



University of Palermo



Department of Humanities (UniPa)
PhD in Humanities (UniPa)



Society for Philosophy of Language

On the importance of being rough. (Im)politeness in the public sphere

University of Palermo, June 15-16 2023

The influential works of Goffman (1967), Lakoff (1973), Grice (1975), Leech (1983), and Brown & Levinson (1987) put emphasis on linguistic politeness, which can be defined as the way language is used in conversation to show consideration for the interlocutors and to adhere to the rules of what a society considers appropriate behavior (Terkourafi 2012). This approach to language finds reminiscence in Aristotle's theory which states that any orator, regarding any kind of persuasion, should always present benevolence, virtue and practical wisdom (*Rhetoric*, I,2, 1377b20-1378a8). However, since the seminal publication of Derek Bousfield (2008), *Impoliteness in interaction*, there has been a turning point in language studies with a growing interest in the concept of impoliteness (Culpeper & Terkourafi 2017; Terkourafi 2019; Domaneschi 2020; Piazza 2019; Di Piazza & Spena 2022).

Now more than ever, aggressive and non-harmonious interactions (Conley 2010; Pernot 2015) seem to have been normalized as a common practice in contemporary political discourse, compelling researchers interested in politeness theory to shed new light on impoliteness as an emerging strategy within the public sphere. Indeed, the rise of so-called populist leaders across Western World – such as Donald Trump in the U. S., Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Viktor Orbán in Hungary – is accompanied by a communicative style where face aggravating behaviour is a distinctive, key element of political success (Rosier 2006; Sedda, Demuru 2019); the Italian case, with Giorgia Meloni, Matteo Salvini and Beppe Grillo (especially his campaign “Vaffa Day” – “F**k off day”) is particularly relevant. Here, foul language, discriminative utterances or verbal aggressions have to be considered as defining components of deliberated strategies of self-presentation and political branding (Marrone 2001). While this type of persuasive practice might recall some ancient rhetoric styles and characters (f.e. the Gracchi, Diogenes – cf. Guérin *et al.* 2022), this also questions the meaning-making mechanisms of the public sphere (Habermas 1989; Serra 2020), that we intend here as a “discursive space”, deployed across multiple media and formats, where different images of the public opinion are shaped and managed by social actors (Landowski 1989; Hauser 1999) through both cooperative and polemic strategies.

Moving from these general observations, the symposium *The importance of being rough. (Im)politeness in the public sphere* proposes to broaden the view on (im)politeness by two complementary moves: firstly, by considering politeness and impoliteness as poles of a strategic field of discursive practices, emphasizing respectively continuity or discontinuity of discursive frames; secondly, by extending the domain of exercise of these strategies, and in particular of impoliteness oriented ones, from conversational frames to the public sphere (Landowski 1983; Fabbri 2009; Alonso Aldama 2018). Thus redefined, (im)politeness appears inextricably linked to power (Culpeper 2008; Bianchi & Caponetto 2020). By doing so, the event invites a reflection upon empirical cases of (im)politeness as a verbal practice (Piazza 2019a) and as a system of values (Cepollaro 2020): departing from a strictly linguistic and conversational approach, we aim to study (im)politeness in the public sphere from a transdisciplinary perspective, bringing together pragmatics, rhetorics and semiotics.



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The call for abstract is open to all, but it especially welcomes contributions from PhD students, post-docs and early-career researchers who wish to engage with the following topics:

(Im)politeness and rudeness in language; critical and corpus-based approaches to (im)politeness; experimental approaches to (im)politeness; figurative language, narrativity and (im)politeness.

Persuasion and (im)politeness; *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* in the (im)polite discourse; blaming, insults, slurs; argumentation in a polemical context; use of mockery; vulgarity and/or verbal violence.

Face-keeping and face-aggravating practices as discursive and narrative construction of the simulacres of the enunciators; promotion of (im)politeness to an axiology/ideology where tone policing is a way of challenging political models from an apparently politically neutral standpoint; textual analysis found in mediated interactions or in media texts.

Confirmed invited speakers:

Marina Terkourafi (University of Leiden), Francesca Piazza (Università of Palermo), Juan Alonso Aldama (Paris Descartes University).

General informations:

- The symposium is scheduled for June 15-16 2023, at the University of Palermo, Italy.
- This symposium is mainly dedicated to PhD students, post-docs and young researchers. A registration fee of 20 € will be asked to the participants.
- A selection of works will be invited for submission to a topic-related call for papers in a double blind peer-reviewed journal.

How to submit a proposal:

- Please submit your paper proposal by **March 31st 2023** to politeness2023@gmail.com
- We will inform you about our decision by **April 15th 2023**.
- All paper proposals must be written in English and submitted to the Committee with the following information: title, author name, affiliation, email address, abstract (300 words maximum), selected bibliography.

Executive Committee:

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