



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1515/pr-2017-0033](https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0033)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Bella, S., & Ogiemann, E. (2019). An Intergenerational Perspective on (Im)politeness. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 15(2), 163-193. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0033>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Spyridoula Bella\* and Eva Ogiermann

# An Intergenerational Perspective on (Im)politeness

<https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2017-0033>

Submitted September 5, 2017; Accepted December 11, 2017

**Abstract:** The present paper provides an intergenerational perspective on Greek conceptualizations of (im)politeness. Based on interviews eliciting narratives of impolite behaviour of our participants' parents' generation, the study illustrates the contested and changing nature of politeness in contemporary Greece.

Through critically evaluating the older generation's behaviour, the participants not only provided insights into their own politeness norms but also showed a clear understanding of the previous generation's politeness norms. The discrepancy between what is perceived as polite by the two generations points to a distinction between empirical (is) and moral (should) norms (Haugh 2010), with the former allowing the participants to classify their parents' impoliteness as non-intentional and the latter reflecting the emergence of new conceptualizations of politeness in Greece.

While Greece has been unanimously characterized as a positive politeness culture in previous research, the present study illustrates an increasing emphasis on values and norms associated with negative politeness.

**Keywords:** (im)politeness, Greek, change, generations

## 1 Background

The discursive turn in politeness research (Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) and, in particular, the realization that “politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour” (Eelen 2001: 109), has led to a shift away from the focus on linguistic forms to participants' evaluations of politeness. The concept of first order politeness, first introduced by Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992), has been studied from both its action-related and conceptual sides (Eelen 2001: 32). While the former empha-

---

\*Corresponding author: **Spyridoula Bella**, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of Linguistics, 28is Oktovriou 12, Athens 15341, Greece, E-Mail: sbella@phil.uoa.gr  
**Eva Ogiermann**, King's College London, School of Education, Communication and Society, London, UK, E-Mail: eva.ogiermann@kcl.ac.uk

sizes the “evaluative moments observable in ongoing social interaction” (Watts 2003: 45), the latter reflects “the way people talk about and provide accounts of politeness” (Eelen 2001: 32), allowing the exploration of (im)politeness phenomena at a societal level.

The present study provides insights into both the conceptual and action-related sides of first order (im)politeness. It examines (im)politeness in Greece from an intergenerational perspective by scrutinizing the younger generation’s experiences and evaluations of the older generation’s behaviour. The focus of the study is on impoliteness, since impoliteness is a more salient and noticeable form of behaviour than politeness. At the same time, the younger generation’s descriptions of the older generation’s impolite behaviour allow insights into their politeness norms, thus capturing the changing nature of politeness in contemporary Greek society.

(Im)politeness has been theorized as closely related to the concept of face, with politeness being regarded as a form of face-threat avoidance or mitigation (Brown and Levinson 1987) and impoliteness as a form of (intentional) face-attack (e. g., Culpeper 1996, Bousfield 2008) – and individual face needs remain central in recent analyses of both the production and evaluation of (im)politeness. The impact of impoliteness on the individual has also been examined by linking it to a range of emotions triggered by impolite behaviour (Culpeper 2011). At the same time, it has been argued that for (im)politeness to arise there needs to be a consensus about what constitutes (im)polite behaviour (Haugh 2003: 400) and that “face is not at the heart of all interaction that can be considered impolite” (Culpeper 2011: 31). At a societal level in particular, politeness “may have to do more with social norms and less with face concerns” (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 681).

Politeness research has identified two different (though related) types of social norms guiding evaluations of (im)polite behaviour (Haugh 2003), referred to as *experiential* and *social* (Culpeper 2008: 15) or *empirical* and *moral* (Haugh 2010: 11), respectively. Empirical or experiential norms (or habits) are formed on the basis of an individual’s experience of interacting with other people over time, while social norms “have their basis in the structures of society” (Culpeper 2008: 15) and reflect our understandings of how one *should* behave, i. e., our moral standards.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The two types of norms are related since empirical norms lead to expectations which can give rise to moral norms. The link can also be traced back to the etymology of the English word *morals* which is derived from the Latin *mores*, i. e. customs (Culpeper 2011: 37). It also becomes visible in Brown and Levinson’s concept of cultural ethos, which they define as “the affective quality of interaction characteristic of members of a society” (1987: 243) and which underlies their distinction between positive and negative politeness cultures. The close etymological and conceptual connection between the Greek notions of *ἔθος* (ethos = habit/customary behaviour) and *ἦθος*

Evaluations of (im)politeness thus “involve an implicit appeal to the moral order” (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 67). The moral order is a dimension of culture that has been conceptualized as a “system of obligations that defines and organizes the proper – good, right, virtuous – relations among individuals and groups in a community” (Davis 2008: 17). These obligations not only morally constrain our conduct but also create expectations regarding others’ conduct (Goffman 1956: 473–474) which, if not met, can result in evaluations of impoliteness. One context in which such evaluations commonly occur is when there is a clash of norms, i. e., when members of different groups follow different social and cultural norms when interacting with each other.

This type of impoliteness has received relatively little attention within impoliteness research, where intentionality still plays a fairly central role in conceptualizing impoliteness: Starting from the concept of face-attack (Culpeper 1996), with the definition of impoliteness then being extended to include behaviours which are merely construed by the hearer as intentionally face-attacking (Culpeper 2005: 38), and the shift of the focus from speakers’ intentions to hearers’ perceptions of these intentions (Locher and Watts 2008: 80) to viewing intentionality as a scalar concept (Culpeper 2011: 52).

Yet, studies illustrating culture-specific concepts of politeness or comparing the linguistic behaviour of speakers of different languages have documented cross-cultural differences in conceptualizations of (im)politeness and the values behind them. This research has shown that there is ample scope for cultural clashes leading to evaluations of impoliteness in intercultural encounters, which may result in (the reaffirmation of) stereotypes about a specific group’s behaviour rather than attributions of impoliteness to individuals.

The present study offers a new perspective on this phenomenon by focusing on two generations of the same cultural group. While these two generations share the same social norms and values, with the older generation having passed them on to the younger one, the younger generation has also developed new social norms. These are used to evaluate the older generation’s behaviour, which adheres to the established, shared norms.

The evaluations of (im)politeness scrutinized in our study thus illustrate the changing nature of the moral order, with the younger generation’s critical assessment of the older generation’s behaviour providing a dual perspective displaying an understanding of competing social norms and, ultimately, a discrepancy

---

(ithos = morality) can be traced back to Aristotle, according to whom *ἦθος* is acquired by means of *ἔθος*, that is by means of habit formation, as individuals repeatedly exhibit socially approved qualities of behaviour (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*).

between empirical and moral norms. This discrepancy, as it emerges from our participants' narratives, reflects Brown and Levinson's (1987) distinction between positive and negative politeness, with the data suggesting that Greek society may be currently undergoing a shift towards a stronger emphasis on individualism and negative politeness.

In order to demonstrate the two generations' divergent understandings of politeness, we first discuss diachronic research on politeness (2.1) and previous work on the Greek concept of politeness (2.2). Following a section justifying and describing the methodology adopted in the present study (3), we provide an overview of the types of impolite behaviours reported by our participants (4.1) and then scrutinize the younger generation's descriptions of the older generation's breaches of social norms in both in-group (4.2) and out-group (4.3) settings. The understandings of politeness emerging from their narratives are then confirmed in Section 4.4 which discusses explicit definitions of politeness provided by our participants. Section 5 sums up the findings in relation to the concepts introduced here and in Section 2.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Politeness and change

Cultures represent “large-scale outcome[s] of people interacting over time” (Eelen 2001: 246). As people interact throughout time “they both sustain the moral order, and over time act to change it” (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 67). Hence, first-order conceptualizations of (im)politeness are subject not only to synchronic variability but also to diachronic change (Ehlich 1992). While contrastive work on politeness has illustrated different conceptualizations of politeness across languages and cultures, studies on historical politeness have documented different understandings of politeness across time. The majority of studies on historical politeness have focused on different aspects of the English concept of politeness, such as terms of address in Anglo-Saxon England (Kohnen 2008) or the preferences for negative and positive politeness in Early Modern (Shakespeare's) English (e. g., Brown and Gilman 1989, Kopytko 1995).

Culpeper and Demmen (2011) make a particularly valuable contribution to the study of historical politeness as they trace the emergence of the concept of negative politeness (in particular the use of ability questions for requesting) back to the Victorian era. They link this development to a wide range of social and cultural factors, such as industrialization and the ensuing social and geographical

mobility, as well as the rise of Protestantism. Unlike traditional Christian morality, Protestantism “involved the idea that life-choices, including choices concerning behaviours, were not simply allotted but were to be made” (Culpeper and Demmen 2011: 53). The increasing agency of the individual, coupled with Victorian values such as self-help and self-control, eventually led to individualism and negative politeness.

While the above studies provide valuable insights into the changing nature of the moral order and first order conceptualizations of politeness, these are derived solely from written texts. Understandably, the periods they study preclude the possibility of accessing lay members’ evaluations of politeness. More recent social and cultural changes and their impact on politeness norms have been documented by Ogiermann and Suszczyńska (2011) who conducted interviews comparing the perceptions of (im)politeness before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The study shows that the political, societal and economic changes which were witnessed by their Polish and Hungarian participants in the late 1980s, such as the introduction of capitalism, market economy, and the opening up of the borders, had a deep impact on interpersonal behaviour, interactional patterns and perceptions of (im)politeness.

The general trend emerging from studies linking the changing nature of politeness to societal changes is that societies are undergoing a shift towards negative politeness. Diachronic politeness studies adopting a cross-generational perspective, however, are still relatively rare and tend to focus on a particular aspect of politeness. He’s study (2012), for instance, focuses on compliment responses in Chinese. Based on an analysis of spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and follow-up interviews, He demonstrates that members of the older generation are twice as likely to reject compliments as are younger people. The author links the underlying divergent conceptualizations of politeness to different socialization practices before and after China’s reform.

Another cross-generational politeness study has been conducted by Fukushima (2011) who analyzed questionnaire and interview data looking into the demonstration of attentiveness by representatives of two generations. A comparison of the answers provided by university students (aged 18–28) and “parents” (aged 36–76) showed differences in only one of the six situations examined in the study. Similarly, Sifianou and Tzanne’s paper (2010), which is particularly relevant to the present study as it focuses on Greek conceptualizations of (im) politeness, compares two sets of questionnaire data collected 25 years apart and does not establish any notable differences.

While Sifianou and Tzanne’s work provides a *cross-generational* comparison, i. e., it compares two independent groups that do not interact with each other, our study takes an *inter-generational* perspective on (im)politeness, entering the

domain of the family and revealing ongoing changes in the conceptualization of (im)politeness in Greek society.

## 2.2 Greek politeness

Greek politeness has been researched widely (e. g., Sifianou 1992; Pavlidou 1994; Antonopoulou 2001; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2003; Makri-Tsilipakou 2001; Sifianou and Antonopoulou 2005; Bella 2009), including a growing body of research on conceptualizations of Greek (im)politeness (Sifianou 1992; Sifianou and Tzanne 2010; Sifianou 2015; Sifianou and Bella 2018).

All the above listed studies portray Greece as a positive politeness culture; one in which politeness is expressed through involvement and positive face enhancement and in which “greater importance is attached to belonging and dependence rather than independence” (Sifianou 1992: 53). But, as Sifianou and Antonopoulou point out, this does not mean that “negative politeness has no place in Greek society but rather that in interactions between people who know each other well and/or are of equal status, positive politeness strategies are preferred” (2005: 264).

Greek society has also been classified as a collectivist culture (Triandis and Vassiliou 1972), which is not only characterized by a preference for positive politeness but also by particularism, i. e., a discrepancy in attitudes towards members of one’s own and other groups (Hofstede 1991). In collectivist societies, in-group behaviour is guided by “cooperation, protection and help” while “relations with members of the outgroup are essentially competitive” (Triandis and Vassiliou 1972: 305).

In Sifianou’s seminal work (1992) comparing politeness in Britain and Greece, she links in-group behaviour in Greece with informality and positive politeness, which she associates with spontaneity, free expression of feelings and mutual support, with formality and negative politeness being reserved for the out-group (1992: 42). In a follow-up study conducted 25 years later, the authors concluded that there were no “noticeable differences in the definitions of politeness provided by our current respondents”, with most definitions reflecting “the breadth of positive politeness” (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 670).

At the same time, it has been suggested that the positive politeness orientation attributed to Greek society is currently changing, in particular that “the positive politeness of urbanite Greeks is increasingly mitigated by a concern for negative face” (Terkourafi 2009: 281). The present study, with its focus on perceptions of (im)politeness across generations, aims to contribute to investigating this phenomenon.

### 3 Methodology

Studies of culture-specific conceptualizations of (im)politeness tend to rely on different types of metapragmatic data, which have been said to provide “a window into the reflexive layers of the moral order” (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 187). Previous research looking into the conceptual side of (im)politeness has either drawn from existing public discussions or discourses of (im)politeness (e. g., Haugh 2010, Locher and Luginbühl 2019) or elicited lay members’ understandings of (im)politeness through questionnaires (e. g., Sifianou 1992, Fukushima 2011), interviews (Blum-Kulka 1992, Ogiermann and Suszczyńska 2011), or focus groups (e. g., Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Bou-Franch 2019).

The present study is based on interviews, which have proved “particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values” (Byrne 2004: 182), including metapragmatic knowledge of politeness norms. Episodic interviews are based on the assumption that “experiences of a certain domain are stored and remembered in forms of narrative-episodic and semantic knowledge” (Flick 2009: 185) and consist of a “combination of narratives oriented to situational or episodic contexts and argumentation that peel off such contexts in favour of conceptual and rule-oriented knowledge” (Flick 2009: 186).

#### 3.1 Interview

The interview used in the present study consisted of two parts, with the first one eliciting memories involving evaluations of impoliteness made during interactions with members of the older generation and the second explicitly engaging with the concept of politeness.

In the first part, the participants were asked to recall episodes involving members of their parents’ generation featuring breaches of politeness norms. The focus on impoliteness facilitated the elicitation of the data since impoliteness constitutes a marked form of behaviour that is more likely noticed and commented upon than polite behaviour. At the same time this focus enabled us to indirectly elicit the interviewees’ understandings of politeness since their portrayal of their parents’ behaviour as impolite was guided by their own politeness norms. While recalling their experiences of the previous generation’s impolite behaviour, the participants produced a wide range of metapragmatic comments, elucidating their understandings of both their and the older generation’s concept of politeness and the underlying social norms.

The interviews concluded with a question explicitly eliciting the informants’ definitions of politeness and the characteristics of a polite person. In order to



ensure that the definitions were not biased towards the narrated stories, we also involved a control group that only responded to the final question of the interview.

### 3.2 Participants

The interviews were conducted with 40 (23 female and 17 male) native speakers of Greek, residing in the capital city of Athens and the third biggest Greek city of Patras. They were aged between 30 and 45 (mean age 39) and had all graduated from university. Twenty one of them spent some time abroad, 19 of those studying in the UK. Another 40 participants (20 female and 20 male), also aged between 30 and 45 (mean age 37.5), and all residing in Athens, were involved in the study as a control group, who we only asked to define politeness.

## 4 Analysis

Following the view of (im)politeness as an emic concept and a form of evaluation reflecting the moral order, the following analysis takes a bottom-up approach in revealing the understandings of (im)politeness emerging from our participants' narratives.

We first identify and categorize the types of impolite behaviours reported in our data and then provide a qualitative analysis tapping into the social norms and values leading to the evaluation of these behaviours as impolite – as well as the older generation's norms sanctioning them. The values identified in the analysis are linked with the concepts of positive and negative politeness, and the evaluations themselves are scrutinized to reveal both rational explanations of the divergent understandings of politeness represented by the two generations and the emotional reactions to the described impolite behaviours.

Given the importance of the distinction between the in-group and the out-group in Greek culture established in previous research, the main part of the analysis is structured according to the settings (private vs. public) in which the impolite behaviours were observed, enabling us to compare our participants' attitudes towards the impolite behaviour of in-group and out-group members. The section concludes with an analysis of definitions of (im)politeness provided by our participants.

## 4.1 Types of impolite behaviour

The 40 interviews contained a total of 109 descriptions of impolite behaviour. Among them, there were 26 instances of stories recounting a particular personal experience (e. g., “I have an uncle who always comments on my weight ...”) and 83 instances of general comments on impolite behaviour (e. g., “Older people think that queues are not for them ...”).

The stories referred to instances of both verbal and non-verbal behaviour, resulting in three different, though slightly overlapping, categories referring to inappropriate actions, content and form of speech. The largest category comprises 51 examples (47 %) of impolite actions and describes different forms of inappropriate behaviour, such as:

- Disregarding queues (19)
- Invading privacy, e. g., entering rooms, opening bags, drawers, etc. (21)
- Being too intimate, e. g., passing on personal information to third parties, engaging strangers in lengthy conversations (7)
- Acting in an authoritative way, e. g., prescribing others what to do, demanding a seat on public transport (4)

These 51 instances of impolite behaviour include 40 examples that refer to non-verbal actions that did not involve language. Some of the remaining eleven actions were performed through language, e. g., demanding a seat was accomplished both verbally and through staring. The remaining two categories, in contrast, comprise exclusively instances of verbal behaviour, with one of them containing 26 (24 %) references to inappropriate (e. g., taboo) topics, such as:

- Asking indiscreet personal questions (17)
- Making inappropriate comments (6)
- Sharing intimate details in public places (3)

The final category, comprising 32 (29 %) instances of impolite behaviour identified by our participants, contained examples related to the lack of verbal politeness, e. g.,:

- Not saying *thank you*, *please* or *I'm sorry* – or reserving the use of politeness formulae to strangers only (11)
- Being overly familiar by using the T-form where the V-form is expected (7)
- Impolite speech act realization: use of imperatives in requests, high degree of insistence in offering (7)
- Prosodic features, such as loudness (7)

As the above figures illustrate, in more than two thirds of all cases, the informants reported being offended by what people do and say rather than *how* they say it. If prosody, which does not constitute politeness per se but plays an important part in rendering linguistic formulae (im)polite, was to be excluded from the last category, linguistic politeness would constitute less than a quarter (23%) of the relevant data. Verbal politeness was attributed even less importance by Sifianou and Tzanne's (2010: 670) participants, only 12.5% of whom viewed politeness as a verbal form of behaviour, while 17% conceptualized it as involving both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Similarly, some of our participants specifically commented on the importance of both linguistic and non-verbal forms of politeness:

Ex1-S34/F

*Συναντιόμαστε συχνά με μια άλλη οικογένεια. Η γιαγιά λέει συνέχεια στα εγγόνια να λένε 'ευχαριστώ' και 'παρακαλώ'. Αλλά την άλλη φορά σε ένα παιδικό πάρτυ την πέτυχα να τους λέει να περάσουν μπροστά από τα άλλα παιδάκια στην ουρά για να πάρουν φαγητό. [...] Τα μαθαίνει να είναι ευγενικά αλλά όχι να σέβονται τα δικαιώματα των άλλων.*

'There is this family we hang out with a lot. The grandmother keeps telling the grandkids to say 'thank you' and 'please'. But at the same time, I have heard her instruct those kids to skip the queue for food at a party. [...] She teaches them to be polite when they speak but shows no respect for others' rights.'

The above example describes a grandmother socializing her grandchildren into using politeness formulae while, at the same time, encouraging inappropriate non-verbal behaviour. Interestingly, our interviewee makes a distinction between being polite, i. e., using politeness formulae, and respecting others' rights, a form of appropriate behaviour which is portrayed as (at least) equally important as the use of linguistic politeness.

## 4.2 In-group vs. out-group

While the majority of the examples, namely 62 instances, referred to impolite behaviour within the in-group, i. e., the (extended) family context (in a couple of cases also involving friends of the family) interacting in private settings, 47 of them referred to the out-group, i. e., to encounters among strangers taking place in the public sphere.

#### 4.2.1 The in-group – private contexts

The examples of impolite behaviour our participants provided were usually accompanied by metapragmatic comments containing evaluations as well as explanations of the criticized behaviour. In the family context, in particular, the explanations were often used to account for both the participants' and their parents' or relatives' perception of the situation.

Ex2-S28/M

*Αυτό που με ενοχλούσε πάντα είναι ότι δεν λένε 'ευχαριστώ' όταν κάνεις κάτι γι' αυτούς. Οι γονείς μου το θεωρούν δεδομένο ότι αφού ζούμε στο ίδιο σπίτι κάνουμε πράγματα ο ένας για τον άλλο και οι ευγένειες είναι περιττές.*

'What has always bothered me was that they never say 'thank you' when you do something for them. My parents take it for granted that, since we live in the same house, we do things for each other and politeness is redundant.'

While interviewee 28 finds the absence of thanking formulae in interactions with his parents inappropriate, at the same time, he displays an understanding of their norms, according to which (formal) politeness is redundant in the family context. Such a view has also been voiced by Sifianou, according to whom "members of the same ingroup see it as their duty to help and support each other, both morally and financially, so they find no obvious reason for thanking or apologizing" (1992: 42).

In the next example, a similar problem is raised in relation to the use of imperatives, where it also extends to contexts outside the home:

Ex3-S10/M

*Ό,τι ζητάει ο πατέρας μου ακούγεται σα διαταγή. Λέει δηλαδή στη μάνα μου 'Μαρία, φέρε τις παντόφλες μου!' Εντάξει καταλαβαίνω ότι έχουν μεγάλη οικειότητα αλλά αυτό δεν δικαιολογεί την αγένεια. Και κάνει το ίδιο και με τους ξένους. Πάει στο χασάπη και λέει 'Βάλε μου έξι μπριζόλες'. Με κάνει να ντρέπομαι, ρε παιδί μου.*

'When my dad asks for something, it always sounds like an order. He will say to my mother 'Maria, bring<sub>SG</sub> my slippers'. I understand that he is very close with my mother but closeness is not an excuse for rudeness. And he does the same with strangers. He will go to a shop and say to the butcher 'Give<sub>SG</sub> me six steaks'. He makes me feel embarrassed/ashamed, you see.'

Interviewee 10 shows awareness of his parents' close relationship being the reason for his father's use of unmitigated, direct request forms, but he disagrees with his assumption that closeness justifies their use. While according to our participant's norms, imperatives can be rude even in intimate contexts, his father routinely uses them with strangers as well. However, although our interviewee understands the motivation behind his father's use of imperatives and, by saying

that they merely “sound” like orders, portrays his father’s impoliteness as unintentional, he still finds it embarrassing.

In fact, shame and embarrassment are recurrent concepts in our data, also referred to in the example below:

Ex4-S32/F

*Όταν έμενα ακόμα με τους γονείς μου και ερχόντουσαν φίλοι μου στο σπίτι δεν τόλμαγα να τους φέρω στο σαλόνι. Ο πατέρας μου καθόταν μαζί μας με τις ώρες και τους ρωτούσε ό,τι μπορείς να φανταστείς για τις ζωές τους τις δουλειές τους, τους γονείς τους. Μεγάλη ντροπή σου λέω. Όταν του την είπα μια φορά μου είπε ότι θα ήταν αγένεια να έχει κόσμο στο σπίτι και να μην τους μιλάει, να μη δείχνει ενδιαφέρον. Προσπάθησα να του εξηγήσω τα όρια. Αλλά στον θεόκουφου την πόρτα.*

‘When I was still living at home and had friends over, I didn’t dare to invite them to the living room because my dad would sit with us for hours asking them all kinds of questions about their lives, their jobs, their parents. So embarrassing. When I confronted him about this, he said that it would be rude to have people in his home and not talk to them or show interest. I tried to explain the limits – but in vain.’

In this example the participant not only provides an evaluation of her father’s behaviour as embarrassing, thus referring to negative emotions triggered by this behaviour, she even reports having confronted her father. The reported speech representing the father’s response reveals the politeness norms that have guided his behaviour. It shows that while our interviewee considers her father’s behaviour as impolite, the father is convinced that it would be rude not to act as he does. Interestingly, while the daughter rejects her father’s view and even feels the need to discuss the matter with him, she does not fully reject her father’s norms, merely arguing that her father’s concept of ‘hospitality’ goes too far.

The expressions of embarrassment found in Examples 3 and 4 can be translated literally as ‘It makes me feel ashamed’ (*Με κάνει να ντρέπομαι* in Ex3) and ‘big shame’ (*Μεγάλη ντροπή* in Ex4) – though dictionaries commonly list *embarrassment* as their English equivalent.

The concepts of embarrassment and shame are, in fact, closely related. They have been both classified as moral, negatively valenced emotions and discussed in the context of impoliteness (Culpeper 2011: 61). More specifically, they are “self-conscious” emotions, and while shame arises due to one’s perceived “failure to measure up to standards of morality, aesthetics or competence” (Haidt 2003, online version), embarrassment is often felt when one violates social conventions and incurs face loss as a result (Haidt 2003).

In the context analyzed here, these emotions are caused by the older generation not measuring up to the younger generation’s standards of morality and violating their social conventions. In addition, these emotions – as well as the ensuing face loss – are experienced on behalf of others. Although the partici-

pants censure the older generation's behaviour, they feel implicated in it due to their close relationship with the person or people they criticize. This reflects the collective nature of face emphasized by Sifianou when she points out that the "behaviour of other closely related members of the in-group contributes greatly to the overall picture of every individual's face" (Sifianou 1992: 41).

Example 5 below contains further expressions describing strong emotional reactions to a father's behaviour. Both *Τρελάθηκα εντελώς*, 'I was totally flabbergasted' and *Ήθελα να κρυφτώ κάτω από το τραπέζι*, 'I wanted to hide under the table' could be seen as ways of expressing shame and embarrassment, with the former also expressing surprise or shock.

Ex5-S21/M

*Τρελάθηκα εντελώς μια μέρα που ο πατέρας μου μιλούσε με τον θείο μου για κάτι κληρονομικά και ξαφνικά σταμάτησε και του είπε 'τι διάολο; τα έχεις χάσει όλα σου τα δόντια'; Ήθελα να κρυφτώ κάτω από το τραπέζι μιλάμε. Λόγω οικειότητας γίνεται αλλά παρατραβάει. [...] Υπάρχουν πράγματα που δεν λέγονται όσο κοντά στον άλλον και να είσαι.*

'I was totally flabbergasted the other day when my father, talking to his brother about some inheritance thing, suddenly stopped and said to him 'What the hell? Have you lost all your teeth?' I wanted to hide under the table or something. It's the result of intimacy, but it goes too far. [...] There are things that shouldn't be said, no matter how close you are to the other person.'

As in example 4, despite his strong emotional reaction, condemning the father's behaviour as inappropriate, the interviewee displays understanding of his father's norms, according to which the intimacy he shares with his brother allows him to be honest and even blunt. While he does not reject the idea of being direct (a feature associated with positive politeness) in close relationships per se (as in example 4), he finds his father's bluntness too extreme. By asserting that there are things that "shouldn't be said", he invokes a moral norm – breached by his father.

While discrepant perceptions of intimacy and the types of behaviours it sanctions accounted for a large proportion of the descriptions of impolite behaviour, privacy was another recurrent concept that emerged as being interpreted differently by the two generations, in particular within the (extended) family context.

Ex6-S8/F

*Είμαι παντρεμένη 7 χρόνια και όταν η μάνα μου παίρνει τηλέφωνο λέει ακόμα πράγματα τύπου 'σας πήρα και πριν αλλά δεν απαντούσατε πού είστε;' Αυτό το πράγμα το βρίσκω τρομερά αδιάκριτο και αγενές. Τι θέλει δηλαδή να της πω; Ότι βαριόμουν να της μιλήσω; Ότι έκανα σεξ με τον άντρα μου εκείνη την ώρα; Σε κάνουν να γίνεσαι και συ αγενής.*

'I have been married for seven years now. When my mother calls, she still says things like 'I called earlier and you did not answer. Where have you been?' I find this so indiscreet, so rude. What does she want me to tell her? That I did not feel like answering? That I had sex with my husband at the time? They make you become rude too.'

Although the above described situation depicts a clash of parent-child expectations that is by no means confined to the Greek context, the example of a mother expecting a high degree of involvement in her daughter's life and the daughter's condemnation of her mother's behaviour as indiscreet and rude illustrate a conflicting understanding of the concept of privacy. This concept is typically associated with negative politeness, which apparently has no place in family life for the older generation, but needs to be observed according to the younger one.

The interviewee not only criticizes her mother's behaviour but also provides a self-reflexive comment describing the effect this behaviour has on her: it puts her in a position where she has to lie in order not to be impolite – or be impolite in order to make her mother aware of her indiscreetness.

Example 7 illustrates a similar problem. The breach of privacy here consists in being constantly confronted with what is regarded by the interviewee as an irritating personal question.

Ex7-S14/F

*Έχω φτάσει στο αμήν με το 'γιατί δεν παντρεύτηκες ακόμα.' Σαν να είναι το μόνο που ενδιαφέρει τους μεγαλύτερους της οικογένειας ακόμα και τους ξένους αυτής της ηλικίας. Θέλω να βάλω τις φωνές 'δεν είναι δική σας δουλειά' αλλά δεν θέλω να τους στενοχωρήσω. Έχουν καλές προθέσεις αλλά γίνεται εκνευριστικό.*

*'I am totally fed up with the 'why haven't you got married yet' question. It seems it's all the older family members care about; and, of course, even strangers this age. I want to scream 'it's none of your business', but I don't want to hurt their feelings. They mean well, but it's irritating.'*

Participant 14 finds her family members' constant concern with her (from their point of view undesirable) marital status highly annoying. She starts her narrative with the expression *Έχω φτάσει στο αμήν*, whose literal translation is 'I have arrived at the Amen', indicating that her patience is coming to an end. Her emotional reaction to their ongoing indiscreet inquiries takes the form of irritation, a mild form of an "other-condemning" emotion; though the phrase 'I want to scream' (*Θέλω να βάλω τις φωνές*) indicates that the negative emotion felt by our participant is in fact much stronger. Yet, she suppresses her own feelings towards her family to protect theirs, since she understands that their questions are motivated by concern and not intended to cause offence.

The participants' willingness to protect the offensive party's feelings and their ability to consider both parties' perspectives when relating their experiences, despite being negatively affected by their relatives' behaviour, becomes even clearer in the next example.

Ex8-S1/F

*Ο λόγος που σταμάτησα να πηγαίνω στη θεία μου είναι ότι επιμένει να με ταΐζει άπειρο φαί που φτιάχνει ειδικά για μένα. Στενοχωριέται τόσο αν δεν φάω που δεν μπορώ να της πω ότι τρώω μέχρι σκασμού. Να με φροντίσει προσπαθεί. Αλλά υπάρχουν όρια ανάμεσα στην φροντίδα και την καταπίεση.*

‘The reason why I have stopped visiting my aunt is the way she insists on me eating tons of food she has cooked especially for me. She becomes so upset if I don’t, that I can’t say no. I eat and eat until I burst. It’s her way of taking care of me. But one needs to draw a line between care and pressure.’

In this example, despite the upsetting effect the aunt’s behaviour has on the participant, it is portrayed as her way of caring for her niece, i. e., a form of positive politeness. This understanding, coupled with consideration for the aunt’s feelings, makes it impossible for our participant to contradict her. At the same time, the association of this behaviour with pressure rather than care leads to opposed views that illustrate an intergenerational clash of norms, ultimately resulting in the family visits being abandoned.

The above examples all describe situations involving family members, i. e., contexts that are generally associated with the use of positive rather than negative politeness. Yet, our informants took issues with concepts such as care and involvement, representing positive politeness, and with the lack of negative politeness in their relatives’ communicative styles, such as their use of imperatives, lack of mitigation or omission of thanking formulae.

As they recalled the older generation’s behaviour that affected them in a negative way, they referred to it as embarrassing and irritating, and reported feeling fed up or ashamed on behalf of their relatives. At the same time, they all displayed an understanding of the motivations underlying the older generation’s behaviour, pointing to their divergent perceptions of intimacy and the forms of behaviour it sanctions, as well as issues of privacy, discreetness and self-determination.

However, while voicing the need for autonomy and the use of politeness formulae in close relationships, the participants did not entirely reject their parents’ conceptualization of intimacy. Instead, they felt that the described behaviour was exaggerated, by pointing out that it ‘goes too far’ (*παρατραβάει*) (Ex5) and that there are limits (*όρια*) (Ex4, Ex8). The overall picture that emerges from the present data so far thus shows that “the positive face orientation of the Greek society turns out to be a matter of degree” (Terkourafi 2009: 280), with differences emerging across generations.

Given that the younger generation perceived the lack of negative politeness in intimate contexts as offensive, clashes of norms can be expected to be even more noticeable in public contexts. Some of the stories (Ex3 and Ex7) have already indicated that the older generation’s overly familiar behaviour was carried over to



encounters with strangers, a context that is generally considered to require negative politeness.

#### 4.2.2 The out-group – public contexts

The examples of impolite behaviour the participants encountered in public contexts tended to take the form of more general descriptions rather than personal stories, with the involved representatives of the older generation being often referred to in the plural as, for instance, *οι μεγαλύτεροι* ('older people'), *αυτοί οι άνθρωποι* ('these people'), or even *οι Έλληνες* ('Greeks').

Despite the public character of interactions among strangers, the themes of intimacy and privacy continue to play a central role in the reported incidents, as in example 9 below:

Ex9-S15/M

*Πάντα με εντυπωσίαζε το πόσο προσωπικά πράγματα συζητάνε αυτοί οι άνθρωποι όταν βρεθούν να περιμένουν σε ουρές ξέρω γω. Μια φορά δύο κυρίες είχανε μια χαρωπή συζήτηση για τη δυσπεψία και τις αιμορροΐδες τους. Δεν μπορώ να φανταστώ να κάνω τέτοια κουβέντα με ξένους της ηλικίας μου. Με ξένους οποιασδήποτε ηλικίας εδώ που τα λέμε.*

'I am always impressed by the intimate details these people share when waiting in queues, for example. The other day two ladies had an animated discussion about indigestion and haemorrhoids. I cannot imagine myself doing this with an unknown person my age, or any other age for that matter.'

While the interviewee portrays the described behaviour as inappropriate, he chooses to use the expression *με εντυπωσίαζε*. Being impressed, in this context, has clearly negative connotations, most likely referring to the (too) intimate nature of the details that members of the older generation are willing to share with strangers and in public. Unlike in the examples involving relatives, this interviewee does not attempt to demonstrate understanding of the described behaviour. Instead, he merely juxtaposes the two generations' norms with regard to handling taboo topics and distances himself from the described behaviour.

A recurrent theme among the examples describing public behaviour was the older generations' disregard for queues:

Ex10-S19/M

*Οι μεγαλύτεροι νομίζουν ότι οι ουρές δεν ισχύουν γι' αυτούς. Το θεωρούν νομάλ να τις πήδανε απλώς και μόνο γιατί είναι μεγαλύτεροι. Δεν με πειράζει να τους αφήνω να περνάνε όταν το ζητάνε ευγενικά. Αλλά εξοργίζομαι όταν το θεωρούν δεδομένο.*

'Older people think that queues are not for them. They find it normal to skip them just because they are older. I don't mind giving them priority as long as they ask politely. When they take it for granted it infuriates me.'

While queuing has previously been discussed as a form of respect for other's rights (Ex1), this example links these rights to age, with older people being portrayed as feeling entitled to disregard others' rights. The interviewee understands this behaviour as a form of age-related privilege, but only accepts it when his rights are verbally acknowledged: Letting somebody skip the queue is a favour that needs to be asked for, and paid for with politeness. While he is happy to grant the favour to those older than him, lack of politeness on their part results in impoliteness, leading to strong negative emotions, such as fury.

The older generation's display of entitlement vis-à-vis the younger generation is also problematized by the next interviewee:

Ex11-S35/M

*Δεν έχει τρόπους αυτή η γενιά. Συμπεριφέρονται σε άγνωστους ανθρώπους λες και είναι υπάλληλοί τους. Ούτε 'παρακαλώ' ούτε 'συγγνώμη' ούτε τίποτα. Την άλλη φορά μια κυρία στην ηλικία της μάνας μου με χτύπησε άσχημα με τον αγκώνα της στο δρόμο και απλώς με κοίταξε περίεργα. Ειδικά αν είσαι νεότερος δεν έχεις ελπίδα να ακούσεις συγγνώμη.*

'This generation has no manners. They behave to complete strangers as if they were their assistants. No 'please', no 'I am sorry', no nothing. The other day a woman my mother's age hit me badly with her elbow in the street and she just stared at me. Especially if you are younger, you have no hope of getting an apology.'

The lack of manners lamented by participant 35 manifests itself through the use of authoritative language devoid of politeness marking; even behaviour causing bodily harm is not repaired with an apology. The older generation's impoliteness is here not only linked to age, but the assumed entitlement is viewed as creating a power differential, putting the younger generation at a disadvantage, i. e., making them feel like assistants.

A recurrent finding emerging from the data on public contexts is a clear *us vs. them* distinction, based on two sets of competing social norms, with the younger generation condemning those represented by the older generation and emphasizing the superiority of their own moral order. The next example, for instance, juxtaposes the older generation's evaluation of their habit of addressing people in the singular as friendly with the younger generation's interpretation of this form of address as impolite.

Ex12-S11/M

*Θεωρούν ότι μπορούν να μιλάνε σε όλο τον κόσμο στον ενικό. Νομίζω πως μερικοί το κάνουν για να είναι φιλικόι αλλά το βρίσκω εξοργιστικό. Οι συνομήλικοί μου το κάνουν αυτό μόνο επίτηδες για να είναι αγενείς.*

'They feel free to talk to anyone in the singular. For some I think it's just a way of being friendly but I find it infuriating all the same. People my age do this only if they want to be intentionally impolite.'

While participant 11 does concede that speaking to others in the singular can be regarded as friendly, he contrasts this evaluation with his own by describing this behaviour as infuriating (*εξοργιστικό*). Emotions such as fury and anger have been classified as ‘other-condemning’ emotions. Unlike embarrassment or shame, which are ‘self-conscious’ emotions and have been experienced by our participants in family contexts and predominantly on behalf of their relatives, those expressing an emotion like fury clearly distance themselves from the offending group.

Having clarified his position, the participant extends it to *οι συνομήλικοι*, ‘people my age’ while claiming that according to this group’s social norms, indiscriminate use of the singular to address people is an instance of *intentional* impolite behaviour. And although the interviewee is aware that the linguistic practice he describes is not intentionally impolite if used by the older generation, he still finds this practice infuriating and offensive.

The next interviewee goes even further in that she describes a form of impolite behaviour for which she does not attempt to provide a justification, ascribing it to selfishness instead.

Ex13-S20/F

*Το χαρακτηριστικό άτομο αυτής της ηλικίας σε κοιτάει με περιφρόνηση στο λεωφορείο μέχρι να του δώσεις τη θέση σου. Δεν τους ενδιαφέρει αν είσαι πιο κουρασμένη ή έγκυος ή δεν ξέρω τι. Άσε που δεν έχω δει κανέναν αυτής της ηλικίας να δίνει τη θέση του σε έγκυο. Εμείς το κάνουμε αυτό πάντα.*

‘There is this typical type of Greek person of this age who will stare at you in contempt in a bus until you give up your seat. They do not seem to care if you are more tired than them, or pregnant or anything. By the way, I have never seen a person of this age group giving up their seat for a pregnant woman. We always do that.’

As was already the case in Examples 10 and 11, the behaviour problematized in this example is based on the older generation’s perceived entitlement to receive special treatment based on their (advanced) age. The staring functions as a strategy of entitlement. It is directed at younger people, irrespective of their individual circumstances, and puts the older generation in a more powerful position than if they verbally requested the seat since it involves virtually no face-threat for them.

Unlike in the previous examples, interviewee 20 does not show understanding for the behaviour she describes. Yet, she implicitly refers to an alternative moral order when referring to the older generation’s contempt directed at those not complying with their expectations. Hence, while she does acknowledge the different social norms guiding the older and younger generations’ behaviour respectively, she criticizes the older generation for not considering factors other than age that make people vulnerable. By switching to the plural and using the

first person pronoun *εμείς* ('we'), she not only claims membership of a more considerate subgroup of the population, but also refers to established norms shared by this group.

Since Greek is a pro-drop language, personal pronouns are optional and mostly used for emphasis. In the present data, they are used to emphasize the contrast between the two generations' norms, as in Example 13 and in Example 14 below:

Ex14-S8/F

*Οι ουρές. Δεν κάθονται ποτέ στη σειρά τους. Ναι, ειδικά αυτή η ηλικία. Εμείς το σεβόμαστε. Το έχουμε μάθει ίσως γιατί ζήσαμε έξω.*

'The queues. They never wait for their turn. Yes, especially this age. We respect this. We have learnt this perhaps because we have lived abroad.'

Participant 8 juxtaposes the queueing behaviours of the older and younger generations with the help of the emphatic *εμείς* ('we') and also offers an explanation for the younger generation's divergent behaviour. But while this participant maintains a clear *us* vs. *them* distinction, in the following example it becomes blurry:

Ex15-S13/F

*Όλη η γενιά φωνάζει και ακόμα και μερικοί από μας.*

'This whole generation shouts and even some of us do.'

Interviewee 13 provides a uniform characterization of the older generation as loud, but at the same time uses the quantifier *μερικοί* ('some') to include members of her own generation in the description. Likewise, Example 16 starts with a general statement about the 'Greeks' (of all ages):

Ex16-S3/M

*Έτσι είναι οι Έλληνες. Έχουμε την τάση να δημιουργούμε ισχυρούς οικογενειακούς δεσμούς. Αλλά εμείς σεβόμαστε την ιδιωτική ζωή περισσότερο από εκείνους, νομίζω.*

'It is how Greeks are. We tend to form strong family ties. But we value privacy more than they do, I think.'

The participant here uses a first person plural verb form (*έχουμε*) to describe the behaviour of all Greeks. The next sentence, however, contains the emphatic *εμείς* ('we') to refer exclusively to the younger generation, which is then followed by a third person plural form referring to the older one. Thus, both generations are portrayed as sharing a certain feature, i. e., forming strong family ties. And although a contrast between the two generations is created, this is done through a comparative form (*περισσότερο*), marking the difference as one of degree.

The descriptions of the older generation's impolite behaviour observed in public contexts differ significantly from those observed in private ones. Our participants not only referred to different forms of behaviour, with many reporting the older generation's disregard for others' rights and lack of manners, but also displayed a much more critical attitude towards the impolite behaviour of strangers. Unlike in their narratives of in-group members' impoliteness, very few participants have shown understanding towards the offensive behaviour of out-group members or attempted an explanation of the underlying norms. Most interviewees distanced themselves from the described behaviour, with some explicitly condemning it and illustrating the superiority of the younger generation's moral order (e. g., Ex13).

The emotional reaction most commonly reported in public contexts was that of fury, a strong form of anger, which is an "other-condemning" reaction to behaviours interfering "with one's plans or goals by reducing power" (Culpeper 2011: 59). Power was a recurrent theme underlying many of the narratives, with the older generation's attitude displaying entitlement and their behaviour a disregard for rules and lack of consideration. The main factor behind the clashes between the two generations' expectations in public contexts seems to be that the older generation adheres to more hierarchical and the younger one to more egalitarian social structures.<sup>2</sup> While the former feels entitled to certain preferential treatments, the latter views them as a favour, to be solicited through politeness.

### 4.3 An emerging concept of Greek politeness

The above analysis has discussed a range of impolite behaviours observed in both private and public contexts, described and evaluated by our participants. The older generation was referred to as rude (*αγενείς*), with some participants using the superlative *αγενέστατοι*, and lacking in manners (*δεν έχουν τρόπους, δεν ξέρουν να φερθούν*). They were described as selfish (*εγωϊστές*) and as people who care only about their own comfort (*βολειψάκηδες*), and even as donkeys (*γαϊδούρια*). Their behaviour was depicted as indiscreet/tactless (*αδιάκριτο*) and out of line/unacceptable (*απαράδεκτο*).

At the same time, the examples of the older generation's impolite behaviour provided by our participants have also offered insights into their perceptions of

---

<sup>2</sup> This shows that the older generation's behaviour is more likely to be guided by the "social responsibility social norms" (Deutsch 1975, in Culpeper 2011: 37), according to which more resources are allocated to the more needy, whereas the younger generation's moral order is based on "reciprocity social norms" (Gouldner 1960, in Culpeper 2011: 37).

what constitutes polite behaviour and the politeness norms according to which the older generation's behaviour was judged. The older generation was, for instance, criticized for ignoring other people's rights, e. g., not observing queues (Ex1, Ex10, Ex14) or violating others' privacy (Ex6, Ex16), for lacking in manners (Ex11), and not using politeness formulae (Ex3, Ex11) or the polite plural (Ex12). While these examples – all of which constitute violations of norms associated with negative politeness – indirectly illustrate what our participants view as polite behaviour, some of them, when comparing their parents' generation's behaviour to their own, provided explicit explanations of why they find certain forms of behaviour polite.

Ex17-S4/F

*Ο πατέρας του άντρα μου είναι χαρακτηριστική περίπτωση ατόμου αυτής της γενιάς. Όποτε ζητάει κάτι το ζητάει με προστακτική και λέει ευχαριστώ μόνο στους ξένους. Αυτά τα πράγματα όμως είναι σημαντικά άσχετα πόσο κοντινός είσαι με κάποιον. Κάνει τον άλλον να νιώθει ότι εκτιμάς την αξία του και τον σέβεσαι.*

'My husband's father is a typical example of people this age. He always asks for things in the imperative. And he says 'thank you' only to strangers. I think these things matter, no matter how intimate you are with the other person. It makes this person feel valued and respected.'

Ex18-S6/M

*Αν κάτι με ενοχλεί είναι ότι λένε ότι κάνουν όλα αυτά τα εκνευριστικά πράγματα γιατί 'ενδιαφέρονται'. Αλλά εγώ δεν το βλέπω σαν ενδιαφέρον. Πρέπει να σέβεσαι την αυτονομία του άλλου. Δεν εννοώ να είσαι κρύος και απόμακρος, αλλά υπάρχουν πιο διακριτικοί τρόποι να φέρεσαι με θέρμη και ενδιαφέρον.*

'What really bothers me is that they claim that they do all these annoying things because they 'care'. But this is not the way I understand caring for other people. You have to respect one's autonomy. I don't mean becoming cold and distant, but there are more discreet ways to be warm and attentive.'

While participant 4 explains that avoiding the imperative and expressing gratitude within intimate relationships shows that one's interlocutor is valued and respected, participant 6 makes a case for non-imposition, i. e., respecting other people's autonomy and being discreet.

As in many of the examples presented above, participant 6 does not fully discard the older generation's view on politeness. He merely asserts that their values of interpersonal warmth and attentiveness (representing positive politeness) can be conveyed in more discreet ways – while at the same time rejecting a concept of autonomy associated with coldness and distance, which could be viewed as a negative view on negative politeness.

It is mainly in the narratives of impoliteness within the in-group that participants provided justifications for the older generation's behaviour, such

as ‘I understand that he is very close with my mother’ (Ex3), ‘It is the result of intimacy’ (Ex5), or ‘It’s her way of taking care of me’ (Ex8). And it is the understanding of concepts such as closeness, intimacy and care – all of which express positive politeness – that differed across the two generations. While there was a general agreement that the older generation’s expression of these values goes too far, some explicitly said that ‘closeness is not an excuse for rudeness’ (Ex3) and that ‘There are things that shouldn’t be said, no matter how close you are to the other person’ (Ex5).

Towards the end of the interview, we explicitly asked our participants what, in their view, constitutes polite behaviour and makes a person polite. Not surprisingly, their characterizations were very much in line with those emerging from their stories, with concepts representing negative politeness being slightly more frequent (55 %) in their answers. While the most frequent adjective, used 32 times, was ‘friendly’ (*φιλικός*), ‘discreet/tactful’ (*διακριτικός*) came second with 27 mentions. And ‘respect for others’ rights’ (*σέβεται τα δικαιώματα των άλλων*), with 19 mentions, was almost as frequent as the adjective ‘warm’ (*θερμός/ζεστός*), which was named 21 times.

These definitions differ significantly from those emerging from Sifianou’s work. In her original study (1992), politeness was defined as “altruism, generosity, morality, and self-abnegation” (Sifianou 1992: 88), and in the follow-up study, a polite person was “characterised as being kind, discrete, selfless, generous, patient, optimistic, and loving” (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 669). According to Sifianou, these attributes reflect approach rather than distance and they confirm “the frequently attested positive politeness orientation of Greek society” (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 669).

In order to ensure that the definitions our participants have provided were not an artefact of the stories they have recalled during the interviews, we asked a further 40 participants of the same age to define politeness, without eliciting any further information from them. The most frequently mentioned terms provided by both groups are presented in Table 1 below (with those generally associated with negative politeness being presented in bold).

The responses provided by the two groups were very similar overall, with the control group showing an even stronger preference for negative politeness, attaching more importance to good manners and polite language than our interviewees, as well as naming considerateness as a feature of politeness, which did not feature in the interview data.

On the whole, among the six most frequently mentioned terms in the interviewee group 53 referred to positive politeness and 64 to negative politeness. And among the seven most frequently named characterizations provided by the control group 42 referred to positive politeness and 95 to negative politeness.

**Table 1:** Characterizations of polite behaviour by the interviewees and a control group

Interviewees			Control group		
<i>φιλικός</i>	‘friendly’	32	<i>φιλικός</i>	‘friendly’	29
<i>διακριτικός</i>	‘discreet/tactful’	27	<i>καλοί τρόποι</i>	‘good manners’	26
<i>θερμός/ζεστός</i>	‘warm’	21	<i>διακριτικός</i>	‘discreet/tactful’	21
<i>σέβεται τα δικαιώματα των άλλων</i>	‘respect for others’ rights’	19	<i>μιλάει ευγενικά</i>	‘polite language’	20
<i>μιλάει ευγενικά</i>	‘polite language’	11	<i>σέβεται τα δικαιώματα των άλλων</i>	‘respect for others’ rights’	17
<i>καλοί τρόποι</i>	‘good manners’	7	<i>θερμός/ζεστός</i>	‘warm’	13
			<i>δείχνει ενδιαφέρον/ενδιαφέρεται</i>	‘considerate’	11

These findings illustrate a much stronger orientation towards negative politeness than suggested in previous research.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

Previous research has not only unanimously defined Greece as a positive politeness culture but also generally viewed it as a homogenous entity. Sifianou and Tzanne’s (2010) study differs in this respect in that it provides a diachronic perspective on the Greek concept of politeness. Having replicated a study conducted 25 years earlier, the authors conclude that their findings confirm the positive politeness orientation of Greek society, which was reflected in their informants’ definitions of politeness.

The definitions of politeness provided by our participants referred to concepts associated with both positive and negative politeness, with friendliness being the most frequent one and warmth featuring prominently in both sets of data. Yet, the bulk of the definitions centred on concepts such as tactfulness, respect for others’ rights, good manners, and polite language, thus showing an overall stronger tendency towards negative politeness.

Sifianou and Tzanne’s interpretation of their informants’ responses as reaffirming the positive politeness tendency of Greek culture was strengthened by



the observation that “this orientation relates primarily to in-group relationships, while the instances of impoliteness cited by our informants relate to cases involving members of out-groups” (2010: 682–683). While Sifianou and Tzanne’s data contained predominantly examples of (im)politeness in out-group contexts, our study has investigated the perceptions of (im)politeness in both out-group and in-group settings. The older generation’s impolite behaviour reported by our participants in in-group contexts consisted mainly in behaving in an overly familiar way. Their narratives voiced the need for more autonomy, privacy, self-determination and formality, i. e., values associated with negative politeness, and problematized the older generation’s involvement practices, such as intervening in others’ lives or sharing personal information, i. e., forms of behaviour generally linked to positive politeness.

Although the instances of impoliteness reported within the in-group were linked to discrepant interpretations of concepts such as intimacy and closeness, the values associated with these concepts by the older generation were not entirely rejected by our participants. Instead, the older generation’s behaviour was described as too extreme, with their concept of care being perceived as pressure and their concept of closeness as not leaving any room for personal autonomy and privacy. The impolite behaviour reported in public, i. e., out-group contexts, on the other hand, was predominantly associated with the older generation’s lack of consideration for others’ rights and their attitude of entitlement towards the younger generation. Hence, our participants expressed the need for more social distance in private contexts and for more egalitarian social structures in public settings – both defining features of individualism.

The impoliteness described by our participants was generally explained in terms of discrepant views on what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Many explicitly acknowledged that the impolite behaviour they criticized was guided by the older generation’s perceptions of social norms and values, different from their own. In in-group contexts, the described behaviour was justified and generally portrayed as a more extreme version of what is acceptable. The participants engaged with their parents’ and relatives’ understandings of appropriate behaviour and the values guiding it. The dual perspective on the reported incidents thus provided illustrates a discrepancy between their experiential and moral norms.

In out-group contexts, the encountered impoliteness was also explained in terms of two competing moral orders, but our participants did not attempt to sanction or justify the older generation’s offensive behaviour, as they did when describing impoliteness within the in-group. Although they contrasted the older generation’s behaviour with their own and sometimes hinted at the norms underlying the described impolite behaviour, it was generally viewed critically and rejected. Similarly, being denied equal status and rights of self-determination

was something that our participants condemned in out-group contexts, yet they endured it in in-group contexts.

The different reactions to the in-group's and the out-group's impolite behaviour in our participants' narratives could be viewed as reflecting the collectivist nature of Greek society, which is characterized by discrepant attitudes towards the two. While this seems to be at odds with the younger generation's preference for values associated with individualism and negative politeness (in both in-group and out-group contexts), in the context of the present study this is not unexpected, given that when referring to in-group contexts our participants were criticizing the moral norms of those who raised them.

Impoliteness research has gradually attributed less and less prominence to the role intentions play in the production and perception of impoliteness, e. g., regarding them as a scalar concept or as forms of responsibility and foreseeability (Culpeper 2011: 52). Since our participants viewed the impoliteness they reported as a result of competing social norms, not a single person hinted that the impolite behaviour they observed was intended to offend. However, despite the awareness that the older generation's impoliteness was not intentional, they reacted emotionally to it. The emotions expressed by our participants differed between the in-group and out-group contexts, again showing their discrepant attitudes towards these two groups' impolite behaviour.

A recurrent emotion referred to in in-group contexts was that of embarrassment, which is a self-conscious emotion closely related to shame. It was verbalized through a range of expressions, such as *ντρέπομαι*, 'I feel ashamed/embarassed' or *με κάνει να ντρέπομαι*, 'it makes me feel ashamed/embarassed', *είναι να ντρέπεις για αυτούς*, 'you just have to be ashamed/embarassed for them'. Another emotion closely related to embarrassment encountered in the data was that of awkwardness, as in the expression *με φέρνει σε δύσκολη θέση*, which translates literally as 'it brings me into an awkward position'.<sup>3</sup>

These emotions appeared exclusively in in-group contexts where members of the older generations acted in an overly intimate, effusive or blunt way towards third parties. This behaviour was linked to concepts such as involvement and intimacy by our participants and can thus be viewed as an instantiation of positive

---

<sup>3</sup> The expression "*με φέρνει σε δύσκολη θέση*" ('it brings me into a difficult/awkward position') is commonly encountered in monolingual dictionaries under the entry *αμηχανία*, cited in bilingual dictionaries as the equivalent of the English word 'embarrassment' (see e. g. Charalambakis (2014) *Christiko Lexico tis Neoellinikis Glossas* [A User's Dictionary of the Modern Greek Language]. Athens: Academia Athinon).

politeness, perceived as too extreme by the younger generation and viewed as impinging on the concerned parties' negative face.

The embarrassment our participants experienced on behalf of their relatives shows that “we get embarrassed at other people’s embarrassment, or even get embarrassed at other people who ought to be embarrassed though they show no signs of being so” (Goffman 1967: 99–100). The fact that the younger generation finds their relatives’ behaviour embarrassing (while they themselves do not) illustrates that the social norms guiding the older generation’s behaviour are no longer acceptable for the younger generation.

In fact, embarrassment has been linked to both social norms and face in the literature. Culpeper argues that “signs of embarrassment can be symptoms of face loss” (2011: 61) and that “violations of face are more likely to be accompanied by self-conscious emotions” (2011: 62) than by other-condemning emotions. Haidt (2003) has further suggested that it is the avoidance of embarrassment that makes “people conform to rules and uphold the social order” (2003: 861) since violations of social conventions lead to face loss. The face loss incurred by our participants concerns their positive face, i. e., their want to be liked and approved of – despite being closely associated with people whose behaviour they disapprove of.<sup>4</sup>

In in-group situations where the impolite behaviour was directed at the participants themselves, they reported feeling annoyed or bothered (*με ενοχλεί*) and irritated, as expressed by the clauses *με εκνευρίζει*, ‘it irritates me’ or *γίνεται εκνευριστικό*, ‘it becomes irritating’. Unlike embarrassment, which for our participants entailed a feeling of responsibility for their relatives’ behaviour, being bothered or irritated was used to indicate a negative reaction to a long-term behaviour rejected but, at the same time, endured by them. Annoyance and irritation are mild – and in our data often suppressed – other-condemning emotions expressed in narratives involving violations of privacy and self-determination and thus negative face.

The most commonly described emotional reactions to public impolite behaviour, in contrast, took the form of the much stronger other-condemning emotion of rage or fury. The participants resorted to expressions such as *το βρίσκω/θεωρώ*

---

<sup>4</sup> Impoliteness research has primarily drawn on Goffman’s (1967) rather than Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of face, with impoliteness affecting face “when a positive attribute the participant is assumed to have is challenged” (Culpeper 2011: 27). While this applies to our participants, whose positive attributes are challenged when their parents demonstrate behaviour that shows lack of these attributes in the family, we felt that our analysis benefits more from Brown and Levinson’s dual concept of face as positive and negative as this is where the cross-generational discrepancies arise.

*εξοργιστικό*, ‘I find/consider it infuriating’, *εξοργίζομαι*, ‘I become infuriated’ or *με εξοργίζει*, ‘it infuriates me’.

According to Culpeper “anger antecedents involve the judgement that something/someone has interfered with one’s plans or goals by reducing power, violating expectations, interrupting, etc., and that interference is illegitimate” (2011: 59). Interfering with others’ rights of self-determination can be seen as violating negative face, though there seems to be more at stake in the contexts analyzed here. The issue of power is central to our participant’s perceptions of impoliteness in the out-group contexts, with members of the older generation being reported as treating the younger generation as inferior and displaying entitlement to special treatment while disrespecting others and disregarding their rights.

Even though these strong emotional reactions show that “there are obvious echoes here with the emotional consequences of face damage” (Culpeper 2011: 59), the encounters with the out-group were less personal than those within the in-group, with impolite strangers being condemned collectively as a group. Interestingly, although behaviour resulting in other-condemning emotions in in-group contexts also involved issues of power and interference with one’s rights to self-determination, not only were the expressed emotions milder, merely taking the form of annoyance and irritation, but the ongoing impolite behaviour was tolerated – out of politeness and consideration for the offenders’ feelings.

Since our participants grew up with their relatives’ behavioural patterns and have been socialized into their moral norms, it is not surprising that they tried to be understanding towards the forms of behaviour generated by these norms. Their critical attitude stems from the fact that while their parents’ norms remain largely unchanged, they are no longer considered valid by the younger generation.

It has been argued that experiential norms are derived from “each individual’s total experience” (Culpeper 2008: 29), which has been different for the two generations. Among the factors our participants named that distinguish their concept of politeness from their parents’ generation’s were personal experiences, such as their access to higher education, in many cases involving studying and living abroad, i. e., exposure to different experiential and moral norms. They also named more general factors leading to changes of Greek mentality, such as globalization, the media, and the fact that Greek society is becoming increasingly multicultural. The older generation’s moral order, on the other hand, has been portrayed as shaped by rural life and closely-knit neighbourhoods leading to a mentality favouring close social ties.

As has been suggested by our anonymous reviewers, the differences between the norms and values represented by the two generations could also be related to the older generation’s experiences of the Greek military dictatorship (Junta). This

period of distrust and fear is likely to have shaped attitudes towards out-groups and the older generation's moral order in general. Future research focusing on the older generation's perspective could provide valuable insights into the impact of these political and social factors on their perceptions of (im)politeness.

The present study has demonstrated that “even members of the same group do not necessarily always perceive the moral order in the same way” (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 69) and that “in their everyday interactions they both sustain the moral order and over time act to change it” (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 67).

The main finding emerging from the data analyzed here is that while the older generation adheres to values associated with positive politeness, the younger generation increasingly values negative politeness. Although our participants represented only a subset of the population, with all of them being highly educated and living in big cities, the factors discussed by them are likely to have an impact on large proportions of the Greek population. Clearly, more research is needed to establish whether and how these, and other, factors contribute to changes in social norms and politeness across Greece – as well as the ongoing shift towards negative politeness demonstrated in diachronic research on politeness.

## References

- Antonopoulou, Eleni. 2001. Brief service encounters: Gender and politeness. In Arin Bayraktaroğlu & Maria Sifianou (eds.), *Linguistic politeness across boundaries: The case of Greek and Turkish*, 241–269. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Bella, Spyridoula. 2009. Invitations and politeness in Greek: The age variable. *Journal of Politeness Research* 5(2). 243–271.
- Blum-Kulka Shoshana. 1992. The metapragmatics of politeness in Israeli society. In Richard J. Watts, Sachiko Ide & Konrad Ehlich (eds.), *Politeness in language: Studies in its history, theory and practice*, 225–280. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bousfield, Derek. 2008. *Impoliteness in interaction*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Brown, Roger & Albert Gilman. 1989. Politeness theory and Shakespeare's four major tragedies. *Language in Society* 18(2). 159–212.
- Brown, Penelope & Stephen Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Byrne, Bridget. 2004. Qualitative interviewing. In Clive Seale (ed.), *Researching society and culture*, 179–192. London: Sage.
- Charalambakis, Christophoros (ed.). 2014. *Christiko lexico tis Neollinikis glossas* [A user's dictionary of the modern Greek language]. Athens: Academia Athinon.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 1996. Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 25(3). 349–367.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2005. Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The Weakest Link. *Journal of Politeness Research* 1(1). 35–72.

- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2008. Reflections on impoliteness, relational work and power. In Derek Bousfield & Miriam Locher (eds.), *Impoliteness in language: Studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*, 17–44. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2011. *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan & Jane Demmen. 2011. Nineteenth-century English politeness: Negative politeness, conventional indirect requests and the rise of the individual self. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 12(1–2). 49–81.
- Davis, Joseph E. 2008. Moral order. *Culture* 2(1). 17.
- Deutsch, Morton. 1975. Equity, equality and need: What determines which values will be used as a basis of distributive justice? *Journal of Social Issues* 31. 137–150.
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, Maria. 2003. *Requesting strategies and cross-cultural pragmatics: Greek and English*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham dissertation.
- Eelen, Gino. 2001. *A critique of politeness theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Ehlich, Konrad. 1992. On the historicity of politeness. In Richard J. Watts, Sachiko Ide & Konrad Ehlich (eds.), *Politeness in language: Studies in its history, theory and practice*, 71–108. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Flick, Uwe. 2009. *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Fukushima, Saeko. 2011. A cross-generational and cross-cultural study on demonstration of attentiveness. *Pragmatics* 21(4). 549–571.
- Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar & Patricia Bou-Franch. 2019. Emic conceptualizations of face (*imagen*) in Peninsular Spanish. In Eva Ogiermann & Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (eds.), *From speech acts to lay understandings of politeness: A multilingual and multicultural perspective*, 301–327. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1956. Embarrassment and social organization. *American Journal of Sociology* 62(3). 264–271.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interactional ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Gouldner, Alvin W. 1960. The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review* 25(2). 161–178.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2003. The moral emotion. In Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Scherer & H. Hill Goldsmith (eds.), *Handbook of affective sciences*, 852–870. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/alternate\\_versions/haidt.2003.the-moral-emotions.pub025-as-html.html](http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/alternate_versions/haidt.2003.the-moral-emotions.pub025-as-html.html) (5 March 2019).
- Haugh, Michael. 2003. Anticipated versus inferred politeness. *Multilingua* 22(4). 397–413.
- Haugh, Michael. 2010. When is an email really offensive?: Argumentativity and variability in evaluations of impoliteness. *Journal of Politeness Research* 6(1). 7–31.
- He, Yun. 2012. Different generations different face? A discursive approach to naturally occurring compliment responses in Chinese. *Journal of Politeness Research* 8(1). 29–51.
- Hofstede, Geert. 1991. *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. Berkshire & New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kádár, Dániel & Michael Haugh. 2013. *Understanding politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kopytko, Roman. 1995. Linguistic politeness strategies in Shakespeare's plays. In Andreas H. Jucker (ed.), *Historical pragmatics: Pragmatic developments in the history of English*, 515–540. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Kohnen, Thomas. 2008. Linguistic politeness in Anglo-Saxon England? A study of Old English address terms. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 9(1). 140–158.
- Locher, Miriam A. & Richard J. Watts. 2008. Relational work and impoliteness: negotiating norms of linguistic behaviour. In Derek Bousfield & Miriam A. Locher. (eds.) *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*, 77–99. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Locher, Miriam A. & Martin Luginbühl. 2019. Discussions on Swiss and German politeness in online sources. In Eva Ogiermann & Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (eds.), *From speech acts to lay understandings of politeness: A multilingual and multicultural perspective*, 250–279. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Makri-Tsilipakou, Marianthi. 2001. Congratulations and bravo. In Arin Bayraktaroğlu & Maria Sifianou (eds.), *Linguistic politeness across boundaries: The case of Greek and Turkish*, 137–178. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Mills, Sara. 2003. *Gender and politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogiermann, Eva & Małgorzata Suszczyńska. 2011. On im/politeness behind the Iron Curtain. In Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini & Dániel Kádár (eds.), *Politeness across cultures*, 194–215. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pavlidou, Theodossia. 1994. Contrasting German and Greek politeness and the consequences. *Journal of Pragmatics* 21(5). 487–511.
- Sifianou, Maria. 1992. *Politeness phenomena in England and Greece: A cross-cultural perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sifianou, Maria. 2015. Conceptualizing politeness in Greek: Evidence from Twitter corpora. *Journal of Pragmatics* 86. 25–30.
- Sifianou, Maria & Eleni Antonopoulou. 2005. Politeness in Greece: The politeness of involvement. In Leo Hickey & Miranda Stewart (eds.), *Politeness in Europe*, 263–276. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sifianou, Maria & Angeliki Tzanne. 2010. Conceptualizations of politeness and impoliteness in Greek. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 7(4). 661–687.
- Sifianou, Maria & Spyridoula Bella. 2018. Twitter, politeness, self-presentation. In Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Patricia Bou-Franch (eds.), *Analyzing digital discourse: New insights and future directions*, 341–365. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2009. Finding face between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: Greek perceptions of the in-group. In Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini & Michael Haugh (eds.), *Face, communication and social interaction*, 269–288. London: Equinox Publishing.
- Triandis, Harry & Vasso Vassiliou. 1972. A comparative analysis of subjective culture. In Harry Triandis (ed.), *The analysis of subjective culture*, 299–335. New York: Wiley.
- Watts, Richard. 2003. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watts, Richard, Sachiko Ide & Konrad Ehlich (eds.). 1992. *Politeness in language. Studies in its history, theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

## Bionotes

### Spyridoula Bella

Spyridoula Bella is Professor of Linguistics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her research interests include pragmatics, linguistic (im)politeness, second language acquisition and second language teaching. Her research output in these areas has appeared in international journals (*Journal of Pragmatics*, *Journal of Politeness Research*, *Multilingua*, *Pragmatics*) as well as a number of collected volumes both in English and Greek.

### Eva Ogiermann

Eva Ogiermann is Senior Lecturer in English Language and Applied Linguistics at King's College London. Her work investigates culture-specific conceptualizations of politeness in English, German, Polish, Russian and Greek and analyses interactions in English and Polish families. Her publications include a monograph on apologizing and articles in *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *Journal of Politeness Research*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Multilingua* and *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. She is also associate editor of the *Journal of Pragmatics*.