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*Researching im/politeness in face-to-face interactions:
On disagreements in Polish homes*

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1. Background

The discursive turn in politeness research (e.g. Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003) has delivered a thorough critique of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987[1978]) and introduced a radical shift away from the top-down approach of an analyst assigning politeness values to linguistic structures (second order politeness) towards a bottom-up approach viewing politeness as a form of evaluation by the participants themselves (first order politeness). First order politeness has been described as having a conceptual and an action-related side,¹ with the former reflecting "the way people talk about and provide accounts of politeness" (Eelen 2001: 32) and the latter being concerned with "evaluative moments observable in ongoing social interaction" (Watts 2003: 45).

The shift towards first order politeness has inspired a vast amount of research exploring the conceptual side of im/politeness in different types of metapragmatic data, either eliciting lay members' understandings of im/politeness (e.g. Sifianou and Tzanne, 2010; Ogiermann and Suszczyńska, 2011) or examining existing public discussions or discourses of im/politeness (e.g. Haugh, 2010; Locher and Luginbühl, this volume). Studying the manifestation of im/politeness in ongoing face-to-face conversations, however, has proved exceedingly challenging, given that participants do not often verbalise the judgements they make about their interlocutors' behaviour as they interact with them.

The focus on participants' evaluations introduced by the discursive approach, coupled with an insistence on politeness not 'residing' within linguistic structures (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003), reduced the role of the analyst to locating turns in interaction that are 'open to an interpretation' as im/polite (Watts, 2003), often resulting in the analyst suggesting a number of possible interpretations rather than demonstrating the participants' evaluations of im/politeness (see Terkourafi, 2005 and Haugh, 2007, *inter alia*, for a critique of the discursive approach).

The only attempt within the discursive approach to identify some form of criteria by which the participants' behaviour can be judged as im/polite, later extended to all aspects of 'relational

¹ Since Eelen views first order politeness as a form of practice, he abandons the terms action-related and conceptual and replaces them with 'classificatory' and 'metapragmatic'. He also introduces a third concept, which he labels 'expressive politeness' (Eelen, 2001: 35) – a form of politeness concerned with the speaker's linguistic choices, thus resembling second order politeness rather than a view of politeness as a form of evaluation.

work' (Locher and Watts, 2005), leads us back to linguistic structures – the so-called expressions of procedural meaning (EPMs). EPMs, a category which contains a wide range of linguistic and interactional features, including politeness formulae but also discourse and hesitation markers (Watts, 2003: 182), are not polite in themselves, but their quantity can serve as an indication of whether somebody is polite, impolite or just politic. According to Watts, politic behaviour "consists in 'paying' with linguistic resources what is due in a socio-communicative verbal interaction," and politeness in paying "more than would normally be required" (2003: 115).

Hence, having dismissed the idea that certain linguistic structures can be equated with politeness as untenable, Watts is proposing that the *quantity* of these (and other) linguistic structures can index politeness. However, both approaches seem equally problematic when it comes to identifying im/politeness in interactional data. In fact, the suggestion that certain linguistic structures make an utterance politic, their absence makes it impolite, and an increased quantity of these structures makes the utterance polite seems to shift the perspective away from participant evaluations to that of an analyst, adding and subtracting linguistic tokens to and from utterances.

It seems that in the absence of participants explicitly evaluating their interlocutors' behaviour as im/polite, it is not possible to analyse im/politeness without relying on the analyst's knowledge of the conventionalised meanings of the linguistic structures used by the participants. This is reflected in proposals that suggest combining the participants' (first order) and the analyst's (second order) perspectives, such as Terkourafi's (2005) *frame*-based approach to politeness, which involves analysing large quantities of conversational data to establish empirical norms on the basis of participants' recurrent patterns of language use. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's (2010) *genre*-based approach also integrates both the participants' and analyst's perspectives, showing that in the genre of news interviews, "impoliteness manifests itself both at the lexico-grammatical level and interactionally" (2010: 83).

Notions such as *frame*, *genre* or *activity type* (Levinson, 1979) can be particularly useful when it comes to analysing im/politeness as they involve norms restricting allowable contributions and guiding their interpretations. However, interactions vary in the extent to which they rely on the use of recurrent linguistic forms – and in how accessible the participants' meanings are to the analyst. They may even involve participants following different interactional and politeness norms, as illustrated, for instance, by Gumperz's (1982) work on intercultural communication.

Gumperz employs the framework of interactional sociolinguistics (IS) which draws on a wide range of disciplines, including ethnography, pragmatics, conversation analysis (CA) and Goffmanian (frame) analysis. This combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches enables him to tackle the problem of interpretive ambiguity, i.e. the lack of correspondence between forms and meanings much debated in first order im/politeness approaches.

The micro analyses conducted within IS are also very much in line with the discursive approach to im/politeness in that they focus on how meaning is co-constructed by the participants. They draw on methods developed in CA, a framework that assigns fairly fixed meanings to linguistic structures and interactional features – albeit always in relation to their sequential position. The interpretations are supported by examining contextualisation cues, such as prosodic features,

which also play a crucial role in the production and interpretation of im/politeness (see e.g. Culpeper et al., 2003).

Although the focus on participant evaluations characterising the discursive approach to im/politeness resembles the concept of next turn validation guiding CA analyses, there has not been much cross-fertilisation between CA and politeness research. A notable exception is Haugh's work, who proposed an interactional alternative to the study of im/politeness (2007). Haugh suggests two ways in which the analyst can identify instances of im/politeness in interactional data, namely through "explicit comments made by participants in the course of the interaction (less commonly)" and "through the reciprocation of concern evident in the adjacent placement of expressions of concern relevant to the norms invoked in that particular interaction (more commonly)" (2007: 312).

But although interactions explicitly commenting on im/politeness are rare, these have become the focus of im/politeness research taking an interactional approach, with the evaluations of im/politeness almost exclusively referring to a third party's conduct, rather than the participants to the interaction (see e.g. Kádár and Haugh, 2013; Haugh, this volume). Similarly, Hutchby (2008) applies CA to the study of impoliteness while focusing on extracts in which participants protest against being interrupted or comment on the inappropriate behaviour of a third party, thus illustrating how they "display an orientation to the actions of others as impolite" (2008: 222). A focus on participants making im/politeness the topic of their talk not only makes it difficult to obtain sufficient relevant data,² but also overlooks instances of im/politeness that may be crucial to the progression of the interaction and the participants' relationship. Just because we do not tell our interlocutors that they have been im/polite, it does not mean that their im/politeness does not affect us. And while interactants are more likely to react emotionally to impolite than to polite behaviour (Culpeper, 2011), they may well be hiding their reactions for the sake of politeness.

In general, it seems that there is more scope for drawing on CA in analyses of im/politeness in interactional data. For instance, there are some clear parallels between the CA concept of dis/preference and im/politeness. Within CA, preferred responses have been described as "supportive of social solidarity" while dispreferred ones are "destructive of social solidarity" (Heritage, 1984: 269). But although preference reflects the observance of the moral order by members of a community, CA operates with a purely structural concept of social solidarity. Hence, a significant difference between politeness theory and CA is that politeness is viewed as strategic and motivated by concern for the hearer's face, while the CA concept of dis/preference is not attributed to individual choice.³ Yet, CA analyses locate breaches of social solidarity through interactants' attempts to resolve them, for instance through the use of accounts or dispreference markers; which bears ample resemblance to speakers mitigating the face-threat inherent in their talk in politeness theory. Within discursive approaches to politeness (Watts, 2003), this results in politic, rather than polite behaviour, which is more in line with how CA conceptualises preference.

² The available work tends to rely on film material (e.g. Kádár and Haugh, 2013) existing spoken corpora (Haugh, this volume) and large collections of conversational data shared by CA researchers (Hutchby, 2008).

³ The concept of dis/preference "describes the systemic features of the design of turns" (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 59), with the preferred response being the one that furthers the accomplishment of the activity initiated in the first pair part (FPP) and the dispreferred one the one that blocks it.

Although CA scholars would not associate excessive use of mitigation with politeness (as does Watts, 2003), it has been pointed out that the absence of dispreference markers can lead to perceptions of impoliteness and that speakers make a “personal motivated choice, as to whether and to what degree to be polite” (Bilmes, 2014: 55). And while the word *polite* does not figure in CA analyses, we do encounter adjectives such as “comfortable, supportive, reinforcing”⁴ (Pomerantz, 1984: 77), words that have emerged as synonymous to *polite* in studies focusing on the conceptual side of politeness and establishing the semantic fields of the term (e.g. Culpeper et al., this volume).

CA work has also acknowledged that specific turn-taking practices can be motivated by face – a central concept in politeness research. Lerner (1996), for instance, has shown how the anticipatory completion of a turn in progress by the recipient can transform dispreferred actions into preferred ones, while arguing that this practice “furnishes a systematic site for the recognisability of face concerns” (1996: 303).

Given the parallels across frameworks and the challenging task of identifying im/politeness in interactional data, it does not seem sensible to limit one’s resources to one approach – or to insist on the superiority of one approach over another. The present study, therefore, draws on all relevant theoretical work. It sets out to identify and analyse im/politeness in naturally occurring family interactions which are shaped by each couple’s unique relational history, resulting in distinctive interactional styles. The study focuses on disagreements, which pose an additional analytic challenge in that they are often rooted in previous interactions, not accessible to the analyst. The disagreements evolve over several turns, thus providing ample opportunity to scrutinise participant evaluations, while the use of video-data enables the analyst to draw on paralinguistic and non-verbal aspects of the participants’ reactions.

2. Disagreements

Previous research on disagreements in a wide range of contexts, and drawing on all the above discussed frameworks, has shown them to be very diverse and multifunctional, with much of the empirical research contradicting how they have been conceptualised in theoretical work. The two frameworks that explicitly discuss disagreements, namely politeness theory and CA, seem to follow the commonsense perception of (overt) disagreements as uncooperative, disruptive and confrontational, viewing them thus as something to be avoided, disguised or expressed reluctantly.

Leech’s politeness maxims include one that explicitly states: “minimize disagreement between self and other; maximise agreement between self and other” (1983: 132), and seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement are among Brown and Levinson’s (1987) positive politeness strategies. Even though for Brown and Levinson virtually any speech act is potentially face threatening, disagreements constitute one of the clearer cases: They mainly threaten (both

⁴ Another word that appears sporadically in CA analyses and comes close to politeness is ‘delicacy’. Clift, for instance, suggests that “producing talk softer or less loud relative to one’s own talk may be a device for the doing of delicacy” (2016: 59).

interactants') positive face by conveying that the speaker does not care about the hearer's wants. The polite thing to do is to "satisfy H's desire to be right" (1987: 112), which can be achieved by choosing safe topics, pretending to agree, or telling white lies (ibid.: 112-115).

Similarly, CA scholars (e.g. Sacks, 1973; Pomerantz, 1984) have noted that disagreement can emerge in very subtle ways; it is generally achieved without saying 'no' and typically takes on a dispreferred format. Unlike agreements, disagreements tend to be delayed, either within a turn, e.g. through hesitation markers, or across turns, e.g. through requests for clarification. They can even be expressed through silence, i.e. remain unstated, in that lack of an expected agreement is likely to be interpreted as disagreement.⁵

At the same time, there is a growing body of empirical research contradicting the premises underlying politeness theory and conversation analysis by demonstrating that overt disagreement can be the expected norm. Adversarial discourse is perhaps the clearest case illustrating this, given that "when an argumentative episode is established, speakers are expected to defend their positions" (Kotthoff, 1993: 209).

In court room discourse, for instance, the preferred response to accusations is likely to take the form of unmitigated disagreement (Atkinson and Drew, 1979). At the same time, studies of different types of institutional discourse have shown that the preference for strong disagreement is, to a large extent, related to participant roles and the specific turn-taking systems of the analysed settings. Myers' study (1998) of disagreements in focus groups, for instance, showed that while the moderator elicited strong disagreement, disagreement among participants was mitigated. In a study of disagreements in British news interviews, Greatbatch (1992) noted that with the turns being allocated by the moderator, interviewees did not address each other directly, making mitigation and delay features redundant. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010), on the other hand, analysed news interviews as a form of confrontation, where the interviewers disagreed openly with their interviewees and even attacked their face to strategically "position themselves against the interviewee and show alignment with their audience" (2010: 67).

Online discussion forums have also been identified to serve as platforms favouring antagonistic discourse, with the anonymity of this medium supporting the use of unmitigated disagreement forms. Langlotz and Locher's study (2012) of reader comments on articles in 'The Mail Online', for example, shows that disagreeing is the norm in these discussions, often leading to outright face attack and escalating into conflict.

Research on everyday conversations between family and friends has provided a completely different perspective on disagreements, viewing them as a form of sociability; while also suggesting that the ways in which disagreements are perceived can vary across cultures (with Greek scholars showing a particular interest in this form of social action!).

Schiffrin (1984) studied what she has termed 'sociable disagreements' among American Jews of East European descent, which were characterised by lack of commitment to the discussed topics and, despite the constant disalignment between speakers, served to maintain rather than threaten friendships. Similarly, Kakavá's (1993, 2002) work on casual Greek conversations

⁵ Pomerantz does, however, note that disagreements with compliments and self-deprecation differ from disagreements with other types of initial assessments (1984: 63), in that they are preferred over agreement and take the strong form - which could also be linked to concepts such as face and politeness.

showed that disagreements can enhance solidarity and turn into an entertaining interactional ritual where differences of opinion often remain unresolved.

While Georgakopoulou (2001) agrees that disagreements can strengthen intimate relationships, she argues against them being merely 'sociable' acts. Her data feature adolescent Greek friends talking about the future, where disagreements help arrive at a "shared perspective jointly shaped and fine-tuned" (2001: 1898). This 'problem solving' function of disagreements has also been established in workplace settings, such as the business meetings studied by Angouri (2012). In discussions aimed at finding the best solution to a problem, disagreements often take on a central role in the problem solving process; and agreeing with everything would be hardly constructive or helpful. Angouri's analysis not only demonstrated that unmitigated disagreement was the norm during meetings with subcontractors, but also linked disagreeing with creativity, since "innovative and creative ideas by definition challenge and 'disagree' with the current status quo" (2012: 1567, citing Haggith, 1993).

Overall, the picture emerging from research into disagreements portrays them as highly 'multidirectional and multifunctional' (Sifianou, 2012), their forms and functions being dependent on a wide range of factors, including the purpose and medium of the conversation, the subject of disagreement, specific participation frameworks and turn taking systems, as well as the participants' cultural backgrounds and their relational histories.

This study examines disagreements taking place between spouses in Polish homes, thus analysing a language and a setting that are strongly under-represented in politeness research. While differences of opinion are a recurrent feature of family discussions devoted to planning future activities, or recalling events that happened in the past, this study analyses the 'here and now' disagreements arising as certain household tasks are performed.

Even though disagreements have been defined as "an oppositional stance (verbal or *non-verbal*) to an antecedent verbal (or *non-verbal*) action" (Kakavá, 2000: 1538, emphasis mine), most previous research has focused on disagreements expressing differences of opinion with regard to a discussed topic. This chapter, in contrast, analyses disagreements arising in relation to an ongoing household activity, i.e. verbal disagreements with non-verbal actions. The activities analysed here are generally accomplished collaboratively, and the disagreements come about either when one partner intervenes in what the other does or when help is elicited and not performed to the other's satisfaction.

The potential face implications of such disagreements are rather complex. On the one hand, intervening with somebody's way of doing things can be face-threatening. On the other, these disagreements are not antagonistic in nature, given that they ultimately aim at accomplishing a task in a way that works best for the whole family. Yet, they are different from the 'problem solving' disagreements discussed in previous literature as the problem raised is only viewed as such by one party – who also needs to keep a balance between wanting to have things done in their accustomed way and appreciating the other's contribution to the completion of the activity.

3. Methodology

As discussed above, the shift towards participants' own understandings of im/politeness poses a serious challenge to the analyst. Participants rarely verbalise their evaluations of im/politeness during interactions. At the time of speaking, they may not even be fully aware of making them. Often, we are just being left with a vague feeling of pleasure or irritation, which can be exceedingly difficult to capture; and yet it may show in our reactions, not just in our choice of words, but in our prosody, facial expression or bodily posture.

Interpersonal communication draws on multiple semiotic fields; "variations in prosody are used to attach different stances and interpretative frames to the same lexical items" (Goodwin and Goodwin, 2013: 3), while posture, gestures, facial expressions and visual alignment play an important part "in the production and intelligibility of social action" (Heath and Hindmarch, 2002: 104). Politeness is clearly a multi-modal phenomenon, but although analyses taking into account prosodic and non-verbal features of interaction can help tackle the problem of interpretive ambiguity and provide insights into participant interpretations, they remain exceedingly scarce in politeness research.⁶

The present study is based on video-recorded, naturally occurring conversations, i.e. data that provide access to the linguistic and prosodic features of talk as well as bodily conduct. The recordings also show the material environment of the interactions and the actions the participants engage in as they talk, such as the manipulation of objects; around which the disagreements often evolve. Accordingly, visual data are used to support the analysis, and screen shots are provided to make the interactions more accessible to the reader.⁷

3.1. Data

The data for the present study were collected as part of a project on Sharing Responsibility⁸ in which six Polish families recorded their everyday conversations, yielding approximately 9 hours and 40 minutes of video data. Due to space restrictions, this study focuses on three fragments representing three different disagreement trajectories and featuring three different couples: Bogusia and Henio, Kasia and Przemek, and Ala and Piotr. All names are pseudonyms and all participants consented to their recordings being used for research and teaching purposes.

Although there was no researcher present during the recordings, the participants were, of course, aware of the camera, which they switched on and off themselves. While it cannot be

⁶ Discursive politeness scholars do concede that "politeness is of course not restricted to language usage" (Watts, 2003: 119), yet they justify their focus on verbal politeness by asserting that "socio-communicative interaction primarily (but by no means always) takes place through the medium of language" (ibid. 130).

⁷ The present paper does not, however, attempt a full-blown multi-modal analysis. The great detail with which some CA studies (e.g. Goodwin, 2000) attend to all observable aspects of bodily conduct serves to illustrate the complex ways in which different semiotic resources are coordinated in the organisation of (inter)action. Such detailed analysis would not only considerably restrict the amount of data that could be examined here but would also go beyond the needs of an analysis of im/politeness (see also Mills, 2003: 21, 45).

⁸ The project was funded by an ESRC grant awarded to Jörg Zinken (RES-061-25-0176) and carried out at the University of Portsmouth.

denied that the presence of a camera affects the participants' behaviour, it is equally true that "people do not *invent* social behaviour" and that their behaviour in front of the camera is "part of a repertoire that is available to them independently of the presence of the camcorder" (Duranti, 1997: 118). Since the disagreements analysed in this chapter arise during everyday tasks, they provide an insight into the couples' behaviour in recurrent situations. At the same time, the analysed interactions can be regarded as spontaneous since the turn initiating the disagreement reflects that something is not being done as expected.

The data were transcribed using CA transcription conventions. With the great amount of detail that can be discovered through repeated viewing of the data, the transcribing process in itself serves as a noticing device, making the data analysis more robust. By looking at how the disagreement evolves turn by turn, as the interactants defend their views or/and try to reach a compromise, the analysis can show how the participants are responding to each other's conduct. Each subsequent turn not only displays an understanding of the prior one, but also conveys acceptance or rejection of the expressed stance. And while interpretations of a turn as face aggravating or face enhancing will remain tentative, a careful analysis of the exact wording of each turn, taking into account prosodic and interactional features, does provide an indication of how the prior turn has been received.

Given the complexity of the analysed disagreements and the participants' rich relational histories, the interpretation of the findings was further facilitated and validated by conducting interviews with the participants. Whenever possible, the interviews were conducted with both spouses present. They started with general questions about the division of labour and the organisation of household activities. The main part of the interviews, however, consisted in eliciting video-stimulated comments on the participants' interactional practices (Pomerantz, 2005), which sometimes resulted in discussions between the spouses either jointly constructing an interpretation of the played sequence or disputing each other's interpretations.

4. Analysis

4.1. Bogusia and Henio (6:43-6:51)

The first disagreement takes place during dinner preparation, with wife, husband and two daughters all making a contribution. Bogusia and her husband Henio are jointly preparing lardons, with Bogusia doing the cutting and Henio the frying. In the extract below Henio looks over Bogusia's shoulder as she is cutting the bacon and says:

01 HEN: Za du:żo bo będzie- (.)
 too much because be.FUT.3SG
Too much, 'cause this will-

02 >nie możemy tak dużo jeść<
 NEG can.PRS.1PL so much eat.INF
we shouldn't eat so much



The sequence is thus initiated by Henio commenting on the amount of bacon Bogusia is cutting. The comment takes the form of a negative assessment (*za dużo/too much*) which shows that Henio disagrees with Bogusia's way of handling things. Having started and abandoned a causal clause, he produces a slightly rushed account extending his criticism to concern about the family's eating habits, which could be interpreted as a form of mitigation.

03 BOG: No ale przepraszam cię bardzo,
 PTL but apologise.PRS.1SG you.ACC very
Well, but excuse me, well but

04 no przecież ile- ile mniej można
 PTL after all how how less can.PRS.IMPRS
how much less can one (cut)?



Bogusia's response, produced with her gaze fixed on the bacon, rejects the criticism directed at her. It starts with a formal, intensified (*bardzo/very much*) apology, specifying the addressee (*cię/to you*) for additional emphasis. This overly formal apology, accompanied by a tone expressing annoyance, is introduced by the conjunction *ale* (but) which conveys a conventional implicature signalling disagreement.

In addition, both turn constructional units (TCUs) produced by Bogusia start with the highly multifunctional particle *no*, which can here be interpreted as expressing vivid negation (Doroszewski, 2011). In the second TCU, *no* is followed by the particle *przecież*, which is similar to *ale* in that it expresses contrast to a previous statement, while also emphasising the obviousness of one's argument (ibid.). Bogusia's second TCU sounds defensive, with her question *ile mniej* (how much less) forming a construction parallel to Henio's *za dużo* (too much). She produces two instances of *ile*, with the first one carrying more emphasis and being cut off, showing Bogusia's emotional stance. The verb *można* (one can) is used in the impersonal form, seemingly objectifying the implied impossibility of reducing the amount being cut. On the whole, her response not only conveys disalignment but also contains several linguistic, interactional and prosodic features which seem to indicate that she perceives Henio's turn as face-threatening.

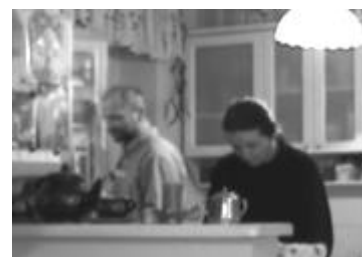
05 HEN: jeden *plasterek (starczy)
 one slice.DIM suffice.FUT.3SG
One slice would be enough.
**takes the bacon*



Although Bogusia's question could be taken as rhetorical, Henio provides a precise answer, without betraying any signs of being bothered by Bogusia's reaction. As he specifies, in a quiet voice, the amount of bacon necessary to make the needed amount of lardons (*jeden plasterek*/one slice), he takes the bacon and walks towards the fridge – as if ensuring that no more bacon is cut.

06 BOG: zro⁺biłam jeden plasterek (.) tylko
 make.PST.PERF.F one slice.ACC.DIM only
I have cut one slice but

07 mi się ukroił (nie tak)
 I.DAT REFL cut.PST.PFV.M NEG so
it did not cut right



Without looking up, Bogusia insists that she cut one slice, fronting and prosodically emphasising the verb *zrobiłam* (I made), thus indirectly agreeing with Henio's stance regarding the required quantity. She continues with *tylko* (only), which functions in a similar way to *ale* (but), though the new information introduced by *tylko* complements rather than contrasting that preceding it. The TCU thus introduced (line 7) takes the form of a distancing impersonal dative construction, where the speaker assumes the role of an experiencer, thus relieving Bogusia from agency and responsibility for the result, which could again be taken as a form of indirect agreement with Henio's initial assessment.

Hence, while Bogusia's initial reaction is aimed at protecting her own face, with her formal apology serving as a marker of disagreement, Henio's sober counter-suggestion elicits implicit agreement, which gives face to Henio; though Bogusia continues to protect her own face by using impersonal constructions to indicate lack of intent and justify her actions.

Notably, throughout the entire sequence, the actual activity of cutting the bacon is not interrupted and remains the visual focus of both participants, making it look like the analysed dialogue merely accompanies it. Given the agreement expressed in Bogusia's final turn, it seems that the discussion (and the act of putting the bacon back into the fridge) did not affect the amount of produced lardons.

Further evidence for regarding the above discussed dialogue as merely a background activity, with the cutting of the bacon remaining the foreground activity throughout, comes from the interview data. The kitchen is described as Bogusia's domain, who involves Henio in cooking related tasks by (humorously) asking him to simply follow her orders without questioning the

reasoning behind them (“...nie musisz myśleć przy tym, wykonaj polecenie” / “...you don’t have to think about it, just execute the order”) since his inclination to discuss everything compromises the efficiency of the tasks (“Ty po prostu zawsze byś dyskutował o najmniejszą rzecz” / “You would simply always (want to) discuss even the smallest thing”). These comments also show that Bogusia is used to Henio’s interventions and may not find them as face-threatening or disruptive as the analysis of a single interaction might suggest.

4.2. Kasia and Przemek (07:11-07:45)

The following extract takes place during breakfast preparation. While Przemek is making sandwiches, his wife Kasia has several pans on the stove and prepares the table while waiting. The disagreement starts as Przemek notices that Kasia is using a small saucepan to heat up milk on a big flame. He walks up to the stove, turns down the flame and says:

- 01 PRZ: jezu kotek nie na↑stawiaj
EXCL cat.DIM NEG set.IMP.IPFV.SG
Jesus, kitten, don’t set the gas
- 02 tak gazu. (.) bo tu
so gas.GEN because here
like this 'cause
- 03 wszystko na ↑boki leci=
all to side.ACC.PL run.PRS.3SG
it all goes up the sides



He starts his turn with an exclamation accompanied by an endearing term of address which, however, could also be viewed as belittling in this context – an interpretation that can be supported by the interview data, where the term *kotek* was used to introduce turns expressing disagreement and irritation. Przemek then utters a request in the form of a negated imperative and an account justifying the request, packaged in a causal clause. While Kasia turns around at the sound of his voice, Przemek, having reduced the flame, returns to the sandwiches, without looking at her.

- 04 KAS: =ale ja- (0.4) PRZEMEK
but I name
- 05 (.)



Kasia’s quick (latched) response is incomplete, merely expressing her astonishment and suggesting that she perceives her husband’s intervention as face-threatening. She starts a TCU with the conjunction *a/le*, indicating an opposed stance, and the pronoun *ja* (I), as if wanting to

say something in her defence. However, as she continues walking around the table, she abandons it and, instead, loudly exclaims her husband's name, thus expressing annoyance.

- 06 PRZ: ale wszystko na boki le:ci,
but all to side.ACC.PL run.PRS.3SG
But it all goes up the sides,
- 07 a nic do garnka=no
and nothing to pot.GEN PTL
nothing into the pot



Przemek responds without looking up from the sandwiches. He starts his turn with another *ale* while reinforcing his previous statement by repeating the final part of his previous turn, which identifies the problem, and adding another statement, describing its effect on the cooking process. This results in a parallel construction contrasting *wszystko* (everything) and *nic* (nothing), juxtaposed with the conjunction *a*, whose function lies halfway between *i* (and) and *ale* (but). This contrast exaggerates the effect the burner setting chosen by Kasia has on the cooking process, thus intensifying the criticism and the face-threat inherent in it. The latched *no* at the end of his turn adds emphasis to his statement.

- 08 KAS: ale widzisz już jest podgrzane mleko,
but see.PRS.2SG already BE.PRS.3SG heat.PTCP.PST.PASS.N milk
But look, the milk is already hot
- 09 *a tak bym musiała zostawić
and so COND.1SG must.F leave.INF.PFV
otherwise I'd have to leave it there
*looks at Przemek
- 10 na pół godziny
for half hour.GEN
for half an hour
- 11 żeby się podgrzało
so that REFL heat.SBJV.PFV.SG.N
for it to get hot.



Kasia returns to the stove and changes the gas setting. Her response starts with another *ale*, which illustrates the ongoing disalignment between the speakers. This is followed by a demonstration (*widzisz/look*) of the quick (*już/already*) result of her method, contrasting it with Przemek's method – with *tak* (so) referring to his way of doing things – and exaggerating the amount of time it would take (*pół godziny/half an hour*). While she briefly glances at Przemek, he stays focused on the sandwiches.

- 12 PRZ: pewnie wiesz jakbyś nie włączyła (0.6) >gazu
surely know.2SG if.COND.2SG NEG switch-on.PFV.F gas.GEN
Sure, you know, if you hadn't switched on the gas

13 to na pewno by tak było<
 then surely COND so be.N
 then that would definitely be the case.

The *pewnie* (surely) introducing Przemek's response is indicative of a preferred second pair part (SPP) conventionally signalling agreement, but is used sarcastically here, thus causing more damage to Kasia's face. He goes on explaining, increasing the tempo after a short hesitation mid turn, that this would be the case if Kasia had not turned on the gas. The conditional sentence specifying the conditions under which what she said would be true includes another confirmation device, *na pewno* (for sure), further ridiculing her exaggeration.

This is followed by a 2.2 second gap, during which Kasia reaches for a towel – and seemingly prepares her response.

14 (2.2)

15 KAS: jak chce żeby się komuś
 if want.PRS.1SG that REFL somebody.DAT
 If I want something to get hot

16 coś podgrzało
 something heat.SBJV.PFV.SG.N
 for somebody

17 to na większym gazie stawiam
 PTL on bigger.INS gas.INS put.IPFV.1SG
 Then I turn the gas up higher



Her turn also takes the form of a conditional sentence, thus structurally paralleling Przemek's turn, but she formulates it in a more general way, with the milk becoming *coś* (something) and the person benefiting from it being heated a *ktoś* (somebody). Hence, even though she retains the first person perspective, i.e. how *she* does things, she presents it as a general rule, i.e. how things should be done. Her statement also makes clear that she is not prepared to comply with Przemek's request. While she is looking in Przemek's direction as she speaks, he does not turn around; or interrupt his work.

18 PRZ: dobra ale pod warunkiem że palnik jest y:
 good but under condition.INS that burner be.PRS.3SG uhm
 Sure, provided that the burner is

19 mniejszego rozmiaru (0.6) niż ten- niż garnek
 smaller.GEN size.GEN than this than pot
 smaller than the pot.

Przemek's response starts with *dobra* (okay), another token conventionally signalling agreement, but here used to introduce a condition under which Kasia's reasoning would work –

not fulfilled in the present case. He finally spells out what his perceived problem is, namely that the size of the flame needs to be adjusted to the size of the pot. Interestingly, his turn includes self-repair involving a short pause and a word search. As he has only just used the word *garnek* (pot) and it refers to the object around which the argument revolves, it confirms that Przemek is more focused on what he does than on what he says.

His turn in line 19 terminates the sequence; the disagreement remains unresolved. Although, except for Kasia's initial reaction in line 4, both spouses speak in quiet, monotonous voices, the continuous disalignment resembles an argument, with both parties insisting on being right and neither of them attending to the other's face. While Przemek's insistence progressively damages Kasia's face, her reactions are mainly focused on defending her position. Both resort to exaggeration, while Przemek also uses sarcasm, ridiculing Kasia's stance. The recurrent use of the conjunction *a/e* (but) and the recycling of syntactic structures across turns create the impression of a routine verbal duel. The analysed sequence is followed by a 40 second lapse, during which both spouses continue with their tasks.

As in extract 1, and despite the argumentative nature of the dialogue, the preparation of the breakfast remains the foreground activity throughout. Although both parties interrupt their tasks to change the gas setting, they stay focused on them during their discussion. Przemek, in particular, does not look in Kasia's direction at all, focusing fully on the sandwiches while speaking to her, despite Kasia, perhaps due to being less busy, trying to establish eye contact on several occasions. The question of whether this makes her feel ignored and offended or merely illustrates that the dialogue is perceived as a background activity to the breakfast preparation remains open.

During the interview, when shown the above sequence, Przemek and Kasia resumed their argument. Przemek explained, in an agitated voice, that he always gets upset with people who never had to support themselves ("nigdy nie pracował na siebie"), comparing Kasia's way of heating up milk to people boiling a whole kettle of water to make one cup of coffee "because the bills were paid by somebody else" ("bo rachunki płacił ktoś inny") and calling it "squandering" ("marnotrawstwo"). It turned out that while Kasia currently runs the household, with Przemek working long hours, in the past, he had lived several years on his own, in the UK, where he was saving up a large proportion of his earnings – an experience that seems to have shaped him long-term.

The argument ends with Kasia saying: "He always lectures me what I have to do" ("On mnie zawsze poucza, co ja mam robić") and Przemek responding "Somebody has to, right?" ("No ktoś musi, nie?") – which shows that the type of interactions analysed here are not uncommon in this family. In contrast to the previous extract, however, which was commented on with humour during the interview, both parties seemed to be bothered by the other's behaviour.

4.3. Ala and Piotr (5:00-5:40)

Unlike in the previous two extracts, where disagreements materialised through a partner finding fault with how things are done and openly stating it, the following disagreement sequence arises when a husband is recruited to help. Ala (with a baby on her lap), her husband Piotr and their sons Lesio and Patryk are having lunch, when Ala decides it is time to feed the baby and asks Piotr to bring her a bib (Lesio and Patryk's turns, unrelated to the analysed disagreement, have been removed from the transcript.)

- 01 ALA: dobra to wiesz co:
well PTL know.2SG what
Okay then, do you know what,
- 02 ↑daj mi jego tutej śliniaczke:k
give.IMP.SG I.DAT his here bib.ACC
give me his bib here



The sequence starts with Ala's request which consists of an imperative construction telling Piotr to bring her a bib. The imperative, a commonly used request form in Polish family data (Zinken and Ogiermann, 2013), displays Ala's perceived entitlement to making the request. Obviously, having the baby in her lap makes it much less convenient for her to get the bib herself. Her request contains no formal politeness marking, though it is mitigated by the turn entry device *wiesz co* (you know what), preceded by *dobra* (okay) and *to* (then) which mark a shift in topic. In addition, the rising intonation on the imperative makes it sound friendly, clearly distinguishing it from an order.

- 03 PIO: **gets up from the table*
- 04 ALA: **i tą zupę tam przygotowałam;*
and this soup.ACC there prepare.PST.PFV.1SG
and the soup I've prepared
- ((Lesio's turn omitted))*
- 07 ALA [i::
 and



Piotr gets up immediately on completion of the TCU and leaves the table, thus providing a preference indicative SPP to Ala's request. While his reaction signals agreement, there is no verbal acknowledgement of receipt and no eye contact between them.⁹ As he gets up, Ala continues speaking, extending her turn by adding an account.

⁹ During the interview, Ala explained that many of the requests she directs at her husband are complied with exclusively non-verbally: "On nie mówi 'dobrze, przyniosę ci śliniaczek'. Nic nie mówi, tylko robi." / "He does not say 'OK, I will bring you the bib'. He does not say anything, he just does (things)."

08 PIO: wiesz co, to ja tu wziąłem tą ścierke
 know.2SG what PTL I here take.PST.PFV.M this cloth.ACC
You know what, I have taken this cloth here

The moment Piotr disappears off camera, he can be heard saying that he has taken a cloth. Hence, although his non-verbal SPP to Ala's request in line 3 can be taken as signalling compliance, in line 8 it becomes apparent that Piotr has only partially complied with the request as he offers Ala a substitute for the required object. His statement begins with the turn entry device *wiesz co* (you know what), followed by the particle *to* and the pronoun *ja* (I), which is optional and used for emphasis in Polish, thus announcing a modification to the requested action. The stress placed on the word *ścierka* shows that Piotr is aware that the object he is holding is not the one he was asked to bring. While this turn constitutes a response to Ala's request, it also serves as a FPP of a new adjacency pair, which takes on the function of a suggestion.

09 ALA: *to daj tą ścier[kę]
 PTL giveIMP.SG this cloth.ACC
Give me the cloth then
**reaches out for the cloth*

((Lesio's turn omitted))



Ala agrees with the offered substitute and rephrases her original request by changing the word 'bib' to 'cloth' and reaches out for the kitchen towel.

12 ALA: ona mokra je[st
 it.F wet.F be.PRS.3SG
it's wet

13 PIO: *[no to NI:C
 PTL PTL nothing
It doesn't matter
**puts the cloth on the baby*



As Ala touches the towel, however, she observes that it is wet. Hence, while she puts her husband's positive face needs above her own preferences when consenting to the bib being replaced with a cloth, she puts the baby's comfort above the need to show appreciation for Piotr's help when it turns out that the cloth is wet.

The potential face-threat inherent in her protest becomes visible in Piotr's reaction who, even before she finishes speaking, brushes aside her complaint by asserting, in a slightly impatient,

louder voice, that it does not matter – and, instead of handing the towel over to Ala, attempts to put it on the baby himself.

14 PIO: ((turns the cloth around))

15 °z tej strony jest su[cha°
from this side.GEN be.3SG dry.F
this side is dry

((Lesio's and Patryk's turns omitted))



While his response discounts Ala's observation as not relevant, and could easily be interpreted as face-threatening, Piotr's next action slightly softens its effect, as he turns the cloth around and presents its dry end. This could be, on the one hand, interpreted as an indirect agreement with Ala's view that a wet cloth is unsuitable, on the other, it serves to prove the suitability of his solution.

19 PIO: ((wraps the cloth around the baby's neck))

20 BAB: beh beh

21 ALA: nie: nie [nie
no no no

22 PIO: [dobrze jest. [>on se zje<
good be.3SG he REFL eat.FUT.PFV.3SG
It's alright. He will eat.



As he wraps the kitchen towel around the baby's neck, the baby gets agitated and begins to make noises, and Ala explicitly and forcefully objects by saying the word *nie* (no) three times. In overlap with her third *nie*, Piotr provides yet another dispreferred second dismissing her protest with the reassuring *dobrze jest* (it's alright) and suggesting that the baby is ready to have food. His reaction could easily be interpreted as offensive, as it fully disregards his wife's preferences. Ala, however, whose facial expression clearly shows her dissatisfaction with what is happening, seems to be primarily concerned about what is best for the baby, rather than about her face needs.

23 BAB:

[((makes noises))

24 PIO: *moves bowl with food towards baby

*masz jedzenie AM AM AM AM AM AM AM

have.PRS.SG food.ACC am am am am am am am

Here is your food: num num num num num num num



As Piotr speaks, the baby makes more noises, and he directs his next conversational turn at the baby, offering him food and making encouraging eating noises. The sequence ends with the baby hitting the spoon in the soup bowl, which falls on the floor, spilling some of the soup. Ala asks Patryk to fetch a sponge, Piotr follows him into the kitchen, returns with the sponge and dives under the table.

Unlike the first two excerpts, this sequence shows Ala agreeing with the modifications to the activity she has initiated (the bib being substituted with a towel and fitted on the baby instead of being handed over) until it becomes impossible for her to agree, when she disagrees forcefully. As she has asked her husband for help and he seems keen to be of service, she is ready to compromise and to attend to her husband's face needs by showing appreciation for what he does and letting him do it his way.

It is only when Piotr's actions start affecting the baby in a negative way that she protests. Her rejection of the wet cloth, motivated by concern for the baby rather than her own face needs, is taken up as a form of criticism threatening Piotr's face and prompting him to demonstrate that things are going to work the way he wants. Both her protests are brushed aside with the dismissing and supposedly reassuring expressions *no to nic* (it doesn't matter) and *dobrze jest* (it's alright), which could be interpreted as Piotr's attempts to protect his face as it becomes increasingly clear that his input is not helpful. But while he is imposing his way of doing things and paying no attention to Ala's face and discounting her experience, ultimately he aims to support his wife by helping her with the baby.

During the interview, with Ala and the boys present, it turned out that of the three families discussed in this paper, Piotr is the husband with the least involvement in household matters. Ala indicated that seeing the cloth did not surprise her ("Nie byłam taka zdziwiona") and that Piotr probably does not even know where she keeps the bibs ("Piotr nawet nie wie gdzie są śliniaczki"). She admitted that she was not happy with the kitchen towel ("Nie było dla mnie to takie idealne"/ "It wasn't ideal for me"), while Patryk commented: "No bo mama tak nie chciała, żeby tata już dwa razy nie latał"/ "Because mum did not want dad to run twice", thus showing an understanding of existing arrangements.

When asked how she felt about Piotr fitting the towel himself instead of handing it over, Ala commented "Albo dlatego, że mam po prostu ręce zajęte dzieckiem, albo czasami Piotr myśli, że on to lepiej zrobi"/ "Either because my hands are busy holding the baby or sometimes Piotr thinks that he can do it better". This confirms the interpretation emerging from the analysis of the

interaction, which pointed to a two-fold motivation, with Piotr being both eager to help and convinced of the superiority of his solutions. Ala's overall attitude towards the help she receives from her husband was summarised by her saying: "myślenie facetów typowe"/ "typical men's way of thinking".

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The above analysis has examined family disagreements arising between spouses during everyday tasks. While there was agreement about the necessity of accomplishing the tasks, in all three examples husband and wife had different opinions about how it is done best.

The disagreements referred to non-verbal actions and were initiated via different speech acts, such as expressions of criticism, requests to do something differently or expressions of outright protest. Each of them evolved in a different way: The first one got resolved relatively quickly, the second continued beyond the analysed extract, and in the final one, disagreement was withheld until compromise was no longer tenable.

The disagreements analysed here, as well as other disagreements about ongoing tasks found in the data, were primarily triggered by concerns about the family, such as the family's eating habits, the family's finances, and a baby's needs. But while the participants' actions were primarily guided by (shared) family concerns, and the disagreements were not directed against the other person, a close turn by turn analysis reveals their adverse impact on individual face needs.

The turns initiating the disagreement, essentially challenging a spouse's way of doing things and thus threatening their face, were articulated forcefully. This can probably be linked to the sequential environment of the disagreements, specifically their occurrence during ongoing practical tasks, where delaying the disagreement may jeopardise its desired impact on the completion of the task.

Although nobody explicitly commented during the interaction on how they felt about the disagreements, there is evidence in the data that they were treated as face-aggravating by the recipients. Their defensive reactions contained counter-arguments, insistence, and questioned the interventions, with negative emotions being conveyed through the use of emotive particles, exclamations, loudness, cut-off words and unfinished turns.

It is, however, highly unlikely that these reactions were caused by the lack of politeness marking and dispreference features in the FPPs, but rather by the nature of the disagreement itself which, however phrased, undermines the agency and challenges the competence of the recipient. At the same time, the politeness marking that the participants did use in their responses did not express politeness. On the contrary, the explicit apology in 3.3.1 expressed irritation rather than politeness. And features of preference, such as the instances of token agreement in 3.3.2 were used sarcastically, aiming to expose the other speaker's deficient reasoning.

Since the use of linguistic structures conventionally associated with politeness did not result in politeness (nor did their absence lead to impoliteness), one could conclude that politeness did

not feature in these interactions. However, while this may be the case in 3.3.2, which depicts an ongoing family dispute, Bogusia's turns in 3.3.1 display a balance between implicit agreement, giving face to Henio, and the use of impersonal constructions, limiting her responsibility and saving her own face. Ala's willingness to compromise in 3.3.3 shows appreciation of Piotr's help, however inconvenient it makes things for her. And even Piotr's behaviour, his immediate reaction to the request, the quick provision of a 'suitable' object and the eagerness with which he attends to the baby could all be interpreted as instances of zealous attention to Ala's and the baby's needs.

Whether these forms of behaviour can be classified as instances of politeness will, of course, depend on how politeness is defined. In fact, the shift towards viewing im/politeness as a form of evaluation means that politeness can be virtually anything. And while pragmatic politeness approaches view politeness as a form of strategic conflict avoidance (a view that may not appeal to many lay members), it has also been equated with "interpersonal supportiveness" (Arndt and Janney, 1985: 282), mutual consideration (Sifianou, 1992: 86), attentiveness (Fukushima, this volume) and "concern for the feelings of others" (Holmes, 1995: 4). Research into emic conceptualisations of Polish politeness has revealed that Polish participants associate it with taking one's own needs back and helping others, with their definitions referring to actions rather than verbal politeness (Ogiermann and Suszczyńska, 2011). Similar findings have been obtained for speakers of other languages, such as Greek (Sifianou, 1992: 90; Sifianou and Tzanne, 2010: 670-671).

In her seminal politeness paper, Lakoff (1973), even though she aligns with Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978) in viewing politeness as a means to avoid friction in communication, suggests that politeness aims at "making A feel good" (Lakoff, 1973: 298). While this particular 'rule' of politeness is applicable to informal, intimate settings, like the one analysed in this chapter, making a person feel good is considered as the underlying principle of all polite behaviour (1973: 301).

The advantage of this broad definition of politeness is that it can be extended to define impoliteness as interpersonal behaviour 'making A feel bad'. In fact, research on impoliteness has elicited descriptions of impolite behaviour by asking participants about encounters that made them feel bad (Culpeper, 2011: 9). Such a definition can also be conceptualised as a form of evaluation of im/politeness – with participants' reactions indicating whether they feel good or bad about what has been directed at them. As the present analysis has illustrated, such feelings can become visible in people's reactions on many different levels, even if they are not explicitly commented upon.

The disadvantage of such a broad definition of politeness is, of course, that politeness is not the only way of making somebody feel good, and that it becomes more difficult to distinguish it from other forms of supportive interpersonal behaviour (or face-work, for that matter). In addition, members of some cultures, including Polish culture, appear to conceptualise politeness as a much broader phenomenon than they do in others, where politeness is more closely associated with the use of particular linguistic forms and conventionalised routines (see e.g. Sifianou's (1992) comparison of Greece and Britain).

And it also seems that while these differences are less significant in formal settings, they become very pronounced in intimate contexts. In an earlier study, comparing object requests in Polish and British families (Zinken and Ogiermann, 2013), for instance, British family members predominantly used conventionally indirect forms, while the Polish families showed a much higher preference for imperative constructions. While politeness in family settings remains strongly under-researched, according to Brown and Levinson's theory the low social distance and equal social power characterising relationships between spouses would predict relatively low face-threat and thus allow for the use of unmitigated linguistic forms. Yet, while this proved true for the Polish data, British families retained a high level of conventionalised politeness despite the intimate context.

While such cross-cultural comparisons of grammatical structures associated with politeness illustrate that they do not share the same politeness values across languages, the present study has analysed data where conventionalised politeness formulae were not only scarce but also used in an unconventional way. The analysis of such data requires careful inferential work on the part of the analyst, paying close attention to all available contextualisation cues.

As argued above, the shift towards participants' (explicit) evaluations in studying im/politeness simplifies the task for the analyst, but it also significantly reduces the insights that can be gained into people's production and perception of im/politeness. What is more, if the analyst cannot reliably interpret linguistic structures, can we really assume that s/he can provide a reliable interpretation of their evaluations? Even if somebody says 'How rude!', can we always conclude that impoliteness has taken place? What if they are joking? Or have run out of arguments?¹⁰

The data analysed in this chapter did not contain any explicit metapragmatic evaluations of im/politeness, yet the analysis has shown that participants display how they are affected by others' turns through a variety of semiotic resources, including their linguistic choices and prosodic features. The inclusion of video-material in the analysis has further highlighted the need to look at what people do, as well as what they say, when studying im/politeness (which is in line with findings showing that lay members often refer to non-verbal actions when characterising polite behaviour). And even if the focus of the analysis is on verbal im/politeness, it usually does not occur in isolation: interactions are hardly ever devoted solely to being polite or offending someone.

CA research has shown that while accomplishing actions through talk, participants attend "to both the larger activities that their current actions are embedded within and relevant phenomena in their surround" (Goodwin, 2000: 1492). The video-recordings chosen for this study feature jointly accomplished activities which become the subject of a disagreement. These activities continue throughout the disagreement sequence, and the participants' primary focus remains on their accomplishment, with the dialogue forming merely a background activity. All activities evolve around the manipulation of specific objects, such as the bacon that is being cut and removed in 3.3.1, the saucepan and the gas switch, as well as the sandwiches Przemek is preparing in 3.3.2, and the cloth in 3.3.3. The handling of the cloth *aka* bib, in particular, has a

¹⁰ And while this phrase is highly conventionalised in English, other languages do not have such ready-made expressions for labelling others as impolite. Does this mean that English-speaking people are particularly impolite? Or keen on judging others as impolite?

decisive impact on how the interaction evolves, with the circumstances of the disagreement changing throughout the sequence.

It has been argued that through the ways in which objects are “used, seen, noticed, disregarded and the like, the particular object gains a specific sense and relevance from within the course of action” (Heath and Hindmarsh, 2002: 117). In the present data, the speakers’ gaze remains focused on the objects most of the time, reducing the opportunities for eye contact and, perhaps, making the disagreement less personal and face-threatening.

What this study has illustrated is that, given the subjective and complex nature of im/politeness, politeness researchers cannot afford to merely match linguistic structures with politeness values or rely on participants to the interaction to comment on each other’s behaviour. There is a wealth of contextual factors to be considered, and the interpretation of linguistic structures can be supported by their co-text and sequential position, as well as with the available paralinguistic and visual information.

Of course, the analyst will never have access to all relevant contextual information. Disagreements, in particular, have been shown to extend “beyond the current activity in subtle ways not always discernible to the overhearers or the analyst” (Sifianou, 2012: 1557). The family interactions examined here feature participants with rich relational histories involved in recurrent activities where they assume roles and stances that have evolved throughout and shaped their marriages.

The only way of gaining an insight into how the participants’ habits, routines, perceptions and attitudes impact on their behaviour seems to be by asking them. The retrospective interviews conducted in the present study have largely confirmed the interpretations emerging from the analyses of the interactions, while also placing them within the broader picture of family life.

The role im/politeness plays in intimate, long term relationships, the ways in which im/politeness shapes these relationships and close relationships shape understandings of im/politeness are all questions that im/politeness research still needs to answer. Studies like the one presented here may also be relevant to research conducted within the field of psychology – albeit almost exclusively in laboratory settings – demonstrating some long-term implications of different behavioural patterns during disagreements and problem-solving discussions between spouses on marital satisfaction and the relationship’s functionality (see e.g. Papp et al., 2009).

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