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# Impoliteness and mock-impoliteness

## A descriptive analysis

Michael Furman

In this article I offer an empirical analysis of impoliteness and mock-impoliteness in colloquial Russian conversation by examining the ways in which interlocutors produce and display an orientation to impolite and mock-impolite utterances. The corpus consists of recorded video from naturally occurring talk-in-interaction from the Russian reality television show *Dom Dva* 'House Two'. I argue that both, first-order, participant-constructed and second-order, analyst-constructed approaches to politeness and impoliteness studies can, and should, be used to inform one another. I use both approaches in order to analyze the specific ways mock-impolite and impolite turns are designed linguistically (through lexical items, turn structure and prosody) and paralinguistically (through laughter, pauses and body language). Further, I examine how these turns are discursively co-constructed by the interlocutors.

**Keywords:** mock-impoliteness, colloquial Russian, reality television, impoliteness, speech act theory

### 1. Introduction

Scholars of impoliteness have rightly observed that studies of impoliteness have traditionally been marginalized relative to those which focus on politeness (Bousfield 2008: 17). Recently, this imbalance has begun to be addressed; scholars such as Jonathan Culpeper (1996, 2005), Derek Bousfield (2007, 2008), Marina Terkourafi (2003, 2005, 2008) and others have been very active in developing and enlarging the growing field of impoliteness. Indeed, the *Journal of Politeness Research* devoted a special issue to impoliteness in 2008, and so did the journal of *Intercultural Pragmatics* in 2010.

The related topic of mock-impoliteness has yet to become a major area of research within politeness and impoliteness studies. In this article, I analyze both

impolite and mock-impolite utterances. *Mock-impoliteness* is defined in terms of impoliteness, as it is parasitic on impoliteness: mock-impolite utterances contain the same lexical content as impolite utterances but, above all, the socially conventionalized impolite meaning has been negated. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between what is said (the locution) and the socially conventionalized meaning (the illocution) of a given utterance. In its use of data from unscripted television, this work can be compared with some recent studies on impoliteness that analyze the dialogue in English-language documentaries and reality television (Culpeper 2005; Bousfield 2008). While there have been a few studies that describe and analyze impoliteness in Russian (Zemskaja 1994; Larina 2009), this is the first study to investigate the phenomena of mock-impoliteness in colloquial Russian.

## 2. Previous research

### 2.1 Impoliteness

Research on politeness (as well as subsequent and current work on impoliteness and mock-impoliteness) builds on J. L. Austin's foundational work *How to do things with words*. There he distinguishes between the three acts involved in performative utterances – the *locution* (the literal content of what is said), the *illocution* (the socially conventionalized meaning of what is said) and the *perlocution* (the effects or consequences of what is said). These insights have allowed linguists and philosophers of language to analyze how language functions as a means to accomplish social action.

In their seminal (if controversial) study of language used to perform social action, Brown and Levinson (1987) posit a model speaker who, in performing a face-threatening speech act (FTA), selects a given strategy from a repertory of five superstrategies – *avoiding the FTA*, *off-record*, *bald on record*, *positive politeness*,<sup>1</sup> and *negative politeness*<sup>2</sup> – in order to index the proper level of politeness. Culpeper (1996) extends this model to the phenomenon of impoliteness, which he calls a “parasite of politeness” (Culpeper 1996: 355). Culpeper conceives of impoliteness as the use of intentionally face threatening acts and lays out five super strategies

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1. *Positive politeness*, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), is the desire to have your wants and desires also be the wants and desires of the group.

2. *Negative politeness*, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), is the desire to have your own will to be free from impingement.

(the inverse of the five super strategies put forth by Brown and Levinson) that speakers use to make impolite utterances:

1. *Bald on record impoliteness*: performing the FTA in a direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise way even when face considerations are relevant.
2. *Positive impoliteness*: strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.
3. *Negative impoliteness*: strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.
4. *Sarcasm or mock politeness*: performing the FTA with politeness strategies that are obviously insincere.
5. *Withhold politeness*: Not performing politeness work where it is expected.

As Culpeper's initial model of impoliteness is based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, it has been subject to the same criticisms – in particular, that it is decontextualized and puts a strict emphasis on production to the exclusion of perception. Culpeper's revision of his model (2005) is in line with the general switch in politeness and impoliteness studies from classifying utterances using an analyst-constructed, second-order conceptions to participant-centered, first-order conceptions.

## 2.2 Mock-impoliteness

One of the earliest works on mock-impolite behavior is Labov's (1972) study of the phenomenon of sounding (the competitive usage of ritual insults) among the youth of the African-American community in inner-city New York. Labov notes that sounds have a rigid structure: they cannot be genuine insults but have to be obviously false, as shown by ritualized cues. In addition, the use of a sound often leads to the occurrence of a second sound designed to "top" the first (Labov 1972: 153). The two sounds thus form adjacency pairs where the production of one sound leads to the expectation of another sound.

Subsequent approaches to mock-impoliteness preserve the notion that ritualized cues are key to separating impoliteness from mock-impoliteness. Thus Culpeper defines *mock-impoliteness* as "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence" (Culpeper 1996: 352). Leech characterizes *banter* as mock-impoliteness meant to encourage social harmony (1983: 254). Kienpointner offers a typology of rudeness where mock-impoliteness is conceived of as a form of cooperative and simulated rudeness (Kienpointner 1997: 261). A more recent study by Bernal (2008) on insults in colloquial Valencian Spanish divides impoliteness into two types: authentically

impolite speech acts and inauthentically impolite speech acts. Bernal also argues that addressees oriented to authentically impolite speech acts differently than to inauthentically impolite ones; mock-impolite utterances are typically accompanied by laughter or a joke, while authentically impolite utterances typically evoke protests and confrontation.

These studies point to the importance of conventionalized meanings. These allow for a mock-impolite utterance to carry some sort of additional information that negates the conventional impolite meaning of the utterance; this, in turn, allows for the interpretation of the utterances as mock-impolite rather than impolite.

### 3. Methodology

Each of us have an understanding of what is and is not politic (Watts 2003) to the interaction at hand, yet this understanding is discursively negotiated anew through each interaction. Further, the structure of talk-in-interaction gives both the analysts and the interlocutors the ability to monitor this negotiation and display our understanding of it to our interlocutors. The field of conversational analysis (CA) has taken the strict empirical stance that their understandings of interaction are to be based only on publicly available information that is displayed during talk-in-interaction. In general, CA describes the procedures and expectations with which participants produce and understand ordinary conversational conduct (Heritage 1984:245). Sacks and Schlegloff argue for the “sequential implicativeness” of a turn, by which it projects a relevant next turn; they observe that many conversational actions form a pair linkage, which they term *adjacency pairs* (1973:295–296). Among such adjacency pairs are the ritualized exchanges of *Hello* and *Goodbye*, but notably also more complicatedly paired actions such as question-answer, request-grant/rejection, etc. Sacks and Schlegloff do not make the claim that adjacency pairs are inherently linked or invariably produced as succeeding actions. Rather, their claim is that there is a normative framework, such that, after the hearer’s recognition of an utterance of a first pair part (a question, request etc.), there is the expectation derived from the interlocutors’ habitus that the next speaker will produce the second pair part (e.g., an answer to the question, the granting of the request).<sup>3</sup> This expectation is contingent upon the utterance of the first turn of the adjacency pair; it allows the interlocutors, as well as analysts,

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3. It should be noted that, even though there is an expectation that the second member of the pair will follow the first, this expectation is outside of the adjacency pair itself. It is not entirely clear where in the process the recognition of the first member of the adjacency pair occurs.

to find that specific conversational events (e.g., answers to questions, refusals of requests) are either present or absent. The fact that conversation is built up of successive turns allows for the interlocutors (and analysts) to demonstrate their mutual understanding of the task at hand without having to appeal to cognitive projections of politic behavior.<sup>4</sup> In this way the interlocutors are able to publicly display and negotiate their understanding of utterances as being mock-impolite or impolite. Following this, I take the position that adjacency pairs can be used to *do impoliteness* and, accordingly, to *do mock-impoliteness*. Impoliteness and mock-impoliteness can be created using any number of turns – from a single turn (in a single profane utterance or command) all the way to an indefinite string of profane language over the course of innumerable turns.

In analyzing my Russian data from *Dom Dva*, I combine aspects of speech act theory and the impoliteness strategies formulated by Culpeper (1996) with tenets from Conversation Analysis (adjacency pairs and the use of natural talk-in-interaction). The given approach acknowledges certain conventionalized understandings of utterances, while still allowing the participants themselves to negotiate and discursively create the local meanings of the utterances. Specifically, I adopt Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies as a set of super strategies that the interlocutors both use and manipulate while ultimately using their publicly displayed understanding of the utterances to classify the utterances as impolite or mock-impolite.

Earlier I noted that Culpeper considers impoliteness to be parasitic on politeness. In much the same way, I argue that mock-impoliteness is parasitic on impoliteness. That is, mock-impolite utterances necessarily contain linguistic or paralinguistic features of a characteristically impolite utterance. I contend that the contents of impolite and mock-impolite utterances are one and the same at the level of the *locution*; consequently impolite and mock-impolite interpretations arise from identical locutions. The difference between genuine and mock-impoliteness arises at the level of the *illocution*, the socialized meaning of the utterance. I propose that, in addition to impolite illocutions, there exist also mock-impolite illocutions. A mock-impolite illocution is one in which the socially conventionalized impolite illocutionary force has been negated. This negation is most often accomplished through contextual factors (as in a host licensed by their authority in a ritualized aspect of the show (Culpeper 2005); cf. the discussion of Clip 2, below). It can also be explicitly mentioned (*I'm kidding*, also present in my corpus) or signaled by paralinguistic cues (winks, laughter, gestures or general body

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4. Conversation analysts have also noted that adjacency pairs can also be utilized to accomplish particular actions such as rejections of requests, offers, proposals, agreements and disagreements (Pomerantz 1984), to name just a few.

language) and/or prosody. Thus, the difference between an impolite illocution and a mock-impolite illocution is in the intended illocutionary force, the desired uptake and potentially, the perlocutionary effect rather than in the lexical content or explicit form (the locution). Yet, whereas impolite illocutions are intended to scorn, belittle or otherwise use further impoliteness strategies, mock-impoliteness illocutions carry no such intention and can be affiliative; that is, they can promote social solidarity by signaling that the interlocutors share their own set of social norms, which is in some ways separate from the larger conventions of social interaction.

### 3.1 Data

My corpus consists of 18 clips of naturally occurring speech (8 mock-impolite and 10 impolite ) gathered from over 40 hours of streaming content through the website for the Russian reality television show *Dom 2* ([www.dom2.ru](http://www.dom2.ru)). *Dom Dva* is a reality television show where the participants are explicitly trying to *postroit' ljubov'* ('build a loving relationship'). The majority of the participants live on site in housing built specifically for the show and have their lives continually filmed. Some participants rotate in and out of the show weekly; however, the majority of the participants have been on the show for a year or more.

In order to accurately transcribe the talk-in-interaction and note relevant paralinguistic features, I captured the free streaming content from the website [www.dom2.ru](http://www.dom2.ru) (last accessed on February 28 2011) using the screen capture technology Snapz Pro X. This allowed the files to be saved to the hard-drive where they could then be accessed and viewed repeatedly and, where necessary, discussed with native speakers of Russian.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Analysis

Turning now to the data, we can see the theoretical principles discussed above at work. I first offer an analysis of *impolite* turns in order to establish a descriptive account of impoliteness before analyzing the mock-impolite turns. The classification of these utterances is done in accordance with Culpeper's impoliteness strategies (1996: 356–357). It is important to note that the analysis that follows is not a

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5. In making transcriptions from the streams, I utilized a set of transcription conventions widely used by conversation analysts (see the Appendix). I chose this form of transcription because it was better able to capture relevant nuances and details within the conversation than other transcription conventions.

comprehensive account of impoliteness and mock-impoliteness in Russian in all of their possible manifestations. Such an account would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. Rather, the analysis is intended to describe particular examples. Nevertheless, these examples do shed light on some of the possible strategies interlocutors can use to express and negotiate impoliteness and mock-impoliteness in other contexts.

#### 4.1 Impoliteness

Clip 1 features the impoliteness strategy of *condescending scorn* or *ridicule*. This interaction has four participants, Sergej Ermakov (S), Tat'jana (T), Inna (I), and Elja (who does not speak in the clip below), although the conversation is largely dominated by Sergej and Tat'jana. They are seated at the kitchen table drinking tea and snacking. The conversation at hand has focused on the potential outcomes of the upcoming ladies' vote, where there is the distinct possibility that Tat'jana will be voted off of the show. Right before the instance of impoliteness, Sergej has been attempting to narrate a story; Tat'jana has been continually interrupting him to dispute his facts.

##### *Clip 1: Past' zakroj! 'Shut your trap!'*

(1)

1. S: ..., slyšiš'? Svoju past' zakroj! S tobom [razgovarivaju!]
  2. T: [Oxrenel, čto li?]
  3. Pas[t' u tebjā!]
  4. S: [Past' zakroj!] Ty čmo
  5. T: =Serëž (*throws hot tea in his face*)
  6. (*They get up from table to confront one another.*)
  7. S: .hhhuuaa Ty kip[tjatkom, suka.]
  8. T: [A ty čë menja] čmom nazyvāeš'?
  9. S: Ty čë menja kipjatkom oblivāeš'?
  10. I: Vy čë, odureli?
  11. S: Ty čë kipjatkom?
  12. T: =A ty kakogo xrena ja tebe!
  13. (*Sergej spits in her face, and she begins to kick him.*)
- 
1. S: ... do you hear me? Shut your trap! [I'm talking with you!]
  2. T: [Have you gone nuts or something?]
  3. You're the one [with the trap!]
  4. S: [Shut your trap!]
  5. You loser!



(line 10); instead, she partially repeats her own question in a locution intensified by profanity<sup>8</sup> before breaking it off to threaten Sergej directly (line 12).

These questions without responses demonstrate to the analyst just what each interlocutor believes to have been impolite. Specifically, Tat'jana is concerned with why Sergej has declared her to be a loser, corresponding to the impoliteness strategy of *calling the other names* (Culpeper 1996: 358). For his part, Sergej orients to why Tat'jana threw water in his face, an action corresponding to the impoliteness strategy of *invading the other's space* (ibid.).

Both Jefferson (1984, 1986) and Larina (2009) have shown that overlapping speech is not necessarily conflictive nor disorderly. However, the turns preceding Clip 1 are overlapping to the point where even my native informants could not readily make out what was said. Such an observation clearly points to the fact that Sergej and Tat'jana are not speaking at potential turn-completion units, but overlapping to the point where the conversation is unintelligible to native speakers of Russian. Further, the perlocutionary effect of two of the turns (lines 4 and 12) is to cause the interlocutors to commit acts of violence against each other (throwing hot liquid, spitting, kicking); the interlocutors assume physically confrontational postures in the course of the interaction (line 6); and one of the bystanders feels it necessary to intervene with disapproval of their behavior (line 10).

### Clip 2: *Očman 'Deception'*

The following excerpt is taken from an interaction at the *lobnoe mesto* ('execution place'), a ritualized outdoor gathering where new participants are introduced, existing participants are voted off of the show, and new romantic liaisons are all publicly revealed. During this gathering, the participants sit in a circle, and one of the hosts of the show (who does not live in the house with them) asks them questions in an interview-like manner. Two of the participants, Venceslav (V) and Alina (A), have just announced that they are now a couple, to the expressed surprise of the other participants and the host, Olja (O). According to the established rituals of the show, they now need to show proof of their relationship – typically in the form of a public kiss. Alina's refusal leads to this sequence.

(2)

1. O: A po moemu tebe prosto ètogo ne xočetsja net ^ Davaj
2. budem čestnymi,
3. Alin. Začem^ ty nas obmanyvaeš.
4. A: Kogo^ ja obmanyvaju?

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8. *Kakogo xrena*, while rude, is still a taboo substitution for *kakogo xuja*; that is, it's not as far as one could go (cf. English *frigging*, *freaking*, or *effing*).

1. O: In my opinion you just don't feel like it right?^ Let's be
2.     honest,
3.     Alina. Why are you deceiving us?
4. A: Whom^ am I deceiving?

Olja's first turn in Clip 2 contains two unflattering propositions (1): *Davaj budem čestnymi* ("Let's be honest"), which implies that Alina not being honest; and (2) *začem ty nas obmanyvaeš* ("Why are you deceiving us?"), which presupposes that Alina is deceiving them. These speech acts are examples of the impoliteness strategy of associating the other with a negative aspect, and both make this association implicitly rather than explicitly. However, in responding to the presuppositional question "Why are you deceiving us?", Alina does not offer an answer – the preferred second turn of a question – but instead responds with another question, *Kogo ja obmanivaju* "Whom am I deceiving?". This would seem to be an anomalous turn according to the norms of conversational interaction, but Alina is not directly orienting to what Olja has said. Instead, she is orienting to the presupposition that she is deceiving the host and the other participants on the show. The illocutionary force of her question is thus to challenge the question previously posed to her.<sup>9</sup>

The seemingly unexpected move in line 3 demonstrates why it is warranted methodologically to use speech act theory and conversation analysis in tandem. Conversation analysis does not allow for a reading beyond what is said. However, as shown in Alina's turn in line 3, at times interlocutors orient not to what is said, but to implicit associations and presuppositions, which cannot be dealt with by conversation analysis alone. Without appealing to presuppositions or implicatures within an illocution, it is impossible to offer an adequate explanation of this turn.

Analyzing these and other interactions from my corpus using both conversation analysis and speech act theory allows us to draw four generalizations. First, impolite turns and illocutions can lead to conflictive speech (*Kogo ja obmanivaju?* "Whom am I deceiving?"). Second, they often do not follow the expected adjacency structuring: one directive may be countered with another, or a question may be followed by a question. Third, impolite turns and illocutions can exhibit an escalation in aggression (physical or verbal) through the course of a given interaction – e.g., throwing hot liquids, spitting and kicking. Finally, impolite turns and

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9. Yokoyama (1990) notes that responding to a question with a question is a strategy used by Russian store clerks in order to invert the power structure so that they now have more power than the customers.

illocutions can be met with social sanctions (e.g., *Oxrenel čto li?* ‘Have you gone nuts or something’; *Vy čě odureli?* ‘What, are you two out of your minds?’).

#### 4.2 Mock-impoliteness

I began with the premise that mock-impoliteness must be parasitic to impoliteness. This is because, in order for an utterance to be produced and perceived as mock-impolite, it must have the potential to be read as authentically impolite. Therefore, there are certain similarities between mock-impoliteness and impoliteness. The following examples bear this out.

The following excerpt (Clip 3) has three different interlocutors – Maša (M), Tomas (T) and Inna (I), although it is mainly Maša and Tomas who speak. Maša walks into the large dining area where Inna and two other participants are seated at the table eating breakfast. Tomas is standing, fixing himself a drink in the kitchen, while Venceslav is seated on the sofa at the far end of the room. Maša has just returned to the *Dom Dva* complex after having nearly been voted off of the show. She returns to a roomful of the people who voted against her. In her opening turn, she uses the conventional impoliteness strategy of *inappropriate identity markers*, such as labeling friends enemies. Yet within the same turn she utilizes the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) *Šuču* ‘I’m kidding’ to explicitly state her intention and display to the interlocutors that this is not an impoliteness strategy but a mock-impoliteness strategy.

#### Clip 3: *Vragi* ‘Enemies’

(3)

1. M: Privet sem'ja^(.3) .hhh
2. I: =privet
3. M: =Prjam vse kto pro<sup>10</sup>-Krome Venceslava (.3) Vse
4. vra-vragi(.) Šuču – [druz'ja], druž'ja.
5. T: [ahh] Privet Maša.
6. M: Zdra^ss'te. Kak dela Tomas.
7. T: =Super^, >Marija Palyč<. Rešili nas vyselit' iz gorodskix
8. kvartir.
9. I: Da^.
10. M: Ser'ěžno^ A ty dumaeš silėnok xvatit^ u tebjā.
11. T: Ne znaju, mošet i xvatit mošet i net.

10. *Pro* is used here in a parliamentary sense, as the adverb ‘pro, ayė’, rather than as the preposition ‘about’ or ‘concerning’. In this case *pro* is meant as ‘in support of voting me off the show’.

12. I: Budut probovat' skazali.  
 13. M: Da^
1. M: Hey, family^(.3) .hhh  
 2. I: =Hey  
 3. M: Everyone who voted aye is here, except Venceslav.<sup>11</sup> All are  
 4. en-enemies(.) I'm kidding – [friends], friends.  
 5. T: [ahhh] Hey, Maša.  
 6. M: Hello^. How are things, Tomas?  
 7. T: =Super^ >Marija Palyč.<<sup>12</sup> They decided to evict us from the  
 8. city apartments.  
 9. M: Seriously^ Do you think that you've got enough^ strength for  
 10. that.  
 11. T: Don't know, maybe enough, maybe not.  
 12. I: They're going to try, they said.  
 13. M: Yes^

Maša initially frames the entire interaction as affiliative by greeting those in the room as her “family”. This greeting is oriented to and returned by Inna “privet” (line 2), who is sitting at the breakfast table. Maša then makes two further utterances at potential turn-completion points. First, she observes that everyone present had been “for” her being voted off the show – seemingly a revelation that she is harboring a grudge; yet, she then declares that they are all her enemies (except for Venceslav). Both of these declarations are ostensibly conflictive, as they are in line with the impoliteness strategy of using inappropriate identity markers. However, Maša negates the conventional impolite illocutionary force in three different ways. She immediately asserts that her illocutionary intent was non-serious (“I’m kidding – friends, friends”). Further, each of her turns leading up to her greeting to Tomas (line 6) are said with a smile and accompanied by exaggerated vertical and horizontal hand gestures. All three of these actions serve to negate the impolite illocutionary force of labeling her interlocutors as *vragi* enemies.

The reading of “vragi” as a mock-impolite rather than impolite utterance is supported by the history of the interactions preceding it. Maša was nearly voted off of the show by the very people whom she is addressing, yet she was not voted off of the show and was still living with those who voted against her. The delicacy

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11. Venceslav did not vote in favor of her leaving the show.

12. It is interesting to note that in line 7 Tomas uses Maša’s (Marija’s) full name, and also her husband’s surname *Palyč* rather than her own, *Kruglyxina*. Name + surname address is not typical in colloquial Russian. In his previous turn (line 5), Tomas used a more expectable form of address, the hypocoristic *Maša*.

of this situation, the unsuccessful attempt to vote her off the show and the addressees' vulnerability to face attacks, coupled with the advisability of maintaining one another's face amongst roommates, help to explain why Maša is careful to be explicit about her intentions utilizing an IFID ("I'm kidding"). Specifically, their decision to vote for Maša's expulsion from the show makes them more likely to read Maša's utterances as impolite, so Maša addresses what she perceives as their predisposition by utilizing an IFID, smiling as she performs the ostensibly impolite utterance and using exaggerated gestures to neutralize any impoliteness that may have otherwise been perceived from her locution.

Importantly, Tomas and Maša simply go about their everyday business in the discussion of the city apartment. There is a four-turn development in which Tomas orients not to the ostensible content of Maša's declaration that he is an enemy but to the negotiated idea that it was meant in jest; he offers the preferred response to a standard greeting, a return greeting (*privet* 'hello', line 5), which suggests that he has taken Maša's first turn as simple greeting rather than an impolite utterance. Maša then displays her understanding that Tomas has rightfully interpreted her turn as a mock-impolite utterance by continuing on with the interaction in a matter-of-fact way. That is, she moves past the greeting and begins questioning Tomas about his everyday affairs. Thus, by using publicly available information, the analyst can state with some degree of confidence that Maša intended her illocution to be mock-impolite and that Tomas rightly understood her illocution to be mock-impolite.

It is interesting to note that Maša utilizes a mock-impolite utterance to broach the sensitive topic of her addressee's voting to dispel her from the show. What this seems to signal is that all of the interlocutors are above the out-group social conventions that would discourage against the selection of such an utterance.<sup>13</sup> Despite being voted against by her interlocutors only hours before, Maša can still utilize certain in-group strategies such as mock-impoliteness. In this way, mock-impoliteness can also be used to signal social solidarity.

Looking at another interaction, we again see further uses that indicate that lexical items traditionally perceived and produced as impoliteness can also be used to express mock-impoliteness as well. That is, conventionally impolite illocutions can have their impolite meaning negated. The following excerpt (Clip 4) features an encounter between Sergej Ermakov (S), and Polina (P). Earlier in the series, Sergej and Polina had a brief romance together, but are no longer together at the time of this interaction. The beginning of the given interaction is not provided on the *Dom Dva* website. In the part that we see, Sergej and Polina are

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13. Brown and Levinson state that in those situations where there is a strong threat to the hearer's face, one should withhold the face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987:69).

already together in a hallway; from there, they move into the kitchen, where sausages are cooking. Internal evidence shows that Sergej has been in the kitchen shortly before the encounter. Just prior to the beginning of the clip, there has been some sort of physical activity in which Polina has pinched Sergej's nipples. This could be read as being violent and impolite, but Sergej does not orient to it in this manner; instead he smiles and continues to joke with Polina in spite of what seems to be some physical discomfort.

*Clip 4: Sučka! 'Little bitch!'*

(4)

1. S: Začem^ ty za sis'ku menja uščipnula.
2. Oh Ohhhh. Oh Ohhh. Sučka! Za sis'ku uščipnula!
3. ((Said between small spurts of laughter.))
4. ((Sergej approaches Polina from behind, puts his arms
5. around her neck and yells something as she smiles))
6. eh ha huh huh Aj pojděm čajku pop'ěm.
7. P: =No ja v šlepkax^ kak s [bazara].
8. S: [Nu čego] zdes' čě
9. tebe v šlepkax ne xoditsja?
10. P: =Ty bol'noj čto li?
11. S: =Tebe nužno kabluki sročno potomu čto u tebja žopa potomu
12. čto visit.
13. Ja uže ix tykal. Podoždi. ((Polina jabs the sausages with a
14. fork.))
1. S: What^ did you pinch my nipple for! Oh Ohhh. Little bitch!
2. You pinched my nipple! ((Said between small spurts of
3. laughter.))
4. ((Sergej approaches Polina from behind, puts his arms
5. around her neck, and yells something as she smiles))
6. eh ha huh huh
7. Let's go have some tea.
8. P: But I'm in sandals^ [like from the bazaar].
9. S: [Well how come you can't] walk around
10. in sandals here?
11. P: =Are you crazy?
12. S: =You need to put heels on right away because your ass –
13. because it's hanging out.
14. I already poked them. Wait. ((Polina jabs the sausages with
15. a fork.))

The mock-impoliteness strategy used here is that of *scorning and belittling* the other through the word *sučka*, diminutive of *suka* ‘bitch’. Typically, *suka* and *sučka* accompany speech acts whose illocutionary force is impolite, and Sergej’s question and exclamation in (lines 1–2) superficially seem so and are conventionally read as reproaches. However, this entire turn is uttered almost in laughter, and is followed by playful behavior and an invitation to drink tea (lines 3–6). Moreover, the perlocutionary effect of the speech act on the addressee is neither an escalation of violence, nor any evidence of conflict over the terms used.

In addition, Clip 4 features another adjacency pair that demonstrates traits of mock-impoliteness. In response to Sergej’s comment in lines 8 and 9 *nu čego zdes’ čě tebe v šlepkax ne xoditsja?* “Well, how come you can’t walk around in sandals here?” Polina seemingly questions his sanity *Ty bol’noj čto li?* “Are you crazy?” (line 10). In the following turn, Sergej does not orient to this as an insult, nor does he offer the conventional second part of a question-answer adjacency pair. Rather, he makes a declaration, with sarcastic intonation, pretending to agree with her insecurity about wearing sandals in the kitchen: *Tebe nužno kabluki sročno* “You need to put some heels on immediately” (line 11), then offers a seemingly rude assertion about her anatomy, including the common vulgarism *žopa* “ass” (line 11). Polina does not orient to either of these potentially conflictive utterances explicitly; the video clearly shows that there is no change in body language that might indicate a change in the tenor of the conversation. Importantly, both the participants continue with the task at hand, i.e., tending to the sausage.

While we cannot use purely linguistic data to support the argument that the last two turns are mock-impolite, we can see through the paralinguistic evidence of their body language (playful shoving and touching of one another) and their cooperative focus on the task at hand that these remarks are not understood to be impolite. In addition, their subsequent interaction (not included in Clip 4) is flirtatious rather than confrontational.

In the next clip, the interaction is between the host Olja (O) and a man named Sergej (S), who has just come onto the show and is attempting to establish himself as a legitimate participant. The ritual of the show, as mentioned above, is that potential participants come and meet the already established participants in the *lobnoe mesto*; there the host then asks them a number of pressing questions in order to find out why they came and with whom they want to build a relationship. For brevity, I have omitted the beginning of the interaction.

*Clip 5: Èkonomist ‘Economist’*

(5)

1. O: A po professii kto?^
2. S: Individual’nyj predprinimatel’.

3. O: =To est' net obrazovanija eh ha [haha]  
 4. S: [ax ejshhh] huh haha.  
 5. Èkonomist ((*smiling*))  
 6. O: =Nu što xorošo èkonomist i prošlyj borec. Začem ty k nam  
 7. prišel^?
1. O: And what is your profession?  
 2. S: Entrepreneur.  
 3. O: =That is you don't have an education [hahaha]  
 4. S: [ax ejshhh] huh haha.  
 5. S: An economist ((*smiling*))  
 6. O: =Alright, an economist and former wrestler. Why^ did you  
 7. come to us?

The straightforward, traditional reading of Olja's assertion that, if Sergej is an entrepreneur, he must not have an education (line 3) is that it is impolite; in contemporary Russian culture, education is a desirable trait to have, while a lack of it is negative. Importantly, however, Olja's turn concludes with laughter, indicating that its illocutionary force is non-serious, i.e., that her utterance is not impolite but only mock-impolite. In the next turn, Sergej immediately and publicly displays his understanding of her intention by latching his turn with laughter to hers before re-answering her initial question (4). While it is possible that this is a case of institutionalized impoliteness,<sup>14</sup> there are several features of this interaction that speak against this, apart from the laughter. First, the host smiles as she delivers this potentially face threatening act, and Sergej smiles in response; second, both interlocutors are relaxed in their body language and lean in toward one another; and third, neither the host nor Sergej orient to these utterances as impolite in any discernable way. Evidently, then, the perlocutionary effect of Olja's potentially face-threatening but actually mock-impolite assertion is not to create conflict but to provoke shared, friendly laughter. Moreover, in Olja's next turn she moves on to a new topic without repairing the previous turn, which suggests that she is satisfied that her illocutionary intent was understood in the way in which it was meant.

We can further deduce that the mock-impolite illocution in line 3 plays an additional role – creating affiliation. As noted above, Sergej has just come onto the show; according to the out-group social conventions typical of contemporary Russian society, he should be treated with a certain degree of respect and not be subject to face-threatening acts. Yet, even in their very first encounter, the host Olja seems to be asserting that he does not have any education; significantly,

14. This possibility was raised by one of the anonymous reviewers.

however, she clearly signals that this assertion is mock-impolite rather than serious (impolite). While this sort of behavior may not conform to larger social conventions, it is in line with the in-group social conventions of *Dom Dva*, where the host is licensed with a certain authority to issue provocative, sometimes mock-impolite or even impolite utterances at the *lobnoe mesto*. Further, as mentioned earlier, Olja's laughter functions as an invitation to Sergej to laugh and to partake in the social norms for *Dom Dva*. In this way, laughter can be seen as a mark of affiliation allowing Sergej to participate in their in-group norms of interaction. Sergej accepts this invitation instead of taking issue with her ostensible insult. This is further evidence that mock-impoliteness can and, in this particular instance, actually does perform a socially affiliative and inclusive function.

## 5. Conclusions

Using these examples as a basis, we can draw several conclusions. In contrast to their impolite counterparts, mock-impolite utterances do not exhibit an escalation in conflict. We saw this in Clip 5, when the traditionally impolite words *sučka* and *žopa* do not lead to conflictive speech; and in Clip 3, when Maša declares all those who voted against her to be enemies, yet the interlocutors do not orient to her statement as an impolite illocution. Mock-impolite utterances can contain laughter produced by both the current speaker and/or other participants – a feature missing in the genuinely impolite illocutions contained in this corpus. IFIDs like the explicit identification of joking are also missing in the genuinely impolite utterances discussed. In addition, all the mock-impolite illocutions are uttered in contexts that favor an affiliative reading, e.g., flirting (Clip 4), same-sex bonding (present in the corpus, but not analyzed here owing to space constraints), and ritualized banter between the host and a new entrant to the show (Clip 5). The analysis has also shown that mock-impoliteness can also be used to signal social solidarity and be socially affiliative.

With only a few exceptions (e.g., Labov 1972 and Bernal 2008), mock-impoliteness has received little attention in previous research. In this article, I have focused on this understudied phenomenon by examining how participants create and orient toward mock-impolite utterances, as well as some of the functions of mock-impoliteness in a specific social group. In addition, I have proposed and demonstrated a methodology for distinguishing mock-impolite utterances from genuinely impolite ones. For a better understanding (rather than simply theorizing) about the function and execution of impolite/mock-impolite utterances and how mock-impoliteness functions, it is necessary to analyze conversational turn sequences in detail, as has been done here.

The methodology used here suggests that conversation analysis and speech act theory can be utilized to inform one another. Conversation analysis does not allow for a reading beyond what is said; however, mock-impoliteness often involves the presuppositions and implicatures that have traditionally been a concern of speech act theory. Conversely, speech act theory has largely concerned itself with the production of utterances rather than their perception. By adopting the assumption of conversation analysis that the utterance of one turn projects the logical completion of the next, one is able to reach a deeper and more detailed understanding of the production and perception of the phenomenon of mock-impoliteness.

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## Appendix: Transcription conventions

- (.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of seconds.
- (.) A dot enclosed in a bracket indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.
- = The 'equals' sign indicates latching between utterances.
- [ ] Square brackets indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
- .hh A dot before an 'h' indicates speaker in-breath. The more h's, the longer the in-breath.
- hh. An 'h' indicates an out breath. The more h's, the longer the breath.
- sou:::nd Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons, the greater the extent of the stretching.
- (guess) Words within a single bracket indicated the transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance.
- word. A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the grammatical end of a sentence.
- word, A comma indicates a continuing intonation.
- word? A question mark indicates a rising inflection.
- word^ A carrot indicates a strong rising intonation. More carrots, indicates a stronger rising inflection.

- words\* An asterisk indicates a 'croaky' pronunciation of the immediately following section.
- word! An exclamation mark is used to indicate an animated or emphatic tone.
- ((*word*)) Segments within two parentheses indicate pertinent non-verbal action.
- >word< Inward chevrons indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeably quicker than the surrounding talk.