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# **Mock impoliteness, jocular mockery and jocular abuse in Australian and British English**

Michael Haugh and Derek Bousfield

## **Abstract**

Mock impoliteness in English has generally been approached in the context of theorising politeness or impoliteness. In this paper we undertake a cross-cultural, intra-English language sociopragmatic exploration of the way in which behaviour such as ‘banter’ is manifested, co-constructed and manipulated for social bonding purposes in both Australian and British varieties of English. The analysis focuses on explicating two particular interactional practices of banter, jocular mockery and jocular abuse, in male-only interpersonal interactions in (North West) Britain and Australia, and comparing the topics of such mockery and abuse. It is argued that jocular mockery and jocular abuse very often occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness, that is evaluations of potentially impolite behaviour as non-impolite, rather than politeness or impoliteness per se, and that these evaluations arise from a shared ethos that places value on “not taking yourself too seriously”. It is also suggested such evaluations are cumulative and differentially distributed in multi-party interactions. For these reasons we suggest the mock impoliteness constitutes a social evaluation in its right rather than constituting a subsidiary form of either politeness or impoliteness.

## **Keywords**

mock impoliteness, banter, jocular mockery, teasing, jocular abuse, insult, variational pragmatics, conversation analysis, Australian English, British English

## **1. Introduction**

Within this exploratory study, we are interested in the nature and role of mock impoliteness in order to: (a) expand our definitional knowledge of the phenomenon by exploring and analysing instances of naturally occurring interactional practices that occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness between individuals who have known each other for some time, (b) expand our knowledge of how mock impoliteness functions as, primarily, a solidarity enhancing pragmatic device, and (c) contribute to the expansion of variational pragmatics by engaging in an initial comparative cross-cultural study of all-male groupings of native English speakers from Australia and the North West of England who are engaged in banter.

The exploitation of jocular/humorous insults or ‘banter’ to display or create solidarity was originally termed “mock impoliteness” by Leech (1983), who suggested that it constitutes a form of “underpoliteness” (or “lack of politeness”) that has the effect of “establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity” (p.144). He treats banter as something that appears to be impolite, but since what is said is regarded as untrue by participants, it is understood as really being a means of conveying politeness, and creating or affirming solidarity. Brown and Levinson (1987), and others employing their model, have consequently treated joking and banter as a politeness strategy, as well as a means of stressing solidarity and creating ambivalence in speaker meaning.

Kotthoff (1996) has since argued that Brown and Levinson’s, as well as Leech’s approaches have inadvertently created slippage between humour, solidarity

and politeness. She claims that although “humour *can* definitely be used to cushion face-threats and to communicate polite non-imposition or polite approval”, this relationship has been over-generalised to the point that “in most models of politeness humorous activities are counted as forms of positive politeness, which is *equated with* familiarity and solidarity (p.299, emphasis added). The problem with equating humour with familiarity/solidarity, and thus with politeness, is that many instances of humorous provocation through teasing or making fun of someone can be argued to be “clearly impolite”, at least for the target of the tease, yet nevertheless still have a “relationship-affirming character” (Kotthoff, 1996: 299). Consonant with Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s (1997: 279) claim that teasing lies on a continuum from bonding and nipping through to outright biting, Kotthoff (1996) argues that “humour can affirm not only social convergence, but also divergence...Humour can strengthen group solidarity...but it can also exclude people” (p.301). Indeed, it is entirely possible to “make fun of” interactants in a socially divisive way. In such cases, then, it might be interpreted as “non-polite” (p.312) or “impolite” by some participants (pp.315-316).

The interpretive ambiguity of humour in relation to politeness has been further explored by Grainger (2004) in her study of humour in British geriatric wards. She suggests that teasing which excludes the patient “can be seen to operate at multiple relational levels, partly creating intimacy, but also carrying aggressive undertones and re-constructing the asymmetrical power relationship between patient and nurse”, while “even playful banter which is inclusive of both participants can have a controlling edge to it, while at the same time promoting a feeling of intimacy” (p.57). In other words, the deployment of humour can be evaluated in diverging ways by participants in relation to im/politeness. Moreover, such evaluations do not necessarily sit comfortably within either a framework of politeness or impoliteness. Indeed, existing definitions and taxonomies of politeness and impoliteness do not lend themselves well to describing or accounting for the relational implications of the use of humour in interaction. The main reason for this is that such models have quite simply not been developed with the concept of mock, jocular, or playful impoliteness as a main research focus (see Bousfield 2008: 136-137).

Research that has concentrated on what we might wish to understand as ‘banter’ or humorous insults in English has, to date, analysed practices such as teasing, mocking, self-deprecatory humour, jocular abuse/insults in interactions between speakers of American English (Butler, 2007; Ervin-Tripp and Lampert, 2009; Everts, 2003; Labov, 1972; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDowell and Schaffner 2011; Norrick, 1993; Straehle, 1993), British English (Drew, 1987; Fox, 2004; Grainger, 2004; Mullany, 2004), New Zealand English (Hay, 1994, 2000, 2002; Holmes, 2006; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Plester and Sayers, 2007; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr and Chan, 2011), and Australian English (Goddard, 2006, 2009; Haugh, 2009, 2010, 2011). In line with the growing interest in exploring differences in pragmatics across varieties of English, in this paper, we compare instances of humour arising in conversations amongst speakers of Australian English and amongst speakers of British English from the North West of England. Our analysis focuses on two particular interactional practices of ‘banter’, namely, jocular mockery (Haugh, 2010, 2011) and jocular abuse (Hay, 2002; Haugh, 2009: 77-78), which were found to arise in casual interactions between friends and family members in both datasets. We will argue that such practices, for the most part, occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness rather than of politeness or impoliteness. This claim rests on the underlying argument that mock impoliteness is neither a form of politeness nor

impoliteness *per se*, and thus needs to be independently analysed, if not theorised, as such.

To this end, this paper has the following structure. We first provide an overview of previous work on mock impoliteness and outline some limitations in the ways in which it has been theorised thus far. We then characterise mock impoliteness as evaluations of potentially impolite behaviour as non-impolite, paying particular attention to differing evaluations of talk or conduct as impolite and non-impolite amongst participants in an interaction. After very briefly reviewing a number of interactional practices which may occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness, we introduce the participants in the Australian and British datasets. We differentiate between two interactional practices, namely, jocular mockery and jocular abuse, giving examples of each from both Australian and British interactions where evaluations of mock impoliteness arise, before finally providing a preliminary taxonomy of “targets” or “topics” of jocular mockery and abuse. We suggest that while jocular mockery and jocular abuse can occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness (but also of evaluations of genuine face threat or impoliteness in some instances) amongst both Australian and (north western) British speakers of English, the targets of such mockery or abuse can vary across different social groups, with such variation arguably being mediated through broader societal norms in (north western) Britain and Australia.

## 2. Mock impoliteness

### 2.1. Previous approaches to theorising mock impoliteness

The term mock impoliteness was originally coined by Leech (1983) to refer to instances where a speaker says something which is obviously “untrue” and “impolite” in order to convey by implicature something which is “true” - often the opposite of what is said - and “polite” to the addressee. He gives the following example of the layers of meanings that could be argued to arise when one says to someone who is actually a friend “A fine friend *you* are!”

- (i) You are a fine friend (face-value, i.e., what is said)
- (ii) By which I mean you are *not* a fine friend. (Irony Principle)
- (iii) But actually, you *are* my friend, and to show it, I am being impolite to you. (Banter Principle). (Leech, 1983: 145)

According to Leech, then, the Irony Principle gives rise to the first part of the implicature (“what *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue”), while the Banter Principle gives rise to the second part (“what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true”) (p.144). In this way mock impoliteness is treated by Leech as a ‘disguised’ or ‘covert’ form of politeness.

The notion of mock impoliteness was further refined by Culpeper (1996, 2005). He defines it as “impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence” (1996: 352), which “reflects and fosters social intimacy” (p.352). Culpeper (1996, 2005) effectively considers mock impoliteness to be a form of “superficial impoliteness”. He also implicitly links this form of “superficial impoliteness” to threats to the addressee’s face as a way of dealing with the fact that Leech did not specify in which contexts would what the speaker says could be said to be “untrue” (although cf. Culpeper [2011] which we

discuss later in this section). In other words, it is claimed by Culpeper that the lack of specification of “contexts in which the impoliteness is understood to be untrue” can be addressed by appealing to ‘face’ within the context of an impoliteness framework. This broadly Brown and Levinsonian approach to mock impoliteness has been subsequently picked up in work by, amongst others, Bousfield (2008: 136-137) and Schnurr, Marra and Holmes (2007: 714).<sup>1</sup>

However, such conceptualisations have attracted a number of critiques. The first centres on the claim that mock impoliteness involves the speaker saying (or implying) something that is “clearly untrue” (Leech, 1983: 144; Culpeper, 1996: 352, 2005: 37). Mills (2003) argues that in some instances “banter or mock impoliteness might allow someone to utter something closer to their true feelings in an exaggerated form at the same time as posing it in a manner where it will be interpreted on the surface at least as non-serious” (p.124). In support of this claim Mills cites the work of Yedes (1996) on workplaces where insults and jokes are used to accomplish tasks in difficult situations. Grainger’s (2004) study also underscores the way in which banter and humour more generally can be used by nurses to accomplish control over patients, while at the same time promoting feelings of intimacy to ease their discomfort. Indeed, Brown and Levinson (1987) themselves note that while insulting someone in front of an audience in a joking manner may be treated by the audience as “merely an assertion of intimacy”, the addressee, on the other hand, who has been “wounded by an accurate dart”, may be “forced to accept it lightly even though he may know better” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 229). As we also show later in our analysis, the content of banter in causal interactions amongst friends and family is not always “clearly untrue”. For this reason, defining mock impoliteness with reference to a speaker’s intention to not offend is problematic, not least because it does not account for the differential effects of mock impoliteness, particularly in multi-party interactions.

A further issue with approaches to mock impoliteness to date is the widespread assumption that “high risk” (i.e. potentially impolite) teasing and banter only arises in interactions between intimates or friends (Holmes, 2000: 174; Leech 1983: 144). Kienpointner (1997) suggests that mock impoliteness constitutes “a means for implying that the relationship is so close and well-established that it cannot be endangered even by seemingly rude utterances” (p.262). Such an assumption is theoretically problematic as it can lead to the conflation of mock impoliteness with solidarity (and thus relationships more broadly), as Kotthoff (1996) has pointed out. It is also empirically problematic as Haugh (2010, 2011) has documented instances of teasing or mockery (some of it arguably “high risk”) arising in interactions between previously unacquainted Australian speakers of English.

A related problem is the conflation of a range of different social actions and effects/functions under a single label. Banter, for instance, is equated with mock impoliteness. Yet the term banter may be used to refer to joking around or jesting in a playful manner (Grainger, 2004: 47-49) or to “a rapid exchange of humorous lines oriented toward a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk” (Norrick, 1993: 29), to refer to teasing or mocking a particular target (Bousfield, 2008: 136-137), or even to refer to insulting others in a ritualised manner (Labov, 1972). And not all social actions that may occasion

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. also mock impoliteness defined as “superficially impolite behaviours that are not interpreted as intentionally impolite in context, but rather reflect the shared knowledge and values of a group, and where the effect and intention is to reinforce solidarity among group members” (Schnurr, Marra and Holmes, 2007: 714).

evaluations of mock impoliteness, for instance, humorous self-denigration or self-teasing (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997; Norrick, 1993), readily lie within the conceptual scope of banter. Moreover, as Bousfield (2007) argues, apparently friendly banter may be used to mask (from the ostensible target) displays of impoliteness (which are understood by other receivers occupying different discourse participant roles). It appears, then, that approaches to mock impoliteness to date have conflated evaluations of im/politeness with both a variety of different social actions/interactional practices (thereby overusing ‘banter’ metaphorically), and with relational work (in particular, the co-construction of solidarity between participants)

A number of the problems in relation to approaches to mock impoliteness to date that we have discussed thus far have been anticipated to some degree in Culpeper’s (2011) recent significant reworking and extension of his previous approach to mock impoliteness (albeit remaining within the context of a model of impoliteness).<sup>2</sup> While we will go on to suggest that mock impoliteness should be treated as a social evaluation in its own right rather than being subsumed within a theory of impoliteness, we nevertheless build upon many elements of Culpeper’s (2011) approach in tentatively outlining the necessary preliminaries for just such a theorisation.

## ***2.2. Mock impoliteness, relationships and interactional practices***

According to the Miriam-Webster Dictionary Online (2011), the term *mock* is defined as “having the character of imitation” or being “simulated” or “feigned”. When it is used to refer to an action it indicates that the action is “done or performed to look like the real thing”, while when it is used to refer to an attitude it indicates that the attitude is “not based on real feelings”. It is generally contrasted with actions or attitudes that are not *genuine* or *real*. It is this sense of *mock* as referring to actions or attitudes that appear like the real thing but are not in fact real, which seems to underlie Culpeper’s (2011) distinction between genuine and mock impoliteness. Mock impoliteness is defined by Culpeper as “an understanding on the part of a participant that the contextual conditions that sustain genuine impoliteness do not apply” (p.208).<sup>3</sup> Culpeper (2011) goes on to argue that “the recontextualisation of impoliteness in socially opposite contexts creates socially opposite effects, namely, affectionate, intimate bonds amongst individuals and the identity of that group” (p.207). This is an important theoretical move as Culpeper thereby associates mock impoliteness not only with relational work between participants, but also with identity work across that social group. This arguably echoes Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s (1997) earlier claim that joking humour accomplishes both identity displays and relational work. He is not tied down, however, to Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s (1997) claim that teasing and joking about others has primarily a relational function, while joking about oneself

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<sup>2</sup> While Kienpointner (1997) also provides a much more nuanced view of different forms of impoliteness, much of his framework remains only sketched out with definitions of “simulated rudeness” (encompassing mock impoliteness, ritual insults and ironic rudeness) versus “common interest rudeness” (encompassing reactive rudeness and sociable rudeness) largely lacking. The notion of mock impoliteness we propose in this paper is perhaps more akin to his (undefined) notion of “simulated rudeness”, although it could also conceivably be encompassed within “sociable rudeness” depending on how the latter is understood.

<sup>3</sup> Whilst their models can be generally viewed to be compatible, there are a number of differences between Culpeper’s (2011: 23) and Bousfield’s (2010: 120) definitions of impoliteness, but as we are focusing here on mock impoliteness, which we argue is conceptually and analytically distinct from the study of impoliteness proper, these are treated as lying outside of the scope of the present paper.

only involves identity display (see also Grainger, 2004). As Norrick (1993: 56) argues, humorous self-denigration can also “nurture rapport”, at least amongst speakers of British English. This suggests that the relational and identity work associated with mock impoliteness across varieties of English is a matter for further empirical investigation, a program to which the analyses in this paper makes a preliminary contribution.

Related to Culpeper’s (2011) claim that mock impoliteness is both relationship and identity implicative, is his recognition of the multiple functions of mock impoliteness. The first function associated with mock impoliteness is reinforcing solidarity, which Culpeper (2011) suggests generally “takes place between equals, typically friends, and is reciprocal” - although Haugh’s (2010, 2011) analysis of humour deployed in interactions between unacquainted Australian speakers of English suggests that this generalisation does not necessarily hold across all varieties of English. The second function, cloaked coercion, involves the use of humour “in the service of power to minimally disguise the oppressive intent, i.e. as a repressive discourse strategy” (Holmes, 2000: 176). The third and final function of mock impoliteness is that it may be deployed for the amusement of at least some of the participants, namely, as a form of exploitative humour that “involves pain for the target but pleasure for other participants” (Culpeper, 2011: 215).

The existence of these multiple functions of mock impoliteness is what primarily provides for slippage between evaluations of genuine impoliteness and mock impoliteness in interaction. Culpeper (2011: 213-215) notes that participants may not see the same event in the same way, with some understanding it in terms of mock impoliteness while others may treat it as genuine impoliteness (even when they may recognise it was not necessarily intended as the latter). Mock impoliteness that is purportedly deployed to reinforce solidarity may also be implicitly understood as a form of cloaked coercion or for the purpose of entertaining others.<sup>4</sup> We would thus argue that this slippage needs to feature centrally in analysing mock impoliteness.

Having established the foundation upon which we are working, we now turn to the way in which we propose mock impoliteness be conceptualised. We start by suggesting that mock impoliteness constitutes an evaluation (by both producer and at least one recipient), and thus it should be theorised separately from the social actions or practices which occasion such evaluations. This means, in other words, that we treat mock impoliteness and banter as linked, but discrete concepts. The former constitutes an *evaluation* while the latter constitutes an *action*. Social evaluation involves assessing or judging a person or relationship, while social action involves directed (non-)verbal behaviour on the part of individuals that takes into account the actions and reactions of others.<sup>5</sup> This is crucial from an analytical perspective because the kind of evidence we can draw upon to establish that a particular *action* has been co-constructed or interactionally achieved is not synonymous with that required to establish that a particular *evaluation* has arisen as a result of that action (Haugh, 2012). In order to establish that participants are orienting to a particular interactional sequence as accomplishing banter, for instance, we can draw upon the understandings displayed by participants in subsequent turns. In order to establish that participants are evaluating such banter as im/polite, however, requires significantly more inferential work on the part of the analyst, as evaluations are not always displayed in interaction

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<sup>4</sup> See Bousfield and Locher (2008) for an exploration of the link between impoliteness and power.

<sup>5</sup> Evaluations can also constitute a form of social action (e.g. compliments, assessments and the like). In this paper, however, we are making specific reference to evaluation in the sense of a directed (in the philosophical sense of intentional) sociocognitive state-process.

but may remain largely tacit. While a variety of approaches to such problems have been proposed, our point here is merely to argue that evaluations of mock impoliteness should be analysed separately, although clearly in conjunction with the interactional achievement of actions or practices that occasion such evaluations.<sup>6</sup>

We have thus far glossed mock impoliteness as a term denoting evaluations of potentially impolite behaviour as non-impolite. We now suggest, more specifically, that mock impoliteness in interaction involves evaluations of talk or conduct that are potentially open to evaluation as impolite by at least one of the participants in an interaction, and/or as non-impolite by at least two participants. From this definition it follows that in an interaction involving only two participants, both of those participants must evaluate the talk or conduct as non-impolite for it to count as mock impoliteness.<sup>7</sup> In multi-party interactions where there are three or more participants, in contrast, not all of the participants need necessarily evaluate the talk or conduct as non-impolite. Indeed the target, or any participants sympathising with the target, may actually (covertly or overtly) evaluate the talk or conduct as impolite. In such situations, however, there is considerable pressure on the target to treat the talk or conduct as non-impolite even if (non-displayed or private) evaluations of impoliteness arise in the minds of one or more of the participants. This potential slippage between evaluations of the talk or conduct as non-impolite and impolite is what lies at the very heart, we argue, of mock impoliteness. In this sense, then, mock impoliteness is neither an evaluation of politeness nor impoliteness, but something conceptually distinct, namely, non-impoliteness.

The notion of ‘non-impolite’ is used here to refer to an ‘allowable offence’ that is evaluated as neither polite nor impolite, but in being potentially open to evaluation as impolite is closer in some respects, of course, to the latter. What we mean by ‘offence’ is that the talk or conduct involves a threat to the target’s person or identity (cf. ‘face’ in a Goffmanian sense as utilised by Bousfield, 2008, 2010). Identities arise through participants “casting” a person (or group of persons) into a “category with associated characteristics or features” (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 3; see also Schegloff, 2007). Talk or conduct can be evaluated as threatening to persons (or groups of persons) when there is inconsistency between how that talk or conduct is interpreted relative to previous castings (including those that are presumed or expected) of that person (or group of persons), and there is no expectation in the current context that there should be such a shift.<sup>8</sup> We also note that since relationships involve interpretations of two (or more) persons as simultaneously in connection and separation with each other (Arundale, 2010a, 2010b), it follows that an evaluation of a threat to one of those persons may also be evaluated as a threat to their relational connection. These threats to person and relationship(s) are open to evaluation as impolite if they “conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be, and/or how one thinks they ought to be” (Culpeper, 2011: 23), in other words, when there is inconsistency with the interpersonal expectations, desires, or beliefs of participants. However, such threats to person and relationship(s) with others can also be treated as ‘allowable’ if participants orient to the offence as being relationship

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<sup>6</sup> We note that a strictly second-order definition of mock impoliteness still requires the analyst to tie conclusions to the data at hand, and so cannot avoid such issues, although would approach them in a different manner.

<sup>7</sup> In other words, we do not privilege either the speaker’s or hearer’s evaluation in analysing mock impoliteness.

<sup>8</sup> This definition of threat builds on Arundale’s (2010a: 2092-2094) definition of threat to face/relationship, although it needs to be emphasised here that Face Constituting Theory is explicitly a theory of face as relational.



supportive - specifically, involving the interactional achievement of interpretations of relational connection (Arundale, 2010a, 2010b), at least amongst some of the participants - and also as being in line with the interactional practice in which the participants are currently engaged, whether it be ritualised insults ('sounding' (Labov, 1972), 'flyting' (Culpeper, 1996), and suchlike.), jesting banter, jocular mockery, jocular abuse and so on. In this sense, then, we argue that the threats can also be evaluated as non-impolite.

We therefore suggest that while evaluations of mock impoliteness threaten the target's person (cf. 'face') as well as his/her relationship(s) with others, they are ultimately evaluated as supportive of relational connection. However, this support for relational connection is quite often differentially distributed across participants in a multi-party interaction (in contrast to dyadic interactions). It is this simultaneous orientation to threats to persons and relationships together with support for relationships in constituting evaluations of mock impoliteness that distinguishes them from evaluations of talk or conduct as strictly polite, impolite or non-polite. Such evaluations, we would also note, arise cumulatively across a sequence of turns as the talk or conduct in question progresses the interactional achievement of a particular action (cf. Hall and Sereno, 2010). Any theorisation of mock impoliteness must therefore build upon the cumulative and distributed nature of evaluations of mock impoliteness when analysing actions that occasion such evaluations.

The talk or conduct that occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness are quite often in the form of recognisable interactional practices, namely, recurrent and recognisable ways of constructing sequences of utterances that afford particular meanings, actions and evaluations (Haugh, 2012). Such practices generally involve co-constructing a playful, non-serious or jocular interpretative frame, and also generally afford evaluations of the meanings/actions as "amusing", "entertaining" and the like. Many of these practices have been identified through previous work on interactional humour in different varieties of English. They include teasing (Butler, 2007; Drew, 1987; Everts, 2003; Grainger, 2004; Hay, 2000, 2002; Holmes 2006; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Holmes and Schnurr, 2006; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Mullany, 2004; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr and Chan, 2011; Straehle, 1993), or a particular sub-type of teasing which Haugh (2010, 2011) terms 'jocular mockery', jesting or mild banter (Grainger, 2004: 47-49; Hambling-Jones and Merrison, this issue; Haugh, 2011; Norrick, 1993: 29-35), humorous self-denigration (Holmes, Marra and Vine, this issue; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Norrick, 1993: 45-57; Schnurr and Chan, 2011), jocular abuse/insults (Goddard, 2006; Haugh, 2009: 77-78; Hay, 1994, 2002), ritualised insults including 'sounding' (Eder, 1990; Kochman, 1983; Labov, 1972), 'chanting insults' (Crowley, 2007), and 'flyting' (Culpeper, 1996; Hughes, 1991), and very likely many others. While a careful review of all of these practices is ultimately in order, such work requires comparable datasets to ensure one is explicating differences in practices not simply differences across local interactional contexts (Schegloff 1993). As such a comprehensive, comparative analysis is beyond the scope and scale of the present paper, we thus content ourselves, here, in focusing in the following analysis of data we have collected from Australian and British interactions on just two of them, namely: jocular mockery and jocular abuse, as these were by far the most salient practices to emerge across the two datasets.

### **3. Mock impoliteness and the interactional achievement of jocular mockery and jocular abuse**

We should make it clear at this point that to which we have alluded above: this is very much an exploratory study which seeks to examine the intellectual and academic terrain so as to plot and plan a way forward for future research. Within the phenomena under scrutiny we distinguish between two practices, namely, jocular mockery and jocular abuse (see sections 3.2 and 3.3, respectively, below). We have drawn from previous work that has established jocular mockery and jocular abuse as recurrent interactional practices across a much larger dataset of interactions amongst Australian speakers of English (Haugh, 2010, 2011), and then examined roughly matched samples of male-male interactions amongst Australian and Northern British English speakers.

The possibility of cleanly studying practices that occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness, such as jocular mockery or jocular abuse, however, is compounded by the fact that there are competing paradigms for the proper study of both interactional practices and im/politeness. It suffices to say, at this point, that the approach that we are adopting to analyse jocular mockery and jocular abuse is one which combines and draws from the common and complementary elements of Arundale (2006, 2010a, 2010b), Haugh (2007, 2010, 2011, 2012), and Bousfield (2008, 2010). The position taken here is that jocular mockery or jocular abuse is interactionally achieved if, both, speaker and hearer(s) project and interpret the meanings/actions as such given the background knowledge that both the speaker and recipients (whether direct or indirect addressees) are assumed to have access to.

Through careful analysis of transcripts of audio-recordings (of which a small subset were also video recordings), a number of similarities as well as differences emerged across Australian and Northern British English speakers, particularly in their deployment of such practices. It also emerged in the course of the analysis that focusing on participant responses, as well as on whether the mockery or abuse is framed and interpreted as potentially inclusive or exclusive of the ostensible target is crucial in establishing that jocular mockery and jocular abuse have been interactionally achieved, rather than aggressive teases or insults. In suggesting that these practices can also occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness we draw from our status as an actual participant and member of the community of practice in the case of the British data, and from careful analysis of a much larger dataset in conjunction with the reference to work on the (meta)pragmatics of humour in Australian interaction in the case of the latter. We readily admit, however, that when analysing such recordings that the feelings of participants cannot always be inferred (Kotthoff, 1996: 320), and to that we would also add evaluations of impoliteness as opposed to mock impoliteness as well. For this reason, the analyses here are offered as preliminary to more extensive study.

#### ***3.1. Data and participants***

Data of the nature of jocular abuse and mockery is challenging to collect. However, the data gathered so far consists of over nine hours of recorded male-to-male interactions amongst both Australian English speakers, and North West British English speakers. Over four hours of data represent male-male Australian English interactions. These data were extracted from the Griffith Corpus of Spoken Australian English (GCSAusE, Brisbane 2007-2009: four separate conversations totalling 40

minutes of data), and the Australian Corpus of the International Corpus of English (ICE-AUS, Sydney, 1992-1993: 14 separate conversations totalling 3 hours and 30 minutes of data). In each case, these interactions took place between two to five speakers in share houses, on university grounds, or in other public spaces. The speakers were aged 18-70, and were from either working or middle class backgrounds, including university students, tutors, retail assistants, builders, and farm workers.

Five hours of recordings were also made of male-male British English interactions amongst speakers from the North West of England (specifically from the county of Cumbria). These recordings were made by the second named author of this paper with the participants' prior knowledge and permission. The same group of participants interacted on a number of occasions in late 2008 and early 2009. This group consisted of up to six participants aged between 29 years and 41 years of age. The social background of the group is predominantly working class (one was from a middle class background), with most members aspiring to middle class professions and careers (ranging from being a financial advisor or surveyor to an electrician). The interactions all took place within a friendly, collegial, 'gaming' session which takes place on a weekly basis. Most, if not all members of this six strong group are in attendance every week. Two of the members are brothers, and all of them have known each other for more than 25 years, except for Selwyn who joined the gaming group in 2003.

### ***3.2. Jocular mockery***

The interactional practice of jocular mockery is a specific form of teasing where the speaker diminishes something of relevance to someone present (either self or other) or a third party who is not co-present within a non-serious or jocular frame (Haugh, 2010: 2108). It has long been argued in relation to the study of teasing in interaction that to characterise mockery as jocular rather than aggressive necessarily involves examining participant responses in conjunction with the way(s) which the mocking talk or conduct is framed by the speaker in the local sequential context in which it occurs (Drew, 1987; Pawluk, 1989; Straehle, 1993). Haugh (2010) has suggested that jocular mockery can be analysed in terms of three inter-related dimensions: (1) what occasions jocular mockery in the local sequential context; (2) how the mockery is framed by the speaker as jocular, and (3) how the mockery is interpreted by the recipient (whether the target and/or audience). Jocular mockery can be occasioned by the target "overdoing" or exaggerating particular actions, such as complaining, extolling or bragging (Drew, 1987), slip-ups or exploitable ambiguity in what the target has previously said (Everts, 2003; Norrick, 1993), and face concerns (Haugh, 2011). It is framed as jocular in a number of ways by speakers, including through lexical exaggeration, formulaicity, topic shift markers, contrastiveness, prosodic cues, inviting laughter, and facial or gestural cues, as noted in relation to non-serious teasing more generally (Attardo et al, 2003; Drew, 1987; Edwards, 2000; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987; Keltner et al, 2001; Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Schegloff, 2001; Straehle, 1993). Responses to mockery that treat it as jocular include laughter (Drew, 1987; Everts, 2003; Glenn, 2003; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987), explicit accord with or appreciation of the mockery, as well as (partial) repetition of the mocking remark (Drew, 1987; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987), although laughter on the part of recipients does not necessarily mean they are accepting or going along with it (Drew, 1987; Glenn, 2003). Whilst recognising, for

future publication, that there were instances where diverging interpretations by speakers and recipients of ostensibly jocular mockery arose, namely, where it slips into being interpreted (by at least some participants) as aggressive teasing, in our present analysis we focus only on instances of mockery that were interactionally achieved as jocular

In the following example of jocular mockery taken from the Australian dataset, for instance, we can see how mockery is occasioned by one of the participants “overdoing” complaining, but that this mockery is framed and interpreted as jocular by both participants. The two participants, Tony and Alfie (both 20 year old students) are housemates talking at home about Tony’s night out drinking the previous evening.

(1) GCSAusE02: 2:24 “Threaten his life”

(Tony has been talking about his night out and the service he got from one of the bartenders)

102 T: and then he was just like- spent most of the  
103 time like flirting with these chicks. (0.9)  
104 while he's meant to be working;  
105 (1.2)  
106 T: po:or work ethic, (0.5) that's what that is.  
107 (0.7)  
108 A: ho:rrible,  
109 (1.0)  
110 T: .hh  
111 A: should find out where he lives and threaten  
112 his life,  
113 (4.6)  
114 A: there's one thing I forgot to bring,=  
115 T: =f(hh)ind out where he li(hh)ves and  
116 threaten his li:fe (.) hehahaha I'm so(h)rry,  
117 .hh I only just caught up to what you were  
118 saying.

Preceding this excerpt, Tony has been describing the behaviour of the barman in pouring his drink as overly flamboyant, with Alfie expressing agreement with Tony’s negative assessment of the barman. The excerpt begins here with Tony claiming that the barman was also paying too much attention to some female customers (line 103) when he should have been serving other customers. He then offers a negative assessment of this behaviour as an instance of “poor work ethic” (line 106), which in being formulated with a fairly idiomatic phrase displays potential recognition of this as an exaggeration, as well as indicating a possible closing of the sequence (Drew and Holt, 1998). This, in a sense, primes a jocular or non-serious frame, which is then reciprocated by Alfie who describes the barman’s behaviour as “horrible” (line 108). This negative assessment is somewhat incongruous with their previous castings of the barman as a “faggot”, “homo”, and his behaviour as “fucking stupid” (data not shown). Alfie then perpetuates this jocular frame in uttering with deadpan or compressed intonation contour (Attardo et al., 2003: 249) that someone (presumably Tony although it is left open to interpretation) should find out where the barman lives and “threaten his life” (lines 111-112). Clearly this suggested response to the barman’s perceived failings is an exaggerated one, going beyond what one might normally do in response to bad service, and in this sense is formulated as non-serious. It also appears likely that the mockery, while framed as non-serious, is occasioned by Tony continuing to overdo complaining about the barman, despite Alfie previously indicating a shift into a non-serious frame. In mocking Tony’s overdoing of

complaining about the barman, then, Alfie's conduct is arguably open to evaluation as impolite because it involves a threat to Tony's person, namely, casting him as someone who overdoes complaining, and thus implicitly someone who takes his own perspective too seriously. The negative value attached to taking things "too seriously" is identified as part of a set of societal proscriptions that place positive value on "not taking yourself too seriously" in mainstream Australian (and on the basis of our findings, here, we would add British) society (Fox 2004; Goddard, 2009: 38). Taking oneself too seriously is said to occasion what is colloquially known as either *taking the piss* or *taking the mickey*.<sup>9</sup> While *taking the piss/mickey* is often treated as synonymous with "sending up", "making fun of" or "teasing" others in many dictionaries, it is more accurately defined in the Australian Oxford Dictionary (2004: 984) as to "(1) ridicule; (2) humble, puncture the pretensions of" someone.<sup>10</sup> Olivieri (2003) goes further in characterising it as "a warning that people can disapprove of the way that the target of the speech act supposedly acts or thinks – the purpose of *taking the piss out of someone* is to make someone aware of the fact that someone thinks about some aspect of himself, or something he does, a little too seriously" (p.70). Ridiculing others is characterised as a basic impoliteness strategy (Bousfield, 2008: 114-115; Culpeper, 1996: 358), and indeed regularly features in folk discourse on impoliteness. However, we would suggest that this implicit ridicule is somewhat different in quality in that it is interactionally achieved within a non-serious or jocular frame, and it is occasioned by an alleged infringement of normative behaviour on the part of the target (i.e. "not taking yourself too seriously"). Casting of Tony's person into a category to which a negative value is associated thus marks a shift in relation to previous castings of Tony's person by Alfie in prior interaction, and is also likely to be in conflict with how Tony might wish his person to be cast. Such a casting can therefore be evaluated as threatening to his person. Moreover, in being open to evaluation as threatening to Tony's person, this jocular mockery is also consequently open to evaluation as threatening to the relational connection between Tony and Alfie.

It appears, however, that Tony evaluates the jocular mockery as supportive of their relational connection, and thus as non-impolite. While not he does not initially respond (lines 113-114), he subsequently orients to Alfie's mocking remark through repetition interspersed with laughter particles (lines 115-116), thereby expressing "appreciation" of it (cf. Drew 1987). Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff (1987: 160) argue that "it is a convention about interaction that frankness, rudeness, crudeness, profanity, obscenity, etc., are indices of relaxed, unguarded, spontaneous, i.e. intimate interaction". Alfie can therefore be seen to be exploiting this convention in that by mocking Tony, he is displaying that he "takes it that the current interaction is one in which he may produce such talk; i.e. intimate interaction" (*ibid*: 160). In other words, the mockery reinforces the ongoing, cumulative indexing of intimacy between Tony and Alfie. This display occurs simultaneously with a situated shift to a non-serious frame, whereby jocular mockery is interactionally achieved, which also implicitly indexes greater intimacy. In that sense, this instance of jocular mockery can be evaluated as supportive of their relational connection. That Tony indeed evaluates it as relationship supportive is evident from his positive assessment of the mockery -

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<sup>9</sup> The former expression appears more commonly in Australian English, while the latter more commonly in British English, although both expressions can be found in each variety (Goddard, 2009: 49, fn.2; Mair, 2007: 445).

<sup>10</sup> Notably, the same definition is found in the New Zealand Oxford Dictionary (2005: 860), which is indicative of interesting parallels in conceptualising "egalitarianism" between (Anglo) speakers of Australian and New Zealand English (cf. Holmes, Marra and Vine, this issue).

specifically, appreciation of its amusement value – displayed through laughter and repetition of the mockery. Such relational work is arguably consonant with Tony and Alfie’s expectations about informal, spontaneous talk where positive value is placed on being humourous and not taking oneself too seriously in Australian (and, we argue, British) society more generally. For this reason, then, we could infer that Tony and Alfie have evaluated this jocular mockery as non impolite (i.e. an allowable offence).

Similar themes became evident in extending our analysis of jocular mockery to interactions taken from the North West British dataset. In the following example, for instance, James, who had just gone for a run that morning, is the target of mockery for taking more biscuits to eat. To briefly contextualise this excerpt, James is considered overweight by the others in the group. The interaction immediately prior to this has centred on the calorific nature of different foods in general and of the snacks that the group are eating at that particular moment, as well as the calorie burning activity of running which Simon has earlier claimed to be something in the order of 500 calories burned for every mile run.

(2) 12:10:08: 0:46 “Biscuit”

(James reaches for a biscuit and then consumes most of it in one bite)

31 B: so that'll make it about, four hundred  
32 and seventy five will it?  
33 (0.8)  
34 J: m(h)m. (0.2) I'd say so.  
33 (0.4)  
33 S: ba:sically that run you went on this  
34 morning James you might as well've  
35 not bothered. ((laughs loudly))  
36 M: ((laughs))  
37 B: ((laughs))  
38 J: ((pulls face, shakes head, then  
39 shrugs and smiles whilst eating))  
40 D: ((laughs))  
41 Se: ((laughs))

The excerpt begins with Baz drawing attention to the fact that James is taking a biscuit and the alleged calorific nature of that biscuit (lines 31-32). In doing so he invokes an ironic situational frame (Mey, 2006: 6) for interpreting James’s behaviour. The irony stems from the mismatch between their shared knowledge that James is trying to lose weight and his current behaviour of eating biscuits. This mocking irony is receipted as jocular by James in that his acknowledgment is interpolated with a laughter particle (line 34). However, it is the next comment from Simon that shifts the mockery of James’s behaviour into a laughable event for all the participants present (including Mike, Baz, David and Selwyn). Here Simon suggests that James has wasted his time going for a run (lines 33-35), and then invites laughter from others in the group (line 35), who respond accordingly, thereby interactionally achieving the mockery as jocular (lines 36-37, 40-41). James also ultimately receipts the mockery as jocular in that he responds with a smile, although it is arguably a po-faced response (Drew, 1987), in that he initially pulls a face and shakes his head.

By mocking James for taking a biscuit when he claims to be trying to lose weight, Baz’s and then Simon’s comments are open to evaluation as impolite as they are categorising him as someone who does not follow through with what he says he is going to do, as well as topicalising the fact that he is considered overweight. In being open to evaluation as threatening to his person, the relational connection between James and Baz and Simon in particular, but also others in their gaming group is also

open evaluation as being threatened. However, his response, while constituting a puffed rejection of the mockery (pulling a face and shaking his head), is nevertheless modulated with a display that acceptance of the tease is inevitable (shrugging and then smiling while continuing to eat). The shared laughter amongst all members of the group, moreover, displays an understanding of the jocular mockery as indexing “intimate interaction” (Glenn, 2003; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987), and thus it appears it has been evaluated as supportive of relational connection across the group of participants. For this reason, then, we can infer that the jocular mockery arising here is evaluated as non-impolite by the participants, and in this sense has occasioned an evaluation of mock impoliteness within their ongoing banter activity.

### 3.3. *Jocular abuse*

The interactional practice of jocular abuse is a specific form of insulting where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or as having undesirable attributes using a conventionally offensive expression within a non-serious or jocular frame. A verbal insult is generally defined as “a remark that puts someone down, or ascribes a negative characteristic to them” (Hay, 2002: 20), and more technically as a dysphemism, “a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance” (Allan and Burrige, 2006: 31). Culpeper (2010, 2011) has argued that such expressions can constitute “impoliteness formulae” which carry negative affective meanings/connotations for the target and/or overhearing audience. The negative connotations or affective meanings of insults generally arise from the speaker picking on or debasing “a person’s physical appearance and mental ability, character, behaviour, beliefs, and/or familial and social relations”, and thus when deployed in a serious interpretive frame “insults are normally intended to wound the addressee or bring a third party into disrepute, or both” (Allan and Burrige, 2006: 79). According to Culpeper (2010), they may also be deployed as a means of “controlling others as well as maintaining dominant groups in society at the expense of others (p.3240), a claim that is evident from other work on insults in interaction (Croom, 2011; Evaldsson, 2005; Reynolds, 2007). However, studies focusing on the *affiliative* dimensions of insults include Labov’s (1972) seminal work on ritual insults (‘sounding’) amongst African American speakers of English, which is inherently competitive in nature, and Hay’s (1994, 2002) more recent work on jocular abuse in informal conversations between New Zealand speakers of English. Hay (2002) defines jocular abuse as instances where “the speaker jokingly insults a member of the audience” (p.20), contrasting this with “genuine insults” when directed at an absent third party despite occurring within a jocular frame.

Jocular abuse thus involves exploiting a particular impoliteness strategy, namely, “explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect – personalise, use the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’” (Culpeper, 1996: 358, see also Bousfield, 2008: 115). More specifically, jocular abuse encompasses instances where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or with undesirable attributes using conventionally offensive expressions, but this casting is framed by the speaker and interpreted by the target (and other recipients) as non-serious or jocular.

The following example of jocular abuse is an excerpt from a conversation between two Australian housemates who are in their mid-twenties. Nathan is showing Danz how he can use his mobile phone to calculate the day of the week on which Danz was born.

(3) GCSAusE06: 1:03 “Nobhead”

(Nathan is telling Danz on which day of the week he was born)

23 N: so you were born  
24 on Sunday, (0.5) of the fir:st month, (0.5) of (.)  
25 the twenty-seventh day of nineteen eighty three=  
26 D: =↑no:, not ↑February ma:n  
27 (0.2)  
28 N: oh, yo:u're a nobhea:d.  
29 (0.6)  
30 D: °what° (.) h ha ↑hehehehe .hhhh

The excerpt begins with Nathan claiming that Danz was born on a Sunday (lines 23-25). Danz then claims he was not born in February implying that Nathan has miscalculated the day on which Danz was born (line 26), to which Nathan responds with an insult in the form of a “personalized negative assertion” (Culpeper, 2010: 3242), namely, calling Danz a “nobhead”. This insult is occasioned by Danz’s slip-up in thinking the first month of the year is February (line 26). Danz responds after a brief pause by seeking an account for Nathan’s insult (line 28), before displaying realisation and appreciation through his laughter that he is the one who has made a mistake. Danz thus receipts this abuse as non-serious. Nathan’s intonation in line 28 in delivering the insult does not provide any indication that he is framing it as jocular. However, careful examination of Nathan’s facial expressions and head movements at this point in the interaction indicate that it was projected as non-serious. At the same time Danz is laughing (line 30), Nathan can be observed to fractionally tilt his head backwards and smile slightly (compare figures 1 and 2 below).

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 here]

In doing so, Nathan arguably non-verbally frames (and receipts) the insult as non-serious, and thus “nobhead” in this case is interpretable as an instance of jocular abuse (cf. Haugh, 2009: 78-79). While an evaluation of impoliteness is conventionally associated with the use of this kind of insult (Culpeper, 2010), it is evident that Danz and Nathan are engaging in what is colloquially termed “rubbishing your mates” (Goddard, 2006), and thus the insult is arguably evaluated as non-impolite by both participants.

Similar instances of this interactional practice were also found in the (North West) British dataset. Preceding the conversation in the excerpt below, Simon had taken part in the Great North Run, with two of his work colleagues, for charity whilst dressed as “The Three Musketeers”. It was not long after they had crossed the finishing line - still dressed as The Three Musketeers - that they were approached by a local news camera team and asked for an interview on the whys and wherefores of their run. In the following excerpt, Simon makes reference to his interview being replayed numerous times, and offers an account for this repeated broadcast being his on-camera compliments about the organisation of the run and the welcoming nature of the local inhabitants as “Bigging up the North East” and telling them “what they wanted to hear”. Drawing attention to this broadcast occasions jocular abuse from others in the group given his apparent immodesty about his appearances on television.

(4) 12:10:08: 2:00 “Media whore”

80 S: hey was on Monday mornin (.) again on the  
81 telly: (.) an Monday evening twice on



82 the fucking news (1.0) fucking four times  
83 on the the fucking telly ((laughs))  
84 M: ((laughs))  
85 B: ((laughs))  
86 D: fucking 'ell  
87 Se: ((laughs))  
88 S: an they only played my bit they didn't  
89 play the lads' [before ]  
90 D: [did they]  
91 S: thi played my bit yeah (.) cos I think I'd  
92 been I'd I'd bigged up the North East  
93 people y'see said what they wanted to  
94 [hear]  
95 D: [you:] big headed you big headed [bastard]  
96 S: [( )]  
97 All: ((lots of laughter))  
97 D: [you big headed ] fucking bastard  
98 S: [yeah cos I were] \*all\* li(h)ke that 'Good old  
99 North East'

The excerpt begins with Simon telling others in the group that the part of the interview in which he featured was re-played again four times on the television, and then inviting laughter about this fact with utterance-final laughter particles (lines 80-83). Others in the group respond with laughter, while David also offers a positive assessment of this replaying of Simon’s interview, albeit via a conventionalised taboo expression (“fucking ‘ell”) deployed as a marker of welcome surprise in line 86. Simon goes on to claim that although all three of the runners featured in the original interview, only his part of the interview was replayed (lines 88-89), a point about which David seeks confirmation (line 90). Simon repeats his assertion (line 91), as well as offering an account as to why the television stations chose to replay only his part of the interview, namely, that he had “bigged up” (lit. promoted) the North East, which is what he presumes they “wanted to hear” (lines 91-94). It is at this point that David responds with an insult in the form of a “personalized negative assertion” (Culpeper, 2010: 3242), namely, casting Simon as a “big headed bastard” (line 95) using the personalising pronoun “you”. This occasions laughter on the part of the other participants, which is followed by a more emphatic formulation of the same insult “you big headed fucking bastard” (line 97) delivered by David. Simon responds to the insult and laughter it occasions by repeating his account for why his interview was replayed so many times (lines 98-99). In repeating his account, Simon also receipts the insult as jocular through a ‘smiley’ voice and the laughter particle interpolated in “like” (line 98). The abuse is thus interactionally achieved here as jocular.

In insulting Simon in this way David’s talk here is open to evaluation as impolite, because it involves a threat to Simon’s person, namely, casting him as someone lacking in modesty (i.e. being “big-headed”), and also involves a conventional impoliteness formulae (i.e. “bastard”), which, incidentally, is rated as “very severe” in a recent study of the level of offensiveness of words in the Midlands and North of England (Culpeper, 2011: 142). It appears what occasions this insult here is that Simon’s talk can be seen as over-doing the extolling of his own achievements. Similar to claims about Australian interactional norms, then, it appears that displays of self-importance invite sanction from others, which is consistent with claims that in English interaction, “pomposity and self-importance are outlawed. Serious matters can be spoken of seriously, but one must never take *oneself* too

seriously” (Fox, 2004: 62, original emphasis; see also Goddard, this issue). Once again, then, it becomes evident that the injunction that one not take oneself too seriously underlies the evaluation of this jocular abuse as not-impolite, and consequently that it has occasioned an evaluation of mock impoliteness. Crucially, then, while insulting Simon in this way may engender a threat to Simon’s person, and thus to the relational connection between David and Simon, it is ultimately evaluated as supportive of relational connection between not only David and Simon, but between all of the participants in this gaming group, as they once again reinforce their mutual commitment to not taking themselves too seriously.

Numerous examples of jocular mockery and abuse that occasioned evaluations of mock impoliteness were found in both the Australian and (North West) British data sets. In the following section, we examine the topics of those instances of jocular mockery and abuse, as it was here that the most obvious differences between the two datasets were evident.

#### **4. Topics of jocular mockery and abuse**

A number of thematic targets, comprising the content of the utterances, as directed or targeted at specific members of the group, were found in the course of our analysis. While there were a number of target themes that were found to be common across both datasets, there were also a number that were found to be specific to either the Australian or British datasets.

##### ***4.1. Topics in common across the Australian and British datasets***

Across the two datasets common target themes were identified as follows: current/past relationships, sexual preference and prowess, habits/personality, gaming, items of cultural significance, and lacking an appropriate degree of modesty. In a number of instances, these target themes were combined in complex and creative ways, with combinations of them being found in both datasets.

Commonly, there were references made to relationships with participants’ own significant others (past and present). For instance, there were references to the status of Selwyn (a freelance artist) and his partner with the assumption that she controls his life. There were also general comments about “getting a pass” from one’s (marital) partner in order to socialise with male friends, as well as “jocular assumptions” about other participants’ sexual relations with target participant’s significant other (for example, in the British English dataset, there were quite commonly instances of Baz implying he has [had] a sexual relationship with Simon’s then live-in partner).

Within both datasets the assumed/hypothetical sexual preference (implying, or less commonly explicitly claiming, that other participants have a same sex-preference) of participants was a common target. Some respondents jokingly adopted an itinerant “same-sex preference” persona as a retort or defence strategy in the interactions. This retort or defence often involved both drawing the implied barb (as part of the game-like quality of the exchanges), and conversely challenging the sexual identity of the original speaker (who by identifying same-sex preferences as “problematic” for the purposes of the banter activity signals non-acceptance – albeit jocularly - of homosexuality). This lent such exchanges a game-like or competitive quality akin to the contest-like elements in ‘sounding the dozens’ or ‘flying’. Additional variants of this category include participants’ self-proclaimed propensity,

or lack of propensity, for viewing pornography, and participants' (lack of) sexual prowess or success in "scoring" in terms of securing a partner for sexual liaison.

The habits or personality of participants also served as targets of mockery and abuse, including reference to previously established 'likes', 'hates', 'habits', 'regular activities', 'levels of activity' and suchlike. For example, in the British English data set, one participant is a vegetarian and this is a common target for jocular mockery and jocular abuse by the other participants. Likewise, in the Australian English data sets, references to participants' forgetful state of mind, or laziness, was a common target for interactions falling under this category. Notably, the propensity for some participants, and not others, to engage in certain forms of gaming for entertainments (e.g. online computerised gaming) also represents a set of targets for jocular mockery and abuse.

#### ***4.2. Targets of jocular mockery and abuse restricted to Australian or British data***

In a number of cases of jocular mockery and jocular abuse there were target themes arising in the Australian data that did not appear in the British data. These included slip-ups or exploitable ambiguities, the job or profession of the target, and lacking "toughness". Slip-ups encompassed both verbal slip-ups (where interpretive ambiguities could be exploited) and actions where the target displayed either forgetfulness or clumsiness. The focus of jocular mockery and abuse about the job or profession of the target involved their (attested) lack of ability or skill in his chosen area or profession. Finally, lacking "toughness" was associated with a lack of financial independence and a subsequent over-dependence on one's parents. This is consonant with Goddard's (2006) claim that exhibiting "toughness" by not avoiding the ascription of "bad feelings" either oneself or others is highly valued in Australian interaction.

There were also a number of targets of jocular mockery and abuse where examples were only found in the British English dataset. These included health and fitness, possessions, and embarrassing past episodes. Furthermore, the use and co-construction of (creative) intertextual references to participants' embarrassing childhood activities, events and (mis)adventures was popular and discernible target of jocular mockery and abuse in the British English dataset. One reason for the prevalence of the latter amongst the British English participants is perhaps because they had shared a childhood in the same settlement, and so have high and interdependent levels of shared experience and shared memory of those activities and misadventures. Hence, they were able to engage in "creative remembering" of childhood activities and youthful personas in formulating instances of jocular mockery and abuse.

However, whilst examples of the above categories were absent from either the British English or Australian English datasets, this is not to claim that they are absent from the sociocultural set of 'allowable' categories for Australian or British English. Indeed, such categories may indeed have currency in these respective varieties of English, and so not finding examples of these targets of jocular mockery and abuse in the Australian or British English datasets does not preclude finding them in other larger datasets in the future. Their precise existence, however, remains an area for future research beyond this exploratory paper. It appears, then, that it not so much that topics of jocular mockery and abuse are likely to be unique to particular varieties of English, but rather their prevalence, and thus their relative distribution that is likely to be a fruitful avenue of future research comparing jocular mockery, jocular abuse, and

other interactional practices that occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness across different varieties of English.

## 5. Conclusion

Jocular mockery and jocular abuse were found to be recurrent interactional practices across both the Australian and (North West) English datasets, and were also found to occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness (i.e. open to evaluation as impolite, but nevertheless evaluated as non-impolite by at least some interactants). There was significant commonality in regard to the targets of mockery and abuse, although there was also some variation across the two datasets. It appears that such interactional practices, and the evaluations of mock impoliteness they occasion, reflect a shared ethos that places value on “not taking yourself too seriously”. Such an ethos can become a core value of some communities of practice, as seen amongst the British English speaker group where the weekly ‘gaming’ activity engaged in is, ostensibly, merely a catalyst for the members to gather to participate to a greater or lesser degree in jocular mockery and jocular abuse. Being able to either receive such jocular mockery and jocular abuse with good humour is seen as reflective of one’s adherence to not taking oneself too seriously, which we would suggest is something positively valued by (North West) British speakers of English as well as Australian speakers of English (cf. Goddard, 2009: 38). Moreover, in light of Butler’s (2007) claim that in some male discourse communities in the United States, being able to “reframe a potentially critical comment into a humorous or playful comment enhances [one’s] prestige in the group as one who can take a punch, as one who has entertainment skill in the teasing ritual, and as one who knows the covert signals of intimacy common in masculine discourse” (Butler, 2007: 22), it appears, then, that not taking oneself too seriously may indeed be valued amongst American English speakers, at least within the context of particular (masculine) communities of practice (cf. Goddard, 2009: 38). How widespread this is in other English-speaking, male-male interactions remains to be seen. Hence, the nature of jocular mockery and jocular abuse amongst speakers of different varieties of English is clearly an area for further study.

However, while jocular mockery and abuse appears to be behaviour designed to strengthen and confirm (amongst other things) the social bonds of friendship, as ever with all social activities there is always the chance of a pragmatic misfire. This is possibly more likely than might otherwise be expected when we consider that mock impoliteness can allow the speaker to utter something closer to his/her “true” feelings (Mills, 2003: 124), which the target nevertheless feels obliged to accept at least on the surface (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 229). Interactional practices which occasion evaluations of mock impoliteness always remains open to evaluation as impolite by some participants, particularly the target or those participants who strongly identify with the target. They therefore need to be examined over time, not only in specific interactional moments, to better account for both their distributed and cumulative nature. For this reason we suggest that mock impoliteness should be analysed as an evaluation in its own right rather than being seen as simply a variant form of politeness or impoliteness.

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## Figures



Figure 1: 1:16:15



Figure 2: 1:17:03