Power, (Im)Politeness and Aggressiveness
in Early Modern Master-Servant Relations (1660-1750)

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Abstract

The article explores the ways in which in early modern England masters exercised power over servants by means of threats and reproaches. More precisely, it investigates power-(im)politeness and the power-aggressiveness interfaces using data collected manually from a non-electronic corpus of advice manuals for masters (and mistresses), servants and apprentices published in English between 1660 and 1750. As we approach the mid-eighteenth century there is a growing concern for servants' feelings and insistence on masters' empathy towards servants. This was probably due to the new form of politeness emerging in the period, one which emphasised complaisance and social harmony. From a strictly linguistic viewpoint, I argue that in these texts (but this may apply to others too) threats are not presented as inherently impolite acts but as aggressive ones, and that impoliteness is only a contextual property aggravating intimidation and affirmation of power. Whatever the master's degree of power and social status, therefore, they cannot be considered forms of 'politic unmarked behaviour'. Reproaches share with threats a potentially intimidating perlocutionary effect, but unlike threats, they are not inherently aggressive, and can be a form of politic or contextually appropriate behaviour on the part of a master.

Keywords: Historical (Im)politeness, Power, Reproaches, Threats, Verbal Aggressiveness

1. *Introduction*

Since Dorothy Marshall's pioneering article of 1929, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century domestic service in England has been the object of research largely focused on socio-historical and cultural aspects of the master-servant relationship (see, for example, Hecht 1980; Hill 1996; Meldrum 2000; Steedman 2004; McKeon 2005; Straub 2009). These studies provide useful accounts of the nature of service and mastery, of dramatic power asymmetries between masters and servants, and of the tensions arising from those asymmetries; but the patterns of linguistic behaviour enacting power and powerlessness have remained unexplored. This article adopts a historical-

pragmatic perspective in an attempt to shed light on the ways in which early modern masters and mistresses exercised power through threats and reproaches, socially-risky speech acts that, unlike requests, promises, apologies, complaints, compliments and insults (see Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000 and 2008) have received virtually no attention in diachronic speech act analysis. Power is considered here in relation to politeness, impoliteness and aggressiveness, that is, vis-à-vis pragmatic strategies which, in the case of politeness, mitigate assertions of power and the risk of subsequent conflict and, in cases of impoliteness and aggressiveness, reinforce those assertions and exacerbate risk of conflict. Although commands are the most prototypical speech acts characterising a master's role,[1] here we shall focus on acts that are unambiguously threatening to both negative and positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987, 67) and that presuppose wide power gaps between addresser and addressee.

During the period embraced by our source material, social and economic change brought about an extension of free, mobile wage-labour (Griffiths *et al.* 1996, 288), and this may have altered power relations between master and servants in ways that affected masters' behaviour. We shall here be attempting to see whether the emergence at the turn of the eighteenth century of a new form of politeness synonymous with refinement, pleasure, good taste and complaisance (as well as virtue), (cf. Carter 2001) was also a feature of the patriarchal household. Politeness was not a pervasive social requirement but expected in certain, restricted places and domains (especially in the public sphere and between equals of the middle- and upper-classes). The question is whether it was called for also in the private sphere of household government and in behaviour towards servants, and if so, how politeness principles affected the expression of threats and reproaches. More precisely, the question is whether threatening and scolding of servants were progressively discouraged and ultimately forbidden, or whether such behaviour continued to be recommended as modes of displaying authority and power but in mitigated forms of expression.

In my analysis of these texts I shall be applying current politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987; Watts 2003) integrated with speech act theory (Searle 1969). I shall also be making specific use of Locher's approach to politeness and power, and of her notion of politeness as 'positively marked appropriate behaviour' (2004, 86),[2] as well as of Culpeper's (2011) notion of impoliteness as unexpected (or negatively marked) linguistic behaviour. I depart from Locher, however, in not assuming a relevance-based politeness perspective, and from Culpeper in my attempt to differentiate between

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[1] 'The power of commanding is in the Master, and the duty of obeying in the Servant' (Burton 1681, 35-36); and 'To Dictate and Command, wou'd be natural enough for a King to a Subject … a Master to a Servant …' (Seaton 1720, 3).

[2] On this see Watts 1989 and Kasper 1990.

impolite and aggressive behaviour. Another primary aim of this study is to clarify the status of threats and reproaches vis-à-vis impoliteness and aggressiveness. As we shall see, although serious threats and reproaches can be both aggressive and impolite (at least according to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century parameters of politeness), aggressiveness is contextually determined for reproaches but contextually independent for threats.

This investigation has been carried out on a corpus of twenty-five advice books, most expressly addressed to masters, servants and apprentices, and all – with a single exception – published in England or Ireland between 1660 and 1750.[3] Of these, nine are seventeenth-century publications, while sixteen saw the light in the first half of the eighteenth century. These manuals, sourced from *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth Century Collection Online*, form a non-electronic corpus; consequently, data were extracted manually, and it was not possible to draw up statistics on ratios between speech act type and total numbers of words per text or over a time span. With the exception of the first volume of Defoe's *The Family Instructor* (1715), which offers imaginary dialogues meant to be credible, these texts only describe verbal actions without giving actual examples. For this reason, Defoe's treatise on the subordination of servants, claiming to contain 'Historical cases, and *Remarkable stories* of the Behaviour of some particular SERVANTS' (1724, frontispiece) and a footman's diary containing what purport to be authentic dialogical exchanges between masters and servants (MacDonald 1790)[4] have also been included.

Although advice literature is usually considered to be a source of information about social norms and ideals rather than as evidence of actual behaviour, it nevertheless offers glimpses of early modern actualities of master-servant dynamics in portraying both the ideal master and his negative counterpart. After all, the ideal does presuppose the real. In connection with this, Dodsley's advice manual of 1730 – the only work to represent a servant's perspective – and MacDonald's diary help counterbalance the bias towards the master's standpoint that characterizes the rest of the corpus. Before discussing the historical and cultural nature of (im)politeness, contemporary theoretical

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[3] The exception in chronological terms is Allen's *The Polite Lady* (1760). As well as manuals explicitly directed at masters and servants, our corpus comprises two from the seventeenth century (Bunyan 1663; Swinnock 1663) and one from the eighteenth century (Fleetwood 1705) offering advice about the management of domestic relationships in general (i.e. including parents and children, husbands and wives). It also includes three advice books on various aspects of life written by fathers for children (Anonymous 1664; Trenchfield 1678; Halifax 1688). Among eighteenth-century advice manuals we have one by a female author, Eliza Fowler Haywood (1743), addressed to servant-maids, and one by a male author addressed to gentlemen in general (Jones [1737?]).

[4] Although published outside the time span under scrutiny, the diary relates events taking place between 1745 and 1779, which makes its inclusion less arbitrary.

approaches to it and the one adopted here, a brief outline of the notions of power, authority and patriarchy prevailing in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English culture will help provide a context for understanding prevailing norms of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour by superiors towards inferiors.

2. *Power, Patriarchy and Family Structure*

At least until the Civil War, early modern English society was 'overtly patriarchal' (Eales 1998, 4) in that adult males exercised authority and dominance both within and without the family, 'a term used by contemporaries to include servants and apprentices as well as blood relations' (Meldrum 2000, 35).[5] The family was commonly regarded as a microcosm of the state, the head of the household being equivalent to the monarch and wielding kingly power within the family.[6] The political theory of patriarchy legitimated by many religious and judicial authorities attributed to the head of a household a power natural and God-given, so that disobedience to either political or paternal jurisdiction was considered not merely disruptive of the social order but also unnatural. In instruction manuals for masters and servants patriarchal ideology was often embodied in the 'rhetoric of place' whereby everyone had his/her own place in the social scale appointed and ordained by God (see Griffiths *et al.* 1996).[7]

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[5] The inclusive sense of 'family' as 'people living under the same roof and under the authority of a householder' is advocated by Tadmor (2001, 22) on the basis of 'personal, literary, documentary and prescriptive sources' from mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Among these are Samuel Johnson's 1755 Dictionary definition of 'family' as 'those who live in the same house' (quoted by Tadmoor 2001, 19), the diary of Thomas Turner (1754-1765, 27), Haywood's (1743) and Richardson's (1734) advice manuals. This evidence suggests that even if servitude was slowly becoming less of a condition and more of a profession this did not necessarily mean that paternalism was dissolving or the traditional idea of the household-family concept vanishing. As Straub (2009, 20) points out, 'As a period of transition from life-cycle to professional service, the eighteenth century saw the continuation of this tendency to think of servants as children'. Counter to this view is that of Carolyn Steedman who, focusing on a later period (from 1760 to 1830), claims that 'servants *in* a household were not necessarily *of* the family. They were there by legal arrangement' (2009, 18), and argues that the idea of servants as family was one of the eighteenth-century 'Christian narratives to promote the thesis that master and servant were really relations; each part of the other'. In line with Tadmor (and with Steedman for chronological reasons), Meldrum (2000, 76) argues that if 'a significant ideological shift occurred' in the notion of the inclusive household family, it was only 'in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', that is, after the period under investigation.

[6] Hill cites an anonymous pamphlet of 1660 entitled *A Discourse for a King and a Parliament* as declaring that 'Servants and labourers are in the nature of vassals' (1975, 227).

[7] Here is an example: 'Be not too familiar with thy servants, neither let them be too privy to thy secrets … Keep a distance with discretion, that others may know their places, do thou know thine' (Anonymous 1664, 38-39).

During and after the Civil War patriarchal theories came to be challenged by new ideas and new forms of freedom, but the notions that fathers were the natural heads of households and that masters were as fathers to their servants (relationships implying dominion but also affection) seem to have survived well into the eighteenth century (cf. Eales 1998, 5). As one anonymous seventeenth-century manual advising householders to consider servants living in their homes much in the same way as they did their own children puts it:

Reckon thy servants among thy children; the difference is only in degrees; both make up the oeconomy … a wise servant is better than a foolish child; cast him not off in old age, when he hath spent himself in thy service … a faithful servant does well deserve to be counted among thy friends. (Anonymous 1664, 41)

The same idea is expressed in the early eighteenth-century manual by William Darrell,[8] who warns that 'Your Care must not stop at your Children, let it reach your menial servants; though you are their Master, you are also their Father' (1704, 15).[9] It is also expressed slightly later by Nicholas Zinzano, who observes 'And 'tis as true that a Servant when affectionate, differeth little from a Son. Affection improves the relationship, and becomes a sort of Adoption' (1725, 52). As Hecht points out, 'in his paternal role, the master was considered accountable for the moral behaviour of his servants' (1980, 76). Literary evidence of the endurance of patriarchal ideals (but also of their post-revolutionary weakening) is Filmer's conservative *Patriarcha, or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680, 78), which states that 'the father of the family governs by no other law than his own will', a statement implying that disobedience was against the law.

Illustrative of the master-father identification was the master's legal right to enforce discipline and obedience by physical punishment: 'As for stubborn and unruly Servants, the law of England gives Masters and Mistresses Power to correct them' (Miège 1703, 288, quoted in Hecht 1980, 79). As we shall see, however, servants were also corrected by means of aggressive and impolite language (see Meldrum 2000, 92-98). Yet another weapon used to secure obedience was the threat of a bad 'character' (or no character at all), characters being essential to obtaining new employment. As an ultimate form of punishment (and manifestation of power), a master might dismiss a servant for what he considered misbehaviour. Here is an account of a dismissal from John Macdonald's *Travels*:

[8] From the records in ECCO it appears that by 1755 this manual had gone through twelve editions.

[9] Even John Locke, one of Filmer's strongest opponents, while arguing for a separation of kingly and fatherly power in his *Two Treatises of Goverment* (1690), does not abandon the idea of the householder as exercising a natural power over his family (Eales 1998, 5).

When she came, he asked her if she knew for what Mrs Innes went away? – Sir, I believe it was because John Macdonald went into her chamber to shave her head. – He turned round, and said nothing; but it turned my master against me, as I soon discovered: for, next day, a number of gentlemen met at Girvan to play at the golf or cricket. The gentlemen, after dinner, drank freely, and my master was in liquor. In the evening, when we came all home to Bargeny, he asked me for one of the clubs that was not in the chaise with the rest. I answered, sir, I suppose it is left at the inn. With that he took one of the clubs, and broke it in pieces over my back, and said, You damn'd scoundrel, provide yourself with a place. (1790, 86-87)

One effect of England's rapid economic expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was to increase the need for a large and mobile labour force. Waged work and the existence of a free labour market became clearer to servants, who could now claim greater occupational freedom for themselves and became aware of their contractual power (see Meldrum 2000). This inevitably raised concerns about social and household order in terms of authority and subordination. Defoe's statement that 'the Peace of Families is ruin'd; all Household Discipline [is] at a full stop' (1724, ii) points exactly to these concerns. In his view, family order had been disrupted and servants become insupportably rude as a result of the 'Advantage of Servants Wages' (81-83). Defoe's lamentation was to be echoed by Fielding about thirty years later.[10] This perceived qualitative change in labour relations may well have had an impact on master-servant relationships, but Defoe's and Fielding's complaints reveal the endurance of paternalistic values as well as the fact that these were felt to be under threat.[11] As Meldrum observes, 'the script for patriarchal household mastery was a rhetorical resource available to masters throughout the period [i.e. 1660-1750], a set of ideal devices that exhibited striking continuity across centuries' (2000, 40). This may suggest that, especially in a conservative and authoritarian literary genre such as that of the advice manual, little substantial change can be expected in the type of advice being offered to masters in dealing with servants. On the other hand, we may

[10] Writing in 1751, Fielding denounces the fact that 'Even Servants, in Process of Time, acquired a State of Freedom and Independency unknown to this Rank in any other Nation; and which, as the Law now stands, is inconsistent with a servile Condition' (1751, xi). Like Defoe, he sees trade as the major cause of corruption and subversion: 'Trade … hath almost totally changed the Manners, Customs, and Habits of the People, more especially of the lower Sort. The Narrowness of their Fortune is changed into Wealth … their Humility into Pride, and their Subjection into Equality' (*ibid.*).

[11] See Griffiths *et al.* (1996, 1-2), who argue that during these centuries of political and socio-economic change, authority and control were contested but were revised more in form than content. In other words, those in authority re-examined and adapted their ideas of power to new circumstances, but this revision consisted more in reinventing the rhetoric of power than in any real effort to mitigate hegemony and control (4).

expect to find the growing demand for servants reflected in exhortations to masters to exercise greater self-control and adopt milder attitudes towards servants in order to avoid the risk of their leaving their places. As we shall see, this is indeed the case.

3. (Im)politeness: its Historical and Cultural Nature

What was meant by (im)politeness in the period discussed here? The term 'politeness', and associated terms such as 'civility', 'good manners', 'complaisance', and so on, certainly denoted a set of social, cultural and moral values (cf. Brewer 1997, 99-122), but can they also be pinned down to specific verbal behaviours and conversational norms? That they can is suggested by a reading of a number of manuals entirely dedicated to or containing sections dedicated to conversation: S.C.'s *The Art of Complaisance, or the Means to Oblige in Conversation* (1673); Walker's *Of Education* (1673); Gailhard's *The Compleat Gentleman* (1678); D.A.'s *The Whole Art of Converse* (1683); the anonymous *Rules for Conversation* (1683); Jones's *The Man of Manners* (1737?); Constable's *The Conversation of Gentlemen* (1738); Allen's *The Polite Lady* (1760).

Although conversational politeness was not a prerogative of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century conceptions of good manners and civility,[12] it was then that polite conversation came to be regarded as a key social activity aimed at obtaining and confirming acceptability, respect, esteem and affection. These social goals were achieved through manifestations of various moral qualities, such as modesty (S.C. 1673, 74; Crossman 1678, 61; Jones (1737?), iii, 39; Allen 1760, 83), 'reservation, dissimulation, dexterity, patience, humility, civility and affability' (S.C. 1673, 8); 'good nature' (Allen 1760, 282), and especially complaisance (or agreeableness). S.C. defines complaisance as

an Art to regulate our words and behaviour, in such a manner as may engage the love and respect of those with whom we Converse, by distributing our praises and differences, where the quality or merit of the person require it … and by mildly suffering the errours and miscarriages of others. (1673, 2)

The ability to please one's interlocutors by accommodating oneself to their dispositions and humours is also central to the notion of politeness in Allen's much later manual:

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[12] 'Questions of language … were central to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conception of the overall "civility of a society"' (Bryson 1998, 151). Della Casa's *Galateo* (1558) is largely concerned with the correction of conversational faults (Bryson 1998, 152), and Jacobean conduct books, such as Cleland's *Hero-paideia*, contain advice on how a noble man should speak (1607, 188).

she who should treat the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the sprightly and the grave, the reserved and the frank with the same insipid uniformity of behaviour, would have no more title to the character of a polite lady, than the stiff-walking dancing master has to that of the fine gentleman. (1760, 282-283)

Verbal tact (or being considerate of others) and the risk of giving offence became 'a prime concern of the polite gentleman' (Bryson 1998, 110), who must also avoid both giving and taking offence in the name of tolerance and social harmony:

For Civility consists in these things, 1. In *not expressing* by actions, or speeches, *any injury, disesteem, or undervaluing* any other. 2. In *being ready to do all the offices and ordinary kindnesses* for another. And 3ly, in *receiving no injuries or offences* from others. i.e. in *not resenting* every word or action, which may (perhaps rationally) be interpreted to be *disesteem* or undervaluing. (Walker 1673, 211)[13]

Social harmony, however, is not merely central to notions of conversational politeness at this time. As Brewer observes, politeness, with its emphasis on the need for mutual tolerance and understanding, had the broader ideological and cultural function of 'creating coherence and unity in a society characterized by change and variety' and by 'political divisiveness', 'religious and moral crisis' (1997, 98-100). As a means of avoiding social conflict, politeness involved the ability to restrain or regulate one's impulses and emotions such as pride, anger and aggression (see Elias 1978, 53) for the sake of what in modern terms might be referred to as one's own and one's interlocutor's face. As Walker puts it, 'Pride, insolence, stateliness, imperiousness, angriness, are not signs or qualifications of a Gentleman, but the scandals of *Conversation*' (1673, 225); and, as Allen advises his would-be 'Polite Lady', 'you must take care to check and restrain your propensity to anger, and never allow it to break forth into those sudden and violent transports, which are, at once, so shocking and ridiculous' (1760, 254). The opposite of anger, Allen thought, is 'humanity and good-nature … the foundation … of many other virtues: such as … politeness and good-manners' (255, 261). If outbursts of anger are equated with incivility, verbal and physical aggressiveness cannot but be considered rude behaviour, as we shall see in sections 4 and 5.

Translated into conversational norms, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century civility of language consisted of, in the words of S.C., 'speaking soberly, to the purpose, and with respect, keeping silence till we are questioned, and in yielding a willing attention to what is said to us' and 'regulating

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[13] These words are almost exactly the same as those used by Jones ([1737?], 46) except for: 'undervaluing of another' (instead of 'undervaluing any other'), 'to do all good offices' (instead of 'to do all the offices'), 'not rightly' (instead of 'perhaps rationally'), 'be interpreted to under-valuing' (instead of 'be interpreted to be disesteem or under-valuing').

our discourse and our silence … and studying brevity without obscurity … principally flying importunity, lying and vanity' (1673, 12, 74-75). Importunity or impoliteness, on the other hand, consisted in being tedious, in not speaking to the purpose, in interrupting, contradicting and anticipating what another would say and in not being attentive to what is said to us; while vanity included boasting and presumption, the latter consisting of imposing our opinions on and contradicting others (75, 82-83; see also Jones [1737?], 28). Direct contradiction is clearly impolite and offensive, as are interrupting, anticipating the interlocutor[14] and being inattentive (cf. Allen 1760, 84-85, 89, 94). Even more offensive and 'destructive of sociable Pleasantry' is doubting everything someone says 'with an *unmannerly* Scepticism' (Jones [1737?], 22).

Some of these norms show striking correspondences with Grice's 'Maxims of Conversation', the guidelines for efficient communication and cooperative social interaction constitutive of the 'Cooperative Principle' (1975) which underlies many contemporary theoretical models of politeness, such as Brown and Levinson's (1987).[15] Most of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century politeness norms we have come across (showing deference, avoiding boasting and contradicting, interrupting and being inattentive) also fall into Brown and Levinson's group of positive politeness strategies, namely actions expressing solidarity with and attention to the interlocutor's desire to be appreciated and approved of (66-67).

Fewer eighteenth-century rules come under Brown and Levinson's heading of negative politeness strategies, that is, behaviour that avoids restricting or impeding the interlocutor's freedom of action (65-66). Among the counsels that do correspond is Crossman's warning against importunate or unbecoming requests (1678, 59); Jones's prohibition on interruptions[16] and excessive talkativeness (1737?, 48), a prohibition also found in Allen (1760, 86); and Jones' advice to be indirect in commands, avoiding 'speaking imperiously, or using any words of Command towards the Person to whom we are speaking' (1737?, 29).[17] The social imperative of complaisance and agreeableness included

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[14] This conversational behaviour no longer seems to be perceived as impolite.

[15] The Maxim of Quality 'Be non-spurious' (speak the truth, be sincere) is expressed in 'Flying lying'; the Maxim of Quantity 'Don't say more or less than is required' is represented by 'speaking soberly' and 'studying brevity'; 'speaking … to the purpose' embodies the Maxim of Relevance 'be relevant'; speaking 'without obscurity' is part of the Maxim of Manner 'Be perspicuous; avoid ambiguity and obscurity' (from Brown & Levinson 1987, 95).

[16] Interruptions threaten both positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987, 67).

[17] Actions to be avoided in the name of 'that Agreeableness which has the Power to conciliate the Applause and Affection of all People' are not keeping promises or promising what one does not intend to or cannot do, loud laughing and drollery (Jones [1737?], iii, 37, 18); the former damage one's own negative face, the latter one's own positive face (see Brown & Levinson 1987, 67-68).

a gentleman's capacity to accommodate to any social rank. The need to adjust matter and manner of discourse to the intellectual and social level of one's interlocutors, and thus avoid giving offence, is 'a pervasive theme of writing on sociable discourse during the seventeenth century' (Bryson 1998, 163), and one which seems to persist into the eighteenth century. Jones, for instance, writes that

Good Manners *is defined a Science in instructing how to dispose all our Words and Actions in their proper and true Places. But, nothing can be said … with Civility, without four Circumstances are observed: First*, That every one behave himself according to his Age and Condition. *Secondly*, That Respect be had to the Quality of the Person with whom we converse. *Thirdly*, That we consider the Time; and *Fourthly*, The Place where we are. ([1737?], iii)

Domestic servants were considered to be both intimates and inferiors, as is implied in S.C.'s counsel: '… with our Domesticks and Confidents we must be free, with strangers distrustful, and more reserved, we must honour Superiours, respect our equals, and towards our Inferiours use Courtesie and sweetness' (1673, 177-178). Freedom in addressing servants did not allow for expressions of anger towards servants in company, however, for public reproofs disturbed social harmony: 'Talk not at table any ungrateful or impertinent discours, nor be angry with your servants, nor do any thing which may interrupt the cheerfulness of the company' (Walker 1673, 218). Similarly disturbing was the use of direct or imperious commands to servants at table, where mitigating expressions are recommended: 'When you would address yourself to the Sideboard, the Footman in waiting must be told, *Sir, pray let me have a Glass of Beer or Wine,* &c.' (Jones [1737?], 6). According to J.B. reproaches are to be avoided both in public and in private, as they 'lessen … People's good Opinion of themselves' (1747, 10), an explanation which seems to echo the modern concept of threatening positive face. A similar appeal to use mildness and easiness towards servants in both contexts is found in Lingard (1670, 27) and in Allen (1760, 243, 254).

It is worth noting that in our manuals threats are not mentioned as examples of uncivil verbal actions, which may suggest that they were considered something more than impolite. The shift in emphasis away from the positive politeness insisted on in early modern English culture to the negative politeness proper to contemporary anglo-centric conceptions of polite verbal behaviour (cf. Taavitsainen and Jucker (2008) is not the only point of divergence between older and newer conceptions of conversational politeness. A more crucial difference seems to lie in the idea of politeness as 'pleasing those with whom we converse' (Allen 1760, 282), a concept which becomes more apparent during the course of the eighteenth century. Giving and receiving pleasure is an aesthetic component that has clearly been lost in today's notion of politeness. Another difference from the conception of politeness now prevailing in western culture

lies in its ideological, instrumental function in 'creating and maintaining a strictly hierarchical and elitist social structure' and 'enforcing social differences' (Watts 2003, 33; see also Elias 1978).

With the exception of its aesthetic and ideological functions, however, verbal politeness has over time preserved its associations with deference, respect, and consideration for others. The notions of verbal (im)politeness described here represent what Watts (1992; 2003) calls 'folk interpretations' of (im)politeness, or 'first-order (im)politeness'. We are now going to look at conversational (im)politeness from a sociolinguistic, metapragmatic perspective (i.e. Watt's second-order (im)politeness), by considering some currently-held theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon *per se* and vis-à-vis power.

4. *(Im)politeness and Power Today: A Theoretical Overview*

4.1 *(Im)politeness*

Today's meta-pragmatic notions of second-order politeness do not seem to depart dramatically from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century 'folk' conceptions. Lakoff (1975), Leech (1980) and Kasper (1990) for example, see politeness as a strategy for avoiding conflict and minimizing antagonism in interaction. In Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) model, undoubtedly the most influential, politeness has both egoistic and altruistic aims in that it involves concern for one's own and for the other's face,[18] while Fraser and Nolen (1981) see politeness as deference, an attitude expected by participants in conversation. What is expected is unmarked and appropriate to a given context, and tends to go unnoticed; when participants violate the rights and obligations of the conversational contract, their behaviour becomes marked and impolite. These linguists seem to emphasize the negative, self-effacing aspects of linguistic politeness, while others (such as Hill *et al*. 1986 and Sifianou 1992) stress its pro-active aspects,[19] that is, showing consideration of others' feelings, giving mutual comfort, promoting rapport and satisfying shared expectations.[20] In addition to these synchronic approaches aspiring to cultural universality and validity, there have been developed theoretical perspectives on (im)politeness which attempt to account for cultural specificities and diachronic variation. The first proponent of a cross-cultural pragmatic approach was Blum-Kulka (1982), followed by Blum-Kulka *et al.*

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[18] 'Face' is 'the public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself' (Brown and Levinson 1987, 61). This notion of face is based on Goffman (1955, 1967).

[19] See also Kerbrat-Orecchioni's (1997) notion of face-enhancing acts.

[20] See Eelen 2001 for a critical survey of these and other approaches to politeness.

(1989), while the historical pragmatic approach was inaugurated by Jucker's (1995) edited volume *Historical Pragmatics*. Situated at the crossroads between pragmatics and historical linguistics, studies using this approach examine conventions of language used at earlier stages of the language, and have mainly focussed on speech acts in historical contexts (see especially the first issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). More recently, Culpeper and Kádár (2010) have opened up the new sub-field of 'historical (im) politeness research' to which this article can also be ascribed.

To return to the view taken by Fraser and Nolen (1981) – which has been re-elaborated by Kasper (1990) and by Watts (1992; 2003) – unmarked appropriate behaviour is termed 'politic behaviour', while polite behaviour is considered a marked surplus with respect to the norm. According to this view, which I partly share, unmarked, politic behaviour should be the same as expected behaviour, but not necessarily the same as polite behaviour. The latter is marked appropriate behaviour (Locher 2004, 90), whereas impolite behaviour is comportment that is unexpected in some situation or role relation, and negatively violates the norm. Culpeper's definition of impoliteness too hinges on unexpectedness and its emotional consequences. For Culpeper degrees of politeness, impoliteness and aggressiveness in interaction are largely influenced by power relations (2011, 189), which in the master-servant relationship are fairly institutionalised and predictable. Since politeness can be used as a strategy for mitigating power and aggressiveness and protecting face, a short overview of the literature on power and (im)politeness in the workplace will be helpful to our analysis.

4.2 *Power and (Im)politeness*

The power-(im)politeness interface is not a new issue in linguistic research, but literature on the topic has focussed mainly on contemporary manifestations of power and the inter-relationship with politeness rather than on impoliteness (Bousfield and Locher 2008), and on institutional and professional settings rather than on private ones (Harris 2003; Holmes and Stubbe 2003; Locher 2004; Mullany 2004). Eighteenth-century domestic service represents a special type of occupational context because of its liminal position between the professional and the familiar. At least until the mid-eighteenth century, it was regarded as pertaining more to what we would now think of as the private sphere; as William Blackstone stated in 1765: 'The three great relations in private life are, 1. That of *master and servant* … 2. That of *husband and wife* … 3. That of *parent and child*' (410). The fact that the work-place coincided with the home might have contributed to this view, although this was also the case with many forms of trade, such as shop-keeping.

The mixed status of the servant, seen as both 'individual agent selling his or her labor for the best available price' and 'as part of the family, working for motives of affection and loyalty' (Straub 2009, 6) was, in the view of some

historians, responsible for tensions in the master-servant relationship becoming particularly acute in the eighteenth century (Hecht 1980, 77).[21] The literature of complaint against servants in this period suggests that these tensions arose out of masters' attempt to impose control and exact loyalty, and servants' attempts to win or preserve their independence and limit their obligations. The key concept for understanding the dynamics of power and politeness between employer and employee is freedom, which masters could claim for themselves and which servants had temporarily relinquished.

Present-day interpretations of power do not differ dramatically from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ones: both involve control, social status and manifest or latent conflict. Control is central to Brown and Gilman's definition of power: 'One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other' (1960, 255, quoted in Locher 2004, 2-3). For van Dijk control entails some restriction of action whereby 'the exercise of power by A results in the limitation of B's social freedom of action' (1989, 20). The exercise of power can be intentional and strategic, claims Wartenberg (1990). This is typically the case with threats, which restrict the action-environment of the addressee coercing him/her into doing or not doing something. Power can also be exercised unintentionally, however. This is the case 'when asymmetrical power roles … reflect societal norms or ideologies' (Locher 2004, 9), as in the master-servant relationship. Ideologies are cultural constructs that take power differences for granted (Fairclough 1989) but, since power is negotiable, it is hardly ever exercised without meeting some degree of resistance. Hence the possibility of conflict, which Lukes (1974) identifies as a clash between the interests of those who exercise power and those over whom power is exercised. Reproaches are examples of actions that can be performed to further the interests of both the more powerful and the less powerful. Power is manifested on a gradience: it can be exercised very bluntly or with varying degrees of softness. As we shall see, reproaches and threats stand at the upper end of this gradient, immediately preceding physical force. In the section that follows, we shall consider threats and reproaches vis-à-vis impoliteness, aggressiveness and power.

5. *Threats*

Threats belong to the class of commissive speech acts which commit a speaker to take some future action directed at a hearer; threats in particular have 'the perlocutionary intention of intimidating the hearer … and with the

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[21] More than any actual increase in tension, what may have been specific to the eighteenth century was, according to Straub, 'the emergence of a social consciousness of those tensions', which 'came to be called the "servant problem"' (2009, 2, 5).

presupposition (preparatory condition) that it is bad for him' (Vanderveken 1990, 183; see also Searle and Vanderveken 1985). Together with insults, threats are the most face-threatening of social acts, because they impinge on both the addressee's negative and his/her positive face by impeding freedom of action and diminishing his/her image (Brown and Levinson 1987, 66-67). They are also the acts most frequently associated with speakers in positions of power (Harris 1984; Song 1995; Culpeper 1996) and with coercive and manipulative communicative strategies (Limberg 2009, 1376),[22] as they put psychological pressure on the addressee in an effort to elicit or discourage some action (Tedeschi 1970; Benoit 1983; Wierzbicka 1987).

In our data, explicit mention of threats is made in five manuals only: three of them, all published soon after the Restoration, have a strong foundation in Holy Scriptures. Bunyan, invoking apostolic authority, bids masters forbear from threatening servants who are 'guilty of … miscarriages'. As a deterrent, he reminds masters that they too have a 'Master in Heaven':

Take heed thou carry nor thy self to thy Servant, as he of whom it is said, he is such a Son of *Belial* that his Servants could not speak to him; I Sam. 25.14, 15, 16, 17. And the Apostle bids you forbear, to threaten them, because you also have a Master in Heaven … wherefore do with, and to your Servants, as you would have your Master do with you. (1663, 61)

Here the negative consequences of threatening befall the master in the afterlife. The idea that threatening behaviour will lead to social disapproval or loss of face (such as by being considered a 'Son of *Belial*') is suggested as a secondary deterrent, while possible damage to the equilibrium of master-servant relations is not an issue.

Swinnock, who like Bunyan was a preacher, starts his discussion of threatening behaviour from the same premise – 'Consider, that thou hast a *Master in Heaven*' (1663, 109, 113) – but then takes a different tack. The arguments he uses to dissuade a master from threatening are, firstly, that it might 'expose him to contempt from his Servants', and secondly, that

There is no such vast difference betwixt thy self and thy servant, as thy haughty spirit would suggest … *Master* and *Servant* are made of the same mould, and have the same maker … Though there be a *civil* difference, there is no natural difference; for he is the same flesh, thy *own flesh*. (1663, 110)

[22] More than any actual increase in tension, what may have been specific to the eighteenth century was, according to Straub, 'the emergence of a social consciousness of those tensions', which 'came to be called the "servant problem"' (2009, 2, 5).

The first of these points to the (secondary)[23] negative perlocutionary effects of threatening, that is, loss of the servant's esteem or affect. The second argument points to the master's sense of superiority/haughtiness, a mental state represented as unjustified before God. A threat thus becomes a gratuitous, arbitrary and abusive exercise of power. There is no degree of power, however high, that can justify threats as politic behaviour.

Unsurprisingly, in these manuals dissuasion is all master-oriented, and shows no concern for the possible negative perlocutionary effects of threats on servants, who are treated as if they were marginal participants or non-persons (cf. Steedman 2004). In a way, these manuals seem to embody the haughtiness they criticise in masters.[24] We have to wait until 1730 for Robert Dodsley's *Footman's Advice* to offer a new perspective on power and impoliteness. Dodsley, a servant himself, attempts to arouse empathy for servants in order to dissuade masters from threatening and reproaching, which are depicted as inhumane actions:

I am persuaded, if some Gentlemen could … imagine all those galling Reproaches, imperious Menaces, and degrading Jeers, with which they daily flout and revile poor Servants; I say, if they would but imagine all these Things as levell'd at themselves, and reflect what Emotions would be rais'd in them upon such Usage, they would certainly treat us with more Candour and Humanity. (1730, 12)

We have now to establish the threat-(im)politeness interface in the context of the idea of mastery that emerges from these sources. In late seventeenth-century manuals, good conduct is synonymous with Christian behaviour, that is, behaviour characterized by kindness and mercy. Kindness involves forgiveness, indulgence and understanding of human weaknesses; 'learn of the Lord Jesus to carry yourself well to your Servants, that your servants may learn something of the kindness of Christ by your Deportment to them', Bunyan advises masters (1663, 63-64). Equivalent to this is the eighteenth-century notion of tolerance, in which mercy (or compassion) seems to coincide with humane behaviour (namely absence of cruelty) and mitigated manifestations of power. As Swinnock puts it, 'God teaches us … to mix our authority with clemency, for he hates tyranny' (1663, 109). In Allen pity and compassion are associated with politeness and good manners (1760, 261), and one definition

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[23] Primary perlocutionary effects are those, such as fear or intimidation, produced in the addressee immediately upon performance of an act of threatening. These may give rise to secondary perlocutionary effects projected onto the addresser, such as contempt – especially in cases of systematic threatening.

[24] In terms of (im)politeness, this lack of concern for the servant's face had probably to do with the view that since servants had renounced their freedom by contract, they could not lay claim (negative) face concerns (that is, freedom of action and freedom from imposition).

of 'mercy' in the *OED* is 'kind [i.e. polite] and compassionate treatment in a case where severity is merited or expected'.[25] Yet mercy and politeness differ in terms of their relations to power. While politeness is a mitigating strategy that affects the way some act is performed, mercy is an attribute of the more powerful, and expresses beneficial authority and power. As such, its mitigating function can only be realized by not performing verbal acts that are detrimental to those who are in a subordinate position.

In fact, the moderate exercise of power does not consist of mildness in threatening, but in avoiding threatening altogether, as recommended by Swinnock and Bunyan. One can, on the other hand, be merciful in threatening by abstaining from performing the action expressed in the threat (i.e. giving up commitment):

forbear threatening; or, rather, as the original word signifies, *remitting their threats*; that is, not always executing the harsh declarations they have made, or resolutions they have taken up, against them, but restraining and receding from the severe sentences they have denounced in their wrath … (Delany 1744, 208)

As observed by Harris, unlike directives, which can be politely attenuated in force and range from requests to orders, threats are 'always at the fierce end of any scale, unless used facetiously'; this implies that 'there is no degree of intensity in threats' (1984, 251, quoted in Limberg 2009, 1380). Although one might object that serious threats too may be formally mitigated by using polite linguistic and paralinguistic devices such as indirectness, polite formulae and tone of voice, these strategies do not necessarily mitigate the perlocutionary, intimidatory force of a threat. Indirect reproaches and commands, for example, tend to be milder because indirectness leaves more options for non-compliance (Leech 1983). But when a threat takes an indirect form, its force is only made opaque, and by no means attenuated, as shown by this example from the first volume of Defoe's *The Family Instructor*. A master is addressing his apprentice, Thomas, who refuses to tell him how he spends his time during his evenings at a neighbour's house:

Ma. '… *Thomas*, I must talk with you a little; I have observ'd it … here in the House, that your Conduct is alter'd very much from what it us'd to be, and you seem dull and melancholly, I must know what is the matter with you: If you do not like your Business, tell me honestly, *Thomas*; tho' you are bound, I will not keep you against your Will; I have a Respect for you, and for your Father, and I won't force your Inclination; if you are willing to go, *Thomas*, you shall; and therefore I would have you speak plainly, what is it you dislike the Trade for?'
Tho. No Sir, I don't dislike the Trade at all; but and you please to let me go I shall be very –
[*Here his Master interrupts him.* (1715, 232)

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[25] <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 8 January 2015.

What to the modern reader might seem an act of liberality on the master's side, is in fact meant as a threat, as becomes clear from the master's exchange with Thomas's father:

Ma. … If I challenge him with his going out, and pretend to demand a strict Account of his time, and he refuses, what can I do, but threaten to turn him away? And that it seems he desires, and yet he will not tell me the Reason of it neither … (244)

This leads us to query the current tendency to include threats among forms of impolite behaviour (Limberg 2009) and classify them as intrinsically impolite acts (Leech 1983, 83; Brown and Levinson 1987, 65). Swinnock (1663, 110) qualifies threatening as 'fierce', which seems to suggest that 'aggressive' could be a more appropriate descriptor than 'impolite'. However, the fact that he opposes cruelty and rigour to kindness and courteousness (114) points to a cultural tendency to consider violence as a breach of politeness,[26] a tendency which persists in anglocentric frameworks of politeness. It is true that impoliteness and aggressiveness are sometimes seen as overlapping, so that the dividing line between the two is often blurred. Yet, it seems to me that it is possible to distinguish between them and that threats are useful for this purpose. The reason why threats cannot be adequately accommodated within a theory of impoliteness (unless they are mingled with insults) is that their perlocutionary aim and effect is intimidation, not offence. In fact, while offensiveness is a perlocutionary effect shared by aggressiveness and impoliteness, intimidation is a prerogative of the former only. For the same reason, there is hardly any context in which they could be considered politic or appropriate behaviour.

In the context of mastery, threats may represent the end-point on a scale of power and aggressiveness (cf. Harris 1984, quoted in Limberg 2009). In the following example threats are seen as an exasperated form of reproach, and are described as being uttered with utmost severity, resentment and passion, and with intent to make servants more careful: 'In all Cases Reproof is to be reasonable, and therefore as free from Passion, as may be … for which reason St. *Paul* cautions Masters against it, advising them to forbear threatening, and putting them in mind, that they also have a Master in Heaven' (Anonymous 1718, 9).

In our next example, violent rage prompts a threat and follows a command. A colonel has a daughter who is secretly in love with his coachman. Upon seeing the coachman 'take her out of the Coach in his Arms, and holding her in his Arms a good while, kiss her several times, and she … give him leave to do it, as long as he wou'd', the colonel

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[26] This is evident in Seaton (1720, 179-180): 'Fighting (i.e. shedding of blood) … is … brutish and disorderly, with respect to that Civility and good Behaviour, which are strictly required in all Families that are well regulated'.

run in upon them, *Unhand her, Villain!* Said he to the Coachman, *or I'll this Minute send you to the Devil*: The Fellow (surpriz'd you may suppose) set her down, but gave his Master the most impudent Language imaginable; and which the Gentleman not able to take, gave him a large Cut over the Face, with his Sword. (Defoe 1724, 179-180)

Here the colonel's threat to send the coachman '*to the Devil*' reinforces the directive and coercive force of the command to unhand the daughter, and is effective in that it obtains the desired behaviour, but it then triggers in the addressee a face-threatening reaction aimed at restoring his own face. The physical violence which follows the coachman's 'impudent' reaction seems to confirm that threats, together with strong insults, occupy a position at the upper end of a scale of aggressiveness, beyond which lies only physical aggression. However, in that it is triggered by anger, the threat would also be considered impolite according to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century conception of politeness as a means to self-control and restraint of passions.

The same can be said about our next example, where a sarcastic threat is reinforced by a menacing gesture that does not induce the desired action in the addressee, nor, apparently, the intended perlocutionary effect of intimidating him. The participants are the same as in the previous example, and the pattern is also the same: threat – impudent reply – physical reaction. The coachman is telling the colonel that even if he is now 'a poor Servant', he was born 'a Gentleman' and came of 'a good Family', and therefore it was not dishonourable for his daughter to become engaged to him:

for, Sir, *says he* [the coachman], I have as good Blood in my Veins as yourself, with some other Language, which the Colonel cou'd not bear; upon which, he took his Sword in his Hand … and opening the Door, said (with a little Smile) <u>Then, Sir, if you don't immediately get out of my House, I'll let some of your Gentlemanly Blood out for you, and that presently too.</u>
Sir, *says the Coachman*, I am none of your Servant, *now*, but as good a Man as your self: This provok'd the Colonel farther, and he rose up … and thrust the Villain out of his Door, and kick'd him down the Steps. (Defoe 1724, 182; emphasis added)

The two above examples illustrate impoliteness eliciting aggressiveness, both verbal and physical, and show that the two phenomena are often in a cause-effect relation. More importantly, the second example seems to confirm our questioning of the status of threats as impolite acts. It shows that in fact polite linguistic devices – such as the euphemistic mock politeness[27] expressed in 'I'll let some of your Gentlemanly Blood out for you' – far from minimizing the speaker's commitment, transmit to the addressee a perlocutionary,

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[27] The speaker himself offers to do something that is unfavourable to the addressee.

intimidating intent, adding sarcasm to the threat and aggravating the speaker's manifestation of his authority and power.

Threats are aggressive unless used in jest and habitually by the more powerful speaker:

This Gentleman, in reproving his Steward … us'd this extraordinary Expression, almost upon all Occasions, Prithee *Humphry*, don't be sawcy; I can't bear your insolent Tongue; *I'll kill you*, you Dog, if you talk so to me, I tell you, *I'll kill you*; this he often said in Jest, after he had us'd it pretty much. (Defoe 1724, 203)

Whether exaggerated and jocular threats preserve some of their aggressive quality – especially in the eyes of an external observer – or whether they lose it completely is for the modern reader hard to say.

6. *Reproaches*

In Vanderveken's classification, reproaches are placed among assertive speech acts, and described as being used 'to accuse with the special mode of achievement of adding personal displeasure as a punishment for the wrongdoing' (1990, 179). In Brown and Levinson reproaches are classified as impolite because they threaten positive face, 'by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings' (1987, 66). Like threats, reproaches are issued from a position of authority, especially moral authority. But it is possible that, as in the case of threats, 'aggressive' is a more appropriate descriptor for reproaches than 'impolite'.

We mentioned earlier that masters were responsible for both the physical and spiritual welfare of their servants. In their roles as moral instructors, they had a duty to 'correct them [servants] in their faults' (Delany 1744, 189, 209). The prototypical speech act serving the function of correcting is the reproach. This is evident in Swinnock, where reproof is necessary in case of lying or swearing: 'Reproof is due to a servant sinning, as much as his diet; nay, a servant that will not be corrected with words, must with blows, Prov.29.19' (1663, 122). Reproaches are seen here as the last step before physical punishment, that is, before physical aggression.

In the more secular *Advice of a Father*, on the other hand, all physical punishment of adult servants is prohibited: 'if he [the servant] be at mans Estate, strike him not; blows become neither thee nor him' (Anonymous 1664, 41). In handing out reproaches, moreover, the pragmatic variables of addressee, entity of fault and time are to be taken into account: 'In Reproving, mind the person, and the time, nothing requires more prudence, than a right Reproof; if he be above thee, let it be with the more meekness, and in much humility; with thy equal thou may'st be the more bold, and bolder with thy inferiour' (21-22). Although meekness (or moderation) is deemed less necessary when

addressing an inferior, a reproach always entails the risk of conflict. This is acknowledged in the exhortation to be prudent (quote above) and (quote below), to choose the appropriate time or avoid reproaches altogether unless necessary: 'Be sure to take the fittest season; without great reason reprove none' (22). Exceptional in our corpus is the idea that a public context aggravates the force and severity of a reproach, which shows clear concern for the servant's feelings: 'Rebuke in private; publick reproof hardens; and he is most prone to offend, who is past shame' (41). Reference to the negative consequences of reproaching publicly (which tends to exacerbate servants' faults rather than amend them) shows instead concern for the master's face, as in the observation that a private reproach is usually more effective than a public one: 'when alone, a man may be willing to hear of that whch [*sic*] he would not have another hear of' (22).

Same or perhaps greater sensitivity to the servant's condition and feelings is found in Fleetwood, who emphasises the servant's (dis)comfort. Again, the negative effects of excessive reproving are highlighted. The master is

not to persue them with perpetual contumely and reproach … It is one of the worst ways in the World of shewing our Superiority by giving ill Language, and words that become no body, to receive. The condition of Servitude is of it self grievous enough, without the additional evil of being on all occasions treated with contempt and scorn; and if the truth were known, the Service is not the better perform'd, for such perpetual chidings and upbraidings, especially in so unseemly manner … Servants that perform their Duty, do it better with good words, and live more comfortably. (1705, 407)[28]

Fleetwood opposes 'perpetual reproach' to 'equal' usage, that is, 'such usage and treatment as is fair, good-natur'd and humane' (406), to be achieved with good words and sensibility. It follows that perpetual reproach is inhumane, a quality more appropriately classed as aggressive than impolite. Reproaches tend to be aggressive when accompanied by strong emotion and especially when mingled with insults: 'his Master … being provok'd at his Ingratitude: *You ungrateful Dog*, says he, did I take you to run at my Horse Foot, and can you talk thus to me; and with that … flew to his Cane' (Defoe 1724, 198). In this example, the imminent physical aggression makes the aggressive force of the reproach clearer.

More moderate is the following reproach, uttered after good words have proved ineffective and the master has lost patience. The servant has been unjustly insulted by another master (i.e. not his own but his master's

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[28] The term 'unseemly' is ambiguous in its reference between reproach and contumely. Of course, it may well refer to both, given the tendency shown in these manuals to consider aggressiveness indecent and thus impolite.

neighbour);[29] and wants to vindicate his damaged reputation and credibility. His master tries to dissuade him with a reproach that points to the dramatic power and status gap between himself and his servant:

so I gave him good Words, and seeing he was heated … I endeavour'd to calm him; but I found it would not do, he insisted, that he was resolv'd to do himself Justice; why you Fool, *says I*, what do you mean by doing your self Justice? You don't pretend to put yourself upon an equal Foot with this Gentleman, and go and demand Satisfaction of him, do you? … I will do myself Right without Fighting, says he. (Defoe 1724, 27-28; emphasis added)

Neither the reproach nor the insult 'you Fool' seems to offend the servant, who has just told his master that what he 'said to him was nothing', for he was 'his Master'. It seems that when verbal abuse is habitual and comes from a familiar and acknowledged superior, it may fail to cause offence even if the words used are in themselves perceived as offensive. In other words, the addressee may choose not to take offence at insults or reproaches, but abusive force remains a property of the verbal act.[30] This means that the offensiveness of a speech act cannot be measured by the addressee's reaction or be equated with the addressee's degree of offendedness, as Culpeper (2011) suggests.

For the anonymous author of *Instructions for Masters, Traders, Labourers*, reasonable and just reproofs are those delivered without passion and proportionate to the fault and the person. In discouraging masters from passionate reproving, this conduct book emphasises what we would describe as the negative perlocutionary effects on good-tempered servants and on their future performance. In the case of an accident, for example, 'the very Accident it self is Grief enough, without the Addition of a Master's Passionate

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[29] Here is the antecedent. The servant in question had caught the servant of his master's neighbour opening the gate and driving horses into his own master's ground. The two servants were then called before the two masters and the neighbour's servant denied the charge, levelled by the first. At this the neighbour 'flies out in … Rage at my Man … and then it was *Damn me*, I won't believe a Word you say, you are a lying Dog, you see my Man denies it; my Servant then offer'd to go before a Justice, and swear it, then he flew out again, you swear it! you are a Rascal, *G – Damn me*, I won't believe your Oath, no more than your Word, and there he went storming, and swearing, and rageing about the House, and calling my Man a thousand Dogs and Villains …' (Defoe 1724, 25).

[30] Even if the master's intentions are good and he speaks in the interests of his servant, the epithet comes from a superior and is uttered in earnest. These contextual factors do not cancel or diminish the intrinsically negative, offensive semantic content of 'Fool' (cf. the use of the more offensive 'you Dog' in the episode with the coachman). Different is the case of insults of solidarity among friends, where the aim is clearly jocular, and where pragmatics override semantics and cancels their offensive potential; even then, insults must be as exaggerated as possible in their semantics to avoid the risk of being taken seriously and causing offence (see Labov 1975).

Resentments, which only serve to Change the Grief into Confusion, and instead of making a Servant more careful, puts him beyond himself, and makes him not know what he does' (1718, 8).

In our next example a just reproach is given without temper. A gardener has not executed his master's order to make a hot-bed. His master tells him 'that he expected, when he order'd a Thing to be done, it shou'd be dispatch'd, and not the Time spent at Backdoors, and Chatting with Companions, &c' (Defoe 1724, 214). Passionate reproaching is explicitly associated with aggressive, impolite behaviour in our next example, where it is opposed to mildness and affability. Here the master is dissuaded 'from being the Aggressor' through the master-centred argument of power impairment: 'behave to them [Servants] with Mildness and Affability; not passionately abusing them, or peevishly cavilling with them, to gratify your own splenetick Humour; but … reprehending Faults with Temper … For nothing more impairs Authority than too frequent, or indiscreet Exertion of it' (Barnard 1740, 60). This example shows that even if reproaches are more often considered aggressive than impolite, polite linguistic or paralinguistic devices can attenuate their force; unlike threats, therefore, serious reproaches are not intrinsically aggressive.

In Delany, as in Fleetwood, excessive reproaching is again stigmatized as inhumane:

… that teizing vexatious humour of some masters is carefully to be avoided, that dwells eternally upon a fault, and delights in perpetual taunts and insults, upon the conduct and character of such as are in subjection to them. This … is hateful and inhuman … and is a sure argument of an abject mean mind. (1744, 217)

It is worth noting that both here and in Barnard reproaching is represented not as the expression of a feeling of superiority, but of a humoural imbalance in the master, 'splenetick' in Barnard, and 'vexatious' in Delany.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to explore the discourse dynamics of power, (im)politeness and aggressiveness as considered in texts dealing with master-servant relationship published in English during the second half of the seventeenth and the first half of eighteenth century. The study paid more attention to the masters' side of the story, and chose to focus on two speech act types prototypically associated with impoliteness, aggressiveness and pronounced power asymmetries, namely threats and reproaches, both of which have received little attention from a synchronic viewpoint and have also been surprisingly neglected from a historical pragmatic perspective. This article is therefore a contribution to both fields of study, the socio-historical and the pragma-linguistic. Based on data extracted

manually from more than twenty-five advice manuals for masters, servants and apprentices published between 1660 and 1750, it has attempted, firstly, to see how social and cultural changes (i.e. greater mobility and wage labour for servants and the rise of a new culture of politeness) are reflected in the manuals in terms of writers' attitudes to masters' reproaching and threatening. Secondly, it reassesses the status of reproaches and threats vis-à-vis impoliteness and aggressiveness. Our data show that the use of threats was strongly discouraged and stigmatized as being associated with a sense of pride and superiority that has no natural justification. Threats are presented as an immoderate, abusive form of exercise of power to which no one should feel entitled. A chronological shift in the rhetorical strategies and arguments used to dissuade masters from threatening servants can be observed between earlier and later manuals, a movement away from the spiritual appeals of earlier manuals to the more secular concerns for the master's face, and especially for the servants' feelings, which we find in later ones. Seventeenth-century manuals insist on after-life consequences of threatening, which is represented as a sin, and on the negative social consequences of threatening for the master's positive face, as masters may lose the servants' affect and esteem and this will diminish their power and authority. In the eighteenth century emphasis is on the inhumanity of threatening and the master's empathy towards servants.

A similar change is observable in the case of reproaches, which are often associated with threats as expressions of anger. Reproaching for moral faults is seen as necessary in earlier manuals, but discouraged as socially risky in later ones. Greater emphasis on the contextual variables and on empathy for the servant's feelings is again manifested as we approach the eighteenth century, a change that seems to reflect the rise of a polite culture calling for sensibility and refinement.

In terms of socio-pragmatic status, harsh threats and reproaches can be considered impolite by eighteenth-century parameters of politeness, as they lead to social conflict, disturb social harmony and reveal lack of self-discipline and control of emotions and impulses. However, semantic and pragmatic descriptors such as 'fierce' for threats and 'inhuman' for reproaches seem to place them closer to aggressive behaviour than to impoliteness. In particular, in eighteenth-century manuals dealing with polite conversation threats are never mentioned, while reproaches are, which suggests that threats were seen as belonging to a class of behaviour well beyond impoliteness. This, plus the fact that, like reproaches, threats are often represented as preceding physical violence, led us to hypothesise that they are in fact forms of aggressive behaviour and to question the contemporary consensus of linguists about their status as intrinsically or contextually impolite acts.

Our conclusions are therefore that in our corpus the use of polite linguistic and paralinguistic devices in serious threats was not seen as attenuating their intimidating perlocutionary force: indirectness, for example, makes their

force opaque, not weaker; that euphemisms and mock politeness were seen as tending to imbue threats with sarcasm and to aggravate a speaker's display of power without mitigating the speaker's commitment or intimidatory intent; and finally, that the perlocutionary aim and effect of intimidation seems to be associated with aggressiveness, not with impoliteness, though threats can also be impolite if they contain abusive expressions. Somewhat different is the case of reproaches, which constitute politic behaviour on the part of a master when uttered with mildness, and become impolite and aggressive when mixed with insults and uttered in an angry tone of voice. Their possible perlocutionary effect of putting a servant 'beyond himself' and making 'him not know what he does' shows their aggressive perlocutionary potential, but the fact that their offensiveness and expressive force can be attenuated by polite linguistic and paralinguistic devices shows that, unlike threats, they are not intrinsically aggressive.

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