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HOW TO BE IMPOLITE: RATING OFFENSIVE STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

HOW TO BE IMPOLITE: RATING OFFENSIVE STRATEGIES

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Recent studies on impoliteness (Beebe 1995, Kienpointner 1997) have shown that politeness is not always the norm and that impoliteness is not unusual in everyday interactions. A few models of impoliteness (Lachenich 1980, Austin 1990, Culpeper 1996) have developed in the literature postulating strategies designed to attack the addressee's face. There are, however, a number of issues that have been overlooked in these models.

First, the models have failed to distinguish all the different impoliteness strategies available to the speaker if he/she decides to attack the addressee. Moreover, none of the models has suggested what the order of the strategies should be with regards to their degree of offense.

This study aims at identifying all the different impoliteness strategies available to the speaker and investigates on their degree of offense. In this way, this study also intends to contribute to resolve the controversy in the literature about the muting function of sarcastic irony.

The findings of this study show that an on-record attack to positive face is the most offensive of all the impoliteness strategies and, that sarcastic irony does not seem to mute the degree of offense relative to direct, literal criticism.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years, politeness theories (Lakoff 1973, 1989; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987) have focused on how communicative strategies are used to enhance cooperative interaction by "establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group [...] during the ongoing process of interaction" (Watts, 1992: 50). The fundamental underlying notion around which all politeness frameworks are built is 'face'. The concept of 'face' was first introduced by the sociologist Erving Goffman as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967: 5). Thus, he argues that "during a contact of a particular type, an interactant can expect to be sustained in a particular face and can feel that it is morally proper that this should be so" (1967: 7).

The notion of 'face' was later extended by Brown and Levinson, in their seminal work on universals of politeness, to include two specific kinds of desires ('face-wants') attributed by interactants to one another as defined below:

> Negative face: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others.
>
> Positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.
>
> (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62)

Politeness researchers have stressed the fact that communication is a cooperative activity and that maintaining each other's face is an essential part of that cooperation. Thus, as Brown and Levinson put it:

> In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each others' face.... (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61)

However, recent studies on impoliteness[1] (Lachenicht 1980, Austin 1990, Beebe 1995, Culpeper 1996, Kienpointner 1997) have shown that politeness (i.e., cooperative behavior) is not always the norm, and that impoliteness is not unusual in everyday interactions. As Kienpointner points out, rudeness cannot simply be regarded as "the marked, abnormal and irrational counterpart of politeness" (1997:251).

In the same vein, Austin argues that "there are many interactional situations where the basic assumption will be that the speaker may not, and probably will not, want to cooperate as it is not necessarily mutual interest which governs the conduct of interaction, but can frequently be the interest of only one participant or group of participants" (1990: 278-279).

These studies on impoliteness have attempted to show that rudeness is not merely pragmatic failure at politeness; rather, "rudeness can also be a reflection of pragmatic competence" (Beebe 1995:154). Thus, Beebe maintains that rudeness is usually instrumental, i.e., functional, and that "people use rudeness and conflict talk to get or do what they want, to serve needed functions in language and life" (1995:156).

---

[1] Both 'impoliteness' and 'rudeness' are used in the literature to refer to non-cooperative verbal behavior that fails to attend the hearer's face. For the sake of parallelism with the politeness literature, I will adopt the term 'impoliteness' throughout my study to refer to this type of verbal behavior.

In spite of what was said above, little work has been done on the communicative strategies that fail to attend the interlocutor's face wants, in particular, those strategies with the purpose of attacking one's interlocutor. However, impoliteness theories deserve some attention and should be considered as a necessary complement to standard theories of politeness.

1.1 Defining Impoliteness

In order to better understand the notion of impoliteness, it will be useful to briefly consider the types of action that lead to face damage. Goffman (1967: 14) suggests that there are three types of action which constitute a threat to face.

First, the offending person "may appear to have acted innocently, his offense 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." Consider the following example. A friend of Mary told her that she was going to have a nose job done. When Mary sees her again after a few weeks, she says to her "I thought you were having a nose job", to which Mary's friend responds "I already did." Mary's remark has unwittingly drawn attention to the fact that her friend's nose still looks bad. However, there was no intention to hurt her friend's feelings. Had Mary known that her friend had already had the nose job done, she would not have said anything.

Secondly, "the offending person may appear to have acted maliciously and spitefully, with the intention of causing open insult." For example, you know that a person that you do not like has not been admitted to a desired graduate school, and you make the comment "Congratulations on being admitted to the program." Since you know

that the person wanted to be admitted into the program, the comment can only be seen as a desire to hurt the addressee's feelings.

Thirdly, "there are incidental offenses; these arise as an unplanned but sometimes anticipated by-product of action – action the offender performs in spite of its offensive consequences, although not out of spite." This type of offenses includes cases where a person has to perform the offensive action because they are obliged to do so, but there is no intention to cause offense. Consider the example given above. The person responsible for communicating to the student that he has not been admitted to the program might say something like "I regret to inform you that you have not been admitted into the program." The speaker performs the offensive action out of obligation, not out of spite.

This third type of incidental offenses are the ones that have been described in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987). They constitute face-threatening acts (FTAs) but they do not involve any intention on the part of the speaker to offend the hearer. Hence, they are usually accompanied by politeness strategies such as "I regret to inform you that ..." intended to mitigate the threat.

Of these three different types of face damage ('offensive behavior'), this study will focus only on the second type, i.e., attacks to face that are intentionally made by the speaker to hurt the addressee. It should be noted that though the phenomenon of impoliteness would also technically include non-intentional offenses, the term 'impoliteness' has been widely used in the literature to refer mainly to intentional offenses.

Culpeper et al. (2003) define impoliteness as "the use of strategies that are designed to attack face and, thereby cause social conflict and disharmony" (2003:1545). Beebe (1995), on her part, gives the following definition of rudeness:

> Rudeness is defined as a face-threatening act (FTA) which violates a socially sanctioned norm of interaction for the social context in which it occurs. It is only rudeness if it receives insufficient redressive action to mitigate its force or, of course, if it does not occur in a context such as intimacy or emergency, that would negate the need for redressive action. Consequently, it causes antagonism, discomfort or conflict and results in some disruption of the social harmony. (Beebe, 1995: 159).

Though different authors differ in the term they use to refer to the type of verbal behavior intended to harm the addressee, they all agree that they are concerned with what some researchers have referred to as 'strategic' (Lakoff 1989) or 'instrumental' (Beebe 1995) impoliteness, that is to say, it fulfills a function that the speaker intended and was not [merely] failed politeness (Beebe, 1995: 166).

Austin (1990) argues that impoliteness is characterized by acts that she identifies as 'face attack acts', i.e., "communicative acts which are injurious to the hearer's positive or negative face, and are introduced in a situation which could have been avoided, but where their inclusion is perceived by the hearer to be intentional" (1990: 279). Face attack acts, then, differ from face-threatening acts (hereafter, FTAs) in the perception of intentionality. While face attacks necessarily involve intention to cause harm, this is not the case of FTAs. Under Brown and Levinson's theory, FTAs have been defined as "those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker"(1987:65), but nothing is said about the intention of the speaker.

Hence, it is clear that intention to hurt the addressee is a necessary component of impoliteness. As Culpeper et al. (2003) point out, "it should be noted that a key difference between politeness and impoliteness is *intention* [italics mine]; whether it is

the speaker's intention to support face (politeness) or to attack it (impoliteness)" (2003: 1549-1550). Of course, identifying speaker intention is not an unproblematic issue.

Requests, for example, are considered by Brown and Levinson to be inherent FTAs since they are seen as posing a threat to the addressee's negative face, i.e., the desire to be unimpeded by others. Yet, requests may or may not involve an intentional attack on the addressee's face. Consider the sentence in (1), taken from Austin (1990: 283), in the context in which a father is addressing his daughter.

(1) Make the tea, will you, Jill?

The example above involves a FTA (it imposes an action on the daughter); yet, we cannot say that there is any perceived intention on the part of the father to attack his daughter's negative face.

However, if we consider the request in example (1) but now, in a different situational context, we can perceive some intention on the part of the speaker to attack the hearer's face. The following example is taken from Austin (1990: 283).

(2) A male executive says to an obviously busy female colleague

Make the tea will you, Jill?

As Austin (1990) explains, since Jill's male colleague knows that she is busy, there is no reason why she should be asked to make the tea. The hearer will then interpret the question as either a general coercion, or one that is linked to her gender (1990: 283).

The above examples strongly suggest that FTAs performed with the intention to cause harm should be distinguished from those with no such intention. Thus, from here

on, I will be adopting Austin's term of 'face attack' to refer to an intentional offense on the addressee.

Finally, it should be noticed the important role context plays in interpreting the speaker's intention. Following Culpeper et al. (2003), I acknowledge that "one cannot reconstruct the actual intentions of speakers, but rather the 'plausible' intentions can be reconstructed, given adequate evidence" (2003: 1552). The next section addresses the importance of context in the interpretation of impoliteness.

1.2 The Role of Context in the Interpretation of Impoliteness

Despite some early assumptions that there are some speech acts which are inherently polite (e.g., offers) and others that are inherently impolite (e.g., orders) (Leech, 1983: 83; Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65), it is now almost widely accepted that "sentences are not inherently polite or impolite independent of the context in which they are uttered" (Fraser, 1990: 233). As Fraser puts it, "sentences are not ipso facto polite, nor are languages more or less polite. It is only speakers who are polite, and then only if their utterances reflect an adherence to the obligations they carry in that particular conversation" (1990: 233) and, one might add, in that particular language-culture community.

Austin (1990) argues that "the context in which the participants in a given interaction operate is what dictates the most fruitful direction of the interpretation process" (1990: 290). The context will include some of the following information:

(i) previous interactions between the participants
(ii) immediately preceding utterances
(iii)encyclopedic information available to the participants, mutual or otherwise

(iv)clues from the physical environment, including the physical behavior of the participants

Austin (1990: 290)

Similarly, following Kienpointner (1997), when talking about rudeness, "it could be claimed that sentences are not ipso facto rude; it is speakers who are rude" (1997: 255). He argues that many linguistic phenomena which are typically assumed to be rude in many languages and cultures, for instance, shouting, frequent interruptions, bare imperatives, taboo words, ironic remarks, etc., are not inherently impolite irrespective of context (1997: 258-259).

The following is an example taken from Culpeper (1996) where a supposedly impolite act will be judged as polite in a particular context. He claims that, "an order could be conceived as polite in a context where it is thought to be of benefit to the target. For example, 'Go on, eat up' as an order for a dinner guest to tuck in some delicacy can hardly be seen as involving a desire to cause offense on the hearer's face" (1996: 351).

The examples given in (1-2) above about the father asking his daughter to make tea and the male colleague asking his female partner to do the same provide further evidence on the crucial importance of context in the interpretation of the politeness/impoliteness of utterances. Though both examples involve the same utterance, it is the contextual information provided about the speaker and hearer identities and relationship what contributes to the different perceptions of the request.

From a cultural point of view, the role of context in the assessment of politeness/impoliteness has been widely acknowledged in the literature. Several studies (Matsumoto 1988, Gu 1990) have contested Brown and Levinson's claim of the universality of their politeness theory. As Kasper (1990) puts it:

> ... the linguistic encoding of politeness strategies is contingent on the properties of any linguistic system and the conventionalized norms of usage. [...] Conventions such as routine formulae and idiomatic expressions tend to be language specific and thus, would not be expected to have formal or even functional equivalences across languages (1990: 198).

Thus, as Kienpointner (1997) explains, in order to correctly assess the actual politeness or rudeness of utterances, they have to be judged relative to verbal and situational contexts, languages and cultures (1997: 259).

1.3 The Social Variables of Power and Distance

Some researchers (Austin 1990, Culpeper 1996) have claimed that the main variables involved in the decision to save or not to save face are power and intimacy. Thus, they argue that impoliteness is more likely to occur between intimates and in situations where there is an imbalance of power.

On the one hand, Culpeper (1996) claims that "a more powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite because he or she can (a) reduce the ability of a less powerful participant to retaliate with impoliteness (e.g., through the denial of speaking rights), and (b) threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite" (1996: 354). Austin (1990) explains that "people cannot always be expected to defend their face if threatened since the consequences of this could be more damaging than the face attack in areas such as job security, employment prospects and physical safety" (1990 : 279).

On the other hand, other researchers have argued that lack of politeness correlates with intimacy: "the more intimate a relationship, the less important it is to be polite" (Leech, 1983: 144). However, these authors were looking at cases of mock-impoliteness

or banter (i.e., impoliteness that is understood to be untrue), as opposed to genuine impoliteness with the intention to cause offense.

Interestingly, genuine impoliteness is not absent in relations of close social distance and equal power. Culpeper (1996), based on a study by Birchler et al. (1975) in which happily married spouses were found to be typically more hostile towards each other than strangers, argues that "in a familiar relationship one has more scope for impoliteness since one may know which aspects of face are particularly sensitive to attack, and one may be better able to predict and/or cope with retaliation that may ensue" (1996: 354).

1.4 The Need for an Impoliteness Model

The claim that impoliteness is a "universally occurring phenomenon" and that "systematic, rule-governed rudeness is not absent in ordinary conversation" (Kienpointner, 1997: 256) seems to suggest that some appropriate descriptive framework is necessary in order to account for impoliteness behavior.

Culpeper et al. (2003) stress the fact that Brown and Levinson's category 'bald on record' does not accommodate all impolite phenomena. Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of 'bald on record' utterances is of those which are issued "in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible" (1987: 69). Moreover, they associate this superstrategy with a specific context, namely, one where the face threat is very small and minimal politeness work is required. Specifically, they suggest that 'bald on record' is used when: (a) the speaker and hearer recognize that face wants are suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency, (b) the face threat is very small, or (c) the speaker is

superior in power to the hearer (1987:69). However, the studies done on impoliteness have shown that these contexts do not exhaust all the possibilities for impolite behavior.

A few models of impoliteness[2] (Lachenicht 1980, Austin 1990, Culpeper 1996) have been proposed in the last few decades. All of them take Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness model as their point of departure and propose impoliteness superstrategies with the opposite orientation, that of attacking one's interlocutor and causing disharmony.

Though the models differ in the number of superstrategies they propose and in the terms used to refer to the different strategies[3], they all distinguish at least the following impoliteness superstrategies: (i) bald on record, (ii) positive impoliteness, (iii) negative impoliteness, and (iv) off-record.

There are, however, a number of issues that have been overlooked in these models. First of all, they all seem to fail to account for all the types of impoliteness superstrategies available to the speaker. All three models consider positive and negative impoliteness as on-record strategies but fail to account for those instances that involve face attacks on the hearer's positive or negative face but that are done off-record (i.e., indirectly). They just postulate the off-record superstrategy with no distinction as to which face is being attacked. Secondly, none of these models has attempted to suggest how the impoliteness superstrategies should be ordered as regards their degree of offense. It is precisely these two topics that the present research addresses.

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[2] These different models will be examined in more detail in chapter two.

[3] Lachenicht (1980) uses the terms 'positive aggravation' and 'negative aggravation' instead of 'positive impoliteness' and 'negative impoliteness' used by Culpeper (1996). Austin (1990) distinguishes two main superstrategies: on-record and off-record, and within the on-record strategy she specifies attacks on positive or negative face.

1.5 The Muting Function of Ironic Criticism

Though none of the proposed models of impoliteness has proposed a ranking for the order of the superstrategies as regards their degree of offense, there have been some inconsistent claims in the literature about the offensiveness of off-record strategies, especially of ironic criticism or sarcastic irony, relative to that of on-record strategies.

Following Brown and Levinson's treatment of irony as a face-saving strategy, Dews and Winner (1995) and Dews et al. (1995) have claimed that ironic criticism performs a muting function that results in a less offensive criticism than that conveyed by its direct, literal counterpart. However, other studies (Colston 1997, Toplak and Katz 2000, Okamoto 2002, Huang 2004) have reported that ironic criticism is perceived as being more offensive than literal criticism. It is also within the limits of this study to investigate the function of ironic criticism.

1.6 Objectives of this Study

The ultimate goal of this work is to try to give a new taxonomy of impoliteness superstrategies where all categories of face attack are accounted for and suggest how the different superstrategies should be ordered with respect to degree of offense. The results of this study will show that an on-record attack to positive face is the most offensive of all the impoliteness superstrategies.

This study also aims at trying to resolve the controversy about the function of ironic criticism or sarcastic irony. The findings here will suggest that sarcastic irony is perceived as less offensive than direct criticism only when the attack is oriented to the hearer's positive face in a distant relation. Direct and indirect (sarcastic) attacks to

negative face and to positive face in a close relation do not show any difference in their degree of offense.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will be organized as follows: chapter 2 will consist of a review of the literature of impoliteness pointing out to its main contributions as well as its gaps. In chapter 3, I will present the results of an experiment carried out with American and Argentine respondents about the degree of offense of the impoliteness strategies. Chapter 4 will discuss in more detail the results obtained in the experiment and will draw some conclusions about the degree of offense of on-record and off-record impoliteness strategies. A ranking of impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense will also be proposed. Finally, chapter 5 consists of a summary of the findings and a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before getting into the analysis of the different models of impoliteness that have been proposed in the literature, it is necessary to briefly review some classifications of impoliteness that have been put forward in order to be able to clearly identify the sense in which the term 'impoliteness' will be used throughout this study.

Different authors have identified different types of impoliteness or rudeness. Kienpointner (1997) makes a distinction between cooperative rudeness and non-cooperative rudeness. By *cooperative rudeness* he means "utterances which at first sight seem to be rude according to standard rules of polite behavior in a speech community, [but which] can actually be cooperative behavior in specific contexts" (1997: 257). This type of rudeness includes examples of what is known as 'mock impoliteness' or 'banter', i.e., "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offense" (Culpeper 1996: 352). Culpeper's example of banter is when he arrived late to a party because he had confused 17:00 hours for 7 o'clock. As he was explaining this to the host, he was greeted with a smile and the words:

(3) "You silly bugger"

As Culpeper explains, the impoliteness of the utterance was superficial; it was not really meant. The host was just letting him know that he was forgiven for his lateness and that it was not a serious offense.

Another example of cooperative rudeness involves 'ritual insults', i.e., a kind of language game involving the use of insults. Labov (1972) has shown that 'sounding' or 'playing the dozens' (as this type of language game is known among male black adolescents in the U.S.) is often used to reinforce group solidarity. The following example of sounding was taken from Labov (1972: 302).

(4) Iron is iron, and steel don't rust.
    But your momma got a pussy like a greyhound bus.

The key to sounding is that the insult is understood to be untrue, an interpretation that comes about on the basis of shared knowledge within the group (Culpeper, 1996: 353).

Kienpointer (1997) identifies a third variety of cooperative rudeness, namely, 'ironic rudeness' or 'mock politeness'. However, as he clearly states, *ironic rudeness* should be distinguished from *sarcastic rudeness*, its non-cooperative counterpart (1997: 264). Leech (1983: 145) gives the following example of ironic rudeness (or mock-irony, as he calls it) where the utterance is clearly recognized as unserious and not intended to cause offense.

(5) A fine friend YOU are! (said jokingly to a partner who has given away an advantage in a card game).

The distinction between ironic rudeness and sarcastic rudeness will become crucial in some later discussion and will be addressed in more detail in chapter 5.

The main concern of this study is the other type of impolite behavior mentioned above, namely, *non-cooperative rudeness*. Non-cooperative rudeness causes "antagonism, discomfort or conflict and it results in some social disruption to the social harmony" (Beebe, 1995: 159).

Within non-cooperative rudeness, a further distinction can be made between motivated rudeness and unmotivated rudeness (Kasper 1990, Kienpointner 1997). *Unmotivated rudeness* is defined by Kasper as "the violation of the norms of politic behavior due to ignorance" (1990: 208). This type of impolite behavior is not intentional but rather "results from the speaker's or listener's unfamiliarity with culturally appropriate forms of politic behavior and its linguistics encodings" (Kasper 1990: 208). Although this type of rudeness is interesting from a cross-cultural pragmatic point of view, I will have nothing more to say about it in this work.

Motivated rudeness, on the contrary, involves the speaker's intention to be heard as rude (Kasper 1990: 209) and to cause harm to the addressee. Different types of motivated rudeness have been identified according to what causes it, for example, if it is due to the person's lack of control or if it is used as self-defense because the person has been attacked in the first place, etc.[4] The type of motivated rudeness I am particularly interested here is the kind of instrumental, i.e., functional (Beebe 1995) or strategic (Lakoff 1989), rudeness that is deliberate and goal oriented.

While Lakoff limits her discussion to the use of strategic rudeness in professional settings, such as the courtroom or the therapist's office, Beebe examines the use of instrumental rudeness in everyday conversation. She argues that rudeness serves two main functions, namely, to get power and to vent negative feelings (1995: 159).

Rudeness to get power consists of rudeness for several alternative purposes:

i. to appear superior
ii. to get power over actions
    - to get someone else to do something
    - to avoid doing something yourself

[4] For different classifications on the various types of motivated rudeness, see Kasper (1990) and Kienpointner (1997).

iii. to get power in conversation
    - to make the interlocutor talk
    - to make the interlocutor stop talking
    - to get the floor
    - to shape what the interlocutor tells you (or how)

Rudeness to vent negative feelings includes the following purposes:

i. to express anger
ii. to express impatience
iii. to express contempt

(Beebe, 1995: 159-160)

To sum up, it is 'non-cooperative, motivated, instrumental impoliteness' which has been the main focus of study of impoliteness researchers in their attempts to construct a model that would account for the different strategies for performing impolite behavior. Having clearly identified what is meant by 'impolite behavior', I will examine next the different models of impoliteness that have been proposed in the literature.

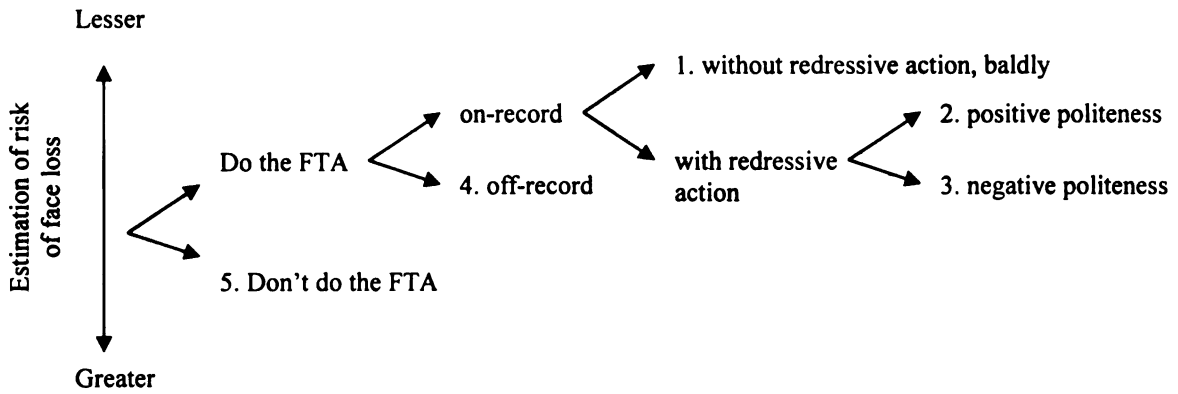
2.1 Impoliteness Frameworks

The three impoliteness models that have been postulated (Lachenicht 1980, Austin 1990, Culpeper 1996) take Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness as their point of departure, and propose impoliteness superstrategies that are opposite in orientation to the ones first proposed by Brown and Levinson. In the next section, I will briefly present Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness.

2.1.1 Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

Brown and Levinson proposed five superstrategies for performing a face-threatening act. These are outlined in figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Brown and Levinson's Model of Politeness



(Brown and Levinson, 1987: 60)

Brown and Levinson claim that speakers' first decision is whether to do or not to do the FTA. Speakers can always withhold the FTA if they consider that that the face threat is too great. If, however, they decide to realize the FTA, they are presented with a second choice: they can either choose to perform the FTA on-record or off-record. To perform a FTA on-record means that "there is just one unambiguously attributable intention with which witnesses would concur" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 68). This 'unambiguously attributable intention' can be expressed in two different ways: baldly, without any redressive action or with some redressive action. The former strategy is referred to as 'bald on record'.

As mentioned in 1.4 above, "doing an act baldly, without redress, involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69). Moreover, Brown and Levinson claim that this superstrategy is used in situations where maximum efficiency is more important than satisfying the hearer's face, where the face threat is very small and minimal politeness work is required (1987: 95-98). These situations include (a) cases of great urgency or desperation (e.g., 'Get out' said to a person inside a room on fire), (b) cases where the speaker is powerful

and does not fear retaliation or non-cooperation (e.g., 'Get to work' said by a boss to his employee) and (c) cases where doing the FTA is primarily in the hearer's interest (e.g., 'Your shirt is inside out!').

The second strategy, i.e., performing an FTA with appropriate redress, can be done by attending to either the hearer's positive or negative face. Thus, 'positive politeness' refers to the use of strategies designed to redress the addressee's positive face wants by communicating interest in and approval of the hearer's wants. For example, exaggerations such as "What a beautiful garden you have!" are used to attend the hearer's positive face wants.

On the other hand, the use of strategies designed to redress the addressee's negative face wants is called 'negative politeness.' This superstrategy is frequently used in requests and commands. Thus, the polite formulas 'Could you please....', and 'Would you mind...' are intended to minimize the speaker's imposition on the addressee's freedom of action.

The last politeness superstrategy available to speakers, if they decide to perform the FTA, is to go 'off-record'. By doing an act off-record (i.e., indirectly), the FTA is performed "in such a way that it is not possible to attribute one clear communicative intention to the act" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 211). This strategy is used when a great deal of face is at stake so that the speaker can avoid responsibility for his/her act and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it.

Finally, it is important to notice that Brown and Levinson take into account 'speaker's face' when assessing the degree of threat of the different superstrategies.

Thus, the more an act threatens speaker's face, the more the speaker will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy illustrated in Figure 1 above.

Having described Brown and Levinson's model of politeness, I will now examine the impoliteness frameworks that have been developed in the literature.

2.1.2 Impoliteness Models Proposed in the Literature

Three impoliteness models (Lachenicht 1980, Austin 1990, Culpeper 1996) have been postulated in the literature in the past three decades. Lachenicht was the first to suggest that 'aggravating language', i.e., a rational attempt to hurt or damage the addressee, is not an impoverished system and that it is possible to study such language from a single consistent viewpoint (1980: 607-610). For this purpose, he extended Brown and Levinson's theoretical system to include abusive language.

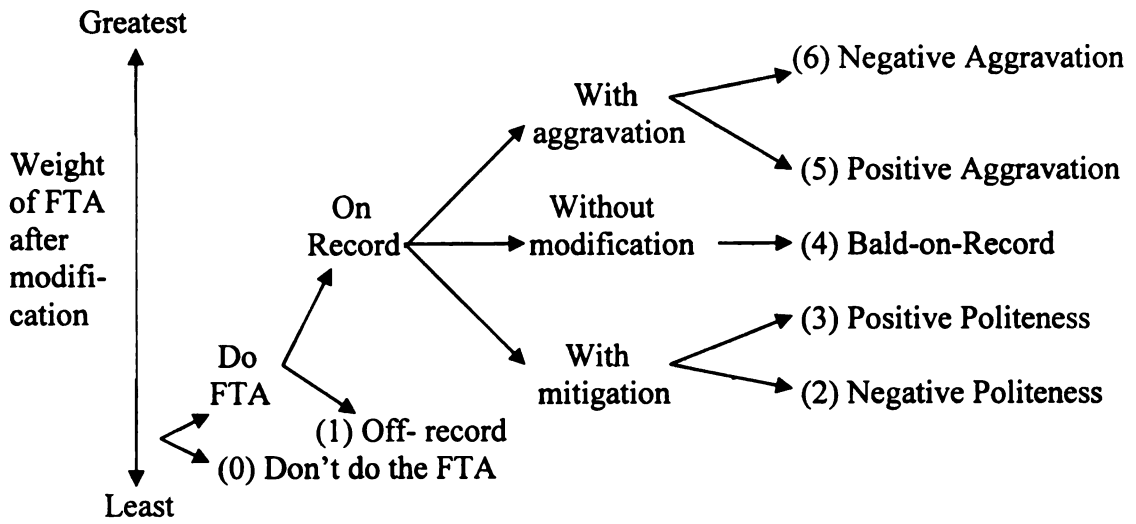
Lachenicht argues that, occasionally, the speaker does not wish social interaction to proceed smoothly for the hearer. Thus, the speaker will assess the risk he can take in aggravating his hearer, and select an aggravation strategy of the required weight (1980: 619). The aggravation strategies that he proposes are:

i. Off-record: ambiguous insults, insinuations, hints, and irony. This strategy is of much the same kind as the politeness strategy, and is designed to enable the insulter to meet aggrieved challenge from the injured person with an assertion of innocence.
ii. Bald on record: directly produced FTAs and impositions ('Shut the door', 'Do your work', 'Don't talk', etc.) of the same kind as in the politeness strategy.
iii. Positive aggravation: an aggravation strategy that is designed to show the addressee that he is not approved of, is not esteemed, does not belong, and will not receive cooperation.
iv. Negative aggravation: An aggravation strategy that is designed to impose on the addressee, to interfere with his freedom of action, and to attack his social position and the basis of his social action.

(Lachenicht, 1980: 619)

Lachenicht's politeness - aggravation system is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Strategies for Performing FTAs



(Lachenicht, 1980: 621)

As Lachenicht mentions, the chart presented above is adapted from an earlier one by Brown and Levinson to include aggravation strategies. The strategies are numbered in order of increasing riskiness to the speaker, from the least risky 'silence', through off-record and various polite strategies, to aggravation strategies finishing with the most risky 'negative aggravation' (1980: 621).

There are, however, some problems with Lachenicht's model. If Lachenicht's strategy bald on record is of the same kind as the politeness strategy in Brown and Levinson (as he claims it is), its use should also be limited to the cases described by Brown and Levinson, i.e., when the face threat is very small and maximum efficiency is needed. But, since the purpose of aggravating language it to *hurt* the addressee, bald on record impoliteness should be found in situations where considerable face is at stake.

The same conclusion can be reached about the off-record strategy. Following Brown and Levinson, Lachenicht conceives off-record as a face-saving strategy of the

same kind of the politeness strategy. However, it is not clear that certain off-record impoliteness strategies such as sarcasm are really face-saving. As Barbe (1995) points out, with sarcasm speakers compromise themselves and there is no room for guessing or doubting (1995: 28-29); the insulting intention cannot be denied. Thus, I believe that these two categories need to be revised in order to be properly accommodated into an impoliteness model. As shown later, this modification is done in Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness.

The two aggravating strategies that Lachenicht's proposes are positive and negative aggravation. In the same way that Brown and Levinson distinguish negative and positive politeness within their on-record strategy according to which face is being redressed (positive or negative), Lachenicht also distinguishes between positive and negative aggravation strategies in terms of their attack orientation to positive or negative face. However, the main contribution of Lachenicht's work is that it is the only one that provides an extensive review of the different linguistic strategies that may be used to aggravate face.

The second model of impoliteness that has been proposed is Austin's (1990). Her model of face attack differs from Lachenicht's in that it is a more hearer-based account of how utterances can be interpreted as offensive. Thus, her framework is intended to show that "what causes utterances to be interpreted on the dark side is the context in which they are produced" (1990: 277). She distinguishes the following impoliteness superstrategies:

i. Bald on record
ii. On-record threats to positive face
iii. On-record threats to negative face
iv. On-record with inappropriate redress to positive face
v. On-record with inappropriate redress to negative face
vi. Off- record

Apart from the four strategies outlined in Lachenicht, she also includes on-record strategies with inappropriate redress. These consist of examples where redress is used in circumstances that render such redress inappropriate. The redress can be oriented towards either the hearer's positive or negative face. An example of an on-record strategy with inappropriate redress to positive face is given below.

(6) A male executive says to an obviously busy female colleague

> Would you mind making the tea today while Mrs. B is away, Jill? You'd be much quicker at it than me. (Austin, 1990: 284)

As Austin explains, though the speaker is aware that the imposition is unjustified, he includes a redressive strategy which is not only inappropriate but reinforces the sexiest nature of the original face attack.

Austin's chief contribution is two-fold. She postulates on-record impoliteness strategies with inappropriate redress (which are not mentioned in any of the other impoliteness frameworks), and she emphasizes the importance of context in the interpretation of impoliteness. However, her bald on record and off-record strategies present the same problems that I have criticized in Lachenicht's model.

Finally, Culpeper's model (1996) considers not just an extension to Brown and Levinson politeness model, but explores the possibility of a parallel structure which differs only in terms of orientation to face (i.e., instead of maintaining or enhancing face, impoliteness superstrategies are designed to attack face) (Culpeper et al. 2003: 1554). The superstrategies are summarized below.

i. Bald on-record impoliteness – the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized. It is important to distinguish this strategy from Brown and Levinson's bald on record. For Brown and Levinson, bald on record is a

politeness strategy in fairly specific circumstances. For example, when face concerns are suspended in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g., 'Come in' or 'Do sit down'), or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer (e.g., 'Stop complaining' said by a parent to a child). In all these cases little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.

ii. Positive impoliteness – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.

iii. Negative impoliteness – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.

iv. Sarcasm or mock politeness – the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realizations. [...] This is, of course, the opposite of the social harmony that is supposed to be promoted through Brown and Levinson's off-record politeness. [...] Sarcasm (mock politeness for social disharmony) is clearly the opposite of banter (mock impoliteness for social harmony).

v. Withhold politeness – the absence of politeness work where it would be expected.

(Culpeper, 1996: 356-357)

Culpeper's model is a better model than the other two in that in his model bald on record and off-record are truly impoliteness strategies with the intention of attacking the interlocutor and causing social disharmony. However, the three models of impoliteness outlined above present the problem that they only indicate that a face attack can be directed towards the hearer's negative or positive face within the on-record strategy but they all fail to make this distinction for the off-record strategy.

I would like to suggest that in the same way that a face attack can be directed towards the hearer's negative or positive face when done on-record, it can also be oriented to both aspects of face when performed off-record. Most of the examples given in the literature involve sarcastic attacks oriented to the hearer's positive face, such as the example given in (7) below.

(7) You are so mature!! (said to a person who has been behaving in a very childish way)

However, we can also find examples of sarcastic (i.e., indirect) attacks oriented to negative face. The following example was taken from Austin (1990: 289).

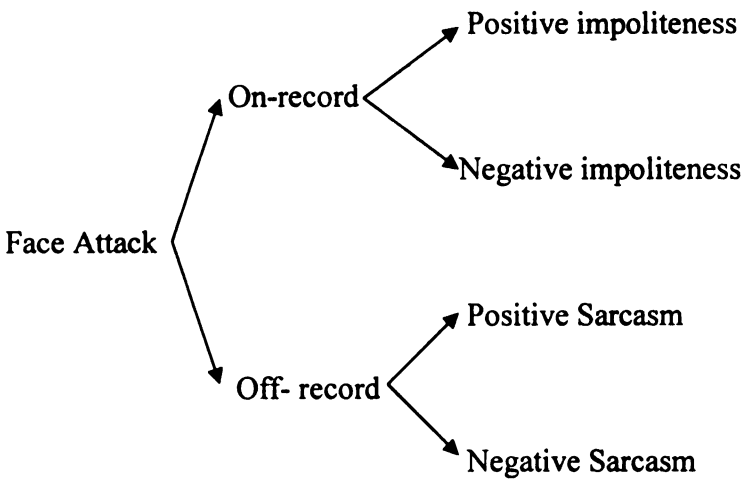
(8) No, no – go ahead. White carpet is boring and the red spots really improve it.
(Where the carpet is new, and the hearer has just spilt red wine on it.)

I suggest, then, a modification of Culpeper's framework of impoliteness to include attacks directed to the hearer's positive and negative face within the off-record impoliteness superstrategy (or sarcasm, as he calls this strategy). Thus, there are two main ways of performing a face attack: on-record and off-record (or sarcastically). Within the on-record superstrategy, a speaker can direct his/her attack to the hearer's positive face (positive impoliteness) or to the hearer's negative face (negative impoliteness). Similarly, when a speaker performs a face attack off-record, he/she can also direct the face attack to either aspect of face.

Following Culpeper (1996) in using the term 'sarcasm'[5] for the off-record superstrategy, I will use the term 'positive sarcasm' to refer to an off-record attack oriented to the hearer's positive face and 'negative sarcasm' to refer to an off-record attack oriented to the hearer's negative face. These impoliteness superatrategies are illustrated in Figure 3.

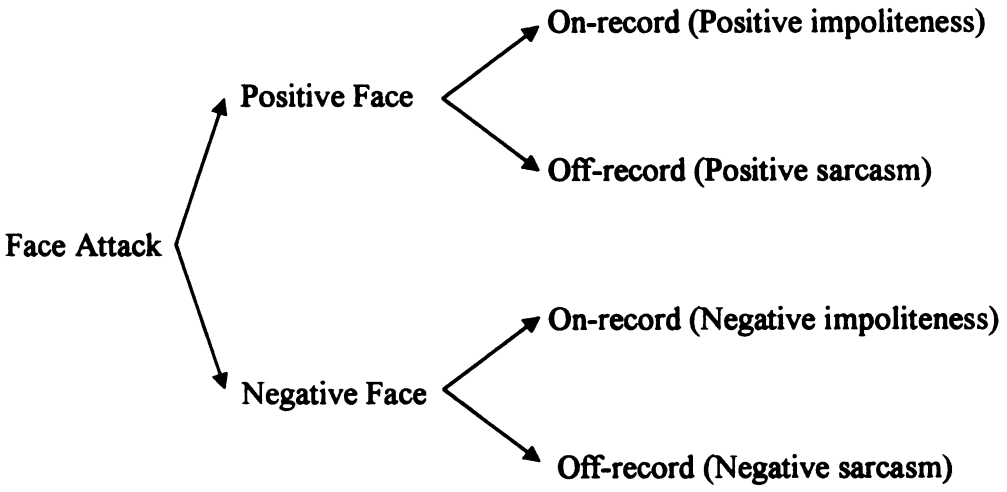
[5] Though sarcasm is not the only indirect way to attack a person's face (other indirect uses of language to attack the interlocutor include understatement, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, etc.), sarcastic irony is probably the most common way of making a criticism indirectly. Therefore, I will use the term 'sarcasm' to refer to the off-record strategy.

Figure 3 - Superstrategies for Performing a Face Attack



I would also want to suggest that, in a model of impoliteness (as opposed to what Brown and Levinson argue for their model of politeness), the first decision the speaker makes, once he/she decides to perform the face attack, is whether to attack the hearer's positive or negative face. Only after the speaker has made this choice, does he/she decide to do it on-record or off-record. This is so, because in order to be able to properly assess the weight of the face attack the speaker is about to perform, he/she is going to compare the weight of the same face attack when done both directly and indirectly. The context of situation in which the speaker finds himself/herself in will give him/her the most efficient way to convey the content of the face attack. If, on the other hand, the speaker were to decide first on how to do the face attack (directly or indirectly), and then choose between an attack to positive or negative face, he/she would never be able to comparatively assess the weight of the face attack against the other possible way of doing it. Figure 4 is a modification of Figure 3 above to illustrate this order.

Figure 4 - Superstrategies for Performing a Face Attack (Revised)



A second point that I would like to make is that no impoliteness model has suggested what the order of the impoliteness superstrategies should be with respect to their degree of offense. Lachenicht (1980), following Brown and Levinson, postulates the order of impoliteness superstrategies with respect to the degree of face threat to the speaker's face. However, since impoliteness refers to the use of strategies designed to cause offense and harm to the addressee, the question of the order of the different impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense is a relevant one. This point constitutes one of the main goals of this study, and will be addressed in more detail in chapter 4, which will discuss the results of an experiment designed to investigate this issue. The next section reviews what has already been said about the degree of offense of some particular superstrategies.

2.2 The Face-Saving and Muting Function of the Off-Record Strategy

Politeness theories have generally claimed that off-record strategies fulfill a face-saving function. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), by doing a FTA off-record

"the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act" (1987: 211). Thus, the speaker can avoid responsibility for the potentially face-damaging interpretation of his/her utterance. Among the linguistic realizations of off-record strategies Brown and Levinson mention in their work (rhetorical questions, irony, understatements, tautologies, hints, etc.), this study focuses on irony, specifically on sarcastic irony.

Irony, usually defined in the literature as "saying the opposite of what you mean", allows the speaker to indirectly convey his intended meaning (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 222). Moreover, Brown and Levinson claim that irony has an essential FTA content: it expresses a criticism; therefore, irony is conceived as "an off-record strategy that attends to face threat" (1987: 263).

Though Brown and Levinson are mainly referring here to saving the speaker's face ("a speaker could protest that he didn't mean an irony in a sarcastic way" (1987: 212)), they also imply that going off-record serves to save the hearer's face: "S [speaker] and H [hearer] could both go away from the interaction 'knowing' in their hearts that it [an irony] really was sarcastic, but because face is largely a matter of surface appearances, S may well get away with his FTA" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 212). The hearer, then, can also ignore the sarcastic intention of the ironic remark.

Leech (1983) agrees with Brown and Levinson on the face-saving function of irony. He formulates the Irony Principle (IP) which states that "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP [Politeness

Principle][6], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature" (1982: 82). Thus, he argues that irony combines the art of attack with an apparent innocence which is a form of self-defense, and because irony pays lip-service to the PP, it keeps away the potential for conflict (1983: 144).

This face-saving function of ironic criticism has been widely supported by other researchers. Barbe (1995) argues that "ironic criticism provides a means to save face for both the speaker and addressee, neither of whom has to acknowledge the possible criticism when challenged" (1995: 10). Jorgensen (1996) claims that sarcastic irony may be thought of as softening the threat to the hearer's face (1996: 616).

Dews and Winner (1995) extended the idea of irony as a face-saving strategy into a more general hypothesis: *The Tinge Hypothesis*[7]. This hypothesis explains that "the evaluative tone of the literal meaning of ironic utterances automatically colors (or tinges) the hearer's perception of the intended meaning" (1995: 4). In the case of ironic insults (i.e., saying something positive to mean something negative) the positive literal meaning tinges the negative intended meaning, resulting in a less critical evaluation (1995: 4). Therefore, irony is conceived as a less nasty form of criticism and less insulting than a directly negative statement.

Dews and Winner (1995) and Dews et al. (1995), conducted two experiments to test their prediction that insulting a person ironically mutes the level of the criticism

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[6] The Politeness Principle (PP) states: "Minimize (other thing being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs", "maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs" (Leech, 1983: 81). Leech argues that there are situations where the Politeness Principle overrules the CP (Cooperative principle) to the extent that the maxim of quality, i.e., "try to make your contribution one that is true" (Grice, 1975: 46) is sacrificed. These include situations where telling the truth will be more hurtful to the addressee that telling him/her a white lie.

[7] Dews and Winner (1995) claim that "The tinge hypothesis" is able to accommodate not only ironic criticism but also the opposite, i.e., ironic compliment, the "surface-criticism-plus-underlying-compliment" form of verbal irony. For the purposes of this study, I am only going to review Dews and Winner's arguments for ironic criticism.

conveyed, and is, therefore, perceived as less insulting than a direct literal insult.

Participants read short stories that ended with either a literal or an ironic insult and were asked to rate how critical the comment and the speaker were. The results showed that participants rated ironic insults as less critical than literal insults and ironic speakers as less critical than literal speakers. These findings provided supportive evidence for the tinge hypothesis.

Several other experiments have been conducted in order to test the face-saving function of ironic criticism and the tinge hypothesis. However, the results of these experiments have shown inconsistent findings regarding the interpretation of ironic insults. While Slugoski and Turnbull (1988) and Jorgensen (1995) reported that sarcastic irony serves a face-saving function making the speaker appear less rude and unfair, Colston (1997), Toplak and Katz (2000), Okamoto (2002) and Huang (2004) found that sarcasm is taken as a more severe form of criticism than criticism directly expressed. In other words, sarcasm intensifies the criticism rather than reduces it. These inconsistent results on the function of ironic criticism will be addressed in more detail in the following chapters.

Notice that the terminology used to refer to this type of criticism (i.e., saying something positive to mean something negative) is not very consist either. While some researchers speak of 'ironic criticism' or 'ironic insults', others have preferred to use the terms 'sarcastic irony' or 'sarcasm'. I will later propose that 'ironic criticism' and 'sarcasm' do not refer to the same type of verbal behavior, and should therefore be differentiated.

In the next chapter I present the results of the experiment designed to address the questions of the degree of offense of the impoliteness superstrategies and the function of ironic criticism.

CHAPTER 3

THE STUDY

Chapter 2 discussed some gaps and problems that appeared in the literature of impoliteness. Firstly, models of impoliteness have not accounted for all the impoliteness superstrategies available to the speaker since they have failed to distinguish off-record face attacks that are oriented to the hearer's positive face from those oriented to the hearer's negative face. Thus, I argued that this distinction should be incorporated into any model of impoliteness.

Moreover, impoliteness models have been limited to describe the different superstrategies for performing a face attack but no model has attempted to propose the order of the superstrategies with respect to degree of offense. I have argued that since the main purpose of impoliteness is to attack the addressee and cause insult, the question of the order of the superstrategies with respect to degree of offense becomes a relevant one.

In relation to this last point, I have also mentioned that there have been inconsistent findings as to the general offensiveness of off-record and on-record superstrategies. Specifically, some studies have reported that making a criticism indirectly (off-record) is less offensive than doing it directly (on-record) while others have concluded the opposite.

In order to address the questions of the relative order of the impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense and the more general question of the offensiveness of off-record and on-record strategies, I conducted an experiment in which I asked American English speakers and Argentine Spanish speakers about their

perceptions of the degree of offense of both negative and positive face attacks done either directly or indirectly (sarcastically). Since I was also interested in finding out if there is any relation between the perception in the degree of offense of a face attack and the degree of intimacy between the participants in a conversation, social distance was introduced as an independent variable in the experiment.

Notice that power, the other social variable that could contribute to different perceptions in the degree of offense of the attacks, was kept constant throughout the experiment. Thus, all the stories used in the experiment described situations involving equal power relationships between the participants.

3.1 The Experiment

The experiment consisted of a web questionnaire and it was carried out in two steps. The first part of the experiment involved a description task and the second part comprised a rating task.

3.1.1 Part 1: Description Task

The main goal of this task was to elicit the relevant descriptors that were going to be used in the rating scales in the second part of the experiment. The inclusion of this task was considered to be important since, by using in the rating scales the descriptors people used in their descriptions of the comments, instead of me providing them, I made sure that the participants were rating the comments according to terms they had intuitions about and which they thought were properly related to the comments. It is possible that the inconsistent results found in the literature about the degree of offense of the on-record

vs. the off-record superstrategies were due to participants having to make their judgments according to terms which they thought did not relate to the situations at hand or which they did not have any intuitions about. This task is also especially important in a cross-linguistic study such as this one where the mere translation of the terms from one language into the other would not be very appropriate, as discussed later on.

Method

Participants. Fifty-five Argentine speakers and seventy-five Michigan State undergraduate students served as subjects for this part of the experiment. The participants did not receive any compensation for participating in the study.

Materials. Four different stories depicting a situation between two people were constructed. The participants in the situations were presented as being on either intimate or distant terms with one another and, in all the situations described, the hearer became the target of a final face attack comment by the speaker. This final comment was directed towards either the hearer's positive or negative face so that two of the four situations ended in a positive face attack comment (one involving participants in a close social relation and the other in a distant social relation) and the other two situations ended in a negative face attack comment. These final face attack comments were done either directly (on-record) or sarcastically (off-record). One of these two types of utterances was used at the end of each story. This resulted in the following eight situations:

Table 1 – Eight Situations Used in the Questionnaire

	Positive face attack		Negative face attack	
	Close relationship	Distant relationship	Close relationship	Distant relationship
Direct comment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sarcastic comment	✓	✓	✓	✓

Two versions of a questionnaire were constructed. The two versions consisted of the same four situations changing only in the way the final comment was made. Thus, the stories that ended in a direct attack remark in one version of the questionnaire (e.g., 'I can tell that you don't know anything about computers') ended in an indirect (sarcastic) remark in the other version (e.g., 'I can tell that you really know a lot about computers'). Each participant read only one version of the questionnaire. These two versions of the questionnaire were written in Spanish for the Argentine participants and in English for the American subjects. The questionnaires used in English and Spanish are given in Appendices A and B respectively.

Procedure. The participants were sent an e-mail with information about the study and were directed to a link to take the web questionnaire. The participants were asked to describe, in their own words, how they perceived the final comment made by the speaker in each of the four situations.

Results

Spanish

One hundred and two different descriptors were obtained from the Argentine respondents. The number of occurrences of the different descriptors ranged from 50 occurrences for *irónico* 'ironic' to descriptors with only one occurrence. Table 2 presents the different descriptors obtained together with the number of occurrences for each of them.

Table 2 - List of Descriptors for Spanish

Irónico	50	Desagradecido	2	Desconsiderado	1
Enojo	14	Despectivo	2	Desilusionado	1
Reproche	11	Frustración	2	Desprecio	1
Agresivo	9	Hiriente	2	Didáctico	1
Sincero	8	Indignación	2	Disgusto	1
Amistoso	7	Injusto	2	Educado	1
Molesto	7	Mordaz	2	Egoísta	1
Directo	6	Negativo	2	Envidia	1
Bromista	5	No amable	2	Espontáneo	1
Burlista	5	Ofensivo	2	Excesivo	1
Descortés	5	Poco amable	2	Falta de tacto	1
Falso	5	Reprimenda	2	Farsante	1
Mentiroso	5	Ácido	1	Franco	1
No amistoso	5	Adecuado	1	Halagador	1
Oportuno	5	Alabanza	1	Harto	1
Poco amistoso	5	Alentador	1	Hipercrítico	1
Reclamo	5	Amable	1	Inapropiado	1
Cínico	4	Ambiguo	1	increpante	1
Crítico	4	Analítico	1	Mala Persona	1
Duro	4	Ansioso	1	Malicioso	1
Fastidio	4	Antipático	1	Peleador	1
Indirecto	4	Antisocial	1	Peyorativo	1
Provocativo	4	Áspero	1	Poco cariñoso	1
correcto	3	Atacador	1	Poco diplomático	1
Desaprobatorio	3	Autoritario	1	Preciso	1
Frontal	3	Busca no herir	1	Reflexivo	1
Gracioso	3	Cabreado	1	Reprobatorio	1
Hipócrita	3	Cáustico	1	Revelador	1
Impaciente	3	Celos	1	Sin delicadeza	1
Mala Forma	3	Chocante	1	Sobrador	1
Sarcástico	3	Decepción	1	Sorprendido	1
soberbio	3	Desalentador	1	Torpe	1
Acertado	2	Descalificante	1	Valioso	1
Desacuerdo	2	Descomedido	1	Violento	1

English

In the English data, subjects' responses resulted in a descriptor list of 93 terms. In this case, the range of occurrence of the different descriptors varied from 94 instances for 'sarcastic' to terms with only one occurrence. The descriptors and their number of occurrences are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - List of Descriptors for English

Sarcastic	94	Disgusting	2	Inconsiderate	1
Rude	32	Disrespectful	2	Indignant	1
Angry	20	Excited	2	Insensitive	1
Friendly	16	Generalization	2	Insulting	1
Upset	15	Indirect	2	Intimidating	1
Annoyed	14	Judgmental	2	Justified	1
Joking	14	Lying	2	Kidding	1
Frustrated	10	Not in a good mood	2	Make her feel bad	1
Nice	9	Sincere	2	Make her feel better	1
Teasing	9	Ungrateful	2	Makes feel bad	1
Honest	8	Aggravating	1	Negative	1
Mean	8	Agitated	1	Non confrontational	1
Unfriendly	8	Appropriate	1	Not rude	1
Unhappy	8	Avoid conflict	1	Not threatening	1
Irritated	7	Bothered	1	Observant	1
Blunt	6	Cunning	1	Offending	1
Mad	6	Daring	1	Reprimanding	1
Polite	5	Destructive criticism	1	Sassy	1
Disappointed	4	Disappointing	1	Scolding	1
Mocking	4	Distrust	1	Serious	1
Not Nice	4	Enthusiastic	1	Snappish	1
Condescending	3	Exaggeration	1	Snobby	1
Dishonest	3	Fake	1	Snotty	1
Funny	3	Faked niceness	1	Softening	1
Impolite	3	Giving a hard time	1	Straightforward	1
Not Mean	3	Harsh	1	Stupid	1
Not to hurt feelings	3	Hostile	1	Sympathetic	1
Stern	3	Humorous	1	Tactful	1
Antagonistic	2	Hurtful	1	Trying to make feel better	1
Bitter	2	Impressed	1	Trying to make feel good	1
Critical	2	In a bad mood	1	Unappreciative	1

Analysis

In order to decide on the relevant descriptors that would be used in the rating task in the second part of the experiment, I selected the most frequently mentioned descriptors in each language (i.e., those with 3 or more occurrences) and arranged them into semantically-related groups. For example, in Spanish, *amistoso* 'friendly' and *no amistoso* 'unfriendly' constituted a group. Similarly, in English, 'angry', 'annoyed',

'mad' and 'irritated' were grouped together. All those descriptors that did not belong in any group and that had less than five occurrences were discarded.

As can be seen from the examples given above, some of the descriptors obtained were describing the attitude of the speaker (as in the English group), while others described the comment made by the speaker (as in the Spanish example). For those groups of descriptors that referred to the attitude of the speaker rather than to the comment itself and that were later selected to be included in the rating task, their labels were changed so that they would refer to the comment and not to the attitude of the speaker.

Eleven groups of semantically-related descriptors were formed for both Spanish and English. These are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4 - Groups of Semantically-Related Descriptors

Group	Spanish	Group	English
1	Enojo, molesto, fastidio	1	Angry, annoyed, mad, irritated, upset, frustrated, disappointed, unhappy
2	Agresivo, duro	2	Rude, not to hurt feelings
3	Irónico, cínico, sarcástico	3	Sarcastic
4	Sincero, falso, mentiroso, hipócrita	4	Honest, dishonest
5	Amistoso, no amistoso	5	Friendly, unfriendly
6	Bromista, gracioso	6	Joking, funny
7	Descortés	7	Polite, impolite
8	Burlista	8	Teasing, mocking
9	Reproche, reclamo, crítico	9	Nice, not nice
10	Directo, indirecto	10	Mean, not mean
11	Oportuno	11	Blunt

After the groups of semantically-related descriptors were formed in Spanish and English, I compared the groups obtained in both languages to see if any of these groups appeared in the two languages. There were eight groups that were used in both Spanish and English. These are the first eight groups in Table 4. For these groups, I counted the total

number of occurrences of their descriptors in both languages. The number of occurrences of their descriptors was taken to be considerable enough for the groups to be included in the rating task.

Table 5 - Number of Occurrences for the Eight Semantically-Related Groups

1	109
2	48
3	151
4	32
5	41
6	25
7	13
8	18

Then, I examined the number of occurrences of the descriptor groups that showed up in only one of the languages. For Spanish group 9, in Table 4 above, the total number of occurrences was nineteen. Since this number was higher than those of two groups found in both languages (groups 7 and 8), and since its inclusion was considered to be relevant because it referred to the degree of criticism of the comment, this group was also selected to be used in the rating scales. On the contrary, groups 10 and 11, with only ten and five occurrences respectively, were not included.

In the case of English, descriptor groups 9 and 10 were also selected to be used as rating scales. The former had thirteen occurrences (the same as group 7 in Table 4 above) and group 10 had eleven occurrences. Moreover, since both of these groups included pairs of opposite terms, it was considered to be interesting to have them used as rating scales. Finally, group 11 was discarded since it had only six occurrences in the data.

In order to decide on the labels that would be used in the scales for the language that did not show those descriptor groups, I looked at the complete descriptor lists in each language to see if any of the relevant descriptors had occurred in the data in the first place. The term 'critical' had been used by the English respondents and could, thus, be used for Spanish 'crítico'. Similarly, the terms *no amable* 'not nice' and *malicioso* 'mean' had been given by the Spanish participants and were, therefore, used in the scales.

Though the meaning of some of the terms obtained were not identical in the two languages (e.g., 'malicioso' in Spanish has a stronger negative connotation than 'mean' has in English), they were considered to be semantically close enough to be used in the rating scales. Moreover, as I have said before, the main point of this task was to use the descriptors given by the participants themselves in order to ensure the reliability of their judgments. Notice that if I had chosen to use the descriptors in one language and had them translated into the other language, I would have either ended up using the term *sarcástico* 'sarcastic' in Spanish or 'ironic' in English and that is not what participants used. It seems that Argentine Spanish speakers prefer the more general term 'irony' to refer to what American English speakers perceive as sarcasm.

The final list of rating scales consisted of eleven descriptor pairs. Some pairs of opposites had been provided by the subjects (e.g., friendly-unfriendly, honest-dishonest) but for those scales where only one of the descriptors was found in the data, the opposite was supplied. As mentioned before, some of the terms used in the scales were derived from semantically-related descriptors to refer to the comment rather than to the speaker (e.g., 'annoying' was derived from 'annoyed') and others were slightly modified to avoid

any ambiguity in meaning (e.g., 'criticizing' was used instead of 'critical'). The rating scales used in the questionnaires are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6 - Scales Used in the Rating Task

	Spanish	English
1	Fastidioso-No fastidioso	Annoying- Not annoying
2	Sincero- Falso	Honest-Dishonest
3	Agresivo-No agresivo	Rude – Not rude
4	Amistoso-No amistoso	Friendly – Unfriendly
5	Irónico- No irónico	Sarcastic – Not sarcastic
6	Gracioso- Serio	Joking - Serious
7	Crítico- No crítico	Criticizing – Not criticizing
8	Cortés – Descortés	Polite –Impolite
9	Burlón – No burlón	Mocking- Not mocking
10	Amable – No amable	Nice – Not nice
11	Malicioso- No malicioso	Mean – Not mean

After the relevant scales were selected, I carried out the second part of the experiment: the rating task.

3.1.2 Part 2: Rating Task

The goal of this part of the experiment was to compare the on-record and the off-record strategies with respect to the scales selected and also to try to derive a ranking of the impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense.

Method

Participants. Fifty-six Argentine respondents and sixty American undergraduate students from Michigan State University participated in this study. The participants did not receive any compensation for participating in the study.

Materials and Procedure. The same four stories used in the first part of the experiment in their two different versions were also used in this part of the experiment.

Each participant read only one version of each of the four stories. Following each story the participants were presented with the eleven rating scales obtained from the description task. The participants were instructed to evaluate the final comment in the 5-point rating scales below each situation which ranged from 1(very rude) to 5 (not at all rude) or from 1(very honest) to 5 (very dishonest). The English and Spanish versions of the questionnaires are given in Appendices C and D.

Results and Discussion

Factor analysis

Following the procedure generally used in classic language attitude works, I determined whether or not the paired items used for evaluating the final comments in the stories could be reduced by means of a factor analysis. Before the factor analysis was carried out, I reversed the value of some of the rating scales used in the rating task so that (1) always referred to the negative end of the scale and (5) referred to the positive end of the scale. The results of the factor analysis for both languages are shown in Tables 7 and 8 respectively.

Table 7 - Factor Analysis for English

Scales	Factor	
	1	2
Annoying – Not annoying	.511	.130
Dishonest – Honest	-.117	.484
Rude – Not rude	.822	.113
Unfriendly – Friendly	.831	-.144
Sarcastic – Not sarcastic	-.022	.826
Joking – Serious	-.167	.859
Criticizing – Not criticizing	.602	-.201
Impolite – Polite	.829	-.020
Mocking – Not mocking	.289	.604
Not nice – Nice	.877	-.072
Mean – Not mean	.766	-.074

Table 8 - Factor Analysis for Spanish

Scales	Factor	
	1	2
Fastidioso – No fastidioso	.629	-.051
Falso – Sincero	.045	.590
Agresivo – No agresivo	.786	-.028
No amistoso – Amistoso	.633	-.104
Irónico – No irónico	.037	.645
Gracioso – Serio	-.140	.702
Crítico – No crítico	.213	-.358
Descortés – Cortes	.723	.075
Burlón – No burlón	.195	.723
No amable – Amable	.783	-.025
Malicioso – No malicioso	.560	.389

Two robust factor groups emerged in each language. With the exception of scale 7 (criticizing-not criticizing) which belonged to factor group 1 in English and to factor 2 in Spanish, the rest of the descriptor pairs were grouped into two matching factor groups in English and Spanish. This result seems to suggest that the descriptor items used in the two languages were more or less equivalent in meaning, and that, therefore, a cross-cultural comparison would be appropriate.

The first factor group in the two languages includes those categories that relate to the offensiveness of the remark and will, thus, be referred to as the 'offense factor'. Factor 2, on the other hand, loads factors that relate to the manner in which the comment was made and will be called the 'manner factor'.

As to the difference in grouping for scale 7, this was not very significant if one takes into account that this item was positively loaded in factor group 1 in English and negatively loaded in factor 2 in Spanish. It appears that 'criticizing' has a more negative connotation in English than the term 'crítico' has in Spanish.

An interesting thing to notice here is that the item 'mocking' showed up in factor group 2, the manner factor, and not in factor 1, the offense factor. This point can have

important implications for understanding some of the inconsistent results given in the literature as to the offensiveness of off-record strategies. In some studies (e.g., Pexman and Olineck, 2002), researchers have taken 'mocking' to mean the same as 'rude' or 'offensive'. The factor analysis seems to disconfirm this conclusion.

After the two factor groups were extracted, I tried to reduce the number of scales to facilitate the discussion of the rating results. For this purpose, I performed ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey tests to see if any of the eleven scales were not significantly different from one another and could, thus, be grouped together. The results of these tests for the two languages are presented in the Tables 9 and 10 below.

Table 9 - Tukey Grouping for the English Scales

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Scale
A			3.6119	Dishonest - Honest
	B		3.2276	Joking - Serious
C	B		2.9067	Annoying - Not annoying
C			2.8619	Mocking - Not mocking
C			2.8246	Rude - Not rude
C	D		2.7799	Mean - Not mean
C	D	E	2.6306	Sarcastic - Not sarcastic
	D	E	2.4664	Not nice - Nice
	D	E	2.4478	Impolite - Polite
		E	2.4179	Unfriendly - Friendly
	F		2.0261	Criticizing - Not criticizing

Note: Means with the same letter are not significantly different.

Table 10 - Tukey Grouping for the Spanish Scales

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Scale
A			4.0242	Gracioso - Serio
A			3.8347	Falso - Sincero
	B		3.3992	Malicioso - No malicioso
C	B		3.3024	Burlón - No burlón
C	B	D	3.0202	Irónico - No irónico
C		D	2.9234	Agresivo - No agresivo
	E	D	2.6935	Fastidioso - No fastidioso
F	E		2.4556	Descortés - Cortés
F	E	G	2.3790	No amistoso - Amistoso
F		G	2.2379	No amable - Amable
		G	1.9758	Crítico - No crítico

Note: Means with the same letter are not significantly different.

In order to decide on how to reduce the scales to form new variables, I followed two criteria: first, the scales had to be insignificantly different from one another as indicated by the Tukey post-hoc tests, and second, the non-significantly different scales had to belong to the same factor group. The reduction resulted in six new variables in both English and Spanish. These are listed below.

English

i. Variable 1: *Dishonesty*, formed by scale 2[8]

ii. Variable 2: *Jocularity*, formed by scale 6

iii. Variable 3: *Rudeness*, formed by scales 1, 3 and 11

iv. Variable 4: *Mockery*, formed by scales 5 and 9

v. Variable 5: *Impoliteness*, formed by scales 4, 8 and 10

vi. Variable 6: *Criticism*, formed by scale 7

[8] These scales are the ones used in the rating task in English and are shown in Table 6 above.

Spanish

i. Variable 1: *Falsedad* 'dishonesty', formed by scales 2 and 6[9]

ii. Variable 2: *Maldad* 'maliciousness', formed by scale 11

iii. Variable 3: *Burla* 'mockery', formed by scales 5 and 9

iv. Variable 4: *Agresividad* 'rudeness', formed by scales 1 and 3

v. Variable 5: *Descortesía* 'impoliteness', formed by scales 4, 8 and 10

vi. Variable 6: *Crítica* 'criticism', formed by scale 7

Notice first that, in Spanish, scales 2 and 6 were grouped together whereas in English they were kept separate. Thus, it seems that Spanish speakers think that something that is *serio* 'serious' is also *sincero* 'honest' and that something that is *falso* 'dishonest' is also *gracioso* 'joking'. This is not very surprising if we consider the context in which these descriptors were used. An ironic comment is obviously untrue in the sense that what is said is the opposite of what is meant, and it is precisely because of this divergence between what is said and reality that an ironic remark is very likely to be considered as joking, as something that is not really meant. Thus, the scale *gracioso-serio* 'joking-serious' seems to be taken here in the sense of speaking or not speaking literally. On the other hand, the fact that scales 2 and 6 remained different form each other in English could mean that English speakers interpreted 'joking' more in the sense of 'teasing', of 'making fun' than as speaking non-literally.

A second difference between the two languages as regards the new variables involves scale 11, i.e., mean-not mean. Whereas this scale was included in English variable 3 with the scales rude-not rude and annoying-not annoying, it was significantly

[9] These scales are the ones used in the rating task in Spanish and are shown in table 6.

different from those same scales in Spanish. This difference might be explained if we consider that the term we used in Spanish, i.e., 'malicioso' has a much stronger negative connotation than 'mean' has in English.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the 'impolite-not impolite' scale and the 'rude-not rude' scale remained significantly different from each other in both languages, a result that suggests that conclusions about the impoliteness of utterances should not be taken as directly implying anything about their rudeness.

Multifactorial Analysis

After the new variables were obtained, I determined if there was a significant difference in the perception of the direct and the indirect face attacks for all these variables and in all the situations described in the questionnaire. Since I also wanted to know if there was a significant interaction between the face attacked (positive or negative) and the familiarity relation between the interlocutors (close or distant) in the perception of the direct and the sarcastic comments, I performed a series of ANOVAs for both the English and the Spanish data.

English

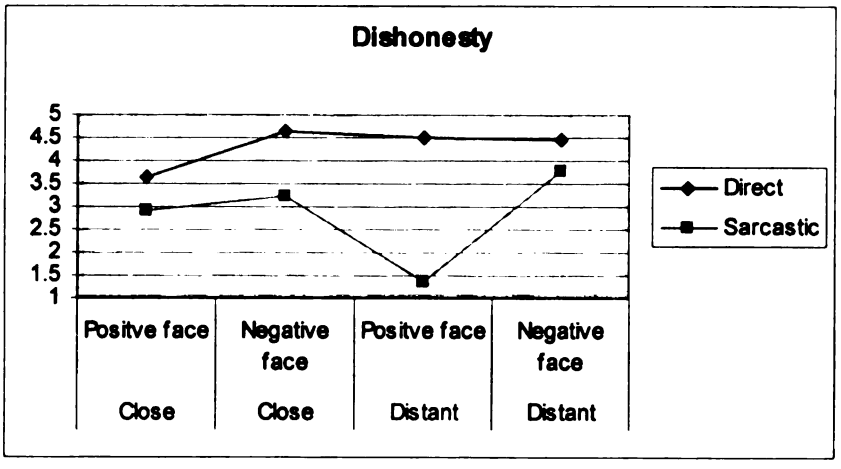
Variable 1: *Dishonesty*

There was a significant three-way interaction of form, face and familiarity in the perception of the dishonesty of the comment types, $F\ (1, 65) = 27.51$, $p<.0001$. A sarcastic face attack was rated as significantly more dishonest than a direct attack in all four situations. This result follows directly from the nature of sarcasm since a sarcastic

comment, by definition, involves saying something that is contrary to fact, something that is not true.

As shown in Figure 5 below, this difference in the perception of dishonesty of a direct and a sarcastic comment was more dramatic when the attack was oriented to the positive face of a person the speaker does not know very well. This could be explained by the lack of shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. In a distant relation, the hearer may fail to perceive the sarcastic intent of the comment and will, consequently, take the speaker's comment literally. However, the rater[10] knows that the literal meaning of the utterance is not what the speaker really means. Thus, the comment is rated as very dishonest. Since the attack is oriented to the positive face, i.e., it involves saying something positive about a person but that is not really meant, the perception of dishonesty of the comment is even greater.

Figure 5 - Variable 1: *Dishonesty*

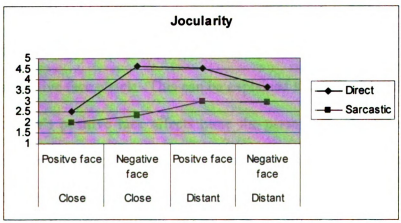


[10] It is not clear what causes the rater to evaluate the comments from one point of view or another. Sometimes the rater seems to align himself more with the hearer, sometimes more with the speaker and other times he/she just rates the comments from the point of view of an overhearer.

Variable 2: *Jocularity*

Analysis of the jocularity ratings also revealed a significant three-way interaction of form, face and familiarity, $F(1, 65) = 18.95$, $p<.0001$. A sarcastic comment was always perceived as more joking than a direct comment. Again, this result is not surprising. Because a sarcastic comment expresses the opposite of what is meant, the situational disparity between what is said and reality contributes to the perception of the sarcastic comment as more joking than its direct, literal counterpart. The interaction is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 - Variable 2: *Jocularity*



Here, however, the difference between the direct and the sarcastic face attack was strongest for a negative face attack in a close situation and for a positive face attack in a distant relation. This difference came as a result of the highly serious ratings of a direct attack in these situations.

Since an attack to negative face is intended to interfere with the hearer's freedom of action, only if it comes from a person close to the hearer is the hearer going to take it seriously. The other situation, i.e., a positive face attack in a distant relation, is also

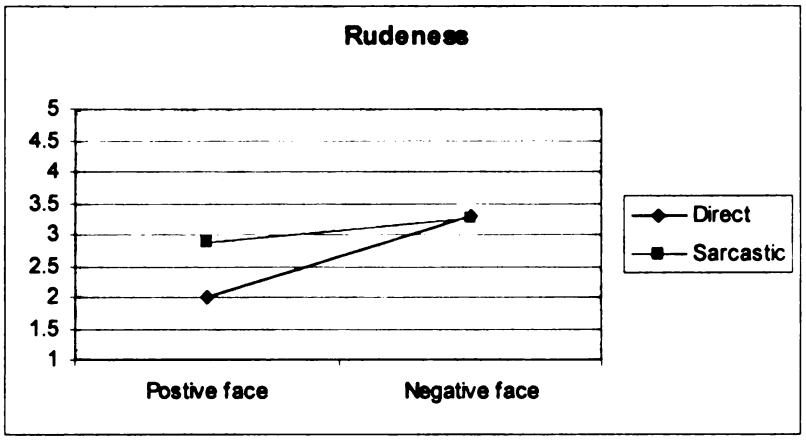
perceived as very serious because the hearer is informed that he is not liked or approved of by a person he does not know very well.

Variable 3: *Rudeness*

The perception of rudeness of the face attacks did not result in a significant three-way interaction, but it did reveal significant interactions for form by face, $F(1, 195) = 24.05$, $p<.0001$ and form by familiarity, $F(1, 195) = 14.36$, $p<.0001$.

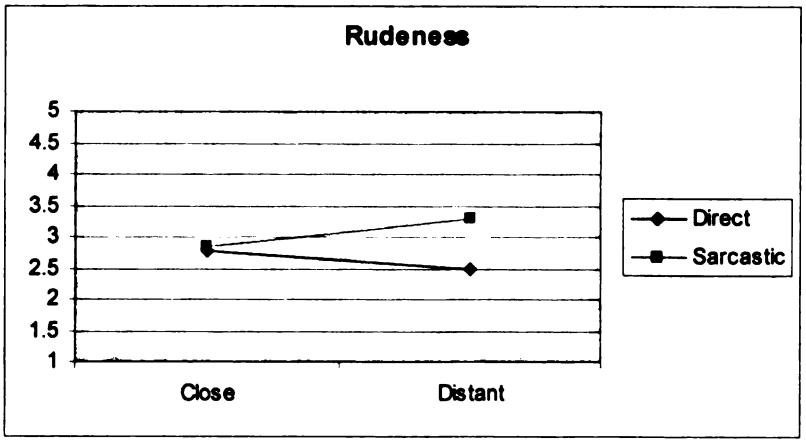
As shown in Figure 7, an attack to the hearer's positive face was perceived as more offensive when it was done directly than when it was done sarcastically. However, there was no significant difference between the two types of comment when the attack was oriented to the hearer's negative face. This result suggests that we can only speak of a difference in the degree of rudeness between the two types of criticism when dealing with a positive face attack. This can be explained if we consider that a comment that attacks a person's positive face affects more the person's feelings since it involves an attack to his/her desire to be liked and approved of by others. Hence, the form in which the criticism is made (directly or sarcastically) has an important impact on the perceived rudeness of the attack.

Figure 7 - Variable 3: *Rudeness (Form by Face)*



The second interaction that resulted for rudeness is between form and familiarity. As shown in Figure 8, a direct face attack was perceived as ruder than a sarcastic comment only in a distant social relation. This is probably because people do not expect to be attacked by someone they do not know very well. On the other hand, there was no significant difference in the rudeness of a direct and a sarcastic face attack in a close relation. Thus, contrary to what other studies have concluded (Dews et al., 1995), this result suggests that the perception of rudeness of a direct and a sarcastic face attack comment depends on the social relation between the interlocutors.

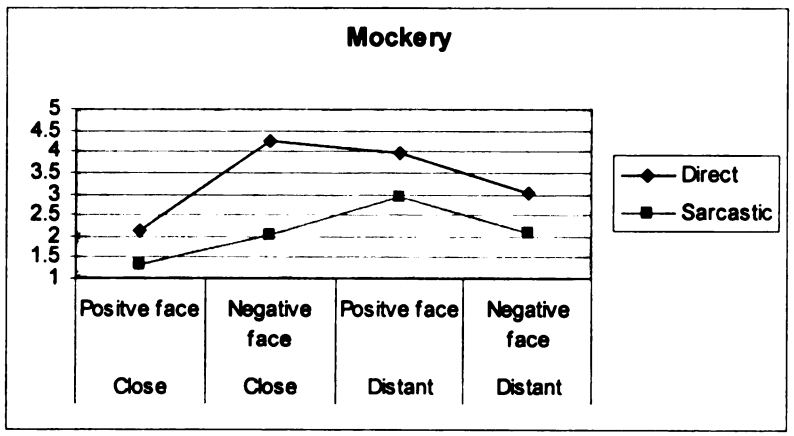
Figure 8 - Variable 3: *Rudeness (Form by Familiarity)*



Variable 4: *Mockery*

As shown in Figure 9, mockery ratings yielded a significant three-way interaction of form, face and familiarity, $F(1, 65) = 9.49$, $p<0.0030$. A sarcastic comment was rated as more mocking than a direct, literal comment in all four situations. This is the result we expected to obtain here since 'to mock' is one of the functions of sarcasm that has been mostly reported in the literature. Similarly to the results obtained for jocularity, the interaction for mockery seems to be a result of the perception of a negative face attack in a close situation and a positive face attack in a distance relation as not being very mocking. This makes sense since 'mocking' and 'teasing' are very close in meaning. They both involve making fun of somebody by embarrassing him/her. Thus, the same conclusions drawn for the jocularity ratings can be also reached here.

Figure 9 - Variable 4: *Mockery*



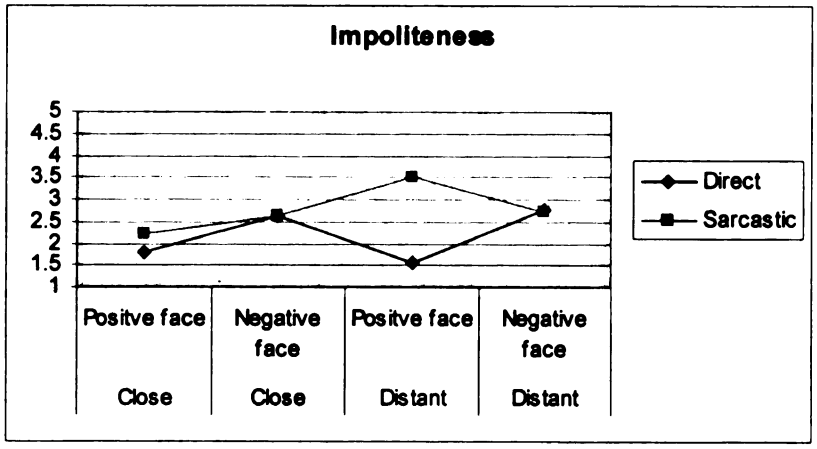
Variable 5: *Impoliteness*

As shown in Figure 10, there was also a significant three-way interaction in the perception of impoliteness, $F(1, 65) = 12.52$, $p<0.0008$. Thus, the impoliteness of the

comment types depends on to whom and to which face the attack is directed. The difference between making the attack directly and sarcastically was only significant when the attack was oriented to the hearer's positive face. No such difference was found for a negative face attack. Thus, it seems that the form in which a person makes a negative face attack does not generate different perceptions in the impoliteness of the comment. This makes sense since to say something to impede someone's freedom of action is always impolite, no matter how you say it.

For a positive face attack, however, a direct comment was rated as more impolite than a sarcastic one, but this difference was strongest in a distant relationship. Thus, the lack of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer is clearly contributing to this big difference in the perception of the impoliteness of the two types of criticism. The direct attack is perceived as very impolite, whereas the sarcastic attack is not really perceived as impolite. It appears that the lack of shared knowledge in an unfamiliar relation makes a sarcastic comment seem less impolite, probably because the hearer does not really know if the speaker is being truthful or not.

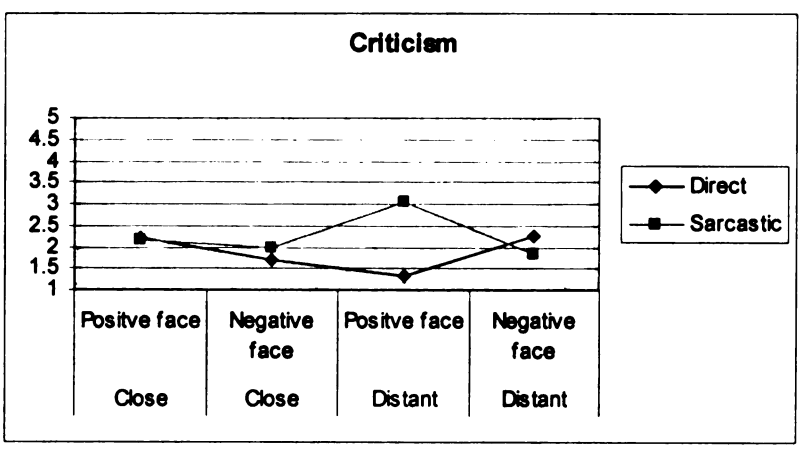
Figure 10 - Variable 5: *Impoliteness*



Variable 6: Criticism

Finally, criticism ratings also yielded a significant three-way interaction of form, face and familiarity, F (1, 65) =19.85; p<.0001. As shown in Figure 11, a direct comment was rated as more criticizing than a sarcastic comment but only for a positive face attack in a distant relation. The difference for comment type was not significant in all the other situations. Similarly to the impoliteness ratings, the interaction of positive face and distant relation is causing the greatest difference between a direct and a sarcastic face attack. Thus, we can also conclude here that due to the unfamiliar relation between the participants, the true degree of criticism conveyed by a sarcastic comment is not really perceived.

Figure 11 - Variable 6: Criticism



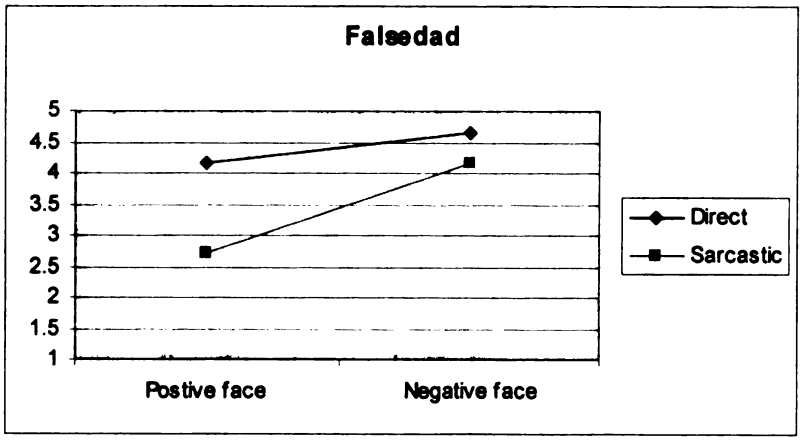
To sum up, the perception of a direct and a sarcastic face attack is always dependent on the face being attacked, the familiarity of the person being attacked or, as in most cases, the interaction of both face and familiarity.

Spanish

Variable 1: *Falsedad 'Dishonesty'*

Analysis of the *falsedad* 'dishonesty' ratings revealed a significant two-way interaction between form and face, $F(1, 180) = 24.77$, $p<.0001$, as shown in Figure 12. As expected, a sarcastic comment was perceived as more dishonest than a direct comment in both positive and negative face attacks. However, this difference was more dramatic in the case of an attack oriented to the hearer's positive face. While a direct comment was perceived as somewhat honest in both cases, a sarcastic comment was perceived as much more dishonest in a positive face attack than when the attack was oriented to the hearer's negative face. Here, I would like to suggest the same that I have suggested for the English dishonesty ratings above. A sarcastic positive face attack is perceived as more dishonest than a sarcastic negative face attack because the former involves playing with the hearer's feelings and emotions.

Figure 12 - Variable 1: *Falsedad 'Dishonesty'*



Variable 2: *Maldad 'Maliciousness'*

There were significant main effects for face, F (1, 180) = 62.68, p< .0001 and familiarity F (1, 180) = 11.41, p< .0009 in the perception of the maliciousness of a face attack. The main effect of face occurred because a positive face attack (M = 2.8067) was rated as more malicious than a negative face attack (M = 4.0158). The main effect of familiarity occurred because an attack in a distant relation (M = 3.1534) was rated as more malicious than an attack in a close relation (M = 3.6691). Though no interactions were found, the results here still support the conclusions reached above about the role of positive face and distant relation in the perception of offense of a face attack.

There was, however, no main effect for form here. Thus, direct and sarcastic face attacks are not significantly different from each other with respect to malice. This could be due to the strong negative connotation that we have already noted in 3.1.1 for the word "malcioso" in Spanish. Probably, speakers considered that neither type of face attack could be described as being really malicious and, therefore, failed to make any distinction between the two. Because there was no effect for form, this variable will not be discussed in further detail in the general discussion in chapter 4.

Variable 3: *Burla 'Mockery'*

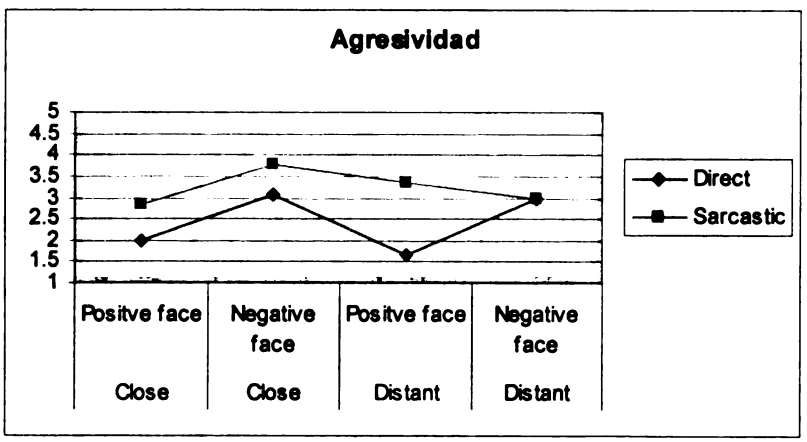
Main effects for form, F (1,180) = 85.26, p<.0001, and face, F (1,180) = 36.94, p<.0001, were revealed for *burla* 'mockery'. A sarcastic comment (M = 2.4832) was perceived as more mocking than a direct comment (M = 3. 8416) and a positive face attack (M = 2.7153) was perceived as more mocking than a negative face attack (M = 3.6095). There were, however, no interactions.

That a sarcastic comment was rated as more mocking than a direct, literal comment is not surprising since to be sarcastic means to mock and make fun of someone or something. That a positive face attack was perceived as more mocking than a negative face attack seems to suggest that any comment that attacks a person's capacities, abilities or personality is seen as very much ridiculing the hearer.

Variable 4: *Agresividad 'Rudeness'*

A significant three-way interaction resulted for Agresividad 'rudeness', F (1, 60) = 6.09, p>0.0165, as shown in Figure 13. A direct face attack was perceived as ruder than a sarcastic face attack in all situations except for a negative face attack in a distant situation. But, it was once again for a positive face attack in a distant situation that the difference between the rudeness of the direct and sarcastic comment was more dramatic. This suggests that, in Spanish too, the lack of familiarity between the participants and the more emotional nature of positive face are probably contributing to the perception of the direct comment as being ruder.

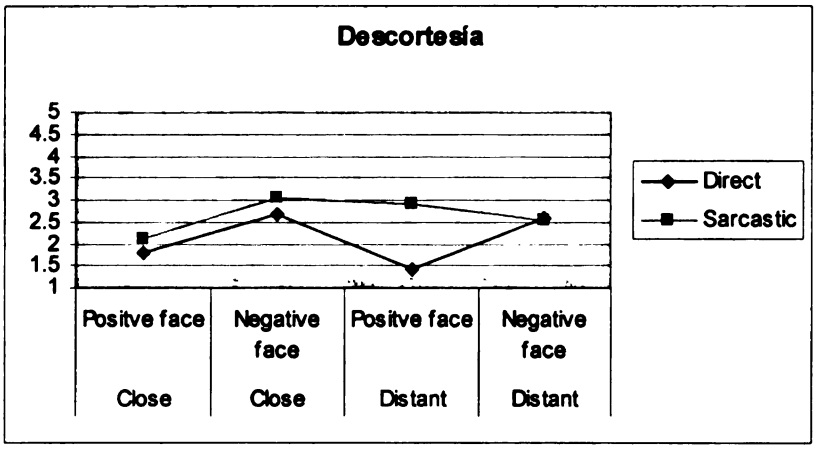
Figure 13 - Variable 4: *Agresividad 'Rudeness'*



Variable 5: *Descortesía 'Impoliteness'*

As shown in Figure 14, a significant three-way interaction was revealed for the perception of impoliteness F (1, 60) = 7.83, p<0.0069. A direct face attack was rated as more impolite than a sarcastic attack only for a positive face attack in a distant relation. In the rest of the situations there was no significant difference between the two types of comments. This result strongly supports the conclusions reached above about the great effect that a positive face attack in a distant relation has in the perception of the impoliteness and rudeness of the two types of criticism.

Figure 14 - Variable 5: *Descortesía 'Impoliteness'*

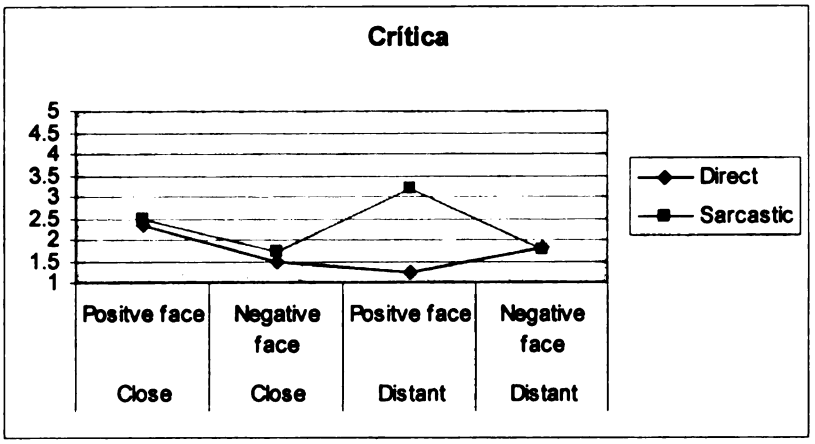


Variable 6: *Crítica 'Criticism'*

Finally, the degree of criticism of a direct and a sarcastic face attack also revealed as significant interaction between form, face and familiarity F(1, 60) = 7.86, p<0.0068, as shown in Figure 15. The only situation that showed a difference between the two types of criticism was a positive face attack in a distant relationship. Similarly to the English criticism ratings, this difference is a result of the less criticizing perception of a sarcastic

attack in this situation. Thus, the same conclusion reached about the lack of shared knowledge between the participants causing a sarcastic attack to be perceived as less criticizing seems to hold here too.

Figure 15 - Variable 6: *Crítica 'Criticism'*



In sum, though some of the Spanish variables did not result in significant interactions, this was not the case of the variables related to the offense of the face attack. Rudeness, impoliteness, and criticism did reveal significant interactions of form, face, and familiarity. Thus, the degree of offense of a face attack seems to depend on the interaction of these three factors. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail the interactions found for the English and Spanish variables and compare the results obtained in the two languages.

3.2 Ranking of Superstrategies

One of the main goals of this experiment was to obtain a ranking of the different impoliteness superstrategies with regards to degree of offense. This was done by ranking the LS (least square) means of the four different superstrategies using an LSD (least

significant difference) test. Only the variables that loaded in factor group 1, the offense factor, were considered.

It should be noticed that though the Spanish variable *crítica* 'criticism' did not load very heavily on factor group 1, the ranking of the different superstrategies was still calculated for this variable. As already shown in the factor analysis in Table 8 above, the scale 'critico-no critico' in Spanish did not load very heavily in either of the two factor groups. Its load was a little higher in factor group 2, the manner factor, but it was negatively loaded there. From this point of view, it was not very different from the positive loading of 'criticizing' in Factor 1 in English. Moreover, the 'criticism' results from the ANOVA in Spanish were also very similar to the ones obtained for the 'criticism' variable in English (and for that matter to the impoliteness ratings in both English and Spanish). Thus, for all the reasons outlined above, and in order to be able to compare the rankings across languages, 'criticism' is also looked at as an offense factor variable in Spanish.

The results from these analyses showed that all three offense variables presented different rankings in the two social distance relations. These results emphasize the important effect that social distance has in the perception of offense of a criticism. The rankings are presented below for both English and Spanish.

English

Table 11 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Rudeness'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			2.3880	Positive face - on record
	B		2.8648	Positive face - off record
		C	3.0422	Negative face - on record
		C	3.0499	Negative face - off record

Table 12 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Rudeness'

Tukey Grouping				Mean	Superstrategy
A				2.2395	Positive face - on record
	B			2.8937	Negative face - on record
		C		3.0787	Positive face - off record
			D	3.2639	Negative face - off record

Table 13 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Impoliteness'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.8046	Positive face - on record
	B		2.2018	Positive face - off record
		C	2.6207	Negative face - off record
		C	2.6228	Negative face - on record

Table 14 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Impoliteness'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.5351	Positive face - on record
	B		2.7105	Negative face - off record
	B		2.7471	Negative face - on record
		C	3.5287	Positive face - off record

Table 15 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Criticism'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.6842	Negative face - on record
A	B		2.0000	Negative face - off record
	B		2.1842	Positive face - off record
	B		2.2069	Positive face - on record

Table 16 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Criticism'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.3421	Positive face - on record
	B		1.8158	Negative face - off record
	B		2.2414	Negative face - on record
		C	3.0690	Positive face - off record

The order of the superstrategies in a close relation was very similar for the 'rudeness' and the 'impoliteness' variables. The ranking for the criticism variable, however, was a little different. While for 'rudeness' and 'impoliteness' attacks to positive face were ranked as more offensive than attacks to negative face, the ranking for 'criticism' resulted in the opposite order. Attacks to negative face were ranked as more criticizing than attacks to positive face.

This difference between the 'criticism' ranking and the 'rudeness' and 'impoliteness' rankings could probably be due to the fact that while 'rudeness' and 'impoliteness' seem to be more emotional concepts that relate to how the hearer perceives the comment, 'criticism' seems to be mainly related to content. Since the examples of attacks on negative face used in the questionnaire involved the speaker criticizing the hearer about not doing something they were supposed to do according to some rule of behavior (e.g., smoking where they were not allowed to do it, throwing trash in a national park), the degree of criticism conveyed by this type of face attack was perceived as greater than if the speaker were criticizing the hearer about something he/she does not like or approve of the hearer.

For a distant relation, on the other hand, the order of the superstrategies was identical for the 'criticism' and 'impoliteness' variables. However, the ranking for 'rudeness' was a little different. It is not clear what may be the cause for the different ranking obtained for 'rudeness' but, nevertheless, it was still a direct attack to positive face that was rated as the rudest of all attacks.

Spanish

Table 17 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Agresividad'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.9821	Positive face - on record
	B		2.8382	Positive face - off record
	B		3.0882	Negative face - on record
		C	3.7679	Negative face - off record

Table 18 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Agresividad'

Tukey Grouping		Mean	Superstrategy
A		1.6471	Positive face - on record
	B	2.9559	Negative face - off record
	B	2.9643	Negative face - on record
	B	3.3750	Positive face - off record

Table 19 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Descortesía'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.7857	Positive face - on record
A			2.0980	Positive face - off record
	B		2.6765	Negative face - on record
	B		3.0238	Negative face - off record

Table 20 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Descortesía'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.4216	Positive face - on record
	B		2.5294	Negative face - off record
	B		2.5595	Negative face - on record
	B		2.9167	Positive face - off record

Table 21 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Close Relationship for 'Crítica'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.5000	Negative face - on record
A			1.7143	Negative face - off record
	B		2.3214	Positive face - on record
	B		2.4706	Positive face - off record

Table 22 - Ranking of Superstrategies in a Distant Relationship for 'Crítica'

Tukey Grouping			Mean	Superstrategy
A			1.2353	Positive face - on record
A			1.7647	Negative face - off record
A			1.8214	Negative face - on record
	B		3.1786	Positive face - off record

The results for the Spanish 'offense' variables also showed a different ranking for *crítica* 'criticism' in a close relation than those for the other two variables. Thus, it appears that the same conclusion reached about 'criticism' in English applies for Spanish too.

In a distant relation, however, all three rankings showed the same order of the superstrategies. This result provides strong evidence that this is how the different impoliteness superstrategies should be ordered according to their degree of offense for a distant relation.

The comparison of the different rankings in both languages and the general conclusions about the ranking of the impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense is presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous studies on the function of sarcastic irony have reported inconsistent findings: while some have concluded that sarcastic irony serves to save face and to soften the degree of offense of its more direct, literal counterpart (Dews and Winner 1995, Dews et al. 1995, Jorgensen 1996), others have reported the opposite, i.e., that sarcasm is ruder and more offensive than a direct criticism (Colston 1997, Toplak and Katz 2000, Okamoto 2002, Huang 2004).

However, none of those studies has taken into account the face to which the attack was oriented (positive or negative), and only a few have looked at the familiarity relation between the participants in the conversation (close or distant).

The results reported in chapter 3 have shown that the perception of direct and sarcastic criticism strongly depends on the face that is being attacked, the social distance between the interlocutors, or the interaction between these two factors. The presence of significant interactions for all the variables which belong to the 'offense' group in both English and Spanish suggests that those studies in the literature of politeness/impoliteness that have concluded that a sarcastic criticism is more or less offensive, insulting, impolite, etc., than its direct, literal counterpart were not completely right. As shown in chapter 3, only in certain situations is a sarcastic criticism perceived as less rude, less impolite, and less critical than a literal criticism.

Before I discuss the results for the variables in factor group 1, the 'offense' factor, I will first summarize the findings for the variables in factor group 2, the 'manner' factor, in English and Spanish.

4.1 Factor Group 2: The Manner Factor

The three variables that loaded in factor group 2 in English, i.e., dishonesty, jocularity and mockery, yielded significant three-way interactions of form, face and familiarity. The survey results indicate that the perception of how dishonest, how joking, and how mocking a face attack comment is depends on the form in which the criticism is made (directly or sarcastically), the face to which the attack is oriented (positive or negative) and the social distance between the interlocutors (close or distant).

For all three variables, a sarcastic criticism was perceived as more dishonest, more joking and more mocking than its direct, literal counterpart. However, for dishonesty ratings, the most dramatic difference between a direct and a sarcastic criticism was found for a positive face attack in a distant relation, whereas for jocularity and mockery the biggest difference between the two types of criticism occurred when the attack was oriented to the hearer's negative face in a close relationship.

For dishonesty, the greatest difference between the direct and the sarcastic criticism came about as a result of the high perception of dishonesty that a sarcastic comment has when the speaker attacks the positive face of a person he/she does not know very well. As already mentioned in chapter 3, this result can be explained by the lack of shared knowledge between the participants and the important role of positive face.

When a speaker criticizes a friend or a person he/she knows very well sarcastically, the addressee may be able to recognize the ironic tone of the comment and, consequently, that the literal meaning of the utterance is not what the speaker really means. But, in a distant relation, the lack of shared knowledge between the participants may cause the hearer to fail to recognize the truly sarcastic intent of the comment. Thus, the speaker may be more inclined to interpret the speaker's comment literally. However, what causes the sarcastic comment to be perceived as very dishonest is the fact that the comment is being evaluated from the point of view of the rater. Since the rater knows that the literal meaning of the comment is not what the speaker really means, the comment is rated as being very dishonest.

The high perception of dishonesty of the sarcastic criticism in this situation was also a result of the attack being oriented to the hearer's positive face. Because positive face is related to a person's desire that his/her wants be liked and approved of by others, when a speaker informs the hearer that this is not the case, it is very likely that the comment will deeply hurt the hearer's feelings and sensibilities. Most people would like to know that they are liked and approved of by others. Thus, it is the emotional connotations associated with positive face that contribute to the perception of the sarcastic comment as very dishonest.

The ratings for jocularity and mockery were very similar. This suggests that participants interpreted 'joking' and 'mocking' to be very close in meaning. Both concepts seem to convey the basic idea of teasing and of making fun of someone. However, it should be noticed that, contrary to what previous studies have implied, the correlation of mockery and rudeness ratings was not so straightforward. The different

results obtained for these two variables suggest that mockery and rudeness are two different categories and that no direct conclusions can be reached about one in terms of the ratings obtained for the other. Thus, those studies that concluded that a sarcastic criticism was more offensive than a direct criticism because it was rated as more mocking (Pexman and Olineck 2002) were not right.

As already mentioned above, a sarcastic comment was rated as more mocking and more joking in all four situations. But, the interaction obtained for these variables came as a result of the high ratings of degree of 'seriousness' that a direct comment showed for a negative face attack in a close relation and for a positive face attack in a distant relation.

An attack on negative face is one that is intended to interfere with the hearer's freedom of action, to impinge upon the listener by telling him/her what to do or what not to do. Thus, when this is done in a direct, literal way, it is clear to the hearer what the speaker wants him/her to do and that he/she is being serious about what he/she says. This seems to be especially true if the topic of the attack involves a serious offense on the part of the hearer such as a violation of a social rule or norm of behavior (as in the example used in this study).

When this type of face attack is done by a person one knows very well, it is more likely to be taken seriously than if it were made by a person one barely knows. The reason for this seems to be that when a person one does not know well wants to impose something on him/her, one is not very likely to feel much threatened and to take the imposition so seriously (unless the speaker is more powerful than the hearer) since one may feel that a stranger has no right to impose anything on him/her. Consequently, the imposition can be ignored. On the other hand, if the hearer's relationship to the speaker

is a close one, the hearer is more likely to consider the speaker's comment more seriously and to do what the speaker says, providing he/she agrees with what he/she has been told to do.

The other rating as 'highly serious' was given to a direct attack to positive face in a distant relation. This result is not surprising since mocking and making fun of someone are much more common among friends than between strangers. Hence, the lack of familiarity between the participants increases the perception that the speaker is being serious about what he/she is saying.

The perception of the seriousness of a direct criticism in this situation was also a result of its being oriented to the hearer's positive face. As mentioned before, a positive face attack informs the hearer that he/she is not liked or approved of. Hence, when the speaker criticizes the hearer's abilities or capacities (as in the example used in the questionnaire where one of the new classmates criticizes the work the other has done), a direct attack is likely to be considered to be very serious and to cause offense. The hearer is likely to feel very much hurt by the attack, and the comment will be perceived as very offensive (as shown by the rudeness and impoliteness results later on).

When we consider the two variables that loaded in factor group 2 in Spanish, i.e., *falsedad* 'dishonesty' and *burla* 'mockery', though no significant three-way interactions were obtained, the results pointed in the same direction as the English ones. As expected, a sarcastic comment was always rated as more dishonest and more mocking than a direct comment. However, ratings for dishonesty resulted in a significant interaction of form and face and ratings of mockery revealed a significant main effect for form.

The difference between a direct and a sarcastic criticism in the perception of dishonesty was more dramatic when the attack was oriented to the hearer's positive face than when it attacked the hearer's negative face. Similarly to the English results, the biggest difference between the two types of criticism came about as a result of the perception of the sarcastic comment as being highly dishonest in a positive face attack. But, though in English this difference also depended on the social distance between the interlocutors (it occurred for a social distant relation), in Spanish the sarcastic comment was perceived as more dishonest independently of the familiarity of the participants in the conversation.

Nevertheless, the results for dishonesty in both languages suggest that a sarcastic criticism that attacks positive face (i.e., the desire to be liked and approved of by others) is perceived as more dishonest than a sarcastic criticism that attacks negative face (i.e., the desire to be free form imposition).

The results for the mocking ratings in Spanish resulted in a significant main effect for form. This occurred because a sarcastic comment was always perceived as more mocking than a direct criticism regardless of the face attacked or the familiarity relation between the participants. This result differs from the one obtained in English where the perception of the degree of mockery of the criticism was dependent on both the face attacked and the familiarity between the participants.

The general conclusion for this factor group in both languages is that sarcasm is more dishonest, more mocking, and more joking than direct criticism. This result follows directly from the nature of sarcasm. By definition, a sarcastic comment involves saying the opposite of what is really meant with the intention of ridiculing somebody. However,

the results here provide evidence that, particularly in English, the perception of dishonesty, mockery and jocularity of the two types of criticism is determined by other factors, namely face and familiarity.

4.2 Factor Group 1: The Offense Factor

The variables that loaded in factor group 1 in English also yielded significant interactions. Rudeness resulted in two-way interactions of form and face and form and familiarity while impoliteness and criticism yielded significant interactions of form, face and familiarity. Next, I will compare the results obtained for all three variables and draw some conclusions for this factor group.

Notice first that no difference was found between a direct and a sarcastic face attack comment in the perception of impoliteness and criticism when the attack was oriented to the hearer's negative face. This holds regardless of the social distance between the interlocutors. These results are also matched by the results found for rudeness. The latter also showed no difference between the two types of criticism for a negative face attack in either social distance relation.

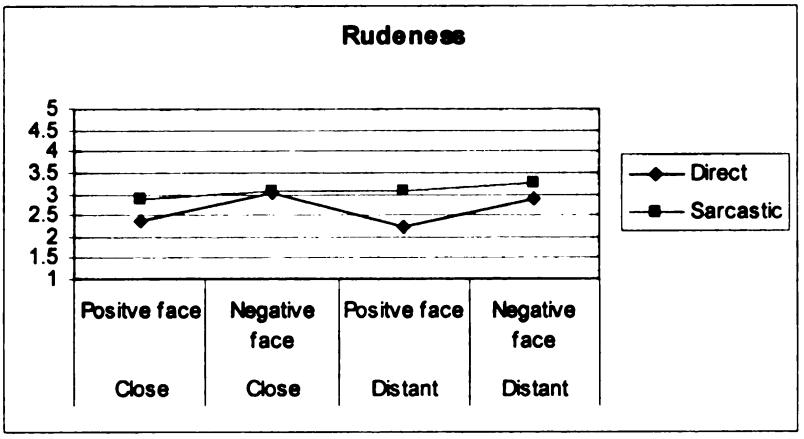
Here, I would like to suggest that the lack of difference between the two types of comments derives from the nature of negative face. Attacks to negative face involve less emotion than do attacks to positive face. While a criticism oriented to positive face attacks the person's sensibilities and feelings by expressing dislike and disapproval, attacks on negative face are intended to interfere with the hearer's freedom of action, and can be considered less emotional. Also, while attacks to positive face include attacks to a person's beliefs, intelligence, bodily features, personal manners, etc., i.e., things that are

hard if not impossible to change, attacks to negative face, i.e., attempts to impose on the hearer's freedom of action can be resisted and ignored. Hence, the way in which a negative face attack is framed (directly or sarcastically) does not seem to make a difference in the degree of offense conveyed. But, for the more emotional attack to positive face, the way in which the criticism is made does appear to affect the degree of offense conveyed by direct or sarcastic attacks.

Contrarily, positive face does seem to play an important role in the different perception of the offense of the two types of criticism. Its contribution to the interaction found for impoliteness is a result of the perception of considerable impoliteness that a direct attack has when it is oriented at positive face. This result is also reflected in the interaction of form and face found for rudeness. A direct criticism is perceived as ruder than a sarcastic criticism only when attacking the hearer's positive face.

The arguments for the difference found between the two types of criticism for positive face in the offense variables are similar to those we have already outlined for dishonesty above. Because of the emotion involved in this type of face attack, a direct, literal criticism would appear as the most rude and impolite of all attacks. This is even more true in a distant relation than in a close relation, as can be seen from the interaction plot for 'impoliteness' in Figure 10 and in the additive effects of the two interactions found for rudeness illustrated in Figure 16 below. These results suggest that the high social distance between the participants in the conversation increases the perception of rudeness and impoliteness of a direct criticism. Because one feels that a person one is not closely related to has no right to criticize us, a direct criticism sounds as very rude and inappropriate.

Figure 16 - Additive Effects of the Two Two-Way Interactions for 'Rudeness'



The interaction of positive face and distant relation also seems to have an effect on the perception of a sarcastic comment. Contributing to the interactions for 'impoliteness' and 'criticism' were the high ratings obtained by a sarcastic comment in a positive face attack in a distant relation. The sarcastic comment in this situation was rated as overall less impolite and less criticizing than in all the other situations.

Here, I would like to suggest that it is the lack of shared, common knowledge between the participants that can account for the evaluations of the sarcastic criticism being less impolite and less rude. Since a sarcastic comment involves using indirect language, usually by saying the opposite of what is meant, only in a close relation, where the speaker and the listener know each other well, can the listener recognize the speaker's true intention with some certainty. On the other hand, the lack of shared knowledge between the interlocutors in a distant relation can result in the ambiguity of the sarcastic criticism. The listener cannot recognize whether or not the speaker is being sincere and if his/her words are really meant. It is this ambiguity between the positive literal meaning and the negative intended meaning what contributes to the perception of the sarcastic criticism between unfamiliar people being ranked as less offensive.

The important role played by shared knowledge in the recognition of sarcasm has been widely acknowledged in the literature. Several researchers (Gibbs 1986, Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989, Dews and Winner 1995, Jorgensen 1996) have stressed the importance of common knowledge in the interpretation of sarcastic irony (and irony in general). In order to understand sarcastic utterances, the speaker and the hearer must share knowledge about the situation and the speaker's evaluation of the situation.

That the ambiguity of a sarcastic criticism appears only when the attack is oriented to the hearer's positive face can be explained, once again, by the more emotional nature of a positive face attack compared to a negative one. Since a sarcastic attack on positive face involves saying something positive about a person's qualities, abilities, capacities, likes, etc., the hearer will be more inclined to interpret the speaker's words as sincere. Thus, the desire to believe that what the speaker says is what he/she really means results in the sarcastic comment having more than one possible interpretation

The findings here also suggest that in a close relationship, where the true intention of the sarcastic utterance is really understood, there is no difference in the degree of criticism conveyed by a direct or a sarcastic face attack and only a very small difference in the degree of impoliteness and rudeness.

In general terms, the results for the three offense variables (i.e., rudeness, impoliteness, and criticism) suggest that the social distance between the participants in the conversation influences the perception of the degree of offense of a face attack. These findings contradict the results in Dews and Winner (1995) which showed that there was no effect for familiarity in the degree of offense conveyed by the two types of criticism.

Finally, it is worth noticing that for all offense factor variables the most dramatic difference between the two types of criticism was found for a positive face attack in a distant relation. It is the interaction between positive face and distant relation that is contributing to the different perception of the face attacks by either intensifying the rudeness and impoliteness of a direct comment or by reducing the degree of offense of a sarcastic comment.

In Spanish, the offense factor variables *agresividad* 'rudeness', *descortesía* 'impoliteness' and *crítica* 'criticism' resulted in three-way interactions of form, face and familiarity. Similarly to the impoliteness and criticism variables in English, *descortesía* and *crítica* did not show a difference between the two types of comments for a negative face attack. Hence, the same conclusions reached about negative face above can also account for the Spanish data.

Though in English a direct comment was rated as more impolite than a sarcastic comment for a positive face attack in a close relation, there was no difference between the two types of face attack comments for this same situation in Spanish, matching the criticism ratings. It was, however, once more, for a positive face attack in a distant relation that the most dramatic difference resulted between the two types of face attacks. For criticism ratings, the difference between the direct and the sarcastic attacks came as a result of the relatively smaller degree of criticism that a sarcastic attack triggered in this situation. This result is similar to the English criticism ratings and can also be explained by the failure to correctly interpret the sarcastic tone of the comment due to the lack of shared knowledge between the interlocutors.

Descortesía 'impoliteness' and agresividad 'rudeness' ratings also showed an effect of face: a direct attack to positive face was rated as more impolite and ruder than a direct attack to negative face. But again, it is in a distant relation that a direct attack is rated as the most impolite and rudest of all. Thus, for Spanish too, the social distance between the participants in the conversation is also a determining factor in the perception of offense of the two types of criticism.

At this point it should be noted that rudeness ratings showed more differences in the perception of the two types of criticism than the other two offense factor variables in both languages. This is not what I expected to find. I expected that all the offense variables would show differences (if any) in the same situations. The different results obtained for 'impoliteness' and 'rudeness' are especially intriguing since the two concepts seem to be very closely related.

One possible explanation for this puzzling result could be that when we speak of the impoliteness of an utterance, we are mainly referring to how the hearer perceives the face attack. Since the content of the attack is the same in the two types of criticism (direct or sarcastic), the degree of impoliteness conveyed by one or the other is not likely to differ much. Both will affect the hearer in the same way.

On the other hand, when we speak about the rudeness of a face attack, we are more concerned with speaker's intention and will probably take into consideration the manner in which the criticism is made. Thus, it is more likely that the way in which the criticism is framed (directly or sarcastically) will make a difference in the perception of the rudeness of the comment.

Notice, however, that 'rudeness' and 'impoliteness' appear to be somehow related. They both seem to behave in the same way: whenever the impoliteness of an utterance increases, its rudeness also increases. Hence, the difference between the two concepts seems to be a very slight one; while 'impoliteness' seems to refer only to the perception of the attack by the hearer, rudeness also seems to relate to the manner in which the attack is made.

As shown above, the offense variables ratings were very similar in both languages. There is an effect of face in the perception of rudeness and impoliteness of a direct attack. A direct criticism is more offensive when attacking positive face than when directed at negative face. But, most importantly, there seems to be a key effect given by the interaction (or additive effects in the case of 'rudeness' in English) of positive face and distant relation that contributes to the highly different perception in the degree of offense conveyed by a direct and a sarcastic criticism.

4.3 The Function of Ironic Criticism

To go back to the controversy about the function of sarcastic irony mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the findings here appear to be more in line with those reported by Dews and Winner (1995) and Dews et al. (1995): whenever a difference between the two types of criticism was found, a sarcastic criticism was perceived as less offensive than a direct criticism. However, the fact that all the offense variables showed at least one situation where there was no difference in the degree of offense between the two types of criticism casts some doubt onto the off-record and face-saving nature of sarcasm and the validity of tinge hypothesis.

Sarcasm has generally been considered an off-record strategy because it has been claimed to allow more than one possible interpretation. However, the findings here suggest that only for a positive face attack in a distant relation is a sarcastic criticism ambiguous between its positive literal meaning and its negative intended meaning resulting in a less offensive form of criticism than its direct, literal counterpart. If sarcasm were always ambiguous it should have muted the degree of offense in all the situations.

On the other hand, if the positive literal meaning of a sarcastic utterance tinges the perception of the negative intended meaning, the resulting decreased negative tone of the sarcastic comment should occur in all situations and for all the offense variables.

The questions that arise are the following: Is sarcasm really an off-record strategy, i.e., is there in fact more than one feasible interpretation in a sarcastic comment? And, how can we explain the different results obtained for the rudeness ratings and the impoliteness and criticism ratings? The next section will review what has already been said about sarcasm as an off-record strategy and the tinge hypothesis, and will try to answer the questions stated above.

4.3.1 Is Sarcasm Really an Off-Record Strategy?

Brown and Levinson's characterization of an off-record communicative act is one that:

> ...is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of this act. Thus if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off-record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it (1987: 211).

They also add that such off-record utterances are essentially indirect uses of language - irony, metaphor, understatement, rhetorical questions, etc. - and that they perform a face-saving function.

Following Brown and Levinson, those studies in the literature of politeness/impoliteness that concluded that sarcasm mutes the degree of criticism conveyed by its direct, literal counterpart have argued that the less offensive nature of sarcasm derives from its ambiguity, i.e., the uncertainty as to how to interpret the utterance reduces the threat posed by it.

Dews and Winner (1995) extended this idea into their tinge hypothesis. The tinge hypothesis states that the positive literal meaning of an ironic utterance tinges the interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning, resulting in a decreased negative tone.

However, it is not so clear that sarcasm always has more than one possible interpretation or that it tinges the negative intended meaning of the criticism. Some researches have argued that sarcasm is really an on-record strategy. Lachenicht (1990) makes a distinction between true irony and sarcasm. He claims that true irony is definitely off-record while sarcasm is generally, if not completely, on-record. He states that "in many cases the paralinguistic signals are so marked, that an insulting intent is undeniable" (1990: 645).

In the same vein, Barbe (1995: 28-29) claims that sarcastic utterances differ from ironic utterances in the following points: (i) the utterance is more personal, and (ii) its sarcastic potential is immediately obvious to all participants in the situation, i.e., shared experience and knowledge is not a necessary factor. (iii) Nevertheless, the utterance still has a face-saving capacity, but only for the hearer and not for the speaker. That is, a

hearer can decide to ignore the sarcasm. Speakers compromise themselves; they cannot say 'I did not mean it' in an attempt to save face because sarcasm leaves no room for guessing or doubting. Even Brown and Levinson have stressed the fact that "many of the classic off-record strategies [...] are very often actually on-record when used because the clues to their interpretation [...] add up to the only really viable interpretation in the context" (1987: 212).

The results in this study, however, suggest that there is some ambiguity in a sarcastic comment and that this ambiguity depends on what is said and to whom it is said. Only when the sarcastic criticism is oriented to the hearer's positive face in a distant relation does it allow more than one interpretation. In all other situations, a sarcastic criticism appears to have only one possible interpretation, as the impoliteness and criticism ratings show. Thus, the on-record or off-record nature of sarcasm seems to depend on the face that is being attacked and the social distance between the participants in the conversation.

The differences between the two types of face attack found for the rudeness ratings cannot, then, be attributed to the availability of more than one interpretation. If this were the case, there should also have been more differences in the impoliteness and criticism ratings. It is unlikely that a sarcastic comment will be ambiguous only when considering its rudeness but not as regards its impoliteness or criticism.

The tinge hypothesis does not seem to account for the differences in rudeness either. According to this hypothesis, the positive literal meaning of the ironic criticism tinges the hearer's perception of the intended meaning, muting the message in comparison to literal language. However, the message of the sarcastic criticism does not seem to be softened in any way, as shown by the impoliteness and criticism ratings.

Nonetheless, the positive language used in a sarcastic criticism does seem to have an effect in muting the offensive manner in which the criticism is made in comparison to its direct, literal counterpart. This is why it is only for rudeness that we find more differences in the perception of the two types of criticism. As already mentioned before, 'rudeness' seems to relate to the offensive way in which the criticism is made, while 'impoliteness' and 'criticism' are more related to the effect the face attack has on the hearer. Since the true intention of the sarcastic criticism is understood in these situations, as I have argued above, it is not surprising that no differences were found in the perception of impoliteness and criticism of the two types of attack. However, when we consider how rude a face attack is, the way in which the criticism is framed does make a difference. A criticism that uses more offensive language is perceived as ruder. Hence, it is the less negative and less offensive language used in a sarcastic criticism that contributes to the perception of the attack as less rude.

Though the findings presented in this study may appear to support the tinge hypothesis (whenever a difference was found between the two types of criticism, a sarcastic attack was perceived as less rude, less impolite, and less criticizing than a direct attack), I have shown that this is not really the case. The tinge hypothesis cannot account for the different results obtained for the three offense factor variables. Thus, I have argued that the less impolite and criticizing perception of a sarcastic criticism for a positive face attack in a distant relation results from the ambiguity that a sarcastic comment has in this situation. On the other hand, though there seems to be some tinging causing the perception of the sarcastic criticism as less rude, it only affects the offensive manner in which the criticism is made but not its offensive perception.

4.4 General Ranking of Impoliteness Strategies

The results for the rankings of the impoliteness superstrategies for the 'offense' factor variables (i.e., rudeness, impoliteness, and criticism) presented in chapter 3 have shown that two rankings are needed: one if the relation between the participants is a close one and a different one if the relation is a distant one. The results also showed that the ranking for 'criticism' in a close relationship was different from the ones obtained for the other two variables in both languages. This difference was explained in terms of the association of 'criticism' to content. However, it should be noted that the rankings for 'criticism' were very similar in the two languages.

Interestingly, the rankings obtained for 'impoliteness' and 'rudeness' in a close relation were also very similar in English and Spanish. And, the rankings for a distant relation were identical in all three variables within and across languages with the exception of the ranking for 'rudeness' in English, which was a little different from the rest.

This great similarity between the different rankings across languages seems to suggest that the order of the impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense may be universal. However, this is a claim that I do not want to make at this point but, rather, I would like to encourage future investigations to be conducted on this topic.

The general rankings of the impoliteness superstrategies with respect to degree of offense in both social distance relations are presented below.

Table 23 – General Ranking of Impoliteness Superstrategies

	Close	Distant
	Superstrategy	Superstrategy
1	Positive face - on record	Positive face - on record
2	Positive face - off record	Negative face - off record
3	Negative face - on record	Negative face - on record
4	Negative face - off record	Positive face - off record

Note: the strategies are ranked in order of decreased offensiveness so that (1) represents the most offensive of all strategies and (4) the least offensive.

Notice that both rankings show that a direct attack to positive face is the most offensive of all the impoliteness superstrategies. The main difference between the two rankings is that while a positive face attack is always more offensive than a negative face attack in a close relation, a sarcastic attack to positive face is ranked as the least offensive of all attacks in a distant relation. As already seen in the factorial ANOVAs, this difference is a result of the hearer's failure to understand the ironic tone and the intended meaning of the utterance.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study was principally designed to determine the degree of offense of different impoliteness superstrategies. By doing this, I was also hoping to contribute to resolving the controversy in the literature about the muting or intensifying function of sarcastic criticism compared to direct, literal criticism. However, this study differed from previous work in that I compared direct vs. sarcastic criticism that attacked a person's positive or negative face in both familiar and unfamiliar relations. Thus, instead of looking at just one factor, i.e., directness, I also considered two other factors: face and familiarity.

Criticism can attack a person's desire to be liked or approved by others (positive face) or a person's freedom of action (negative face). Thus, in order to find out if there is any difference in the degree of offense conveyed by a direct and a sarcastic criticism, attacks to both aspects of face needed to be considered. Similarly, since a criticism can be directed to an intimate person (a close relation) or to a person one is only acquainted with (a distant relation), social distance was also included as an independent variable. In this way, this study was careful to maintain distinctions among the contributing factors of directness, face and familiarity in both the analysis and presentation of the data.

The findings reported in this study confirm that this is a more adequate approach in looking at the relative degrees of offense of direct and sarcastic criticism. All the variables that loaded in factor group 1 of the factor analysis (the 'offense' factor) resulted in significant interactions. Thus, the main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the degree of offense of a direct and a sarcastic criticism depends on the face to

which the attack is oriented and the familiarity relation between the participants. This means that no general conclusions can be reached about whether criticism in a sarcastic form mutes or intensifies the degree of offense of a face attack if face and familiarity are not looked at.

The different results obtained for 'rudeness' and 'impoliteness' suggest that there is a slight difference between the two concepts. A possible explanation for this puzzling result could be that while impoliteness has to do more with the perception of an utterance, rudeness seems to relate more to the intention of the speaker. Perhaps, as expressed in the manner in which the criticism is made.

The results for impoliteness and criticism ratings do not appear to support the tinge hypothesis. Only in one situation (positive face attack in a distant relation) was sarcastic criticism rated as less offensive than its direct, literal counterpart. The rest of the situations did not show any difference in the degree of offense of the two types of criticism. This less offensive nature of sarcastic criticism was a result of its ambiguity in this situation.

Rudeness, on the other hand, showed more differences between the two types of attack. A sarcastic comment was rated as less rude than a direct attack in three of the four situations described. These differences, however, could not be due to the tinging of the intended meaning as we have seen from the results obtained for impoliteness and criticism. Hence, I suggested that the positive language used in a sarcastic comment causes sarcastic criticism to be perceived as less rude than literal criticism precisely because rudeness is related to the manner in which the message is delivered. Thus,

though the sarcastic criticism appears to be less rude, it does not appear to be less impolite or less criticizing.

In general terms, the findings reported in this study suggest that there is no significant difference in the degree of offense conveyed by a sarcastic or a literal face attack. This result differs from what has already been reported in the literature, which found sarcastic criticism to be either more or less offensive than its literal counterpart. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even those studies that reported that ironic criticism is less offensive than literal criticism found some situations where there were no differences between the two types of criticism.

In Dews, Kaplan and Winner's studies (1995), ironic criticism was found to be less offensive than literal criticism, but only when the topic of the speaker's remark was the addressee's poor performance. When the topic was some offensive behavior on the part of the addressee that affected the speaker, no significant difference was found. As Colston (1997) proposed, the involvement of the speaker seems to play an important role in determining the function of ironic criticism.

Moreover, Jorgensen (1996) found that when the content of the criticism is a trivial topic, a sarcastic comment mutes the degree of criticism conveyed. But, when a speaker criticizes a serious mistake made by the hearer, couching the criticism in sarcastic form has no effect on the face threat. These results suggest that the content of the criticism is another important factor in determining the function of sarcastic irony.

However, it is not my intention here to imply that sarcastic irony can never serve a muting function. Previous research has reported that sarcasm can serve more positive

functions such as humor (Dews et al. 1995, Kreuz et al. 1991, Roberts and Kreuz 1994, Gibbs 2000) and face-saving (Jorgensen 1996) resulting in a less offensive criticism.

A possible explanation for the availability of the muting function of sarcastic irony seems to be related to intention. If the intention of the speaker is perceived to be to severely criticize and hurt the addressee, sarcastic criticism does not seem to dilute the degree of offense compared to its literal counterpart. On the other hand, the muting function of sarcastic criticism appears when the speaker criticizes the hearer in a teasing way, with no intention to hurt the addressee. Thus, the muting function of sarcastic irony seems to depend on the recognition of the intention of the speaker.

As discussed above, the less offensive nature of a sarcastic face attack for the impoliteness and criticism ratings seems to result from the hearer's failure to recognize the speaker's intended criticism. Nevertheless, as I have already pointed out in the introduction to this work, it is not easy to identify speaker intention. Only the presence of appropriate contextual information can help the hearer to recognize what the speaker's true intention is. The context will need to include information about whether the criticism is about a serious or a trivial matter, if the speaker is a victim of the hearer's offensive behavior, the social distance between the interlocutors, the face that is attacked, if there is an audience as witness, etc.

Since recognition of intentionality seems to be an important factor contributing to the muting function of sarcastic irony, it seems appropriate to make a distinction between sarcasm and irony. Several researchers (Gibbs 1986, Kreuz and Glucksberg 1989, Lee and Katz 1998, Leggit and Gibbs 2000) have postulated that the basic distinction between the two concepts is that "sarcasm is [especially] appropriate for conveying a person's

hostile attitude toward, or ridicule of, some other individual, usually the addressee" (Leggit and Gibbs, 2000).

Myers (1977) has claimed that irony serves two main functions: (a) sometimes irony is used to reinforce solidarity, camaraderie between or among members and (b) sometimes irony serves to elevate the speaker's own position at the expense of his hearer, via a put-down. Sarcasm, she claims, belongs to the second category since it is the use of irony for the particular purpose of causing hurt (1977: 180).

In the same vein, Gibbs (2000) suggests that there are five different forms of irony, among which he distinguishes jocularity, where speakers tease one another in humorous ways, from sarcasm, where speakers speak positively to convey a more negative critical intent (2000: 12).

Thus, sarcasm does not seem to allow the muting function precisely because the intention of the speaker is to severely criticize and to hurt the addressee. Irony, on the other hand, can serve to dilute the criticism conveyed by its direct, literal counterpart. This brings us back to the distinction mentioned at the beginning of chapter 2 between *ironic rudeness* and *sarcastic rudeness*. Kienpointner (1997) argued that these two forms of rudeness should not be confused: while ironic rudeness is a variety of cooperative rudeness, sarcastic rudeness is a form of non-cooperative rudeness.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the findings here do not support the intensifying function of sarcastic irony sometimes postulated in the literature (Colston 1997, Toplak and Katz 2000, Okamoto 2002, Huang 2004). Sarcastic criticism was never rated as ruder, more impolite or more critical than direct, literal criticism.

5.1 The Ranking of the Superstrategies

One of the main conclusions about the rankings of the impoliteness superstrategies for the various offense variables in the two languages studied is that two different rankings are needed. One ranking applies if the relationship between the participants in the conversation is a close one, but a different ranking emerges if the relation is a distant one.

Also, the fact that English and Spanish got similar rankings in both social distance relations is a promising result in favor of a possible universal order in the degree of offense of the different superstrategies. However, more evidence is needed before one can claim the universality of this ranking.

5.2 Remaining Questions for Future Research

The findings in this study have cast some doubt on the validity of the tinge hypothesis, at least as far as sarcastic utterances are concerned. However, there seem to be some other forms of irony that dilute the degree of offense relative to a literal criticism in certain situations. There is no doubt that future research would benefit from identifying what these instances are.

Another issue that needs further research is what may be causing the different results obtained for rudeness and impoliteness ratings.

Moreover, it would also be interesting to see if positive face and distant relation also have a significant effect in the perception of offense of the different impoliteness superstrategies in other languages and cultures, especially in East Asian cultures where

the notion of negative face plays such an important role in people's lives (Gu 1990, Matsumoto 1988, Okamoto 2002).

Finally, cross-linguistic research is encouraged to test the validity of the ranking of the impoliteness superstrategies presented here as a universal ranking.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Description task (English)

Instructions

Below you will find four brief stories describing a situation between two participants. Each situation ends with a comment or remark made by one of the participants and directed towards the other participant. Please describe with words, phrases and/or short sentences this last comment or remark in the space provided below. For example, if you think the comment is friendly, simply write "friendly"; if you think that it shows that the speaker is in a good mood, write "the speaker is in a good mood."

Friendly. The speaker is in a good mood.

Situation 1

Robert has just bought a new computer. After installing it and putting it to work, he realizes that there is one program that is not responding. Since he doesn't know how to solve this problem, he calls his friend Mike. Mike is constantly bragging that he knows everything about computers. Mike tries to solve the problem but cannot do it. So, Robert says to him:

"I can tell that you really know a lot about computers!!"
"I can tell that you don't know anything about computers!!"

Situation 2

Mary and Julie are good friends. For their summer vacation, they went camping for a week in the Glacier National Park. At the entrance of the park there was a notice reminding them that littering was not allowed. While they were hiking on the trails, Mary threw her empty bottle of water in the bushes. Julie, who was watching Mary, said to her:

"You have no respect for the environment!!"
"You have such great respect for the environment!!"

Situation 3

John and Steven are coworkers. They have just started to share an office. In the company building, smoking is not allowed. Steven, however, who is a chain-smoker, opens the window in their office and lights a cigarette. John sees this and says to him:

"I see you are the kind of person who follows the rules"
"I see you are not the kind of person who follows the rules"

Situation 4

Liz and Laura were assigned to work on a project by their professor. It's the first semester of school and they don't know each other well. Liz is a dedicated student and wants to do well on the project. Laura is not as good a student as Liz but she understands the material better. They decide to each research a part of the assignment and meet after one week to discuss what they have done. When Laura reads Liz's part, she thinks it is terrible and says:

"You did a very bad job!!"
"You really did a great job!!"

APPENDIX B

Description task (Spanish)

Instrucciones

A continuación, usted encontrará cuatro situaciones donde se describe la relación entre dos hablantes. Cada una de las situaciones que se presentan finaliza con un comentario hecho por uno de los participantes y está dirigido hacia el otro.

Por favor describa este comentario usando palabras, frases y/u oraciones cortas en el espacio que encontrará debajo de cada descripción. Por ejemplo, si usted piensa que el comentario es amistoso, simplemente escriba 'amistoso', si piensa que el comentario muestra que el hablante esta de buen humor, escriba 'el hablante esta de buen humor'.

Amistoso. El hablante esta de buen humor.

Situación 1

Roberto acaba de comprar una computadora nueva. Después de instalarla y ponerla en funcionamiento, encuentra que uno de los programas no responde. Como no sabe como solucionar el problema llama a su amigo Luis. Luis constantemente esta alabándose acerca de su conocimiento en computación. Luis trata de solucionar el problema pero no consigue hacerlo. Entonces, Roberto le dice:

"¡¡Se nota que sabes un montón de computación!!"
"¡¡Se nota que no sabes nada de computación!!"

Situación 2

María y Carolina son buenas amigas. Para las vacaciones de verano salieron de camping por una semana al parque nacional "Los Glaciares". Cuando llegaron, en la entrada les recordaron que estaba prohibido arrojar basura. Mientras recorrían los senderos del parque, María tiro su botella de agua vacía entre las plantas. Carolina que estaba mirándola, le dijo:

"¡¡Que poca conciencia del medio ambiente que tenés!!".
"¡¡Qué conciencia del medio ambiente que tenés!!"

Situación 3

Alejandro y Fernando son nuevos compañeros de trabajo. Acaban de empezar a compartir una oficina. En la empresa esta totalmente prohibido fumar. Sin embargo, Fernando que es un fumador compulsivo abre la ventana de la oficina y prende un cigarrillo. Cuando Alejandro ve a Fernando fumar le dice:

"¡¡Se ve que sos el tipo de persona que respeta las reglas!!"
"Se ve que no sos el tipo de persona que respeta las reglas"

Situación 4

Josefina y Laura son compañeras en la clase de Cálculo en la universidad. Es el primer semestre de clases y apenas se conocen. El profesor les asignó que trabajen en un proyecto juntas. Josefina es una alumna muy aplicada y quiere sacar una buena nota en el trabajo. Laura no es tan aplicada en el estudio como Josefina pero entiende el tema mejor que ella. Para realizar el proyecto, Josefina y Laura deciden dividirse la tarea. Cada una va a investigar sobre una parte del tema y una semana después se juntarán para discutir sobre lo que hizo cada una. Cuando Laura lee la parte que Josefina escribió, piensa que está todo mal y le dice:

"¡¡Realmente hiciste un trabajo muy malo!!"
"¡¡Realmente hiciste un trabajo excelente!!"

APPENDIX C

Rating task (English)

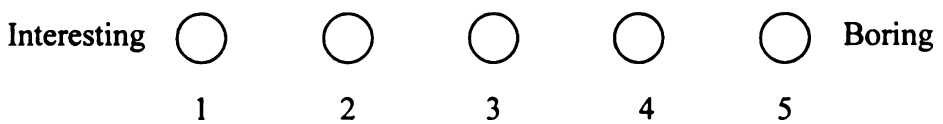
Instructions

Below you will find four brief stories describing a situation between two participants. Each situation ends with a comment or remark made by one of the participants and directed towards the other participant.

Please use the 1 to 5 scales given below each situation to rate how you would interpret the remark made by the speaker.

An example is given below for your reference.

If you consider the remark to be very interesting, select 1.
If you consider the remark to be somewhat interesting, select 2.
If you consider the remark to be neither interesting nor boring, select 3.
If you consider the remark to be somewhat boring, select 4.
If you consider the remark to be very boring, select 5.



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Mary and Julie are good friends. For their summer vacation, they went camping for a week in the Glacier National Park. At the entrance of the park there was a notice reminding them that littering was not allowed. While they were hiking on the trails, Mary threw her empty bottle of water in the bushes. Julie, who was watching Mary, said to her:

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John and Steven are coworkers. They have just started to share an office. In the company building, smoking is not allowed. Steven, however, who is a chain-smoker, opens the window in their office and lights a cigarette. John sees this and says to him:

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Liz and Laura were assigned to work on a project by their professor. It's the first semester of school and they don't know each other well. Liz is a dedicated student and wants to do well on the project. Laura is not as good a student as Liz but she understands the material better. They decide to each research a part of the assignment and meet after one week to discuss what they have done. When Laura reads Liz's part, she thinks it is terrible and says:

"You did a very bad job!!"
"You really did a great job!!"

APPENDIX D

Rating task (Spanish)

Instrucciones

A continuación, usted encontrará cuatro situaciones donde se describe la relación entre dos hablantes. Cada una de las situaciones que se presentan finaliza con un comentario hecho por uno de los participantes y está dirigido hacia el otro.

Por favor indique en las escalas del 1 al 5 que se encuentran debajo de cada situación como interpreta el comentario hecho por el hablante.

Use el ejemplo a continuación como referencia.

Si usted considera que el comentario es muy interesante, elija 1.
Si usted considera que el comentario es un poco interesante, elija 2
Si usted considera que el comentario no es ni interesante ni aburrido, elija 3
Si usted considera que el comentario es un poco aburrido, elija 4
Si usted considera que el comentario es muy aburrido, elija 5.

Interesante	○	○	○	○	○	Aburrido
	1	2	3	4	5	

Situación 1

Roberto acaba de comprar una computadora nueva. Después de instalarla y ponerla en funcionamiento, encuentra que uno de los programas no responde. Como no sabe como solucionar el problema llama a su amigo Luis. Luis constantemente esta alabándose acerca de su conocimiento en computación. Luis trata de solucionar el problema pero no consigue hacerlo. Entonces, Roberto le dice:

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"¡¡Realmente hiciste un trabajo excelente!!"

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