Entertaining Functions of Verbal Impoliteness in Computer-Mediated Communication

Lin-Xia CHEN¹,a,*

¹School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University City College, Hangzhou, China, 310015

a wzdxclx@163.com

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Impoliteness, Computer-mediated communication, Entertaining function

Abstract. With the popularization of the internet, computer-mediated communication has drawn the attention of many linguists. This paper analyzes the verbal impoliteness in cyber context and explores the entertaining functions of verbal impoliteness in network interaction by using the examples collected on the network interactivity.

Introduction

Impoliteness, a field of pragmatics, was overlooked by many researchers until the 1990s. In the recent decades, impoliteness, as a variety of face-aggravating verbal behaviors, has become relatively popular and been paid extensive attention by scholars. The importance of studying impoliteness has been widely recognized and impoliteness has been studied in many different media and contexts, such as television shows and everyday interactions and so on. In the global information age, internet communication has become a newly-developing social interaction form. Computer-mediated communication, as the mainstream of social intercourse, has attracted the attention of all circles of society and also provided a new field for linguistic research. Linguistically motivated research on impoliteness in computer-mediated communication settings has appeared recently. Now the verbal interactions in computer-mediated communication have becoming challenging topics. Some researchers and scholars have chosen material from computer-mediated communication to study impolite utterances. Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviors happening in particular contexts. Such behaviors are always assumed to cause emotional consequences for at least one participant (Culpeper, 2011). But impoliteness also has its positive pragmatic function in computer-mediated communication and has elements of entertainment as type of the emotional pleasure, voyeuristic pleasure, aesthetic pleasure and pleasure of being superior. Hence, this paper based on the theory of pragmatics in impoliteness attempts to analyze the above four entertaining functions of impoliteness through case analysis of internet interaction. It can deepen our understanding of impoliteness and its entertaining functions, thus promoting the development of impoliteness theories in cyber context.

Literature Review

Culpeper et al. (2003) defines the notion of impoliteness as communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony. Harrison (2007) addresses the question of identifying communication problems in computer-mediated communication, and appropriate analytic procedures and strategies to deal with problems.
Bousfield (2008) in his book “Impoliteness in Interaction” has made a thorough investigation and analysis of the use of impoliteness. Nishimura (2010) has explored how impoliteness affects Japanese bulletin board system (BBS) communities and found that impoliteness has different effects on interactions, depending on the community's implicit norms and the forms in which impoliteness is communicated. Culpeper (2011) has published a book “Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence”, in which he holds the view point that impoliteness refers to communicative behaviors that attract negative evaluation in context and cause offense. He views impoliteness as a multidisciplinary field of study and approaches it from several different linguistic perspectives. His book provides us with new insights into the field of investigation. Pennanen (2013) has explored the structure of impolite events in computer-mediated communication and analyzed how impoliteness events were realized in computer-mediated communication by compiling the data from the United States of America version of CNN-website.

In China, the research achievements of cyber utterances are plentiful and substantial, but just a few scholars in China have explored impoliteness in computer-mediated communication. Chen Qiang (2012) in his paper “An Anatomy of Impoliteness in Bulletin Board System(BBS)” presents the idea that impoliteness in BBS is very common in current electric world and BBS enables people to communicate with each other through internet. Zhou Lisha (2013) has done a research about the impoliteness on Sina blog in her paper “A Pragmatic Study of the Impoliteness Strategies of the Sina Blog”. She has mentioned two ways in Sina blogs to present the positive impoliteness communicative strategy: the use of snubbing words and taboos. Zhang Wei and Xie Zhaoqun (2015) have explored the pragmatic functions together with interpersonal pragmatic effect of impoliteness on the basis of identity analysis and with reference to date collected from Weibo. Xie Zhaoqun et al. (2015) discuss in detail the construction models of impoliteness in computer-mediated communication and pragmatic mechanisms by employing different pragmatic theories concerning impoliteness. This is the book systematically and completely analyzing impoliteness in China until now. It stands as an invaluable reference for the study of impoliteness in computer-mediated communication. Niu Li and Luo Yaohua (2015) in their article “Inquiry about Positive Pragmatic Functions of Impoliteness in TV variety shows” explore the positive pragmatic functions of institutional impoliteness by taking TV Variety Shows as example and point out that institutional impoliteness has the positive functions of entertaining the audience and can construct harmonious interpersonal relationships.

To sum up the studies at home and abroad, the author finds in the linguistic research linguistically motivated study on impoliteness in face-to-face (FTF) contexts has appeared recently (e.g., Culpeper 2005; Bousfield 2008; Bousfield and Locher 2008), and on impoliteness in computer-mediated communication settings even more recently (e.g., Harrison 2007; Graham 2008; Danet In press). The impoliteness strategies have not received much attention in computer-mediated communication and there are just few studies discussing the impolite phenomena from the perspective of impolite theory and the in-depth valuable analysis and discussion are fewer. Most of the researchers focus mostly on negative functions of impolite utterances. In fact computer-mediated communication offers a large amounts of data. The methods in computer-mediated communication to be researched is immense and they range from blogs to social networks and from discussion boards to more private messages. Therefore, the study of the positive functions of impolite cyber utterances has becoming increasingly important. The present article aims to explore the entertaining
functions of verbal impoliteness in network interaction by using the examples collected on the internet interaction from the perspective of pragmatics. This article will provide a new approach to the understanding and use of impolite utterances to achieve better communication effect and promote the successful communication in cyber context.

**Entertaining Function of Verbal Impoliteness in Computer-mediated Communication**

Internet has gone through about half a century from its appearance to its popularization and now has had a profound effect on people’s lives. People can express and exchange their ideas and attitudes towards affairs of general appeal freely on the internet. Network platform has promoted the transformation of information interaction mode. More and more people choose the network communication as a new way of communication instead of face-to-face communication. E-mail, BBS, ICQ, and Blogs meet the need of human’s wishes for expression. In the process of using network interaction, everyone can give full play to the personalized features, and it is not strictly restrained by the formal expressions. The netizens have a stronger sense of freedom. They often neglect self-control to say something impolitely. Therefore, some impoliteness of cyber utterances appear unavoidably. But impoliteness also has its positive functions in computer-mediated communication and has elements of entertainment as type of the emotional pleasure, voyeuristic pleasure, aesthetic pleasure and pleasure of being superior.

**Emotional Pleasure**

In internet communication the netizens sometimes use impolite utterances to vent their angry emotions about some events and some persons. For example: After Le Jia left a popular dating show “If You Are the One” on Jiangsu Satellite TV, Zeng Zihang, a famous psychologist and professor, took place of him. But the audience dissatisfied with his performance. They used the impolite utterances to make comments on him. One of the audience said in BBS that Zeng Zihang of “If You Are the One” should be laid off. I watched the show last night. He had done so badly. The above comments use the impolite words such as “laid-off” to hurt Zeng Zihang. The comments in BBS point out Zeng Zihang’s shortcomings as a host and ask him to get out of the show. The impolite comments from the audience finally force Zeng Zihang to leave the dating show “If You Are the One”. The program rating of the TV show has risen to 2.68% later. From the example we can see the impolite utterances in BBS can vent people’s angry emotions about some events and some persons and have the positive function of monitoring the TV show and improving the quality.

**Voyeuristic Pleasure**

Impoliteness also has elements of entertainment as a type of “voyeuristic pleasure”. It is common that people are curious about other people’s private lives for voyeuristic pleasure, especially concerning the lives of some famous people. For instance: The Chinese famous film star Chen He has an affair with Zhang Zixuan. After the netizens know that Chen He has already divorced with his first wife Xu Qing, but still pretends to be a good husband in public, most of the netizens become so angry that they begin leaving abusive comments under his blog and Zhang’s blog. Many bloggers asked him to leave the show “Running Man”. One of bloggers said Chen He must get out of the show “Running Man”. Wen Zhang and Huang
Haibo have already been imprisoned. Slag man as Chen He should not appear in the show “Running Man” again. The bloggers use the impolite utterances “get out of”, “slag man” and keep on attacking Chen He on the internet and force him to get out of the show “Running Man”. Finally Chen He has to make an apologetic comment in his blog: “Excuse me, excuse me for hiding the fact that I have divorced, but I beg you to give me some space and allow me to keep some secrets”. He has to leave the show “Running Man” finally. Marriage and divorce are one’s private affairs. It is none of the business of others This offending event initiated impolite communication has seriously influenced Chen’s physical and psychological health. It has made a personal affair become a public diatribe. The bloggers impolite utterances forced Chen He to make a public apology and leave the show “Running Man”.

**Aesthetic Pleasure**

Aesthetic pleasure has become the dominant public aesthetic tastes. Some impolite cyber utterances use the rhetorical device to produce the aesthetic pleasure to arouse the interest of the netizens. For example: After Mo Yan had won the Nobel Prize for literature, he became so popular that some bloggers used a humoristic symbol or metaphor to make fun of Mo Yan for his rising social status after winning the Nobel Prize. One of the bloggers said “Mo Yan has broken the hymen of Nobel Prize”. Mo Yan’s appearance fee, barmaid fee, prostitute fee have risen from the previous free of charge to 500000 Yuan. Mo Yan’s novels, manuscript, signature, letters, his briefs and his toilet paper have become rare commodity in the auction market. The blogger compares Mo Yan’s winning of Nobel Prize to breaking the hymen of Nobel Prize and makes something the most proud of to become the laughing stock which damages Mo Yan’s face more or less. Then the blogger holds that after winning the Nobel Prize, all the things related to Mo Yan have raised the price rapidly, including “barmaid fee”, “prostitute fee”, even his “briefs” and “toilet paper” have become rare commodity in the auction market. These utterances divulge blogger’s impolite attitude towards Mo Yan. The blogger’s impolite utterances produce the joy of aesthetic pleasure by using the rhetorical device.

**Pleasure of Being Superior**

Pleasure of being superior means someone who thinks of himself superior to others and uses impolite utterances to make fun of disadvantages of the other people (the target). But the target and the participants (audience) will not be angry because they can understand the mock impoliteness and the speaker’s intention of entertaining.

For example: Deng Chao published a photo of the other six members in the show “Running Man” and him in the blog saying “Six short-legged people wanted to take a photo with me.” Deng Chao describes the other six members in the show “Running Man” as “six short-legged people”. Short-legged is an impolite utterance. But the target (the other six members in “Running Man”) respond with happy feelings. For example, one of the targets Li Chen responds with a naughty expression, expressing his pleasure feeling and the participants (audience) respond with a lot of likes. After observing the responses of the target and the participants, we can draw the conclusion that they are pleasant instead of angry. Deng Chao’s impolite utterance can bring pleasure for both the target and other participants. The target and the participants can understand the entertaining function of Deng Chao’s impolite utterance of pleasure of being superior to other. And know this is just a kind of impoliteness strategy.
Summary
The article chooses the impolite utterances concerned some hot topics in computer-mediated communication as the research objects to analyze the phenomenon of impolite network utterances in cyber context and discusses the four entertaining functions of impoliteness such as emotional pleasure, voyeuristic pleasure, aesthetic pleasure and pleasure of being superior. It can promote the development of impoliteness theories in cyber context. I am convinced that the study of the impoliteness in computer-mediated communication is important.

Computer-mediated communication appears to be a medium completely different and in some ways incomparable to face-to-face communication. It is a highly different form of communication and gives scholars and researchers many opportunities that should be grabbed in the future.

Acknowledgement
This research was financially supported by Zhejiang Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Circles (Grant No. 2016N51Y).

References


