rudeness) is worth mentioning, a rather moderate number of publications compared to the vast amount of literature in politeness research. As impoliteness was hastily dismissed as a by-product of or a deviation from politeness, unworthy of being treated as an autonomous field of research, scientific approaches inadequately tried to explain impoliteness in terms of politeness, either by making use

44. Note that the notion of impoliteness is used here as a hyperonym for inappropriate behavior in general and thus includes various subtypes which will be dealt with in more detail in the course of this chapter.

of models and methods which were originally designed for a completely different phenomenon or by deriving models for the description of impoliteness from politeness models. As Eelen points out,

the concepts involved can never explain impoliteness in the same way or to the same extent as they explain politeness. So the bias towards the analysis of politeness is not just a matter of differential attention, it goes far deeper than that: it is a conceptual, theoretical, structural matter. It is not so much quantitative, but rather a qualitative problem. (2001: 104)

This way of proceeding can be exemplified with the help of three approaches, which take politeness, or, to be more precise, Brown/Levinson's model of politeness as a starting point for the classification of impoliteness:

"Aggravating language – a study of abusive and insulting language"

Lachenicht's (1980) approach⁴⁵ investigates what he calls *aggravating language*, which he studies "as a rational attempt to hurt or damage the addressee" (1980:607) and which can be "performed with various degrees of intention to hurt" (1980:613).⁴⁶ This hurt can be induced by two types of aggravation, which allude to Brown/Levinson's dichotomy of face in a rather obvious way:

Negative Aggravation: an aggravation strategy that is designed to impose on the addressee, to interfere with his freedom of action, and to attack his social position and the basis of his social action.

Positive Aggravation: an aggravation strategy that is designed to show the addressee that he is not approved of, is not esteemed, does not belong, and will not receive cooperation. (1980:619)

The center piece of Lachenicht's paper is his modification of Brown/Levinson's theoretical system (see Section 4.3.1), to which he adds another branch, thereby extending it to abusive language (see Table 6). In line with Brown/Levinson, this adapted model takes FTAs as a starting point and assumes that they can be modified – the only difference being that modifications can lead not only to the weakening of their face-threatening potential (*with mitigation*, which corresponds to Brown/Levinson's category *with redressive action*) but also to their strengthening (*with aggravation*). The extra branch, containing *positive and negative aggravation*,

45. For a detailed critique of Lachenicht's model, dealing, among others, with the authenticity of his data and the selectivity between positive and negative aggravation, see Culpeper et al. (2003).

46. As will become obvious later in this chapter, Lachenicht's concept of aggravation equals with the notion of *rudeness*.

Table 6. Lachenicht's strategies to modify FTAs (1980:621, my emphasis)

Greatest				
Weight of FTA after modification	Do FTA	On Record (1) Off Record (0) Don't do the FTA	With aggravation Without modification With mitigation	(6) Negative Aggravation (5) Positive Aggravation (4) Bald-On-Record (3) Positive Politeness (2) Negative Politeness
Least				

is added right above the familiar bald-on-record strategy to indicate the severity of the FTA's impact (mirrored also by the increasing numbers). Additionally, Lachenicht designates Brown/Levinson's bald-on-record and off-record strategies to serve as possible aggravation strategies.

To illustrate his own two concepts, positive and negative aggravation, he deliberately copies Brown/Levinson's course of action and provides an extensive compilation of linguistic strategies which can be used separately or in a combined way to aggravate face. Yet he hints that the "final realization of the superstrategy need not always be verbal [but] may consist of gifts, punches, reassuring smiles, raised eyebrows, gestures, and the tone of voice" (1980:622), thus indicating that "the range of techniques that may be employed far exceeds the bounds of linguistics" (1980:680).

"Politeness revisited – the dark side"

Another approach referring back to Brown/Levinson's taxonomy is presented by Austin (1990). Contrary to Lachenicht, she regards the construction of a model which attempts to impose a taxonomic structure as a futile endeavor (1990:291) – still she relies on Brown/Levinson's superstrategies. Without questioning them, she claims that they are multi-functional in that "[f]ace attack is often, in fact, an application of the same principles which are used for face preservation; and many of the strategies for the one can be co-opted for the other" (1990:277). By *face attack acts*, Austin means "those communicative acts which are injurious to the hearer's positive or negative face, and are introduced in a situation which could have been avoided, but where their inclusion is perceived by the hearer to be intentional" (1990:279). As will be seen later on, face attack acts fit the description of rudeness.

For utterances to be interpreted "on the dark side", contexts were regarded as decisive – an insight which is the outstanding feature of her paper. Above that, she

specifically stresses the role of hearers, thus concentrating her analyses more on their part – definitely a step in the right direction.

“Towards an anatomy of impoliteness”

A similar, yet more elaborate attempt to modify Brown/Levinson’s classic model for the sake of inappropriate behavior is presented by Culpeper (1996). In order to draft “an anatomy of impoliteness”, he does not extend Brown/Levinson’s original model, but literally turns it upside down. He assumes that each of their politeness superstrategies has its opposite impoliteness superstrategy – meaning that impoliteness superstrategies are opposite in terms of orientation to face, which are thus means of attacking face instead of enhancing or supporting face (1996:356). What is more, Culpeper also adopts Brown and Levinson’s formula for assessing the weightiness of an FTA: “The greater the imposition of the act, the more powerful and distant the other is, the more face-damaging the act is likely to be” (1996:357). Culpeper therefore invokes the following five strategies, which do not necessarily have to occur singularly but can be mixed:

1. *Bald on record impoliteness*: the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised. It is important to distinguish this strategy from Brown and Levinson’s Bald on record [...] where little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.
2. *Positive impoliteness*: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s positive face wants.
3. *Negative impoliteness*: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s negative face wants.
4. *Sarcasm or mock-politeness*: the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.
5. *Withhold politeness*: the absence of politeness work where it would be expected (e.g. failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness). (1996:356f., 2005:41, my emphasis)

This clearly needs elaboration as obviously, some politeness strategies cannot be turned around to create impoliteness strategies that easily. While it works quite well with *positive* and *negative politeness/impoliteness* by employing a diametrically opposite set of (negative) instructions (e.g. “seek disagreement” or “invade the other’s space”), the *bald on record*-strategy poses the first problem. This time, the strategy as such remains untouched, since – as some have argued before – it already is an impoliteness strategy. Instead, and thus diverging from Brown/Levinson’s original model, the contextual conditions are turned upside down here, as there is a danger to face now.

The fourth strategy resembles Brown/Levinson's *off record*-strategy insofar as the FTA is performed in a veiled, indirect way. But contrary to the original, Culpeper proposes the use of insincere politeness (and not rhetoric figures) to be deliberately hurtful (and not mitigate an FTA). As Culpeper's understanding of sarcasm strongly resembles Leech's view of irony, Culpeper (1996: 356) refers back to Leech's definition of the Irony Principle (IP): "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the [Politeness Principle, see Section 4.2], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature" (1983: 82). On the interplay of the IP and the PP, Leech (1983: 142) later expands as follows:

Apparently, then, the IP is *dys*-functional: if the PP promotes a bias towards comity rather than conflict in social relations, the IP, by enabling us to bypass politeness, promotes the 'antisocial' use of language. We are ironic at someone's expense, scoring off others by politeness that is obviously insincere, as a substitute for impoliteness.

Consequently, politeness can be used in an inappropriate fashion. For this reason, the result of the IP is "the opposite of social harmony that is supposed to be promoted through Brown and Levinson's Off record politeness" (Culpeper 1996: 357). Since irony is normally used for enjoyment and comity, Culpeper replaces Leech's notion of irony with sarcasm (or mock-politeness), which is supposed to cause social disharmony – a fact which is actually stated in Leech's definition of irony as well!⁴⁷ Culpeper then goes on declaring sarcasm (and mock-politeness) as the opposite of banter (and mock-impoliteness, see 5.6), since the latter two usually cause social harmony (ibid.). With reference to Locher/Watts' integrative model, Culpeper's mock-politeness could therefore be regarded as a case of over-polite and thus inappropriate behavior, which is not used accidentally but strategically. Last but not least, *withhold politeness*, as the last of Culpeper's five strategies, seems to be the appropriate counterpart for the classic politeness strategy *withhold the FTA*.

Emulating Brown/Levinson's model even further – and consequently attracting the same points of criticism –, Culpeper (ibid.) also gives a provisional list of output strategies for *positive* and *negative impoliteness*. Accordingly, he issues a warning to remind his readership that this list is clearly not exhaustive, as strategies always depend upon an appropriate context to be impolite and can also be

47. The distinction between (harmonious) ironic and (disharmonious) sarcastic rudeness, which is based on the underlying intention of speakers rather than the surface form of potentially ironic or sarcastic utterances, is also shared by Kasper (1990: 210f.) and Kienpointner (1997: 263).

conveyed by paralinguistic and non-verbal means such as the avoidance of eye-contact or shouting (Culpeper 1996: 358).

As the three short overviews have proven, it is not necessarily easy to describe inappropriate behavior based on a model designed for politeness, as strategies cannot be adopted par for par. To my knowledge, attempts to do so have only taken recourse to Brown/Levinson's model, consequently inheriting a lot of its flaws and shortcomings. It is thus little surprising that such courses of action did not only result in descriptively inadequate comments on impoliteness, to say the least (Eelen 2001; Culpeper et al. 2003; Bousfield 2008), but above that, impoliteness also ran the risk of being discredited as "the parasite of politeness" (Culpeper 1996: 355). Accordingly, and also true to the corresponding word formation process behind it, impoliteness was simply regarded as the polar opposite of politeness. An admittedly naïve equation based on an extremely oversimplified notion of politeness could therefore read as follows: impoliteness is attributed to the non-adherence or even the deliberate and conscious violation of socially sanctioned rights and obligations of politeness, like the lack of particles such as *please*, *thank you*, and *sorry* when expected by interlocutors in a particular situation. Back in 1973, Lakoff agreed with this premature point of view in arguing that impoliteness was simply the absence of politeness and a form of "plain speaking". Beside the fact that we do not know what exactly Lakoff considers to be "absence" of politeness, this assessment strongly contradicts with insights gained through Locher/Watts' classification of relational work (see 5.3): A "lack of politeness" in whatever form does not automatically equal with impolite and inappropriate behavior, but might just as well be considered as non-polite and perfectly appropriate behavior. The polar perspective thus cannot be upheld.

Regarding politeness as the norm and rudeness as "merely pragmatic failure at achieving that norm" (Beebe 1995: 156) needs to be discarded as a simplistic myth as well. A closer look into the matter easily proves that impoliteness is just as multi-faceted as politeness. A by all means perfect example to illustrate that point is presented by Beebe (1995: 161): In a busy New York restaurant, a group of people were repeatedly asked by different waiters if they would care to order. As they had made it plain that they intended to have a discussion over lunch and would therefore take their time over their meal, the attentiveness of the waiters "seemed to reflect a desire on the part of the waiters to get it over with, not a policy regarding length of stay, a lack of communication among waiters, or a problem with crowding, so it was viewed as rude". This scenario proves the point that "pushy politeness", as Beebe termed this special instance of over-politeness, is most probably evaluated as a case of negatively marked behavior. Beebe concludes that impoliteness is *not* automatically a failure to be polite, but that it can,

on the contrary, also be a matter of tactic motivation and thus in fact “a reflection of pragmatic competence” (1995: 154) for the achievement of certain aims in a conversation. Impoliteness is thus non-cooperative but still (mostly) rational behavior.

5.5 Distinguishing types of inappropriate behavior:

Impoliteness vs. rudeness

The remarkable terminological haziness between the two concepts of *impoliteness* and *rudeness* has often been tried to be explained away with respect to speakers' intentions. Terkourafi, for example, remarks that “[p]inning down the speaker's intention plays a decisive role for charting one's subsequent course of action [which is why] resolving the speaker's intention cannot be dispensed with” (2008: 62). This entails, however, a severe problem, as vital importance is placed on yet another flighty and indeterminable factor for the assessment of the appropriateness of speakers' (non)verbal behavior. Terkourafi is very aware of the fact that there is no way of undoubtedly attaching these two labels to authentic conversations based on intentions, as they are not available for open inspection. Speaking with Culpeper et al., “[i]nterlocutors do not wear their intentions on their sleeves [and] what is in people's heads is accessible neither to analysts nor to interlocutors (nor even, ultimately, fully accessible to those whose behaviour is under investigation)” (2003: 1552, with reference to Grimshaw 1990: 281). Observing analysts cannot count on participants' openly sharing their true intentions with others either because, as a matter of fact, candid statements about their intentions do not necessarily have to mirror the truth but can be deliberately deceiving.

Before, however, we start to use *impoliteness* and *rudeness* synonymously or choose one over the other in default of a reliable distinctive criterion, I intend to uphold Terkourafi's (2008: 62) definition according to which impoliteness is regarded as accidental and sometimes attributed to speakers' ignorance or incompetence (as in cross-cultural communication), while rudeness is described as intentional. Rudeness is thus regarded as prototypically non-cooperative communicative behavior which usually destabilizes personal relationships between interactants. As examples of unintentional, hence accidental and unmotivated impoliteness, Kienpointner (1997: 269) invokes the impolite behavior of children and foreigners, who just do not know better (yet). In both cases, we can witness the consequences of insufficient linguistic and/or cultural knowledge, which Thomas (1983) calls “pragmatic failure”. But even adults within the same culture or language can produce impoliteness in the form of slips of the tongue or

Freudian slips (Kienpointner 1997: 269). In the following, I will give preference to the notion of *impoliteness*, reserving *rudeness* only for specific cases in which we have at least some kind of evidence that the speaker acted with bad intentions to willfully commit a face-threatening act.

Another way of approaching the matter is by examining the different functions of impoliteness which entails the appealing question whether it is inevitable to consider impoliteness as inappropriate behavior once and for all – especially in view of concepts such as Leech’s (1983) *mock-impoliteness* or *banter*, which call into play a vital function of impoliteness in human communication. Following Kasper’s definition, mock-impoliteness “extends to utterances which are overtly impolite yet blatantly false in their propositional content, and are thus understood as joking behavior” (1990: 211). Obviously, we are dealing with a completely different function of impoliteness, one that is extremely marked, yet – in contrast to all the other functions mentioned before – in a positive rather than in a negative way. Strictly speaking, it is thus not even a kind of impoliteness – least not when we look at its function and not at its form – because it is not at all face-threatening but on the contrary face-maintaining or even face-enhancing. For this reason, superficially impolite utterances cannot automatically be judged as inappropriate once and for all, which is why I propose a differentiation between two functions of impoliteness, which are based on the (intended or unintended) effect a speaker’s utterance has on his interlocutor’s face (see Table 7).

The advantage of this model is its hearer-orientation. We are not reliant on non-tangible speakers’ intentions of whatever nature, but can base our judgments on parameters which are comparatively easy to access: hearers’ reactions, which mirror their evaluations of the appropriateness of utterances at least to some degree. As discussed before, the differentiation between the notion of *impoliteness* or *rudeness* within the left column remains problematic, as it strongly depends on

Table 7. Types of impoliteness according to face-orientation

Types of impoliteness according to face-orientation	
face-threatening	face-maintaining / face-enhancing
negatively marked impoliteness:	(positively) marked “impoliteness”: ⁴⁸
– <i>impoliteness</i>	– <i>mock-impoliteness</i>
– <i>rudeness</i>	– <i>banter</i>
= inappropriate	= appropriate

48. Strictly speaking, the term *impoliteness* can only be used for a superficial, formal description. From a functional perspective, however, we are clearly not dealing with impoliteness at all.

Table 8. Modified model of relational work

Relational work				
negatively marked	(positively) marked	unmarked	positively marked	negatively marked
impolite rude	mock-impolite banter	non-polite	polite	over-polite mock-polite
inappropriate	appropriate	appropriate	appropriate	inappropriate

the state of evidence for speakers' negative intentions. With these two functions of impoliteness separated, we can now add a new column to Locher/Watts' (2005) framework of relational work, representing (positively) marked "impolite" behavior as displayed in Table 8. This new column enriches the original model with one more variety of appropriate behavior – only this time in combination with formally "impolite" behavior. As this type of formal impoliteness is extremely marked, rather positively than negatively, the next chapter will reveal the working principles behind both types of "appropriate impoliteness".

5.6 Appropriate impoliteness: *Mock-impoliteness* and *banter*

Although swearwords and "other linguistic phenomena which are assumed to be typical examples of rudeness"⁴⁹ in many languages/cultures, for instance loudness of voice (shouting), frequent interruptions, bare imperatives, taboo words, ironic remarks, aggressive jokes, indirect attacks, etc." (Kienpointner 1997:255) are strongly biased towards an impolite interpretation – at least from a purely formal point of view –, they might as well be a sign of something completely different: familiarity, solidarity or even a signal of intimacy (cf. Lachenicht 1980:608; Leech 1983:144; Terkourafi 2008:68). In this case, mock-impoliteness and banter are instances of a special type of "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence" (Culpeper 1996:352). As established before, a prototypical feature of impoliteness, non-cooperativeness (cf. Kienpointner 1997:258), does not hold for these two kinds of appropriate impoliteness. A closer look at the characteristic workings of these two phenomena

49. For the sake of legibility, one needs to keep in mind that Kienpointner (1997) prefers the term *rudeness* over *impoliteness*. The use of the term *rudeness* thus only mirrors Kienpointner's wording. It is not, however, used intentionally to imply the difference between the two notions as established above.

might help us tell them apart. In order to do so, let us start with Leech, who introduced the *banter principle*:

In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to *h* [which leads to the interpretation that] what *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue. Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true. (1983: 144)

Whether utterances as those described by Leech are automatically polite just because they are not impolite has been questioned before. It should go without saying that mock-impoliteness as well as banter can only be assessed correctly and thus appreciated if interlocutors know each other well. Otherwise, utterances such as “You silly bugger” (Kienpointner 1997:261) could easily be misinterpreted as truly face-threatening, when used between relative strangers. Kienpointner interposes that although mock-impoliteness can be a bit risky in rather formal circumstances, it can nevertheless be successfully used to relax the stiff atmosphere (1997:262). The question whether interlocutors who are in fact close to each other still sense the slightest face-threat within mock-impoliteness or banter can only be answered individually by the interlocutors involved. I argue that if mock-impoliteness and banter are appropriate in a given context, chances are rather slim that a face-threat is actually perceived. On the contrary, odds are that a face-maintaining, if not even a face-enhancing stance is detected by the hearer; according to Leech, banter reflects and fosters social intimacy (1983: 144). He also points out that in intimate relationships, the necessity and importance to show politeness tends to decrease (*ibid.*). Consequently, not showing explicit means of politeness and even being superficially impolite can paradoxically be associated with and promote intimacy (cf. Culpeper 1996:352).

In fact, Wolfson (1988:32) came to the same conclusion: In closely examining social distance, Wolfson’s bulge model of interaction shows that “speech behavior tends to be most frequent and most elaborated between those who are acquaintances and casual friends, rather than between intimates or strangers” (Holmes 1995:13). With intimates and strangers marking the two extreme poles on a scale of minimal and maximal social distance respectively, Wolfson perceives a bulge-shaped curve spanning between these two extremes: While behavior among intimates and strangers seems to show great similarities in terms of reduced (interpersonal) attention, there is a marked difference in the more elaborate interpersonal behavior of acquaintances and casual friends at the center of the bulge. Wolfson explains her findings with the relative degree of stability of the relationships involved.

Although mock-impoliteness and banter are often used synonymously, the latter one stands out as being more ritualized in form, which is why Kienpointner uses the term *ritual insults*⁵⁰ in his taxonomy, defining them as “sophisticated systems of syntactic and semantic rules [...], known in different languages and cultures all over the world, especially among young male adults” (Kienpointner 1997: 262f.). As a kind of language game, known in America as *sounding*, *playing the dozens* or *signifying*, it usually takes place particularly amongst black adolescents (cf. Labov 1972; Culpeper 1996: 353). On the basis of shared knowledge within a peer group (see Section 6.3), the key to understanding ritualized banter lies in taking insults in a non-serious way and perceiving them as obviously untrue. Only then can banter be considered as a game: purely competitive, totally detached from actual facework, with winners (those who have the widest range of insults at hand) and losers. Ritual insults thus do not endanger social relationships but are often used as “a societal safety valve” (Culpeper 1996: 353), which enhances group solidarity. Unlike real insults, “the more exaggerated ritual insults are, the less they are in danger of being taken seriously” (Kienpointner 1997: 263). Typical cases of banter are introduced by Labov in his renowned study *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (1972). The target of these insults usually being someone’s mother, those forms of banter also go by the name *Yo Mam(m)a Jokes*:

J1: Your mother take a swim in the gutter.

J2: Your mother live in a garbage can.

J1: Least I don’t live in 1122 Boogie Woogie Avenue, two garbage cans to the right. (1972: 319)

Labov (1972) warns that it is consequently the “weak” insults which may cause the most trouble, as this kind of behavior may be interpreted as real personal insults and thus as truly inappropriate behavior (cf. Culpeper 1996: 353). In equal relationships, impoliteness has a tendency to escalate due to a lack of “a default mechanism by which one participant achieves the upper hand” (1996: 355). An insult can thereby trigger a counter-insult which may set in motion a spiral of insults, possibly even including physical violence. This leads us to the dynamics of insults and corresponding counter-measures as described by the notion of *flaming*.

50. Ritual insults can also be witnessed in army recruit training discourse, where they appear to be the norm rather than the exception. Drill sergeants’ behaviors may or may not be evaluated by recruits as impolite, as the face-threat is based on “ritualized and institutionalized codes of linguistic behavior” (Mills 2005: 270).

5.7 Strings of inappropriate online behavior: *Flaming*

[L]ay observers commonly represent flaming as a highly negative message that functions like a metaphorical flamethrower that the sender uses to roast the receiver verbally. (O'Sullivan/Flanagin 2003: 68f.)

The presumed reasons for the occurrence of flaming – among them anonymity, text-based communication without social context cues, an initial lack of a normative code of conduct, cultural diversity and disparate interests, needs and expectations – have already been outlined in Section 2.6.1. In the past, this term has been used abundantly to label the most diverse phenomena: swearing, insults and name-calling, but also an increased willingness to communicate bad news or negative information or even expressions of personal, emotional feelings towards other people. It is therefore imperative to delineate the notion of *flaming* as precisely as possible.⁵¹

Originally borrowed from computer subculture, to *flame* meant “to speak incessantly and/or rabidly on some relatively uninteresting subject or with the patently ridiculous attitude” (Steele 1983: 63) – not only in CMC but in general. *Flaming* in this sense was thus equaled with violations of Grice's maxims. In recent years, however, semantic changes of this notion seem to have limited its scope of application to forms of computer-mediated communication only. According to general consensus, flaming is “hostile and aggressive interaction” (Thurlow et al. 2004: 70) directed towards an immediate interlocutor. Accordingly, my reading of flaming is restricted to *ad hominem* attacks only. Whether repetitious punctuation, constant capitalization, swearing and other expressive and uninhibited verbal means count as flaming, needs to be decided by interlocutors, making flaming another emergent and evaluative notion. Being a co-constructed phenomenon very similar to other types of inappropriate behavior, we cannot speak of flaming if nobody seems to take offence (cf. Avgerinakou 2003: 276), which is why we are again reliant on interlocutors' (explicit) reactions. What is more, flaming in tight-knit groups is not automatically negative and destructive but can, on the contrary, be used just like mock-impoliteness or banter to express identification with the group and convey a sense of belonging and camaraderie. Since “affiliation reduces the danger of threats to interpersonal face” (Arndt/Janney 2005: 39), the term *pseudo-flaming* or even *mock-flaming* clearly is in order in these cases.

51. For an ample collection of definitional approaches to the notion of *flaming* see Turnage (2007).

If the notion of *flaming* encompasses the same interpersonal functions as impoliteness, or even rudeness, and mock-impoliteness – only in an online context – how come we need this additional notion at all? As a matter of fact, there is only one characteristic that does set *flaming* apart from all the other notions, prompting some users to even speak of *flame wars* for dramatic effects: Flames can only be witnessed in strings of utterances, the minimum being two causally but not necessarily spatially consecutive inappropriate entries, in which one impolite utterance is followed by another and maybe even by yet another. In other words, flames involve one, sometimes more users in reciprocally exchanging ad hominem attacks, which can be interspersed with unmarked, pacifying comments of third party interlocutors. Thus describing a structural quality rather than a functional one, the notion of *flaming* does not qualify to be incorporated into Locher/Watts' (2005) framework of relational work. It could, however, be seen as a structural hyperonym to all the other types of inappropriate behavior – at least for the sphere of online interaction.

The notion of *flame war* is insofar more fortunate as it reflects the dialogic or even polylogic quality of a process, which continues until one of the parties involved gets bored and is too tired to continue. To illustrate this process, Shea cites a USENET (see Section 2.4) participant who describes the typical sequence of a flame war and points out that, at least in his view, they are ubiquitous:

Every discussion list of which I have been a part – no matter what its subject – has fallen victim to such ills – a few have gone down in e-flames. The pattern is absolutely consistent. Writer A drops a light remark – always *tangential* to the main discussion. Writer B interprets the message in the worst possible light and fires off an outraged reply, in which writer A is called a racist, a classist, a fascist – whatever seems to apply. Writers C-L chime in, rather like the crowds in a DeMille film, muttering 'Shame!' or 'I agree!' or 'A is right!' or 'B is right!' Writer A replies saying, 'Gosh, it was just a joke. I'm not a fascist. Lighten up.' Writer B says, 'This issue (the South, date rape, Nicaragua) is DEADLY SERIOUS. I won't lighten up. I won't.' By the time things have cooled down, Writers A and B have left the list; or Writers N-DD have left the list; or the list has died. These are not *odd* occasions – they happen to *every* list.* (1994: 73)

Investigating ways of resolving attacks in a USENET group, Baker (2001) lists and explains the following, CMC-specific strategies:

1. Advocate "sympathy/understanding" (albeit issued with a patronizing and superior tone, one of the least aggressive resolution strategies);
2. Laissez-faire (ignore the attacker);
3. Flame (by far the most common resolution strategy was to respond in kind);

4. Threat of physical violence (less common, more aggressive and probably face-tious means of challenging);
5. Censorship (complaining to the postmaster in charge to express intention of denying the attacker e-mail access, in effect to censor him);
6. Exposure (outing a user by listing all of his postings to a Usenet group, about any subject, thus substantiating any antagonistic tendencies).

In fact, flames hardly ever arrive in an agreement between the opponents. Third party interventions, on the other hand, are all the more common and involve other users in attempting to reconcile or least to silence the flaming parties. In this regard, the fifth strategy, the contacting of the attacker's system administrator, can be seen as the last and certainly most extreme resort in online environments (Lee 2005: 388).

5.8 Summary: Implications of an integrative perspective for the analysis

In the course of finding a working definition for politeness from a postmodern, discursive point of view, a strategy for the handling of the slippery notion of politeness in the forthcoming empirical analysis emerged. It became obvious that labeling utterances as polite always involves a certain amount of subjectivity on the part of the observing analyst. This bias can, however, be reduced by allocating the hearer perspective, i.e. fellow users involved in a string of message board conversation, and contextual variables a central position within the analytical framework.

Above that, the notion of politeness was put in perspective and integrated in Locher/Watts' framework of relational work. With the advent of *appropriate behavior*, the scope of politeness was reduced considerably, leaving only those utterances to the label *polite* which feature a surplus of consideration towards interlocutors. This revised notion of politeness was then contrasted with inappropriate behavior. The vagueness between the two terms *impoliteness* and *rudeness* could not, however, be eliminated completely since the only difference lies in a willfully hurtful intention on part of the speaker in the case of rudeness, which can, of course, never be proven without doubt in actual data.

A special case of impoliteness could be found in mock-impoliteness (and its ritualized version banter): Utterances which appear impolite and hurtful on the surface level actually aim at creating solidarity and consequently usually lack any face-threatening force. In the right context, mock-impoliteness as (positively) marked behavior is thus absolutely appropriate. As a distinct type of relational work, it was assigned a place of its own in Locher/Watts' model, which was

expanded accordingly to serve as a profound basis for the upcoming empirical analysis.

The last of the subtypes of impoliteness to be distinguished, *flaming*, was not granted that privilege, since it cannot be set apart from types of impoliteness functionally. It can, however, be considered a hyperonym of negatively marked behavior of whatever sort, as it designates a particular structural feature that can theoretically be sported by all of them: strings of utterances which are used to reciprocate inappropriate behavior over a longer stretch of time.