

# Humour, Face and Im/politeness in Getting Acquainted

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## 1. Introduction

An important characteristic of humour in interaction is its ambivalence. Humour may not only give rise to politeness but also impoliteness, and sometimes in treading the fine line between it appears to give rise to both. Researchers teasing out the complex ways in which humour is related to im/politeness have distinguished between various functions which humour may have in interactions, including co-constructing solidarity (Hay, 2000; Holmes, 2000; Davies, 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Plester and Sayers, 2007), status and power marking and/or enforcing (Hay, 2000; Holmes, 2000; Mullany, 2004; Plester and Sayers, 2007), challenging presumed power and status structures (Holmes, 2000, 2006), and outright face threat (Davies, 2006). The ways in which humour can also function as a coping mechanism in (emotionally) stressful circumstances have also been highlighted (Grainger, 2004; Hay, 2000). The relationship between these identified functions of humour and im/politeness is complex, however, and it is not possible to simply map between say, for instance, co-constructing solidarity and politeness, on the one hand, and outright face threat and impoliteness on the other. Being overly familiar can be perceived as impolite, while insulting one's friends, if done within a joking frame, is not necessarily perceived as such (Hay, 1994, 2000).

In order to further our understanding of the relationship between humour and im/politeness, then, studies of the ways in which humour functions in a variety of settings have been undertaken. A large body of research focusing on humour in workplaces has emerged, with both meetings and mundane encounters in the workplace being analysed (Holmes, 2000, 2006, 2007; Holmes and Marra, 2002a, 2002b; Grainger, 2004; Mullany, 2004; Holmes and Schnurr, 2005; Schnurr, Marra and Holmes, 2007). Humour in interactions between family (Everts, 2003) and friends (Hay, 1994, 2000, 2001; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp 2006) has also been the focus of research. A common theme running through all these settings, and thus most work on the relationship between humour and im/politeness, is that the interactants are familiar with each other. Yet while we are aware that humour can also arise in interactions between people who do not know each other, either those engaging in passing small talk in public places (Schneider, 1987), or those who are not previously acquainted (Usami, 2002), there has been little explicit focus on the ways in which humour arises in such contexts. The lack of attention paid to the role of humour in interactions between unacquainted persons is perhaps a consequence of the widespread assumption, originating in Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) classic work, that humour in the form of teasing, banter and jocular abuse generally only arises in "joking relationships" where people are familiar with each other (Hay, 2000: 740; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006: 53). The aims of this chapter, therefore, are to explore the ways in which humour arises in conversations between unacquainted interactants, as well as the inter-relationships between humour, face and im/politeness.

The chapter begins with a review of previous work on getting acquainted from a variety of disciplines including social psychology and conversation analysis. An

interactional approach to the analysis of face and im/politeness drawing from both ethnomethodological conversation analysis and pragmatics is next outlined. The subsequent analysis of the relationship between humour, face and evaluations of im/politeness arising in a corpus of recorded interactions between Australian English speakers getting acquainted is then grounded in this interactional framework. The implications of this analysis for politeness research are then briefly considered.

## 2. Getting acquainted, face and politeness

Most of the research thus far on conversations between unacquainted persons has been undertaken in social psychology where there has been little focus on the details of language and social interaction. Drawing from primarily experimental data or staged conversations, social psychologists have focused on psychological themes such as 'self-disclosure' (Holtgraves, 1990; Vittengal and Holt, 2000), 'uncertainty reduction' (Berger, 1992), and 'mental scripts' (Kellerman and Lim, 1989). Work by Usami (1993, 1994, 1996, 2002) on conversations between unacquainted Japanese from a social psychological perspective is thus exceptional in that it focuses on the analysis of authentic, spontaneous conversations.

Working within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, Usami has found a number of strategies employed in the initial part of conversations between unacquainted persons in both Japanese and (American) English, including laughing/smiling, joking, establishing common topics, showing interest, and in the case of Japanese, speech-level shifts<sup>1</sup> (Usami, 1993, 1994). She has also found a similar "flow" of topics across both Japanese and English interactions (Usami, 1994). In coding various strategies and topic shifts in a large corpus of 72 conversations, and analysing the frequency of these relative to age, Usami (2002) argues that the use of strategies, as well as the initiation of topics, depends on both the age of the speaker and the other interlocutor (that is, the relative power of the interlocutors). It is claimed, for instance, that older participants initiate topics more often than younger interlocutors in Japanese (Usami, 1996, 2002). The topics initiated are generally restricted to talk about (1) place of residence and commuting, (2) work, (3) the (history of the) subjects' name, (4) setting talk, and (5) prepared topics (Usami, 2002: 115). However, the focus on coding and quantitative analysis in this approach naturally means it undertakes little in the way of a deeper linguistic or interactional analysis (Haugh, 2006b: 315). While joking, for instance, is coded as an instance of "positive politeness", there is little explanation given as to what counts as joking in the interactions, and how the analyst distinguishes between joking that co-constructs solidarity (and thus presumably what Usami labels positive politeness), and that which is more contestive or hostile in nature. This is not to suggest that the coding undertaken by Usami (2002) is in any way flawed, but merely to point out that joking has functions *in addition* to co-constructing solidarity or rapport that are not addressed in her work.

Thus, while such interactional details may be of marginal interest to social psychologists, they are arguably of importance in that there are very real sequential constraints on how interlocutors introduce and develop personal matters in conversation, as well as the ways in which topics are introduced, as work in conversation analysis has demonstrated (Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; Svennevig, 1999). "Pre-topical" (Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984) or "self-presentational" sequences (Svennevig, 1999), for instance, standardly consist of a presentation-

eliciting question (first position), minimal or expanded self-presentation from the other interlocutor (second position), and then a response from the initiator of the sequence (third position) (Svennevig, 1999: 100). Deviations from this three-part structure are interpretable as marked, and thus getting acquainted constitutes an activity type as defined by Levinson (1992: 69).

Moreover, such sequential constraints, particularly the ways in which interlocutors *orient* to their lack of acquaintance through these sequences, have implications for the development of their relationships, and thus also for evaluations of im/politeness. Svennevig (1999: 136–160), for instance, proposes that politeness arises by speakers showing attentiveness through their orientation to others, once again largely within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. This display of attentiveness is implicit in the self-presentational sequence, mutual self-selection (as speaker) to show involvement, self-revelatory comments that build intimacy, and self-oriented comments to show alignment, the latter two being also noted by Maynard and Zimmerman (1984: 313) in their earlier study. The importance of the relational implications of talk between unacquainted persons is also apparent in the ways in which interlocutors deal with (potential) impoliteness or offence. Both Maynard and Zimmerman (1984: 311) and Svennevig (1999: 236–237) suggest that participants generally avoid talking about themselves in ways that might offend the other interlocutor, as well as avoiding topics or giving evaluations that could be perceived as offensive, instead seeking “safe topics” to thereby establish common ground (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 112–124).

It is notable, however, that both of these studies mention little about humour and its relationship with face and im/politeness, despite joking being identified as an important politeness strategy in Usami's work on conversations in Japanese and (American) English (Usami, 1993, 1994, 2002). In the present study, where the focus is on a small corpus of 18 conversations between unacquainted Australian speakers of English, it becomes apparent that humour in the form of jocular mockery (or teasing), jocular irony, and hyperbole (or exaggeration), is an important means of accomplishing face in interaction leading, at times, to evaluations of im/politeness. However, before outlining the findings of the present analysis, the data and the way in which it was analysed is briefly discussed.

### **3. An interactional approach to face and im/politeness**

#### **3.1. Data**

A total of 18 conversations between nine unacquainted Australians were recorded in two separate sessions at a university in Australia in 2002.<sup>2</sup> The interactants were asked to introduce themselves and talk to each other freely for around 15 minutes in sessions which were audio-recorded. The actual conversations ranged in length from nine to twenty-two minutes, giving a total of approximately five hours of recorded conversations in the corpus. The participants were not given any set topics, being told that the conversations were being gathered for a study of conversation in Australian English. While there is evidence in the interactions that the participants did at times orient to the fact they were being recorded, all the participants reported in follow-up surveys that they felt their conversations were fairly “natural”. The participants ages ranged from early twenties through to late forties, with nine of the conversations being in female–female dyads, and the remaining nine being in male–female dyads

(see the Appendix for further details about participants).<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting here that while a data set of this size is not representative of all Australians, it does provide some insight into what educated, middle class Australians *can* say in getting acquainted with others.

The recordings were then transcribed and audited according to standard conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004). In this process, various forms of humour emerged as recurrently occurring across a number of the conversations. 38 excerpts involving humorous exchanges, including jocular mockery (Haugh, 2010a; cf. Drew, 1987), jocular irony (Goddard, 2006), and jocular hyperbole or exaggeration (Norrick, 2004), were identified in the corpus. Rather than making inferences about putative speaker intentions in identifying instances of humour in the corpus, however, excerpts were identified based on interactional cues from both speakers and recipients (Holmes, 2000: 163–164; Hay, 2001: 55). In the case of speakers, these included intonation, (propositional) contrast, and shifts in register, with other facial and gestural cues, while important (Attardo, Eisterhold, Hay and Poggi, 2003), lying outside of the scope of this study since it involved audio-recordings only. In the case of recipients, cues included laughter, using echo or overlap, playing along with the gag, contributing more humour, offering sympathy, and/or contradicting the speaker (in the case of self-deprecatory humour). The excerpts were then classified as to whether they were primarily self-oriented (16 excerpts), recipient-oriented (13 excerpts), or object/third-party oriented (9 excerpts). The analysis that follows, however, focuses primarily on self-oriented and recipient-oriented humour as evaluations of im/politeness are most salient when first- or second-party directed.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2. Analysing face and im/politeness in interaction

While previous studies, in particular Maynard and Zimmerman's (1984) and Svennevig's (1999) seminal work, have shown through careful analysis how evaluations of im/politeness are locally occasioned, and that such concerns are oriented to by participants in interaction, their approaches to face and politeness are arguably problematic. In the case of Maynard and Zimmerman's (1984) study, politeness and offence are under-theorized with recourse made to only intuitive, and thus ill-defined, notions. Svennevig's (1999) study, on the other hand, gives rise to possible (unintended) theoretical incoherence in drawing from Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, as his analysis is grounded in the orientations of the participants themselves at the discourse level, particularly those of the recipients, yet Brown and Levinson's theory is explicitly focused on the intentions of speakers at the utterance level (Arundale, 1999, 2006).<sup>5</sup> In other words, making recourse to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, in an otherwise interactionally-based approach, may result in the analyst vacillating between first-order or folk views of politeness (where participants are orienting to face or politeness), on the one hand, and second-order or theoretical notions of politeness (namely, Brown and Levinson's theory), on the other (Watts, Ide and Ehlich, 1992; Eelen, 2001). An interactional approach to the analysis of face and im/politeness in interaction (Haugh, 2007a, 2009, 2010a), drawing from Arundale's (1999, 2006, 2010) Face Constituting Theory, is arguably more methodologically and theoretically parsimonious, and is thus utilised in the following analysis.

In Arundale's Face Constituting Theory, face is conceptualised as participant projectings and interpretations of "persons-in-relationship-to-other-persons", specifically relational connectedness and separateness (Arundale, 2006: 204; cf.

Goffman, 1955: 213). Unlike Brown and Levinson's notions of positive and negative face which are assumed to be pan-universal, Arundale (2006: 205) argues connectedness and separateness constitute an abstract relational dialectic that encompasses a range of culture-specific manifestations. Ethnographic studies of Anglo-speakers of Australian English, for instance, indicate that relational connection is broadly understood from an emic perspective as involving a sense of "shared ordinariness" and "toughness", where one is expected to "downplay anything special about oneself, including one's abilities, achievements and experiences" (Goddard, 2006: 71), purposefully reject "any overt show of respect, with implications of familiarity, friendliness and equality" (Wierzbicka, 2002: 1194–1195), and to "not take oneself too seriously" (Goddard 2006: 68, 2009; Peters 2007: 243). Relational separateness, on the other hand, primarily involves a sense of one's own "space", a territory that should not be entered into without the (tacit) consent of the individual or group concerned, as well as a sense of self-respect in regard to one's own competence (Haugh, 2010a: 2113; cf. Haugh 2004: 90, 2006a: 21–24).<sup>6</sup> However, while separateness is obviously of concern to interactants, it is arguably connectedness that is the primary focus in the process of getting acquainted, as convincingly argued by Svennevig (1999: 161). It is thus connection face that constitutes the main focus of the subsequent analysis.

Building on this understanding of face as interactionally achieved, Arundale (1999, 2006, 2010) conceptualises facework, and as a subset of this im/politeness, specifically, as evaluations participants make of projectings and interpretations of face as involving either threat, stasis or support (cf. Haugh and Hinze, 2003: 1600–1608; Haugh, 2004: 98–104). Since such evaluations are primarily rooted in the individual's cognitive processes, it follows that any inferences made by the analyst from the participants' utterances/behaviour need to be undertaken with due caution, particularly in cases where participants are neither overtly nor implicitly orienting to face or im/politeness concerns (Arundale, 2010; Haugh, 2007a, 2010). Nevertheless, as discussed further below, there was evidence emerging from this analysis that interactants did indeed orient to locally occasioned evaluations of face and im/politeness at certain points in these interactions.

The approach to the analysis of face, im/politeness and humour in this work, then, draws from both ethnomethodological conversation analysis and pragmatics. As Svennevig (1999) argues, an integrated framework drawing from both allows the analyst to not only identify and describe recurring patterns in the data (p.83), but also allows him or her to interpret such identified structures within the context of a pragmatic explanatory framework (p.86). In this way, the analysis can build upon the descriptive strength of ethnomethodological conversation analysis and the interpretive strength of language pragmatics. In the following section, the inter-relationships between humour, face, and evaluations of im/politeness in the examples identified are discussed in further detail building on this framework.

#### **4. Humour in interactions between Australians getting acquainted**

While participants displayed similar orientations to those found in Maynard and Zimmerman's (1984) and Svennevig's (1999) studies, for instance, showing interest, indicating alignment, avoiding disagreement and the like, all of which are interpretable through the lens of face(work) or im/politeness, what emerged as striking in this particular corpus of interactions between Australian speakers of

English getting acquainted was the role that humour played. In the following analysis, which is made through recourse to particular examples selected from the 38 excerpts involving humorous exchanges found in the corpus, it emerges that humour, including jocular teasing, mocking, irony and exaggeration, constitutes an important means of interactionally achieving connectedness face amongst Australian speakers of English who are getting acquainted.

In the following excerpt, for instance, the conversation between Natalie and Kathy begins with a fairly conventional exchange of names and greetings (Usami 2002: 112–115). What is notable, however, is that the two interactants launch into teasing banter within the first 14 seconds of starting to talk to each other.

(1) NJKR: 0:00

1 N: Hello [hhh.  
 2 K: [Hello he he he  
 3 N: I'm Natalie.  
 4 K: I'm Kathy.  
 5 (0.5)  
 6 N: >It's nice to meet you<=  
 7 =Kath or Kathy?  
 8 K: Kathy=  
 9 N: =Kathy  
 10 K: =Yep <h y>  
 11 (2.2)  
 12 K: °Kathy°  
 13 (0.5)  
 14 N: Lovely.  
 15 (0.8)  
 16 K: No worries. Nice meeting you.  
 17 N: Yes. h[hh.  
 18 K: [hhh.  
 19 N: So [far.  
 20 K: [ha ha ha hhh.  
 21 (0.7)  
 22 N: So what do you do.  
 23 K: what do I do? (0.2) that's a nice standard opening  
 24 ques[tion?]  
 25 N: [hh ] he he  
 26 K: U::m  
 27 (0.2)  
 28 N: I'll ask about the weather ne(hh)xt he ha >he he<

After exchanging names, and a short digression as Natalie confirms Kathy's name (lines 1–10), neither of the interactants self-selects to initiate a self-presentation sequence, and so the conversation loses temporary momentum (lines 10–15). Kathy then launches a conventional 'nice to meet you' greeting exchange (line 16), to which Natalie responds not with an unmarked return of something like 'nice to meet you', but rather a simple acknowledgement token "yes" (line 17). In responding in this somewhat non-conventional or marked way, Natalie lays the groundwork for the tease that follows in line 19, where she implies that it may not be pleasant talking to Kathy later in the conversation. The jocular or non-serious tone of this tease is invoked through Natalie's own laughter tokens preceding the tease (line 17), and supported by Kathy's laughter in response (line 20). Natalie then projects the first position of a self-presentation sequence (line 22). But instead of responding with either a minimal or expanded self-presentation in second position, Kathy echoes Natalie's question and then issues a metapragmatic comment about such a question being fairly "standard"

(lines 23–24). That this is also framed as jocular teasing is evident in Natalie’s response where she first laughs (line 25), and then mocks herself in suggesting she might ask about the weather (line 28), invoking the stereotypical associations of such talk with ‘boring’ conversations where people do not know what to talk about.

In this brief excerpt from the beginning of this conversation, then, these two unacquainted persons both project face threatening teases oriented at each other, as well as Natalie mocking herself and thereby threatening their separation face. Yet it is also apparent that these teasing and mocking utterances are framed as jocular. Indeed, this banter between the two interlocutors appears to help them overcome a temporary hitch in the flow of the conversation, as well as establishing a friendly rapport between them, thereby arguably leading to the interactional achievement of relational connection.

Analysing such humorous sequences thus poses a particular challenge for any theory of face, as while they are face threatening, they are also often received positively by participants. The overwhelming focus of research thus far has been on face threats as a form of impoliteness or hostility (Culpeper, 1996; Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield and Culpeper, 2008; Bousfield and Locher, 2008), with banter and mock impoliteness being treated as only ostensibly face threatening (Leech, 1983: 142; Bousfield, 2008: 87, 95). In this analysis, however, it is suggested that such humour can also be face threatening in a very real way. While the teases discussed in excerpt (1) above are interpretable as jocular, for instance, it is only by threatening their connection face that this humour – and so evaluations of support for relational connection – arises. Taking such a position is plausible within Face Constituting Theory where it is argued that “evaluations of face interpretations as threatening may arise apart from evaluations as supportive, but they may also arise in conjunction” (Arundale, 2010: 2094). This means that while (potentially) face threatening utterances or sequences, such as humorous teases or irony, may threaten connection or separation face, they may also, at the same time, be interpreted positively by Australian interactants as indicative of a sense of shared ordinariness, and thereby also support connection face. In other words, it is argued here that this kind of humour is inherently ambivalent, in that while it may be face threatening, it can nevertheless be evaluated positively by interactants, leading to evaluations by participants of both threats to and support of their connection face.

#### 4.1. Self-oriented humour

Self-oriented humour encompasses instances where the target of the utterance is the speaker him/herself, but it is projected in such a manner by the speaker that it is interpretable by the recipient as being within a joking frame. In the present corpus, self-mocking (or self-deprecatory) assessments and anecdotes, ironic understatements, as well as exaggeration all occasioned self-oriented humour.

In the following excerpt, for instance, Emma responds to Jill’s question about her level of fluency in Japanese with self-deprecatory comments that are evidently projected and interpreted within a humorous interpretive frame.

(2) ERJH: 1:01

35 J: So you can speak it fairly fluently? [(.) can ↑you

36 E: [Hh hh No(h)

37 J: ↑Really

38 E: I w[ish I could

39 J: [so how did you survive for four yea↑rs if ah=

40 E: =I survived but [umm my Japanese is very rough  
41 J: [mm  
42 J: [Ok]  
43 E: [yo]lu know I speak like a taxi driver  
44 J: Ok hh hh hh [hh hh  
45 E: [or a truck driver  
46 J: y[eah  
47 E: [yeah

In line 36, Emma responds to Jill's question by first explicitly denying that she is fluent in Japanese. Her denial is preceded by and interspersed with laughter, which underscores her self-assessment of the level of her Japanese as being fairly minimal. The denial is also indirectly oriented towards the presupposition arising from Jill's question in line 35 that Emma could be considered good at Japanese. Further evidence that Emma considers her Japanese to be so bad that such a presupposition is laughable comes in her response to Jill's question about how Emma 'survived' in Japan with such (apparently) minimal Japanese. Emma first assesses her Japanese as "rough" (line 40), and then goes on to compare her level of fluency to the way in which "taxi drivers" or "truck drivers" speak. The manner of speaking that Emma evokes through these comparisons are not those of Japanese taxi or truck drivers, but rather stereotypical images of taxi and truck drivers in Australia that Emma could reasonably suppose Jill to share. Taxi drivers *stereotypically* come from non-English speaking backgrounds and speak English badly, while truck drivers *stereotypically* speak a fairly crude, uncultivated style of English. In doing so, Emma projects a negative assessment of her Japanese as being spoken badly and crudely, thereby impugning her ability to communicate in Japanese and thus conduct herself in Japan. In drawing from such hyperbolic stereotypes it is evident that this negative assessment is being projected within a joking frame, and in conjunction with Jill's laughter in line 44 in response to Emma's self-mocking comments, is indicative of self-oriented humour being interactionally achieved here. However, it is worth noting that while Emma's self-deprecatory comments are modest, and therefore interpretable as polite (that is, Emma does not think too highly of herself), Emma also displays an implicit orienting to a sense of 'shared ordinariness' in downplaying her abilities in speaking Japanese. In this way, by positioning herself as 'ordinary' and Jill's appreciation of the humour of this in response, evaluations of support for connection face arise. This is not to say either Emma or Jill are (consciously) aware at this point in their interaction that evaluations of politeness or support for relational connection have arisen, but rather that such inferences are at least consonant with the understandings of what the other interlocutor's have said (provisional interpretations) and what they themselves have said (operative interpretations) apparent from their subsequent responses.

In the following excerpt, the way in which self-oriented humour can occasion evaluations of face support is also apparent. Prior to this excerpt, Kathy has been talking about how she forgot words in English when she was overseas in Indonesia. Earlier, she gives the word "supermarket" as an example in an anecdote where she claims she kept calling it a "food shop" for almost a year after returning back to Australia. At the point where the excerpt below starts, Kathy is relating how her sisters laughed at her for not being able to remember the word for "supermarket".

(3) ERKR: 11:45  
351 K: umm one was in high school  
352 and one was in primary school and they just

353 found it incredibly f hilariousf that you know older  
 354 sister (.) came over †here  
 355 (0.9)  
 356 E: Can't [speak English]  
 356 K: [Didn't- ] †yeah didn't know English  
 357 E: ye:[ah  
 358 K: [and couldn't remember a word  
 359 E: ye:[ah=  
 360 K: [they just found it hysterical.  
 361 E: The worst thing is (.) my Japanese is is crap  
 362 K: hhh. heh [heh heh heh  
 363 E: [but then my English is crap †too  
 364 so I was just crap in two †languages yo[u know?  
 365 K: [O:h †no:  
 366 that's not a good feeling.  
 367 E: Oh.  
 368 K: Heh heh heh

In lines 351–360, Kathy and Emma are co-constructing an anecdote which relates how Kathy could not remember English words after returning from a stay in Indonesia. The humorous tone of the anecdote emerges through not only its framing as non-serious by Kathy through her light, ‘smiling’ voice, but also Emma’s reaction where she goes on to mock her own ability in Japanese and English. As the anecdote relates to Kathy’s ability to speak English, such self-mocking impugns her ability to competently speak her native tongue. Such self-deprecation is not readily interpretable as modesty, since there is nothing significant about speaking one’s first language fluently, and so does not appear to give rise to evaluations of politeness. However, it is oriented towards the interactional achievement of connection face, in that through such self-deprecation Kathy indexes a non-serious attitude towards herself (that is, as someone who does not mind being the target of mocking).

However, not only does this self-face threatening humorous anecdote display an orienting towards the interactional achievement of relational connection, it also occasions further facework, namely Emma’s mocking of her own ability to speak both Japanese and English (lines 361, 363). The joking nature of this negative assessment is evident in Kathy’s receipting it with laughter (lines 362, 368), followed by a fairly formulaic and non-serious expression of sympathy (lines 365–366). By subsequently impugning her ability to competently speak her native tongue, Emma is also thereby orienting towards the interactional achievement of relational connection. Moreover, by admitting to having similar problems, Emma lessens the degree of the previous negative assessment initiated by Kathy, and so such self-mocking humour is interpretable as polite (that is, Emma thinks highly of Kathy).

In the excerpt that follows we see how humour not only occasions facework, but is also occasioned *by* participants orienting to face. The excerpt begins with Emma asking Kathy about the topic of her PhD research, which turns out to be cyber communities.

(4) ERKR: 1:43  
 57 E: What are you doing your PhD on?  
 58 (0.9)  
 59 K: Umm=Cyber communities.  
 60 (0.4)  
 61 E: Wh[aa::]  
 62 K: [Actu]ally Yea:†h  
 63 E: Whaa::  
 64 K: Which is an excuse just to stare at a computer

65 screen all day but you know  
 66 (0.4)  
 67 E: M:m. That's bad for your health  
 68 K: Yeah hah hah hah °heh°  
 69 (.)  
 70 E: °°heh°° °heh heh°

Emma responds in lines 61 and 63 by signalling that she is impressed with this topic through repetition of an elongated variant of the token “wow”. This positive assessment of Kathy as an individual who undertakes interesting study is interpretable as polite. However, it occasions a jocular self-deprecatory utterance on the part of Kathy lines 64–65, where she downplays Emma’s admiration by claiming her research is not really serious and just an excuse to surf the Internet and the like. In doing so, Kathy impugns her ability as a competent research student, but also simultaneously orients to their connection face by invoking a sense of being someone ‘ordinary’ who does not take things too seriously (including her own research). The way in which a joking frame is being interactionally achieved by these two interlocutors emerges through Emma’s teasing response (line 67) (cf. Drew, 1987), where she suggests that such behaviour would be unhealthy, and Kathy’s and Emma’s subsequent receipting of this tease with laughter (lines 68, 70). In this way, then, it becomes apparent how humour (in this case jocular self-mocking) can also be occasioned by previous facework (cf. Haugh, 2010a: 2115–2116).

#### 4.2. Recipient-oriented humour

As the discussion in the previous section has indicated, self-oriented humour not only occasions facework as well as being occasioned by facework, it may also itself occasion further humour, often in the form of recipient-oriented teasing. In the next excerpt, for instance, which occurs at the beginning of their interaction, the conventional exchange of greetings and names is followed not by the first-position of a self-presentation sequence, but rather jocular self-mockery on the part of Emma.

(5) ERJH: 0:00

1 E: Hi: [hh hh]  
 2 J: [Hi: ]  
 3 E: I'(h)m Emma  
 4 J: I'm Jill °how are you (.) nice (0.5) to meet you.=  
 5 E: =Nice to meet you=  
 6 J: =Yeah,  
 7 E: If you can hear my stomach rumbling umm (.)  
 8 [just ignore it  
 9 J: [It's lunch time hh hh  
 10 E: Yea:::h yeah [pretty much  
 11 J: [Well let's hope the tape doesn't pick  
 12 up any loud noises °and we won't have to worry hh h=  
 13 E: =I hope not.=  
 14 J: =Yeah so have you been at the university all  
 15 ↑morning do you work ↑here or?

In requesting that Jill ignore any noises that might issue from Emma’s stomach (lines 7–8), Emma threatens her dignity as an individual whose bodily functions should not be noticeable to others. While the comment is receipted by Jill in line 9 with an account for such noises if they were to arise, namely it is lunch time, the jocular tone of this mocking comment is evident in Jill subsequent laughter. Jill then teases Emma

that such potentially embarrassing noises might be hearable on the audio-recording (lines 11–12). Such a tease threatens their separation face (as they are only just getting to know each other), yet in lying within the joking frame that has been invoked earlier in the interaction, it is also orienting to their connection face (in that they can freely talk about such a topic which is stereotypically avoided in “polite” conversation). In other words, in this interaction we can see how self-oriented humour not only occasions facework, but also further humour, in this case, an other-oriented tease, which also itself occasions subsequent facework.

While the interlocutors in these conversations were not previously acquainted it is notable how many instances there are involving other-oriented teases and irony. And while these teases are face threatening, they are nevertheless often received positively by the recipients, rather than with the po-faced response (that is, rejection of the tease), which has previously been claimed to be most prevalent type of response to teases (Drew, 1987). In the next excerpt, Gary responds to Emma bemoaning the “tragic” loss of traditional values in modern practices of Chinese medicine in mainland China with a fairly deadpan call to “just move on” (line 182). This response occasions a tease from Emma implying that Gary is overly cynical (line 184), to which Gary responds in lines 185 and 188 with laughing agreement rather than any form of explicit or implicit denial.

(6) ERGR: 7:15

176 E: So: um (0.5) <yea:h> any of the old (0.9) ↑any of  
 177 the old ways any of the enduring stuff they pretty  
 178 much (.) got rid of. (0.5) and look at all the  
 179 scientific side of it.  
 180 Was a real tragedy.  
 181 (2.8)  
 182 G: °just move on° (.) you know  
 183 (3.4)  
 184 E: .hhhh YOU’VE BEEN AROUND TOO LONG  
 185 G: AH HA HA ha ha ha ha ha ha  
 186 E: Hah .hhh hah you’ve been around for too many  
 187 lifetimes.  
 188 G: Ah ha ha ha hhh. I think you’re right

In elevating her volume, Emma’s tease in line 184 can be interpreted as an accusation that Gary is someone who does not care about retaining traditional culture, yet both her own preceding in-breathing that arguably anticipates her own laughter in line 186, as well as Gary’s laughter in response that receipts the tease (line 185), frames it as jocular. The first tease on Emma’s part is further expanded upon in the subsequent turn where she accounts for such cynicism as arising from too many lifetimes of experience (lines 186–187), which is not only receipted with laughter by Gary, but which also elicits explicit agreement with what has been implied by Emma, namely, that Gary is overly cynical. Thus, while Emma’s tease is clearly threatening their separation face, in receipting the tease with laughter and agreement, Gary indicates that he does not take himself too seriously, thereby leading to the interactional achievement of relational connection.

Finally, while most instances of other-oriented humour found in the corpus were oriented to supporting connection face, and in some of these cases also towards evaluations of politeness, this is not to say that all face threats in the conversations involved invoking an unequivocal joking frame. In a few cases connection face was actually threatened in such a way as to be interpretable as impolite. In the following

excerpt, for instance, Gary is responding to Natalie's prior request that he take his share of the conversational load by asking her some questions.

(7) NJGR: 8:00

208 G: U:M I haven't got any questions to ask you  
209 actually.  
210 (1.2)  
211 N: ↑you must be fun at parties.  
212 G: .hhh don't like parties  
213 N: No: I can imagine. Ahe parties probably don't like  
214 you either(h)  
215 (0.6)  
216 G: I guess so. ↑OH NO. (0.8) people always like  
217 someone they can saddle up to  
218 (2.1)  
219 Talk to. At least someone in the corner they can  
220 talk to.

Gary responds by claiming he does not have any questions to ask in lines 208–209, thereby implicitly refusing her request. Natalie's response in turn is hearable as sarcasm, as she places intonational emphasis on “you” (line 211), thereby implying that Gary would not be fun at parties as opposed to other people. In sarcastically implying that Gary would not be fun at parties, Natalie also implies that Gary is socially inept. Such criticism directly impugns Gary competence as an individual who is friendly and competent in social interaction. Such criticism, veiled in sarcasm, is thus interpretable as impolite in that Natalie indicates she does not think highly of Gary (cf. Bousfield, 2008: 95). Yet while Natalie's comment is face threatening, Gary responds with a laughing in-breath and a negative assessment of his own social competence in line 212, and thus potentially invokes a joking frame in interpreting her comment in line 211. And even when she increases the degree of face threat by agreeing with his negative assessment, and then going on to hint that others probably do not like interacting with him at parties in lines 213–214, Gary still responds with hedged agreement (line 216), before going on to claim that he actually does talk to some people at parties (lines 216–220). While a face threat is projected through sarcasm by Natalie, then, Gary does not appear to orient to the possible impoliteness implications of such criticism. Instead, he responds in a way that treats the criticism as quite possibly true. In other words, in not orienting to this potential impoliteness, the status of Natalie's comments as face threatening remain ambivalent.

In analysing excerpts involving humorous exchanges found in conversations between Australian English speakers getting acquainted, then, two key findings have emerged. First, not only self-deprecatory humour, but also other-oriented humour occurs in interactions between unacquainted Australians. Such a finding serves to undermine the common assumption that such mocking or teasing humour is only found amongst those who are already well-acquainted (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Hay, 2000: 740; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006: 53;). Second, it was found that humour not only occasions interactants to orient towards face, it is itself also occasioned by interactants orienting to face in interaction. However, since evaluations of face threats, as well as im/politeness, are grounded primarily in the cognizing of individuals, such humour often remains ambivalent as to how threatening and/or supportive, or how polite and/or impolite, it is taken as being by interactants.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The analysis of conversations between unacquainted Australian speakers of English through the lens of Face Constituting Theory (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2010) has indicated that both self-oriented as well as teasing, other-oriented humour is an important means of establishing connection face. In doing so, it has moved beyond the current focus on face threatening as impolite to a consideration of how face threats can be received favourably within jocular interpretive frames thereby leading to interactional achievement of relational connection, an area which has hitherto been relatively neglected as Bousfield (2008: 137) points out. It has also demonstrated how such a theory of face, which is grounded in a social constructionist epistemology consistent with ethnomethodological conversation analysis and interactional pragmatics, can be utilised in analysing such phenomena (Haugh, 2007a, 2010a).

The analysis in this chapter also raises broader questions as to the role of humour in different national and regional varieties of English across various situated contexts and social strata. It has been suggested that such occurrences of recipient-oriented, as well as self-oriented humour, including teasing, mocking and irony, are reflective of a broader Anglo-Australian cultural ethos that emphasises ordinariness, familiarity and friendliness, as well as not taking oneself too seriously. This raises the question of whether such jocular face threatening is less likely to occur amongst unacquainted speakers of other varieties of English. The study of face and im/politeness can thus arguably lend insight into broader cultural issues, including the different 'cultures' of English speakers, an area that has recently been the focus of increasing interest amongst politeness researchers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Speech levels in Japanese can be determined by the presence or absence of addressee honorifics as well as referent honorifics, together with the level of formality of vocabulary (Haugh 2007b: 666-667; Ikuta 1983; Usami 2002), with speech-level shifts referring to changes in the relative level of honorifics used. Speech levels should be not conflated with politeness, however, as discussed by Haugh (2010b: 272-279).

<sup>2</sup> These conversations were gathered by the author as part of a broader project being led by Mayumi Usami (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). I would like to thank Professor Usami for the use of these recordings. All the transcriptions and subsequent analyses of these recordings, and thus any errors, are my own, however.

<sup>3</sup> Due to difficulties in recruiting sufficient male participants who did not know each other, no male-male conversations were recorded. While gender is not a focus in this study, this is clearly an area requiring further investigation.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that evaluations of im/politeness do not arise through third party references, but rather that such references generate an additional layer of complexity for the analyst that cannot be easily addressed within the constraints of space in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> The clash between the underlying epistemological (objectivism) and ontological (positivism) assumptions underlying Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as it was originally framed (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987: 10–12, 48), and those underlying Conversation Analysis (namely, social constructionism), is an issue that is often missed by those working in CA (Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010: 2074). The employment of Face Constituting Theory (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2010) is a move to address this fundamental clash. See Haugh (2007a, 2009) and Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini (2010) for further discussion of these issues in regard to face and politeness research more broadly.

<sup>6</sup> Such descriptions do not amount to the claim that such understandings of connectedness or separateness are in any way unique to Anglo-Australian speakers of English, as anthropological work by Kate Fox (2004) on English interactional norms, for instance, clearly indicates there may be significant overlap. Such comparisons across varieties of English, however, remain beyond the scope of this work.

### **Transcription conventions (following Jefferson, 2004)**

[ ]	overlapping speech
(0.5)	numbers in brackets indicate pause length
(.)	micropause
:	elongation of previous vowel or consonant sound
-	word cut-off
.	falling or final intonation
?	rising intonation
,	'continuing' intonation
=	latched utterances
<u>underlining</u>	contrastive stress or emphasis
<b>CAPS</b>	markedly louder
◦ ◦	markedly softer
↓ ↑	sharp falling/rising intonation
£ £	hearably smiling voice
> <	talk is compressed or rushed
< >	talk is markedly slowed or drawn out
( )	blank space in parentheses indicates uncertainty about the transcription

## Appendix: Participant backgrounds in Australians Getting Acquainted corpus

Participant code	Gender	Age	Occupation
ER	F	early 30s	undergraduate/acupuncturist
NJ	F	mid 20s	postgraduate student
SJ	F	late 20s	postgraduate student/tutor
KR	F	early 20s	postgraduate student
IK	F	mid 30s	teacher (primary)
JH	F	mid 40s	administrative officer
AB	M	mid 40s	lecturer
CH	M	mid 20s	postgraduate student
GR	M	mid 30s	lecturer

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