

Identitäten / Identities

Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven

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Monika Pleyer

Identities and Impoliteness in Harry Potter Novels

1. Introduction

Possibly every participant in human conversational interactions has experienced discourse aimed at hurting one's feelings, at disassociating from and imposing on the self. What participants are for the most part unaware of is that this self, i.e., what we commonly refer to as our identity, can not only be attacked by language, but is actually constructed by it. Language thus not only reflects who we are and how we want to be seen, but makes us who we are.¹

This sense of identity is expressed not only in face-to-face communication, but also in the description of characters in fictional texts. As in observable natural conversations, characters use language to express who they are, how they want to be seen, and which roles they occupy – or rather, the author uses language to achieve this effect. In children's narrative texts, these struggles for character identity are represented in a very clear, concise, and prototypical manner. The question of how impolite utterances in particular are used to deny another character's chosen identity or force a certain (unwanted) identity on somebody has not yet been researched, nor has the question of which linguistic structures speakers can employ to defend themselves against unwanted attacks on their identities.

This paper thus aims not only at describing the use of impolite utterances in children's literature, but also at discerning whether and how this use changes over the course of a series of books, i.e., with the

1 John E. Joseph, "Identity", in *Language and Identities*, ed. Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 9.

coming-of-age of the protagonist. The paper will conduct an analysis using the example of the *Harry Potter* series, as it includes many instances of potentially rude behaviour between the protagonist, Harry Potter, and his Potions teacher, Prof. Snape.

2. Background

2.1 Identity and Face

Commonly, lay speakers talk about the self in the singular, i.e., about identity. The term is understood “to mean the active negotiation of an individual’s relationship with larger social constructs, in so far as this negotiation is signalled through language and other semiotic means.”² Identity is perceived as something that belongs to the individual. In scientific discourse, however, identity is not seen as a possession, but as a process, that is, as something the speaker does or performs in an interaction.³ Hence, “identities are selves enacted by behaviours in particular situations.”⁴ Needless to say, depending on the specific situation at hand, one individual can incorporate more than one identity.

Growing up, children learn how these differing identities are constructed in language and which social roles are available to them at any given time (they can be, e.g., their parents’ child, a sibling, a student, a friend, often even occupying some or all of these roles in the course of the same interaction). They learn that each of these roles encompasses differing responsibilities and ways of behaving towards the other. As young as age nine, children understand the need to form requests according to the understanding and social position of their interlocutor,⁵

2 Norma Mendoza-Denton, “Language and Identity,” in *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, ed. J. K. Chambers et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 475.

3 Joseph, “Identity,” 14.

4 Jonathan Culpeper, *Impoliteness. Using Language to Cause Offence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

5 Giovanna Axia and Maria Rosa Baroni “Linguistic Politeness at Different Age Levels,” *Child Development* 56 (1985): 923.

i.e., they acquire an understanding of which linguistic structures are seen as polite or appropriate in their community of practice.⁶

Likewise, children learn to negotiate their own identities through language use. As stated above, one does not have only one fixed identity, but multiple selves or different layers of self. The self as understood in scientific discourse is not only comprised of features such as one's appearance or abilities, but also of elements like one's family, school, sports team, or other groups one is invested in. When the self is threatened, the areas emotionally closest to the hearer are most sensitive to offence.⁷

These threats, termed 'face-threatening acts' in politeness literature, can be defined as (linguistic) acts which challenge the wants of a participant in an interaction. In Goffman's definition, 'face' is understood to mean "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [*sic*] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact;"⁸ 'line' here refers to the speakers' own evaluation of the interaction and of all participants, including themselves.⁹ In other words, a speaker's face is a mask worn for the duration of an interaction. Feelings about one's self, then, depend on how others see the self and what the self can expect from others.¹⁰ If said others think badly about the self and voice these beliefs, the social position or chosen identity of one's self can be threatened.

2.2 Identity and Impoliteness

Using linguistic politeness or impoliteness strategies can thus be used to threaten identities, but also to protect one's (chosen social) identity or to refuse or accept for oneself certain identities.

6 Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, "Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 464.

7 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 25.

8 Erving Goffman, *Interactional Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 5.

9 Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini, "Face and Politeness: New (Insights) and Old (Concepts)," *Journal of Pragmatics* 35 (2003): 1458.

10 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 25.

The term impoliteness¹¹ itself is disputed in scientific research. The base assumption underlying all definitions in Locher and Bousfield's edited volume *Impoliteness in Language* is that "impoliteness is behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context."¹² Focussing more strongly on identity, Culpeper defines impoliteness as:

a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, *including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction*. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered 'impolite' – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not.¹³

Impoliteness is thus any behaviour that violates contextual norms, is evaluated negatively, and has negative consequences for at least one participant; the definition encompasses a variety of behaviours such as, for instance, the use of expletives when talking to one's superior, or a snide remark made to a good friend.

Kienpointner's definition further stresses the interpersonal effect of using strategies that can be evaluated as impolite. For him,

11 Following Bousfield, I shall understand 'impoliteness' to mean intentional face damage, and 'rudeness' to mean unintentional damage to a hearer's face; see Derek Bousfield, "Researching Impoliteness and Rudeness: Issues and Definitions," in *Interpersonal Pragmatics*, ed. Miriam Locher and Sage L. Graham (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2010), 114.

12 Derek Bousfield and Miriam Locher, "Introduction: Impoliteness and Power in Language," in *Impoliteness in Language*, ed. Derek Bousfield and Miriam Locher (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 3.

13 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 23 (emphasis mine, M. P.).

[r]udeness is a kind of prototypically non-cooperative or competitive communicative behaviour which destabilizes the personal relationships of the interacting individuals and [...] creates or maintains an emotional atmosphere of mutual irreverence and antipathy, which primarily serves egocentric interests.¹⁴

This observation is especially interesting when looking at narrative texts. Here, strategies can be used to characterise speakers as antagonistic; the use of a large amount of potentially impolite utterances can help bring about this impression in readers. However one has to bear in mind that impolite behaviour should not automatically be equated with character flaws or an evil nature.¹⁵

2.3 Identity in Narrative Texts for Children

The investigation of impoliteness in narrative texts, however, is a fairly recent endeavour. Previous research into impoliteness in fictional texts concentrated mainly on Elizabethan drama. Thus, a study by Rudanko investigated impoliteness and speaker intentions in an episode of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* in order to establish "strategies of intentional face attacks designed to disrupt social relations."¹⁶ Seventeen years before that study, Brown and Gilman tested Brown/Levinson's¹⁷ formula for assessing the weightiness of a face-threatening act in Shakespearean monologues as these "provide the access to inner life that is necessary for a proper test of politeness theory."¹⁸ However, neither of these studies focuses on the construction and representation of identities using potentially impolite

14 Manfred Kienpointner, "Varieties of Rudeness. Types and Functions of Impolite Utterances," *Functions of Language* 4: 2 (1997): 259. In his 2008 article, he makes it clear that "[f]or the purpose of this paper, I will use 'impoliteness' and 'rudeness' as synonyms". See Manfred Kienpointner, "Impoliteness and Emotional Arguments," *Journal of Politeness Research* 4: 2 (2008): 245.

15 Jonathan Culpeper, "(Im)Politeness in Dramatic Dialogue," in *Exploring the Language of Drama. From Text to Context*, ed. Jonathan Culpeper et al. (London: Routledge, 1998), 93.

16 Juhani Rudanko, "Aggravated Impoliteness and Two Types of Speaker Intention in an Episode in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*," *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (2006): 830.

17 Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 [1978]).

18 Roger Brown and Albert Gilman, "Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies," *Language in Society* 18: 2 (1989): 159.

linguistic structures, nor do they comment on the use of impoliteness in narrative texts.

Narrative texts written for a young audience (ages nine through twelve) are especially rewarding for the analysis of impoliteness and identity. First and foremost, children's texts often show a clear dichotomy of good and evil characters. The plot often requires the antagonist(s) to instigate conflict, which can then lead to the open expression of impolite beliefs.¹⁹ Certain children's novels thus include a wealth of token structures that have been deemed relevant in impoliteness studies.

Secondly, children's texts are composed with the special knowledge and requirements of the age group in mind. As children lack an intimate experience with various literary styles, texts often imitate children's speech and an oral style of narration.²⁰ Linguistic structures are thus presented in a clear, comprehensible format.

Third, dialogue is dominant in children's novels. With a simple vocabulary, shorter sentences, and a paratactic structure,²¹ dialogues in children's texts seem more authentic than transcribed natural conversations – they conform to our expectations as to what oral communication sounds like. Thus, they include features such as exclamations, short sentences, and ellipses that are characteristic of natural dialogue; however, features speakers do not attend to, such as repetitions or mistakes, are excluded.²²

While the material analysed is constructed, “the type of verbal behaviour in question is by no means unique to a fictional world. Instead, it is easy enough to imagine and to encounter it in real life.”²³ This is of special importance as “naturally occurring impoliteness is relatively rare in everyday contexts and thus difficult to collect for analysis.”²⁴ As it is children's literature's “mission to socialize young readers into the

19 Culpeper, “(Im)Politeness in Dramatic Dialogue,” 87.

20 Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein internationales Lexikon. Vol. 1, A-K* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), xiii.

21 Thomas Kullmann, *Englische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2008), 52–55.

22 Gabriele Yos, “Reden sie wie du und ich? Gesprächsstilistische Untersuchungen an epischen Texten für junge Leser,” in *Beiträge zur Text- und Stilanalyse*, ed. Angelika Feine and Hans-Joachim Siebert (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1996), 183.

23 Rudanko, “Aggravated Impoliteness,” 30–31.

24 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 9.

thought patterns, codes, norms, values, and habits of a specific culture,”²⁵ linguistic structures are presented in a prototypical, yet natural-sounding manner.

2.4 Identity in the School Story

In stories set in a school, the exertion of politeness and impoliteness enters strongly into a construction of student identity – (non)conformity to rules and norms can be the reason for identity ascriptions as, e.g., the teacher’s pet or the truant.

The school story as a literary genre is a preferred topic of children’s literature. It focuses on the development of the students’ character in the school environment.²⁶ Concentrating on interpersonal relationships, it paradigmatically presents processes of finding one’s identity and negotiating it in contrast with others. This narrative strategy reflects Bucholtz and Hall’s positionality principle which stresses the emergence of identity through temporal roles occupied in discourse²⁷ – child protagonists learn not only to appreciate others despite their differences and individuality,²⁸ but also to defend their choices.

Narrative texts thus illustrate which role im/politeness and adequate (politic) behaviour play in the negotiation of identities. Since protagonists in children’s texts usually belong to the same age group as the children reading them, readers are invited to share the characters’ experiences as well as new points of view.²⁹

In *Harry Potter*, which draws heavily on the British school story, these processes of finding and defending one’s identities using impolite linguistic structures are explicated in a prototypical manner. The plot follows the protagonist Harry from his introduction to the magical world with its new norms and values to his becoming a magically adept adult. The story is especially interesting as, in the beginning of the first novel,

25 Eva-Maria Metcalf, “Exploring Cultural Difference through Translating Children’s Literature,” *Translators’ Journal* 48: 1–2 (2003): 323; her article discusses children’s literature from a cross-cultural perspective.

26 Kullmann, *Englische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, 118.

27 Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, “Locating Identity in Language,” in *Language and Identities*, ed. Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 20–21.

28 Kullmann, *Englische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, 186.

29 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

Harry is not aware of his being famous in the magical world and later refuses to be seen as such. However, his teacher Prof. Snape tries to force this identity upon him on multiple occasions. Here, identity is emphasized as a relational phenomenon (relationality principle) – the authenticity of Prof. Snape’s claims about Harry’s chosen identity is discursively questioned (as is, likewise, the authenticity of Harry’s own claims); Prof. Snape further imposes an (unwanted) identity upon Harry by means of his institutionalized power as a superior and teacher.³⁰

This raises the question of how, at the micro level of specific talk exchanges, Harry negotiates his role as a student and as an individual in conversation with a teacher who seems to be undermining his chosen identity. Further, it raises the question of which strategies are used by Prof. Snape to impress a certain identity upon Harry, and which strategies are used by Harry to ascertain his own identity and refuse the one Prof. Snape claims that Harry wants for himself. A change in strategies used by Harry to defend his chosen identity and to position himself in opposition to Prof. Snape is expected to occur over the course of the series.

3. Method

All of the conversations between Harry Potter (HP) and Prof. Snape (SN) from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (the first *Harry Potter* book, published in 1997) and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (the sixth instalment of the series, 2005) were selected for analysis. The sixth book was given precedence over the seventh and final volume as the latter contains almost no meaningful interaction between the two characters.

The data were analysed using analytic categories developed by Culpeper³¹ (see figure 1). Further, Watts’s concepts of politic behaviour, i.e., linguistic behaviour that is deemed acceptable and appropriate in a given situation, was included in the analysis, as well as polite behaviour, i.e. behaviour that exceeds expectable behavioural norms for a given context.³² The paper thus follows a theory-based or second-order

30 This imposition of identity in the narrative fits well with Bucholtz and Hall’s framework for language and identity. Cf. Bucholtz and Hall, “Locating Identity in Language,” 23–24, especially types 2 (authentication and denaturalisation) and 3 (authorisation and illegitimation) of the relationality principle.

31 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 135–36; 155–56.

32 Richard J. Watts, *Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

approach.³³ However, there is a set of shared conventions that allows for (out-of-context) judgments that laypeople make about certain expressions – these often coincide with categories in classical established models.³⁴ As Culpeper’s categories are gleaned from a diary report study, they might thus conform to what most ordinary speakers understand as open to an interpretation as impolite.

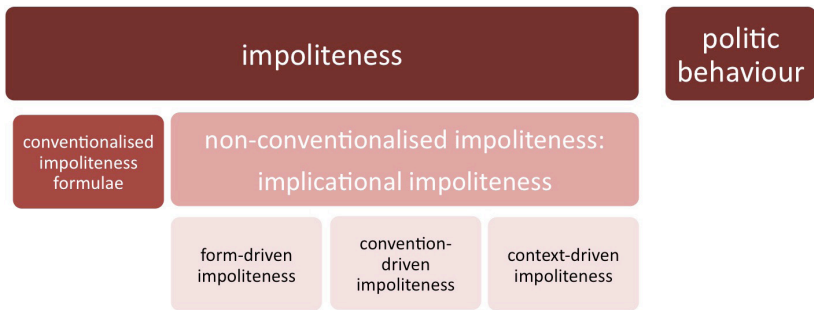


Fig. 1: Conventionalised and implicational impoliteness strategies

The first – and fairly direct – way of insulting another participant is the use of conventionalised impoliteness formulae. Building on Leech’s pragmalinguistic or semantic (im)politeness,³⁵ this category comprises strategies that are commonly associated with impoliteness and thus come to be seen as impolite in almost every context of use, i.e., they become conventionalised. Examples are dismissals (“get lost”), pointed criticisms (“that is absolutely rubbish”), or personalized negative assertions (“you make me sick”).³⁶ However, it is the interaction between context and linguistic expressions that clearly classifies an utterance as impolite: while the word “cunt” alone can be a positive attribute among a group of friends, the utterance “you cunt” with falling intonation and an expression of disgust is less likely to be interpreted positively.³⁷ Conventionalized

33 Gino Eelen, *A Critique of Politeness Theories* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001), 43–47.

34 Sonja Kleinke and Birte Bös, “Intergroup Rudeness and the Metapragmatics of its Negotiation in Online Discussion Fora,” in *Language @ Internet special issue*, ed. Miriam Locher et al. (forthcoming); Bousfield and Locher, “Impoliteness and Power,” 5.

35 Geoffrey N. Leech, “Is there an East-West Divide in Politeness?” *Journal of Foreign Languages* 6 (2005).

36 For a more extensive list, see Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 135–36.

37 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 117; 125.

impoliteness formulae thus require certain prosodic and non-verbal signals to count as truly impolite.³⁸

If the speaker does not choose this direct way of attacking the hearer, s/he can opt to use a more indirect one. Culpeper distinguishes three types of non-conventionalized impoliteness which are realized via implication and comprise deviations from pragmatic principles.³⁹

The first type, form-driven implicational impoliteness, shows a marked surface form or semantic content of a behaviour. The category thus comprises innuendoes, snide remarks for which no positive interpretation is possible, as well as echoes, i.e., utterances where the surface form is marked. With echoes, speakers not only quote the hearer's statement, but also imitate characteristic prosodic or dialectal features to express their derogatory opinion.⁴⁰

An ascription of impoliteness can also be caused by violations of conventions. This is the second type, where either parts of a certain behaviour in a given context mismatch or a given behaviour mismatches the context. The first of these strategies can be realized, e.g., by a sarcastic or ironic utterance whose linguistic expressions lend themselves towards a polite interpretation, but whose prosody suggests otherwise; this is termed internal convention-driven implicational impoliteness. Its counterpart, external convention-driven implicational impoliteness, can be brought about, for instance, by uttering a superficially polite statement after having insulted and threatened one's interlocutor(s).⁴¹

In the third and final category, impoliteness is ascribed due to participant expectations in a given context. It is subdivided into two aspects, the first

38 Ibid., 139–41. Most researchers do not recognise this category, however, and believe that impoliteness is not an inherent feature of utterances—so Bousfield, though he acknowledges that some expressions might be less neutral than others; Kienpointner, who extends the claim to paralinguistic and non-verbal features; and also Mills and Locher and Watts (for politeness). See Derek Bousfield, “Impoliteness in the Struggle for Power,” in *Impoliteness in Language*, ed. Derek Bousfield and Miriam Locher (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 136; Kienpointner, “Varieties of Rudeness,” 225; Sara Mills, “Gender and Impoliteness,” *Journal of Politeness Research* 1 (2005): 265; and Miriam Locher and Richard J. Watts, “Politeness Theory and Relational Work,” *Journal of Politeness Research* 1 (2005): 151–52.

39 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 156.

40 Ibid., 157–65.

41 As Culpeper has shown in his analysis of Simon Cowell's strategies used in *X Factor*, external strategies can also become conventionalised if they are used often enough with the same intention and/or in the same situation or activity type. See Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 165–68; 170.

of which includes formally unmarked linguistic behaviour which does not match the given context, e.g., a mother talking to her grown-up daughter as if she were still a child. The second aspect refers to the absence of behaviour, i.e., the withholding of polite behaviour where it would have been expected.⁴²

Culpeper himself does not attempt a ranking according to conventionalisation or other aspects,⁴³ and it is clear that all strategies threaten the hearer's face. However, for young children, the first three categories might be quite easy to understand as an impolite implication is fairly obvious – either there is no possible polite interpretation, the expressions used are quite conventionalized, or there is a strong mismatch within a single message.

Contextual features, on the other hand, might be harder to conceptualise. A judgement of impoliteness occurring might be even harder for contexts young readers are not intimately familiar with. Thus one might expect young speakers not to use these strategies in abundance.

4. Results

The conversations between Harry Potter (HP) and Prof. Snape (SN), including the surrounding narration, were analysed according to the above criteria. The books yielded six conversations for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (HP1) and twelve for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (HP6).

Each utterance was analysed and tagged with the appropriate category. The conversations included no utterances that were open to an interpretation as polite. Some utterances included more than one impoliteness category. For example, SN's utterance "And you'd turn my inventions on me, like your filthy father, would you? I don't think so... no."⁴⁴ can be classed as form-driven impoliteness as we find an aspersion – SN implies that using 'his inventions', i.e. spells created by him, is beyond HP's abilities. The insult to HP's father ("filthy") falls under conventionalised impoliteness formulae.

42 Culpeper, *Impoliteness*, 180–83.

43 *Ibid.*, 156.

44 Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 563.

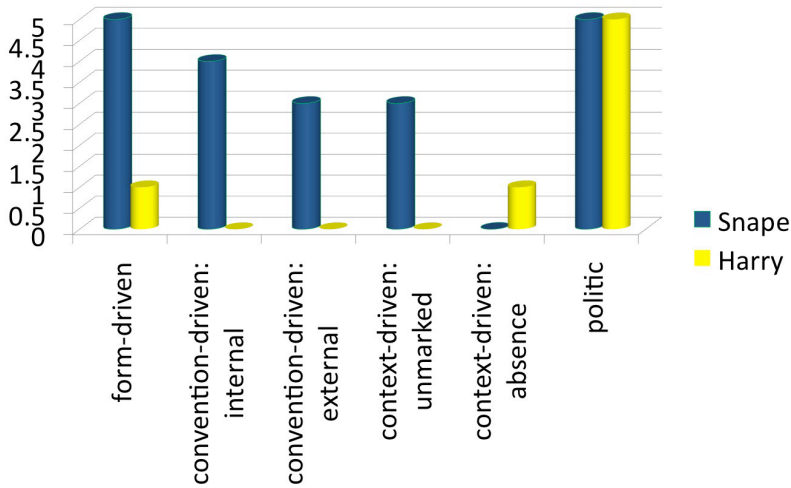


Fig. 2: Impoliteness strategies in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Figure 2 shows that form-driven impoliteness is used most often by SN (five times), with internal convention-driven impoliteness (four times) a close second. External convention-driven impoliteness and unmarked context-driven impoliteness are both used three times.

SN uses impoliteness mainly to stress HP's fame⁴⁵ and, most importantly, that the latter enjoys thinking of himself as famous. He also emphasises that "fame clearly isn't everything"⁴⁶ when HP supposedly shows a lack of knowledge. However, in the scene in question, the narration highlights the fact that only one pupil in the whole classroom was raising her hand, i.e., able to answer the questions posed by SN.

Throughout the book, HP talks significantly less than SN, and does not defend himself against SN's allegations (only two strategies are used, each one time). Of his politic utterances, almost all stress that he does not know an answer ("I don't know" used three times in one situation⁴⁷); his only threat is found in the same scene: his utterance "I don't know. I think Hermione does though, why don't you try her?"⁴⁸ questions SN's competence as a teacher and is punished straight away.

45 In stressing HP's fame, SN refers to the fact that HP is famous for bringing about the demise of the powerful dark wizard Lord Voldemort; see Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 12; 69–70.

46 Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 137.

47 *Ibid.*, 137–38.

48 *Ibid.*, 138.

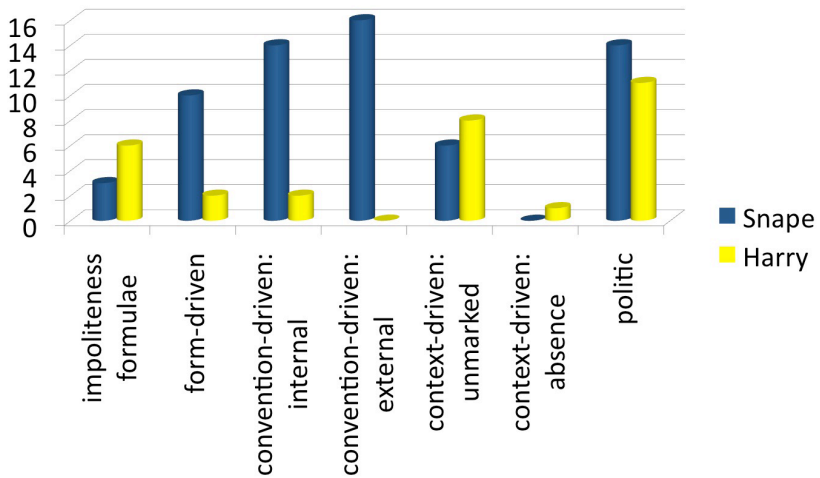


Fig. 3: Impoliteness strategies in Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Figure 3 shows a marked difference in the usage of impoliteness strategies in HP6. The higher amount of strategy usage is due to the book being longer than HP1; compare twelve conversations in HP6 to six in HP1. SN now uses external convention-driven impoliteness the most (sixteen times), followed by internal convention-driven impoliteness (fourteen times) and form-driven impoliteness (ten times). SN again uses impoliteness to impress upon HP that he enjoys being famous. Compare the following conversation:

Situation: In their first encounter in HP6, HP had been immobilized by a spell on the school train and is thus late for the start-of-term banquet.

1. “Fifty points from Gryffindor for lateness, I think,” said Snape.
2. “And, let me see, another twenty for your Muggle⁴⁹ attire.
3. You know, I don’t believe any House has ever been in negative figures this early in

49 “Muggle” is the term used in the wizard world for non-wizards, i.e., “normal” people. While wizards dress in robes, HP’s “Muggle attire” might consist of jeans and a sweater. It is also worth noting that “Muggle” can be used as a derogatory term.

4. the term: We haven't even started pudding. You might have set a record, Potter.”
5. The fury and hatred bubbling inside Harry seemed to blaze white-hot, but he would
6. rather have been immobilized all the way back to London than tell Snape why he
7. was late.
8. “I suppose you wanted to make an entrance, did you?” Snape continued.
9. “And with no flying car⁵⁰ available you decided that bursting into the Great Hall
10. halfway through the feast ought to create a dramatic effect.”⁵¹

Here, SN uses convention-driven impoliteness (staves 1–4) and form-driven impoliteness (snide remarks, staves 8–10) to attack HP on the grounds that he supposedly sees himself as too famous to adapt to school rules by not arriving by train and not wearing the school uniform. Staves 5–7 show that HP sees these allegations as unjustified, as he feels anger at SN.

SN also uses impoliteness to impress upon HP that he still lacks knowledge. However, in the following excerpt, HP verbally counters this allegation.

Situation: HP has not been paying attention in class.

1. “Let us ask Potter how we would tell the difference between an Inferius and a ghost.”
2. [...]

50 See Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 69–76. Here, HP had to borrow a flying car to reach his school as he was hindered from going on the school train.

51 Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 153–54.

3. “Er – well – ghosts are transparent –” he said.
4. “Oh, very good,” interrupted Snape, his lip curling.
5. “Yes, it is easy to see that nearly six years of magical education have not been
6. wasted on you, Potter. ‘*Ghosts are transparent.*’”
7. [...] Harry took a deep breath and continued calmly, though his insides were boiling,
8. “Yeah, ghosts are transparent, but Inferi are dead bodies, aren’t they? So they’d be
9. solid –”
10. “A five-year-old could have told us as much,” sneered Snape.⁵²

In staves 4–5, SN uses internal convention-driven impoliteness to dispraise HP’s answer, followed by mimicry (“*Ghosts are transparent*”) in stave 5; by repeating HP’s answer using his intonation, he is mocking HP’s attempt at answering. The narration in stave 7 shows that HP feels anger towards SN, thus SN’s utterances are evaluated as hurtful. His reaction in stave 8, though, can be classed as unmarked context-driven impoliteness in that he insinuates that SN cannot tell the basic difference between ghosts and solid entities. In stave 10, SN could have chosen to use a politic strategy, i.e., stress that the answer was good, but still lacking; instead, he feels confronted by HP and thus uses form-driven impoliteness to further attack HP’s knowledge.

As seen in HP’s utterance in staves 8–9 above, HP now defends himself more often against SN’s threats to his identity, using unmarked context-driven impoliteness most throughout HP6 (eight times). He also uses conventionalized impoliteness formulae (six times) – most of these, however, are curses that HP utters in one fight with SN at the end of the

52 Ibid., 430–31.

novel. These are direct threats to SN's identity, as their use implies that HP is willing and able to hurt him physically.⁵³

SN also employs conventionalized impoliteness formulae in HP6. He stresses that HP is "a liar and a cheat" in a scene where HP presents a classmate's copy of the Potions book as his own, despite the book stating "Roonil Wazlib" as the owner's name.⁵⁴ In the fight scene discussed above, SN also uses insults to HP's father: "[...] like your filthy father, would you?"⁵⁵ Readers familiar with the series know that HP has a high opinion of his late father and that attacks directed at him will be seen as very hurtful.

5. Discussion

At first glance, we could claim with Eccleshare that "superficially, the relationship between Harry and Snape remains unchanged"⁵⁶ as in HP1 and HP6, SN attacks the same aspects of HP's identity, i.e., his knowledge and his status as a famous member of the community. However, HP's reactions tell us differently – while he does not react to SN's insinuations in HP1, in HP6 he uses more and more varied impoliteness strategies and also attacks SN's status as an important community member who is his teacher and also, in terms of magical abilities, his superior. HP thus uses impoliteness strategies to undermine SN's institutional authority to subvert any claims SN holds about HP's identity. He further uses impoliteness strategies to call attention to the way SN refers to an identity that HP feels is false for him.

As Rowling had the series "clearly planned"⁵⁷ when writing the first book, a further study of whether these tendencies can be shown to hold in all seven *Harry Potter* books would be of interest. In addition, in order to better understand the functions of impoliteness in children's literature,

53 HP even attempts to use the so-called Unforgivable Curses, i.e., curses against which there is no cure and which could land the user in prison (Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* [London: Bloomsbury, 2000], 217). Also, HP attempts to use *Sectumsempra*, a spell invented by SN himself, which HP has previously used in the novel to hurt another student (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 489).

54 Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 494.

55 *Ibid.*, 563.

56 Julia Eccleshare, *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels* (London: Continuum, 2002), 92.

57 *Ibid.*, 7.

it would be useful to analyse how readers of the target age group see and understand these interactions, for instance by presenting salient excerpts to target group readers in a questionnaire study.

This paper has shown that impoliteness in narrative texts is an important research endeavour for impoliteness studies. Further, it has been shown that impoliteness strategies that are more direct are used most often in the first book of the *Harry Potter* series, which has younger children as its main target audience. This is in keeping with children's texts being more prototypical and clear in their use of language. The paper presented evidence that characters use impoliteness strategies to attack their opponent's identity and that the use of these strategies changes over the course of a series of books, i.e., over the course of HP's coming-of-age. The use of more varied strategies conforms to the fact that adult speakers are included in the target audience of the sixth book. HP's identity as a member of the magical community is thus consolidated in the sixth book. He uses impolite strategies to demonstrate this identity and to prove and defend it against antagonistic characters.

Thus, while HP could only stammer "we were –" when pressured by SN at the end of HP1,⁵⁸ he does not hesitate to use impoliteness to imply his superiority to SN in HP6,⁵⁹ and it stands to reason that Rowling's original readership, who grew up with the *Harry Potter* series, would have matched the protagonist's pragmatic development.

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58 Rowling, *Philosopher's Stone*, 268.

59 "There's no need to call me 'sir,' professor," Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince*, 171.

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