

Impoliteness as a vehicle for humour in dramatic discourse

by

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ABSTRACT

Currently there is considerable interest in the nature and realisation of linguistic impoliteness – that is, intentional and unintentional face-threatening behaviour (see e.g., Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2011; Bousfield 2007, 2008, 2010). There is also a growing literature which argues that, far from being a marginal form of behaviour, conflictive or aggressive behaviour is ‘ubiquitous’ (see e.g., the papers in Bousfield and Locher 2008); a fact that has not been missed by television producers who are increasingly exploiting this area of human behaviour in the name of ‘entertainment’. Indeed, Culpeper (2011: 252) has noted that ‘entertaining impoliteness’ is one of ‘three key, specific functional types of impoliteness event’. Despite this observation, however, research on the nature and relationship of impoliteness as entertaining is largely uncharted territory. In particular, there has been little in the way of academic exploration into determining how far impoliteness models can be used alongside other academic approaches towards facework and the influence of pragmatic principles in order to project impolite behaviour as *humorous*.

This study aims to investigate the proposed complementary relationship between impoliteness (as a form of aggression), and humour (as a form of entertainment). My aim is not merely to explain *why* offence can be entertaining (or even funny). Rather, I will focus on the ways in which we are influenced, as viewers, so that we interpret offence as funny. I do so by incorporating what we know about Facework (Goffman 1967) and Discourse Architecture (Short 1996) into an approach which also combines humour theory and impoliteness theory.

Taking the fictional film *As Good As It Gets*, I draw from a number of scenes involving the main protagonist Melvin Udall. Although this character is extremely offensive to others, the film is classified as a *romantic comedy*. As such, it offers a good basis on which to test out my ideas regarding the proposed relationship between impoliteness and humour, and more importantly, how and why we may feel the need to laugh at what is essentially socially proscribed and disturbing behaviour. My work, then, contributes to two main academic fields of interest: with regards the field of impoliteness I demonstrate why offensiveness can be entertaining by making specific links with humour theory, and within the field of stylistics I show how a multi-disciplined approach to character analysis can offer us richer observations and interpretations of behaviour, than would otherwise be available through analysis of models in isolation.

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CHAPTER 1

Impoliteness as humour

1.1 Introduction

Academic interest and research on linguistic impoliteness - broadly defined here as 'behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context' (Locher and Bousfield 2008:3) - has been minimal in comparison to that of its counterpart *Politeness* (i.e. the study of the way(s) in which interlocutors maintain self and others' *face* during interaction: see, e.g., Brown & Levinson [1978]1987, Leech 1983, Goffman 1967). Culpeper *et al* (2003) have noted that, despite the paucity of research in impolite discourse, it nevertheless appears to manifest itself extensively in many different Activity Types (Levinson [1979]1992) and discourses:

Conflictive talk has been found to play a role-and often a central one-in, for example, army training discourse (Culpeper 1996), courtroom discourse (Lakoff 1989; Penman 1990), family discourse (Vuchinich 1990), adolescent discourse (Labov 1972; Goodwin and Goodwin 1990), doctor-patient discourse (Mehan 1990), therapeutic discourse (Labov and Fanshel 1977), 'workplace' discourse' (Andersson and Pearson 1999), parliamentary discourse (Harris 2001), 'everyday conversation' (Beebe 1995), radio talk shows (Hutchby (1996) and fictional texts (Culpeper 1998; Tannen 1990)

(Culpeper *et al* 2003: 1545-1546)

Offensive behaviour, it seems, is 'ubiquitous' (Locher and Bousfield 2008); a fact that has not been missed by television producers who are increasingly exploiting this area of human behaviour in the name of 'entertainment.' As Culpeper (2005, 2011) and Lorenzo-Dus (2009) have demonstrated, intentionally communicated linguistic offence can actually have an 'entertainment' or 'aesthetic' value for some receivers. Many film and media productions specifically marketed as 'comedies' contain offensive behaviour, which itself alludes to the idea that offence can somehow be entertaining generally and humorous in particular. It is on this premise that the current study is based. Despite intriguing observations from Culpeper and Lorenzo-Dus above, our understanding of the nature of the relationship between humour and offence is still very much undiscovered territory.

1.2 The relationship between humour and offence – why study it?

Of the three ‘traditional’ approaches (Morreal 1983) – by this I mean conventionally accepted explanations which have contributed to current understandings surrounding the phenomena of humour (Attardo 1994, 2003 and see also Chapter Three), it is the idea of *Superiority* - the notion of ‘glorifying’ in the ‘apprehension of some deformed thing in another’ (Hobbes [1651]1996:38) which appears to offer a *significant* explanation as to *why* we should find amusement/entertainment when viewing behaviour which trades on the disparagement of others (although as I will demonstrate, there are examples of all three approaches – *superiority*, *incongruity* and *release* within my data). Such an approach implies aggression or hostility and, indeed, the notion of ‘hostile’ comedy was recognised and laudably explained by Freud (1905) in *Witzarbeit* (joke work). According to Freud, ‘plays’ on words (on which much humour is based) rely on a disjunction or ambiguity¹ within the semantic structure of a joke. He maintained that such word play was able to camouflage taboo or hostile behaviour, and whilst people might believe that they are laughing at the surface joke work - the ‘play’ on words, they are, according to Freud, unconsciously responding to the taboo or hostile elements ‘hidden’ within the joke.² Whilst comedy has been a prominent feature within television and radio since the 1950s, it is the idea of ‘hostile’ or ‘tendentious’ comedy in particular which continues to thrive since the introduction in the early 1970s of Norman Lear’s American ‘sit-com’ *All In The Family*³ – a program which became famous for the ‘insults, put-downs, racist remarks, and other forms of veiled viciousness’ of the show’s protagonist Archie Bunker (Zillman and Bryant 1991:265). This show was consistently ranked as no1 in the Nielson ratings between 1971 and 1976, with the character of Archie Bunker being voted as ‘the greatest character of all time’ (ibid).

Impoliteness models seek to explain how we communicate, perceive and deal with face-attacking behaviours - one area of which concerns the use of offence as a strategic vehicle for entertainment and humorous purposes. Humour theories attempt to explain *why* we can be predisposed to laugh - one area of which concerns humour at the expense of others. By

¹ My use of the terms ‘abiguity’ and ‘ambiguous’ throughout this thesis are to do with the idea of something being *unclear*, that is, of having more than one meaning or intention.

² One of Freud’s Jewish bath jokes will serve as an example here:

One Jew says to another ‘have you taken a bath?’

The other replies ‘No, is one missing?’

As Oring (2007:42) explains, the joke does not simply rely on a double meaning on the word ‘taken’, the word is actually ‘displaced’ by the second speaker which highlights the underlying message that Jews are unclean

³ Based on the British television comedy series *Till Death Us Do Part* which aired from 1965 to 1975.

combining the apparently disparate pivotal themes of impoliteness and humour, together with facework models and a framework for explaining communication and effect in prototypical drama (Short 1996), I will argue that we are rewarded with more than the ‘sum of their parts’. Indeed, such an approach allows us to glean additional information not only with regard to character analysis generally, but also how we (as a viewer or receiver) can be motivated to laugh at one character’s offensiveness towards others.

1.3 Aims of the thesis

Observations attempting to explain why humans are motivated to laugh or find *x* humorous (especially at the expense of others) have been around since the days of the Greek philosophers. The attempt to ‘pin down’ or encompass the full nature of humour is an ineffectual undertaking, not least because (as with impoliteness) the concept itself appears resistant to definitional succinctness (Attardo 1994:3).

Although research on humour and *politeness* has been undertaken - Holmes (2000:179) discusses the role that humour plays in the workplace as a ‘dynamic means of expressing and constructing solidarity and an effective strategy for reducing potential offence’, whilst Holmes and Schnurr (2005:121) consider how workplace humour is used as ‘a means of exploring the issue of politeness as a gendered concept’ - no systematic treatment of *impolite* language use as a means of generating humour has been undertaken, at least as far as this author is aware. More specifically, the function of impoliteness as comedic generator within a media construct (film) has not yet been examined.

The aim of this study, then, is to further the work on impoliteness research generally by looking at how theories of humour can intersect and inform the current, cutting edge models dealing with linguistic impoliteness, and to show how these two areas may be seen as an interface in the generation of ‘entertainment’ in film. Focusing on a DVD of the (1997) film *As Good As It Gets* by Mark Andrus and James L. Brook, I aim to investigate the way that much of the film’s purported humour is generated via the main character Melvin Udall’s linguistic expression and communication of impoliteness (see Chapter Two); behaviour which is in direct contrast to our perceived notion of acceptable social codes in Western society. I argue, however, that the humour is not just generated from Melvin’s linguistic expressions, and to demonstrate this I draw on other approaches and models taken from areas of interpersonal communication, pragmatics, stylistics and narratology to demonstrate that, not only do these additional approaches aid us in explaining how some of the humour may be

generated, they also allow for a much richer analysis of the character of Melvin Udall, in effect allowing us to achieve more - from a stylistic analysis point of view - by bringing all these areas together.

1.4 Original contribution to existing research

The precise link between impoliteness (as a form of aggression), and humour (as a form of entertainment) in cultural artefacts such as film, has not, to my knowledge, been academically examined. Whilst there have been explorations of impoliteness and entertainment (Culpeper 2005, Lorenzo-Dus 2009) these have been confined to "game show" style programmes where we might expect a certain amount of antagonism and antipathy to come to the fore in the form of competition. As such, the use of impoliteness is not an overt surprise to us as it is in a situation where we would not expect it to arise. In films - especially "romantic comedy" films - the sustained use of impoliteness from one character will tend to surprise us due to the preconceived non-aggressive expectations implied by the film's classification, and is thus foregrounded. However, the particular film I am focusing on won numerous Oscar nominations and awards, suggesting that there has been something compelling (and critically admirable) within the film's dialogue. My study sets the ball rolling for future research into *how* and *why* forms of (at least linguistic) aggression, which we might be expected to find repellent - given that socially its use is divisive (see Kienpointner 2008, for example) - are actually found to be attractive-enough-to-watch as well as humorous to a mainstream and critical audience.

1.5 The data

The data chosen for this study is the film *As Good As It Gets*. Originally written as a screenplay by Mark Andrus and James L Brooks, it was the basis for the film version which was made in 1997. Billed as a 'Romantic Comedy', the film's central character Melvin Udall (played by Jack Nicholson) is an irascible, middle-aged author who suffers from the socially-debilitating condition known as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This is a psychiatric disorder which is characterized by obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions (Challacombe *et al* 2011). This is compounded by his generally misanthropic nature which results in him eschewing communication with the people he encounters as he attempts to maintain a strict ritual in his day-to-day activities. Without over-generalising, his directness may be perceived as offensive – at least within a Westernised culture, (see Leech's 1983:108 comments on the

relationship between indirectness and politeness). However, context is always a consideration within pragmatics and impoliteness can just as easily be conveyed indirectly as well as directly (see Culpeper *et al* 1549; Chapter Four and Chapter Seven).

When Melvin's routine is disrupted for any reason, the dialogue he engages in to the unsuspecting receiver is, on the surface, extremely face-damaging. However, it is *precisely* this display of extreme impoliteness indicating unrestricted violations of westernised social or polite expectations relating to interactive linguistic behaviour which marks the film as a *comedy*.

My primary reason for analysing a film is that it forms a permanent record of the behaviour of Melvin Udall which, if desired, is readily accessible and can be observed by others for comparison of interpretation and reactions. Another reason for choosing a film is to demonstrate how aspects of Melvin's impoliteness and our perception of it as humorous can also be conveyed non-linguistically through multimodal means (see Chapter Seven). Messages are conveyed to us via many channels – non-linguistic as well as linguistic. We therefore need to consider the performance elements of this film as well as the dialogue, since impoliteness can be communicated symbolically as well as verbally. The integration of multimodality into the stylistic analysis of drama and film is a relatively recent one (McIntyre 2008; Bousfield and McIntyre 2011). As McIntyre (2008:309) points out, this has been in large part because the stylistic analysis of drama has traditionally concentrated on a text, as this was considered a more stable medium than a live performance. Since no two performances could be entirely alike, accurate critical discussion would be impossible unless the people discussing it had both seen the same performance under analysis (Short 1981). Not only do films offer a permanent record of the behaviour under scrutiny, they allow us to analyse the performance elements of the characters which arguably guide our interpretation of events (McIntyre 2008:309). Using a film for analysis also enabled me to incorporate still-shots from some of the scenes to demonstrate my argument and interpretation (see Chapter Seven).

A few caveats need to be borne in mind at this point. Firstly, my analyses and discussion are based on my own interpretation of a film. This in itself is a highly subjective endeavour. However, the film's classification as a 'comedy' implies that we are being invited to view Melvin Udall's behaviour as humorous (at least on some level). The fact that we as the viewer are being primed in this way is methodologically questionable. I suspect that, were the

film to be shown to respondents without prior notification of genre or plot (or even with a completely different predisposition), then alternative interpretations would surface. This is probably the biggest issue surrounding the concept of humour; we are more likely to experience it if we expect or anticipate it⁴.

Secondly, we may pride ourselves on having a ‘sense of humour’ but we do not all laugh at or even feel amused by the same things all the time. The film *As Good As It Gets* will not necessarily be perceived as humorous (or even considered entertaining) by everyone. The entertainment value within this film comes from Melvin’s offensiveness, which has been designed for us as over-hearers. What is important is that we - as the over-hearers - understand the probable impoliteness effects for the target (Culpeper 2011:234). Whether we find those impoliteness effects amusing is purely an individualistic matter. Finally, it needs pointing out that I am not arguing that the film is funny *per se* - it is not, and some of the scenes I discuss are not even to demonstrate any potential humour. Indeed, on the surface, the character of Melvin is a disturbing one, as are some of the scenes he appears in. My argument is to demonstrate that a complex interface exists between humour and offensiveness. This study is based on my own subjective interpretation of a film; albeit a film that *predisposes me* to feel amused and hence entertained, at the behaviour of the central character.

1.5.1 *As Good As It Gets* – A brief synopsis of the characters and plot

In order to aid the reader with a sense of context concerning the examples discussed below, I will now provide a brief description of the main characters and plot of the film.

Melvin Udall – an extremely popular writer of romantic fiction (he is on his 66th novel). He lives alone in an apartment apparently satisfied with his life and strict regime, which is dictated to him partly by his Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). His misanthropic outlook on life, plus his superstitious nature and extreme fear of germs, serves to alienate most people who come into contact with him; this, however, does not worry Melvin.

Carol Connelly – a single mother and waitress who works in the restaurant where Melvin religiously eats his breakfast (at the same table and at the same time) every day. She is the only waitress who can tolerate Melvin’s extreme behaviour. Similarly, she is the only waitress who he will let serve him.

⁴ Without delving too far into the realm of psychology, the same could be said of *any* behaviour if we are predisposed to look for it.

Simon Bishop – Melvin’s homosexual neighbour, who lives alone with his small dog Verdell in the same apartment block as Melvin. He is a successful painter. Very personable and by nature non-confrontational. He is also nervous and distrusting of Melvin.

Frank Sachs – Simon’s agent and art dealer. Very fond and protective of Simon. Completely unafraid of, and unfazed by, Melvin’s brash aggressive exterior.

Nora Manning – Simon’s loyal and affectionate housemaid.

Zoe – the receptionist who works for Melvin’s editor. Completely in awe of Melvin as a romantic author, and longs to engage him in a conversation about his successful way of writing about women’s emotions. This is something which she has not yet managed to do, thanks to Melvin’s ability to exit the building quickly after his meetings with his editor are over.

Plot – After Melvin’s homosexual neighbour, Simon, is viciously attacked in his apartment and left for dead by thugs one day, Melvin is forced by Frank to take care of Verdell while Simon recuperates. Despite initial reluctance, Melvin grows attached to the small dog and is upset when it is time to hand the dog back when Simon returns home to convalesce. The dog, it seems, has also grown attached to Melvin in the meantime, and seems reluctant to settle back in Simon’s apartment; something which adds to Simon’s fragile emotional state as he tries to get well.

When Carol decides to leave the restaurant where she currently works, in order to find a job nearer to home so that she can better attend to her small asthmatic son, Melvin is in turmoil and arranges for private medical care to be made available so that she will not have to leave her job.

Simon’s fragile physical and emotional state means that he has been unable to paint since his attack, and as a result he is almost bankrupt. Melvin is again coerced by Frank into driving Simon to Baltimore one weekend, so that Simon can appeal for money from his estranged parents – as a last desperate measure to save his apartment. Melvin reluctantly agrees and asks Carol if she will accompany them in order to lessen the awkwardness. Carol feels indebted to Melvin due to his intervention with her son’s medical condition (which, by now, has greatly improved), and so reluctantly accepts. During the weekend it becomes clear that Carol and Melvin are developing romantic feelings for one another, with Melvin also displaying signs of jealousy at the friendship which emerges between Carol and Simon. Thanks to Carol’s compassionate nature towards Simon whilst they are away, her influence

allows his creativity to return. As a result, despite a refusal from his parents for him to contact them, plus the loss of his apartment, he returns home emotionally buoyant. Once home, Melvin offers to let him share his apartment with him until he is able to get another one of his own. The complicated relationship which has so far existed between Carol and Melvin, is now made relatively uncomplicated by Simon, who encourages Melvin to declare his love for her. By the end of the film, all three characters have embarked on emotional journeys of self-enlightenment.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter I begin Chapter Two with a discussion of Brown and Levinson's ([1978]1987) Politeness model which has proved to be the *raison d'être* of linguistic impoliteness research. I then move on to discuss what I consider to be the most academically prominent and empirically viable models on *linguistic impoliteness* and *facework*, including the associated concepts of *rudeness* and *verbal aggression*. As with all the chapters, my discussion and application of the models is demonstrated with examples taken from the film.

Chapter Three deals with the concept of humour and, in particular, provides a brief history of the three commonly accepted explanations of *Superiority*, *Incongruity* and *Release*, including Freud's ideas concerning humour as a form of self deception, and Bergson's (1911) observations regarding ridicule as a necessary social function. I consider how 'implicational' (Culpeper 2011) or indirect instances of impoliteness can be more damaging than direct ones given the creative way that offence can be implicated. This chapter then looks at impoliteness as a specific device for entertainment, and argues that a distinct overlap exists between humour and offensiveness.

Building on my discussion and observations from Chapter Three concerning *why* we may be predisposed to laugh in disparagement at others, Chapter Four details *how* we as receivers are guided to view Melvin's behaviour within the discourse structure of the film (Short 1996). I also argue that we need to consider the cognitive processes of the viewer and how these can impact on our comprehension of a text. I address Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle in this chapter to demonstrate how Short's discourse levels can influence a viewer's perception of behaviour depending on which level implicatures are generated, and note that Grice's ideas

fit perfectly within a discussion of impoliteness and humour, since his maxims allow for impolite beliefs to be communicated in an indirect and hence entertaining way.

Taking the idea of cognitive processes one stage further, in Chapter Five I discuss how a consideration of a character's mental processes can afford us greater analytical power in our interpretation of that character. In addition to this, I show how, by incorporating Archer's (2011a,b) work on *strategic ambiguity*, along with Freud's (1905) ideas concerning 'tendentious jokes' and the proposed social function of *ridicule*, we are afforded a much 'darker' reading of Melvin's character and intentions - something which we could not have ascertained with any confidence by only considering one model in isolation.

Chapter Six takes the notion of facework further in relation to character analysis by including the concepts of identity and impression management. I argue that in order to fully explore and account for the 'roundness' of Melvin's character, we need to consider all three of these aspects in order to dispel the idea that Melvin is 'simply' rude or obnoxious. When we look at the way Melvin projects himself towards the other characters, and the way those characters perceive their own identities in relation to him, we are afforded greater analytical mileage in our interpretations of him.

Chapter Seven briefly considers the area of multimodality within the area of stylistics generally, and argues that we need to include the non-linguistic production elements of Melvin's behaviour in addition to his non-linguistic cues, in order to gain the greatest possible interpretation of his behaviour and intentions. By incorporating some still shots of a scene discussed within this chapter, I demonstrate that consideration of non-linguistic cues - such as facial expression - can have an implication on our interpretation of Melvin's behaviour.

Chapter Eight is a summary of the aims of the thesis, and the arguments I have developed within each chapter. I discuss the limitations with the study, nevertheless, observing in tabular form, the remarkable overlay between offence and humour which this thesis has highlighted. I conclude with a few suggestions concerning areas for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

Models of politeness, impoliteness and face

In this chapter I discuss what are, in my view, the most prominent second-order expositions within the field of politeness research. I explore three widely cited second-order (theoretic) frameworks for *impoliteness* and the associated phenomena of *rudeness*. Research on the concept of politeness has raged ever since it became spotlighted as an academic concern in the 1970s (cf. R. Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983). By contrast, academic interest on the notion of *impoliteness* has been slow to catch up. However, since 2008 which saw the first monograph on impoliteness (Bousfield 2008), followed by an edited collection of papers (Bousfield and Locher (2008) and the more recent *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* (2013), the field surrounding linguistic aggression and all its associated phenomena is not only gaining ground theoretically, it is now drawing interest from a wide variety of methodological and epistemological perspectives (cf. Bousfield 2010:102).

The literature on Politeness research (including impoliteness) is extensive, and encompasses discursive as well as theoretic models. The discursive approaches to explaining impoliteness (known variously as *first-order* or *impoliteness*¹ approaches) – typically Mills (2003); Watts (2003, 2008) and Locher and Watts (2008) argue that the only way to define this concept is through the way a lay person reveals their own understanding of it as displayed within their discourse. Such approaches therefore place little emphasis on the role of context and prosody in the conveying of impoliteness; variables which *second-order* or *impoliteness*² (theoretic) researchers advocate (cf. Culpeper *et al* 2003). Nor do discursive approaches adhere to the claim that impoliteness can be sophisticated, creative, entertaining, subtle and able to be deployed systematically for both direct and indirect offensive purposes (e.g. Culpeper 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2011; Bousfield 2007a, b, 2008a, b, 2010; Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann 2003). As these elements of impoliteness relate directly to my own research area of impoliteness as an entertainment device, I therefore draw on the above work by Culpeper, Culpeper *et al* and Bousfield. Not least because they address specific concerns within my data, such as the problem surrounding terminology (for example, the difference (if any) between *rudeness* and *impoliteness*), the role of *intentionality* and whether we can actually be entertained by impoliteness (or even consider it to be humorous); they are also empirically

robust models with categories which allow us to test whether offensiveness has been deemed to occur.

I begin with a discussion of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model for politeness in section 2.1. This is necessary as it has formed the blueprint for the second-order impoliteness models that followed it, and which I then discuss and compare in section 2.2. What I aim to demonstrate in this discussion is that when we take elements of the impoliteness models and put them together, they allow us greater analytical power when deciphering character behaviour. As Bousfield's (2010) approach to understanding and defining impoliteness and rudeness is social in its orientation, section 3.0 sees the introduction of Goffman's (1967) ideas on facework and social interaction. I then draw on more recent models of facework such as Spencer-Oatey's (2009) approach to understanding face, which takes into account a person's *identity* and their goals. Not only does this introduce a concept which I discuss more extensively in Chapter Six, Spencer-Oatey also stresses the importance of the face concerns for the speaker as being just as fundamental as those for the hearer. This is something we need to bear in mind in our interpretation of Melvin's character and the way he displays his facework, because he is a very self-oriented character. By this, I mean that he has little (if any) concerns for the faces of the other characters – at least at the beginning of the film. As Goffman's ideas do not really address the concept of aggressive facework, I then utilise Ting-Toomey's (2009) approach to facework, which she situates within a conflictive context (labelling it *facework collision*). In line with Spencer-Oatey's ideas, she also discusses the concept of *identity* and in particular, identity inattention, which, when applied to an example from my data set, appears to offer a plausible explanation as to why Melvin is able to offend some of the characters unintentionally.

I begin, then, with an overview of a model of politeness, which has turned out to be the foundation for second-order models of impoliteness.

2.1 Brown and Levinson's ([1978] 1987) model of Politeness and *face* management

Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'universal' model for *politeness* is based on Goffman's (1967) concept of *face* alongside Durkheim's (1912) ideas on 'positive' and 'negative' rites within societies. Beginning with Goffman's definition in which he defined *face* as

[...] the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact

(Goffman 1967:5)

Brown and Levinson considered *face* to be comprised of two ‘sides’:

- **Positive face:** the want of every member that his/her wants be desirable to at least some others
- **Negative face:** the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his/her actions be unimpeded by others.

(Brown and Levinson 1987:62)

Positive politeness is therefore indicative of an ‘approach-based’ strategy which

[...] ‘anooints’ the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S wants H’s wants (e.g. by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked)

(Brown and Levinson 1987:70)

By contrast, negative politeness is indicative of an avoidance or ‘withdrawal’ based strategy and works to indicate that

the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee’s negative face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with the addressee’s freedom of action

(Brown and Levinson 1987:70)

For Brown and Levinson, then, *face* is intrinsic; it is something which we necessarily have and desire to keep maintained. However, the paradox in this idea is that if something is intrinsic then we cannot ‘lose’ it, as Brown and Levinson maintained. Researchers such as O’Driscoll (1996) have noticed this apparent confusion in Brown and Levinson conflating Goffman’s idea of *face* (as a socially-constructed – and hence external concept) with one which is internally generated (as a *want*). O’Driscoll defends Brown and Levinson’s stance by pointing out that their conception of face is *dualistic* in nature; in other words, the positive ‘wants’ which they describe are derived from wider more basic ‘wants’ such as ‘com[ing] together, mak[ing] contact and identify[ing] with others’ (O’Driscoll 1996:4). Similarly, negative ‘wants’ imply ‘the need to go off alone, avoid contact and be individuated’ (O’Driscoll 1996:4). For O’Driscoll then, elements of *face* within communication need to be seen as scalar with politeness being on a scale from positive to negative. However, what O’Driscoll appears to suggest in his wording is that positive and negative face are an *either-*

or concept; in other words ‘politeness addressed to face...can be either very positively or negatively polite, or only so’ (O’Driscoll (1996:4). As researchers such as Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003) and Bousfield (2007b) have argued convincingly, both elements of *face* can be manipulated simultaneously. This has led Bousfield (2007b) to suggest that ‘the positive/negative face dichotomy should now be considered as constituting ‘points of reference’ for aspects of face, not as discrete and divisible elements...that don’t interact’ (Bousfield 2007b:2199). Brown and Levinson’s stipulation that face is something which *every* member wants also implies a universal or worldwide application of their model. Such an individual interpretation of Goffman has been widely criticised by researchers who point out that in the case of *negative face* in particular, ‘freedom from interruption’ and ‘freedom from imposition’ are relative concepts which can vary from culture to culture (Watts, Ehlich and Ide 1992:10). Similarly, Brown and Levinson’s stipulation that certain acts (such as *requests*) are inherently face threatening has also been shown to be a culture-specific generalisation. Nwoye’s (1992) study of the Igbo society of Nigeria demonstrated that such acts are considered beneficial rather than imposing, as they form part of

[a] reciprocal social contract...requests are not in themselves inherently polite or impolite; rather, they are appropriate performances and attributes of good behaviour inherent in good upbringing

(Nwoye 1992:327)

Brown and Levinson maintained that certain illocutionary acts inherently threaten the face of the speaker and/or hearer. Here, they draw on the concept of Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962) and the performative nature of utterances which Austin discussed – such as *orders, requests, suggestions, advice, threats, warnings, offers, promises* and *criticism*. Labelled as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) they proposed a series of ‘superstrategies’ which they maintained we employ in order to avoid (or at the very least, mitigate the potential for), offence, and thereby maintain harmonious interaction. The strategies are reproduced in table 2.1.1 below:

Table 2.1.1 Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Superstrategies

Politeness Superstrategy	Performance of FTA	Example
<i>Bald, on-record</i>	'in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible	Orders/commands/emergency situations or where 'danger to the hearer's face is very small e.g. 'come in' or 'sit down'
<i>Positive Politeness</i>	Via strategies which 'anoint' the face of the addressee	Via compliments, attentiveness of speaker to hearer, sympathy of speaker to hearer, approval of speaker to hearer
<i>Negative Politeness</i>	By acknowledging hearer's need for freedom from impingement,	Self-effacement, restraint, formality via apologies or deference of speaker to hearer
<i>Off-record Politeness</i>	FTA produced via an implicature so that the actor cannot be held to have committed one particular intent	Any indirect use of language which invites the hearer to make an inference e.g. by hinting, being vague or ambiguous
<i>Withhold the FTA</i>	FTA considered too risky even to perform	B and L do not discuss this strategy, however it would pertain to <i>very</i> unequal relationships

(adapted from Brown and Levinson 1987:69-131)

Brown and Levinson (1987:18) concede that the strategies of *positive*, *negative* and *off-record* may not in fact be as mutually exclusive as they first supposed, and that they 'may have been in error to set [them] up [as such]'. They point out that 'Hints' for example, which would be classed as an *indirect* use of language 'may in fact have been *de facto* on record'. This obviously has consequences for any model of impoliteness which takes Brown and Levinson as a framework (cf. Lachenicht 1980; Culpeper 1996). Culpeper *et al* (2003:1560-62) go on to argue convincingly that positive and negative face-threat can combine, with Bousfield (2008a:94) pointing out that, in fact, 'most utterances, even only secondarily, implicate both aspects of face on, or at, some level'. He also identifies a major issue surrounding the original 'bald, on record' strategy as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987). The problem, being, that their definition is placed within *specific* situations; most notably, in adherence to Grice's (1975) conversational maxims; where the possibility of face damage to the hearer is *very* small (such as *offers* and *requests*); where the speaker is 'vastly superior in power' to the hearer or where 'S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency' (Brown and Levinson 1987:69 emphasis in original). Quite simply, this definition does not take sufficient account of context or the multifunctional nature of language and communication. As a feature within impoliteness models there is also the issue that first and foremost, *Bald, on-record* is a *politeness-derived* strategy which means it cannot be adequately accounted for within models of impoliteness (Bousfield 2008a:62).

Criticisms of Brown and Levinson notwithstanding, their model has been the catalyst which has inspired subsequent research into the field of impoliteness. In particular, it was becoming apparent to researchers that any account of linguistic communication should take into account hostile as well as harmonious interactions (see e.g. Craig *et al* 1986; Eelen 1999, 2001; Fraser 1990, 1999). Culpeper (1996) was the first to systematically address this shortfall and I turn to him now.

2.2 Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness

One of the first systematic studies to address the way offence can be communicated was Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness (but see also Lachenicht 1980⁵). Originally defined as 'the use of strategies that are designed to [cause] social disruption' (Culpeper 1996:350), his ideas were modelled on the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson - but with one major adjustment: Culpeper's impoliteness strategies were opposite to Brown and Levinson's politeness ones in terms of orientation i.e. they were designed to attack, not maintain face. He noted, however, that they were not necessarily opposite pragmatically (Culpeper 1996:356/7); for example, the notion of 'on-record' and 'off-record strategies' might be opposite from a politeness point of view, but for Culpeper, 'off-record' impoliteness can be just as damaging as 'on-record' (see also Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003); Culpeper 2005). His superstrategies are listed in table 2.2.2 below:

Table 2.2.2 Culpeper's impoliteness superstrategies

Impoliteness Superstrategy	Performance of FTA	Example
<i>Bald, on-record Impoliteness</i>	the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is <i>not</i> irrelevant or minimised.	Any situation in which it is the speaker's intention to attack the hearer's face, and where there is much face at stake.
<i>Positive Impoliteness</i>	Any action which damages the addressee's positive face wants.	Disassociation or disinterest of speaker to hearer, seeking disagreement with the hearer, ignoring hearer, snubbing, use of inappropriate identity markers, use of taboo or abusive language.
<i>Negative Impoliteness</i>	Any action which damages the addressee's negative face wants.	Any action which either frightens, scorns or ridicules the addressee (e.g. challenging). Belittling, invading addressee's space – linguistically or physically. Associating addressee with a negative aspect.

⁵Lachenicht's (1980) study of 'aggravating language' whilst impressive in scope, was only based on constructed examples taken from dictionaries containing insults.

<i>Sarcasm or mock politeness</i> ⁶	Use of insincere politeness.	The use of implicature to express the opposite of what is said i.e. ‘have a good day’ said e.g. sarcastically, within a confrontational context where the sentiment is <i>not</i> genuinely wished for.
<i>Withhold Politeness</i>	Remain silent when politeness is expected.	E.g. by refraining from saying ‘Thank you’ in situations where it is customary to do so.
<i>Off-record impoliteness</i>	FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.	Such impoliteness is typically portrayed through creative/witty use of language to implicate ‘impolite beliefs’ (see Leech 1983:170), and in many respects can be more damaging to the hearer than on-record impoliteness.

(adapted from Culpeper (1996:356-358, 2005:44), Culpeper *et al* (2003:1559)

Despite the fact that strategies such as ‘associating the other with a negative aspect’ which by implication could include aspects of ‘scorning’, ‘ridiculing’ and ‘condescension’, (and therefore would be indicative of positive impoliteness and not negative), the above strategies were upheld in Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann’s (2003) study of impoliteness which aimed to revisit, refine and ultimately justify the framework and strategies laid out in Culpeper (1996).

2.3 Impoliteness and prosody - Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003)

Culpeper *et al* (2003) began with a re-issue of Culpeper’s original definition of impoliteness as constituting ‘communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony’ (2003:1545). However, whilst the definition had remained largely unchanged it became obvious that research was rapidly progressing. Their elaborate exposition on what was at the time still an under-exposed academic realisation of human linguistic behaviour, now considered the notion of impoliteness within a more encompassing sphere. In particular, they demonstrated that far from being ‘rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances’ (Leech 1983:105), linguistic aggression actually played a ‘central’ role in many forms of everyday discourse (Culpeper *et al* (2003: 1545-1546). They specifically addressed issues such as *context*, *intentionality* and *prosody* and the sort of impact these could make on the communication and interpretation of impoliteness. The notion of prosody in particular is fundamental within discussions on how impoliteness is communicated, as it refers not to *what* is said, but *how* something is said. This

⁶ Culpeper’s definition of ‘sarcasm’ is based on Leech’s (1983) understanding of ‘irony’ and the *Irony Principle* i.e. ‘if you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn’t overtly conflict with the PP [Politeness Principle], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of an implicature’ (1983:82).

is due to the ability to convey (impolite) implicatures via acoustic means such as intonation and volume. This, of course, refers to Grice's (1975) Maxim of Manner whereby an implicature is generated not through what is said, but the way in which it is said. It formed part of his Cooperative Principle which stipulated that we should 'avoid obscurity of *expression*' (Grice 1975:45-46 my emphasis. See also Chapter Four section 4.2). Responses to impolite discourse were also considered which showed how certain utterances were being interpreted and countered, as well as how sequences of impolite discourse were being panned out (see especially Bousfield 2007b here). They found that subjects within their data set were using impoliteness strategies in *combination* in order to intensify the communication of face-attack. For example, they showed that a negative impoliteness strategy (such as 'asking a challenging question') could be combined with a positive impoliteness one ('using taboo/abusive language') to boost or enhance the force of an impolite structure. As such, Culpeper *et al* (2003) extended the frameworks for how impoliteness could be realised within longer stretches of discourse; considerations which had hitherto been neglected in earlier treatments of impoliteness analysis. Their study showed that even when an impoliteness strategy is used, it does not necessarily mean that impoliteness will be perceived in all contexts (2003:1576). The role of context and prosody was obviously in need of further attention here in order to determine their impact on hearer uptake. This is something which Culpeper addressed in his (2005) study, as well as declaring an additional function of impoliteness.

2.4 Culpeper's (2005) model of impoliteness

Picking up where Culpeper *et al* (2003) left off, issues of context and prosody were now more thoroughly considered in his 2005 instantiation of impoliteness. In particular, Culpeper substantially revised his definition of impoliteness in which he now stipulated that:

Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or
(2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a
combination of (1) and (2)

(Culpeper 2005:38)

This latest definition suggested that an addressee can now 'construct' behaviour as impolite irrespective of the speaker's intention. Making the idea of *intentionality* less of a dominant factor in definitions, as earlier ideas had been want to do. Indeed, Culpeper's (2005) research demonstrated that even when speaker intentionality could be discounted, damage to an

addressee's face could still occur. Culpeper also considered an additional function of impoliteness; namely ways that face-attack could be deployed creatively for the specific purpose of generating entertainment for a third party. This, maintained Culpeper, was through a combination of psychological factors, such as the recognition advanced by philosophers of 'Superiority' theories of humour (e.g. Bergson (1911), and Hobbes (1640), regarding the way that humans are able to find pleasure at the expense or misfortune of others⁷, as well as considering the way that impoliteness can be deployed via sarcasm, mimicry or implicatures (cf. Grice 1975). Taking the British daytime entertainment show *The Weakest Link* as his data, he demonstrated that the impoliteness from the show's host, Anne Robinson, was not something which was simply realised through her lexical or grammatical strategies; it was also influenced by the context and, more crucially, her use of prosody. Prosody can be a powerful conveyer of interpersonal orientation and therefore should not be underestimated. As a phonological, non-verbal feature of language it can convey signals (such as an impolite belief) about the hearer, which the hearer is able to pick up on and consequently form an implicature from. Due to the amount of inferencing work that prosody demands, where the prosody is impolite in intention, the effect of the face-attack is strengthened because in deciphering the prosodic cues, the target actually becomes the architect of their own face damage (Bousfield 2007a). In Culpeper's (2005) study, he demonstrates how Anne Robinson uses prosody to produce an 'echoic acoustic caricature' to mimic the contestants' nationality and regional backgrounds, as well as subverting the intonation generally expected for declarative questions (Quirk *et al* 1985). Not only does her prosody convey sarcasm towards the contestants, she also manages to conduce or 'verbally trap' them into accepting their own face-damage through verification of the negative declarative questions she asks them; verification which the contestants (presumably out of nervousness) provide (Culpeper 2005:60 see also Bousfield 2007a).

Such was the impact of Anne Robinson's use of prosody in Culpeper's study, that, although she was only playing the part of a *host* within the context of a *game* (and as such, merely a *media construct*), the contestants still reacted to her as if her comments had been made personally, i.e. they displayed typical signs that they had been offended (suffered face damage) by her behaviour towards them. This face loss was apparent through various means: nervous laughter, averting of the eyes and prosodic disaffiliation - classic non-verbal signs of an emotional reaction such as *embarrassment* (Culpeper 2005:67 my emphasis).

⁷ See Chapter 3 section 3.3.1

In other words, the contestants had treated Anne Robinson (the persona) as a ‘real’ person, and as such, had *constructed* her behaviour as *intentionally* face-attacking. This, then, showed, that the impolite signals given by Anne Robinson as a persona were more encompassing than the game show context in which they were situated. The intriguing point to note here is that within this game, Anne Robinson plays on various stereotypes⁸, whilst never actually articulating them. She *implies* bigoted opinions through mimicry and prosody. The reason why the contestants became offended was because *they* had applied a particular stereotype to *themselves and accepted it*. Logically, if you disagree with a stereotype then you are not likely to be offended by it because you don’t take the stereotype (or the speaker’s opinion) seriously. All Anne Robinson does is to allow the contestants to think that *she* thinks they are deficient in some way through the implicatures she employs within, for example, her use of prosody and caricature. The perceived deficiency is only ever implied, and if the contestants are offended it is because *they* are adhering to the specific stereotype that she is playing on. Such is the powerful nature of strategic linguistic ambiguity (cf. Archer 2008, 2011a, b) – something which I touch upon later in this chapter and again in Chapter Five. As Culpeper (2005:67) noted:

To neutralize the impoliteness, the context must compete with the salience of the impolite signal. This is exactly what happens with ritualized banter. The formulaicity, suspension of the Maxim of Quality⁹, poetic effects, and so on, compete with the impoliteness to neutralize it (and, on occasion, fail to do so).

The creative and exploitative elements of Anne Robinson as a persona in *The Weakest Link* have helped to make the show extremely successful. Not only does the show endorse the fact that, as viewers, we gain voyeuristic pleasure from observing others in a worse state than ourselves¹⁰, it also highlights the importance of context by demonstrating that ‘behaviours tend to be more salient than situational factors’ (Culpeper 2005:67). *Theoretically* the contestants should not have taken offence within the context or activity type of the game show (cf. Levinson 1979), because the context of the program as a *game* should have effectively neutralized any construction or perception of intended offence. But the contestants *did* take offence and the context did not neutralize the face damage suffered¹¹. Galbraith’s

⁸ Students on the show are typically singled out and are implicated as being lazy, although this stereotype is never actually articulated.

⁹ See Chapter 4

¹⁰ See Chapter 3 section 3.2

¹¹ Face damage is a regular occurrence in this show – something which has made it so successful and popular over the years.

(1995) *Deictic Shift Theory* (DST) can be used here to explain why this is (and continues to be) the case. This is something which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, but essentially, DST explains the way we can become immersed within an alternative fictional world. We are able to project ourselves from our own origo within the ‘real’ world into the fictional context of a story we are reading, or a film we are watching or indeed a game show we are taking part in. This becomes easier if all aspects (or most aspects) of the fictional world correlate to our own world (as is the case with *The Weakest Link*). This is known as Ryan’s (1980) *Principle of Minimal Departure* whereby messages within an alternate world are reconstructed in line with our own reality – unless we are given indications to the contrary. I discuss this principle in more detail in Chapter Four, but it explains the way we are able to experience palpable emotion when reading a suitably emotional book or watching an emotional film. In the case of the contestants in *The Weakest Link*, it was easy for Anne Robinson to play the character of ‘offensive host’ because there were fewer steps the contestants had to take to become immersed within that context; they did not even have to project themselves out of their own origo, they had simply swapped the *persona* of Anne Robinson for the ‘real’ one, thereby making her behaviour more salient than the context of the game.

As Culpeper (2011:145) notes from *The Weakest Link*’s BBC website, Anne Robinson’s offensive persona on the show has earned her the title of ‘The Rudest Woman on Television’. This leads us nicely on to explore in more detail the concept of *rudeness* in relation to our discussion on impoliteness.

2.4.1 Impoliteness or rudeness?

Despite some agreement amongst researchers regarding the broad features common to an understanding of impoliteness e.g. *face-attack*, *rudeness* and *intentionality*, a conclusive conceptualisation of the concept may forever elude us. As Sell (1992:113) points out regarding the concept of politeness, ‘Nothing will ever fix the referent for “politeness” to human behaviour once and for all’.

As impoliteness research has necessarily been a ‘parasite’ of politeness (Culpeper 1996), then obviously the same definitional dilemma applies when studying linguistic offence. Compounding the issues surrounding definitions has been the associated usage of the near-synonym *rudeness* both by lay-users as well as academics (see Watts 2003, Culpeper 2008, Terkourafi 2008, Kienpointner 2008; Bousfield 2010). In Culpeper’s (2008) work he notes

that the terms *rude/rudeness* appear to be more common amongst lay-member conceptualisations of what constitutes linguistic offence. This was demonstrated in his study of the 100-million word British National Corpus, which showed that the terms *impoliteness* and *rudeness* are not used by lay-members in the same way or in the same contexts; in particular, it appeared that the terms *rude/rudeness* occur more frequently in adjectival or nominal forms; are distributed across genres differently and have completely different collocates compared to *impolite/impoliteness* (Culpeper 2008:44). In addition to this, examination of the way the words were defined based on ‘real’ usage (as per Sinclair’s (1987) corpus-based dictionary) showed that the word *rude* attends to people who are ‘not polite in their behaviour towards other people...*Impoliteness*, on the other hand more specifically relates to people who offend others’ (Culpeper 2008:33).

Currently, it would appear that *rudeness* is an acceptable term academically in constituting the ‘unintentional damage inflicted upon a recipient’s face expectations’ (Bousfield 2010:114) or instances of ‘unintentional relational mismanagement’ (Culpeper 2008:33) but see Terkourafi (2008) for alternative instantiations. However, we are still left with the discrepancy of trying to explain a *discursive* concept via a *theoretical* framework. Culpeper’s (2005) definition for impoliteness above suggests that both approaches need to be taken into consideration, and whilst this issue has been noted as early as 1986 (e.g. Craig, Tracy and Spisak; Watts, Ehlich and Ide 1992, Eelen 2001) it is only relatively recently that researchers have acknowledged this as being the way forward (cf. Bousfield and Locher 2008 and the articles therein; Archer 2008; Bousfield 2010).

In the following section I discuss Bousfield’s early (2008) definitional standpoint and the parameters which he maintained would enable a solid identification of linguistic impoliteness.

2.5 Bousfield’s (2008) model of impoliteness

Building on the work of Culpeper (1996, 2005) and as a co-author in the Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003) paper, Bousfield’s (2007a, b, 2008 a, b, 2010) approach to understanding and defining impoliteness is based on the premise that impoliteness can only be considered ‘successful’ where the speaker intends to offend, *and* the hearer (on understanding that intention) is thus offended. For Bousfield, impoliteness is the antithesis of politeness and is defined thus:

[impoliteness constitutes] the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening acts (FTAs) that are purposefully delivered:

- i) Unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and /or,
- ii) With deliberate *aggression*, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, ‘boosted’ or maximised in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

Furthermore, for impoliteness to be considered successful impoliteness, the intention of the speaker (or ‘author’) to ‘offend’ (threaten/damage face) must be understood by those in a receiver role

(Bousfield 2008a:72 emphasis in original)

Obviously, where face damage is *not* the intention, or if the addressee/receiver does not recognise or understand the intention to offend, then impoliteness cannot be deemed ‘successful’; *offence* however can still be constructed or perceived, as Bousfield notes:

If the Speaker/Producer does *not intend* face-damage but the Hearer/Receiver *constructs* the Speaker’s/Producer’s utterance as being *intentionally* face-damaging then this could be one of the following:

accidental face-damage (as opposed to *incidental* or *intentional face-damage*; see Goffman 1967:14), which could be caused by one or more of:

- *rudeness* (e.g. inadequate levels of politeness);
- *insensitivity* (on the part of the Speaker/Producer);
- *hypersensitivity* (on the part of the Hearer/Receiver);
- *a clash of expectations*;
- *a cultural misunderstanding*;
- *misidentification* (by the speaker or the hearer) *of the community of practice or activity type in which they are engaged*;
- some combination of these; or some hitherto unidentified means of inadvertently causing offence or of perceiving offence when none was intended.

(Bousfield 2008a:73 emphases in original)

Similarly: If the Speaker/Producer does *not intend* face-damage but the Hearer/Receiver *constructs* the Speaker’s/Producer’s utterance as being *unintentionally* face-damaging, then this could be one, or more, of the following:

incidental or accidental face-damage (as opposed to intentional face-damage; see Goffman 1967:14), which could be caused by one or more of:

- *rudeness* (e.g. inadequate levels of politeness);
- *insensitivity* (on the part of the speaker/Producer);
- *hypersensitivity* (on the part of the Hearer/Receiver);

- *a clash of expectations;*
- *a cultural misunderstanding;*
- *misidentification (by the speaker) of the community of practice or activity type in which they are engaged;*
- some combination of these, or some other hitherto unidentified means of inadvertently causing offence or of perceiving offence when none was intended.

(Bousfield 2008a:73 emphases in original)

Bousfield (2008a:62) argues that the strategy of *bald, on-record* both as a politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987:60) and as an impoliteness strategy (Culpeper 1996:356) is necessarily ‘superfluous’ due to its ‘form-function’ mismatch. What this means is that *any* and *every* ‘bald-on record’ utterance will impact (threaten/damage) either (or both) someone’s positive or negative face. As an illustration of this, Culpeper *et al* (2003:1559), in their discussion of an altercation between a parking attendant and some parents who have been ticketed for parking illegally outside a school, note that an example of ‘bald, on record impoliteness’ occurs when one of the parents tells the attendant to *shut up and act like a parking attendant*. However, not only is this an attack on the parking attendant’s *negative face* (as it is ‘an aggressive means of impeding speech’ (Culpeper *et al* 2003:1559), it is also a threat to his *positive face* due to the inherent criticism within the directive that his input within the dispute is not wanted or valued. As Bousfield (2008a:63) has convincingly argued, the strategy of ‘bald, on-record’ is *form* based (i.e. it is face threat which is issued ‘in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible...following the specifications of Grice’s (1975) Maxims of Cooperation, (see also Brown and Levinson, 1987:69). The strategies of Positive/Negative politeness/impoliteness which relate to Positive or Negative face are *function* based superstrategies. Indeed, as Bousfield (2008a:63) correctly points out, *all* communicative utterances serve some function.

His (2008) model, therefore, suggests the need for only two ‘overarching tactics’:

(1) On-record impoliteness

The use of strategies designed to explicitly (a) attack the face of an interactant, (b) construct the face of an interactant in a non-harmonious or outright conflictive way, (c) deny the expected face wants, needs, or rights of the interactant, or some combination thereof. The attack is made in an unambiguous way given the context in which it occurs

(Bousfield 2008b:138)

(2) Off-record impoliteness

The use of strategies where the threat or damage to an interactant's face is conveyed indirectly by way of an implicature (cf. Grice [1975]1989) and can be cancelled (e.g. denied, or an account/post-modification/elaboration offered, etc.) but where "...one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others" (Culpeper 2005:44), given the context in which it occurs

(Bousfield 2008b:138)

Also within this latter category is included the strategy of

a) *sarcasm* in which:

[...] strategies which, on the surface, appear to be appropriate but which are meant to be taken as meaning the opposite in terms of face-management

(Bousfield (2008b: 138)

b)

the *withholding of politeness where it is expected*

(Bousfield 2008b:138 emphasis in original)

What had become apparent from these ideas was that whilst impoliteness might be (relatively) easy to identify, the notion of *offence* was indeed far trickier. Earlier studies had already conceded that offence could be constructed in the absence of intention on the part of a speaker (cf. Culpeper *et al* 2003; Culpeper 2005). Bousfield himself admits (2010) that the above definition does not go far enough for two reasons: he notes that whilst his model assumes that recognition of speaker intent necessarily entails actual face damage, this result is in fact not always the case¹². Secondly, the notion of *incidentally* offensive utterances are not sufficiently accounted for due to the fact that his model does not

separate a 'lack of intent' to damage face on the part of the producer, from the producer *recognising* that their contribution may, actually, be face-damaging to someone in a receiver role

(Bousfield 2010: 121)

This is neatly demonstrated by Culpeper *et al* (2003:1550-1551) in their data in which the council adjudicators, whilst not *intending* to damage the face of the receivers who have been charged with (and are challenging) a penalty notice, realise or *recognise* that the appeal they disallow will, in fact, be face damaging for the said receivers. Noting that first-order

¹² In some situations, for example, we can choose *not* to take offence even though we might have recognised that it was, in fact, the speaker's intention to try and offend us.

approaches, whilst not sufficient by themselves to fully explain the phenomenon of impoliteness, have nevertheless served to *inform* second-order theorising. Bousfield went on to refine his definition which necessarily places his impoliteness model within a more *social* realm.

2.6 Bousfield (2010) – a prototype approach to defining impoliteness

In a bid to address the above issues, as well as position the lay-user (discursive) concept *rudeness* within a theoretical framework, Bousfield (2010) suggests a ‘prototype’ approach to explaining linguistic offence. His model aims to draw on ‘community-wide’ (i.e. ‘socially conventionalised’) concepts, and to treat lay-users’ interpretations of them as ‘*individually understood variations-on-a-theme*’ based on the specific communities of practice (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992a and hereafter CofP) in which the analysis is taking place (Bousfield 2010:119 emphasis in original). What this allows for, then, is for ‘individuals [to] make judgments in relation to their understanding of norms, the norms of which are socially acquired’ (Bousfield 2010:120)

By advocating ‘a first order informed, second order model of concepts’ (2010:120), Bousfield’s prototype approach casts the analysis net much wider, which means that any number of offensive scenarios may now be considered because the expression/construction of *impoliteness* is now a *variation-on-the-theme* of offence in general, based on a CofP and the norms within it. Whilst Bousfield’s original definition is still adhered to (i.e. impoliteness can *only* be deemed to occur if the speaker has intended it and the hearer, having understood the intention, is suitably offended), there are many other ‘variations’ of offence with ‘impoliteness [being] just one possible outcome given producer intent and projectability....and receiver understanding/perception/construction and face damage taken’ (Bousfield 2010:121).

Bearing in mind the ‘discursive struggle’ (Watts 2003) which surrounds (im)politeness research, Bousfield (2010) points out that members of sociocultural groups tend to hold generalised ideas as to what counts as ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ behaviour, which is predicated upon their understanding of how a *model person* should behave within their particularised (CofP). The notion of a ‘Model Person’ was referred to within Brown and Levinson’s politeness model, and whilst they specified such a person as only being metaphorical or ‘tongue in cheek’ (1987:58), and hence tacit, they have been roundly criticised (most notably by Werkhofer 1992:155) for using a lay-person perspective within a theoretical framework. Ironically, however, as Bousfield (2010:107) has noted, such

generalised understandings of what counts as ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’ behaviour for lay persons, do appear to have foundation. What this means is that, despite words not having *inherent* impolite or polite ‘meaning’ (cf. Fraser 1990:233), it would appear that, for some people, some words - notably taboo or swear words - do in fact have a stable or *conventionalised* meaning. Terkourafi (2001) has maintained that, in the case of *politeness*,

[...] conventionalisation will be defined as a relationship holding between utterances and context, which is a correlate of the (statistical) frequency with which an expression is used in one’s experience of a particular context

(Terkourafi 2001:130)

However, as Culpeper (2011) points out, frequency cannot be a dominant factor for conventionalising impoliteness, since our *knowledge* of it far exceeds our *usage* of it. He suggests that the metadiscourse surrounding impolite formula plays more of a central role in stabilising certain linguistic structures, and hence resulting in our ‘understandings’ of what language is ‘usually like’ and ‘what certain ways of speaking connote and imply’ (Culpeper 2011:131).

The twelve scenarios which Bousfield cites within his prototype model are not exhaustive, but they offer more encompassing accounts for explaining the communication and perception of impoliteness in particular and offence in general. However, there are certain *types* of impoliteness (e.g. *banter/mock impoliteness*) which currently do not fit into the model (Bousfield personal communication). ‘Mock impoliteness’ was originally coined by Leech (1983) within his *Principles of Pragmatics*. Rather than something which conveys offence to a hearer, mock impoliteness actually fosters solidarity and social intimacy due to the fact that the impolite linguistic form is cancelled by the context¹³, or to put it another way, it is understood by the hearer that the impoliteness is untrue or superficial. He defined it within his Banter Principle as thus:

In order to show solidarity with *h*, say something which is (i) obviously untrue, and (ii) obviously impolite to *h* [and this will give rise to an interpretation such that] what *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue. Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true.

(Leech 1983:144)

¹³ Leech does not actually specify what these contexts might be.

Hence, the everyday term *banter* has subsequently been considered as another ‘type’ of impoliteness; however, in a recent study by Haugh and Bousfield (2012), which looked at the way banter was used and understood amongst a data set of Australian and British English speaking males, they found that two distinct interactional practices could be identified: *jocular mockery*, which Haugh (2010) has defined as

... 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 emphasis as original)

And jocular *abuse*, which consists of

...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

(Haugh and Bousfield 2012:1108 emphasis in original)

Their findings showed that the subjects’ use of *jocular mockery* and *jocular abuse* reflected a ‘shared ethos that places value on “not taking oneself too seriously”’, and as such, gave rise to evaluations of mock impoliteness (what Haugh and Bousfield have defined as being ‘open to evaluation as impolite, but nevertheless evaluated as *non-impolite* by at least some interactants). This suggests that the term ‘mock impoliteness’ as an evaluation, actually lies *outside* the realm of politeness and impoliteness-based concepts, since ‘non-impolite’ is neither polite nor impolite. Leaving aside the fact that for a target of mock impoliteness there is *always* going to be the possibility of an evaluation as impolite, their study concluded that the concept of ‘mock impoliteness’, rather than being seen simply as a variant of politeness or impoliteness research (which up until now has been the case), should in fact be considered and analysed as an evaluation in its own right. Following on from Bousfield’s prototype approach which necessarily moves us towards a social explanation of impoliteness, Culpeper’s (2011:23) definition below is one in which he attempts to ‘cover all cases of impoliteness’.

2.7 Culpeper’s (2011) model of impoliteness

In his latest work on impoliteness, Culpeper reconsiders the definitional aspects of linguistic offence, which he maintains are a reflection of his ‘current thinking’. He now considers impoliteness as constituting

a negative attitude¹⁴ towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and /or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively –considered 'impolite'- when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not

(Culpeper 2011:23)

Most notable within this definition then, is a back-grounding of the role that intention can play in the communicating of offence. Indeed Culpeper now states (2011:23) 'that an understanding of impoliteness does not depend on the recognition of intentions'. If impoliteness is more of a 'perlocutionary effect' (cf. Terkourafi 2001:120-7), a standpoint which Culpeper himself now advocates (2011:23), then this necessarily delimits what the speaker or author of the impoliteness is doing in favour of the hearer (or receiver). Culpeper also flags up the notion of 'identity' which I discuss more fully in section 3.1 and also Chapter Six.

With the most prominent and widely cited models of impoliteness thus discussed, I will now apply them to my own data, not only in order to compare and contrast their definitional standpoint, but also to see how they may be applied within an analysis of the character of Melvin Udall.

2.8 Discussion of models – an example from the data

[Example 2.8.1]

Context: Melvin and Carol are in a beach restaurant. A jacket and tie are compulsory attire for the male diners, both of which Melvin is not wearing. Horrified at the thought of wearing a substitute jacket and tie offered by the waiter, Melvin has left the restaurant briefly to purchase his own. Now back in the restaurant looking suitably dressed, he watches Carol for a minute sitting at the bar, obviously enjoying herself, and smiles before catching her eye and beckoning her over. They make their way to a table, with the whole evening ahead of them. Anticipation seems to be very much in the air...

¹⁴ For me, impoliteness cannot be simply an 'attitude'. I can have a negative attitude about something or someone but choose not to express that attitude impolitely.

(1) **Carol:** [*Enthusiastically*] You look great! [*they arrive at the table and he holds out the chair for her*] You wanna dance?

(2) **Melvin:** I've been thinking about that since you brought it up before -

(3) **Carol:** [*rising from her chair in eager anticipation*] And?

(4) **Melvin:** [*distractedly, looking around*] No...I don't get this place. They make me buy an outfit but they let you wear a house dress. I don't get it.

[*Melvin appears to have no idea of the impact of these words. Carol stands up preparing to leave*]

(5) **Melvin:** [*Panicking*] No. Wait. What? Why? I didn't mean it. You gotta sit down. You can still give me the dirty look...just sit down and give it to me.

(6) **Carol:** Melvin, pay me a compliment...I need one and quick...you have no idea how much what you said just hurt my feelings.

[end]

In view of Culpeper's (2011) definition above, Melvin's utterance at line 4 would constitute linguistic impoliteness. In Carol's eyes he has displayed a 'negative attitude' both in his complaint about the restaurant (for making him buy an outfit in order to be able to eat there) but more importantly, by the inference which *she* has drawn about the state of her dress. Whilst Melvin's implicature here has been about *him* (and the unfair way he is being treated by the restaurant), Carol has picked up on this as a criticism against *her*, and in particular the connotations of 'mundane' and 'ordinary' which she has mapped from the description of her dress on to herself as a woman; something which would have a demoralising effect on her identity within this context. Having seized on these (understandable) inferences, she stands up abruptly with the intention of leaving the restaurant. Melvin has no idea of the pragmatic consequences of his utterance, supposedly because of his OCD and generally isolated existence, in which female acquaintances do not play a part. This is somewhat paradoxical however, when we consider what Melvin does for a living; he is an author of *romantic* fiction and as such, is *extremely* knowledgeable in the sort of sentiments that women appreciate – especially within the sort of setting that they are currently in. For Carol, Melvin's utterance constitutes a clash of 'expectations, desires and beliefs' concerning his behaviour within this particularized context (i.e. they are away for the weekend, in a restaurant together for the first time as a *couple*, and Carol herself is beginning to acknowledge that she is developing feelings for Melvin). Furthermore, as a result of this clash, Carol experiences an 'emotional consequence' from Melvin's words (i.e. she suffers *face damage*). Carol's expectations are based on a wider context than simply the immediate setting; they are also based on the wider

social norms which we acquire (and continue to acquire) as we become socialised beings (see Bousfield 2010:119).¹⁵ That Carol has internalised the norm for social complimenting (and therefore has an expectation of it herself)¹⁶ may be evident in her own appraisal of Melvin when she tells him *you look great!* That Melvin hasn't done likewise is highly foregrounded behaviour, and as such demands interpretation. One possible explanation could be that Melvin is not happy being in Carol's company or is displeased with her appearance; however, we know this cannot be a plausible explanation because when he goes back into the restaurant after obtaining the jacket and tie we see him *admiring* Carol (unknown to her). What would appear to be a more logical explanation is that Melvin is way outside of his comfort zone here (even though he has acknowledged to himself that he desires Carol), and as such, is extremely nervous.

Now let us consider the same scene, but this time from Bousfield's (2008/2010) model. First of all, let us recap on what Bousfield considers to be 'impolite':

[...] the issuing of *intentionally* gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening acts (FTAs) that are purposefully performed ... for impoliteness to be considered successful impoliteness, the intention of the speaker (or 'author') to 'offend' (threaten/damage face) must be understood by those in a receiver role

(Bousfield 2008b:132)

Within Bousfield's (2008) definition, then, and conversely to Culpeper, Melvin's behaviour cannot be deemed to constitute impoliteness as there is no *perception of intent* to harm from Carol's perspective (she acknowledges that '*you have no idea* how much what you said just hurt my feelings'). Similarly, Melvin himself *displays* his lack of intention to offend Carol when he says *No. Wait. What? Why? I didn't mean it.* So although *face damage* has occurred through her *construction* of impoliteness, she has not perceived an intention on Melvin's part and he has not knowingly constructed one.¹⁷ Within Bousfield's (2010) prototype model, *accidental* face damage occurs as:

A result of rudeness: Inadequate levels of, or inexpertly used politeness, 'speaker insensitivity', 'hearer hypersensitivity', clash of interactant expectation, cultural

¹⁵ One such norm being the customary (though not obligatory) practice of complimenting a partner's appearance when going out with them (at least for) the first time – something which Melvin does *not* do.

¹⁶ This expectation is eventually articulated by Carol when she tells him *I need a compliment – and quick.*

¹⁷ And this is why we know that his moan was about the restaurant, and *not* against Carol.

misunderstanding, misidentification (on either part) of the type of communicative activity engaged in, ...(see Goffman 1967:14). [Ultimately] impoliteness is inferred.¹⁸

(Bousfield 2010:123)

We can discount two of the above explanations immediately; those being ‘cultural misunderstanding’ (both Melvin and Carol are American), and ‘misidentification of activity type’ (both are well aware not only of the activity type in question, but also the possible outcome for later in the evening). Of the remaining explanations, I would suggest that ‘speaker insensitivity’ and ‘hearer hypersensitivity’ are the likeliest combination of factors here, based on Melvin’s comment about the dress, and Carol’s explicit request for a compliment. Rather than being *impolite* towards Carol (as per Culpeper 2011), what I maintain has occurred here is *rudeness*. It is a term which Locher and Bousfield (2008:4) have conceded occupies a ‘very similar conceptual space’ to that of impoliteness. Interestingly, the notion of *rudeness* also fits in with both Culpeper’s and Bousfield’s frameworks, with Culpeper maintaining it to be ‘unintentional relational mismanagement’ (2008:33), and Bousfield as ‘unintentional damage inflicted upon a recipient’s face expectations’ (2010:114). Whilst Culpeper and Bousfield may not totally agree on what constitutes impoliteness, their approaches, *once taken together* more accurately define what has happened between Melvin and Carol. This suggests that the two approaches are, in fact, complementary, and when you put elements of them together, at various points, they offer greater granularity of explanation and analysis of character behaviour.

Whilst Carol does not assign malicious intent to Melvin’s words, she does articulate that he has ‘hurt [her] feelings’ i.e. her ‘face’ (*positive* in this case) has been *aggravated*. Locher and Bousfield (2008:3) have noted ‘face aggravation’ as being a ‘common denominator’ to definitions of impoliteness. Locher and Watts (2008:79) point out that within the terminology surrounding ‘negatively marked behaviour’ i.e. behaviour which evokes negative evaluations and hence produces an emotional reaction is the alternative lexeme *aggressive*. Daily, Carmen and Spitzberg (2007:303) point out that the impairment of a ‘person’s enduring preferred self image’ (which is what Melvin effectively does with Carol above), is a form of *communicative aggression*. Likewise with definitions surrounding (im) politeness, *aggression* appears to be another problematic concept. As Bousfield (2008a:75) notes, definitions of *aggression* are compounded by the fact that they are dependent upon the field of study

¹⁸ Within his (2010) prototype model, Bousfield appears to suggest that *rudeness* is on the same level as ‘speaker insensitivity’ and ‘hearer hypersensitivity’. Rather, speaker insensitivity and hearer hypersensitivity are, for me, symptoms which *can give rise to* the expression and construction of rudeness.

attempting to demarcate it. Space precludes me from discussing this concept in depth, nor indeed the many definitions which have been put forward to explain it. Interested readers should refer to Bousfield (2008a) for an informed overview. Definitional problems notwithstanding, many formulations of the concept of aggression (especially within the area of Social Work and developmental psychology) refer to *intent*, which is *the* fundamental variant lying at the core of second-order impoliteness theorising. Indeed, some researchers (cf. Archer 2008) have questioned whether ‘verbal aggression’ and ‘impoliteness’ are, in fact, synonymous terms,¹⁹ and I digress briefly from my discussing to consider this.

2.8.2 Impoliteness and verbal aggression

In her recent work on the various ways lawyers and judges utilise and take advantage of facework activities in Anglo-American courtroom practice (see Chapter 5), Archer (2008, 2011b) notes that whilst a courtroom may be conventionally²⁰ associated with impoliteness (as per Bousfield 2008 above), such behaviour is in fact relatively rare due to the fact that intentional face attack is *not* the ultimate goal of the lawyers; indeed such behaviour would result in legal sanction for them. However, the notion of *verbal aggression* is very much an accepted and understood term by such lawyers, who acknowledge the fact that *accidental* or *incidental* offence is a common feature of courtroom discourse due to the strategic nature of their questioning. Whilst Pearson, Andersson and Wegner (2001:1403) maintain that aggression is a ‘deviant’ form of behaviour within the workplace, Archer (2008:189) points out that within such settings as the historical courtroom this is not necessarily the case; but only becomes so if ‘the *primary* goal is to harm (i.e. cause intentional or deliberate face threat, in a Goffman (1967) sense)’. Within the Anglo-American courtroom, especially in a cross-examination, facework is only a ‘subsidiary’ concern; the primary concern being to counter evidence (Archer 2011b: 3221). However, for the witnesses and defendants, such an adversarial CofP can result in them easily perceiving or constructing offence which *they* necessarily interpret as *intentional* (and therefore impolite). From the lawyers’ perspective, though, within the Anglo-American courtroom conceptualisation, verbal aggression does *not* denote a primary intention to hurt.

¹⁹ Leaving aside the logicity of the fact that there can be no such thing as a ‘true’ synonym.

²⁰ I refer to the lay-person understanding here

In terms of Melvin's utterance above we have already ascertained that his behaviour has constituted 'rudeness' (as per Culpeper (2008) and Bousfield (2010)), but can we say he has been 'verbally aggressive'? Hurst Tatsuki (2000) has put forward an explanation for assigning linguistic aggression which, like the courtroom lawyers, does not place *intent* at its heart. In exploring the use of aggression within complaints, Hurst Tatsuki (2000) considers how aggression can be seen as a form of *response*, most notably to *frustration* on the part of the person complaining. She points out that

Frustration can be attributed to the environment, an object, a person or the subject himself (sic). The subject can respond to that frustration by lashing out, turning it inward, or denying its existence

(Hurst Tatsuki 2000: 1005 my emphasis)

She goes on to point out that such aggression, rather than being seen as a form of *hostility*, might actually be considered as a 'coping' mechanism with the possibility of being either constructive or destructive in its consequences. Two things are of interest here; not only does this conceptualisation of aggression neatly account for Melvin's *faux pas* here, the fact that it becomes manifest through *frustration* is readily applicable to his character in general, as he attempts to *cope* with the daily challenges (personal and situational) which his OCD necessarily causes. The emotional challenge of being in a romantic context for the first time with Carol must necessarily be making Melvin nervous, and such nervousness means that he is not in control of *this* situation as he is with other day-to-day encounters with her. Such, then, could be his frustration towards *himself* (as he effectively 'lashes out' in his rant against the restaurant). Upon Carol's response he then attempts to *deny the existence* of that frustration (cf. *No. Wait. What? Why?*). Interestingly, in line with Hurst Tatsuki's thinking above, the consequence of Melvin's utterance, whilst being very nearly destructive, does have an ultimately constructive or beneficial outcome, as it forces him to admit to Carol how important her presence in his life actually is (see Example 2.9.1.1below).

Linguistic offence is very much a social phenomenon (cf. Culpeper 2011: xii); a justification of why a prototype approach to explaining impoliteness is needed. Since Goffman was a social psychologist, and his ideas on facework (as a model for social interaction) have been so fundamental to theories of both politeness and impoliteness, then it would seem pertinent at this point, to consider his ideas in more detail. The fact that he only made very brief comments on the 'aggressive use' of facework (Goffman 1967:24-6) is probably down to the

widely held view at the time that ‘conflictive illocutions [were considered] to be rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances’ (Leech, 1983: 105).

2.9 Face

2.9.1 Goffman’s (1967) concept of face

As mentioned earlier in 2.1, central to Goffman’s conception of the way humans conduct themselves in face to-face interactions is the notion of *face* which he defines as

[...] the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes

(Goffman 1967:5)

He defines a *line* as

[...] a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which [a person] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself

(Goffman 1967:5)

Goffman maintains that such is the social nature of face that people ‘experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allows’ a person to feel (Goffman 1967:6). However, he pointed out that such an attribute must not be taken for granted; since our social *face* is bestowed from others’ evaluations and expectations within an encounter, it can also be taken away along with the ‘security’ and ‘pleasure’ which we cultivate within that encounter. In effect, *face* is ‘on loan...from society’ and may be withdrawn unless we conduct ourselves in a way which is worthy of it (Goffman 1967:10). In order to uphold the ‘interactional ritual’, individuals perform *facework* which is ‘the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with *face*’ (Goffman 1967:12), more specifically ‘*facework* serves to counteract “incidents”- that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten *face*’(1967:12). Crucially, the idea of facework does not imply that people are automatically concerned with the upkeep of face *maintenance* (as per Brown and Levinson’s assumption), but rather is controlled by two ‘orientations’ of point of view – ‘a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the [face of the other]’ (Goffman 1967:14). Being ‘defensive’ of one’s own face can easily accommodate the notion of impoliteness as Goffman himself briefly concedes

on his discussion of ‘the aggressive use of facework’ (1967:24). For Goffman then, *face* is firmly rooted within an interaction (whether that interaction is aggressive or harmonious); it is a concept which is ‘[...] diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter’ (Goffman 1967:7). An interlocutor’s social face can become compromised, then, when such appraisals are *lower* than the expectations held by that actor of how his neighbour should be constructing him, as Culpeper’s (2005) study and example [2.8.1] above demonstrates.

Goffman identified three ‘levels of responsibility’ (or types of *face* damage). The first one he noted as occurring *accidentally*, ‘[...] his offence seems to be unintended and unwitting, and those who perceive his act can feel that he would have attempted to avoid it had he foreseen its offensive consequences’ (Goffman 1967:14). In contrast to this are occasions when face damage is deployed *intentionally* where ‘the offending person may appear to have acted maliciously and spitefully, with the intention of causing open insult’ (Goffman 1967:14). Goffman also recognised *incidental* cases of face damage, where ‘unplanned but sometimes anticipated [offence]’ was caused as a by-product of an action. He stressed, however, that even though this type of offence could be predicted in some situations, it was *not* employed out of a sense of spite.

Whilst Goffman’s approach to understanding social interaction was groundbreaking in the 1960s, the idea of interactional conflict did not concern him to any great degree. He alluded to the notion of *aggressive facework* as being ‘wilfully introduced’ threats to *face*, but his exposition of how these threats might be manifested and dealt with in response was brief and necessarily vague; his account being based on the metaphor of a ‘game’ in which ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ attempt to score and/or concede ‘points’ over one another. He summed up the notion of *aggressive facework* thus:

In aggressive interchanges the winner not only succeeds in introducing information favourable to himself and unfavourable to the others, [he] also demonstrates that as an interactant he can handle himself better than his adversaries

(Goffman 1967:25)

Critics of Goffman’s conceptualisation of face and facework (e.g. Arundale 2009), have pointed out that by specifying interactions as a *ritual* and by using analogies of actors in a play internalising a *script*, Goffman’s explanation of facework is necessarily governed by rules which, apart from implying that individuals are merely passive creatures blindly following society-imposed scripts (cf. Eelen 2001, Garfinkel 1967), cannot tell us anything

about the way that interactions can constrain and be constrained within an on-going encounter. Schegloff (1988:100) has pointed out that such a rule-led explanation of interaction is unable to explain ‘how the participants together shape the trajectory of the interaction’. Additionally, by acting as judge and jury when explaining social encounters, Goffman has been accused of omitting to consider how the participants themselves understood the dynamics of their interactions. In much the same way that Brown and Levinson decided what did or did not constitute a FTA, Goffman himself ‘determined whether an actor’s move was a face-threatening ‘challenge’, or a face-saving ‘offering’ (Arundale 2009:40). As MacMartin, Wood and Kroger (2001:254) have stipulated ‘[the] interpretation of a particular communication practice...may differ across recipients and observers depending upon their individual orientations to the talk [and] prior expectations’. Whilst the observation from MacMartin, Wood and Kroger above cannot be disputed logically, the implication from the above researchers hitherto mentioned, is that Goffman’s approach is too rigid or objectivist. A closer reading of Goffman shows that his ideas were not to be taken so literally. Goffman specifically stated that

...[the rules] *when followed*, determine the evaluation he will make of himself and of his fellow-participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings, and the kinds of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory *kind* of ritual equilibrium. The *general* capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transforms him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters

(Goffman 1967:45 my italics)

For Goffman, the idea of interaction as bound by ‘rules’ was much looser than would appear to be suggested by Arundale or Schegloff. Indeed, Goffman points out that ‘Instead of abiding by the rules, there may be much effort to break them safely’ (1967:45). Furthermore, Schegloff’s own criticism that Goffman’s account fails to show ‘how the participants together shape the trajectory of the interaction’ seems rather harsh; in my interpretation of Goffman, his account of *face* as being an emotional construct which can be given, maintained or taken away (1967:6-7) perfectly captures the way that *face* requirements (i.e. ‘moral rules’) can evolve in the ebb and flow of an interaction and hence, shape ‘the trajectory of the interaction’- as I will briefly demonstrate in example [2.9.1.1] below, and which was originally discussed in example [2.8.1] above:

[Example 2.9.1.1]

(1) **Carol:** You look great! [*they arrive at the table and he holds out the chair for her*] You wanna dance?

(2) **Melvin:** I've been thinking about that since you brought it up before

(3) **Carol:** [*rising from her chair in eager anticipation*] And?

(4) **Melvin:** [*distractedly, looking around*] No...I don't get this place. They make me buy an outfit but they let you wear a house dress. I don't get it.

[*Melvin has no idea of the impact of these words. Carol stands up preparing to leave*]

(5) **Melvin:** No. Wait. What? Why? I didn't mean it. You gotta sit down. You can still give me the dirty look...just sit down and give it to me.

(6) **Carol:** Melvin, pay me a compliment...I need one and quick...you have no idea how much what you said just hurt my feelings.

(7) **Melvin:** [*muttering*] that monominute somebody gets that you need them they threaten to go away. Never fails.

(8) **Carol:** That's not a compliment, Melvin...that's just trying to sound smart so I feel stupid...A compliment is something nice about somebody else...now or never.

[*a few lines later*]

(9) **Melvin:** Okay, I got a real great compliment for you and it's true...

[*he explains that she is the reason for him re-commencing the medication which controls the anxiety he suffers with his OCD*]

(10) **Carol:** I don't quite get how that's a compliment for me.

(11) **Melvin:** You make me want to be a better man.

(12) **Carol:** That's maybe the best compliment of my life.

[end]

As previously explained, Melvin's initial comment about Carol's dress is perceived as face-damaging due to the fact that the 'positive social value' she is expecting from Melvin (based on the *line* she has assumed he has been taking with her up to this point (as a dinner-date with potential for a romantic end to the evening) has suddenly been curtailed. That she considers such positive social value as a personal *need* is indicated by her vocally. Goffman pointed out that when such expectations are not fulfilled 'one expects that [they] will "feel bad" or "feel

hurt” (1967:6). By ‘taking away’ Carol’s ‘positive social value’, Melvin has effectively taken away Carol’s *face*. However, that which can be (metaphorically) ‘taken away’ can also be ‘given’. Whilst unaware of the impact that his words have occasioned (Melvin has, in fact, been guilty of a *faux pas* in Goffman’s terminology, 1967:14), he still realises that he can make amends. Furthermore he knows that the value of retracting the offence he has just unwittingly communicated (and which will ultimately form the speech act of an apology) is dependent upon the felicity condition of *sincerity* (cf. J.L Austin 1962), hence, ‘I got a real great compliment for you *and it’s true...*’

Goffman noted that ‘If events establish a face for him that is better than he might have expected, he is likely to “feel good” (1967:6). Carol’s response to Melvin’s admission that she makes him want to ‘be a better man’ is a profound one because she knows that such an admission has not been made lightly; as such, what was taken away only seconds ago has been re-established - with the suggestion of *more* respect and admiration than she would have previously suspected. By not following the ‘rules’ at the beginning of this interaction, i.e. by not taking into account Carol’s *face* requirements or needs before opening his mouth to condemn the restaurant, Melvin very quickly upsets the equilibrium of their social evening. One such ‘rule’ pertaining here (and I suggest, pertaining generally) is obviously the need for *mutual face concern* (see Ting-Toomey in section 2.9.3 below). That Melvin has very quickly internalised such a rule (and which up until now has been conspicuously absent in his behaviour with the other characters) has become *established in the ritual*, in other words, the emerging organization within this particular social encounter, and in particular, in the way that both characters have negotiated (‘shaped’) their own *face* ‘needs’.

One of the reasons for the relational disjunction between Carol and Melvin in the above scene could be the fact that for the first time within the film, they are within an activity type which requires them to take on differing roles or identities²¹, and as such, means that additional considerations need to be taken on board by them when interacting. This leads me nicely on to Spencer-Oatey’s understanding of the relationship between face and identity, to which I now turn.

2.9.2 Face and identity: Spencer-Oatey’s (2009) approach

For Spencer-Oatey, the notion of *face* is necessarily tied up with notions of identity and goals (intercultural, interactional and relational). She maintains that *face* must be considered as a

²¹ Up until this point Carol has been in the role of waitress and Melvin in the role of customer. Now, however, there is an acknowledgment – if only privately to themselves – that there is the potential for a relationship.

dynamic concept - as something which emerges in interaction, and she stresses that *face* concerns for the speaker are just as fundamental as those of the hearer. Since an interlocutor's goals also need to be considered during interactions, Spencer-Oatey argues that a wider context than purely face concerns at the time should be taken into account. One factor which can impact upon the wider context is the notion of *identity*. She adopts Simon's (2004) Self-Aspect Model of Identity in which

...[identity can become derived] from self-interpretation in terms of a complex set or configuration of different self-aspects [such as an individual's] roles, abilities, behaviours, tastes, traits, attitudes, or explicit category or group membership

(Simon 2004:47)²²

Spencer-Oatey points out that *face* and *identity* can be viewed as concepts which overlap in as much as they 'both relate to the 'self'-image (including individual, relational and collective construals of self...and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes'. However she goes on to qualify this statement by pointing out that 'face is *only* associated with attributes that are effectively sensitive to the claimant' (2009:141 my emphasis). In the examples discussed above then, we can see that, if Melvin had limited his criticism to the restaurant's admission policy of enforcing formal attire, and had *not* mentioned a specific (and very personal) attribute of Carol (her choice of dress), then his comments would not have been injurious to her.

Spencer-Oatey goes on to point out that '[face] is associated with positively-evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly), and with negatively-evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others NOT to ascribe to him/her' (2009:141). So, for example, describing Carol's dress as a 'house dress' with the negative connotation that this implies (typically, 'unremarkable'), means that she experiences a huge threat to her face: in essence, his description of her dress becomes a *negatively-evaluated attribute of Carol herself*, which she most certainly would *not* have wanted him to ascribe to her; hence her marked offence both visually (in her standing up preparing to leave) and linguistically. However, Spencer-Oatey goes on to make a very valid and interesting point; she points out that "[...] people may attach varying importance to different attributes in different contexts" (2009:142). This observation is echoed by Tracy and Baratz (1994) who argue that, depending on the context, some aspects of identity (and hence *face* concerns) are

²² Simon's (2004) Self-Aspect Model of identity is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

more prevalent than others. They quote a hypothetical scenario in which a woman who is interacting with her daughter's school teacher would want to be seen primarily as a good mother, whilst at her league basketball game she would want to be seen primarily as a good athlete. In the example with Melvin and Carol above, within the context of the restaurant, Carol is wanting to be seen *primarily* as Melvin's 'date', and she is doing this by claiming a variety of additional attributes that she does not usually have to display in her alternative roles as waitress and mother (such as attractive/desirable/appealing/stimulating). These attributes are more important *in this particular context* to Carol, as they are the types of relational attributes which are usually displayed when we are in the company of someone we desire. Similarly, Melvin is also wanting to display additional attributes (along much the same lines and for much the same reason as Carol). In this context, he is no longer the demanding and offensive customer in Carol's restaurant, and (from Carol's perspective) he has since acquired the attributes of selflessness, compassion and generosity ever since his recent intervention in obtaining appropriate care for her poorly son. Melvin is acutely aware of Carol's gratitude as well as sensing her increasing attraction towards him, and his *faux pas* of unintentionally offending her (cf. Goffman 1967:14) might be explained in facework terms as nervousness in wanting to *uphold* those attributes that Carol has assigned to him; in other words he is wanting to *claim the positive social values by the line that Carol has assumed that he is taking* in this context (cf. Goffman 1967:5).

As Goffman did not specifically consider the ramifications of aggressive facework in any great detail, I will now introduce Ting-Toomey's (2009) 'facework-collision' approach, which, when taken alongside Spencer-Oatey (2009) and Hurst Tatsuki (2000) above, offers a convincing explanation (in facework terms) of what has happened between Melvin and Carol in the above scenes.

2.9.3 Ting-Toomey's 'facework collision' approach to communication

Fundamental to Ting-Toomey's understanding of (intercultural) communication (and pertinent to the present study) is the notion of 'facework collision'. She defines such collision as

[...] behavioural expectancy violations and actual communication clash issues. The clash can entail perceived incompatibility of value orientations, norms, interaction goals, facework styles, and meanings between two interdependent parties or groups

(Ting-Toomey 2009:227)

In line with Spencer-Oatey, Ting-Toomey also considers face and facework as being manifested within communication as well as being influenced by various factors, and hence, is something which must be considered beyond the actual discourse process itself. She notes some of those factors as being ‘cultural/ethnic value clashes, communication decoding problems, and identity inattention issues’ (Ting-Toomey 2009:228). In addition to this she identifies three specific types of ‘face concern’, namely:

Self face Concern - the protective concern for one’s own identity image when one’s own face is threatened in the conflict episode

(Ting-Toomey 2009:228)

Other Face Concern - the concern for accommodating the other conflict party’s identity image in the conflict situation

(Ting-Toomey 2009:228)

Mutual face Concern - the concern for both parties’ images and the image of the relationship

(Ting-Toomey 2009:228)

If we consider Ting-Toomey’s approach to face and facework in the above scene, it can be argued that the ‘facework collision’ which Melvin and Carol experience is due to a combination of *identity inattention* (on the part of Melvin) along with a lack of *other face concern* (towards Carol) as well as over-concern for Melvin’s own *self-face*. Ting-Toomey’s (2009:228) assertion that ‘face is really about identity respect and other-identity consideration issues within and beyond the actual social discourse process’ is something I would agree with, since we naturally draw on past experiences (such as relationship *schema*), in order to make sense of new ones. In other words we all have at least *some* expectations (however small) of how certain interactions and situations should evolve and progress. Such expectations, in turn are, ‘tied to the emotional significance and estimated appraisals that we attach to our own social self worth and the social self worth of others’ (Ting-Toomey 2009:229; see also Goffman 1967, Ting-Toomey and Kurogi 1998, Tracy 2005)

In line with Goffman’s own ideas, Ting-Toomey also agrees that face collision can be unintentional as well as intentional. Unlike Brown and Levinson’s concept of a *Face Threatening Act* (which implies a disregard for the *dynamic* properties of interaction), Ting-Toomey considers *Face Threatening Processes* (FTP) which is more in line with Goffman’s own conceptualisation of *face* as being something which is ‘[...] diffusely located in the flow

of events in the encounter’(Goffman 1967:7). Also in line with Goffman, Ting-Toomey makes a valid point about an interlocutor’s *needs* within an interaction. She points out that:

Everyday facework is a well-coordinated and well-oiled social interaction process. When the communication rituals in a particular situation are socially derailed, identity repair works are interpersonally *needed* and socially expected

(Ting-Toomey 2009:245 my emphasis)

Carol’s demand of Melvin in the above scene - *Melvin, pay me a compliment...I need one and quick...you have no idea how much what you said just hurt my feelings* - demonstrates not only what happens when *self-face* concern clashes with *other-face* concern such as when the communication ritual has been ‘derailed’ (whether intentionally or unintentionally), but also the emotional insecurity (hence *need* for assurance) that can result from such derailment.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored what I consider to be some of the most empirically valid second-order models of (im) politeness, alongside some recent academically prominent models of face and facework. Beginning with a discussion of Brown and Levinson’s ‘face-management’ model of politeness, I then discussed work by Culpeper, Culpeper *et al* and Bousfield and compared their definitions in relation to examples from my data set. When elements of Bousfield and Culpeper’s models were combined, they afforded greater analytical clarity regarding the characters of Melvin and Carol and the way they were orienting towards each other. This demonstrated that the two approaches were in fact complementary, even if their terminology was different.

Bousfield’s (2010) approach to explaining impoliteness opened up the definitional ‘net’ by considering impoliteness as being just one variation on the theme of offence in general. This approach can now account for many more instances in which offence can be expressed and constructed, as understood by lay-members within their own CofP. As the prototype approach necessarily moves us towards a social explanation of impoliteness, I drew on Goffman’s ideas on social interaction in more detail, augmenting them with more recent accounts of facework which specifically consider facework in relation to identity (Spencer-Oatey 2009),

and facework within an aggressive context (Ting-Toomey 2009). The models thus discussed (impoliteness and facework) offer greater explanatory power when considering character behaviour and development. Facework is also a concept which helps to explain how some of the humour within the film is being generated. Due to his socially debilitating condition OCD, Melvin's *Reality Paradigms* (see Archer 2002, 2008, 2011a and Chapter Five) or conceptual viewpoints of the world are foregrounded. As such, his marked opinions provide a good basis on which to apply the various models of facework, and in particular, the way we can *exploit* the face needs of others to induce amusement for a third party. Goffman, like Brown and Levinson, built his ideas around the notion of a *Model Person*²³. Melvin offers no such clearly demarcated characteristics and his behaviour, at first glance, appears to be *gratuitously* face-damaging (i.e. *impolite* per Bousfield 2008/2010). However, we must not forget that the film in question is classified as a *romantic comedy*; hence, the face damage inflicted by Melvin's character is being exploited for the viewer for entertainment purposes. The fact that so much comedy draws on the exploitation of another person's face needs suggests that a) there must be an underlying reason as to *why* (in context-specific situations) we are amused by watching others being a target of offensiveness, and b) formulaic ways in which that entertainment and amusement can be elicited. In the following chapters I demonstrate how, as viewers, we are compelled to feel amusement at Melvin's offensive behaviour, starting with an overview of humour theory in Chapter Three.

²³ A consideration of facework in relation to the condition of OCD also suggests an area ripe for further academic scrutiny, in order to consider whether people with socially challenging conditions such as Aspergers, Autism and OCD actually have differing face wants and needs.

CHAPTER 3

Impoliteness as entertainment and humour

“...little in the area of humour is straightforward...”

(Billig 2002:454)

In the previous chapter I discussed recent theoretical models of linguistic impoliteness and facework, based on Goffman's (1967) sociological study of human interaction. In this chapter, I discuss (i) types of non-conventionalised (implicational or covert instances of) impoliteness), and (ii) demonstrate how the nature of 'implicational impoliteness' (cf. Culpeper 2011) is not only more exacerbating in terms of gravity of offence, it can also be highly entertaining for viewing observers due to the creative way we are able to formulate face-damaging utterances²⁴.

The notion of what is humorous is incredibly personal as well as contentious. Billig (2005:184) points out that there are 'infinite ways of being humorous' and warns against defining humour simply in terms of its effects (i.e. laughter). Such is humour's complexity that we can only aim to understand it when viewed within the wider social order: this includes its political, moral and aesthetic dimensions as well as its psychological ones (Billig 2005:179). More importantly, we need to consider humour as a powerful rhetorical tool since it - like facework and impoliteness - is multifunctional in nature.

I will briefly discuss the history of humour in relation to the three commonly-held explanations of *superiority*, *incongruity* and *release*, which have been put forward to explain the mechanics of why we can feel compelled to laugh at others. A more detailed discussion of the social function of humour and its implications for how we can view the behaviour of Melvin Udall will be taken up in Chapters Five and Seven. In discussing the concept of humour I am not arguing that this film - or certain scenes within it - are *necessarily* funny (even given its 'comedy' classification); such is another paradox of humour that it is both universal and particular (Billig 2005:176). What I am seeking to do, rather, is to consider the overlapping nature which I believe exists between two supposedly disparate concepts, - offensiveness and humour, - and I am using a fictional character in order to explore this. The notion of what it means to be 'entertained' is also something which I will unpack and discuss

²⁴ See link in footnote 30

in the present chapter. To begin with, I will consider the creative or unconventional ways in which offense can be conveyed, because it is my belief that such creativity is what helps to define some forms of offense as ‘entertaining’ as opposed to ‘gratuitous’²⁵.

3.1. Conventional and non-conventional Impoliteness

Terkourafi (2005:248) argues that *politeness* is realised through ‘the regular co-occurrence of particular types of contexts and particular types of linguistic expression’. However, Culpeper does not agree that this analogy automatically applies to impoliteness. He points out that being able to convey impoliteness does not depend on ‘conventional impoliteness formulae’ (2011:155). Impoliteness is (and must be, for society to function effectively), an *irregular* activity; or, to quote Leech (1983:105), be ‘rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances’. Understanding what is ‘normal’ involves a society’s understanding or ideology concerning appropriate ways (or ‘rules’) of speaking and behaving, and this is what Leech is referring to here. As such, Leech’s point would seem to be a valid one, in as much as it is *politeness* which needs to be an un-marked or standard form of behaviour within any civilised society. Having said that, Culpeper *et al* (2003) and Kienpointner (1997) demonstrate that there are certain specific contexts in which impoliteness and rudeness play a *dominant* part in discourse, including

[...] army training discourse (Culpeper, 1996), courtroom discourse (Lakoff, 1989); Penman, 1990), family discourse (Vuchinich, 1990), adolescent discourse (Labov, 1972; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1990), doctor-patient discourse (Mehan, 1990), therapeutic discourse (Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Lakoff, 1989), ‘workplace’ discourse (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), parliamentary discourse (Harris, 2001), ‘everyday’ conversation’ (Beebe, 1995), radio talk shows (Hutchby, 1996), and fictional texts (Culpeper 1998)

(Culpeper *et al* 2003:1546)

As Jaworski *et al* (2004:3) point out, linguistic ‘rules’ arise from social norms or ‘folk beliefs’ about language, which in turn are established through ‘structured understandings, perhaps even ‘common sense’ understandings of how language works, what it is usually like, what certain ways of speaking connote and imply, what they *ought* to be like’ As such, they can be ignored or transgressed, especially by groups who do not wish to uphold the dominant ideology of a particular community or power hierarchy.

²⁵ These two elements of offence are not necessarily mutually exclusive

Culpeper notes that insulting/personalised vocatives are prototypically associated with contexts in which impoliteness occurs²⁶. However, this form of impoliteness is relatively rare in my own examination of Melvin's utterances, and certainly does not constitute the level of offence as reported in Jay's (1992) psycholinguistic study of swearing in American culture. Unconventional or indirect linguistic formulas can be just as damaging (indeed more so) than the types of expressions considered by the Nebraska Supreme Court as 'fighting words'.²⁷ Being able to convey impoliteness indirectly involves an appreciation of how language functions pragmatically and creatively (something at which Melvin, as an author, is exceptionally good).

3.1.1 Implicational Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011:155) identifies three means by which implicational impoliteness might be triggered. I focus on two of them in subsections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 below.²⁸

3.1.2 Implicational impoliteness: Form driven

In form-driven implicational impoliteness it is the surface form or semantic content of a behaviour which is marked and which, when triggered, can have 'negative consequences for certain individuals' (Culpeper 2011:157). In order for the 'negative consequence' (face damage) to find its mark, however, the target concerned must be able to understand the semantic content in the first place otherwise the end result will be non-comprehension rather than 'successful impoliteness' (cf. Bousfield 2008 and also Chapter Seven)²⁹. The discourse structure of the film however, which allows for dramatic irony to be produced and which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter, means that the puzzlement of the other characters is a source of amusement for the viewing audience who have more knowledge about Melvin's intentions as well as his behaviour generally. Examples of form-driven

²⁶ He uses the insulting vocative *motherfucker* as a typical example, which Jay (1992:178) claims to be 'the most offensive in American English'.

²⁷ Gard (1980) maintains that 'fighting words' have four defining components:

- 1) [the word(s)] 'must constitute an extremely provocative personal insult'
- 2) '[they] must have a direct tendency to cause immediate violent response by the average recipient'
- 3) 'the words must be uttered face-to-face to the addressee'
- 4) 'the utterance must be directed to an individual and not to a group of people'

As I will demonstrate in my own analyses, these components are all apparent in Melvin's behaviour towards the other characters, but are *not* conventionally administered through personalised negative vocatives or assertions.

²⁸ Culpeper's third category of 'context-driven' implicational impoliteness (whereby behaviour is *unmarked*) is not discussed as it does not feature within my data. Culpeper's approach to impoliteness is not agreed by all researchers; Bousfield, for example, argues that *all* impoliteness is implicational (personal communication 2013).

²⁹ The fuller argument and demonstration of such non-comprehension will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven which includes still-shots as evidence of 'failed impoliteness'.

implicational impoliteness include ‘insinuation’, ‘innuendo’, ‘casting aspersions’, ‘digs’, ‘snide comments/remarks’ (Culpeper 2011:156), all of which are regularly within Melvin’s day to day behavioural repertoire.

Whilst the notion of *off-record* FTAs was an aspect of *politeness* within Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model, Culpeper (2011:160) points out that ‘Off-recordness in contexts where the impoliteness interpretation is clear seems not to mollify the offence; if anything, it might exacerbate it’.

For Brown and Levinson, such off-recordness could be cancelled or denied should the recipient of the face damage challenge the speaker about their intentions, but this is something which cannot be done in contexts where an impolite message overrides a polite one (such as innuendos); indeed, as Bell (1997:46-7) has pointed out, innuendo has social properties which, unlike the logical properties of implicature (cf. Grice 1975) make it impossible to cancel out due to the fact that

[...] the cancellation or denial of an innuendo articulates and so *makes more explicit* what is considered to be non-mutually manifest

(Bell 1997:4607 my emphasis)

One of the reasons why much of Melvin’s offensive behaviour is so damaging to the other characters is because (due to the creative way Melvin frames his offence) it requires them to make extra cognitive effort in deciphering the impolite message which, in effect, makes them architects of their own face damage (cf. Bousfield 2007a.)

It is not just linguistic features which can propel us towards an impolite interpretation; prosodic cues such as intonation and mimicry can also play a significant part. Culpeper defines mimicry as ‘caricatured re-presentation’ (2011:160) and, taking Sperber and Wilson’s (1986:240) understanding of ‘echoic irony’ when trying to retrieve an implicature, Culpeper (2011) suggests that impolite mimicry consists of

[...] first ... a recognition of the behaviour as an echo; second, [as] an identification of the source of the behaviour echoed; third, the recognition that the source behaviour is a characteristic of the identity of the speaker who gave rise to it, and fourthly, on a recognition that the speaker’s attitude to the behaviour echoed is one of rejection or disapproval

(Culpeper 2011:161)

Such impolite mimicry is one of the ways in which Melvin conveys his bigoted attitude at the beginning of the film towards Simon's friend and manager Frank (see example 3.1.2.1 below). As his mimicry is shocking (and hence *foregrounded* given conventional politeness norms) we, as the viewer, are immediately alerted to aspects of Melvin's character, in particular, that a) Melvin has unreasonable/offensive opinions and b) he is not afraid to articulate them:

[Example 3.1.2.1]

[Context – *Melvin, annoyed that his neighbour's dog is roaming the apartment corridor again and attempting to urinate, has just unceremoniously forced it down the garbage chute. Simon comes out of his apartment calling for his dog. Growing increasingly worried, he spots Melvin about to enter his own apartment and risks an interaction...*]

(1) **Simon** – Mr Udall...Excuse me. [*Melvin is trying to ignore Simon*] Hey there! [*Melvin is forced to turn round*]. Have you seen Verdell?

(2) **Melvin** – [*looking puzzled*] What's he look like?

(3) **Simon** – [*slightly confused*] My dog...you know...I mean my little dog with the adorable face...don't you know what my dog looks like?

4) **Melvin** – I got it. You're talking about your dog. I thought it was the name of that coloured man I've been seeing in the hall.

(5) **Simon** – [*Glancing back towards his own apartment and calling Frank over*] What colour was that?

(6) **Melvin** [*parodying a deep Southern accent*] – Like thick *molasses*, with one of those wide noses perfect for smelling trouble and prison food...

[end]

At line 6 Melvin places unnecessary prosodic emphasis on the word *molasses*, which acts as a clear parody of a Deep South American accent. The exaggeration immediately triggers a schema or framework which links the intonation with images of black slavery in the nineteenth century, when intolerance and fear of ethnic minorities was at its highest. Peter Kolchin, writing on the history of American slavery 1619-1877, notes that during this time the English had three 'stereotypes' regarding African people which facilitated their enslavement via their 'difference'. In the first case their blackness was metonymically associated with immorality or uncleanness; secondly, they were seen as uncivilised (and

hence ‘savage’) and thirdly they were non-Christian. This is something which Kolchin notes as being the most damaging attribute of all ‘for in an era when being a wrong kind of Christian put one in mortal danger in most of Christendom (including most of the English colonies), being a non-Christian automatically put one beyond the pale’ (Kolchin 1995:15). For Melvin to instigate this image of Frank is an *extremely* marked form of behaviour, not only because it bears no resemblance to the way Frank actually speaks, but also because in 21st century westernised countries such as America, such bigoted behaviour is highly abhorrent and incongruous³⁰. As I will demonstrate later in the chapter sections, *incongruity* is a staple ingredient in many aspects of humour as well as being a defining feature within convention-driven implicational impoliteness, which I discuss next.

3.1.3 Implicational impoliteness: Convention-driven

Any behaviour which has the ability to shock or offend must involve incongruity. Incongruity arises when we have a clash of expectations. In convention-driven implicational impoliteness, the clash is actually a mixing of linguistic features – both conventionally polite and impolite, as Thomas’ (1995:176) verbatim example below illustrates:

[Example 3.1.3.1]

[Woman addressing importunate man]

Do me a favour – piss off!

In the above example there is a mixing of conventionalised politeness and conventionalised impoliteness formulae. The first part ‘do me a favour’ puts the speaker’s indebtedness on record (by mitigating the hearer’s negative face) whilst also being face-enhancing for the hearer as it suggests reciprocation for the requested ‘favour’. However, the second part of the suggestion attacks the hearer’s positive face by use of conventionalised taboo language (see Culpeper 1996), and also his negative face by excluding him from the current activities of the speaker. If both sides of ‘face’ can be manipulated simultaneously – as Thomas demonstrates - then they cannot be mutually exclusive as Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest. Indeed, Locher and Watts (2005) point out that

politeness is only a relatively small part of relational work (i.e. the ‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others [in order to pursue] their life goals and aspirations) [and as such, it] must be seen in relation to other types of interpersonal meaning.

³⁰ Unfortunately, even in 21st century liberalist societies such as America, racism is still going strong.

(Locher and Watts 2005:10)

The major point about this type of implicational impoliteness, however, is that the interpretation is more implicit and therefore involves more inferencing on the part of the target. For the impolite interpretation to find its mark, the target of the impoliteness must be able to discern or encode those features within the wider pragmatic context, and this may not always be the case, especially where the target has a different language or culture to the offender (see Chapter Seven). The mismatching of features exacerbates the force of the impolite message due to the fact that

A conventionalised politeness formula can provide ... a reference point against which a conventionalised impoliteness formula or context predicting an impolite interpretation can be assessed. It alludes to a desired politeness context and in doing so provides a measure of the extreme distance by which the message flowing from the conventionalised impoliteness formula or context falls short.

(Culpeper 2011:168)

If we look again at example [3.1.2.1] above, at line [4], Melvin begins by conveying two things: firstly, that he has an understanding about the activity type (cf. Levinson 1979) in which he and Simon are engaged (this being a discussion about a missing dog), and secondly the suggestion that he is going to be amenable to Simon's query. In the split second we see Simon's face clear as he also arrives at the same conclusion, Melvin not only switches the activity type but he also administers an offensive attack on Simon's friend. In this case, then, there is an external mismatch between Melvin's polite acknowledgement and his implicit racist utterance which immediately follows it.

The fact that Melvin uses implicational impoliteness rather than conventional or gratuitous formulas is something which, I will argue, makes the film entertaining for the viewer due to the creative way in which Melvin formulates his offensiveness. This is not to suggest that we are amused by Melvin's racist comments because we ourselves have racist tendencies; such is the complex nature of humour that we can find amusement in Melvin's impolite behaviour for a variety of reasons, one of which is through a release of the tension which we can build up when observing his racist comments. This is something I will discuss shortly in section 3.3. Traditional humour theory however, maintains that we have an inherent desire to feel complacency and superiority towards others who are in a less favourable position than ourselves such as watching the disparagement of others. This idea in itself suggests a rather dark side to human nature but, as I will shortly be discussing, and as Billig (2005:2) in his

critical view of humour points out, ‘common-sense beliefs about humour are not straightforward’. Indeed, rather than adhering conventionally to the popular idea that it is good *to* laugh - as positivist psychology would have us believe (see Billig 2005), what we need to consider is the idea that it feels good to laugh *at* others...in other words, it is the notion of *ridicule* which we in fact appreciate, and which, I maintain, is central to our ability to be entertained by impoliteness (see Chapter Five).

3.2 Entertaining impoliteness

Whilst Culpeper (2011:233) describes this type of impoliteness as ‘exploitative’, what do we actually mean when we talk of being ‘entertained’? Media communication researchers have acknowledged that they ‘do not have sufficient understanding of all that entertainment includes’ (Klimmt and Vorderer, 2003). Zillmann and Bryant (1994:437) consider it to be a ‘ubiquitous phenomenon’ and have defined it as

[...] any activity designed to delight and, to a smaller degree, enlighten through the exhibition of the fortune or misfortunes of others, but also through the display of special skills by others and/or self... [it is a concept which] encompasses more than comedy, drama and tragedy

(Zillmann and Bryant 1994:438)

In the above definition there is the suggestion that (in certain contexts) being entertained is analogous to being ‘delighted’ and, not only that, but also being delighted *at the misfortunes of others*. If such appreciation is indeed ‘ubiquitous’ then this endorses Billig’s (2005) argument that ‘ridicule lies at the core of social life’ (Billig 2005:2). But why should there be any correlation between aggressiveness and entertainment? The answer lies in the word *social*. As Culpeper (2011) points out, impoliteness which is designed for entertainment purposes functions in order to amuse others (typically those who are *not* targets of the impoliteness). Since the earliest days of civilisation when human groups no longer had to struggle to survive, and consequently had more time to relax, we have actively sought out entertainment (Zillmann and Bryant 1994:437; see also Manilowski 1948). Moreover, we have sought out such entertainment using *conflict* as a hook. Early forms of entertainment centred around live-action events in front of an audience such as gladiator battles in ancient Rome and horse racing in British stadia (Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld 2004:388; see also Zillmann 2000). The next question to be posed, then, is why we should gain such social enjoyment from something which is (on the surface) anti-social. Culpeper (2011:234/5)

suggests that the link is in the type of ‘pleasure’ we are able to experience when viewing impoliteness as entertainment, for which he posits five sources:

Emotional pleasure

Here we experience an inherent emotional enjoyment when viewing conflict. Culpeper quotes Myers (2001:174) who points out that the ‘potential for violence’ is enough to form an affective response within the viewer i.e. for the viewer to experience a ‘thrill’, hence our enjoyment at live-action spectator sports such as boxing.

Aesthetic Pleasure

This type of pleasure is derived from ‘socially negative uses of verbal creativity’ (Culpeper 2005:46). In literary genres in particular, conflict and verbal creativity are complementary devices which enable the elaboration of characterisation and plot (see Culpeper 1996: 364-6; Culpeper 1998; Rudanko 2006). Drawing on Carter’s (2004) work on language and creativity, Culpeper (2011:239) considers the way that verbal creativity can be a very effective (and amusing) way of conveying face-attack³¹. He points out that, whilst creativity is not confined to entertaining impoliteness, it is nonetheless an important feature of it. This is because creativity in language allows us to deviate from conventionality (i.e. be *incongruous*) as well as allowing for linguistic devices such as presuppositions and implicatures to be set in place as discussed in Section 3.1.1 above. Such devices are powerful *indirect* conveyers of impoliteness and any deviation in language is by its definition foregrounded.

However, when discussing ‘creativity’ in language and interactions we need to understand what such creativity entails. Carter notes that there are two levels: the first one – that of pattern *re-forming* is:

more overt, [with] presentational uses of language, open displays of metaphoric invention, punning, uses of idioms and departures from expected idiomatic formulations

(Carter 2004:109)

³¹ Whilst Carter acknowledges the use of creativity for conflictive purposes, his own data was limited to instances of creative language use for ‘convergent purposes’ (Carter 2004:160)

The second level – that of *pattern forming* is:

[...] less overt, maybe even subconscious and subliminal parallelisms, echoes and related matchings which regularly result in expressions of affective convergence, in signals of intimacy and in explicit symmetries of feeling

(Carter 2004:109)

Culpeper notes two more kinds of creativity in language: one of which he classes as ‘situational deviance’ (2011:241). He cites Leech (1969:182) who, whilst discussing the deviational effects in poetry noted, that ‘one special kind of violation ...arises when a piece of language is somehow at odds with the immediate situation in which it occurs’. The last kind of creativity which Culpeper acknowledges is also alluded to by Carter, who describes it as ‘unusual implicitness’ in which

The well-known truths expressed by proverbs are usually oblique and implicit rather than direct statements, they often have a metaphorical basis and their indirectness prompts interpretation and a ‘creative’ inference of meaning

(Carter 2004:134)

Such aspects of creativity - especially pattern re-forming - have been observed by Culpeper (2011:235) in his discussion of a (supposedly genuine) letter of complaint by a customer of a telephone cable company³². The letter was circulated on the internet for the sole purpose of providing entertainment for third parties. Internet responses from those parties confirm unanimously their appreciation of the author’s offensive linguistic creativity.

Voyeuristic pleasure

Culpeper notes that voyeuristic pleasure can be gained through the observance of others in conflictive situations. Richardson and Meinhof (1999:132) cite television talk shows as typical examples here which they maintain trade on ‘the exploitation of human weaknesses’. More recently, Lorenzo-Dus (2009:162) also notes that the rise in reality television shows since the 1990s is due, in part, to the ‘climate of voyeurism’ which appears to have progressed analogously with shows which explicitly trade on the unmitigated face-attack of the individuals involved e.g. *The Weakest Link*; *Hell’s Kitchen*; *The Jeremy Kyle Show* to name a few examples from British T.V.

³² <http://www.derbygripe.co.uk/ntl.htm>

The pleasure of being superior

The notion of Superiority as a factor for feeling entertained (through viewing the disparagement or degradation of others) is not new. The early observations as put forward by philosophers such as Aristotle (*Poetics*), Plato (*Philebus*) and Hobbes (*Leviathan*) have become generally regarded as the Superiority theory of humour. Humour theory will be addressed shortly, but in general terms we gain pleasant feelings of superiority when

[...] we compare ourselves favourably to others as being less stupid, less ugly, less unfortunate, or less weak

(Keith-Spiegel 1972:6)

The pleasure of feeling secure

This is something (along with *superiority* above) which the discourse structure in my data allows for, and which I address in more detail in the following chapter. Culpeper draws on his translation of Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura*, Book 11, 1-4) who sums up the idea of entertainment-through-security as follows:

It is pleasant, when on the great sea the winds are agitating the waters,
To look from the land on another's great struggle;
Not because it is a delectable joy that anyone be distressed
But because it is pleasant to see what ills you yourself are free from³³

The fact that we can gain such 'pleasure' suggests that it is 'good to laugh'. However, in order to appreciate fully why we have the capacity to enjoy offensiveness towards others, we need to disregard our common-sense ideology that humour is necessarily good (Billig 2005). As with language, ideologies change over the centuries and the notion of humour is no exception. In the following section, then, I will discuss briefly the three major components of what is conventionally referred to as 'traditional' humour theory, including the ideas put forward concerning the social function of ridicule. Humour and ridicule will be discussed again in Chapter Five where they will be assessed within examples from my data.

³³ Culpeper's (2005) translation of:

Sauve, mari magno turbantibus ventis
E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
Non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
Sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere saepe est.

3.3 Theories of humour

Like impoliteness, the concept of humour³⁴ is just as intriguing and resistant to definitional succinctness due to the fact that it is one of the least understood phenomena within the domain of philosophical psychology (Morreal 1983:297). Indeed, Attardo (1994) has argued that '[humour] is impossible to define "a priori"'. Whilst its modern-day conventional understanding is used to denote all things amusing or funny, originally a humour was one of the four bodily fluids which controlled a person's moods (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile). A 'humorist', then, was 'a person with an extreme character that seemed to comprise a single humour rather than a balance of various humours' (Billig 2005:62).

Theatrical comedy in the early eighteenth century typically featured characters with extreme temperaments. As audiences continued to laugh at the absurdity of the stock figures, the word 'humour' over time metonymically became associated with comic or 'humorous' characters (Billig 2005:62). Such an association also explains why the notion of humour is heavily centred on laughter and pleasure (cf. Bergson 1911; Freud 1905). But this assumed association belies the ambiguous nature of humour and laughing; laughing does not *automatically* denote pleasant feelings (one merely has to imagine laughing triumphantly over an adversary), and conversely, situations which are in no way intrinsically amusing e.g. fear or tragedy can (in some situations) evoke a response of laughter (as in hysterical laughter brought on by extreme shock). Keith-Spiegel (1972) has accurately pointed out that 'the most important point to be made is that laughter may be forthcoming as a reaction to *any* sort of emotional state, not solely amusement' (Keith-Spiegel 1972:17, emphasis in original).

Although laughter may not be the sole indicator of amusement, Holmes (2000:163) nonetheless points out that it is still a 'crucial auditory clue' to the identification of amusement. This is absolutely necessary for performers of stand-up comedy who rely on laughter as a positive feedback device. Acknowledging that instances of humour can 'fall flat' indicates that hearer uptake is as important a consideration as the speaker's intention to amuse. More importantly, the hearer needs to *understand* and *accept* that intention, and then *allow* for the perception of amusement to be experienced. Failure of uptake on any one of

³⁴ For the majority of this discussion I will adhere to the English spelling of the word, although some quotes may use the American spelling.

these conditions will affect the (desired) response from the hearer³⁵. Cultural variations concerning what is or is not perceived as humorous are also necessary considerations when trying to understand the pragmatics of humour, and this is something which I address again in Chapter Seven.

In his social critique of humour, Billig (2005) argues that humour's 'significant force within mass culture' is due to its necessary role in being able to sustain serious social life (2005:4). He points out that the entertainment industry spends billions of dollars every night of the week in making us laugh. Such is our pursuit of humour in modern day society, that the genre of comedy has been described as a 'giant' within television entertainment (Zillmann and Bryant 1991:261). The fact that my data is a media construct which has been designed specifically for people to watch is enough to define it as 'entertaining'; but in what way might we perceive Melvin's behaviour as humorous or comedic? In order to understand this we need to look at the way the concept of humour has evolved and the various approaches which have attempted to explain why we laugh; and in particular, why we laugh at others.

3.3.1 The Superiority Theory of Humour

Arguably the oldest of the three approaches to explaining humour/laughter is what has become known as the *superiority* or *degradation* theory. Although early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle made conjectures on the nature of laughing, it wasn't until Hobbes' profound writings on the human condition in the seventeenth century that any 'theory' was put forward at all. As Billig (2005) points out, the notion of 'humour' as a subject for study did not exist as such. Hobbes' psychological account of human nature written in 1640 and published in 1650 was a dangerous endeavour. He was writing amidst much social unrest; indeed, the English Civil War was to break out two years later forcing Hobbes to flee the country for his own safety³⁶. For Hobbes, human nature – humour included – was a cynical business. He believed humans were driven by selfish materialistic 'passions'; these passions – which were in reality our feelings of morality – were first perceived in the mind – as an 'internal substance of the head' – and then felt in the heart, where they produced either

³⁵ A notable instance of non-acceptance of humour occurred in 1985 with the controversial comedian Roy 'Chubby' Brown. He appeared on stage in Bradford a few days after the Bradford City Stadium Fire in which 56 people died and 265 were injured and 'joked' to the audience: "*You didn't invite me to your barbecue, you bastards!*". Not only was the comedian booed off stage he was also allegedly 'chased out of town' (<http://www.sabotagetimes.com/life/the-bradford-city-fire-26-years-on/> accessed 28th June 2011)

³⁶ Hobbes left England before the publication of *Human Nature* and before the outbreak of war.

pleasure or pain. As selfish creatures, then, we are driven towards things which afford us pleasure and are repelled away from that which causes us pain. For Hobbes, there was no such thing as *goodness* being an intrinsic attribute of humans, for

Every man, for his own part, calleth that which pleaseth, and is delightful to *himself*,
GOOD

(Hobbes [1650] 1999:44, my italics, emphasis in original)

Hobbes systematically listed those virtues which we would automatically denote as having altruistic motives and instead subjected them to an alternative interpretation in order to demonstrate the delusion of man. For example, ‘courage’ was simply ‘contempt of wounds and death’ (1999:52); ‘pity’ towards others as nothing more than fear of a similar misfortune happening to ourselves, and ‘charity’ which, rather than something in which we ‘bestow...benefits on strangers’, is merely a ‘contract’ in which we seek to purchase friendship, or in the case of being afraid of the other person, we seek it to purchase peace ([1650] 1999:57). His treatment of laughter was also subjected to the same cynical treatment; it was

[...] nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others

(Hobbes [1650] 1999:54)

Hobbes’ ideas were especially shocking in the mid seventeenth century when religious fervour was at its highest. His depiction of man - who was purportedly made in God’s own image - to be nothing more than a venal, self-seeking individual was tantamount to heresy³⁷. Hobbes claimed that the ‘passion of laughter’ was derived from observing ‘the infirmities of others wherewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated’ (1999:54). By comparing others less favourably to ourselves we gain feelings of ‘eminence’ which we find pleasant and which induces us to laugh, although we ‘take it ‘heinously’ to be laughed at or derided’ (1999:54). The impulse to laugh *in derision* at others places ridicule at the centre of the superiority theory.

For Hobbes, there were no grey areas in what we laughed at, and the rigidity of his views has been described by Billig (2005:53) as ‘an essentially meaningless manifestation of an inner emotional state’ which does not consider the idea of laughter as being a social phenomenon.

³⁷ This, of course, depended on your own version of Christianity as there were different denominations or faiths emerging at this time (see MacCulloch 2010)

A hundred years later the social climate was to change politically and economically, and with the idea of *wit* rather than humour being the new genteel pastime for Victorian gentlemen, ‘incongruity theory’ was developed (Billig 2005).

3.3.2 Incongruity Theory

Incongruity theory was an alternative explanation for humour and laughter which was developed when Hobbes’ critics pointed out that people have the capacity to laugh not just at other people but also at other aspects of the world. By the eighteenth century, the social and political climate had changed significantly from Hobbes’ day, and the concept of humour and laughter was a popular (albeit serious) concept for debate amongst philosophers and literary thinkers (Billig 2005). However, whilst the notion of bawdy humour was still popular in the London theatres, for the Victorian gentleman it was unthinkable to laugh at such behaviour. In the aesthetic climate of the new coffee houses it was important to know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate forms of laughter. As Billig (2005) points out, the idea of gentlemanly *wit* became the new acceptable way to partake in ‘amiable humour’³⁸ (see Tave 1960), and the idea of incongruity developed against this backdrop. Incongruity theory, then, was in effect a theory of wit, the ability to produce clever verbal sayings and in particular ideas which, whilst in reality very different, were brought together as if they were similar. Central to the idea of wit was the element of surprise, and it was this surprise, coupled with the dissimilarities, which, it was argued, produced the incongruous (and allegedly comic) effect.

Whilst incongruity theory by itself is unable to account for cases of emotional humour which trade on the humility or deformity of others, its relationship to impoliteness may be observed due to the fact that ‘much humour stems from violations of what is socially or culturally agreed to be normal’ (Meyer 2000:314). Incongruity, like impoliteness, then, may be seen as a form of *deviation*. As a theory of humour, the idea suffers from the same rigidity as Hobbes’ idea that laughter was *nothing more* than a feeling of smugness when contemplating the infirmities of others. As such, it must be placed in proper perspective when considering the nature of humour and laughter. As Palmer (1994) has pointed out, not everything that is

³⁸ In effect, making the idea of *wit* a form of humour which was class-specific.

incongruous is automatically funny; hence incongruity cannot by itself be accountable for humour. In particular:

Some incongruities may be so minor that they pass more or less unnoticed; others may be so major as to be positively threatening

(Palmer 1994:99)

Although Incongruity theory was developed as an alternative to Hobbes' *cynical* view of laughter, the idea of contempt could not entirely be dismissed even when disguised as 'wit'. Beattie (1779:320), acknowledging that laughter could be provoked by 'two or more inconsistent, unsuitable or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage', pointed out that it was more easily elicited when 'things important, serious or great, are ludicrously compared to such as are *mean, frivolous or vulgar*' (1779:353 my emphasis). Similarly, Hutcheson (1758) in his *Thoughts on Laughter*, pointed out that lapses in taste or behaviour by dignified people are 'more effectually corrected by ridicule than by grave admonition' (1758:51). However, base motives such as these are not something to which we easily or readily admit. The idea of laughing at others through unconscious motivation will be discussed shortly in section 3.3.4. I turn now to the third theory of humour to be discussed known variously as *relief* or *release*.

3.3.3 Relief/Release theory of humour

The 'relief' or 'release' theory of humour attempts to account for the fact that situations involving tension (even though they may not be inherently amusing), can result in laughter as a way of alleviating the emotional strain involved by releasing us from our 'inhibitions, conventions and laws' (Attardo 1994:50). The idea of laughter as a form of release was originally put forward by Herbert Spencer (1864), who maintained that laughter was a form of 'muscular excitement' brought on by emotional feeling which has passed a certain pitch resulting in an accumulation of nervous energy (1864:110-11). Spencer proposed a theory of 'descending incongruities' to explain how such muscular excitement might be generated in the first place. By using the analogy of a goat wandering onto a stage whilst a serious play is under way, Spencer argued that the audience's anticipation regarding the climax of the play would have resulted in an accumulation of tension for them. The incongruity of the goat's appearance interrupts the scene causing the audience members to laugh-though not out of any desire to humiliate the actors. Spencer explained this outburst of laughter as occurring 'when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small-only when there is what we

may call a *descending* incongruity' (Spencer 1864:116, emphasis in original). He goes on to explain that for those people in the audience who are *not* provoked to laugh at the incongruity, it is because 'there has arisen in them an emotion not participated in by the rest ...which is sufficiently massive to absorb all the nascent excitement'³⁹. What this emotion might be Spencer does not say, and his ideas on the whole are rather vague, but, in relation to the present study (and impoliteness in general), we can see how *relief* may be a component which can excite laughter when we consider the *tension* which surrounds us to uphold and maintain constant forms of socially accepted behaviour (politeness).

Instead of thinking about the effects of laughter, as Spencer had done, a contemporary of Spencer's – Alexander Bain - tried to determine its causes. Firstly, he disregarded the incongruity approach to humour arguing that some things which were incongruous were anything but funny: 'a decrepit man under a heavy burden, five loaves and two fishes among a multitude...an instrument out of tune, a fly in ointment, snow in May etc' (Bain 1865:247-8). Drawing from Hobbes' ideas regarding humour through superiority, Bain argued that it was in fact a feeling of *degradation* towards someone or some idea which gave us pleasure:

The occasion of the ludicrous is the Degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity, in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion

(Bain 1865:248)

In particular, then, it was our desire to degrade people possessing dignity or solemnity which Bain emphasised, endorsing the earlier ideas of the Victorian incongruity theorists Beattie and Hutcheson. Secondly, Bain maintained that, when we laugh, it is often as a result of being constrained, especially where that constraint is serious in nature, thus connecting together the idea of release from constraint with the idea of degradation.

When we observe Melvin's blatantly offensive comment at lines 4 and 6 in example [3.1.2.1] above, we may (arguably) experience *relief* in the knowledge that it is not us who are breaking such strict social rules, and the relief may be expressed or *released* in the form of shocked laughter because we are morally free from the social constraints that surround anti-social behaviour. Each theory or approach by itself cannot explain the nature of humour or the reasons why we laugh, but if we combine the three approaches together there is at least

³⁹ The audience's laughter at the goat is as a result of them being 'popped out' of the scene in which they are absorbed in, and hence brought back to reality. The terms *POPPing* and *PUSHing* are used by Galbraith (1995) to explain how we are able to 'move' within a fictional universe, in particular, how we are projected in and out of them. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four.

some explanation as to why we may want to laugh at some scenes in the film which, on the surface, are offensive and not comedic. If we take the above example again we can see how this might work:

- Superiority/degradation may be perceived if we laugh at Melvin ridiculing Simon and Frank and we are safe metaphorically from Melvin's acerbic comments.
- Incongruity can be noted because Melvin's behaviour is socially deviant. We may laugh at this because *anything* incongruous has the potential to excite laughter.
- Release/relief may be noted as our laughter can dispel the tension which Melvin's anti-social behaviour might create in us.

Whilst there may be elements of all three approaches when considering our motives for laughing at Melvin (if, indeed we do), the idea of release is a significant explanation, especially when we consider the popularity of some stand-up comedians who are notable for their racist and discriminatory material. They trade on the fact that audiences *enjoy* watching them subvert social and behavioural niceties; and the reason they enjoy it is because they are morally free (temporarily) from the social constraints which surround them.

Talking about laughter as a relief from tension or constraint implies that humour serves some kind of function. For Spencer that function was biological (it enabled the release of nervous energy), whilst for Bain it was partly physiological (laughter was a release from constraint) and partly social (because he connected that release with the idea of ridiculing others of a serious disposition):

[...] the comic is a reaction from the serious. The dignified, solemn, and stately attributes of things require in us a certain posture of rigid constraint; and if we are suddenly relieved from this posture, the rebound of hilarity ensues, as in the case of children set free from school

(Bain 1865:250)

For Bain, then, laughter was rebellious in nature. In particular, laughter-through-degradation allowed us to 'waive even our serious feelings of respect [towards] false or faded deities and dignities'. Other elements which did 'not command serious homage' were:

splendour and show without meaning; the unworthy occupants of high office; hollow pretensions; affectation; assumption and self-importance, vanity, airs and coxcombry; all the windings of the hypocrisy that aims at seeming greater than the reality, [and] painful strivings to gain glittering positions

(Bain 1865:251)

Hilarity may ensue, but it was not something we would easily admit to. Bain pointed out that even the incongruity theorists, whilst on the surface enjoying innocent witty repartee, were deep-down enjoying a *hidden* rebelliousness against people of dignity or high-standing, except ‘the indignity is disguised, and, as it were, oiled by some kindly infusion’ (Bain 1865:249). Whilst not explicitly articulated by Bain, we can see hints of what modern-day psychologists would refer to as *repression* – where we have ‘the recognition of incompatibility between desires and morality’ (Boag 2012:6). Forty years later the two most profound writers on the theory of humour – Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud - both made observations which suggested that far from being a physiological reaction to a stimulus, laughter served a darker social purpose. The remainder of this chapter will be an outline of their basic ideas, with wider discussion and implications being reserved for Chapter Five where they are discussed in relation to the data under observation.

3.3.4 Freud’s (1905) theory of humour and laughter

In line with Hobbes’ ideas two centuries earlier, Freud placed humour and laughter under suspicion. For Freud, this was because the human nature is marked by self-deception as we try to continually repress dangerous instinctual urges of sexuality and aggression from invading our everyday behaviour. This was necessary in order to uphold the moral fabric of society. However, as Freud pointed out, such repression was not always successful as our unconscious instincts attempt to thwart us in various ways. Dreams, for example, are prime ways in which our wishes and instincts can manifest themselves without censure: ‘Every dream is the fulfilment of a wish’ (Freud [1900] 1990:214). Similarly, slips of the tongue are not as innocent as we might believe, but are in fact indications of hidden desires whereby ‘unconscious thoughts find expression as modification of other thoughts’ (Freud [1901] 1975:342). It was the same for humour and in particular, jokes. Freud distinguished between two types of jokes; ‘innocent’, in which ‘the joke is an end in itself and serves no particular aim’ (such as a pun), and ‘tendentious’, in which the joke does serve an aim (typically the breaking of a social taboo or the humiliation or disparagement of others) (Freud [1905] 1991:132). However, as with the incongruity theorists who assumed their wit to be inoffensive, even supposedly innocent jokes could have a deeper hidden agenda in which there is a ‘kernel of thought’ enclosed within a ‘joking envelope’, that is, the play on words or joking technique (Freud [1905] 1991:135). Joking envelopes enable us to overcome social

restrictions because they allow us to express something – that which may be hostile or obscene or both – which we would not normally be able to say, and tendentious jokes in particular ‘evade restrictions and open sources of *pleasure* that have become inaccessible’ (Freud [1905] 1991:147 my emphasis). That we can gain such pleasure suggests a more fundamental reason behind our laughter than the mere surface form of the words. Freud recognised that word-play was able to camouflage taboo or hostile behaviour, and maintained that jokes which did contain such elements were more likely to result in more intense mirth from the receiver, and this was because, rather than laughing at the surface form of the joke (which should not really be able to account for extreme laughter), what we were actually responding to was the hidden socially-censored content of the joke itself.

According to Billig (2005), Freud’s theory suggests that moral judgements are closely tied up with tendentious humour. As he points out:

Laughter at an aggressive joke does not merely express an appreciation of the joke-work but *validates* the mocking of a particular target. If the target is deemed morally inappropriate, then the result is likely to be explicit disapproval

(Billig 2005:159 my emphasis)

The interesting thing to note here in relation to *As Good As It Gets* is that, depending on where we place ourselves within the fictional world of the film it can impact on how we view Melvin’s behaviour towards the other characters. This is something which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, but for simplicity’s sake here, it can make a difference in respect of how we *validate* Melvin’s behaviour (by placing ourselves within *his* world and thereby taking on *his* perspective), or whether we feel moral condemnation against him (by projecting into the world of another character). The classification of the film prompts us towards the former reaction but, as Billig points out regarding the nature of tendentious humour (and as some stand-up comedians know only too well):

Extreme reactions are to be expected: the joke-form that is liable to be greeted by intense laughter is also liable, under other circumstances, to evoke strong disapproval

(Billig 2005:159)

For Freud, then, jokes were another avenue in which we could bring about ‘the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile) in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way’ (Freud [1905] 1991:144). As such, tendentious jokes could serve a rhetorical function by allowing us to mock an enemy indirectly and thereby ‘achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of

overcoming him' (Freud [1905] 1991:147). Not only does this suggest (like Bain) a rebellious function socially, but there is also a feeling of release to be gained by being able to express that which we would otherwise have to repress, thereby releasing us momentarily from a social constraint. In addition, such is the coercive power rhetorically of the 'joking envelope' that it makes challenging the speaker's intentions very difficult, for fear of reprisal that the recipient lacks a 'sense of humour' – another criticism in itself (see Chapter Five and example [5.2.1]). Indeed, researchers such as Holmes (2000) have demonstrated the coercive power of humour within the workplace whereby it is

Used by those in authority as a repressive discourse device, concealing the authority structures or power relations involved in order to gain the addressee's compliance. In this case, humour functions strategically, encoding a directive or criticism in a more acceptable form...which makes the negative communicative intent less easy to challenge

(Holmes 2000:179)

Both Freud and Bain suggested that ridicule could serve a social function (one of rebellion), but a more compelling idea was put forward by one of Freud's contemporaries who suggested that ridicule could actually serve as a disciplinary force within society. The remainder of this chapter will be an outline of Bergson's (1911) ideas on *Laughter*. As already mentioned, I will take up these ideas again in more detail in Chapter Five.

3.3.5 Bergson's theory of humour and laughter

In his groundbreaking essay *Laughter*, Bergson (1911) made three observations which, when considered together, suggest that laughter can have a disturbing function within society:

Observation No 1 - *laughter is human*:

Several have defined man as "an animal which laughs." They might equally well have defined him as an animal *which is laughed at*

(Bergson 1911:4 my emphasis)

Observation No 2 - *laughter accompanies an absence of feeling*:

[...] laughter has no greater foe than emotion [when we laugh] we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity

(Bergson 1911: 4)

Observation No 3 – *laughter is a social phenomenon*:

To understand laughter we must put it back in its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one

(Bergson 1911:4)

For Bergson, then, when we laugh, we invariably laugh at other people, and when we do so there is an absence of social feeling or empathy. Unlike modern-day psychologists who espouse the ‘common-sense’, that is, unquestioningly *positive* aspects of humour and laughter, Bergson was talking about something much darker and distasteful; the notion of ridicule. More worryingly, he implied that such ridicule could serve a function in society. For Bergson, laughter was provoked by habitual or rigid behaviour, and its function was to alleviate ‘inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body’ (1911:19). In other words, ‘rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective’ (Bergson 1911:21). Bergson then concluded with something very insightful:

[...] society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing, which, although it is slight, is nonetheless dreaded...
[laughter is] always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed

(Bergson 1911:135)

For Bergson, laughter in the form of ridicule essentially served as a disciplinary function within society to prevent the ossification or rigidity of social life (Billig 2005: 128). In describing his notion of rigid behaviour, Bergson was referring to people who did not speak or act in a conventional way and this was the reason we laughed at them. This made the comic ‘frequently dependent on the manners or ideas, or to put it bluntly, on the prejudices of society’ (Bergson 1911:138). Laughing at such characteristics in others implies that, not only is the ‘rigid’ person refusing to comply with society’s conventions, the laughter is functioning as a way of exerting social compliance, and the pleasure we experience through laughter ‘always implies a secret or unconscious intent’ (1911:135-6). Bergson goes on to point out that

In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed

(Bergson 1911:136)

And similar to Freud’s ideas above, there is the implication in Bergson’s theory that our intention to humiliate is a *repressed* one. Billig succinctly sums up Bergson’s ideas thus:

The pleasure of laughter depends on a lack of sympathy or a temporary anaesthesia of the heart. The cruelty of our laughter does not reflect well on us. The desire to humiliate the person at whom we laugh is unadmitted, unavowed - to be disavowed should we ever be challenged. This is a secret intent - secret, not just from others, but also from *ourselves*

(Billig 2005:134 my emphasis)

If ridicule is central to humour, and humour is a social phenomena, then understanding the communicative force of ridicule must be a learned behaviour. This is something that Bergson did not explore. Whilst there is a paucity of psychological studies which detail how parents might employ mockery as a way of disciplining their children, Buss (1980:232) has suggested that ‘one of the prime means of socialisation is through teasing, laughter and ridicule’. This is not something I have space to discuss here, but interested readers may refer to Schieffelin (1986, 1990); Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1986); Eisenberg (1986) and Clancy (1986).

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the idea of impoliteness as an entertainment device. This idea in itself is not new. In order to unpack it further however, I have combined Culpeper’s (2011) findings on the notion of ‘entertaining impoliteness’ alongside traditional humour theory so that I might consider why some will laugh at offensiveness towards others. What seems to have emerged is a distinct *overlap* between the two concepts.

Firstly, I considered the way that ‘implicational’ impoliteness and the ‘mismatching’ of conventional linguistic forms when coupled with creative (or non-conventional) forms can produce incongruous results. As a staple form of traditional humour theory, incongruity works by combining disparate concepts together as if they were similar, to produce novel (and therefore surprising) results. Impoliteness at its most basic definition is behaviour which is incongruous (however much it might be expected or accepted), as it goes *against* the expected social norm of politeness. Behaviour which has the potential to disrupt our expectations also has the potential to provoke laughter (although that laughter may not necessarily signal amusement).

Much of humour’s affinity with impoliteness is based on the concept of ‘tendentious’ humour, i.e. that somebody is the object of ridicule or derision, and superiority humour theory maintains that observing others in a less favourable position is something we can enjoy. ‘Reality’ television shows are aware of this; indeed, their basic format is to focus on

the exploitation of the weaknesses of the contestants for the benefit of the viewing audience. As viewers of such exploitation, we are at liberty to feel metaphorically safe from the on-screen conflict whilst at the same time enjoying a sense of social release as we watch someone else break taboos or conventions, and this release may be in the form of laughter. Impoliteness (especially ‘affective impoliteness’ – see Culpeper 2011) is also something which we can resort to in order to discharge a build-up of tension (in the form of anger), and the impoliteness we then engage in affords us emotional release.

Due to the overlap which appears to exist between offensiveness and humour, there is always going to be the potential for some situations (which have been framed as *funny*) to be perceived as offensive, and conversely, there will be, for some, amusement to be gained from viewing offensiveness towards others. This leaves us with a fragile conundrum; at what point does something stop being amusing and suddenly become offensive for us? This is an area for future research to consider but may be contemplated when viewing the film under scrutiny. In the current chapter I have considered traditional theories of humour and how we might draw on them as a way of explaining *to some extent* why we should want to laugh at offensive behaviour towards others. However, the theories do not, by themselves, account for what happens to us cognitively when we watch a film or read a book. In Chapter Four, then, I discuss how we are projected into fictional worlds, as well as considering the film’s discourse structure, in order to explain how the screenwriters have manipulated us to feel amused by Melvin’s socially disturbing behaviour.

CHAPTER 4

Discourse levels: architecture and expectations

In Chapter 3 I suggested that linguistic theories of facework and humour by themselves do not go far enough to explain certain receiver responses whilst viewing dramatic discourse. In particular they are unable to fully explain the way in which an audience viewer is ‘guided’ to perceive ostensibly *offensive* behaviour as *humorous*. This is because when we engage in the act of interpreting – be it textual or visual stimuli triggers - there are cognitive processes occurring contextually (cf. Stockwell 2002, Gavins and Steen 2003, van Dijk 1976, 1977, 1978, 2006). We need to understand how such processes impact on our comprehension of a discourse if we are to explore in fullest detail how an *ideal* or *sensitive* interpretation of a text is made possible. In respect to the film under observation, this would mean recognising and acknowledging that the protagonist’s (Melvin Udall’s) behaviour towards the other characters, while clearly offensive on the surface, is nevertheless intended to be perceived as amusing for the receiving viewer. How we are able to arrive at these interpretations involves more than a straightforward consideration of linguistic form and function.

My aim within this current chapter is to consider how the discourse ‘architecture’ of drama (cf. Short 1996), when applied alongside recent research concerning reader responses in fictional texts, can enable us as viewers to make richer interpretations regarding a character’s behaviour. To do this, I incorporate a discussion of Possible Worlds Theory (Ryan 1991) and, taking Ryan’s (1980) concept of *The Principle of Minimal Departure*, I discuss how Short’s discourse architecture can complement Ryan’s ideas by being viewed as a construct which can symbolise a series of alternate possible worlds for the characters, which we as viewers are able to ‘enter’ and ‘emerge’ from through a series of ‘deictic shifts’ (Galbraith 1995, McIntyre 2006). Prototypical drama – of the type I am investigating here - consists of only two levels of discourse, but where there are more than two levels, for example in plays which have one or more narrators, the discourse levels can increase accordingly. This could offer interesting implications in relation to Ryan’s ideas concerning the various possible worlds within each level and is an interesting prospect for future research to consider.

Once we accept that we can ‘involve’ ourselves within a fictional world (Galbraith 1995, Werth 1997, Semino 1997) and ‘recognise, understand and appreciate [the] fictional characters insofar as their appearances, actions, and speech reflect or refer to those of persons

in real-life' (Mead 1990:442), then we are in a strong position to explore not only a character's behaviour under scrutiny, but also consider, as viewer's, how *our* reactions and interpretations of that behaviour might be being shaped or influenced *schematically*. By this, I mean to consider the way we perceive behaviour and events according to our established world knowledge and expectations regarding them (see section 4.5). With this in mind, I will be incorporating Tannen's (1993:53) research on the way people's expectations regarding fictional events can 'serve to filter and shape perception'. Her findings allow for a more finely nuanced analysis of how, as viewers, we respond to (in this case) a film, in light of our own schematic behavioural expectations. I begin first, however, with the basic features of a dramatic fictional structure.

4.1 Short's (1996) 'Discourse Architecture'

Being able to elicit a response of amusement and/or laughter from an audience member is paramount for stand-up comedians as well as writers of humorous plays, films, television and radio shows. When the content of the material is largely offensive (such as 'blue' comedians)⁴⁰, getting the desired response of amusement cannot be simply down to the lexical features (i.e. the words used) all by themselves; not least because, as with impoliteness (see e.g. Fraser and Nolan 1981:96, Culpeper *et al* 2003), there is nothing inherently 'funny' in words or phrases outside of a context. As was discussed in Chapter Three, 'tendentious' or offensive jokes have the power to be more amusing because their content blatantly breaks strict taboos thereby allowing the audience a temporary release from social constraints surrounding appropriate forms of behaviour. But even taking context into account, there has to be more going on whenever we attempt to interpret linguistic (and non-linguistic) behaviour.

In the case of dramatic dialogue, the most overarching concern we need to consider are the discourse levels themselves, and how they might be able to influence our responses. Short (1996:169) maintains that the discourse architecture for prototypical drama consists of at least two levels of discourse: the 'top' level in which the 'addresser' (author/screenwriter) is essentially giving a message to an 'addressee' (reader/audience), underneath which is an embedded (2nd) level which consists of the discourse between characters within the fictional world they inhabit. Such an embedded nature of discourse effectively makes the

⁴⁰ Comedians who perform routines which typically use profanity and sexual imagery to gain laughs from the audience.

audience/readers legitimized *voyeurs*,⁴¹ as dramatic discourse is intended to be overheard. Its structure may be observed thus:

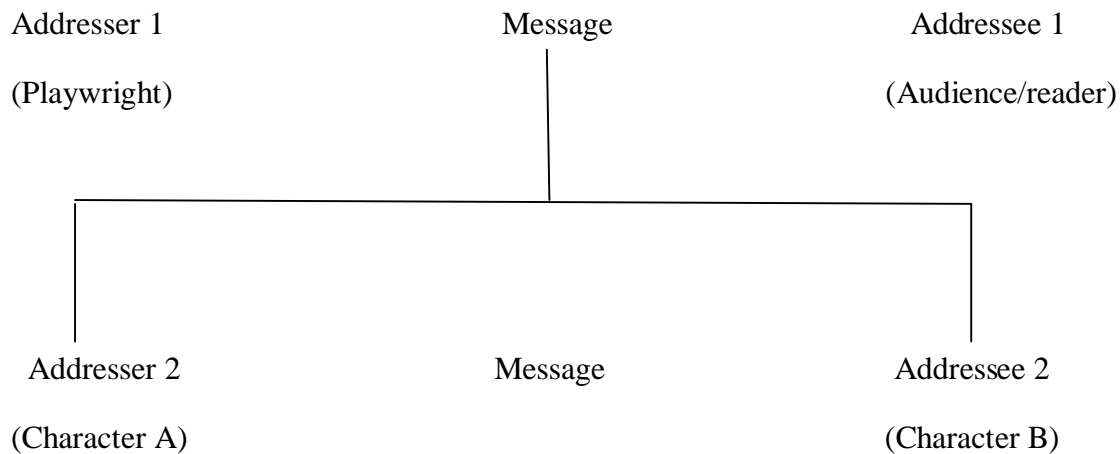


Figure 4.1.2 A ‘prototypical’ structure of dramatic text based on Short (1996:169)

Such a discourse structure not only allows for the perception of *dramatic irony*⁴² (by allowing insight for the audience through the act of ‘listening in’), it also highlights the fact that communication and interpretation can operate on different levels, with behaviour on the character-to-character level providing *additional* meaning and implications on the author-to-audience level. The social relations between the characters can also be observed as messages about those characters, thus providing cues as to how we as the viewer are invited to infer characterisation and plot development (Short, 1981).

⁴¹ Whilst predominantly known within medical fields as a psychiatric disorder of the personality, which defines it as [the deliberate viewing of] ‘unsuspecting individuals, usually strangers, who are naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity’ (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health*, 4th Edn), Metzl (2004:418) has noted that the term ‘voyeur’ has been ‘discursively produced’ over time, especially since its adoption within British and American popular entertainment culture such as ‘reality-based TV’. My own understanding of the term in relation to my current argument is that of an activity in which we observe the personal lives of other people.

⁴² Short’s structure does not allow dramatic irony *per se*. It is, however, a mechanism whereby we can explain dramatic irony as it allows for one group of people (such as the viewers) to be feeling something entirely different from another group of people (such as the characters) and can therefore explain how the audience can laugh at the misfortunes of a character. It also allows for different implicatures to be produced – what can be a *flout* for the audience can be a *violation* for the characters (cf. Grice 1975).

4.2 Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle

Understanding how discourse levels might influence a viewer's perception of character behaviour can be demonstrated via a consideration of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (hereafter shortened to CP), which seeks to explain the inferential mapping between linguistic form and pragmatic meaning. In other words, it explains how we can understand what someone *means* beyond what they actually *say*. Grice's principle maintains that there is a basic expectation within interactions that interlocutors will tell the truth, give the necessary amount of information, be relevant and make their utterances understandable. This general expectation he described as

[...] a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

(Grice 1975:45)

Underpinning this conversational 'rule' are four maxims which we assume are in operation during an interaction:

Maxim of Quantity - Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

Maxim of Quality - Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Maxim of Relation - Be relevant

Maxim of Manner - Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity.⁴³ Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly.

(Grice 1975:45-46)

Because Grice's idea of a Cooperative Principle was one of linguistic - not social - cooperation, his ideas fit well within a discussion of impoliteness, as non-observance can also prompt a hearer to look for an impolite implicature as well as a polite one, that is, if we want to be offensive we still have to be linguistically cooperative. Grice noted that we do not follow this principle all the time - indeed if we did, communication would become extremely

⁴³ This particular maxim actually relates not to *what* is said, but the *way* in which it is said.

tedious and unexciting. We purposefully break or exploit the maxims regularly in order to communicate additional meanings and this can be achieved in various ways, including:

Violating a maxim - The speaker 'may quietly and unostentatiously *violate* a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead'

(Grice 1991: 30)

Opting-out – the speaker 'may *opt-out* from the operation both of the maxim and of the cooperative principle; he may say, indicate, or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, for example, *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed*'.

(Grice 1991: 30)

Clash - the speaker 'may be faced *by a clash*: he may be unable, for example, to fulfil the first maxim of quantity (be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxim of quality (have adequate evidence for what you say)'.

(Grice 1991: 30)

Infringing – 'whereby a speaker who, with no intention of generating an implicature and with no intention of deceiving, fails to observe a maxim...in other words, the non-observance stems from imperfect linguistic performance [such as] nervousness, drunkenness, excitement or cognitive impairment, rather than from any desire ...to generate a conversational implicature'

(Thomas 1995: 74)⁴⁴

Suspending – non-observance of a maxim because there is no expectation on the part of any participant that a maxim will be fulfilled. Non-observance therefore does not generate any implicatures

(Thomas 1995:76)⁴⁵

For Grice, the most interesting case of non-observance involved *flouting* in which the speaker deliberately or 'blatantly' fails to observe a maxim(s) because of his desire to create an implicature which he knows the hearer will be able to infer.

Short's discourse structure, combined with Grice's ideas on linguistic cooperation, can offer us richer insights in terms of characterisation, especially when we look at the way non-observance of the maxims can function differently depending on which discourse level is under observation. This is because the surface meaning on the character-to-character level may be different from the *intended* message (about the characters) on the author-to-audience level. In order for the implicature to be successful however, the interlocutor needs to

⁴⁴ Whilst the notion of *infringing* is one identified by Jenny Thomas and not Grice, I have included it because it there are instances of it within my data – see discussion following example 7.1.1 in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁵ As with the case of *Infringing*, *Suspending* a maxim is actually attributed to Thomas (1995) in her development and interpretation of Grice's ideas.

understand and *recognise* the intended message; in other words, have pragmatic awareness. This is not straightforward for interlocutors who have different cultural backgrounds – as I demonstrate in Chapter Seven.

In the example below, Melvin's intentionally offensive comment at line 6 has different implications depending on which discourse level it is considered. For the audience, it is giving us characterisation cues about both Melvin and Zoe, whilst on the character level, Zoe's expectations and background knowledge regarding Melvin are different from the viewer's and so his indirectness is incongruous to her, but (potentially) amusing for us.

[Example 4.2.1]

Context – *Melvin is at his publisher's waiting for the lift to arrive and is anxious to get away. The receptionist, who is a huge fan of Melvin's romantic novels, is overawed by his presence. She is gazing at him rapturously from her desk and he senses - uneasily - that she is summoning up courage to speak to him. After only a cursory glance in her direction he calls for the lift making it obvious that he has no intention of staying to chat.*

(1) **Zoe** [*gushing, with big smile*] – I can't resist! You usually move through here so quickly and I have so many questions I want to ask you! You have no idea what your work means to me!

(2) **Melvin** [*turning to face her, resigned*] – What does it mean to you?

(3) **Zoe** – [*slowly standing up*] That somebody out there knows what it's like [*solemnly placing one hand on her heart and another on her head*]...to be in here.

(4) **Melvin** [*under his breath and turning back to face the lift*] – Oh God, this is like a nightmare... [*he begins to frantically jab at the call button*].

(5) **Zoe** [*quickly moving around her desk and rushing towards him, still smiling, anxious to detain him if only for a few seconds*] – Aw, come on, just a couple of questions – how hard is that? [*Melvin turns round to face her again and we are given a close-up of Zoe's smiling face. She is breathing heavily. At last she has his attention and she can ask him the all-important question...*] How do you write women so well?⁴⁶

(6) **Melvin** [*without missing a beat and looking straight at her*] – I think of a man and I take away reason and accountability

[end]

⁴⁶ See still-shots from this scene at the end of Chapter Seven

Here, then, we can see that Zoe is addressing Melvin on the assumption or justifiable *expectation* that he is going to uphold a basic conversational assumption, that is, that he will answer her question truthfully, with the appropriate amount of information and in a manner befitting an author addressing one of his fans (i.e. be *polite*). However, she is not privileged with knowing as much about Melvin's brusque character as the audience (cf. *you usually move through here so quickly*), so when he does not answer her in a way she expects him to she is understandably nonplussed. The fact that she looks puzzled⁴⁷ and not offended indicates that Melvin's impolite implicature, that women - and through metonymic association Zoe herself - are unreasonable and inexplicable, has passed by unnoticed by her. For the audience, however, we are by now accustomed to Melvin's general non-observance of social niceties and his penchant for flouting maxims in order to be impolite (in this case of Quantity, Manner and arguably Quality), and as such, we are much quicker to pick up on and recognise his intentionally offensive message. What can serve as an implicature for the benefit of the audience, then, might not necessarily be interpreted as such on the character level. For example, we, as the audience, know that Melvin is being intentional in his offensiveness here; i.e. he wants her to leave him alone. His messages then, for us, are cases of *flouting* because the screenwriters are telling us something about both Zoe's character and how Melvin regards her. On the character level however, Zoe does not appear to have recognised the full implications of Melvin's comment at line 6. This could be for various reasons. Pragmatic understanding, whilst relying on context for successful interpretation, can also be affected by different factors. A clash of expectations as in the above example or even a clash in cultures. This is something which I pick up on again in Chapter Seven.

What makes Melvin's comment at line 6 so damaging is the nature in which he has communicated it. Zoe looks deservedly puzzled because his impolite belief (Leech 1983) has been issued in an indirect or 'off-record' way (Culpeper 2005:43-44). As an impoliteness device it has an increased force of offensiveness because it means that Zoe has to expend cognitive effort in working out that Melvin is being intentionally offensive to *her*, thus making her construct her own face-damage in the process (Bousfield 2007a). The ambiguous nature of 'off-record' impoliteness means that, should the speaker be challenged as to the illocutionary force of their utterance, they may, if they wish, deny or cancel the implied message. Had Melvin followed up his remark at line (6) with a post-modification such as

⁴⁷ This will be demonstrated in Chapter Seven in the section on multimodality

'present company excepted', then the offensive implication would have been lessened somewhat in terms of it being a personal insult to Zoe; however, the implicature that Melvin still regarded women in general as being unreasonable and accountable would still be there. The fact that Melvin does not bother to modify his comment leaves us in no doubt that 'one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others' (Culpeper 2005:44). In terms of how this non-observance functions on the character-to-character level, Zoe's expression indicates that Melvin's utterance has been *too* obscure for its offensive force to be recognised. This could be due to the fact that, because she does not *expect* Melvin to be rude or offensive towards her, then she does not perceive his impoliteness, or indeed his dismissive attitude toward her generally. Certainly, if she was working on the assumption that, as an author being complimented by a fan, he would gladly spend a few minutes discussing his work with her, then her lack of comprehension here is justified and understandable. However, her inability to pick up on Melvin's message in itself offers certain characterisation cues about Zoe - namely the fact that she has a rather innocent and very romantic outlook on life. On the author-to-audience level, the screenwriters are giving a message to *us* (via the implicature) about the way Melvin views Zoe (and potentially, women in general).

It is arguable that Melvin's offensiveness occurs before he makes his impolite implicature at line 6, and actually begins at line 2, with his near-parallel response to Zoe's declaration *you have no idea what your work means to me*. Melvin's *what does it mean to you?* is foregrounded due to the lack of ellipsis which is usually a feature found within informal conversations or where interlocutors are sufficiently close enough to be able to infer aspects of a conversation. For Zoe, this is perceived as an opener for a conversation with someone she admires, whilst for the viewer (who is all too aware by now of Melvin's intolerance of the other characters), it carries a different message: namely *step into the trap*. And this is what Zoe does. Zoe's innocence here not only gives us cues about her as a character generally, it creates amused anticipation on the audience level as we observe her inadvertently inviting Melvin to become gradually more offensive⁴⁸. We know that he is trying to tell her to 'go away', but because of the clash of expectations here, coupled with Melvin's socially-

⁴⁸ There appears to be an offensiveness scale developing here, even though Melvin is still being indirect. He is upping the ante and almost inviting Zoe to step into the 'trap' which it is arguable, he is laying out for her. We know this because, unlike Zoe, we the viewer are all too well aware at this stage just how offensive Melvin can be (which, of course, is one of the generators of humour for us). And as we know, Melvin's offensiveness does not have to be overt or 'prototypical' (cf Bousfield 2010). The idea of an aggression scale is an intriguing area of study currently being researched by Dawn Archer (2011), and is something which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

debilitating condition, plus the fact that Zoe is (rightfully) assuming Gricean cooperation, she is unaware of the face-damage she is about to experience. Melvin's response at line 6 is clearly the offensive *coup de grâce*, and even leaving aside the implicature itself, the fact that he phrases his response in such a way as to make it a personal decision '*I think of a man and I take away reason and accountability*' increases his culpability or intention to offend. Interestingly, there are times when Melvin is inadvertently or *accidentally* offensive (as in example 2.8.1 in Chapter Two), which indicates that, to some extent, he is not aware of emotions or indeed the face requirements in other people. However, with Zoe this is not the case. He is aware of her gushing admiration for him, hence his desire to exit the building as quickly as possible. The fact that Zoe manages to detain him from leaving sets up a frisson of anticipation for the audience, as we wonder how Melvin will deal with the situation. Unlike Zoe, we know to expect some form of offensiveness from him, which, when it comes, has the potential to generate humour for us the viewer, through the incongruity of his behaviour on the character level (in effect, providing a release of tension for us).

Since this is the only scene which features Zoe, it is important that we are able to infer her character quickly enough to be able to understand the dynamics of the discourse, and align ourselves to Melvin's point of view (as we are intended to, otherwise we would not be able to experience amusement at his behaviour towards her or any of the other characters). However, a linguistic analysis alone does not explain all the inferences which we may arrive at regarding the character of Zoe. Indeed, there are also non-linguistic factors which we are responding to here (as throughout the film generally), which not only guide us in our inferences about her, but also help to underline Melvin's discourteous attitude. Such extra-linguistic or *multimodal* production elements (cf. McIntyre 2008, Bousfield and McIntyre 2011) will be discussed in Chapter Seven in order to demonstrate how such features are able to augment our understanding and interpretation of the characters, whilst at the same time acknowledging this burgeoning area within stylistic analysis.

As I have pointed out earlier, linguistic features by themselves are insufficient when attempting text interpretation. Whether reading or viewing a text, the fact remains that we are not passive recipients; and recent advances in the field of cognitive stylistics are acknowledging this (see Semino and Culpeper 2002 and the articles therein). In particular, there is now a recognised interface between findings in the fields of cognitive and social psychology and linguistics (see Tannen 1993:14). We therefore need to consider cognitive factors within our analysis and interpretation of *As Good As It Gets*. In the following section

then, I outline how readers may become cognitively involved in a fictional world using Galbraith's (1995) Deictic Shift Theory. This theory, when considered alongside the discourse levels, suggests how we are able to take on the different perspectives of the characters within their fictional world, as well as understand the additional messages being made available to us from the author or screenwriter within our own actual world.

4.3 Deictic Shift Theory

Allowing ourselves to become 'immersed' within a story world - to become the 'ideal' viewer or reader - involves us metaphorically 'shifting' into the fictional world. The way we do this, according to Galbraith (1995), is via our ability to project ourselves from the deictic field of our real world and take on the deictic centre of the character within the world of the fiction. Galbraith defines deixis as 'a psycholinguistic term...that orients the use of language with respect to a particular time, place and person' (Galbraith 1995:21). By default we naturally locate and identify deictic referents from our own perspective or *origo* which allows us to indicate our own point of view. But when we watch a film we need to appreciate the character's points of view in order to fully experience what they do, and we do this via *deictic projection* (Stockwell 2002:43), or as Galbraith explains it: 'in order to "enter" into a fictional world, we need to imagine deictic fields in which HERE, NOW and SELF coordinates are transposed from their usual anchorage in the "I" into an anchorage in the narrative text" (Galbraith 1995:46 emphasis in original). We can see how such a projection might transport us into the world of Melvin Udall if we consider the following example (which occurs in the opening few minutes of the film):

[Example 4.3.1]

Context: Afraid that his neighbour's dog Verdell is going to urinate in the apartment hallway, Melvin is trying unsuccessfully to coax it into the elevator by trying to keep the doors open and talking nicely to the dog. The dog is unresponsive and continues to sniff before lifting its leg. In a rage, Melvin advances on the small dog and picks it up holding the dog out at arm's length. Verdell, struggling to escape, begins to urinate and Melvin looks around for somewhere to put the dog. Noticing the door of the garbage chute at hand he opens the hatch and forcibly stuffs the struggling dog inside it...

(1) **Melvin** - I'll bet you wish you were some sort of real dog now, huh? Don't worry...this is New York. If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere....⁴⁹

Melvin's use of the proximal deictic markers '*this* is New York...if you can make it '*here*', are the linguistic indicators which serve to propel us from our own deictic centre in our own real world into the world of Melvin Udall, which apart from his rather unsympathetic attitude towards his neighbours' pets, corresponds exactly with our own world. Melvin's language and the visual world building elements that we are shown (Werth 1997) within the opening credits (such as the streets of New York and the people who are populating it) serve to establish the fictional world of *As Good As It Gets*. Once we are projected there we naturally allow ourselves to take on the deictic centres of the characters by 'suspending our normal egocentric assumptions about deictic terms of reference' (McIntyre 2006:99).

By following the linguistic and visual cues of the narrative we are able to 'move' alongside the characters within the fictional universe. Galbraith's terminology for such movement (which is borrowed from computer science) is described as PUSHing and POPping. She defines the term PUSH as the phenomenon by which 'one may submerge from a basic level to a less available deictic plane, such as episodic memory (known as "flashback" in fiction), fictional world (this may be a fiction within a fiction), or fantasy' (Galbraith 1995:47). With regards my own data, then, as soon as we begin to watch the film and concentrate on the characters we immediately PUSH into the deictic field of those characters in *As Good As It Gets*.

As well as being able to 'move' among the deictic fields of the characters, we are also able to 'move' between the fictional world and our real world. Conversely, when we leave a deictic field – when we stop watching or the film ends - we emerge from the deictic field of the story world via a POP, thus returning back to our own deictic centre in our own real life as a real viewer. The importance of considering how discourse levels and deictic shifting may work together to complement viewer understanding and interpretation is neatly summed up by Galbraith when she states:

...at any moment of [viewing] a narrative, a [viewer] may attentionally occupy one of several deictic fields-for example a character's subjectivity within the story world, or the

⁴⁹ The intertextual reference of the song *New York New York* made famous by Liza Minnelli and Frank Sinatra also adds to the humour here, as it is associated with the celebration of New York City and is therefore entirely inappropriate or incongruous when applied to a dog

author's wry commentary on some historical phenomenon. The same sentence read [or indeed viewed] from different levels has different self-world significance and, hence, a different meaning. There are textual, logical, psychological and accidental factors that influence our choice of level at any moment of [viewing].

(Galbraith 1995:49)

Deictic shift theory attempts to explain how we 'enter' a fictional world, but, as Galbraith's quotation above makes clear, the discourse levels are able to affect the 'self world significance' of that fictional world by influencing the meaning and interpretation we derive from it (as example 4.2.1 demonstrates). So how exactly are they able to do this? In order to make full sense of the discourse levels and appreciate their impact on a narrative, we need to explain what the architecture actually 'creates', and my argument here is that the discourse levels create *different alternate worlds*. Understanding and interpretation thus involve a comparison between the alternative world of the characters and the real-world understanding of the viewer, with interesting effects and interpretations arising where we have a disjunction between those worlds. Such a creation allows us to:

accommodate the existence of fictional entities, and account for our intuitive attributions of truth and falsity to sentences about fictional objects and situations

(Semino 1997:62)

In order to explore how the fictional world of *As Good As It Gets* might function as an 'alternative' world, and hence be able to account for the way the viewer is manipulated to find amusement at Melvin's socially dysfunctional behaviour, we need to consider how audience members are able to become immersed in fictional worlds in the first place, and how their expectations and interpretations might fluctuate accordingly. In the following section I will outline Ryan's (1991) ideas regarding the semantics of fictionality, in order to suggest that the discourse levels on which the characters reside might be viewed as one of many alternate *possible worlds*. Once we accept that we can accommodate such worlds and allow deictic projection to make available the perspectives of the characters, we are in a position then to consider what the expectations and understandings of those characters might be. When we compare our own understanding and expectations of the fictional world with those of the characters, we have the chance to explore further how *humour* might be distilled for the viewer, from *tension* between those characters.

4.4 Possible Worlds Theory

Possible Worlds Theory originated from problems experienced by logicians and philosophers regarding the truth values of propositions (McIntyre 2006:124). Despite its original lack of cognitive aspects, Possible Worlds Theory has been adapted by narratologists with regards to fiction and how fictional worlds are structured internally. Although various theories regarding possible worlds in fiction have been proposed (see for example Eco 1990; Doležel 1989, 1998; Pavel 1986; Palmer, 2004), I am using Ryan's (1991) approach in particular as she specifies that 'fictional worlds [can be considered as] systems of *reality*' (Semino 1997:67). As 'rules' within fictional discourse are intended to mirror rules within our own society, Ryan's analogy is, I believe, a readily accessible one in which to explore the way we interpret the character of Melvin Udall.

Ryan's (1991) approach maintains that, within fiction, there is a world which is equivalent to the 'actual world' of the reader or viewer – the *textual reference world* (TRW). Surrounding the TRW are various *alternative possible worlds* (APWs) which, whilst being the domains of the fictional characters, are nevertheless 'constructs of the human mind' (Ryan 1991:110). Ryan (1991: vii) points out that the TRW is 'the world in which propositions asserted in the text are to be valued,' with the textual realisation of the TRW being known as the *textual actual world* (TAW). Essentially, then, the TAW is 'made up of what exists absolutely in the semantic universe of the text, as opposed to what exists in the mind of the characters' (Ryan 1991:112). As viewers we are able to 'enter' these domains by the act of 'recentering':

...whereby the frame of reference for the notions of possibility and actuality is shifted from the actual world to an alternate possible world

(Ryan 1991 cited in Semino 1997:67)

Such 'shifting' can be seen as analogous to Galbraith's notion of deictic *PUSHing* here due to our being able to

[...] imagine worlds inhabited by individuals who can be assumed to behave, physically and psychologically, in ways which reflect our real-life experiences of being situated in the real world

(Emmott 1997:58)

What this means is that all aspects of the TAW of *As Good As It Gets* correspond with the viewer's own 'actual' world. Melvin's world is in effect our world, which makes it effortless

for us to ‘enter’ or *deictically project* ourselves into it, due to what Ryan has called *The Principle of Minimal Departure*. It is this principle which allows us to

reconstrue the world of a fiction and a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know...we...project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world and ...make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid

(Ryan 1980: 406)

Put simply, when we watch *As Good As It Gets*, we assume (unless we are given indications to the contrary), that all the same physical laws apply (such as gravity) as well as the same social structure and expectations being in force. Indeed, it is this identical nature of the TAW which makes Melvin’s non-observance of polite social conventions so shocking and incongruous for both the characters as well as the viewer, because misogyny and racism are proscribed in western society and culture. Added to this is the fact that, not only is he using proscribed behaviours, he actually seems to enjoy using them; he appears to *embrace* these particular behaviours, and this is what is so incredible to us as the viewer. We are not laughing *with* him however, we are laughing *at* him because he is audacious enough to say (and get away with saying), things which in western society you simply cannot say. The fact is, we *enjoy* being shocked by Melvin’s character because it is *safe* shock, and we can experience a *thrill* at his outrageous behaviour. The Principle of Minimal Departure, then, effectively allows us to fill in any ‘gaps’ whenever we enter a fictional world, with such ‘gaps’ being part of the ‘implicitness [which is] based on presupposition [and] is a major source of fictional-world construction and reconstruction’ (Doležel 1998:175).

Whilst discourse levels and deictic shift theory can explain how we might be ‘shifted’ *between* various deictic fields, we need to consider in more detail what might be occurring *within* the world of the fiction itself. In particular we can consider whether Ryan’s (1991) notion of the different fictional universes might serve to prime the viewer in some way as to how we are guided in our interpretation of a character’s behaviour; in our case, to perceive Melvin’s anti-social behaviour as humorous.

4.4.1 Ryan's (1991) Typology of fictional universes

Ryan proposes a variety of APWs which may exist within a fictional universe beside the TAW, these being:

K-World (Knowledge World) – What a character knows or believes to be the case within his actual domain.

Prospective Extension of K-World – What a character expects or anticipates happening within his actual domain.

O-World (Obligation World) – These concern a character's moral commitments or prohibitions

W-World (Wish-World) – The wishes and desires of a character

Intention World – this corresponds to any plans or intentions a character may have to change their actual domain

F-Universe (Fantasy World) – The dreams, fantasies or hallucinations of a character

Pretended World – Any inauthentic constructs within a character's domain including mock desires, faked obligations and pretended intents

(adapted from Semino 1997:72 and Ryan 1991:113-119)

Ryan suggests that plot development occurs when 'conflicts arise from incompatibilities between TAW and the private worlds of characters' (Ryan 1991:156). This happens because the individual characters all have *their own* APWs in which *they* think *they* know what is going on, and what their own obligations, wishes, intentions and expectations are. In addition to this, however, and via the discourse architecture, *we* also have access to their beliefs and expectations and are able to interpret them in relation to our own understanding of how our own world works.

If we return to the scene with Zoe above, we can see the discrepancy between Melvin's own belief system (*Knowledge World*), in which women in general are inexplicable, empty-headed creatures, and Zoe's, whose own view about *herself* corresponds exactly with the romantic, emotional depiction of them in Melvin's books (cf. *how do you write women so well?*). Similarly, within Zoe's belief system, Melvin is someone who has almost God-like properties on account of his abilities as a writer of fictional romance. In Zoe's knowledge world, authors are happy to discuss their work with appreciative fans (or rather, their

obligation worlds make this seem like the case). But Melvin's obligation world is almost non-existent and, as such, he does not feel any such moral commitment towards Zoe. Such a clash is clearly able to provide the incongruity to generate humour here, but as demonstrated earlier in section 4.1, the scene can be viewed differently depending upon the discourse level from which we view the exchange. If viewed on the character-to-character level we might feel affronted on behalf of Zoe (due to the *Principle of Minimal Departure*), while on the screenwriter-to-audience level we have the psychological factors of *safety*, *superiority* and *release*, which, in Galbraith's words, offer us 'different self-world significance and, hence, a different [and potentially humorous] meaning' (Galbraith 1995:49)

Having noted how the higher discourse level can allow for additional levels of meaning, we now need to come down onto the character-to-character level in order to consider in more detail how cognitive aspects regarding interpretation might be functioning. Whilst the 'de-humanising' approaches to character comprehension in literary criticism would consider this to be 'erroneous' (see e.g. Chatman, 1978; Weinsheimer, 1979; Knights, 1963), due to their denial that characters represent real people, it is my belief that *only* by considering characters in their fullest psychological sense - in other words, as counterparts of ourselves - that we are able to explore how cognitive processes are able to impact upon and inform our interpretation.

4.5 Interpretation and cognitive processing

The interpretation of character behaviour (either verbal or non-verbal) involves active cognitive effort in which we draw on our stores of knowledge structures which 'guide' our interpretations of behaviours and events. Such 'knowledge structures' - which may be likened to 'structures of expectation' (Ross 1975) - are built up over time as we internalize our experiences of situations and events. These 'structures' are not unlike the concept of a *schema*, which Eysenck and Keane (2000:352) have described as '[...] well integrated chunks of knowledge about the world, events, people, and actions'. The relevance of these concepts for our discussion is neatly summarized by Culpeper (2002) who points out that:

First impressions of characters are guided by schemata, which, once activated, offer a scaffolding for incoming character information. Moreover, schemata allow us to make further knowledge-based inferences, and thereby flesh-out our impressions of character. This...enables us to account for the complexity and indeterminacy of character [...]

The notion of ‘complexity’ fits the character of Melvin perfectly. Indeed one of the reasons why there is so much incongruity in this film - which, as I argued in Chapter Three is one of the generators of humour - is precisely because Melvin’s character is largely unpredictable. Although we can infer that he is going to be offensive in *some* way (which maintains our levels of tension in the film), the Principal of Minimal Departure ensures that we are frequently shocked by the extent to which he goes *against* many of our stereotypes and behavioural schema. This, of course, is the intention of the screenwriters. In Cook’s (1994) discussion of ‘schema disruption’ (where a reader or viewer’s existing schema about someone or something is challenged) and ‘schema refreshment’ (where we revise and modify our understanding of a schema), he points out that

[...] the primary function of certain discourses is to effect a change in the schemata of their [viewers]. Sensations of pleasure, escape, profundity, and elevation are conceivably offshoots of this function

(Cook 1994:191)

He goes on to say that

[...] discourses attempting this function but failing (for a given individual) are not simply ignored, but often violently attacked by those individuals and dismissed as boring or even harmful...[these] discourses [are] rejected because they seek to cause too sudden and too drastic a change

(Cook 1994:191-192)

Such non-acceptance of certain discourses may be observed when stand-up comedians ‘fall flat’ in their joke or routine, especially if the content is too offensive (see footnote number 35 in Chapter Three). Similarly, ‘schema disruption’ which has been too sudden or drastic can also explain why some aspects of humour can feel ‘too close for comfort’ and goes some way to explaining why we can laugh at someone in one moment but then fail to accept the humour once we have deemed that it has ‘gone too far’.

As pointed out earlier, our schema regarding Melvin begins to develop from the opening credits. Not only do we observe him putting a small dog down a garbage chute, we are also given other ‘world-building elements’ (Werth 1997) which tell us about Melvin’s occupation as a writer. Holyoak and Gordon (1984:50) point out that knowing the social role of a person allows us to make additional inferences about that person. For example, it is apparent that

Melvin is a bestselling author of romantic fiction. From this we might infer that, as an author in general, Melvin must be reasonably well educated and articulate. We might also infer that, as a *best-selling* author, he is accomplished, successful, financially secure and popular. Similarly, we can make inferences about him based on our schema surrounding the genre of his books. In particular, as an author of *romantic* fiction, we might expect him to be someone who is (variously) sensitive, caring, emotional, loving and attentive to women (the logic here being, arguably that, if he can write about these attributes so successfully in his own characters, then he must have these qualities himself).

In order to understand how cognitive factors can be applied to character analysis and viewer interpretation, we need to consider what the schematic expectations on both levels of discourse might be. This is not such an obscure undertaking as we have already accepted that the fictional world of *As Good As It Gets* is identical to our own, and for as long as we stay within the fictional universe, we ourselves have expectations of the way the characters should behave. In the case of Melvin Udall, however, our inferences and expectations regarding him (and likewise the expectations of the other characters towards him) are frequently incompatible with Melvin's own. Understanding *how* our schematic knowledge might be contributing here - by generating among other things, the incongruity or 'schema disruption' (Cook 1995:191) between what Melvin does and what we *expect* him to do - is the logical next step within our discussion.

According to Hamilton and Sherman (1994:15), our expectations are based on stereotypes which, they maintain, are formed from a set of perceived differences and beliefs concerning social groups. These are 'stored in memory as a cognitive structure and can then influence subsequent perceptions of, and behaviours toward, that group and its members'. The ability to exploit-through-disruption the cognitive processing in viewers and readers can be seen as a technique of authors and film-makers, whereby our expectations are set-up only to be dropped for literary or aesthetic effect. In terms of the present film under discussion, I would argue that such exploitation devices are another generator for the perception of humour through the incongruity which the viewer perceives after having their conventional schemas and expectations disrupted in this way. This may be viewed in the following scene (which occurs at the opening of the film's credits) and immediately precedes the scene discussed in example 4.3.1.

[Example 4.5.1]

Melvin is bending down, attempting to coax his neighbour's dog (Verdell) away from the apartment wall (of which it is tentatively sniffing, obviously with the intention to urinate). His words are pitched low and soft as he tries to persuade the dog to approach him.

(1) **Melvin:** Come on sweetie. Come on now sweetheart. Go for a little ride then you can whiz all over the city...

As these are the opening moments of the film we might also have a stereotype for *dog-lover* being activated here, which would then underscore our initial impression of Melvin as perhaps having compassionate attributes, along with those listed above as an author of romantic fiction. For all we know at this point, Melvin could be attempting to coax the dog with the intention of taking it for a walk. As the scene continues though, it is obvious that this is not the case. As the dog attempts to lift its leg against the wall Melvin's soft tones are immediately abandoned as he yells:

(2) **Melvin:** NO! You monkey-eared son of a....You have pissed your last floor!

As Melvin is cursing, he is scooping the dog up and holding it out at arm's length desperately trying not to be sprayed by the dog's urine as it struggles, growling, in Melvin's arms. Wondering what to do now he has hold of the dog, he notices the garbage chute, opens the hatch, and stuffs the dog unceremoniously inside. We hear the dog yapping in distress as it slides and bangs its way to the basement far below. What positive impressions we may have had prior to this part of the scene will now have had to be 'refreshed' in light of Melvin's callous behaviour, because disposing of live animals down garbage chutes is not the province of dog-lovers or people who care⁵⁰. This behaviour, then, would constitute what Culpeper (2002:266) has labelled *dramatic recategorisation*, and, not unlike Cook's notion of 'schema refreshment', constitutes a 'phenomenon which involves significant cognitive reorganisation' (Culpeper 2002: 266).

Exploitation of cognitive inferencing also allows film producers and authors to initiate characterisation cues, as by now - one minute forty-five seconds into the film - one thing we *do* know about Melvin, is that he obviously *is not* imbued with the attributes we might

⁵⁰ At least in the viewer's own 'actual' world which, via *The Principle of Minimal Departure* is identical to the fictional world of Melvin Udall

initially have assigned to him based on our inferences and expectations pertaining to his social role as an author of romantic fiction.

In order for an appropriate interpretation of a behaviour or event to be retrieved, one must 'match the internal representation of particular events and individuals with internally represented prototypes' (Chafe 1977:42). The concept of 'prototype' here is analogous to the concept of 'Frame' (as used by and associated with the anthropological work of Hymes 1974, and the sociological work of Goffman 1974), and refers to 'an expectation about the world, based on prior experience, against which new experiences are measured and interpreted' (Tannen 1993:17). As such, then, 'prototype' and 'knowledge structures' might be considered similar concepts, although I will hereafter refer to 'knowledge structures' because as well as our expectations, we also draw on our general as well as cultural knowledge concerning an event or behaviour in question when interpreting a new experience. This 'general knowledge' includes our own personal interests, opinions and attitudes which make up a 'cognitive set' of features that, whilst having a 'minimal conventional identity', are nevertheless 'contextually variable' (van Dijk 1978:149). This variability may be one of the factors which might explain the subjective nature of humour and why (in some situations) the same utterance could evoke amusement from one person whilst being perceived as offensive to someone else.

Despite our knowledge structures having such 'contextually variable' features (van Dijk 1978 above) the fact remains that, *in general*, we are 'guided' towards making one interpretation rather than another. The question now then is: *how do we decide on which interpretation to make?* Understanding that we have *some* expectations influencing how we interpret Melvin is all very well, but there must also be something going on conventionally which leads us to make one interpretation over another. In other words, if we are intended to find amusement in Melvin's behaviour then there must be enough cues within the film to ensure that we maintain that particular interpretation, otherwise we would not be able to stay within the fictional world as our real-world schema would override what Coleridge (1817) called the 'willing suspension of disbelief', and effectively PUSH us out.

If we consider the broadest level of context to begin with, we can note various cues which we are given prior to even watching the film. The fact that the film is depicted as a 'smash-hit comedy' not only primes us to the fact that it contains material which is intended to amuse, it also implies that its reception has been exceptionally popular. This, then, suggests that the

film's classification is appropriate and correct. The film stars the well-known Oscar-winning actor Jack Nicholson, which can be seen as another cue which might prime us to enjoy the film, despite instances where our own world schema might be trying to resist some of the material within it. Jack Nicholson is famed for playing neurotic and/or offensive characters. It could be said his persona in *As Good As It Gets* is typical of a lot of his roles. So *on what basis* is the film being classified as a comedy? Even if we have the 'individual differences' which van Dijk (1978:149) maintains, there are still all kinds of cues guiding us to infer that this film is funny *at some level*. I have just mentioned some of the more overarching considerations which we will undoubtedly utilise at a subconscious level, not least the film's classification which indicates that it was *not* the intention of the screenwriters for the film to be perceived as offensive. I will now discuss how we might be primed in other ways to perceive humour in Melvin's actions, rather than offence. This discussion will incorporate Tannen's (1993) research on how "structures of expectation" allow us to 'filter and shape [our] perception[s]' (Tannen 1993:53).

4.6 Discourse levels, expectation and perception

Central to Tannen's ideas on expectations is the way we judge and perceive behaviour based on past experiences concerning that behaviour. Her notion of 'frame', which was originally introduced as an anthropological term by Bateson in 1955, has since been utilised within many other disciplines, notably Hymes and Goffman in sociology, Minsky in artificial intelligence and Fillmore in Linguistics (Tannen 1993:18). Similarly, the concepts of *schema* (Bartlett 1932), *script* (Schank and Abelson 1977) and *scenario* (Sanford and Garrod 1981) have all been used interchangeably with the concept of 'frame', although Schank and Abelson do point out that, for them, *script* is only one form of a knowledge structure with their most notable example being a 'restaurant script', which constitutes 'a specific situational context [with] multiple participants, whose interactions are governed by a *shared understanding of the application of the script*' (Semino 1997:159 my emphasis). The idea of sharing an understanding of a script is important: it constitutes part of the 'minimal conventional identity' (van Dijk 1978:149) which most of us will possess and which we need to consult when we observe Melvin and Carol as they arrive at the restaurant in the scene below (see example 4.6.1). Without a conventionally-shared understanding of what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour in a restaurant, we would not be able to be guided into interpreting (and hence appreciating) the humour in the following scene:

[Example 4.6.1]

Melvin and Carol are in Baltimore for the weekend and have just arrived at a popular beach-front restaurant. They are both dressed very casually; Carol in a red print dress and Melvin in trousers and open-necked blue shirt. They both appear cheerful, and are obviously looking forward to the rest of the evening. Melvin is repeatedly asking everybody he passes whether the restaurant sells hard-shell crabs, to which everybody is affirming that they do. They are met at the door of the restaurant by a smiling maître d' dressed in dinner jacket and black tie.

(1) **Maître d'** – [*smiling, jovial*] Good evening!

(2) **Melvin** – Hi. You have hard-shells, right?

(3) **Carol** – [*smiling at Melvin and under her breath*] Stop asking everyone...

(4) **Melvin** - Just him, that's all. Okay, you can answer. We worked it out.

(5) **Maître d'** [*smiling at them*] – Yes we do, oh, and I can give you a tie and jacket

(6) **Melvin** – [*Melvin's smile immediately disappears*] What?

(7) **Maître d'** – They require a tie and jacket, but we have some available. [*The Maître d' turns away obviously with the intention of furnishing Melvin with the necessary attire. Both Melvin and Carol scan the room and observe the other male diners who are all wearing jacket and ties. The maître d' returns, still smiling, clutching a coat-hanger upon which a maroon jacket and yellow and blue Paisley tie is adorned and offers it to Melvin.*] Sir?

(8) **Melvin** - [*Melvin looks at the jacket and tie, his expression indicating a mixture of horror and contempt.*] No, I'm not putting that on. And in case you were gonna ask, I'm not going to let you inject me with the plague either-

(9) **Carol** - [*turning to Melvin quickly trying to brush-over his rudeness*] It's such a nice place... [*then addressing the Maître d' who is looking unsure of Melvin's last comment*] I imagine you have these dry-cleaned all the time, don't you?

(10) **Maître d'** – [*looking at the jacket doubtfully*] Actually, I don't think so...

[end]

As a 'socioculturally defined mental protocol for negotiating a situation' (Stockwell 2002:77), Melvin's refusal to adhere to the script application necessary for guiding his behaviour in this situation is incongruous for us as it is for the Maître d'. For Carol, however,

who is aware of Melvin's OCD and his fear of potential germs, his behaviour, whilst inappropriate, is understandable - hence her attempt at line 9 to establish that the garments are in fact clean. So how might we be primed to view Melvin's behaviour here as amusing? For one thing, we have linguistic cues via the implicature that the jacket and tie on offer are infestitious, which is incongruous within the context of the scene. Secondly we have the facial expressions of the Maître d' who, after *expecting* that Melvin will take the jacket and tie offered, is not only puzzled by his refusal, but looks as if he is struggling to work out the implicature that the garments he is offering are not fit for a respectable person to put on. As in example 4.2.1 with Zoe above, the characters' expressions as they try to work out Melvin's implications are also helping to guide us towards an amusing interpretation in this scene.⁵¹ We don't experience the puzzlement because – due to the discourse structure – we are more privileged in knowing how Melvin functions in stressful situations than the other characters. Therefore, due to the schema we have built up regarding Melvin, we *expect* him to behave in ways which are going to be at odds with the people around him⁵². This expectation, on the audience level, might also be seen as one of the cues which guides us to interpreting Melvin's behaviour as amusing rather than boorish. Viewed within the character level, expectations regarding Melvin's behaviour are completely different, hence the puzzlement and/or offence from the other characters when he does not behave in accordance with *their* expectations.

We have considered what the expectations of the other characters might be, but what are Melvin's expectations? And how are we invited to perceive them? Tannen (1993:47) notes how evaluative language such as adjectives can reveal a person's expectations concerning settings, people and objects. As part of his morning routine, Melvin visits the same restaurant and is served the same meal by the same waitress (Carol). As such, both characters have a certain amount of schema in place regarding one another; Carol knows that he has a reputation for offending the other diners and waitresses but is generally civil towards her. Melvin knows that Carol is the only waitress who will serve him and tolerate his eccentric predilections (e.g. his need to use his own plastic cutlery); more importantly for Melvin,

⁵¹ The expression of puzzlement on the characters' faces as described in this chapter needs to be taken on trust. In chapter 7 I will incorporate still-shots from the film to augment my discussion on multimodality, which I will argue is needed in order to make a fully informed stylistic analysis of a dramatic character.

⁵² We are shown, during the opening moments of the film, Melvin going into his bathroom, selecting a new bar of Nutrogena soap from a cabinet which is stocked full of them, unwrapping it, washing his hands in *extremely* hot water, discarding the bar of soap into the bin and selecting a second bar and repeating the routine. It is these visual world building elements (cf. Werth 1997) which first alert us to Melvin's obsessive compulsive nature. We may also excuse (some) of his offensiveness – especially towards the Maître d' - because we know that Melvin has a phobia about germs. The humour, of course, lies in the fact that the Maître d' is unaware of this.

though, is the *predictability* which Carol provides and due to the anxiety he experiences from his obsessive compulsive condition, he necessarily relies on. When his morning routine becomes disrupted because Carol is absent from work one morning, Melvin is forced to give his order to one of the other waitresses. As viewers, we know that Melvin's anxiety levels have just spiked considerably; the waitress on the other hand is conscious only that he is another customer in need of serving:

[Example 4.6.2]

Context: *[Melvin is sitting in his booth unwrapping his cutlery. Cheryl, a heavy-set waitress, approaches Melvin's table and observes him taking plastic cutlery out of a packet. Melvin does not immediately notice her. She takes hold of the bag and bends closer to observe, whilst at the same time enquiring]*

(1) **Cheryl:** What the heck are those for?

(2) **Melvin:** *[Noticing Cheryl for the first time and realising that it is not Carol. He stares at her for a couple of seconds, his cutlery now being minus its wrapper. He waves towards the pay desk]* No. No. No. Get Carol.

(3) **Cheryl:** *[Briefly looking in the direction of where Melvin has pointed and realises that he is referring to one of the regular waitresses.]* Oh I'm fillin' in. We don't know if she's comin' back. She might be getting a job closer to home. *[Melvin's expression indicates the enormity of what Cheryl has just said. Oblivious to his dilemma Cheryl picks up his plastic cutlery and screwing up her face asks him]* Why plastic?

(4) **Melvin:** *[His arms outstretched in supplication]* What are you trying to do to me?

(5) **Cheryl:** *[Puzzled]* What do you mean?

(6) **Melvin:** *[Obtaining another packet of cutlery from his back pocket]* Look, elephant girl, just go get Carol or something. Just have her do my one meal here. I'll pay whatever you want. I'll wait. *[Cheryl is just staring at him open-mouthed. When she does not respond he slams the table and shouts]* DO IT!

(7) **Cheryl:** *[Cheryl turns from Melvin in shock and walks rigidly back to her station passing the manager on the way]* Bryan. Code Blue.

[end]

Melvin's expectation in this scene is that Carol will be there as usual to serve him, so when Cheryl comes over to him and *touches* his plastic bag containing the cutlery out of innocent

curiosity, Melvin has two enormous anxiety-causing issues to deal with. The first is the realisation that his safe routine is going to be necessarily disrupted if Carol stops working at the restaurant. Routine is something which he relies on as it allows him to stay in control of daily events. The second is that there are the invisible germs which Cheryl has just transmitted by touching his belongings, resulting in him very quickly having to discard the original cutlery and obtain a fresh supply.

Whilst there is incongruity in this scene based on Melvin's non-observance of the 'restaurant script' alongside Cheryl's innocence regarding Melvin's idiosyncrasies, there is, I would argue, no amusement here. As was pointed out in section (3.3.2), incongruity *per se* does not automatically generate laughter. Indeed, as Palmer (1994:99) concedes, some incongruities are 'positively threatening', as is the case with Melvin's behaviour here. But is he being *intentionally* offensive (or impolite as per Bousfield's 2008 definition)? Certainly, Melvin's raised voice and table-slamming at line (6) would indicate this, as does Cheryl's shocked expression, but I would argue that there is more going on with Melvin's behaviour in this scene that, when analysed further, will throw doubt on this knee-jerk interpretation, as well as affording us a richer interpretation of Melvin's character.

Cheryl is unaware of Melvin's obsessive routines and so *her* expectations are that he is just another customer who wants feeding and who will probably engage her in a couple of minutes of chat as she takes the order. Melvin, on the other hand, is expecting Carol to be there, as indicated by his repetition and directive *No. No. No. Get Carol*. Tannen (1993:41) notes that repetition 'of identical or changed wording' can be indicative of an expectation; in this case it emphasises Melvin's lack of composure now he has realised Carol is not there to serve him. Melvin has not even afforded Cheryl a brief greeting or attempted to answer her question, and Cheryl has not picked up on his alarm. Notice too that she does not react to his brusqueness because she is not *expecting* him to be either off-hand or insulting, and therefore carries on with her explanation of why Carol is absent. The fact that she responds so innocently and commits the mortal sin of actually touching Melvin's possessions, builds up the dramatic tension in this scene as we wonder what Melvin will do as a result of this. His description of Cheryl as *Elephant Girl* indicates that at this point he *is* being intentionally impolite. But is such intentional impoliteness a knee-jerk reaction to the devastating news (for him) that Carol may never be at the restaurant to serve him again? Or is he just being offensive to get his own way (i.e. by being *strategic* in his offensiveness in order to make Cheryl go away and get his meal)? We, as the audience, can appreciate the anxiety which

Melvin must now be feeling, but on the character level Cheryl would not have this level of knowledge about him. Her schema regarding how customers behave in the restaurant has been disrupted now she has been shouted at and insulted, and hence her *moral judgement* made to the manager that Melvin is dangerous is indicated by her *code blue*, which is presumably code-speak for the eviction of difficult customers.⁵³ Tannen (1993:49) notes how ‘moral judgements’ are based on a speaker’s frames or knowledge of the world. Cheryl interprets Melvin as being potentially dangerous because in her knowledge-world people do not act so inappropriately in restaurants. For Melvin, however, his moral judgements are occasionally based upon the constraints of his OCD, which in his knowledge-world means that sometimes he behaves according to an ‘unable paradigm’ as opposed to an ‘unwilling’ one (see Harris 1984 and Chapter Five). Indeed at line (4) Melvin actually puts *himself* in the role of victim - *what are you trying to do to me?* This, then, suggests that he perceives himself as *not* being in control of what is happening around him (at least some of the time).

We could argue then, that in this scene, the anxiety and frustration and *fear* which Melvin is now experiencing from learning that Carol may not be working in the restaurant again, is likely to be the overriding reason for his offensiveness. As this knowledge is only at the audience level of the discourse structure, it could be seen as one of the factors which may be guiding us to perceive the character of Melvin with more empathy than we would normally have toward people who behave in this way.

I have suggested that Melvin’s offensiveness in this scene is not *entirely* intentional. We *could* classify his offensiveness as being *incidental* (cf. Goffman 1967) i.e. whereby Cheryl’s face-damage is an ‘unplanned by-product’ which Melvin is still nevertheless prepared to create. However, we also know that Melvin sometimes *utilises* his offensiveness in times of anxiety (cf. The scene with Zoe at the publishers). This then suggests that whilst his offensiveness in the scene with Cheryl may not have been a primary goal *prior* to being served, once he realised that Carol was unavailable (thus rendering Cheryl a threat to his equilibrium), he was nevertheless strategic i.e. *purposeful* in his offensiveness. Whichever way we view this scene the fact remains that there is some ambiguity as to how his behaviour might be viewed or interpreted. From Melvin’s point of view, the anxiety that Carol’s absence has caused means that (for him) he will be operating under an ‘unable to be appropriate/polite’ paradigm. From Cheryl’s point of view Melvin’s behaviour has gone

⁵³ We are able to infer this presumption because in the fictional world in which we view Melvin, customers do not act in this way.

completely against the norm for this particular activity type. Unaware of his psychological issues, she will have attributed his behaviour as an ‘unwilling’ (to be appropriate/polite) paradigm.

Exploring how Melvin’s offensive behaviour might be influenced by his own particular ‘Reality Paradigms’ (Archer 2002, 2011a) is the focus of the next chapter as well as a more thought-provoking consideration for impoliteness research itself; the notion of multifunctionality. The above scene highlights an interesting complexity within Melvin’s behaviour which Goffman’s existing levels of face-damage cannot fully account for. Melvin’s offensive behaviour may not always be intentional, but there are occasions – such as in the above scenes with Cheryl and Zoe, where his offence tends ‘to be more planned and more anticipated than Goffman’s (1967:14) incidental level seems to allow’ (Archer 2011b: 3222). In the following chapter I discuss Archer’s (2011b) ideas regarding a *face aggravation scale* in which she positions a level of face-damage which sits in-between Goffman’s *intentional* and *incidental* levels and which seeks to ‘assess the extent to which S uses indirectness and multifunctionality in a planned but not a ‘spiteful’ way’ (2011:3220)

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that linguistic theories of impoliteness and the psychology of humour are insufficient by themselves to fully explain how we are able to understand and interpret fictional characters within the universe of their worlds.

In this current chapter, then, I incorporate a structure for fictional discourse which is based on Short’s ([1981]1996) discourse architecture, and utilise the work of Galbraith (1995) on Deictic Shifting alongside Ryan’s (1991) Theory of Possible Worlds within fictional narratives. Short (1996:169) points out that the ‘embedded’ nature of fictional discourse allows for various effects to be produced (such as expectations, implicatures and interpretations) via the concept known as *dramatic irony*. However, in order for us to perceive those effects we first need to become involved in the text itself. Short’s ideas, when incorporated with Galbraith and Ryan, go some way to explaining how we can become situated within the character level of a fictional exchange, and, once there, be able to shift our frames of reference from our real world to the fictional world of the narrative. Once we do this, the expectations and schemas we abide by in our real world, when applied to the fictional world, can (if intended by the screenwriter or author) provide the clash or incongruity necessary to affect us as viewer or reader.

Drawing on the notion of Tannen's (1993) 'structures of expectations' (and the quasi-synonymous concepts of '*frame*' and '*schema*'), I also explored the importance of *shared* cognitive structures when considering not just a character's behaviour, but also a way of 'guiding' our interpretation generally. As such, then, Tannen's ideas fit nicely alongside Ryan's concerning a character's *prospective extension of k-world*, as this particular world is concerned with what a character expects or anticipates happening within the fictional domain.

My intention in this chapter was to demonstrate that our analysis and perception of character behaviour can be made richer by bringing various approaches together. However, we haven't considered *why* Melvin's world-view is so different from the other characters (as well as ours). In the following chapter, then, I take Ryan's ideas regarding a character's knowledge world a stage further and incorporate Archer's (2002, 2011a) ideas concerning 'Reality Paradigms' to demonstrate how we can gain further insight into Melvin's character. Archer's ideas, along with her (2011b) *face aggravation scale*, show how Melvin's impoliteness might actually be functioning, because Goffman's notion of *intentional*, *accidental* and *incidental* offence do not appear to fully account for some instances of Melvin's behaviour. Underpinning this will also be the intriguing question of whether Melvin (and by extension *anyone* who suffers from OCD) might have different face wants and needs due to him/them having different 'Reality Paradigms'.

CHAPTER 5

Reality Paradigms, facework intentionality and the social function of humour

The previous chapter discussed Short's (1996) *Discourse Architecture* and explained how a reader or viewer is 'positioned' to receive 'messages' about characters from the playwright or author. Such a discursual structure explains how the concept of 'dramatic irony' can be generated but does not explain how we are 'projected' into the character's world initially or how we might 'move' from one character's perspective to another's. I thus incorporated Galbraith's (1995) Deictic Shift Theory along with Ryan's (1980, 1991) notion of Possible Worlds as a way to augment an explanation of our own understandings and expectations concerning a fictional world and the characters within it. Next, I considered Tannen's (1993) 'structures of expectations' alongside Cook's (1994) concept of 'schema disruption' in order to explore how the notion of shared (or *schematic*) understandings of day-to-day experiences might impact on our interpretation of a character's behaviour, as well as being vehicles for the generation of incongruity. My analysis thus far has nonetheless been incomplete: in order to really understand facework from a characterisation perspective, we need to understand where the characters are coming from mentally as well as socially; in other words we need to consider their *Reality Paradigms* (Archer 2002, 2011a). However, pinpointing more fully the implications of a character's mental worlds involves accepting that the behaviour under analysis might not fit neatly into the categories of *accidental*, *incidental* and *intentional* (cf. Goffman 1967:14). Understanding the wider implications of how facework can function may also provide insight into how we might capture verbally aggressive facework within a wider context of activity types when we consider a) the strategic ambivalence of language (as a term for indeterminacy in context), and b) the fact that 'any given communicative act can have more than one goal description' (Penman 1990:16).

The latter half of this chapter will then focus on Archer's (2011b) *Face Aggravation Scale*. Her model captures a level of facework which can be positioned in-between Goffman's (1967) *incidental* and *intentional* levels (so as to allow movement between them). Labelled as *strategic ambivalence*, this intermediary level is indicative of situations whereby face *damage* is *not* the primary motive. In terms of character analysis this is an intriguing concept, and when we apply it to the character of Melvin Udall, the strategic ambiguity of his language allows for more than one 'reading' of his intentions. Depending on whether we empathise

with him, or not, can also influence the way we ‘read’ his behaviour. One such interpretation is that, through strategic ambiguity, Melvin is able to exploit an instance of instrumental offence (cf. Bousfield 2008) which, while creating short-term face-damage, can be argued as being ultimately for long-term *face-beneficial* purposes (see example 5.2.1). As such, strategic ambiguity allows for interesting interpretations and analysis of character development. It also allows us to consider instances where face-damage (whilst not maliciously intentional)⁵⁴ nevertheless ‘tend[s] to be more planned and more anticipated than Goffman’s (1967:14) *incidental* level seems to allow’ (Archer 2011b:3222). More importantly for facework research itself, Archer’s *facework intentionality scale* implies that facework in general needs to be considered as operating on a cline, with face-enhancement at one end and face-aggravation at the other (Archer personal communication). Being able to identify the facework intentions of both speaker and hearer on the character-to-character level of the discourse structure is dependent on both characters’ *perceived* goals throughout the interaction; however, as Penman (1990:19) has noted, ‘it is not necessarily the case that the goal is an immediate one or that the effect of the strategy can be discerned immediately’. This obviously has implications for how facework strategies are interpreted (see example 5.2.2 below).

The aim of this chapter is to ascertain to what extent facework intentionality, Reality Paradigms and humour might impact on one another within the context of the film generally, and for Melvin in particular. Archer’s facework model suggests that there may be additional contexts in which her work may be situated. In the present discussion I am applying it to character analysis, but the notion that we *all* have the potential to be strategic and implicit in the way we convey offence (when the situation suits us), is a justifiable argument for extending the model even further than simply fictional dialogue. In relation to the humour in this film, my aim in this chapter is to demonstrate how the concept of strategic ambiguity feeds into humour theory (and in particular Freud’s theory of humour here), as well as offering us alternative ‘readings’ of character. Freud’s ideas on the reasons why we feel compelled to laugh at certain types of jokes, offers compelling evidence which suggests that Melvin is strategic in most of his scenes, which means his offensiveness is rarely accidental.

⁵⁴ For me, the idea of ‘maliciously intentional’ is analogous to Culpeper’s (2011:23) definition which considers the idea that behaviours can be perceived as ‘strongly intentional’.

I begin with a brief outline of Harris' (1984) study on 'perspectives of reality' which necessarily sets the scene for a discussion of Archer (2002, 2008, 2011a) to follow. In order to bring together more definitively the interplay between facework and humour and how they might be functioning within this film, I finish with a discussion of Freud's ideas on self-deceit which he maintained was inherent in some joking techniques (first outlined in Chapter Three), followed by a discussion of Billig's (2005) argument concerning the social function of ridicule.

5.1 Facework and Reality Paradigms

5.1.1 Harris' (1984) 'Perspectives of Reality'

In her 1984 study of a number of Arrears and Maintenance courtroom sessions, Harris noted that 'magistrates and defendants start from radically differing perspectives of reality' (Harris 1984:18). From the magistrates' perspective, they had to ascertain whether non-payment of a fine or spouse maintenance was due to legitimate reasons such as an unforeseen change in the defendant's circumstances, or whether they had wilfully chosen not to pay. From the defendants' perspective, they had to convince the magistrate and clerks that non-payment had been through unfortunate circumstances beyond their control. As Harris points out, the significance of such differing perspectives of reality means that 'magistrates and clerks nearly always begin with the assumption that defendants are *unwilling* rather than unable to pay, and defendants, that they are *unable* rather than unwilling to pay (Harris 1984:19 my emphasis).

5.1.2 Archer's (2002, 2011a) 'Reality Paradigms'

Taking Harris' observations above concerning 'unwilling' and 'unable' paradigms, and applying them to her own study of historical courtroom discourse within the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692⁵⁵, Archer demonstrated that 'interlocutors operate out of, and filter information about their world[s] through "particularised" mental perspectives or mind-frames' (Archer 2002:14). The term she adopts for these 'many and varied' mental perspectives is 'Reality Paradigm' (Archer 2002:14).

⁵⁵ Infamous series of hearings, prosecutions and executions within the town of Salem from 1692 to 1693. In the Middle Ages Witchcraft was believed to be a form of magic which was influenced by the devil and was therefore a threat to Christianity and God-fearing citizens. Beginning with the trials of three women (Sarah Good - a homeless beggar, Sarah Osbourne - a non-attender of church and Tituba - a slave, they were accused of 'afflicting' three girls within the village (Betty Parris - aged 9, Abigail Williams - aged 11 and Ann Putnam - aged 12). After several days of interrogation the three women were jailed, but the hysteria which surrounded the concept of 'witchcraft' meant that many more accusations (of men and women) and trials followed, with some of the defendants being executed as a result of a 'guilty' verdict (Hoffer 1997).

Archer defines her own understanding of ‘Reality Paradigms’ as

[...] the *truth* filters interlocutors use to interpret/make sense of their worlds. They are thus more specific to the individual than expectation frames... [rather], they tend to overlap with or feed into representational frames, that is, the way(s) in which interlocutors opt to “represent the character traits, ideas and opinions of and even statements made by others” (Locher and Watts 2008:99, n9)

(Archer 2011a:75 emphases in original)

A fundamental feature of Archer’s (2002) study was the observance of the way the defendants utilised Grice’s (1975) maxims in order to circumvent the magistrates’ ‘particularised’ mental perspective; this being, that the defendants were in fact guilty of the charges of witchcraft, but were ‘unwilling’ to admit to them. However, since the magistrates themselves were also operating within *their* own reality paradigm, which shaped what the ‘truth’ was *for them*, (i.e. that they believed the defendants were, in fact, guilty), the evidence provided by the defendants was necessarily disregarded because it did not ‘fit’ with the magistrates’ belief system. In effect, the magistrates’ *a priori* assumption that the defendants were adopting an ‘unwilling to confess’ paradigm consequently resulted in the *function* of their questions being transformed from purely information-seeking into accusatory (Archer 2002:14 see also Harris 1984). In addition to this, the magistrates’ adherence to their reality paradigms meant that they chose to *ignore* any implicatures made by the defendants which actually contradicted their beliefs, thus making *them* ‘unwilling’ to consider that the defendants might actually be innocent (Archer 2002:14). Indeed, the only way out for the defendants was to ‘abandon their own reality paradigms [of protesting their innocence] in favour of those of the magistrates’ (Archer 2002:16).

Archer’s definition of Reality Paradigms necessarily borrows from Fowler’s (1977:76) notion of ‘mindstyle’ which he defines as ‘cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another’. When applied to literary fiction, Fowler draws on Halliday’s (1978) linguistic theory concerning the *textual*, *interpersonal* and *ideational* (experiential) function of language. From this perspective, Fowler maintains that mindstyle is ‘the world-view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the ideational structure of the text’ (Fowler 1996:214).

Fowler specifies *consistency* as a necessary defining feature of mindstyle, but Melvin’s own ‘mindstyle’ or ‘world view’ does *not* remain constant; and this is the main reason why I

prefer to use the term ‘reality paradigm’ rather than ‘mindstyle’ in my analysis of him⁵⁶. This is because Melvin’s own Reality Paradigms *are* able to shift and change, hence his character is able to develop within the film. By this, I mean that he does not remain ‘static’ as simply an ‘offensive character’. The two concepts are similar, indeed as Archer points out, ‘mindstyle tends to be used to depict world views that are odd in some way⁵⁷, and thus marked (when compared to the societal “norm”)’ (Archer 2011a:86), and Melvin’s world views are definitely marked. Understanding and applying the concept of ‘Reality Paradigms’ to my chosen extract, and the analysis of Melvin in particular, not only shows us the extent of his marked assumptions and expectations within his own world, it also shows us how his facework is functioning, since his facework is influenced *by* the opinions and prejudices which make up his Reality Paradigms. This in turn allows us (as researchers) greater analytical power when determining the extent of Melvin’s communicative intentions – something which lies at the heart of (im) politeness² research. Last but not least, the concept of Reality Paradigms allows us to see the extent of Melvin’s ‘journey’ towards self-enlightenment because as he grows more tolerant of the other characters (Simon in particular), his Reality Paradigms necessarily change.

In the following example, Melvin’s Reality Paradigms and his belief world indicate his marked attitude not only towards the other diners, but also how he expects to be treated whenever he enters the restaurant.

Example [5.1.2.1]

[Context. *Melvin is in the restaurant. There is a couple seated at the table he usually occupies. Frustrated, he hovers around the waitress’ station. It is very busy and Melvin is obviously getting in their way. The waitresses are ignoring him whilst chatting amidst taking out orders. Melvin is becoming increasingly agitated, not just at the thought of one of them accidentally brushing against him (and thereby transmitting germs of which he is phobic), but also because he wants – needs – to be seated at a specific table-and that table is otherwise occupied*].

- (1) **Melvin** [*when Carol eventually looks at him and with frustrated emphasis*] I’m starving!
- (2) **Carol** [*Unmoved. Closing the hatch down to prevent Melvin coming in any further*] Go on. Sit down. You’re not allowed back here.

⁵⁶ Indeed, we can use the notion of Reality Paradigm in discussions of character developments more generally.

⁵⁷ *Mindstyle* does not have to be about marked cases, even though, of course, these are the most discussed ones.

(3) **Melvin** [*moving round to the opposite side of the station where there is no hatch and where the waitresses are bustling in and out. Up close in Carol's face and with indignation*] I've got *Jews* at my table!

(4) **Carol** – It's not your table. It's the place's table. You can sit at someone else's station. [*This produces a collective gasp of horror from the other waitresses*]. Or you can wait your turn.

[end]

Melvin's emphatic declarative made visually up-close to Carol at line 1 implies (via a flout of the Maxim of Manner) that she is somehow responsible for Melvin being hungry. Within his reality paradigm, then, Carol is someone who he expects (indeed *needs*) to cater for him the minute he walks into the restaurant. There is further linguistic evidence of his marked reality paradigm at line 3 also: '*I've got Jews at my table*'. Firstly, his use of the possessive pronoun to demarcate the table as *his* property implicates (this time via a flout of the Maxim of Quality) a number of propositions, or rather *expectations*, which (in his world) he holds to be *true*:

- The table should be kept vacant for him (or at the least, be vacated before he arrives)
- It is the responsibility of Carol (in particular) to ensure that this particular table be kept free
- By allowing other diners to sit at his table Carol has reneged on her duty

All of these implicatures can be seen as indications of Melvin's marked or 'odd',⁵⁸ Reality Paradigms. For, not only is he signaling linguistically what his particular prejudices are, he is also being socially uncooperative by haranguing Carol in this way. This clash of expectations and assumptions in Melvin's belief world, compared to the world of Carol and the other characters, suggests that the idea of incongruity is *symbolic* of Melvin's overall character in general. I prefer to use the term *belief world* here (and from herein generally), in relation to Melvin because I am in agreement with Semino *et al* (1999) who favour the term *belief world* rather than *knowledge world* due to the discrepancy within truth conditional semantics between what we know or believe to be true in our own world, compared to a fictional world (see McIntyre 2006:124 for a fuller discussion on this phenomenon).

⁵⁸ They are 'odd' when viewed according to the *Principle of Minimal Departure*. Obviously, they are not odd as far as Melvin is concerned.

We can account for some aspects of Melvin's behaviour as being manifested by his socially debilitating condition here; for example, we know that he needs predictability and structure in his day-to-day existence, hence his *need* that a certain table is going to be vacant at the same time each morning, in the same restaurant where he is served by the same waitress. However, the way in which he articulates this necessity is unwarranted; his offensive reference to the couple at the table by referring to them as *Jews* is indicative of an aggressive personality as well as racial intolerance, not least since the noun *Jews* has undergone *pejoration* (Katamba 2005: 176). What this means is that the German use of the word during world War II was pejorative (disparaging), and, as such, over the years, has taken on a negative semantic prosody. The structure of his declaration is also rather odd. By declaring *I've got X at my table*, it is almost as if the entity concerned is distasteful or harmful to him. I have already discussed the various implicatures and expectations generated with his use of a possessive pronoun regarding the table, but his use of the word *Jews* is also *priming* us lexically (cf. Hoey 2005) to view this word (and by extension the characters seated there) negatively (thus encouraging us to take on Melvin's point of view as well). So, not only is Melvin *framing* the diners in a negative (and very incongruous) way, given what we know about 'appropriate' behaviour and expectations in restaurants (cf. Schank and Abelson 1977), our schemata regarding Melvin are triggering us to naturally anticipate rude or obnoxious behaviour from him.

Whilst 'mindstyle' may be 'captured' by 'Reality Paradigms' (Archer 2011a:86), I believe Reality Paradigms are a more accessible way of gaining insight into the way a character constructs his/her own reality, as they enable the reader or viewer to 'understand what might lay behind certain framing devices' (Archer 2011a:86); something which can be seen in the way Melvin negatively frames the couple seated at 'his' table which leads us to infer a racist reality paradigm on his part. More importantly, we can see how Reality Paradigms are able to demonstrate how linguistic and cognitive factors can co-occur in order to manipulate the viewer to perceive character behaviour in a certain way. As a cognitive model for characterisation inferencing, we can see how such clashes of beliefs and expectations are perfectly in line with the incongruity theory of humour which maintains that 'much humour stems from violations of what is socially or culturally agreed to be normal' (Meyer 2000:314).

In the following example (discussed previously in Chapter Three example 3.1.2.1), we can see another indication of Melvin's reality paradigm which 'feeds' his beliefs and hence prejudices concerning people of a different culture:

Example [5.1.2.2]

[Context – *Melvin, annoyed that his neighbour's dog is wandering the apartment corridor and attempting to urinate, has just unceremoniously forced it down the garbage chute. Simon comes out of his apartment calling for his dog. Growing increasingly worried, he spots Melvin about to enter his own apartment and risks an interaction...*

(1) **Simon** – Mr Udall...Excuse me. [*Melvin is trying to ignore Simon*] Hey there! [*Melvin is forced to turn round*]. Have you seen Verdell?

(2) **Melvin** – [*feigning puzzlement*] What's he look like?

(3) **Simon** – [*slightly confused*] My dog...you know...I mean my little dog with the adorable face...don't you know what my dog looks like?

(4) **Melvin** – I got it. You're talking about your dog... I thought it was the name of that coloured man I've been seeing in the hall.

(5) **Simon** – [*Glancing back towards his own apartment and calling Frank over*] What colour was that?

(6) **Melvin** [*parodying a deep Southern accent*] – Like thick molasses, with one of those wide noses perfect for smelling trouble and prison food...

(7) **Simon** [*Simon has had enough and attempts to put Melvin on the spot with an introduction*] Frank Sachs – Melvin Udall.

(8) **Melvin** [*not missing a beat*] How're you doing?

(9) **Simon** – Frank shows my work, Mr Udall. I think you know that.

(10) **Melvin** – What I know is that as long as you keep your work *zipped up* around me, I don't give a rat crap what or where you shove your show. Are we done being neighbours for now?

[end]

At line (6), we can see how Melvin 'frames' Frank as having criminal tendencies through the metonymic association of Frank's skin colour and facial features. This portrayal of Frank is based on Melvin's own stereotypical assumptions regarding people of African-American

origin and, whilst we might be able to argue that Melvin's impoliteness here is merely a trigger-response derived from his OCD and his general need to maintain his negative face wants, it is (I would argue) a more *predominant* linguistic indication of his racially-prejudiced reality paradigm. If further evidence is needed to support this interpretation, consider Melvin's attempt to parody a deep Southern accent and his use of the remote deictic demonstrative '*that* coloured man' at line (4) which, for me, are further indications of his psychologically 'remote' or negative attitude towards Frank. Indeed, as Melvin does not even know Frank, I would argue that they are strongly indicative of his racially-intolerant reality paradigm concerning people of a different skin colour and/or ethnicity.

Within the context of the viewer's own actual world, Melvin's reality paradigm creates incongruity and tension here because he speaks and behaves in ways which are *not* considered appropriate in modern western society. In terms of Ryan's (1991) Possible Worlds typology, in which 'rules' within fictional discourse are intended to mirror rules within our own society, referring to another person as being 'coloured' is no longer acceptable terminology, again, due to a pejorative shift (as with the word *Jews*, above) which has affected its semantic and social sense (cf. Katamba 2005:176). With the tension now manifest on both levels of discourse, there is the potential for laughter for the viewer here since 'laughter may be forthcoming as a reaction to *any* sort of emotional state, not solely amusement' (Keith-Spiegel, 1972:17, emphasis in original).

In terms of Archer (2002), one interpretation of Melvin in the above scene would be that he is 'unwilling' to behave 'appropriately'; whilst another interpretation could be that he is 'unable'. Archer noted that in her study of the Salem Witch Trials, the magistrates sometimes deliberately chose *not* to understand the implicatures of the defendants because they had already assumed that they were lying. However, it was also the case that within the magistrates' own Reality Paradigms they also *believed* that the girls really had been afflicted by witchcraft. This suggests that the two paradigms ('unwilling' and 'unable') are not mutually exclusive and that we can 'flip' between both paradigms depending on our goals within the discourse situation at a given time. In example 5.1.2.2 above, Melvin's refusal to acknowledge the true nature of Simon's professional work (an artist), and instead implicate that he is a male prostitute, suggests that (in Melvin's belief world) he is 'unwilling' to *believe* that Simon has a respectable occupation simply because of his homosexual disposition; which also indicates that Melvin adheres to a homophobic-motivated reality paradigm as well.

As I have pointed out, these two paradigms are dynamic in nature depending on the discourse goals at the time. In the following example, Melvin begins by implying an ‘unable’ paradigm....

[Example 5.1.2.3]

[Context- *Melvin has gone to the restaurant but Carol has not been there to serve him. After an altercation with another waitress which results in him being thrown out by the restaurant manager, Melvin calls at Carol’s private address to ascertain the reason for her absence AND to convey his frustration and dissatisfaction that she hasn’t been at the restaurant to serve him.*]

(1) **Melvin** – [*as Carol opens her door*] I’m hungry! [*She is astonished at the sight of him on her doorstep. He is unabashed-indignant even*] You’ve ruined my whole day. I haven’t eaten.

(2) **Carol** – What are you doing here?

(3) **Melvin** [*Ignoring the question*] This is not a sexist thing. If you were a waiter I would still be here saying-

(4) **Carol** – [*interrupting*] Are you totally gone? This is my private home!

(5) **Melvin** – [*calmly*] I am trying to keep emotions out of this. Even though this is an important issue to me and I have strong feelings about the subject.

(6) **Carol** – [*angrily*] What subject? That I wasn’t there to take crap from you and bring you eggs? Do you have any control over how creepy you allow yourself to get?

(7) **Melvin** – [*calmly*] Yes I do, as a matter of fact, and to prove it I have not gotten personal and you have. Why aren’t you at work? You’re not sick; you don’t look sick, just very tired and bitter.

(8) **Carol** – [*with resignation*] My son is sick, Okay?

[end]

Melvin’s lamentations at line (1) lead us to infer that he has been ‘unable’ to eat because Carol was not at the restaurant to serve him. However, his admission to Carol’s presupposition in line (6) *do you have any control over how creepy you allow yourself to get?*

suggests that he does understand the consequences of his actions upon the other characters. Not only that, he has complete control over those actions as well. Such understanding and control indicate that, far from being ‘unable’ to eat, he has actually chosen not to and therefore is operating under an ‘unwilling’ paradigm here; in the sense that he has been unwilling to allow anyone else to serve him⁵⁹. Further evidence for this control can be seen in the following example in which he strategically plays on his OCD in attempting to secure an unscheduled appointment with his therapist:

Example [5.1.2.4]

[Context. Melvin is rushing to get to his therapist. He has not bothered to make an appointment. On arriving at his office he barges straight in. His therapist looks up, unsurprised.]

(1) **Melvin** [*agitated*] – HELP!

(2) **Therapist** [*calmly*] – If you wanna see me you will not do this. You’ll make an appointment.

(3) **Melvin** – Dr Green how can you diagnose someone as an obsessive-compulsive disorder and then act as though I had some choice about barging in?

(4) **Therapist** [*calmly*] – There’s not going to be a debate. You must leave-

(5) **Melvin** [*shouting*] – You said you could help me! What was that? A tease?

(6) **Therapist** [*calmly opening the door of his office to show Melvin out*] I can help you if you take responsibility to keep regular appointments-

(7) **Melvin** [*noticing the change in decor for the first time*] You changed the room around...

(8) **Therapist** – Two years ago. I also grew my beard but you’re not interested in changes in me-

(9) **Melvin** – Shh! I don’t have this mountain of available time. I have to get to my restaurant on time. Now do you know how hard it was for me to come here?

(10) **Therapist** – [*admittedly*] yes.

[end]

⁵⁹ CF Chapter Four. Example 4.6.2, line 2 ‘No No No get Carol’

In this example then, Melvin's cry for help at line (1) immediately suggests that he is not in control of his present circumstances and is therefore operating within an 'unable' paradigm. The therapist, however, is unmoved, and his calm refusal to accommodate Melvin's unscheduled arrival drives Melvin further in his quest to appear helpless: *how can you diagnose someone as an obsessive-compulsive disorder and then act as though I had some choice about barging in?* The therapist's refusal to acknowledge the presupposition here suggests that he is aware of Melvin's flimsy attempt to secure an unscheduled appointment and, hence, he knows that Melvin is more in control of his behaviour than he sometimes likes to portray. The above scene suggests that we might want to think twice about *justifying* his offensiveness as being a direct result of his OCD. In light of the discussion on Melvin's Reality Paradigms, we should now consider the possibility that his offensiveness arises because he has a *naturally offensive disposition*⁶⁰. Moreover, it suggests that Melvin's use of offensiveness is determined by his goals at the time, i.e. (for the majority of the time) he is offensive *strategically* (cf. Archer 2011b). In the above examples, Melvin's goals, whilst appearing to be framed within a 'helpless' or 'unable' paradigm, are actually all self-serving and therefore strategic ones. Such behaviour is not illogical, for, as Thomas (1995:179) suggests:

people employ certain strategies ...for reasons of expediency - experience has taught us that particular strategies are likely to succeed in given circumstances, so we use them.

Understanding how goals can influence facework intention is not a straightforward business. As Penman (1990) points out:

Not only are messages inherently ambiguous...they can be intentionally misleading. They can serve more than one goal at the same time and can serve different goals over time. The intent can be expressed directly or indirectly and the effect can be immediate, cumulative or even indeterminate

(Penman 1990 21-22)

Melvin's attempt to display an 'unable' paradigm in the above scenes whilst being capable-but-unwilling, displays a strategic or calculating aspect of his character which would not otherwise have been observable to us without a consideration of the concept of Reality Paradigms. We can see then, how Reality Paradigms when applied to fictional dialogue, can

⁶⁰ This also raises questions as to the screenwriters' accuracy in the portrayal of the condition of OCD; ultimately of course, we may have to accept that some of Melvin's behaviour is primarily for the benefit of the audience.

offer a richer analysis of character. Whilst the notion of ‘intentionally misleading’ someone carries a negative implication, this need not always be the case. Interpreting facework intentionality is a difficult business whichever discourse level we approach it from. In order to unpack the *functions* of Melvin’s facework more fully, we need to consider facework more generally as a *scalar* concept; moreover, we might want to consider how facework strategies which on the surface *appear* as aggravating might actually have a *beneficial* goal.

5.2 Archer’s (2011b) Facework Intentionality Scale

Noting the strategic ambiguity which lawyers exploit within a court of law through the multifunctionality of their questions, Archer (2011b) has noted how ‘a particularly skilful lawyer can construct his/her questions in such a way that s/he communicates his/her message to the jury - the real addressee - regardless of the witness’s answer’ (Archer 2011b:3216). Whilst it is a prosecuting lawyer’s job (and therefore intention) to discredit a witness’s narrative, they are careful not to do this in a way which would suggest either ‘maliciousness’ or ‘spitefulness’ (following Goffman’s 1967:14 level of intentional face attack). However, as lawyers understand only too well, and Penman has already observed, the beauty about facework intention can sometimes lie in its ambiguity. Whilst the lawyers can (correctly) claim that they do not wilfully seek to damage the face of the witness-under-question, they nevertheless ‘undertake *planned* actions as “part of the strategic process of presenting evidence”, fully knowing that a “by-product” of their actions will be face damage’ (Archer 2011b:3217 see also Harris 1984:150 emphasis in original).

In order to account for such *strategic ambiguity*, Archer proposes a scale which accounts for a level of facework which sits (so as to allow for movement) between Goffman’s *intentional* and *incidental* face threat levels. As such, one level of facework it can account for is in the way ‘S uses indirectness and multifunctionality in a planned but not a ‘spiteful’ way’ (Archer 2011b:3220). However, what is intended by the speaker and what is perceived by the hearer can very easily be at odds. Part of that perception is modelled on our prior experiences or *schemas* surrounding a particular activity type or person. In courtroom discourse in particular, the fact that witnesses and defendants anticipate having their ‘morality, competence and/or trustworthiness called into question’ (Archer 2011b:3226) means that they will naturally perceive face-aggravation as a primary function of the lawyers’ questions. The clash between intention and perception necessarily produces what Ting-Toomey (2009:227) has labelled ‘facework collision’ i.e.

[...] behavioural expectancy violations and actual communication clash issues. The clash can entail perceived incompatibility of value orientations, norms, interaction goals, facework styles, and meanings between two interdependent parties or groups

(Ting-Toomey 2009:227)

Archer's *facework aggravation scale* can allow us to understand instances of strategic ambivalence, and also be used to account for more 'accidental' instances of facework collision. For example, where 'deliberate face attack [has been perceived by the hearer] but was considered as politic [by the speaker]' (Archer 2011b:3227). As such then, her model, with the addition of an *accidental* zone which overlaps with a *politic* (non-marked behaviour) zone, allows for the possibility of scenarios in which "genuine" accidental face damage [might] be seen for what it is – unintentional' (Archer 2011b:3227 see also chapter 2, example 2.8.1). Strategic ambivalence, then, allows us to make multiple interpretations about Melvin's behaviour, and what motivates a particular 'reading' is what we think of him as a character. Consider the following example:

[Example 5.2.1]

[Context. Simon's medical bills have bankrupted him and he is about to lose his home. In desperation he has been ringing his friends to ask for their help financially. There have been no offers and he is distraught in the knowledge that there are now no other avenues open to him. It is also obvious to him now that these friendships have only been superficial. Melvin has just returned from walking Verdell and Simon is anxious that his tearful condition is unobserved. He wheels himself from the room keeping his back to Melvin. Melvin is unaware of Simon's highly emotional state].

- (1) **Melvin** – [Addressing Simon's back] Maybe I'll bring him some food by
- (2) **Simon** – [Over his shoulder] Thank you for walking him. If you'll excuse me I'm not feeling so well.
- (3) **Melvin** – [looking around him] This place smells like shit!
- (4) **Simon** – [indistinctly] Go away.
- (5) **Melvin** – that cleaning lady doesn't –
- (6) **Simon** [with increasing volume and intonation] please just LEAVE!
- (7) **Melvin** [his attention is now caught by the note of hysteria in Simon's voice] What happened to your queer party friends?

(8) **Simon** [*At last turning round to face Melvin in tears of rage and frustration*] GET OUTTA HERE! [*He completely breaks down, sobbing*] Nothing worse than having to feel this way in front of you...

(9) **Melvin** – [*Unmoved*] Nellie, you're a disgrace to depression.

(10) **Simon** - [*wheeling towards Melvin in anger*] Rot in hell Melvin!

(11) **Melvin** [*trying to make light of Simon's response and almost smirking*] No need to stop being a lady. Quit worrying. [*Turning away from Simon and smiling flippantly*] You'll be back on your knees in no time.

(12) **Simon** – [*This is too much for Simon. He propels himself out of his wheelchair and lunges at Melvin using the cast on his arm as a weapon. Melvin is taken completely by surprise and falls to the floor. He realises the extent of Simon's emotional state and hurriedly gets back to his feet now feeling genuinely worried about what Simon will do to him. Simon is now the confrontational one and with each step that Melvin takes backwards, Simon takes one towards him*] Is this fun for you? You lucky devil. This just keeps getting better and better doesn't it? I'm losing my apartment Melvin. And Frank, he wants me to beg my parents who haven't called me, for help, and I won't and...and I don't want to paint anymore. So the life that I was trying for is over. The life that I had is gone and I'm feeling so damned sorry for myself that it's difficult to breathe. It's high times for you isn't it Melvin? The Gay Neighbour is terrified. TERRIFIED! [*Simon's emotion all spent up, he collapses into a chair. Melvin is at a loss on how to respond to this. In resignation he also sits down in an adjacent chair*].

(13) **Melvin** – [*sounding almost apologetic*] I was just... trying to give you a boost.

[end]

From lines 3 to 11, Melvin's behaviour towards Simon appears to be impolite (in terms of Bousfield 2008). Certainly, Simon is under no illusion with regards Melvin's intention here; on the character level it is just another occasion for Melvin to score homophobic points at the expense of his Gay Neighbour. But this is not the only interpretation available to us (as analysts). Melvin knows that Simon's physical and emotional state is extremely fragile at this point. His response *Nellie, you're a disgrace to depression*, is highly offensive both in terms of the implicature (that Simon is merely wallowing in self-pity) and the disparaging colloquial term used to denote homosexual men. It appears puzzling, then, as to why he continues to provoke Simon, not only with his face damaging remarks in general, but also by trying to make a 'joke' of his sexuality with the pun on the well-known idiom *you'll soon be back on your feet*.

One way of ‘reading’ Melvin’s behaviour here is to consider that his offensive comments are being issued with more than one purpose; the ultimate goal *could* be an attempt to force Simon out of his depression, thus enabling him to regain his self-respect. In other words Melvin’s offensiveness in this scene is *multifunctional* (Penman 1990). Whilst Melvin’s face-attack here *appears* to be ‘intentionally gratuitous and conflictive’ (cf. Bousfield 2008), we could, in fact, argue that there is a deeper more *altruistic* motive for his behaviour. As someone who regularly employs ‘instrumental impoliteness’ i.e. ‘with the primary goal of affecting the target(s) of the impoliteness so that she/he acts in certain setting-specific,(extra) linguistic ways’ (Bousfield 2008:139), then, Melvin *knows* that a “by-product” of his actions is going to be face damage. Indeed, the face-damage is necessary here in order to provoke Simon sufficiently enough to make him want to retaliate. We could think of Melvin’s facework intention here as being a case of short-term damage for long-term benefit. As such, his offensiveness is situated between Goffman’s intentional and incidental levels of face-damage (cf. Goffman’s 1967:14 definition of *incidental* as being “unplanned” but with possible face damage still being anticipated; Archer 2011b). But we can *only* consider this possibly altruistic motive by taking account of Melvin’s utterance at line (13): *I was just... trying to give you a boost.*

The strategic ambiguity inherent in language, of course, allows Melvin’s comment at line 13 a certain amount of ‘plausible deniability’ (cf. Leech 1983), by allowing him to claim that his ultimate goal was positive in intent. However, as Penman (1990) notes above, language is inherently ambiguous, which means that what is intended by the speaker and what is perceived by the hearer can very easily be at odds. If Melvin *was* trying to convince Simon that his offensive remarks were simply a way of raising his spirits then he has failed spectacularly, as a continuation of the example demonstrates:

[Example 5.2.2]

(13) **Melvin** – [*almost apologetically*] I was just... trying to give you a boost.

(14) **Simon** – Lucky you. You’re here for rock bottom. You absolute horror of a human being.

[end]

Whether or not Simon has perceived Melvin's attempt to help him, he has nonetheless *chosen* to disregard this interpretation and made explicit that he has interpreted Melvin's words not only as being 'purposefully offensive' (cf. Tracy and Tracy 1998:227), but also that they have been 'calculated to convey complete disrespect and contempt through symbolic means' (Goffman 1967:89). This has implications for any definition of impoliteness which holds speaker-intention to be its defining feature. Indeed as Terkourafi (2008:58) has pointed out in relation to politeness, we may be better placed to view (im) politeness as 'a perlocutionary effect' since it may, but need not, rely on recognising the speaker's intention. This view is also upheld by Culpeper (2011:23), whose latest definition of impoliteness places intention firmly in the background of explanatory features. If nothing else, the above example demonstrates nicely the 'inherently ambiguous' and 'indeterminate' nature of facework intention and goals as per Penman (1990) and Archer (2011b).

Whilst I have been at pains to argue a case for the fact that Melvin *appears* to be unable to see other people's emotional origo (as in line 13 above, and Chapter Two example 2.8.1), this cannot be the case if we remember that Melvin's profession is as a (very) successful author of romantic fiction. He therefore *clearly* has an ability to understand, manipulate and effectively communicate not only other people's emotions, but women's emotions in particular. What I argue here, though, is that he *disconnects* between understanding people's emotions when he is communicating via a *product* i.e. on an intellectual level within his writing, and when he is interacting with people in his day-to-day living. Understanding people's emotions from a work-related perspective does not necessarily mean that he has this capacity himself. He understands emotion on an intellectual level only, and this is what is important here, because when he *is* taken by surprise at the emotional reaction of others (see especially Chapter Two example 2.8.1), it demonstrates that he is *not* thinking about the consequences of his behaviour for the other person, and this suggests that he is *not* partaking in enough facework.

Strategic ambiguity allows for another explanation for Melvin's utterance at line 13; one which throws doubt on an altruistic motive and instead points to a darker purpose. The alternative reading suggests that Melvin has a naturally offensive disposition, and that he is simply targeting Simon (again) whilst Simon is in a vulnerable state. The fact that Simon reacts so vehemently appears to take Melvin by surprise hence his lame 'excuse' at line 13. What we can incorporate here then, is an element of humour theory – in particular Superiority Theory, which allows us to gain mischievous pleasure from watching Melvin torment Simon in this way. The idea of humour as serving a *social function* (cf Billig 2005) is something

which I want to address in the next section, because it offers a suggestion as to why we may find amusement when we observe Melvin's offensive behaviour throughout this film in general.

Before we consider this however, let me just summarise my thesis, to this point: I have demonstrated how Reality Paradigms (Archer 2002) can be used to support Ryan's (1991) notion of Possible Worlds, and from this I argue that we still need to think about behaviour in facework terms. I have shown that it is not simply the case that impoliteness either is occurring or is not; behaviour is not black or white, which means that our analysis should not be either. What we *can* do is incorporate Archer's (2011b) *Aggravation Scale* to account for the 'grey areas' when attempting to discern behaviour, because this scale incorporates Penman (who considers *multifunctionality*) with Archer's *strategic ambivalence*, which uses indirectness for socially-motivated means. Once we acknowledge behaviour as socially motivated we can go on to consider what the *social functions* of certain behaviours might be. This idea necessarily links in with humour theory because humour is necessarily a social endeavour. In other words, we need all the sum of the parts combined together; to *blend* together, because when applied together, each one helps to validate the other. Humour theory then, is useful up to a point, but by incorporating Reality Paradigms and strategic ambivalence we can explain *why* it is useful; in other words the application of the humour theory to our analyses fills the gap between the claims that are made by humour theorists, and its practical application to – in this instance – fictional dialogue. So, having ascertained that linguistic behaviour is multifunctional (and we have seen how Melvin himself can be strategically ambiguous when the mood suits him), we can now move on to consider what function the humour in this film draws on. In other words, let us now delve deeper into the psychology which might attempt to explain not only the 'comedy' element of the film in general, but the reasons why we should want to laugh at Melvin's offensiveness towards the other characters. In order to explore this we need to consider the social functions of humour.

5.3 The social functions of humour

5.3.1 Ridicule

Billig (2005:176) convincingly argues that one of humour's paradoxes is that it is both social and anti-social: 'it can bring people together in a bond of enjoyment, and, by mockery, it can exclude people'. As a social phenomenon then, this implies that humour (and laughter) must both serve a function in society, and that function must be communicative in nature. As such,

we must refrain from trying to explain such behaviour using individualistic approaches, as the three ‘traditional’ approaches have hitherto done; by this I mean that we can no longer rely on explaining humour and laughter as being physiological reactions to a single comic stimulus. This has been the inherent weakness within the three major theoretical perspectives which I outlined in Chapter Three (Billig 2005:195). If, as Bergson declared (1911:5), ‘laughter appears to stand in need of an echo’ in as much as laughter is ‘always the laughter of a group’ (Bergson 1911:5), then this implies that both laughter and humour are socially-grounded phenomena. As Billig (2005:195) has correctly pointed out, however, it is *humour* rather than laughter which requires the echo, as some forms of rhetorical laughter (as in for example ‘problems-talk’) are anything but humorous (see Jefferson 1984; Chapman 2001; Du Pré 1998).

The idea of ridicule as serving a social function was first discussed in Chapter Three when I outlined Bergson’s Social Theory of Humour. For Bergson, laughter in the form of ridicule was there as a corrective device, as a way of exerting social compliance upon people whom (we believe) are not behaving ‘appropriately’, i.e. by complying with social conventions. So how might we apply the concept of ridicule as a form of social discipline in our analysis of scenes 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 above?

Disciplinary humour in the form of ridicule is about making the hearer conform to the speaker’s ideas concerning social norms of appropriateness. In Melvin’s belief world, and in line with his Reality Paradigms, the other characters (and Simon in particular) do not conform to *his* version of appropriateness⁶¹, hence his habit of ridiculing them at the first opportunity - with the exception of Carol. This form of social discipline-through- ridicule may be an unconscious motive on the part of Melvin, who may be convincing himself (as he attempts to do with his therapist) that his OCD controls his behaviour. But Simon is especially difficult for Melvin to comprehend because of Simon’s homosexual preferences. Nor can Melvin understand men who engage in open displays of emotion. Notice that Melvin does not make reference to Simon’s sexuality until Simon has raised his voice to such a pitch as to be foregrounded at line (6). Melvin knows that Simon is un-confrontational by nature and his curiosity is now piqued, although visually at this point Simon still has his back to Melvin keeping his true emotional state hidden. When Simon turns round in anger and frustration at line (8) his tears are plain to see, but Melvin’s reaction is not one of sympathy

⁶¹ This is ironic considering the inappropriate way that Melvin behaves generally.

(remember that face-concerns and reciprocity are not part of Melvin's make-up at this point). For Melvin, Simon's behaviour is inappropriate; grown men do not cry. However, he is unaware of the full extent of Simon's financial and mental breakdown and his response implies that Melvin has inferred that he is simply indulging in self-pity - *quit worrying...you'll be back on your knees in no time*. Indeed, this flippant quip is also highly aggressive given the sexual implication which the comment evokes and knowing what we do about Melvin's attitude towards homosexuality. What is interesting is Melvin's 'explanation' at line 13, because on the surface it looks like Melvin is trying to apologise for upsetting Simon; indeed we have considered the possibility that Melvin is simply trying to rouse Simon from his depression by being a little 'harsh' on him. But in order to tease out a 'darker' interpretation of Melvin's motives, we need to return to Freud and apply his ideas concerning the hidden intentions within jokes.

5.3.2 Tendentious and non-tendentious jokes

As discussed briefly in Chapter Three, Freud maintained that human nature in general was marked by self-deceit, and this included humour and jokes. He distinguished between two types of jokes; 'innocent' jokes⁶² where 'the joke is an end in itself and serves no particular aim' (Freud [1905] 1991: 132) and 'tendentious' jokes which do serve an aim.

Freud noted though that even 'innocent' jokes could have 'a kernel of thought' wrapped up inside the 'joking envelope' (i.e. the joking technique or word-play), and this thought could be tendentious in nature; indeed it was very often something – either hostile or sexual in nature - which we would not utter out loud because of the social restrictions surrounding the content. However, when wrapped up in the 'joking envelope' we are able to express, comment on, even laugh at something which we would otherwise have to repress. Being able to find an outlet for such restrictions and taboos necessarily offers us a sense of release (either socially or emotionally or both). Melvin's pun on the idiom *you'll soon be on your feet* is not, I would argue, an attempt at making Simon feel better, because we know from his Reality Paradigms how he views homosexuality in general, and Simon in particular. Melvin's comment must be, first and foremost, aggressive in intention. His 'explanation' then, suggests that he is trying to delude *himself* as to this being his real motive. This was something that

⁶² A good example of 'innocent jokes' can be found on Tim Vine's website, a comedian who is famous for his one-liners <http://www.jokes4us.com/peoplejokes/comedianjokes/timvinejokes.html>

Freud maintained we all do; we all try to delude ourselves that a joke is ‘just’ a joke. A joke affords us a sense of ‘pleasure’ and in the case of a tendentious joke when applied to an enemy (as in Melvin’s pun above), we are able to ridicule them in an oblique way due to the ‘joking envelope,’ which allows the joker to ‘achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming [the enemy]’ (Freud [1905]1991:147).

But why should we laugh at Melvin here (if, indeed we do)? One of Freud’s observations concerning tendentious jokes was that they produce much greater hilarity than do innocent jokes, even though both jokes employ similar techniques (such as word-play). This offers support for the fact that, when we laugh at a tendentious joke, we are actually enjoying the hidden meaning or content of the aggressive or sexual thought which lies at the core of the joke, even though, on the surface, we may think we are appreciating the wittiness of the remark. In terms of the example above, as Melvin tries to assert that his comment was just a way of giving Simon a boost, on the audience level any humour generated suggests that it might not be entirely innocent; indeed by laughing at Melvin’s remark Freud would point out that what *we* are actually doing is *validating* and *enjoying* his mockery of Simon’s sexuality, which is actually the underlying content of the remark. In support of this idea, research has shown that people enjoy jokes involving taboo topics more than non-taboo topics (see Kuhlman 1985), which in turn adds weight to Freud’s theory that it is not the surface-form or joke-work that we react to with aggressive jokes, it is the tendentious content hidden beneath.

I would argue that linguistic aggression is actually Melvin’s goal here; as Billig (2005) has noted

[...] a speaker may be suspected of possessing ulterior, even hidden purposes, in uttering an innocent pun at a particular point [in a] conversation...

(Billig 2005:157)

Billig goes on to point out that one of those hidden purposes might be ‘disrupting the seriousness of others’ (Billig 2005:157). This is something we cannot discount knowing what we know about Melvin up to this point in the film.

I have already suggested that Melvin’s ridiculing in the above scene constitutes a type of social disciplining, but we can also see how his use of ridicule might also be considered as rebellious in function - not necessarily against Simon here, but against society’s ethical codes in general. Sartre’s (1948) essay *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* suggests that, when bigots

indulge in their outrageously exaggerated opinions and views surrounding stereotypes, they are actually *mocking* the standards of liberalism and tolerance, whilst at the same time affording themselves release from ‘standards of rationality, decency and evidence’ (Billig 2005:210). Whenever someone attempts to account for their laughter by saying it was ‘just a joke’, they are being rebellious - they are mocking the seriousness of society’s tolerance as well as implicitly criticising others who have not permitted that ‘joke’. Far from Melvin trying to convince Simon (as well as convincing himself) that his ridiculing was intended to benefit Simon in some way (by *just trying to give [him] a boost*), it is possible that what he was unconsciously doing was mocking society’s ethical standards which allowed him temporary release from having to uphold any standards of decency. In terms of viewing Melvin’s behaviour from the audience level, this would mean that we are able to be entertained by Melvin’s behaviour because by validating it (which we do if we enjoy it) we are allowing ourselves to be temporarily freed from the social codes which prohibit his behaviour. This, then, places both types of humour firmly on both discourse levels simultaneously: we have humour being experienced as *ridicule* on the character-to-character level, and we have humour being perceived as *rebellion* and *release* on the author-to-audience level.

There is also another reason for explaining the humour in this scene, and it is something which Billig (2005) has noted links humour and ridicule together: embarrassment.

5.3.3 Embarrassment

Billig notes how Goffman’s original essay on embarrassment was observant of actors’ need to maintain *face* and that when a breach of *face* occurred it would result in a ‘feeling of discomfiture ... [which] seems always to be unpleasant’ (Goffman 1967:101). Goffman noted that embarrassment could arise through ‘unfulfilled expectations’ and, in particular, those moral expectations which ‘surround the individual...who carries on social encounters’ (1967:105). Our fear of embarrassment, then, is the social constraint which we abide by and which monitors our everyday behaviour.

Drawing on, and extending the ideas of both Goffman (1967) and Bergson (1911), Billig (2005) makes three pertinent observations which point to the missing link between ‘the practices of ridicule with the conduct of social life’. The first two are as follows:

1) Everyday codes of behaviour are protected by the practice of embarrassment. If one infringes expected codes of interaction, particularly if one does so unwittingly, one might expect to be embarrassed (Billig 2005:201)

2) Social actors fear this laughter [and as such] the prospect of ridicule and embarrassment protects the codes of daily behaviour, ensuring much routine conformity with social order

(Billig 2005:201)

Simon experiences a breach of face at line 3 above with Melvin's offensive remark, *this place smells like shit!* But it is Melvin's total disregard for Simon's welfare here - including the basic (polite) expectation that Melvin will do as he has been asked and vacate the room - which ratchets up Simon's emotional levels. The reason his emotion escalates so quickly is because he knows the level of embarrassment he will be subjected to if Melvin sees his tears. It is this fear of embarrassment which enables him to exercise restraint against Melvin's provocative remarks up until line 7. It is only when Melvin's ridiculing plumbs new depths of offensiveness at line 11 that Simon disregards his embarrassment and attempts to attack him.

This brings us on to Billig's third observation, which was originally hinted at by Goffman (1967:112) in a footnote, and which Billig makes explicit:

3) What is embarrassing is typically comic to onlookers

(Billig 2005:202)

Because children are socialised in the norms of behaviour from their parents which utilise ridicule and embarrassment, and which result in laughter when such behaviour by the child is incorrect or inappropriate, as adults it ensures that we conform to social constraints. If we do not, if we commit a *faux pas* (especially in front of others), we can expect onlookers to laugh at us. Melvin's offensive comments create embarrassment for the other characters and it is this embarrassment as well as his linguistic dexterity which, I would argue, we are responding to in this film. Whenever we laugh at Melvin's offensiveness, we are not actually laughing *at* Melvin, but at the embarrassment and puzzlement experienced by the other characters. At the same time we are freeing ourselves (temporarily) from the social constraints of what Goffman called the 'moral order', i.e. 'the 'rules of conduct which bind the actor and the recipient together' (1967:90). In these moments of amusement and laughter,

when we ‘delight in the gaffes and social stupidity of others, [we] find [ourselves] temporarily freed from the constraints of empathy’ (Billig 2005:225). In other words, in enjoying this film, we have to undergo what Bergson (1911:5) termed ‘anaesthesia of the heart’.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how we might gain a richer understanding of the character of Melvin Udall by considering his mental world or Reality Paradigms (Archer 2002, 2011a) and incorporating these alongside Archer’s (2011b) model of facework and Billig’s (2005) ideas on the social functions of humour. Understanding how Melvin views his world can allow us greater insight into how his facework is functioning, because his facework is determined by his Reality Paradigms. Similarly, Melvin’s use of strategic ambiguity when taken together with Freud’s (1905) ideas on humour allow for a darker reading of his character and intentions, as well as offering compelling explanations as to why we should want to laugh not just at this film, but at targets of offensiveness in general.

I began with a discussion of Archer’s (2002, 2011a) notion of Reality Paradigms to show that, far from being an ‘unable’ victim of his OCD, Melvin is very much in control of some situations and encounters he becomes involved in. This, in turn, held implications for how we (as researchers) might want to assign the notion of intention to his instances of offence. Once we realise that the notion of facework intention can be a) ambiguous and b) determined by goals (of which there may be many at any one time), we can see that the concept of facework can only be fully appreciated if we consider how it functions according to scalar properties which can range from face threat/attack through to face maintenance/enhancement. In addition, we also need to give as much consideration to the cognitive processing efforts of the hearer as much as the speaker’s awareness of their own intentions. By this I mean that we should not just limit ourselves to looking at aggressive facework practices and automatically assigning an aggressive (or negative) intention. Archer’s (2011b) concept of *strategic ambivalence* demonstrated not only Melvin’s multifunctional nature in the portraying of his offence, but also illustrated the way that face damage need not be the *primary* motive when employing aggressive facework practices. In addition to this, once we applied humour theory to the notion of strategic ambiguity we can see how a much darker ‘reading’ or interpretation of Melvin’s behaviour is made available to us. This, then, led to a discussion of how humour functions socially and, in particular, as a form of social discipline and rebellion. The

conclusions from this offered suggestions as to why, in some cases, we may want to laugh *not* necessarily at the character of Melvin Udall, but at the *discomfort* experienced by the other characters who are the receivers of his offence. This would mean, then, that we are not laughing at offence *per se*, but rather at others' *perception* and *understanding* of that offence.

In the following chapter I take the concept of *face* further in order to gain additional insights into the character of Melvin Udall. In particular I apply it alongside theories of self-presentation and impression management in order to demonstrate how Melvin's own sense of identity develops in the film. One of the ways Melvin copes is to control information about himself as well as the other characters, and I consider how his use of impression management impacts on the way we and the other characters understand and react to him.

CHAPTER 6

Impression management, face and identity

The aim of chapter 5 was to ascertain the extent to which facework, Reality Paradigms and the social function of humour can, when considered together, provide richer interpretations for dramatic character analysis and the analysis of Melvin Udall in particular. By broadening our application of facework to include Archer's (2011a, b) notion of *strategic ambiguity* and the *facework intentionality scale*, we are consequently able to gain additional interpretations and understandings of Melvin's behaviour. For example, it is possible to argue that in example 5.2.1 where Melvin claims to be trying to placate Simon after having just upset and humiliated him, Melvin's facework intention *could* be viewed as beneficial (given his explanation at line 13 that he was 'just trying to give [him] a boost'). However, an alternative interpretation is possible when we consider Bergson's (1911) ideas concerning our 'unavowed intention to humiliate' our neighbour, along with the ambiguous nature of humour in general, and our capacity for self-deceit in particular (Billig 2005). As a result, when we also take into account the Reality Paradigms (Archer 2002, 2011a) which directly influence Melvin's stereotypical ideologies concerning the other characters, his explanation can be viewed more sceptically as a thinly-veiled attempt to justify the face-damage he has caused, rather than any genuine attempt at sympathetic understanding.⁶³ The effect of this alternative interpretation, borne out through a combination of the above linguistic and psychological approaches, demonstrates the ambiguous nature of facework in general and hints at a more strategic, darker side to the character of Melvin than we may have previously supposed.

For all Melvin's offensive attributes, they cannot be his overriding qualities; if they were, then he would be little more than a slightly extended version of what Forster (1974:73) labelled as a 'flat' character, i.e. someone who is 'constructed round a single idea or quality'. Indeed, Simon (2004), on his analysis of collective and individual identity in modern society, points out that

⁶³ Melvin's behaviour in this scene could be viewed as a combination of both self-deception (in as much as he is trying to convince *himself* that his offence wasn't intentionally malicious), and strategic deception. This is because Melvin appears to be deliberately provoking Simon to the extreme, which he may be doing in order to anger Simon sufficiently to raise him out of his financial and emotional despair – albeit temporarily. The point, here, is that there is more than one way to view Melvin Udall; and as a fictional character this is obviously something which has been contrived by the screenwriters. As I have argued in previous chapters, and as I will continue to do in this chapter, only a combination of linguistic and stylistic models and approaches can demonstrate this complexity of character.

It may be somewhat misleading to speak of *the* collective identity of a given person⁶⁴. At least hypothetically, a person can have as many different collective identities as she has socially shared aspects.

(Simon 2004:49)

Such an observation would appear to endorse not only Tracy's (1990:221) point that 'facework has many faces', it also offers substance to Forster's rather vague (1974) conception of what constitutes a 'round' character in a work of fiction. According to Forster

The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round

(Forster 1974:81)

As Culpeper (2001) rightly points out, such a definition is impressionistic as well as being cognitively and textually vague, as we may each have a different idea of what it is to be 'surprised' as well as 'convinced' by a character. However, I do not intend to digress here regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Forster's character distinctions (see Culpeper 2001 for an informed and in-depth discussion regarding character typologies).

My argument here is that Melvin is not the one-dimensional character we may be inclined to perceive when we view his offensive behaviour during the first half of the film. Although his lack of compassion for anything or anybody is a foregrounded attribute presented to us from the beginning of the film, it is largely a device to provide some of the humour which the film proclaims, as well as being an indicator of his character development as he learns how to understand and show (more) compassion for others. The callous schema which we might automatically assign to him when we see him put Verdell unceremoniously down the garbage chute, plus his undisguised racist, homophobic and sexist opinions are generators of text-world incongruity (cf. McGhee 1979 and Werth 1997), which enable the viewing audience to experience emotional *shock* followed by *release* as we observe someone other than ourselves subverting so gratuitously those social norms which we are socialised to abide by (cf. Goffman 1967). As Spencer, one of the significant Victorian laughter theorists proposed, such release is manifested as nervous energy when 'unexpected contrasts of ideas' are able to induce the effects of humour or laughter in us (Spencer 1864:105). In addition to providing

⁶⁴ Simon (2004) maintains that such an identity 'results from self-interpretation that centres on a socially shared (collective or social categorical) self aspect [which is] basically one-dimensional (e.g. 'first and foremost I am a Christian') (Simon 2004:49)

humorous relief for the viewer, Melvin's predilection for anti-social behaviour is also an initial marker for character recognition. Its ultimate function, however, is to allow us to observe how his character develops throughout the film as he undergoes his personal journey of understanding and enlightenment.

I believe we can take the concept of facework a stage further in order to demonstrate this and I intend to do this for the remainder of this chapter, with the emphasis being on the orientations of the speaker in particular. This is because Melvin is an exceptionally self-centred character. Indeed, even during the few occasions when he is attempting to enhance someone's face, it is done in such a way as to be ultimately beneficial to *him*. This strategy appears to run counter to Leech's (1983) Generosity Maxim of politeness which is oriented towards the hearer in terms of a 'cost-benefit scale' (Leech 1983:106) i.e. as something which should usually cost the speaker and benefit the other. In terms of the fictional aspects of the film however, it is a staple of Melvin's condition. In reality, for people with the condition of OCD, it does suggest that more facework might be needed for those with psycho-social disorders. Exploring how those with social disorders actually constitute their own sense of 'face' could be an area for future research to consider.

The application of facework strategies from the perspective of the self is not something which politeness theory has fully explored, as yet, as its emphasis has been on analysing what one person might do towards another. For example, the way we might honour or threaten the other's face (Shimanoff 1987); whether we aggravate or mitigate the other's face (McLaughlin, Cody & O'Hair, 1983) and whether we socially cooperate or antagonise the other (Craig *et al*, 1986); but see also Penman 1990, who looks at Self and Other concerns/strategies in the context of the courtroom). Goffman (1967:5), however, defined face as '...the positive social value a person effectively claims *for himself*', which suggests that his notion of face and facework is predominantly a self-directed concept. It also implies that negatively-held values are not associated with face, in so far as we usually claim not to possess them (Spencer-Oatey 2007:643). However, in the case of Melvin this social convention is subverted as he *deliberately* sets out to claim extremely negative attributes when the occasion suits him.

Facework is not just a social phenomenon; Spencer-Oatey (2009) and Tracy and Baratz (1994) rightly argue that the only way we can fully account for what is occurring interactionally is to take an 'action-oriented' approach to the study of face. This means not

just concentrating on face issues in light of Goffman's general definition above (cf. 1967:5), but also considering the wider communicative context such as the interactional goals and the perceived *identity* of the participants - in this case, the main protagonist, Melvin Udall. These all need to be considered if we are to fully explore (and account for) the complexity of character and humour - as I will do in this chapter. The concept of identity is important to consider here not only because, as Tracy (1990:213) observed, 'identity issues ... motivate communicative behaviour', but also because research on the interface between facework and identity has not been explored in any great depth since Tracy's (1990:210) recommendation that 'a communicative theory of facework [should] take [...] account of the full range of identity concerns people have in interaction'.

In the following sections, then, I discuss face and identity beginning with the relationship between them, drawing on Simon's (2004) socio-psychological approach to identity. Using such a combined approach is beneficial because it naturally encompasses the notion of facework (sociological) as well as emotion (psychological) within our analyses of Melvin, and emotion is very much a part of the research surrounding impoliteness studies (Culpeper 2011, see also Ekman and Friesen, 2003; Ekman (2003)). I then move on to consider the research done on impression management and self-presentation theory which considers the way we are able to control information about people (including ourselves), objects or ideas in order to influence another person's impression of them/us. Self-presentation is a significant aspect of Melvin's character, because only through controlling the responses⁶⁵ of the other characters in relation to his behaviour can he control the anxiety which he suffers as a result of being in social contact with them. By analysing further scenes from the film in conjunction with models of facework, identity, and self-presentation, I will demonstrate how we are afforded richer interpretations of Melvin's character. Ultimately, it should dispel any overriding perception of Melvin as being simply 'rude' or 'anti-social'. Indeed, as I aim to demonstrate, the character of Melvin is far more complex than we have hitherto been led to suppose.

⁶⁵ For the most part, he does this by deliberately offending them within enforced interactions so that they will avoid him

6.1 Broadening the concept (and application) of face

6.1.1 Identity

Since Tracy (1990) there has been little in the way of research into the precise nature of the relationship between face and identity (although see Spencer-Oatey 2007, 2009; Ruhi 2009). There have been various theories and approaches put forward to explain a person's 'identity'; for example, Stryker (1980:65) takes a sociological approach which argues that the way people behave socially is key to understanding their identity, since the 'patterned regularities which characterise most human action' are reflected within the structures of society (see also Stryker 1987). Tajfel and Turner ([1982]1986) consider identity from a psychological perspective which examines the psychological process that individuals draw on when negotiating group membership; and Linville's (1985) notion of 'self-complexity' considers identity in terms of the social cognition or number of 'self-aspects' which a person considers themselves to possess. Spencer-Oatey (2007) has pointed out that such a combined approach is now beginning to gain popularity with researchers since 'the various perspectives reflect different levels of explanation rather than inherently contradictory conceptualisations' (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 640).

One such integrated approach is Simon's (2004) Self-Aspect Model of Identity (SAMI) which considers the notion of identity from a social psychological approach; the premise of which is that

Identity results from interaction in the social world and in turn guides interaction in the social world

(Simon 2004:2)

A person's perspective about oneself, then, is something which is realised through social interaction with others. This is an interesting concept to explore for our interpretation of Melvin, because at the beginning of the film (and due to the constraints of his OCD), Melvin has very little in the way of social interaction with the other characters.

Simon (2004) goes on to suggest that

...individual identity derives from self-interpretation in terms of a complex set of configurations of different self-aspects

(Simon 2004:73)

Whether we consider our identity as being individual or collective ultimately depends on how we ourselves perceive a given self-aspect. For example, being a teacher may form a single aspect of our individual identity with respect to our social role, but can also be an attribute of a collective identity: for example, we might be a member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT).

Simon (2004), borrowing from Linville (1985) views a self-aspect as

[...] a cognitive category of concept that serves to process and organise information and knowledge about oneself. [They] can refer, *inter alia*, to generalized psychological characteristics or traits (e.g. introverted), physical features (e.g. red hair), roles (e.g. father), abilities (e.g. bilingual), tastes (e.g. preference for French red wines), attitudes (e.g. against the death penalty), behaviours (e.g. 'I work a lot') and explicit group or category membership (e.g. member of the communist party).

(Simon 2004: 45)

We can use the idea of self aspects to chart Melvin's character development, because at the beginning of the film his identity is very much determined by his attitudes, which are predominantly negative. As these attitudes shift, so too does his identity; not just for him personally when he recognises the positive impact that Carol has on him and his day -to-day living, but also in the eyes of Simon and Frank when they eventually see beneath Melvin's aggressive veneer.

Within SAMI, the way we perceive and evaluate our self-aspects can differ according to various criteria:

- **Valence** - this concerns how positively or negatively we might evaluate (a) given self-aspect(s).
- **Actuality** – this refers to whether our self-aspect(s) are based on reality or are something which we are striving to be like ideally.
- **Currency** – this refers to the context and the time in which we are evaluating our self-aspect(s). For example, we may consider some attributes as only applying to us in the past (e.g. heavy smoker); some we may attribute as only relevant in the current moment (e.g. heavy drinker) and we may envisage that some aspects will apply to us in future situations (e.g. health-consciousness). Similarly, the context surrounding an interaction will influence our self-aspects making our evaluation and projection of them more (or less) salient in some contexts.

- **Centrality** – this refers to how much we consider our self-aspects to be a core or defining component of ourselves.

Consequently, whilst our self-aspects may appear on the surface to be rather fixed, they are, in fact, dynamic in nature as we are able (at least to some extent) to negotiate and control them in interactions. For example, someone's social and personal role, as say, teacher and mother will differ depending on the situation they are in. A mother or father who is attending their son/daughter's school to discuss their child's performance might be keen to display an identity consistent with their role as a parent (warm, encouraging, and involved). However, in a work-related meeting with colleagues their professional identity would be more important and hence display different attributes such as competency and efficiency.⁶⁶

In addition to conceptualizing identity as consisting of various attributes, Sedikides and Brewer (2001) maintain that there are three different levels of self-representation which we draw on whenever we attempt to define ourselves in relation to others and the social groups which we are a part of:

1) **The Individual Self** – this level is concerned with how we might differentiate ourselves personally from others in terms of our 'unique constellation of traits and characteristics that distinguishes [us] within [our] social context'. It is associated with protecting or enhancing the person psychologically (Sedikides and Brewer 2001:1; see also Brewer and Gardner, 1996) This has a distinct resonance with the concept known within feminist and critical literature as *Othering* whereby we deliberately set out to distance ourselves from others by exploiting differences in characteristics such as class, ethnicity, sex and religion (Canales (2000:18). Canales also points out that this mode of discourse is a 'negative, exclusionary process' and hence ideally sums up the predominant aspects of Melvin's character at the beginning of the film. However, Charon (1992:107) makes the pertinent observation that 'It is through others that we come to see and define self'. I would argue that such a realisation is applicable to the character of Melvin as it captures perfectly the way he develops as a result of his interactions with Carol, Simon and Frank.

2) **The Relational Self** – this is a more interpersonal level of identity, and concerns the way we share certain aspects of ourselves with significant others. It is based on 'bonds of attachment [such as] parent-child...friendships and romantic relationships' (Sedikides and

⁶⁶ These social and personal roles are, of course, subject to socio-cultural modification

Brewer: 2001:1). As such, it is the level most concerned with protecting and enhancing the other and of maintaining the relationship (Sedikides and Brewer 2001:2). It is this level of self which marks Melvin's character at the end of the film, in particular the very last scene with Carol in which he is trying to convince her to give their relationship a go⁶⁷.

3) **The Collective Self** – This level of identity is based around memberships of large[r] social groups and the 'impersonal bonds to others derived from common...identification with [that] group' (Sedikides and Brewer: 2001:2). It is therefore a level which is concerned to protect or enhance that group.

The above three levels of self-representation all suggest that identity, besides consisting of certain attributes, is also a phenomenon which becomes manifest within a social context. In this respect, identity, it would seem, is very similar to face. Indeed, as Goffman (1967:7) defined it, face is something which 'is diffusely located in the flow of events *in the encounter*'. Without a social context then, there can be no face considerations. As Lim (1994:210) points out, 'one cannot gain face from a great feat that is not witnessed by others, and cannot lose face from blunders made in private'. Such an understanding of identity and face as being equated however is not consistent with all researchers. For example, Arundale (2005) maintains that 'relationships and identity arise and are sustained in communication...a relationship, and hence face, is a dyadic phenomenon, whereas identity is an individual (and much broader phenomenon)'. I would argue that there is a much more symbiotic nature pertaining between face and identity, as the above attributes listed by Sedikides and Brewer show how both face and identity incorporate not only individual attributes but also relational and collective ones (see also Hecht, 1993; Hecht *et al.*, 2005). If more justification were needed for this, Spencer-Oatey (2007), citing Simon's (2004) SAMI, lists some of the functions of identity as:

- [helping] to provide people with a sense of belonging...and with a sense of distinctiveness
- [helping] people 'locate' themselves in their social worlds...in relation to others, it helps to anchor them ...giving them a sense of 'place'
- [helping to] provide people with self-respect and self-esteem. However, self-respect and self-esteem do not result simply from independent reflection; the respectful recognition of relevant others also plays a crucial role.

⁶⁷ See example 6.1.2.5

These functions all imply a social element being as inherent in identity concerns as it is in face. In other words, as Charon (1992:107) points out above, it is only through our interactions with others that we are able to define ourselves. Spencer-Oatey also notes that contrary to Goffman's claim that face is only associated with 'approved social attributes', it is quite possible for us to claim other attributes which may not be socially sanctioned, but which may be more important to us within a certain context. This is a valid point in terms of our analysis of Melvin as he occasionally claims attributes which are definitely *not* socially sanctioned – but which he draws on when the situation dictates (see example 6.1.2.4 below). This implies that he has a choice of when to draw on such attributes and hence indicates again a strategic nature to his personality.

Another aspect of Melvin's identity is necessarily influenced by his OCD and is also prevalent in his various phobias and ritualised behaviours. Attempting to control his phobias influences the way he behaves sometimes; his fear of contamination, for example, dictates his *social role* (he needs to work from home rather than in the community), as well as his *behavioural characteristics* (scrupulous adherence to cleanliness/routine, the need to avoid stepping on cracks/patterns in floors and the avoidance of unnecessary encounters with other people). This last attribute he manages to achieve via his deliberately face-damaging linguistic behaviour, and this, in turn, leads us and the other characters to perceive Melvin as (variously) rude, obnoxious, anti-social, impolite and generally very unpleasant. If a person's psychological perspective about themselves is something which is realised in social interaction (as Simon 2004 maintains), then, for Melvin, development of his character identity is dependent upon the way he behaves socially, including the way he controls information about himself to the other characters. The strategic control of information is known within the realm of social sciences as *impression management*, to which I now turn.

6.1.2 Impression Management & Self-Presentation

In his 1959 essay *Performances*, Goffman noted the importance of being able to project a certain type of impression on others:

...during the period in which the individual is in the immediate presence of others...[he] will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally *expresses* himself, and the others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him

(Goffman 1959:14 emphasis in original)

As Goffman suggests, impression management is concerned with the *strategic* or *goal-directed* way in which we present and control information about ourselves in order to create a desired response in others; but impression management has a broader remit and I include Schlenker's (2003) definition here in full to exemplify this:

Impression management is the goal-directed activity of controlling or regulating information in order to influence the impression formed by an audience. Through impression management, people try to shape an audience's impressions of a person (e.g., self, friends, enemies), object (e.g., a business organization, a gift, a consumer product), event (e.g., a transgression, a task performance), or idea (e.g., pro-life versus pro-choice policies, capitalism versus socialism). When people are trying to control impressions of themselves, as opposed to other people or entities, the activity is called *self-presentation*.

(Schlenker 2003:492 emphasis in original)

Whilst the need to create a favourable impression on others *generally* is a basic part of human nature in both our public and personal lives (DuBrin 2011), Goffman (1959) points out that such impression management need not be harmonious in intention, indeed:

...he may wish...to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them. *Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind, and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him*

(Goffman 1959: 15, my emphasis)

Hence, impression management can also be employed to convey false or disingenuous impressions. However, we need to be careful that we do not assume that impression management is a *necessarily* duplicitous business; indeed, according to Schlenker and Pontari (2000) and Schlenker (2003), we engage in very subtle impression management *all the time*; even when we think we are 'just being ourselves'. This, they argue, is because our self-presentational concerns (i.e. our face sensitivities) are never absent. They use the analogy of a computer program which is running in a minimised or backgrounded window, to show that whilst the program may not be salient it is still active and hence working towards a specific goal. Only when a problem arises, for example, if a computer virus is detected within that program, which then makes the program salient, does the operator's attention become drawn to it. So it is with self-presentation. If events threaten our identity within a particular situation, we immediately sense imminent self-face damage and subsequently focus our attention on damage repair (Schlenker 2003:495).

Since Goffman's insights, work on impression management by sociologists and social psychologists has focused on the way we perform within organizational contexts; these have included (but are not limited to) performance appraisal (Ferris *et al* 1994; Wayne and Ferris, 1990), leadership (Wayne and Green, 1993), interviewing (Kacmar *et al* 1992) and careers (Judge and Bretz, 1994)⁶⁸. Such contexts have, however, meant that research has tended to concentrate on those attributes commonly associated within an institutional setting; notably 'ingratiation' (Rao, Schmidt, and Murray (1995). But human communicative behaviour is much richer and infinitely more complex, which means a wider taxonomy for understanding and measuring impression management strategies is needed in order to capture the full domain of impression management behaviours (Bolino and Turnley 1999:190).

One such model which explored a variety of impression behaviours was proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982). They suggested five theoretical groupings of impression management which may be sought by an actor⁶⁹ and which are detailed in table 6.1.2.1 below. A brief description of each strategy is then offered.

Table 6.1.2.1 – Jones and Pittman's (1982:231-262) Taxonomy of Impression Management Behaviours

	Strategy	Attribution sought	Negative attribution risked	Emotion to be aroused	Prototypical actions
1	Ingratiation	Likable	Sycophant, conformist	Affection	Favours, other-enhancement, opinion conformity
2	Intimidation	Dangerous (ruthless,volatile)	Blusterer, ineffectual	Fear	Threats, anger, breakdown
3	Self-promotion	Competent ("a winner", effective)	Fraudulent, conceited, defensive	Respect	Performance claims, performance accounts
4	Exemplification	Worthy, dedicated	Hypocrite, exploitative	Guilt	Self-denial, helping, militancy for a cause
5	Supplication	Helpless, unfortunate, handicapped	Lazy, demanding	Nurturance (obligation)	Self-deprecation, entreaties for help

⁶⁸ There has also been theoretical developments in the study of *performance* within the field of linguistics (amongst many others), something which would be useful to consider when looking at aspects of impression management and fictional characterisation (see Carlson 1996).

⁶⁹ Jones and Pittman use the term *Actor* here generically to denote a person and not specifically someone in the acting profession.

Ingratiation – this strategy is used when the actor wishes to appear more likeable or attractive to the audience, and involves four possible sub-strategies:

- **Self-enhancement**- where acquisitive impression management is used to make the actor more attractive (Schlenker 1980). Rosenfeld *et al* (1995) have pointed out that in situations where people have limited information about a topic, the successful self-enhancer is likely to exaggerate about those topics as they put more effort into their eagerness to impress.
- **Other-enhancement** – This strategy uses compliments and flattery in order to secure admiration from others, as we are psychologically more predisposed to others who pay us positive compliments (Tedeschi and Reiss 1981)
- **Opinion conformity** – as the title suggests, we seek to agree on our audience's beliefs, attitudes and opinions in order to secure their admiration (Bohra & Pandey: 1984)
- **Favour-doing** – again the psychological principle behind this strategy is that people who do favours for others are considered as having attractive (and hence likeable) attributes such as compassion, sympathy and friendliness.

Intimidation – this strategy is used in order to instil fear in the target audience as the 'intimidator advertises his available power to create discomfort or all kinds of psychic pain' (Jones and Pittman 1982:238).

Self-promotion – This strategy is used to achieve the attribution of competence. Tedeschi and Reiss (1981:11) suggest that such a tactic may be used in order to gain admittance into a university, or the securing of a new job. However, if the self-promotion is particularly aggressive in nature, it can also cause intimidation and jealousy in others (Jones and Pittman 1982), especially where the actor is particularly successful.

Exemplification – Here the actor desires the attribute of respect. Rosenfeld *et al* (1995) suggest morality as being the defining attribute of this particular strategy, and point out that self-sacrifice is often used as the exemplifier attempts to show others the extent of their dedication and integrity.

Supplication – Here the actor exploits their own weaknesses to appear helpless or dependant, in order to secure help from others, thus (if successful), invoking a sense of social responsibility in the other person (Rosenfeld *et al* 1995:56).

It goes without saying that the above strategies for impression management may not always be successful as the following two examples will demonstrate (for a fuller discussion of the possible variables which may affect the sought-for attribution see Jones and Pittman 1982 and Rosenfeld *et al* 1995).

[Example 6.1.2.2]

Context – [*Having suspected Melvin of putting Verdell down the garbage chute, Simon has gone with Frank to confront Melvin about this. Melvin is at a critical point in one of his books and is trying to ignore the disruptive knocking. Simon is attempting to be assertive*]

(1) **Simon** - [*knocking*] Mr Udall!

(2) **Melvin** – [*Under his breath, engrossed in his writing*] ‘Somewhere in the dark she had confessed and he had forgiven...this is what you live for he said... two heads on a pillow where all is approval...and there is only the safety of being with each other...how, she wondered, could she find such hope in the most shameful part of her...’

(3) **Simon** - [*still knocking*] Mr Udall!

(4) **Melvin** [*Ignoring the knocking*] ‘...at last, she was able to define love...Love was...’

(5) **Simon** [*Louder. Insistent*] Mr Udall, I’d like to speak to you please! [*Turning to Frank*] Let me do this by myself. [*Frank raises his hands to acknowledge that he will not interfere and steps to one side of the door which puts him out of Melvin’s immediate viewpoint once he opens the door*]

(6) **Melvin** - ‘love was...’ [*he is desperately trying to ignore the knocking. He almost has the rest of the sentence – the meaning of love...*]

(7) **Simon** [*Unrelenting*] Are you in there?

(8) **Melvin** - [*Melvin concedes defeat. The knocking and Simon’s constant entreaties have ruined the creative flow. He snatches his glasses off and throws them down*] ... SON-OF-A-BITCH-PANSY-ASSED-STOOL-PUSHER! [*Flinging his door open we see Simon who instinctively takes a step back. Melvin is furious. Frank is out of Melvin’s view but signals his encouragement to Simon*]. YES???

(9) **Simon** – [*Faltering now - intimidated by the force of Melvin’s anger*] Maybe this can wait. [*Melvin briefly glimpses Frank then moves to go back inside his apartment. Simon gathers his courage*]. I found...er....I found Verdell, Mr Udall.

(10) **Melvin** - [*Turning round slowly to face Simon*] Well, that’s a load off.

(11) **Simon** – [*Fighting emotion and indignation*] Did you...do something to him?

(12) **Melvin** – [*Totally unmoved. Arms folded.*] Do you realize that I work at home?

(13) **Simon** – [*The question has thrown Simon*] Er, no...I wasn't aware-

(14) **Melvin** – Do you like to be interrupted when you're nancing around in your little garden?

(15) **Simon** – er...no. I actually turn the ringer off my phone and sometimes put a piece of cardboard-

(16) **Melvin** [*interrupting*] well I work all the time. So never, NEVER interrupt me. Okay? Not if there's a fire, not even if you hear the sound of a thud from my home, and one week later there's a smell coming from in there that can only be a decaying human body, and you have to hold a *hanky* to your face because the stench is so thick you think you're gonna faint...even then, Don't. Come. Knocking. Or if it's Election Night and you're excited and you wanna celebrate because some fudge-packer that you date has been elected the first Queer President of the United States and he's going to have *you* down to Camp David, and you want someone to share the moment with... Even then, don't knock. Not on this door. Not for ANY reason. Do you get me, sweetheart?

(17) **Simon** – [*Totally cowed*] Yes. It's not a subtle point that you're making.

(18) **Melvin** – Okay then. [*He steps back into his apartment and slams the door shut*]

(19) **Simon** – [*addressing Frank and attempting to make light of the face-damage he has just suffered*] So, the theory of confrontation is 'think twice before messing with me!' [*Simon walks away and leaves Frank outside Melvin's door*].

[end]

There is no doubting the effect that Melvin wishes to make on Simon in this scene. He means to intimidate Simon to such an extent that Simon will be afraid to interrupt him again. This is impoliteness in its purest form, or as Bousfield (2008) has described it, 'instrumental impoliteness'. This, he points out, is necessarily tied up with the notion of *power* since

[it has] the primary goal of affecting the target(s) of the impoliteness so that she/he acts in certain setting-specific, (extra) linguistic ways

(Bousfield 2008:139)

Bousfield's understanding of power is in line with Watts (1991) which he defines in two parts:

An individual A possesses power if s/he has the freedom of action to achieve the goals s/he has set her/himself, regardless of whether or not this involves the potential to impose A's will on others to carry out actions that are in A's interests

(Watts 1991:60)

This, maintains Watts, is the definition of *power to*. He defines having *power over* as follows:

A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's perceived interests, regardless of whether [or not] B later comes to accept the desirability of A's actions

(Watts 1991:61)

As we can see from the above exchange, having *power over* Simon is very much a part of Melvin's agenda here (as it is in many of his interactions with the other characters in the first half of the film), and is also very successfully conveyed. To begin with, Simon's initial question at line 11 does not gain an *appropriate* response from Melvin. In Conversation Analysis terms, Melvin exploits the specific turn-taking mechanisms of their interaction, and by doing so is able to control the interaction (see Bousfield 2007a). This is because of Melvin's non-observance of the rule concerning what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) termed *adjacency pairs*. As Levinson (1983) points out

Adjacency pairs [are] the kind of paired utterances of which question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance...are prototypical

(Levinson 1983:303)

He goes on to point out that the use of adjacency pairs is governed by a 'rule', namely

Having produced a first part of some pair, current speaker must stop speaking, and next speaker must produce at that point a second part to the same pair

(Levinson 1983:304 my emphasis)

Rules however, are not always followed, and Melvin's response constitutes what Levinson has termed a 'dispreferred' answer (see also Pomerantz (1984). However, it is *precisely* because we have what Goffman (1967) considered as interactional 'rules' within encounters that makes exploitation of them so effective when used for face-damaging purposes (Bousfield 2007a). And this is exactly what Melvin does: he 'answers' Simon's original question with a return question; one which, in impoliteness terms can be seen as a FTA towards Simon in two major ways. Firstly, it poses as an impolite 'challenge' towards Simon by 'critically questioning [Simon's] position, stance, beliefs, assumed power, rights, obligations, ethics [and] previous actions' (Bousfield 2007a:15, see also Labov and Fanshel

1977; Lachenicht 1980). Secondly, because Melvin's question is not perceived by Simon as being a rhetorical one, he attempts to genuinely answer him, but (due to Melvin's exploitation of Simon's expectations here) is abruptly cut off by Melvin's interruption. This can be seen as a negative impoliteness strategy which 'linguistically blocks' the response as well as 'imply[ing] that [Simon's] opinion [is not] valued', and hence is also a positive face issue (Culpeper 2005:42). Melvin's interruption, coupled with the parallelisms (i.e. prominent patterning) of his repeated grammatical structures of his orders not to knock on his door again, can be seen as a pragmatic strategy (see Culpeper *et al* 2003:1561) which exacerbates the damage being done to Simon's face, because as well as not letting him speak, it also 'serves as a rhetorical device to increase the force of the repeated speech act' (Holmes 1984:355). Melvin's tag question *okay?* at the beginning of line (16) is preceded by a negative statement *never, NEVER interrupt me*. Such constructions, especially where the tag has a rising tone at the end of it – as in the above scene- are used to invite verification from an interlocutor (Quirk *et al* 1985:810).

Melvin however, does not give Simon chance to respond at this point, and by the end of turn 16 there is another tag – *do you get me, Sweetheart?* – which, as well as being an 'inappropriate identity marker' (Culpeper *et al* 2003:1555), again invites a positive response (which Simon gives). As a result, Simon effectively 'accepts' Melvin's face-attack due to the 'verbal trap' which Melvin has deployed within his impolite challenge (Bousfield 2007a:18).

It would appear that Simon understands that Melvin's intention here is to intimidate him (cf. his brief reflection at line 9 that *maybe this can wait*). Bousfield considers such understanding as being another requisite for 'successful' impoliteness to be achieved, and hence, makes Melvin's behaviour towards Simon all the more insidious. Indeed, as Culpeper (2011:50) acknowledges, in the area of social communication studies, hurtful verbal behaviour is more damaging when it is considered to be intentionally communicated (see also Leary *et al*, 1998; Stamp and Knapp 1990; Vangelisti and Young 2000).

From an academic perspective, the notion of intentionality is an area of contention for theorists, due to the popularity of 'traditional' politeness models which have relied on the Gricean notion that *a priori* intentions exist in a speaker's mind prior to communication, and that it is the hearer's ability to recover the 'polite' intention which allows for the perception of politeness (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech 1983). However, subsequent research by communication theorists such as Duranti (2006) and Haugh (2008) have argued that in many

cases, intentions can be a *post-facto* emergent construct which can become realised as the interaction unfolds, and are hence eligible to flux and change (Culpeper 2011:49).

Malle and Knobe (1997:102) point out that whilst the notion of intentionality has been traditionally studied in the area of psychology as an objective fact about the mind, ‘the concept of intentionality [also] permeates social behaviour’. In their 1997 study which explores a ‘folk’ concept of intentionality they conclude that

In people’s folk concept of intentionality, performing an action intentionally requires the presence of five components; a desire for an outcome; beliefs about an action that leads to that outcome; an intention to perform the action; skill to perform the action; and awareness of fulfilling the intention while performing the action

(Malle and Knobe 1997:111)

They point out that *intent* and *intentionality* are hierarchical concepts; with *intention* being an attribute which links desire for an outcome, with belief about a plan of action which can achieve that outcome and *intentionality* which requires the *intention* itself, plus *skill* plus *awareness* with regards to the outcome. Obviously, if one performs an action and has little awareness of the outcome, then the intentionality is called into doubt.

For Melvin, the *desire* is that he be left alone to work on his novels without interruption. He *believes* that his intimidating behaviour towards Simon will ultimately lead to Simon avoiding him and, hence, not interrupting him again. He fully *intends* to perform the action (as evidenced by his anger at Simon’s intrusive knocking) and he has the *skill* to perform those actions; as a best-selling author he is extremely articulate and linguistically creative. Indeed, as I argue in the following chapter, it is Melvin’s linguistic creativity which generates incongruous images, thus generating an attempt at humour on the audience level whilst simultaneously providing offence on the character level. As I have argued earlier, the perception of humour is highly subjective and the recognition and uptake of what is impolite or offensive is also contentious. The film’s classification as a *comedy* suggests that humour/laughter is the desired response towards much of Melvin’s behaviour (on the audience level); however, what may be humorous for one person may be offensive for another.

As Bousfield (2008) points out and impression management theorists themselves acknowledge, what we intend by our behaviour (i.e. what we *desire* and *believe*) may *not* have the desired effect on some of our receivers. In the case of impoliteness:

If the Speaker/Producer intends face-damage but the Hearer/Receiver fails to *perceive* the speaker's intent/any face-damage, *then the attempt at impoliteness fails*

(Bousfield 2008:72 emphasis in original)

The point being, and what impression management theorists Jones and Pitman (1982) warn of, is that with every attribution sought, there is a *negative* attribution which we risk having assigned to us, as I will demonstrate in example 6.1.2.3 below.

There is also another possibility which we need to consider here in relation to the above definition; namely, what if a hearer/receiver has perceived and understood the speaker's intent but has *refused* to respond to the impoliteness? As I will also demonstrate within the next example which is a continuation of the scene discussed as example 6.1.2.2 above, it is possible for us to put our response towards impoliteness 'on hold' until such a time as we choose to respond to it. Whilst Simon has definitely demonstrated acute face-damage in the above scene, Frank has not. However, this is not to say that Frank is not offended by Melvin's behaviour; merely that he *hasn't displayed* it. This is primarily due to the fact that Frank attempts to stay out of sight⁷⁰ during the interaction in order to give Simon the chance to exercise some righteous (and independent) indignation towards Melvin (whilst safe in the knowledge that Frank is there should he need him). It becomes clear afterwards that Frank is extremely offended by Melvin's behaviour, but does not let Simon see this⁷¹.

[Example 6.1.2.3]

Context – [*Melvin, assuming that he can now resume his work in peace, is back at his desk and in his creative zone again. Frank is on his own now outside Melvin's door. His*

⁷⁰ When viewed it is apparent that Melvin *does* see Frank. Interestingly he sees him at the point when Simon says falteringly at line 9 that *maybe this can wait*. Assuming that Simon is too afraid to challenge him any further, Melvin turns to go back inside, but following silent encouragement from Frank, Simon immediately follows this up with the statement that he has found his dog. The fact that Melvin is now aware of Frank's presence casts an interesting thought with regard to the extent of his impoliteness here. The thought is this: is Melvin *especially* offensive towards Simon here *because* he knows that Frank is also going to be a party to it and because he has guessed that Frank is not going to interfere? The thought is an interesting one and offers more evidence which points towards Melvin being a very strategically motivated person as well as the possibility of having a cruelty element highlighted within his personality, since he knows that should this be the case, Simon is going to be extremely vulnerable within this exchange.

⁷¹ This scenario, where a receiver refuses to display any face-damage despite the speaker/producer's intention to induce it is actually accounted for in Bousfield's (2010) Prototype model which builds on his (2008) definition, as discussed in Chapter 2.

demeanour has changed and he now exudes a sense of determination and anger which he did not display in front of Simon. He knocks loudly and confidently on the door]

(1) **Melvin** [*Assuming the knocking is Simon's*] Oh, I'm pissed! Now I am REALLY PISSED! [*Frank waits patiently while Melvin flings his door back open then grabs Melvin by his shirt and pulls him out of the apartment. Melvin is now scared and almost hysterical at the fact that someone is actually touching him*] Don't touch! Don't touch! Don't touch!

(2) **Frank** – [*Looking demonic. His arms outstretched, walking towards Melvin physically barring him from attempting to escape back to his apartment*] SHUT UP! You think that you can intimidate the whole world with your attitude but you don't intimidate me. I grew up in hell, homeboy! My grandmother had more attitude.

(3) **Melvin** – [*panicking now, and trying to get around Frank, who blocks him at every turn. He starts jumping up and down shouting.*] POLICE! DOUGHNUT-MUNCHING MORONS! HELP ME!

(4) **Frank** – [*Unmoved by this display but conscious that the neighbours are likely to hear them*] SSHHHHH!!!!

(5) **Melvin** – Assault and battery! And you're black!

(6) **Frank** – I LIKE Simon! I like him enough to batter you unrecognizable. If you verbally abuse him or so much as touch that dog again.... [*Frank tries to calm himself down*] Meantime, I'll think of some way that you can make it up to him. I HATE DOING THIS! I'm an ...art dealer. Have a nice day. [*He goes back to Simon's apartment his anger spent. Melvin watches after him, the adrenalin still very much coursing through his veins*]

[end]

Whilst the attribution which Melvin has sought in front of Simon has been one of aggression, the attribute which Frank ascribes to him is one of ineffectual bluster, and this is one of the negative features which we risk when we attempt to claim intimidation through impression management. With regard to the impoliteness in this scene, I have already described in some detail how power can be made manifest within an impolite interactional exchange. What I want to do now is to consider Frank's response in the above scene because he demonstrates in example 6.1.2.3 that he is not going to be offended by what Melvin has said about *him*, but he *is* going to be offended by what Melvin has said about Simon cf. – *I LIKE Simon! I like him enough to batter you unrecognizable*. What is interesting here, though, is that Frank chooses when (and how) to respond to Melvin's impoliteness from example 6.1.2.2. The fact that he reacts with such cold fury towards Melvin at a time to suit *him* draws on the debate within emotion theory which argues that emotion is biologically determined rather than socially constructed (e.g. Lupton (1998) and Plutchik (1982). Culpeper (2011) drawing from

Darwin's (1872) edition *Origin of Species*, points out that 'the traditional approach to human emotion considered emotional displays as a *reflex* of a physiological state (Culpeper 2011:56 my emphasis). Even recent research such as Beatty and Pence (2010) proclaim that 'verbal aggression is best accounted for by biological factors rather than variables in the social environment'. So where does this leave us with regard Frank's response? Culpeper points out that

Emotions are not hardwired to behaviours. Emotional states go through a process of cognitive appraisal, whereby the person judges what happened, why it happened, how angry he or she feels, what might be possible courses of action, and so on

(Culpeper 2011:221)

He goes on to say:

...there are times when the frustration-aggression hypothesis is a more adequate account, but other times when it is not. When it is not, then aggression is more instrumental in character

(Culpeper 2011:221)

This captures perfectly Frank's calculated and controlled response to Melvin here and can be compared to Melvin's much more affective display of anger at line 8 in 6.1.2.2 and line 1 in 6.1.2.3. Also in contrast here is Melvin and Frank's face orientation; whilst Melvin's impoliteness is produced through concerns for himself, Frank's fury is activated because of his concern for another. It is interesting to note that Frank gains *power over* Melvin by employing the very stereotype which Melvin assigns to him through linguistic coordination (*cf. Assault and battery! And you're black!*), whilst at the same time consciously trying to distance himself from that stereotype (*cf. I HATE DOING THIS! I'm anart dealer*). By doing so, he also highlights a stereotype of his own (this time concerning how art dealers should behave). Where Melvin uses impression management to intimidate Simon and gain power, (by conveying his undisguised homophobic views), Frank uses self-presentation for much the same ends with Melvin, by displaying the very tendencies which inform Melvin's own racist views (e.g., black skin = violence).

As Tracy and Baratz (1994) and Spencer-Oatey (2009) have advocated, in addition to identity concerns we also need to consider the context and interactional goals of the participants. According to Goffman (1959:28), the way we present ourselves can influence our own reality. The idea of self-presentation as defining reality is an important point to consider in terms of facework analysis for Melvin, because, due to the constraints of his OCD, it is

imperative that he be able to control the anxiety which dictates his life, and this control is his main interactional goal - certainly within the first half of the film. The way he controls that anxiety, however, is not always through socially-sanctioned means. As far back as 1990, Tracy pointed out that ‘face references socially situated identities [that] people claim or attribute to others’ (Tracy 1990:210). She did *not* specify that the identities which we claim should be necessarily positive or ‘good’, and this point can be demonstrated in the following scene, chosen because it demonstrates nicely the way that Melvin uses facework in a *negative* (i.e. socially prohibitive way) to construct a particular identity for himself which then allows him to achieve his interactional goal of sitting at his usual table.

[Example 6.1.2.4]

[Context-Melvin has arrived at his usual restaurant at his usual time and is put-out to find a couple seated at his usual table. They are deep in conversation, oblivious to Melvin who is standing next to the table observing them]

(1) **Woman** – It just came out of me. I said you love me the way a remote control loves the TV. As long as I switch every time you press one of my buttons-

(2) **Male companion** – That’s great!

(3) **Melvin** – People who talk in metaphors ought to shampoo my crotch. [*The couple look up at him*]. Eat up! [*They ignore him and carry on their conversation. Melvin goes over to the waitress’s station and stands in front of Carol blocking her path. She puts two hands lightly on his waist to move him out of the way*]. I’m starving!

(4) **Carol** - [*She is unconcerned at Melvin’s dilemma. She is discussing her upcoming date for the evening with another waitress, Lisa, and is obviously looking forward to it, but is conscious that her evening out depends upon her son not suffering from one of his regular allergy attacks. Melvin stands in her way again*]. Go sit down. You know you’re not allowed back here. [*Turning to Lisa again*]. Spencer’s more excited about it than I am. He says, “Mom, I promise not to get a fever or cough during your date”. [*The other waitresses all coo appreciatively at this*]. I know, he’s just the best.

(5) **Melvin**- [*Increasingly agitated-not just at the fact that his table is occupied, but also because Carol appears unconcerned at what is, for him, a high anxiety-provoking situation. He stands in front of her again*]. I’ve got Jews at my table!

(6) **Carol** – It’s not your table. It’s the place’s table. Behave. This once, you can sit at someone else’s station [*There is an audible gasp of horror from the other waitresses*]. Or you can just wait your turn.

(7) **Melvin** – [*He walks back to the couple again and lingers...his discomfort building*]. How much more you got to eat? Your appetite isn’t as big as your noses, huh?

(8) **Woman** – [Affronted] What?!!

(9) **Male companion** – Let's go.... [*The woman starts to protest*]. Let's leave. We're going.
[*They get up and walk out of the restaurant*]

[end]

Melvin is being impolite here via a combination of both self-presentation and impression management. Whilst haranguing the diners who are seated at 'his' table to hurry up and vacate it, he is being deliberately intimidating. This he manages through negative impoliteness (cf. Culpeper 1996) by positioning himself too close to their personal space and invading their privacy. The identity he is keen to foster in this situation is one which the diners are going to find uncomfortable; hence his socially inappropriate behaviour of standing next to their table followed by his instruction that they *eat up*. However, all this achieves is their perception of him as someone who is mildly annoying and who might go away were they to ignore him. Melvin realises that something more extreme is needed and so assigns to them certain traits which he believes they will be face-sensitive to (large noses and greediness). This would threaten the face of any diner, but we also know that Melvin is making a veiled racist reference to their ethnicity here as well (cf. his remark to Carol at line 5 *I've got Jews at my table*). In urban American society, racial discrimination is a morally reprehensible form of behaviour, and, by constructing an identity for *them* through impression management he simultaneously constructs an alarming identity for *himself* through self-presentation. This identity is sufficiently abhorrent to make the diners want to leave. The fact that they leave so quickly endorses Bousfield's (2008b) contention that

...the communication of offence through one's impolite utterance(s) (if successful and left uncountered (see Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann 2003; Bousfield 2007b)) is, context permitting, a device *par excellence* for the (re-) activation of one's power over one's interlocutors within an interactional exchange

(Bousfield 2008b 141/142 emphasis in original)

By controlling the conduct of the diners through impoliteness, Melvin is able to achieve his goal of sitting at his usual table, ultimately assuaging the psychological anxiety he was feeling at finding it occupied.

Impression management is goal-directed behaviour which suggests that whilst we strive to impress people in a certain way, there is no guarantee that we ourselves actually believe that the person we are ‘playing’ is the ‘real’ one. Thomas (1995) points out that

...people employ certain strategies...*for reasons of expediency*-experience has taught us that particular strategies are likely to succeed in given circumstances, so we use them

(Thomas 1995:179 my emphasis)

Does this suggest, then, that we should give Melvin the benefit of the doubt where his verbal aggression is involved? Does Melvin disregard the face needs of others purely as a means to an end? Or is he obnoxious through *choice*? As I argue at the beginning of this chapter, Melvin is not a one-dimensional character, and if we continue to examine the above scene in the restaurant we can observe how complex and strategic his character actually is.

[Example 6.1.2.5]

(1). **Melvin** – [*Satisfied, he sits at the now-vacated table and takes out of his pocket his plastic eating utensils and unwraps them. He can’t help but smile smugly as Carol approaches to take his order. He shrugs innocently*]. They left.

(2) **Carol** – [*Smiling at his audacity, obviously unperturbed by his behaviour, unlike the other waitresses*] Yeah, waddya know! Bryan says he doesn’t care how long you’ve been coming you ever act like this again you’re barred for life. I’m gonna miss the excitement, but I’ll handle it. [*She begins to clear the table*].

(3) **Melvin** – [*Unconcerned with the threat*] Three eggs over easy, two sausage, six strips of bacon with fries, a short stack, coffee with cream and sweetener.

(4) **Carol** – You’re gonna die soon with that diet, you know that?

(5) **Melvin** [*Unthinkingly, while fidgeting with his cutlery*] We’re all gonna die soon. I will, you will, and it sure sounds like your son will.

(6) **Carol** – [*Stunned that someone could be so cruel. Melvin, briefly glancing up, senses immediately that he has gone too far this time. He quickly averts his gaze*]. If you ever mention my son again, you will never be able to eat here again. Do you understand? [*Melvin, afraid to look at her, does not respond. Carol sits down next to him*]. Give me some sign you understand or leave now. [*Melvin still cannot bring himself to look at her. Carol’s composure is crumbling*]. Do you understand me, YOU CRAZY FUCK? [*A beat, then Melvin at last looking at her, fear on his face, nods slowly, hardly breathing*]. Okay. I’ll get your order.

For Carol, Melvin is just another customer; although she is aware that she is the only waitress who will tolerate his unconventional behaviour (cf. her comment at line 6 in 6.1.2.4 and the reaction of the other waitresses). Her flippant acknowledgement that she will *miss the*

excitement were he to be barred indicates that she does not usually feel threatened by him, and indeed, can even engage in some form of rapport – hence her light-hearted but negative evaluation of his breakfast order. Carol's friendly demeanour is an attribute which is consistent with her social role as a waitress. However, Melvin's riposte at line 5 foregrounds her identity as a *mother*, and not only that, he makes reference to the one thing which she is most face sensitive about: her son Spencer. It is at this point, then, that we become aware that Melvin has heard and acknowledged what Carol was saying to Lisa at the service station about something her son had told her earlier that day. What is interesting about this is the fact that he has chosen not to respond to it until now (which is much too late to be reiterating a topic which you were never supposed to hear or be a party to). This is more evidence to suggest that, not only does Melvin have arrogant disregard for the face needs of others, it also hints at an opportunistic streak within him. Such is his need to get what he wants (whether it is a favourite table in a restaurant or the last word in an altercation - cf. Line 5 above), the fact is that he is wholly strategic and instrumental in his behaviour. The reason Melvin does not engage with the reciprocal notion of face with the other characters is simply because he chooses not to. After hearing Carol tell Lisa that her son is ill, he has stored that information away until such a time as suits *him*. This, then, is not a part of his OCD but is an attribute of his identity and is one of his generalized psychological characteristics or traits (cf. Simon 2004).

There is no doubt that some form of other-awareness is brought home to Melvin within this scene. However, I would argue that his awareness is actually self-orientated in nature, and that the fear he displays is more the sudden realisation that Carol has the power to bar him from the restaurant rather than any sense of shame at upsetting her. The thought of not being allowed in the restaurant again must be the more alarming one for Melvin at this moment, because it is the routine of having Carol serve him every morning which forms part of his ritualised behaviours and hence keeps his anxiety in check. We could go so far as to say that Carol is a metaphorical anchor for Melvin, but whilst the romantic theme of the film might lead us to assume that his sudden awareness of her significance to him is brought about by a concern for *her* feelings, the anxiety he displays here is, I would argue, a predominantly selfish one and concerns thoughts about the impact of the consequences for *him* rather than her.

Melvin's self-centredness would appear to be a constant trait throughout the film and so we can assume it is one of his self-aspects. However, this is not simply the marker of a selfish

personality as we might at first suppose. Interestingly, such is Melvin's use of facework in some scenes that, when he so wishes, he is able to turn what is essentially an individual level of self-presentation into something which is face-enhancing (and hence, ultimately relationally oriented – cf. *you make me wanna be a better man*, example 2.9.1.1) for the other character. Such behaviour by Melvin demonstrates how impression management and self-presentation can, in fact, be used for beneficial purposes. As Schlenker (2003) points out

Although people act in ways that advance their own self-interests, they also seem to regulate information in order to support and protect the identities of others, to make others feel good, to help others cope, and to inspire them to seek new challenges

(Schlenker 2003:492)

We can observe Melvin employing these self-presentation tactics in the last few minutes of the film:

[Example 6.1.2.6]

Context – [4am. Unable to sleep and disturbed by his feelings of wanting to be with Carol, Melvin has turned up unannounced at Carol's apartment. Carol is also awake and similarly disturbed by the thought that although a part of her wants to be with him, she does not think that a relationship with him would work. In a bid to escape his feelings of awkwardness and claustrophobia, Melvin suggests they take a walk with the excuse that a bakery will soon be open and they can get some fresh rolls. Carol reluctantly agrees – the doubts in her mind growing increasingly stronger. As they begin walking in silence the awkwardness between them becomes almost tangible].

(1) **Carol** [*sighing – ready to admit defeat*] I'm sorry Melvin, but whatever this is, is not going to work.

(2) **Melvin** [*taking this hard and forcing himself to acknowledge something*] I'm feeling...I've been feeling better.

(3) **Carol** – Melvin, even though it may seem that way now, you don't know me all that well [*he scoffs*] I'm not the answer for you. [*She starts to turn away but he tugs at her arm*]

(4) **Melvin** – hey, I've got a great compliment for you-

(5) **Carol** – you know what? I...

(6) **Melvin** – Just let me talk. [*Gathering himself*] I'm the only one on the face of the earth who realizes that you're the greatest woman on earth. I'm the only one who appreciates how amazing you are in every single thing you do – in every single thought you have, in how you are with Spencer – Spence – in how you say what you mean and how you almost always mean something that's all about being straight and good. [*Carol is transported by his words.*]

Unable to speak]. I think most people miss that about you, and I watch wondering how they can watch you bring them food and clear their dishes and never get that they have just met the greatest woman alive...and the fact that I get it makes me feel great – about me! You got a real good reason to walk out on that?

(7) **Carol** [*still moved*] – No. It's certainly not. No – I don't think so. No.

(8) **Melvin** – [*tentatively*] I'm gonna grab you [*with more conviction*] I didn't mean it to be a question. I'm gonna grab you. [*He kisses her. An awkward bomb of a kiss. They separate. Then more determinedly*] I know I can do better. [*They embrace again, this time with mutual synchronicity. As the camera pans down we see Melvin's foot land squarely on a crack in the pavement. They break and look at each other and almost in unison begin to walk away from camera, Melvin following a path that avoids cracks. Lights come on in a nearby bakery and they turn to enter. As a worker moves towards them to clean the entranceway Melvin is forced to step back onto a crack in the pavement. Acknowledging this fact Melvin moves to join Carol inside. Fade out.*]

[end]

Here then, we can observe how Melvin essentially uses positive politeness strategies in order to feel better about *himself* (Brown and Levinson 1987). As a linguistic strategy which aims to communicate to the hearer that their desires or wants are also those of the speaker (Brown and Levinson 1987), it is typically conveyed through compliments, attentiveness and approval (all of which Melvin employs in the above scene). Essentially, for Brown and Levinson

Positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of metaphorical extension of intimacy...as a kind of social accelerator, where S, in using them, indicates that he wants to 'come closer' to H

(Brown and Levinson 1987:103)

The fact that Melvin is using positive face enhancement in order to feel good about *himself* does not mean that he is necessarily being disingenuous towards Carol; rather it demonstrates conclusively *his own recognition* that by maintaining and supporting the face of others – in this case Carol - he feels better about himself *as a person*. Therefore, by using linguistic politeness, Melvin is able to enhance not just Carol's face but also his own, and by extension, also enhance his own sense of identity. Since our identity is about who we are and what we value (including the value we hold regarding ourselves – what Simon 2004 terms *Valence*), then enhanced identity is analogous to enhanced value, and this is what Melvin is finally

recognising (and admitting) in the above scene. His meta-pragmatic comment *the fact that I get it makes me feel great-about me!* is his on-record acknowledgement of what Carol's identity means to him, which is not as a waitress but rather, *the greatest woman on earth*.

It would appear, then, that Melvin is not necessarily unaware of other people's face concerns at the beginning of the film; rather, that he actively chooses to damage rather than maintain them. Whilst this gives him power over them it does not appear to offer him any other form of emotional gratification (nowhere does Melvin acknowledge either explicitly or implicitly that his linguistic aggression has made him feel good in any way). This suggests that his linguistic aggression is more a means to an end - by avoiding social encounters with others in order to escape the anxiety such encounters necessarily cause him - and may *not* be an intrinsic feature of his personality. The only problem with maintaining this façade long term is that he (arguably) forgets to 'switch off' his aggressive demeanour occasionally, hence his instances of what Goffman (1967:14) labelled as '*faux pas*' or '*gaffes*' (cf. Example 2.8.1 and 6.1.2.5 above).

Melvin's speech in line 6 above demonstrates that facework, identity theory and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, when considered together, can offer further insight into character analysis and interpretation. Despite the general criticism surrounding Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, and in particular Locher and Watts' (2005:10) claim that 'politeness is only a relatively small part of relational work' Brown and Levinson can actually be applied successfully here. Not only that, their model also helps to explain the relationship between face and identity because Melvin *explicitly* points out that by using linguistic politeness and enhancing Carol's face to the extent he does, it makes *him* feel good as a person.

6.2 Conclusion

Since chapter 4 I have been arguing that in order to understand and sensitively interpret a character in the fullest detail we need to take a multidisciplinary approach in our explanation. As the main character in the film – Melvin Udall – is a predominantly offensive person (whether we argue intentionality or not), then one of the main areas for examination is in the area of linguistic impoliteness. However, the film is also officially classified as a comedy which means we also need to account for the humour within the film, and this has necessitated the consideration of psychological as well as social theories of humour and laughter. The fact that this film centres on an offensive person whilst being portrayed as a

comedy suggests that there is some kind of relationship pertaining between offensive behaviour and humour in general. The premise of this thesis has been to explore that relationship within the context of fictional characterisation. This chapter has explored the application of (im) politeness, facework and identity in order to gain richer interpretations of Melvin's character. In the following chapter I consider how his impoliteness and any potential humour for the audience can be conveyed non-linguistically, as well as exploring an interesting case for 'failed impoliteness'.

CHAPTER 7

Aspects of Multimodal analysis and a case for Failed Impoliteness

In the previous chapters I have used a combination of analytical tools and frameworks to explore the concept of aggressive facework, and considered how such facework may be perceived as humorous for an overseeing audience. Having taken a fictional film (classified as a *romantic comedy* but with a linguistically aggressive protagonist) as my data, I have also argued that when we apply the models of linguistic impoliteness, facework and humour together, we are afforded much richer insights not only into the way that offensiveness and humour may co-occur, but also with regard to the stylistic analysis of characterisation.

Thus far, I have concentrated my analysis on the language of the character of Melvin Udall in order to justify whether impoliteness has occurred, and, if so, how this might generate humour for the audience. However, as we saw in Chapter Two (section 2.4) and Chapter Five (example 5.1.2.2), offensiveness can be conveyed via non-verbal and prosodic cues (such as intonation). Similarly, some of the humour in this film is arguably generated not from what Melvin actually says but, rather, from the facial expressions of the other characters as they struggle to comprehend Melvin's facework intentions towards them⁷².

Previously within my discussion, I have argued that we cannot categorically state that Melvin's attempt at impoliteness towards another character has been successful. This is because, despite his linguistic aggression, such is the incongruity and/or ambiguity within his behaviour that it appears to be non-comprehension, rather than offence, which is the initial reaction displayed⁷³. Both Bousfield (2008, 2010) and Culpeper (2011) maintain that, for impoliteness to be realised, there must be certain recognitions from the addressee. For Culpeper, this involves the addressee having an 'emotional consequence' as a result of the behaviour. For Bousfield, it involves the addressee understanding that a) the speaker *intended* to offend them and b) the target of the impolite utterance experiencing offence as a result. Bousfield (2008:72) goes on to stipulate that '[...] impoliteness does not exist where one, but not both of the participants (in two-party interaction) intends/perceives face-threat'. This is something I will consider later in the current chapter, because it would appear that the discourse levels in this film have an impact here, effectively allowing for the perception or understanding on the author - to - audience level, but not necessarily on the character - to -

⁷² This is something I discuss later in the current chapter

⁷³ Cf. Chapter Five with Melvin's brief interaction with Zoe, and figure 16 below.

character level. This not only allows for the phenomenon of ‘failed impoliteness’ on the character level, I will argue, but also contributes to the generation of humour-through-superiority for the audience.

Another aim within this chapter is to consider how Melvin and Nora display their facework towards each other non-linguistically, and I begin with a brief foray into the burgeoning area of Multimodality (cf. McIntyre 2008). This is because messages are not received via one channel; we rely on many cues, including non-verbal ones such as body language and facial expression when communicating and interpreting facework intention.⁷⁴ I argue that we need to take account of all channels - linguistic as well as visual - in order to gain not necessarily a ‘correct’ interpretation of the characters’ behaviour, but rather, one which is richer and hence more plausible. This is not least because impoliteness as well as humour can be generated non-linguistically as well. I provide some visual examples at the end of this chapter of some still-shots taken from Melvin’s interaction with Zoe in Chapter Five, and from the scene with Nora, which is discussed below. I believe these still-shots underscore my argument with regards to a) my own interpretation of non-comprehension, and b) the justification of ‘failed impoliteness’ as a result of this, which, in turn, allows for the generation of humour.

7.1 Multimodality

McIntyre (2008:309) argues that ‘some performances of plays incorporate production elements that seem to add substantially to the original play script, and which arguably guide our interpretation of the play’. The elements of *multimodality* that McIntyre is referring to here are known as *mise-en-scène* and refer to ‘those aspects of the film that overlap with the art of the theatre: setting, lighting, costume and the behaviour of the figures’ (Bordwell and Thompson 2001:56). As McIntyre (2008) argues in his analysis of the opening scenes from Ian McKellen’s *Richard III*, it is the non-linguistic features of the film’s production which we draw on as much as the linguistic ones when we interpret Richard’s behaviour. Indeed, Bousfield and McIntyre (2011) have convincingly demonstrated the power of *mise-en-scène* to show how the emotion of *fear* can be constructed paralinguistically within a film, to the extent that it can be ‘experienced vicariously by the viewing audience’ (2011:105).

It is elements of paralinguistic multimodality which I specifically want to focus on in this chapter. In Bordwell and Thompson’s (2001) model, such elements come under the title of

⁷⁴ Indeed, a classic way of mediating a potential FTA within a request by, for example, an employer (powerful person) to an employee (less powerful person), is through *smiling*.

staging, and include the movements and visual elements (gestures, facial expressions and voice) of the characters. Other elements of multimodality, such as *lighting*, *costume* and *setting* will not be discussed specifically, although they are necessary in establishing the visual schemata which accord to ‘our world’ (cf. *The Principle of Minimal Departure*, whereby we interpret the fictional world according to the schemata we have concerning our own world, Ryan 1980:406, see also Chapter Four). *Costume*, for example, confirms the conformity of Melvin and Nora to our schematic stereotypical expectations of them as the characters they portray; Nora, for example, is viewed in each scene wearing a maid’s uniform and Melvin is dressed casually, to signify he works from home. We need all these elements in order to be ‘set up’ for our expectations of normativity. It is these expectations which we rely on when trying to interpret what might be happening next, and which can be exploited for humorous purposes by the screen-writers and directors. In the following example, then, my focus is going to be on both linguistic and non-linguistic communication between Melvin and Nora, in order to demonstrate how Melvin’s impoliteness can be displayed symbolically as well as verbally. Whilst the humour within this film is operating on the production team - to - viewer level, the impoliteness is very much on the character - to - character level of Short’s (1996) discourse architecture; and as Melvin demonstrates, we can convey impoliteness very effectively without words.

[Example 7.1.1]

Context – *Whilst Simon has been recuperating in hospital following a vicious attack by two thugs, Melvin has been looking after his dog Verdell. On Simon’s return home to convalesce, Melvin has had to give the dog back (to which he has grown attached). However, Simon’s stay in hospital now means he can no longer afford to pay his bills nor indeed keep the services of his faithful maid Nora. Nora is upset to be leaving Simon and also worried about the dog as Simon is still in a wheelchair and so unable to take Verdell out for his walks. Knowing that Melvin has recently been looking after the dog, she wonders if he would be available to walk the dog on an afternoon. Upon leaving Simon’s apartment, and still visibly upset from her dismissal, she crosses the hallway and knocks on Melvin’s door. We see Melvin observing his visitor through the peephole and then dropping his shoulders when he realises who it is.*⁷⁵

⁷⁵ This scene is also illustrated via screenshots at the end of the chapter, mostly frame by frame, to display the non-linguistic behaviour of Melvin and Nora.

- (1) **Melvin** [*Opening the door then slightly closing it*] - Is he dead yet?
- (2) **Nora** - No! [*hesitant*] Would there be any way for you to be willing to walk his dog for him?
- (3) **Melvin** - [*completely taken by surprise but evidently pleased. He opens his door wider*] Absolutely.
- (4) **Nora** - [*still hesitant, maybe not quite convinced by his reply*] Not just today – Uh, could you do it – until, until he gets back on his feet?
- (5) **Melvin** - Sure thing.
- (6) **Nora** – [*Smiling*] You're a wonderful man! [*Melvin looks down and appears momentarily embarrassed. Nora's confidence has been given a boost*] Two o'clock is a good time. Here's the key in case he's asleep. [*Looking serious now, about to expand on her own philosophy concerning a person's destiny*] Open the curtains for him, so he sees God's beautiful work, and knows that even things like this happen for the best.
- (7) **Melvin** – [*deadpan*] Where'd they teach you to talk like this? Some Panama City 'sailor wanna hump-hump' bar? Or was today getaway day and your last shot at his whiskey? Sell crazy someplace else – we're all stocked up here [*He closes the door in her face*].

[end]

In terms of *mise-en-scène* staging, Melvin's body language and the way he uses the door here communicates a lot to us (and to Nora) about how he is feeling about the encounter. As the screen shots demonstrate (see images below), we are meant to infer that Melvin is unhappy to see Nora on his doorstep by the way he hangs his head when he spies her through the peep hole. When he opens the door to her and then immediately slightly closes it against her, it communicates his defensiveness against the intrusion as well as his general offensive stance towards her (by signalling something along the lines of 'I am giving you only limited scope for interaction'). In terms of negative face this is quite constraining, and, I would argue, symbolically rude. As the audience, we know that Melvin is habitually rude, and his capacity to shock is what propels the entertainment within this film (cf. Chapter three, section 3.2). However, his propensity to offend is taken up a gear when he assumes that Nora's visit is to do with the demise of Simon's state of health⁷⁶. This makes his opening question at line 1 extremely insensitive (cf. Bousfield 2008). Asking if someone is dead *yet* suggests, via a

⁷⁶ Melvin, like the audience, can see that Nora has been crying when he observes her through the spy hole. The audience knows however, that she is upset at having to leave Simon (her employer). Melvin is not party to this information. Whilst his assumption is incongruous on both discourse levels, for the audience it *may* generate laughter (in the form of shocked release), but for Nora it would be offensive and frightening (cf. Negative Impoliteness as per Culpeper 1996).

conventional implicature (Grice 1975), that in the speaker's expectation frame, that person is going to die soon. In addition, the word *dead* is, for some, a taboo word – hence the use of euphemisms (such as 'passed away'). By pronouncing the word so baldly, Melvin has in fact created an illocutionary 'booster' in order to 'facilitate the negative interpersonal intent' (Holmes 2000:159; Bousfield 2008:72). In terms of conventionality (i.e. in line with *The Principle of Minimal Departure* (cf. Ryan 1980) we would also expect a greeting structure here as well as a goodbye structure at the end. Melvin does neither of these and the omissions are incongruous. Instead, he uses his opening structure to pose a question which indicates to us (and Nora) that, not only does Melvin dislike Simon *intensely*, his use of the pronoun 'he' as an intertextual reference to Simon reaffirms to Nora that this is the *one and only* thing that they have in common, and that Melvin has no interest in widening the discussion any further. Indeed, when Nora does try to extend the conversation, with her suggestion of religious determinism at the end of line 6, he uses impoliteness to curtail her topic expansion, and he does this quite effectively and brutally. Nora, however, does not display an indication of any offence having been taken. She responds to Melvin's brusque enquiry in a literal rather than pragmatic way. In other words, she responds to the semantic proposition within his question rather than his use of facework towards *her*. This may be because, as her ultimate goal is to secure the services of him as dog-walker, she is willing to disregard his offensiveness and insensitivity and proceed (albeit nervously) to ask the all-important question. This question comes as a surprise to Melvin, and his pleasure at the thought of looking after Verdell again is demonstrated by him opening his door wider and this can be seen as a paralinguistic indicator of positive politeness; opening the door wide to someone indicates a welcome which implies that you approve of them being there. It also signals that he is no longer using the door as a 'block', which, only seconds ago, was an indicator of negative face threat. As Penman (1990:19) points out, however, we must allow for multiple goals being served simultaneously within an interaction, and undoubtedly Melvin would be conflicted with his goals here; on the one hand he does not want to be interrupted or have to interact with Nora (hence the lack of greeting and one-word replies in lines 3 and 5). On the other hand, we know he grew attached to Verdell and so can infer that he *does* want to help to look after the dog again.

Such a response does not appear to be what Nora expected and this is underscored by her faltering clarification at line 4. Melvin, however, is (for once) unambiguous in his response. Her surprise and delight at his unequivocal agreement is conveyed non-verbally by her

smiling face, and her sudden confidence results in her gushing appraisal towards Melvin's own positive face: '*you're a wonderful man!*' Such an adjective is not normally directed towards Melvin (again telling us something about the way people in *general* behave towards him), hence his visual display of embarrassment (and, we might add, ungraciousness) as he momentarily lowers his eyes away from hers. Nora, however, displays faith and confidence now in the interaction as demonstrated by her lack of indirectness in her instructions along with her religious philosophy regarding a person's destiny. Melvin's previous uncharacteristic cooperation at lines 3 and 5, along with Nora's gushing effusiveness and *infringement* of Grice's (1975) Maxim of Manner here (arguably unobserved through nervousness, and which states that speakers should 'be brief [and] avoid unnecessary prolixity'), sets both us and Nora up schematically for the fall which occurs at line 7. Bousfield (2008 points out:

[episodes involving impolite confrontation] consist of general disagreements in interaction which are displayed by the occurrence of some sort of opposition to an antecedent event (Corsaro and Rizzo 1990:26). Essentially impoliteness is triggered by what is perceived to be a threat to some aspect of the impoliteness utterer's face.

(Bousfield 2008:183)

If we follow this argument, we must assume that, somewhere in line 6, there has been a 'trigger' or what Jay (1992:98) calls an 'offending event'. In his psycholinguistic discussion on 'cursing'⁷⁷, Jay notes a variety of factors which can serve to trigger aggressive linguistic behaviour. The most important factors being the *offender* (followed by their various aspects such as *age, sex, status, ethnic group* and *physical appearance*), and the *event* itself (including the *language* used by the offender). Whilst there are no 'general disagreements' in the interaction between Melvin and Nora prior to line 7, we know enough about Melvin by now to realise how much he detests being interrupted, and seeing Nora on his doorstep would have been an initial trigger here. Indeed, his dismay at observing Nora on his doorstep is displayed multimodally when he drops his head and shoulders as he spies her through the peephole. Given this, then, we would arguably have an immediate expectation of at least brusqueness on his part when we see him open the door to her. We also know from Melvin's Reality Paradigms (see Chapter Five) that he has a bigoted, racist mind-set, and as a Hispanic, Nora would undoubtedly be within his remit here. This again is demonstrated at

⁷⁷ What Jay (1992:9) defines as wishing harm on someone, whether that harm is physical, emotional or mental

line 7 where he makes reference to her *sex*, *status* and *ethnic group*, again suggesting that these aspects have also been factors or ‘triggers’ which have contributed to his annoyance.

Whilst we do not know how well Nora knows Melvin, we can infer that she is at least cognisant of his general intolerant demeanour given the way she falters with her questions at line 2 and 4. Not only are interruptions extremely aggravating for him, he arguably has misogynistic tendencies as suggested by his interaction with Zoe (Chapter Five). The fact that it is Nora, then, who has interrupted him, will arguably have compounded his annoyance.

When Nora tells Melvin to let Simon ‘*see God’s beautiful work*’, it characterises Nora as being a gentle concerned woman who is genuinely informed by her religious convictions. Her language behaviour, with her unfettered belief in God, indicates a very Roman Catholic belief, but Melvin’s response suggests that not only does he possess no religious convictions, it suggests that he actually feels threatened by her language (cf. *sell crazy someplace else*). His turn at line seven indicates a similar mindset to the eighteenth-century writers (such as Shaftesbury 1711) and their views on the social purpose or disciplinary function of ridicule (cf. Chapter Five and the social function of humour). For such writers, ridicule was needed in order to maintain common sense and liberty of thought. In particular, it was required as ‘a weapon to be used against the sort of dangerous religious enthusiasm that threatened liberty’ (Billig 2005:75). In other words, Melvin’s impolite response is a way of bringing back normativity for *him* by using sarcasm as a way of protecting himself against (what he perceives to be) stupidity.

Not only is there a clash in *belief worlds* here, but also *obligation worlds* (Ryan 1991 and Chapter Four). Melvin perceives Nora to be annoying to such an extent that in effect, she can be disregarded and, as such, he does not feel obliged to engage in even basic facework (such as a common greeting when he opens the door). For us, as the viewer, there is nothing offensive in what Nora says to Melvin (even taking into consideration her bald instruction of opening the curtains), but we know from Chapter Five that Melvin has different Reality Paradigms to the other characters (cf. Archer 2002, 2011a), and instead of thanking her and bidding her good-day he responds with a series of highly aggressive rhetorical challenges. Challenges as aggressive impolite devices are discussed originally by Lachenicht (1980:668), who cites them as ‘‘positive’ [face] aggravation strategies’. Bousfield (2008), building on this, and the discussion made in Culpeper *et al* (2003:1559), points out that, in fact, challenges can be both positively and negatively face oriented, due to the fact that, not only do challenges impede an interlocutor’s freedom of action (negative impoliteness), the

inherent element of criticism also impacts on their positive face wants. Bousfield identifies two types of challenge in particular: *Rhetorical Challenges* - which do not require an answer but which serve to 'activate' in the mind of the interlocutor what the 'answer' actually is (2008:241), and *Response Seeking Challenges* which do require an answer; albeit an answer which is 'controlled' so as to be face-damaging to the individual uttering it (2008:241). Further, Bousfield and McIntyre (2011:111) point out that 'challenges show disapproval...and indicate that the antecedent events causing the speaker to issue the challenge should not be repeated'. The obscure nature of Melvin's challenges along with his use of negative impoliteness by not allowing her to answer, indicate that they are rhetorical in orientation. Melvin does not expect an 'answer' from Nora; he is simply closing off the encounter and venting his derision of her in the way he knows best: through creative linguistic impoliteness. Embedded within these challenges are some highly offensive beliefs about Nora and her social habits, which, through the sheer incongruity of them, in comparison to her character as a loyal, warm, caring housemaid/servant, have the potential to be generators of humour for the audience. Due to the discourse levels (Short 1996; see also Chapter Four), we are, hence, 'safe' to laugh at Melvin's ridiculing of Nora without feeling guilty.

Melvin's offensive beliefs are conveyed through him flouting, I would suggest, all four maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner to imply that Nora is:

- Deficient in her communication skills (a thinly-veiled attack on her ethnicity here with her being Hispanic, and again indicative of a racist Reality Paradigm)
- A frequenter of premises where prostitution commonly takes place – (Melvin's reference to *Panama City* is a reference to central America and the naval military base situated there, which is heavily populated by sailors.)⁷⁸
- Of such dubious character that not only does she prostitute herself indiscriminately with the men she comes into contact with, she also avails herself of their possessions, including their alcohol and money, implying that she herself is not only alcohol-dependant but also a thief.
- Is mentally unbalanced.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Trotter (2009:700), in his discussion of the temporal dynamics of dockside prostitution, notes that 'For centuries, shipping has sustained a global network of ports where dockworkers, prostitutes and bar keepers have thrived on sailors' presence'

⁷⁹ Interestingly, Melvin's appendage at the end of line 7 where he tells her to 'sell crazy someplace else – *we're all stocked up here*' implies that he considers *himself* to be, as he terms it, 'crazy', which suggests that he is very self-aware: he knows he is anti social and annoying and there is evidence of this all the way through the film.

When we consider the *creative* and off-record way in which Melvin is able to produce his impoliteness, we can see how an entertainment factor can be inherent in impolite behaviour.⁸⁰ The *volte-face* of Melvin's facework towards Nora, coming so soon after his positive linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, creates a huge schematic clash for her and the audience. In terms of the Activity Type (Levinson 1979) being played out here – that of a discussion regarding the welfare of Simon's dog whilst he gets better – our expectations are set up and then quickly shattered. As Levinson (1979:371) pointed out, 'to each and every clearly demarcated activity there is a corresponding set of *inferential* schemata'. This means that Nora's understanding (and subsequent expectations) regarding Melvin's behaviour is based on the schemata she has built up since the beginning of her communication with him in this scene. Given the positive replies she has received at lines 3 and 5 she has inferred that he is going to be amenable. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975:45, see also Chapter Four) stated that we should 'make [our] conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the *accepted* purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (my emphasis). Grice admitted that this principle was only a 'rough general' one, and unfortunately his death in 1988 prevented him from revising his ideas as much as he would no doubt have liked. However, it allowed some researchers to develop his ideas substantially, such as Thomas (1986: 1995), who noted that non-observance of the maxims could also be through *Infringing* (where, for example, nervousness may prevent someone observing say, the Maxim of Quantity), and *Suspension* (whereby there is no expectation (or there is perceived to be no expectation) on the part of any interlocutor that the maxims will be fulfilled-see also Chapter Four).

Specifying that the conversational contribution needs to be *accepted* means that, like impoliteness *and* humour, certain conditions have to be acknowledged for the intended effect to make its mark. In the case of impoliteness, it means an understanding and acknowledgment by the hearer that the speaker intended to offend (Bousfield 2008), and in the case of humour it means not only an understanding and recognition of the humour intended, it also needs to be *permitted* (Douglas 1968). In other words, if a *contribution* (to the talk exchange) is not

This adds more evidence to an argument made in Chapter 5 that Melvin *is* in control of his behaviour and follows an 'unwilling to conform' paradigm rather than an 'unable' one.

⁸⁰ It also highlights one of the problems with the Brown and Levinson (1987) model of Politeness in which they maintain that '...the major motivation for being indirect...is politeness' (1987:139). Clearly, this is not always the case.

‘accepted’ – whether it is humorous or offensive in intention, then the required effect (in Melvin’s case a hasty departure by his interlocutor, or for a stand-up comedian the perlocutionary effect of laughter) ‘falls flat’. If we apply Grice’s ideas to the interchange between Melvin and Nora above, we can see how a humorous reaction from the audience may be manifest, because, what is obviously an allowable contribution in Nora’s Reality Paradigm, i.e. her faith-inspired declaration at line 6, is most certainly not an allowable contribution for Melvin. Indeed, Melvin’s main concern throughout this encounter is to bring Nora’s threatening visit to a speedy conclusion as soon as possible (hence his Gricean efficiency at lines 3 and 5). Understanding why we might grasp a humorous interpretation of Melvin’s words here, especially when he has been so blatantly offensive, does not just involve the concept of incongruity or his creative way with words. An incongruity does not in itself entail humour. Freak disasters, for example, are incongruous (in as much as they go against what we expect to happen in the normal course of events). However, if that incongruity occurs within a certain context or activity type - in this case the watching of a film which has been classified as a *comedy*, it ‘allows’ us to engage in laughing at what could otherwise be considered a distressing situation (if, e.g., we witnessed it in ‘real life’). In other words

If...situations are framed and expressed in a particular way, it is possible to make them seem funny [because] the discomfort that limits tragic situations for joke-making are lifted

(Matte, 2001:232)

For someone who has not seen the film, or is unaware of the specified genre or even the idea of westernized values, then a different interpretation (where no humour is generated) is entirely possible. However, by *expecting* Melvin to be humorous, we are therefore more likely to interpret his impoliteness as funny, or, as Raskin and Attardo (1994:37) put it, we ‘look for the necessary ingredients of the joke in the speaker’s utterance’. Schaeffer (1981) makes the same point but expresses it more succinctly:

An incongruity, if it is to cause laughter, must be accompanied by a sufficient number of cues that indicate to an audience the risible intention of the incongruity, and prepare them for the appropriate response of laughter

(Schaeffer 1981:17)

One such ‘cue’ is the need for a joke to observe social rules. As *Good As It Gets* is written by, and stars, American actors. As such, in cultural terms it is Westernized values (such as US

variant politeness norms) which are subverted and used for entertainment purposes. Our social conditioning means that certain behaviours are restricted or frowned upon. Melvin's customary offensiveness is one such type of inappropriate behaviour in Western society, but, by laughing at his behaviour towards others, we are actually freeing ourselves momentarily from those social codes which we are conditioned to abide by for most of the time. If, in a fictional frame or narrative, we find ourselves laughing at Melvin's derision of Nora, this may afford us a legitimate psychological release from the pretensions of always having to act 'appropriately', which may not actually cast us as racist. On an unconscious level, however, we may even be *sharing* Melvin's derision of Nora, in effect, thus making Melvin's response at line 7 a kind of 'punchline' which allows

an opportunity... [for the] willing listener to collaboratively engage with the speaker in the creation of humour

(Veale 2004:422)

In another culture, the same scene may elicit a very different and ultimately non-humorous reaction due to differing social codes and cultures. Considering how other cultures interpret impoliteness within a humorous setting is perhaps an area for future research within intercultural stylistics to explore. One only has to be reminded of the stunning failure of the Dubai satellite media bosses MBC to Arabize the American comedy *The Simpsons* to see an intriguing area for investigation here. Put simply, the show failed because the elements of the show which Americans respond humorously to - such as beer drinking in the character of Homer - are considered sinful in Arab countries. To re-iterate in Gricean terms; what was an 'allowable contribution' to Americans, was not an allowable contribution to Arabs. Or, as Richard Poplak (2007) has summarized:

Comedy is especially a culturally sensitive matter. What you can define as funny is an outcome of learnings, habits, doings, local behaviour — it is the sum of so many factors. Drama is one thing, but with comedy, it is black and white. Deep inside, either you laugh or you say, 'No, this is not funny.' They did not think this was funny."

As members of the audience we are also *receivers* of Melvin's impoliteness – (cf. Bousfield 2008). But, unlike Nora, we understand that Melvin has intended to be impolite. Indeed, such a display of unwarranted gratuitous linguistic and non-linguistic offence would (in many contexts) produce anger and/or righteous indignation. Nora, however, does not display *any* discernable face-threat reaction. This suggests that Melvin's attempt at impoliteness towards

her has failed. There are two possible readings here which may explain how this might have happened, which I will discuss in turn.

7.2 Explanation No 1 – Failed impoliteness due to Pragmatic Failure

One reason why Nora does not make any discernable offensive reaction to Melvin's implicatures at line 7 could be because she has simply not understood them. Such a misunderstanding is what Thomas (1983:91) labels *cross-cultural pragmatic failure*. Defining 'pragmatic failure' as being 'the inability to understand what is meant by what is said', Thomas goes on to say that the 'cross-cultural' appendage refers to 'any communication between two people who, in any particular domain, do not share a common linguistic or cultural background' (Thomas 1983:91). She cites as examples here such asymmetric relationships as pertaining between 'workers and management, members of ethnic minorities...the police, or ...university lecturers and new undergraduate students' (Thomas 1983:91). The relationship between Melvin and Nora is analogous here when we consider that he is a successful author and she is a cleaning maid, his position on the social scale in terms of profession and wealth, being considerably greater than Nora's. Of particular note here, however, is Melvin's use of language, and as we are already aware, he is very creative linguistically. Whilst Nora will have understood that he was referring to *her* (cf. *Where'd they teach **you** to talk like that?*), it is possible that, given the number and rapidity of the implicatures she has simply not been able to work out the offensive suggestions within them.

Thomas also cites a second factor involved in pragmatic failure which she describes as *sociopragmatic failure*. Adopting Leech's (1983) terminology here, Thomas points out that this type of failure 'stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour' (Thomas 1983:99). The term 'appropriate' is obviously a relative one, but she points out that, essentially, *sociopragmatic failure* is to do with a person's system of beliefs as much as their knowledge of the language they use. What we have here, then, is in effect, perceptions of 'appropriate linguistic behaviour' according to a person's *Reality Paradigms* (Archer 2002, 2011a) and *Belief World* adherence (Ryan 1991). We know from as early as Chapter Three that Melvin has a homophobic and racist mindset, and we can arguably infer, then, that religion might also be something which he has little or no tolerance of, or belief in. We can also infer here, however, that Nora is an inoffensive, warm-hearted woman who is genuinely informed by her religious convictions. When Melvin

asks *where'd they teach you to talk like this?* the question itself, and his facial expression, indicate that, according to *him*, Nora's linguistic behaviour is inappropriate. Nora's expression partway through Melvin's rhetorical challenges indicates (I would argue), non-comprehension. In *her* Reality Paradigm religious faith is very strong and her request that Melvin open Simon's curtains so that he can see the view from his window (*God's beautiful work*) is made because it is her *belief* that this will augment Simon's emotional recovery.

Thomas (1983) points out that

[...] pragmatic principles are needed in order to a) assign sense and reference to the speaker's words (this I call 'level 1 speaker meaning'); b) assign force or value to the speaker's words ('level 2 speaker meaning').

(Thomas 1983:92)

Nora's speech act here (arguably a *request*), may have been interpreted by Melvin as something more forceful. Given to him by someone who he considers as being inferior ethnically, socially and also in terms of gender, it would probably be antagonistic for him (and is possibly another 'trigger'). However, as Thomas goes on to say:

[...] the pragmatic force of an utterance is frequently ambivalent...and often intentionally so. For reasons of politeness and expediency, both speaker and hearer may deliberately exploit ambivalence

(Thomas 1983:93)

Pragmatic and linguistic exploitation is something which Melvin is very adept at (cf. Archer's *facework intentionality scale* 2011b, and Chapter Five), and he may have deliberately *chosen* to misinterpret Nora's intended illocutionary force because, by doing so, it allows him the perfect opportunity of curtailing the interaction via an offensive response. He does this through an *extreme* flouting of the Gricean (1975) Maxim of Relation, to such an extent that, I will argue, *she simply does not understand* what he is saying, nor, indeed, the illocutionary force of his words. Despite the extreme offensiveness of Melvin's utterance at line 7, the result (ironically) appears to be a case of failed impoliteness (cf. Bousfield 2008, 2010). Thomas (1983:99) goes on to point out that 'In order to interpret the force of an utterance in the way in which the speaker intended, the hearer must take into account both contextual and linguistic cues'. But this *is* something which Nora has done (cf. *you're a wonderful man!*), which must necessarily compound her non-comprehension, because only *seconds* earlier, Melvin's linguistic and non-linguistic cues were conveying positive politeness as he indicated an almost eager accommodation of her request for him to walk the dog. Such indeterminacy

within language and facework means that intended outcomes can fail. This, Thomas (1983:94) points out, is not because the pragmatic force of an utterance was necessarily ‘wrong’, merely that it failed to achieve the speaker’s goal.

Of course, it is possible that Nora *does* understand what Melvin has just communicated to her, which brings us on to our second ‘reading’ or interpretation of the scene.

7.3 Explanation No 2 – Failed impoliteness due to extreme incongruity

Melvin is a master at pragmatic exploitation and one of the reasons why the incongruity at the end of this scene is so shocking is because Melvin exploits Nora’s *expectation* of his response to her request. The notion of *preference organisation*, which is essentially what we are talking about here, was first suggested by Sacks *et al* (1974). As part of the model of *adjacency pairs* (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973), there is a preferred response (and hence expectation) to certain types of paired activities: greetings are usually followed by greetings; answers follow questions; requests by acceptance or denial and so on⁸¹. Bousfield (2008:235) points out that the exploitation of speaker expectations and the conventions associated with everyday speech can be used to deliver intentionally face damaging utterances. In particular, it is ‘through sophisticated usage of (dis)preferred seconds to first pair parts’ that ‘highly effective’ face-damaging utterances can be generated.

Sacks *et al* (1974) considered the notion of preference organisation to be a structured (i.e. *rule-led*) phenomenon. Levinson (1983) was also of this opinion, pointing out that

The notion of preference...is not intended as a *psychological* claim about a speaker’s or hearer’s *desires*, but as a label for a structural phenomenon very close to the linguistic concept of markedness (my emphasis).

(Levinson 1983: 332-333)

However, human behaviour and the way we can use language to further our own ends suggests that, as a linguistic phenomenon, preference cannot be as structured as Sacks *et al* (1974), and other researchers such as Levinson (1983), Pomerantz (1984) and Silverman (1998) have claimed. Ironically, even Brown and Levinson (1987:38), who also maintain that preference is a structural concern, do suggest that ‘face considerations’ play a large part in

⁸¹ Obviously the concept of preference organisation is not so brief or straightforward, but a thorough discussion of its characteristics is outside the scope and scale of this current chapter. I make reference to the construct to point out that we have certain expectations for some conversational structures. For an excellent overview refer to Levinson 1983:332-345).

determining which kinds of responses are preferred. As Bousfield (2008: 237) points out, ‘face considerations are not structural concerns, but rather are concerns which are socially and thus psychologically rooted and driven’. And, given that certain second pair parts of adjacency pairs *are* preferred, this means that there is the potential to *subvert* that preference. Bousfield goes on to point out that, once we consider the nature of preference organisation *in combination with* the pragmatic effects of conductive questions, whereby ‘the speaker is predisposed to the kind of answer he (sic) has wanted or expected’ (Quirk *et al* 1985:808), then we have a linked *sociopragmatic* as well as a *structural* aspect to preference organisation. This pragmatic aspect is something which Hayashi (1996) and Owen (1983) appear to concur with. Indeed, as Owen (1983:151) points out, the fact that we can talk about the notion of ‘preference’ as being in relation to a speaker or conversational context, necessarily suggests that we are dealing with ‘motivations, wants, or some other similar notion’.

If we apply the notion of preference organisation to the above scene with Melvin and Nora, and in particular the idea of *preference subversion*, then we are given another interpretation of Nora’s non-response at the end of line 7. Essentially, Melvin’s retort is too unexpected (incongruous) for Nora to comprehend. This is because a) she is still assuming a cooperative schema built up through the previous few turns, and b) she is not privileged with the same amount of knowledge regarding Melvin as the viewing audience. Such a privileged stance allows us, as the audience, to experience what Lucretius described as being a sense of ‘pleasure’ when we observe others in a plight which we ourselves would not wish to be involved in (cf. Chapter Three). Added to this are the ‘generic factors’ which Culpeper (2005:45) maintains are involved in our capacity to feel entertained through watching conflict. These being a) a basic or ‘intrinsic’ desire to observe confrontation, b) a voyeuristic inclination, c) a feeling of superiority i.e. *smugness*, and d) a feeling of metaphorical safety from the confrontation itself. But whilst incongruity might be on both discourse levels, its effects or consequences can be quite different. This makes it a prime component for blurring the perceptive ‘line’ between what might be considered as humorous or offensive. For a humorous effect to be available, the viewer needs to be sufficiently distanced (metaphorically) from the behaviour in order to feel ‘safe’; safe to laugh ‘at’ the misfortune of another, as well as safe from the offensiveness being delivered. One reason why the media bosses in Dubai failed to achieve the effect of humour in their portrayal of an Arabic version of *The Simpsons* could be because the viewers were ‘too close’ to the events and the

characters being portrayed. For an Arab, watching a cartoon character indulge in behaviours which are considered sinful in their country in order to produce humour would be considered offensive in the extreme⁸². Incongruity, then, can, in effect, *saturate* the context. In other words, if the clash of expectations or Reality Paradigms is too great on either level, the anticipated response may fail. In terms of humour for the audience, this could mean a joke falling ‘flat’ (as in the cross-cultural version of *The Simpsons* above), or, in terms of impoliteness on the character-to- character level, it could mean the failure of an offensive intention being perceived by the addressee. For Nora then, there is the possibility that whilst she understands him pragmatically i.e. his offensive implicatures, such is the unexpected about-turn in his facework towards her that she is simply too stunned to respond. Interestingly, there is a comedic consequence for the audience from Nora’s lack of display here, as it effectively turns Melvin himself into the ‘butt’ of the joke. For once, his impoliteness has failed to find its mark, making his frustration and annoyance all the greater, thus (arguably) making *him* the recipient of our amusement at his linguistic behaviour.

Such is the relationship between incongruity and discourse levels that what can be funny on one level is not necessarily funny on another. Whilst extreme ambiguity in offensive facework might result in a case of ‘failed impoliteness’ on the part of the speaker or producer, it can also result in an exacerbated form of face-damage for the target. This is due to the target having to use their own resources to work out for themselves what the intention of the speaker was. By constructing an offensive intention, people can, if they allow it, become architects of their own face damage (Bousfield 2007a).

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how aspects of facework can be communicated non-linguistically. I began with a brief discussion on the area of multimodality, in particular *mise-en-scène*, which includes elements of staging, costume and appearance, and concerns the behaviour and expressions of the characters. I argued that this additional consideration of interpretation is necessary because, although this project is essentially linguistic in nature, when we watch a production of any film or play, we are also guided by other channels of communication, such as body language. Indeed, it has been my contention that some of the humour in this film can be generated not from Melvin’s linguistic creations, but rather from

⁸² I specifically mention Arabs here because of the controversy surrounding the media bosses in Dubai, but arguably, the same would apply to anyone watching something which disagreed with their own perceptions of appropriate behaviour based on their own cultural CofPs.

the visual expressions of the other characters as they try to comprehend his facework intentions towards them. If a character does not display a recognition that they are offended (based on an examination of the impoliteness strategies discussed in Chapter Two), then according to the definitions I discuss in that chapter (cf. Culpeper and Bousfield), the attempt at impoliteness necessarily fails. In order to defend my interpretation of non-comprehension for the character of Nora above, and Zoe (cf. Chapter Five), I have included a series of still-shots which serve as a visual representation as seen in figures 7.5 and 7.6 below.

Given my argument for failed impoliteness above, the remainder of the chapter has considered two possible ‘readings’ or interpretations as to why, in a scene which contains arguably Melvin’s most offensive speech, his attempt to offend Nora fails. One explanation I have offered has been that, as Nora is not a native speaker of English she has misunderstood, pragmatically, what Melvin has said to her; i.e. such was his extreme flouting of the Maxim of Relation (cf. Grice 1975), that his offensive implicatures have simply not been understood.

Another explanation has considered Melvin’s ability to subvert speaker expectations, drawing on the notion of *adjacency pairs* (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973), and *preference organisation* (Sacks *et al* (1974). In this second interpretation I pointed out that it is possible that Nora *did* understand Melvin pragmatically, but, due to the extreme incongruity or unexpected change in his facework towards her, she was simply too stunned to respond. Either way, the effect at impoliteness still failed on the character level. As this scene is arguably one of Melvin’s most offensive, this result is ironic and allows the audience to laugh at Melvin now (through superiority towards *him*) as we realise this.

As I hope to have demonstrated, taking a combined linguistic and multimodal analysis offers richer interpretations for character analysis and facework intention. Visual interpretation is highly subjective, but the more channels you incorporate, then the more interpretations you gain. This is not to say that all interpretations will be ‘correct’ ones; my argument for ‘failed impoliteness’ in this chapter is based on my own reading of Nora’s expression as being one of non comprehension, but the point is, that it is an argument I would not have been able to make had I taken a purely linguistic analysis of the scene.

In the following chapter I will summarize my argument as discussed in Chapters Two through Seven, pointing out limitations within the study and indicating areas for future research to consider.

7.5 Visual representation of example [7.1.1]



Figure 1 Melvin sees who is at his door

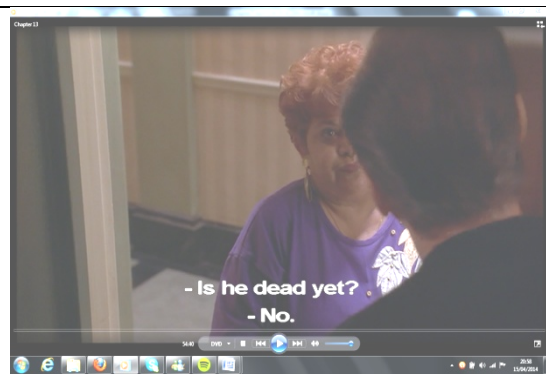


Figure 2 he initially opens the door wide...

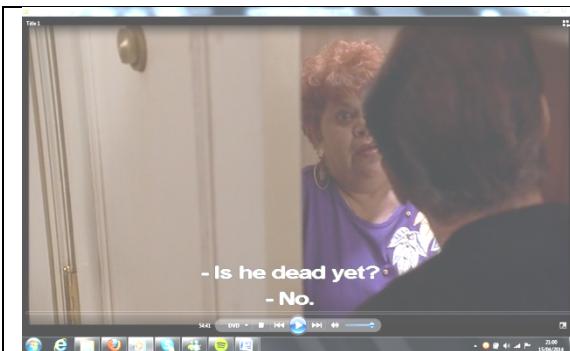


Figure 3 ...then partially closes it again

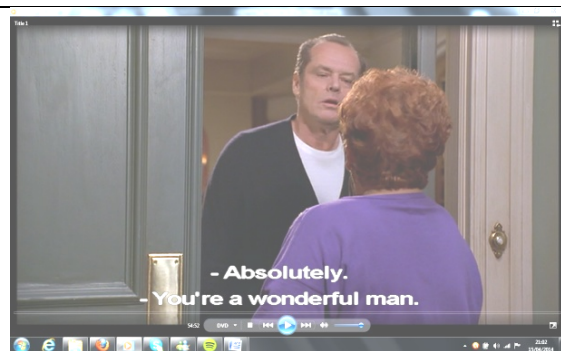


Figure 4 The door is opened wide as Melvin learns he can look after Verdell again



Figure 5 Nora's reaction to Melvin's readiness to look after Verdell

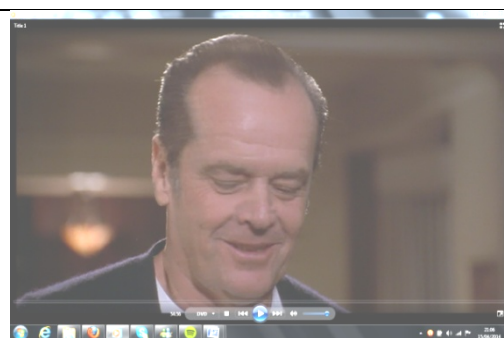


Figure 6 Melvin's reaction to Nora's appraisalment



Figure 7 But then returns the eye contact

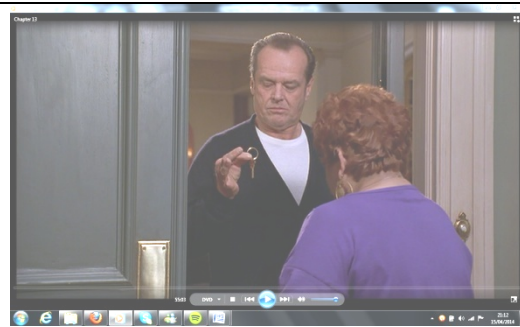


Figure 8 Melvin has to touch the key she gives him

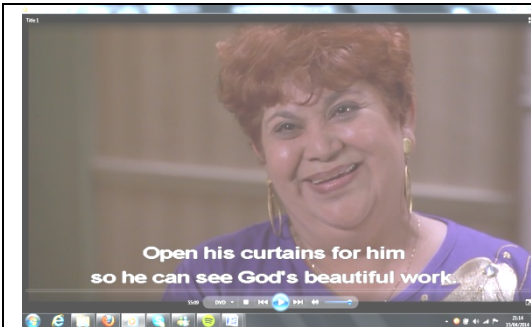


Figure 9 Nora's faith is very strong...

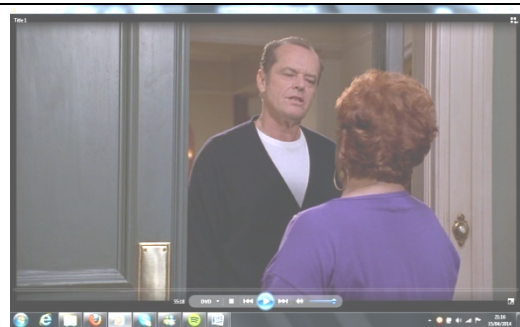


Figure 10 'Where'd they teach you to talk like this?'



Figure 11 Nora's expression

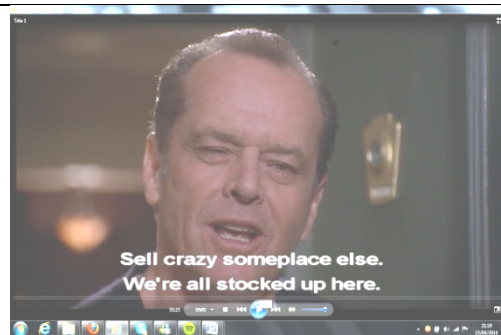


Figure 12 Melvin's closing comments...



Figure 13...followed immediately by the closing door



Figure 14 Nora slowly turns and walks away

7.6 Visual example of example [4.2.1] Chapter Four

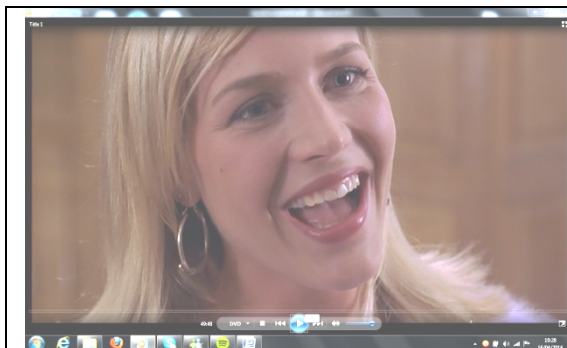


Figure 15 'How do you write women so well?'



Figure 16 'I think of a man...and take away reason and accountability'

CHAPTER 8

General summary

As I have demonstrated, the main aim of this thesis has been to explore the relationship between humour and impoliteness, taking Culpeper (2005) as my starting point. I have attempted to unpack how the nature of impolite linguistic behaviour is conveyed and received as entertaining (and even funny) within film dialogue. My reason for undertaking this has been to try and understand what we are responding to when we observe linguistically aggressive behaviour (designed for us as over-hearers), within a comedic context.

The idea that we are entertained by viewing such behaviour has already been acknowledged, as the ever-increasing research into ‘reality television’⁸³ will testify (hereafter RTV). Indeed, the extreme popularity of RTV shows such as *The Weakest link*, *Hell’s Kitchen*, *Big Brother*, *The Jeremy Kyle Show* and its equivalent US version *The Jerry Springer Show* (to name just a few), seems to be *because* of their trading on the display of human weakness in order to afford the audience a sense of ‘voyeuristic pleasure’ (Richardson and Meinhof 1999:132; see also Lorenzo-Dus, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013 chapter 9). This is not new, as Culpeper (1998) has noted:

Impoliteness is a type of aggression, and aggression has been a source of entertainment for thousands of years...moreover, it is from a position of relative safety and comfort that [we] can watch [the] conflict

Culpeper (1998:86)

This suggests that there is an overlapping relationship pertaining between the concepts of offence and humour, and it is this relationship which I have explored using a fictional character as my data.

Within impoliteness research the link with humour specifically is largely uncharted territory (but see Dynel 2013:105-144). In order to explain how humour-through-impoliteness may manifest itself for a viewing audience, I have also considered a number of additional approaches from the areas of stylistics, narratology, pragmatics, interpersonal communication and psychology in order to demonstrate that, by combining them, we are afforded a richer interpretation of character behaviour. This combined approach was needed (I felt), because

⁸³ See Lorenzo-Dus, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013 for an informed history of this concept

one of the main pivots within impoliteness definitions which I discuss (see Chapter Two), has been the idea of *intention*. Obviously, as my data concerns a fictional character, then we cannot say categorically what his intentions really are; however, if we take Grimshaw's (1990:281) line that we make 'inferences and attributions' which are 'no less plausible than actual participants' given the availability of 'an optimally complete behaviour record' then I believe my analysis in terms of characterisation and indeed in relation to impoliteness assessment, given the models applied, has allowed for a 'plausible' and informed analysis of the character of Melvin Udall (see also Chapter Four and Mead's (1990:442) assertion that we should approach fictional characters as if 'their appearances, actions, and speech reflect or refer to those of persons in real-life').

My starting point was to take Culpeper's (2005/2011) research on what he argues to be one of 'three key, specific functional types of impoliteness event: entertaining impoliteness' (Culpeper 2011:252). Since this type of impoliteness utilises the face-attack of a target for the entertainment of over-hearers, I have taken an extremely anti-social and linguistically aggressive character situated within a film classified as a *Romantic Comedy* as my data. The fact that the film *As Good As It Gets* has been classified as a *comedy* suggests that there is something about Melvin Udall's behaviour which we, as viewers, are invited to perceive as funny.

The subjective nature of humour (and indeed my interpretation of the film itself) has not allowed for a cut-and-dried explanation of why we may laugh at Melvin's offensiveness towards the other characters; however, I believe that there is a fundamental link between aspects of humour theory (and, in particular, incongruity) which sit *extremely* closely to the notion of impoliteness (and Melvin's behaviour in particular); so close, in fact, as to 'blur the lines' when determining what is and is not funny regarding the idea of offensiveness-for-entertainment's sake.

In the course of my analyses, it has become clear that the nature of humour is a much darker concept than we would anticipate, given the current ideology surrounding the notion that it is 'good to laugh' (Billig 2005). Whilst laughing affords us a sense of pleasure, it is the idea of what we are laughing *at* which I have been concerned with; in this case, the extreme anti-social behaviour of a fictional character. Applying the linguistic models of impoliteness and humour theory together brings us closer to understanding why some aspects of humour can actually be *too close for comfort*.

My analysis then, if we borrow from Gestalt psychology, has been able to demonstrate that the whole is, in fact greater than the sum of its parts. The way I have *layered* each approach within each chapter has allowed me to make observations which have added to the overall discussion about a) the link between impoliteness and humour theory and b) the application of these theories to the character of Melvin Udall (and our perception of him). By using Culpeper's (2005:46) observation that 'humour often involves impoliteness', I have done more than simply show that impoliteness is an entertainment device. He acknowledged that we need to look at this phenomenon in more detail, and, using a fictional character as the route in, this is what I have done.

8.1 Research questions revisited

The main goal of this study was to explore reasons why we can be predisposed to laugh at offensiveness towards others. After discussing what I argue to be the most prominent expositions on impoliteness and facework in Chapter Two, I considered academically-accepted theories or propositions considering the nature of humour and laughter in Chapter Three, as well as a definition of the concept of 'entertainment'. The literature on humour and humour theory is extensive, but by taking the three traditional approaches to explaining why we laugh, and applying them alongside impoliteness research and more specifically, its entertainment function, I demonstrated that not only are the two entities *not* disparate (as might first be assumed), but that they actually overlap to such an extent that I have documented this in tabular form in order to better view their similarities (see Table 8.2.1 below). This chapter, then, essentially discussed *why* we can laugh at offense towards others.

In Chapter Four I looked at *how* we might be manipulated as viewers to experience amusement at watching conflict, and noted that the discourse architecture of the film under scrutiny is such that, as a viewer, we are metaphorically distant and hence 'safe' from Melvin's behaviour, as well as becoming essentially, legitimized voyeurs of his behaviour (cf. Culpeper 2005; Lorenzo-Dus, Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013). In addition to this, I considered how we are propelled into the fictional world of Melvin Udall, taking Galbraith's (1995) idea of a 'deictic shift' here, and applied this alongside Ryan's (1980) concept of *The Principle of Minimal Departure*, which allows us to interpret Melvin's world as if it was our own. Once positioned in the fictional world, we take on expectations and schemas which we abide by in our own world. When there is a clash with those

expectations (as there frequently is with Melvin's behaviour), we have the potential for humour through the incongruity of Melvin's world compared to our own.

In Chapter Five, I examined Melvin's mental world in more detail and, in particular, demonstrated how a consideration of his *Reality Paradigms* (Archer 2002) shows us how Melvin constructs his own reality, which in turn affects his behaviour towards others. The way he 'frames' the other characters for example (cf. Locher and Watts 2008), offers convincing evidence that he has misogynistic, racist and chauvinistic tendencies. In addition to this, I explored how Archer's more recent work concerning a *facework intentionality scale* offers us intriguing possibilities in terms of character analysis, allowing for more than one 'reading' of Melvin's behaviour. This, in turn, suggests that there are additional contexts in which her work may be situated.

In Chapter Six I developed the notion of facework by including the concepts of Identity and Impression Management to show how Melvin develops as a character. This is important in order to keep the story evolving and hence the viewer entertained. Being able to control information about yourself and others is known as Impression Management (Schlenker 2003). This is an interesting concept to consider in relation to Melvin because while we generally strive to make a *good* impression in front of others, Melvin deliberately sets out to make a bad one (when the occasion suits him). As the audience, we are meant to infer that his condition of OCD propels him to eschew interactions with the other characters; however, the application of the linguistic models discussed throughout – in particular *Reality Paradigms* and *facework intentionality* (Archer 2002, 2011b) suggests his offensiveness is more strategic than his condition permits. This deeper interpretation of Melvin's character suggests that Archer's work can be successfully applied within the stylistic analysis of characters.

In Chapter Seven, the final analysis chapter, I briefly discussed the concept of multimodality and the symbolic nature of politeness and impoliteness. Since Culpeper (2011:255) stresses that 'a negative emotional reaction' is needed to determine whether offence has been taken, and similarly Bousfield (2010) maintains that understanding of intention and resultant uptake of offence is needed, then essentially what both models agree on is that offence needs to be *displayed* by the target in order to be considered successful. Within the scene discussed in this chapter, (arguably one of Melvin's most offensive), I maintained that his impoliteness fails due to the lack of display by Nora of any offence being taken. I offered two possible explanations as to why this should be the case. The possibility of different interpretations, in

turn, endorses the idea that impoliteness¹ approaches to explaining the communication and perception of offence - whereby it is the lay-person's own *evaluation* of linguistic behaviour (Mills 2003; Watts 2003, 2008, Locher and Watts 2008) - may indeed be needed alongside Impoliteness² approaches (Culpeper, Culpeper *et al*, Bousfield) a theoretically based concept within the study of verbal interaction as the above second order researches have noted.

8.2 Limitations of the study

This thesis has entailed a detailed study of my own subjective interpretation of a film, and this, of course, has been a major limitation with the project. Similarly, the extracts studied have been relatively few and have concentrated on the behaviour of one main character. Additionally, knowing that the genre of the film was a *romantic comedy* may also have coloured my interpretation of Melvin Udall's behaviour, in as much as I *expected* him to be amusing. An interesting study here would be to show the film without prior notification of its comedic intentions and assess viewer interpretations.

Another limitation is, of course, a cultural one: the film *As Good As It Gets* is written by American screenwriters, and stars American actors. The behaviour under scrutiny is based on American-British norms and values surrounding politeness. The same film translated and shown in another country may not offer itself up for identical humorous appreciation (see Chapter Seven). Given the restrictive nature of the study, I have not been able to make any wide-reaching conclusions concerning the nature of impoliteness-as-humour. This said however, many startling similarities between the two concepts have illuminated themselves throughout the course of my analyses. I have detailed these in Table 8.2.1 below. The table, which is a development of my ideas borne out of my MA work, is a summary of my argument and observations made in chapters Two and Three, and displays at a glance the definite link between offence and humour (as I perceive it). More than anything, it underscores the futility of pinning either concept down with a single definition:

Table 8.2.1 – Perceived similarities between the concepts of Impoliteness and Humour

Impoliteness	Humour
Context / Activity Type dependent	Context / Activity Type dependent
Can be used to promote solidarity e.g. <i>Banter</i> (what Leech 1983:144 calls ‘an offensive way of being friendly’) See also Culpeper 1996:353) and Labov (1972)	Can be used to promote solidarity (see Holmes 2000:159-167)
Can be used to gain power/coercion over another (See Bousfield 2008b:164)	Can be used to gain power/coercion over another (see Holmes 2000:175 on FTAs as ‘repressive humour’ in the workplace)
Words by themselves not inherently polite or impolite (Fraser and Nolan 1981:96), however conventionalisation <i>does</i> seem to play a part – see Bousfield (2010), Terkourafi (2008)	Words by themselves not inherently funny
Can be used to inflict face-damage (Lachenicht (1980), Culpeper (1996), (2005,2008,2011), (Culpeper <i>et al</i> 2003), Bousfield (2007, 2008, 2010)	Can be used to inflict face-damage (e.g. sarcasm, mimicry-see Culpeper 2005)
Multi-layered, complex concept, personal assessments of which can vary enormously (see Watts 2003:1-2)	Multi-layered, complex concept, personal assessments of which can vary enormously (see Attardo 1994:3)
Incongruity used for impolite purposes by setting up false expectations in hearer e.g. that speaker is going to be informal and friendly. A shift in activity type (from friendly to confrontational) increases the force of the face-attack on hearer as well as establishing the incongruity.	Incongruity used to elicit humour (see Bergson 1911)
Ritualised banter (or impoliteness which is understood <i>not</i> to be true) can act as a release from personal responsibility or ‘societal safety-valves’ (see Culpeper 1996: 353)	Humour allows for a release from ‘strain or constraint’ (see Keith-Spiegel 1972:19). Labov (1972:352-353) noted that ‘in ritual we are freed from personal responsibility for the acts we are engaged in’
Susceptible to emotional states i.e. anger/frustration (see Jay 1992 , Kienpointner 2008, and Culpeper 2011 (‘affective’)	Susceptible to emotional states-see Keith-Spiegel (1972)
Can be a form of unacceptable behaviour in some contexts e.g. the 2008 Ross/Brand radio controversy AKA ‘Sachsgate’	Can be a form of unacceptable behaviour in some contexts e.g. the stand-up comedians Roy ‘Chubby’ Brown or Bernard Manning
Elements of aggression – see Bousfield definition (2008b:155, Culpeper 1998:86)	Elements of aggression –e.g. Superiority Theory (Aristotle, Plato and Hobbes)
Staying silent e.g. ‘withholding politeness’ can be interpreted as a FTA (see Brown and Levinson 1987:5 and Culpeper 1996:357)	Staying silent e.g. not laughing when it is expected/anticipated may result in ‘loss of face’ for speaker (see Goffman 1967

	and Brown and Levinson 1987:61)
Controversial regards definition	Controversial regards definition
Can be used creatively for humorous purposes (see Culpeper 2005,2011)	Can be used creatively for impolite purposes e.g. stand-up comedians
Manipulation of Grice's maxims can be used for impolite purposes	Manipulation of Grice's maxims can be used for humorous purposes
Needs to be 'successful' (understood) by at least someone in a receiver role to create impact-see Bousfield (2008)	Needs to be 'successful' i.e. understood and <i>permitted</i> by at least someone in a receiver role to create approved impact
Can be used for entertainment purposes e.g. 'reality TV' (see esp. Culpeper 2005, 2011)	Can be used for entertainment purposes
Can be both social and anti-social	Can be both social and anti-social
Universal phenomenon	Universal phenomenon
Can be used for disciplinary and/or rebellious purposes – see Culpeper <i>et al</i> (2003:1545-1546)	Can be used for disciplinary and/or rebellious purposes – see Billig (2005)

8.3 Areas for future research

Within my analyses I have occasionally mentioned where future research would be an intriguing endeavour. The rise in popularity of RTV and 'exploitative' television shows suggests a disturbing trend towards the idea of aggression-for-amusement's sake becoming an acceptable media-led concept. More worrying, is the exponential rise of *trolling* within computer-mediated-communication (CMC) which also appears to have entertainment at its heart. This is a slang term associated with internet discourse whereby users *deliberately* set out to cause negative emotional reactions in others by communicating offensive messages or *posts* (Hardaker 2010). Hardaker (2010, 2013) has already made impressive strides in researching this relatively new field of on-line aggression, and the suggestion that amusement is one of the propellers driving this phenomenon suggests that 'entertaining impoliteness' is becoming a cultural entity, and, as such, deserves greater academic exploration.

The idea of banter, whilst still being situated within the realm of impoliteness studies is an intriguing concept, not least because it utilises the idea of face-attack for the purpose of social bonding. Haugh and Bousfield (2012) question whether this concept should actually be considered as part of impoliteness given that its intention is face enhancement and not attack. They suggest that the idea of 'mock impoliteness' should perhaps be considered as an off-shoot of impoliteness research, in light of the findings they have made surrounding the nature of 'jocular mockery and jocular abuse' within their data set of Australian and British varieties

of English linguistic behaviour. In terms of my own work, the face threat instigated with banter is not taken seriously, and humour is an element within the understanding of this. I have not discussed the area of banter in any great depth within my current data set because the character I have been concerned with has, on most occasions, been intentionally gratuitous with his face-attack of others. In addition, the idea of his behaviour as having a humorous element has been for *us* as the viewer, and *not* on the character discourse level, as would be the case with banter. An analysis of what constitutes banter as viewed on a character-to-character level would, however, be useful in future studies of drama, impoliteness and humour.

As Culpeper *et al* (2003:1575) note, the role of prosody is deserving of greater examination in studies surrounding linguistic aggression. They point out that prosody is able to convey an “attitudinal’ role of intonation’. This is something which I note in Chapter Three whereby Melvin’s use of prosody is a paralinguistic device which, via the exploitation of Grice’s (1975) Maxim of Manner, is able to convey impolite beliefs about the character of Frank. As this was the only occasion where I note its presence for impolite purposes, I do not discuss it in any great depth. However, the role of prosody does deserve greater examination within the realm of face-attacking interactive communication, including the RTV studies as mentioned above. Indeed, much of the perceived face attack in Culpeper’s (2005) study of Ann Robinson’s presentation style in the game show *The Weakest Link* was not through what she said, but how she said it. This again highlights the need for further exploration of how far Grice’s Manner maxim can be utilised to convey impolite beliefs.

The character of Melvin Udall is portrayed as suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Whilst this affliction has been exploited by the screenwriters for humorous effect (itself a controversial endeavour), it nevertheless raises two interesting issues and avenues for exploration:

The first is that, from a character analysis point of view, it may influence our perception of whether Melvin’s behaviour is intentionally offensive in design, as we can argue that Melvin’s aggression is a way of him controlling the anxiety which his condition necessarily causes. If we go with this premise and consider it within an impoliteness framework – using Bousfield’s (2008/2010) model where the idea of intention is pivotal, then it may ‘colour’ our assessment of Melvin’s behaviour. For Bousfield (2008/2010), producer intention as well as hearer understanding and inference is needed for successful impoliteness to be conveyed.

However, if OCD *causes* the character of Melvin to behave in ways which run contra to social conventions in order to alleviate his anxiety, then we might be more likely to disregard the *intentional* element within his anti-social behaviour. This would mean, then, that we would not be able to assign an interpretation of impoliteness based on Bousfield's (2008/2010) definition. As Culpeper's (2011) definition backgrounds the role of intention whilst still maintaining an 'emotional consequence' for at least one of the interactants within the exchange, this definition would still apply. (Interestingly, it was only when we *combined* linguistic models of communication and facework together that we could actually say with 'plausibility' (cf. Grimshaw 1990) that, *despite* Melvin's affliction, he was in many cases, intentional in his offensive behaviour).

The second issue concerning the screenwriters' exploitation of OCD has interesting implications for studies in facework. Throughout my analyses I have discussed facework models (both of *self* and *other*), and noted how much of the humour in the film is generated via the exploitation of the face needs of the characters. Melvin's OCD is something which directly impacts on his own face needs and those of the other characters. In particular, he has a desire for negative face acknowledgment (the need for solitude and minimal interaction with others) and an *almost* complete lack of any positive face needs (he appears unmoved by the defensive actions of others – with the exception of Carol who *does* affect him – obviously). His complete disregard for any face reciprocity of the other characters is incongruous (and hence has the potential for humour for us as observers). This raises an important question: do people with socially debilitating conditions such as OCD, Asperger syndrome, Autism and ADHD (to mention just a few), have different face perceptions and needs compared to those without the affliction?

Whilst I have only touched on the idea of multimodality within this project, its importance in the area of stylistics should not be underestimated. Non-verbal and performance cues can tell us as much about a character (and the way we are meant to perceive them) as their linguistic articulations.

Due to the overlap which exists between offensiveness and humour, there is always going to be the potential for some situations which have been framed as *funny* to be perceived as offensive and, conversely, there will be, for some, amusement at viewing offensiveness towards others. This leaves us with a fragile conundrum (and is an element which I would like to explore further): at what point does something, which we *initially* perceive as

humorous, start to become offensive for us (if it even does)? When do we stop ‘permitting’ a humorous interpretation and start to perceive offence? Whilst impoliteness as an academic concept continues to grow, its *entertaining* function has been relatively disregarded. The psychology which links the two areas discussed is personally intriguing as it essentially deals with the way we *perceive*. Humour and impoliteness are emotional as well as linguistic concepts and their impact is dependent on many factors. Understanding what these factors might be is an area I am interested to follow and in particular, I would welcome the idea of researching further the ‘darker’ side of the concept of humour (assuming that we already have a conventional idea of what is meant by ‘darker’). A wider application of Archer’s work on strategic facework ambiguity to my own findings within this thesis is an obvious starting point.

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