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Impoliteness and Entertainment in the Television Quiz Show: *The Weakest Link*

Jonathan Culpeper

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Abstract

Building on Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003), I first propose a new definition of impoliteness and general revisions to my model of impoliteness, both derived from data analyses. Given that my particular data in this paper, *The Weakest Link*, is a television entertainment quiz show, I will briefly account for why impoliteness might be entertaining. As a backdrop to my micro-analyses of interactions, I discuss the nature of “exploitative” chat and game shows, and I examine the structure of *The Weakest Link* and how it maximizes the potential for face-damage. In my analyses, I show the formulaic and creative nature of parts of the discourse, and also how analyzing prosody is key to understanding the impoliteness. I pay special attention to “off-record impoliteness”, sarcasm and mimicry, and I integrate into my model Spencer-Oatey's (2002) revisions of Brown and Levinson's (1987) concepts of negative and positive face. Finally, referring to Levinson's (1992) “activity types”, I consider whether the context of the quiz show “neutralizes” the “impoliteness”. I argue that the salience of “impolite” signals engulf the context, with the result that targets often take offense in contexts where they theoretically should not.

Keywords: [impoliteness](#); [mimicry](#); [politeness](#); [prosody](#); [quiz shows](#); [sarcasm](#)

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