

(Im)politeness rituals in *The Young Pope* and teaching pragmatics

Abstract

The potential of audiovisual material in language teaching (Rodríguez Martín 2006; Kaiser 2011; Pavesi 2012; Bruti 2015, 2016a, 2016b), has been recognized, although there are still some reservations, mainly about its authenticity, that is, its comparability with spontaneous conversation (Baños Piñero and Chaume 2009; Rodríguez-Martín and Moreno-Jaén 2009; Al-Surmi 2012). By way of a case study, this contribution investigates (im)politeness in a recent production, *The Young Pope* (Sorrentino 2016), with a view to increasing English learners' awareness of how it can be expressed verbally, with various degrees of explicitness, or entrusted to other semiotic resources. Given the nature of telecinematic texts and the limits imposed by narrative requirements and showing time, (im)politeness is stylized; that is, specific traits are chosen strategically to achieve narrative purposes, among them characterization (Queen 2015). A corpus-linguistic analysis of the main character's speech serves to identify and highlight the most evident and explicit markers of impoliteness, and what could be seen as more subtle and hidden strategies to oppose his interlocutors.

I. The potential of TV series for gaining pragmatic insight on (im)politeness

TV series as a form of entertainment have gained tremendous popularity in the first decade of the 21st century, partly because they reach a wider audience than the cinema, and partly because they explore a vast array of themes by using innovative narrative means and technical devices. In García's words (2016, 6),

New TV narratives have not only developed riskier products and unprecedented channels of consumption, but also new identities for the spectator (the multi-screen spectator, forensic fandom, fan fiction, etc.) and unusual and novel ways of relating to and interacting with other spectators, with even the creators of the TV series being ‘consumed’ by the process (many executive producers are on Twitter during the broadcast of their episodes).

People enjoy watching TV series (something that can be inferred from the sheer increase in number over the years) because they offer a representation of a selection of features of society that suggest identification with the protagonists (when the setting is a contemporary one), even though in many cases, especially in comedies, the reality on display is seen through rose-tinted spectacles.

Telecinematic language has been selected as an object of study in itself (Alvarez-Pereyere 2011; Androutsopoulos 2012), sometimes also by scholars aiming to demonstrate that it is a useful model to be used in language teaching to present learners with examples of situated talk in which the verbal code is paralleled by many other semiotic codes (Rodríguez Martín 2006; Kaiser 2011; Pavesi 2012; Bruti 2015, 2016a, 2016b). TV series can offer an interesting repertoire of situated talk that mainly employs a wide assortment of sociolects or, more generally, speech that can be recognized for several sociolinguistic parameters, such as age, gender, social class, provenance, level of education, thus exposing learners to many of the varieties they will encounter in real life interactions in the L2. This represented rendition of real life, as Coupland (2004, 258) claims, has the advantage that “fictionalized reality can sometimes reveal social processes more clearly than lived reality”. Quite often, as shown by

Dynel (2016, 119), they feature “more humor than spontaneous dialogue”, in that they are necessarily a stylized representation of an interactive scenario that needs to amuse and entertain. This opinion is shared by Beers Fägersten (2016, 2), who recognizes that “television series are media artifacts that potentially serve as mirrors of society, forums for social and political commentary, and influential vehicles for change, but also, significantly, as multi-layered examples of language in action”.

Some scholars endorse the view that the planned and scripted nature of telecinematic discourse, that is “written-to-be-spoken-as-if-not-written” (Gregory and Carroll 1978, 42), or its “prefabricated orality” (Baños Piñero and Chaume 2009; Chaume 2012), differentiate it hugely from spontaneous talk. As Al-Surmi clarifies (2012, 672), the authenticity of texts to be used in pedagogical environments has been defined in different ways, either as a quality of “spokenness” not intended for non-native learners, or as “a naturalness of form, and an appropriateness of cultural and situational context” (Rogers and Medley 1988, 468), irrespective of the audience for whom it is destined.

Recent studies on audiovisual dialogue have highlighted that it is a register in its own right, in that it aims to sound natural, but is in fact meticulously planned to appear so. To this end, scriptwriters select specific features of both speech and written texts (to be enacted by actors, who might also add some other elements to render their speech more “natural”) because they aim at fostering creativity on the one hand, yet on the other they have to comply with a complex set of norms having to do with the constraints of the media, the conventions of the genre, and the stylistic rules dictated by television authorities (Baños Piñero and Chaume 2009; Baños Piñero 2013, 527).

Some current corpus-based studies comparing screen dialogue and real life conversation (Quaglio 2009a; 2009b; Al-Surmi 2012; Forchini 2012) evidence rather similar uses and patterning in both registers¹, for example in dealing with what is normally called the interpersonal dimension. However, changes are observable in the different frequency of some phenomena: Both vague language (as discussed in Quaglio 2009b) and features of *impromptu* speech (repetitions, false starts, redundancies, broken syntax, etc.) are avoided because of the need for clarity². TV dialogues are necessarily more efficient and “tidier” than spontaneous talk, which – depending on the context – may slip into repetitiveness, inaccuracy and inconclusiveness, features that are often studied by linguists and disclose interesting information about the dynamics of communication, but which may be considered less suitable for language teaching purposes. The fact that conversational turns are balanced and uninterrupted, in the majority of cases smoothly delivered and devoid of the various “imperfections” of spontaneous speech (Dose 2013), proves to be an asset in language teaching.

Yet the aim of entertaining the audience favors the use of a more creative and effective vocabulary than in spontaneous interaction (Rodríguez Martín and Moreno Jaén 2009; Rodríguez Martín 2010). Research has unveiled that both compliments (Rose 2001; Tatsuki 2006) and insults (Azzaro 2004) in telecinematic discourse display a more varied vocabulary, for instance a larger repertoire of adjectives in films, which may even be beneficial to students, as they are likely to retain more useful vocabulary to be used later in everyday interactions.

¹ Not all TV genres share the same potential to resemble natural conversation. As shown by Al-Surmi (2012), sitcoms are for instance closer to natural conversation than soap operas. At the same time, since TV shows cater for a contemporary audience, they depict what authors think viewers would like to find, thus reflecting dominant socio-cultural trends in our society. In Beers Fägersten’s words, “television both represents and influences our ideas about usage of language and linguistic resources” (2016, 6).

² In Pavese’s view (2012, 164) telecinematic language is both simplified, i.e. with fewer forms than natural conversation, and “easified”, i.e., made more comprehensible and more fluent.

The integration of the verbal code in a contextualized semiotic scenario makes excerpts from TV series a useful instrument to be adopted with learners, especially in order to show and teach them more complex aspects of interactional dynamics such as (im)politeness phenomena. As shall be seen in the analysis (V.2), impoliteness can be effected by means of various indirect strategies such as irony, sarcasm, insinuation, mockery and reticence that are strategically embedded in the verbal texture and often do not rely entirely on the use of aggressive vocabulary. The exemplification from TV series capitalizes on the fact that one recognized trait of some contemporary shows is the presence of some outstanding and deviant characters whose behavior can be defined as “‘antisocial’, ‘abnormal’, ‘rude’, or ‘not quite human’” (Bednarek 2012, 199). Personalities that make a lasting impression on the audience, such as Sheldon in *The Big Bang Theory* (Bednarek 2012; Dynel 2016), or Gregory House in the homonymous series (Richardson 2010) are cases in point of people who have difficulty in building rapport. The protagonist of *The Young Pope*, the series studied in detail in this contribution, can rightfully be included in this group of characters, as shall be seen in what follows.

The chapter is organized as follows: After introducing the aims and data of the study (Section II), I establish a definition of impoliteness (Section III), and introduce the methodology and the corpus (Section IV). In the analysis part (Section V) , I discuss telecinematic language and its relationship with spontaneous talk before I consider the advantages of using examples of TV series to illustrate some (im)politeness issues in learning environments (Section VI).

II. Aims and data

I chose to use *The Young Pope* as a source of examples of (im)politeness strategies because it is a show in which the protagonist's characterization is intertwined with (im)politeness. In TV series, given the element of serialization, viewers often see characters as their own projections and tend to sympathize with them, or even “engage with them emotionally and otherwise” (Bednarek 2012, 200). It often happens that, over time, the audience gains knowledge about characters and can build some kind of bond with them.

The Young Pope is a TV series directed by Paolo Sorrentino. The first two episodes screened on 3 September 2016 at the 73rd Venice Film Festival, and it was the first time that a TV series was included in the program. The series then premiered on Sky TV in 2016³. The show tells the controversial story of the beginning of Pius XIII's pontificate. Lenny Belardo, the youngest Pope in the history of Roman church, is a provocative and conflicted character, at the same time traditional, even repressive, in his doctrinal choices, but also compassionate of other people's suffering. As the plot unravels, the excruciating pain from being abandoned by his hippie parents as a young child emerges. His fellow cardinals favored his election because they thought he was a “photogenic puppet” whose strings could be pulled from behind, but their judgment soon proves to be wrong. Although quite modern in his habits of smoking, drinking Cherry Coke Zero and working out in a white jumpsuit, Belardo is no modernizer. Especially at first, he stubbornly fights the scheming and plotting of Vatican courtiers and men of the church, unconcerned with the possible negative effects this antagonism might have on his public image.

³ The end of the season immediately evoked hypotheses for the future and the filming of a second season. The series was a success and the producer mentioned that Sorrentino is taking into account the idea of developing the subject further, even though he is currently involved in other projects. However, the final decision will lie with Sky, Canal+ and HBO once they will have read the screenplay, which is yet to be written (cf. <http://www.ilsussidiario.net/News/Cinema-Televisione-e-Media/2016/11/19/The-Young-Pope-2-Anticipazioni-seconda-serie-che-fine-ha-fatto-Tonino-Pettola-finale-ultima-stagione-/733661/>).

After he reaches his lowest possible moment when talking to a semi-deserted Saint Peter's Square, he undergoes a change of mind and begins to be more prone to negotiation.

The strong dynamics of power struggle and the initially uncompromising temperaments of Pope Pius XIII and Cardinal Voiello, his Secretary of State, offer a vast array of uses of (im)politeness. The rich scenario of the Vatican accommodates in fact many relationships, ranging from close and private to official and distant. The two main characters and antagonists in a sometimes frank, sometimes covert verbal duel, quite often sound abrasive or sarcastic, so much so that they can be defined as triggers of impoliteness events (on impolite characters in TV series cf. Richardson 2010 and Mandala 2011; see Section III for a review of impoliteness research).

In what follows, I will show what emerges from a corpus-driven analysis (Tognini-Bonelli 2001, 84-100) of the key-word and key-domain clouds for the dialogues of the series, and then proceed to demonstrate, by means of a qualitative analysis, how the dialogues are often skillfully imbued with (im)politeness without resorting to offensive or derogatory language, but by exploiting more shrewd and covert insinuating and ironic strategies. As Dynel (2016, 110) has shown impoliteness in TV programs, regardless of the genre, can be considered as “incivility-as-spectacle” (Lorenzo-Dus 2009, 100), because it often entertains the viewer at someone else's expense (Culpeper 2005; 2011, 249–52).

The results of this analysis can be employed in class to better illustrate (im)politeness in interaction and can provide the starting point for deeper investigations into (im)politeness strategies to be carried out by students under the guidance of their instructor. I specifically decided to delve into (im)politeness because the development of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge in a second language needs to be raised in learners. As Brown

claims, this awareness is built on the basis of “existing frames of L1 knowledge” (2011, 91). A “frame-based” approach to politeness (Escandell-Vidal 1996; Terkourafi 2005) is one in which (2011, 71)

through exposure to the social world, speakers build up schemas of activities and events, frames that act as a source of reference for future linguistic behavior. For adult L2 learners, the process is more one of “re-framing” rather than constructing such mental representations from scratch; in other words, L2 learners re-analyze and enrich existing frames of knowledge regarding social contexts and the linguistic behavior that commonly occurs within them.

Both Thomas (1983) and Leech (2014) have amply shown that the nature of pragmatic language learning is significantly different from the learning of grammar, more a matter of nuances and degrees of acceptability than a binary choice. As a consequence, they have underlined that it is beneficial for students to be offered explicit teaching in L2 pragmatics. This could include, for example, focusing on the (im)politeness strategies emerging from the TV series under consideration.

III. Toward a definition of (im)politeness

Before disclosing by means of analysis where impoliteness resides in *The Young Pope*, some brief considerations on its status are in order. In some of the seminal first-wave studies (Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987) impoliteness was mainly conceived as the counterpart of politeness and was equated with face-threatening acts and aggressive behavior. Conversely, in more recent “postmodernist” and discursive approaches (Watts 2003;

Locher and Watts 2005; Locher 2006) it has become an object of interest in its own right, mainly due to its pervasiveness and to its ongoing discursive construction.

In his comprehensive account of impoliteness (2011), Culpeper attaches special importance not only to types of impoliteness (more or less conventionalized formulae) but also to types related to functions. As has been shown in various accounts (Kasper 1990; Beebe 1995), impoliteness is typically envisaged as detrimental in social rapport, apart from some uses linked to banter (Culpeper 2011, 94; Leech 2014, 238–9). Even when it endangers smooth social interaction, impoliteness may have some positive functions, for example that of entertaining, obviously not the addressee or target of the impolite remark, but other participant(s) in the speech event. This is for example the case of fictional impoliteness in literature and in TV narratives, in which the audience either reads or watches a sequence in which one of the characters is verbally attacked and abused. This is even more interesting for viewers when impoliteness is conveyed in indirect ways, for example effected through irony and insinuation rather than through open attacks.

As Leech proposes (2014, 216), there are four different ways of construing the opposite of politeness, that is nonpoliteness (the mere absence of politeness), impoliteness (the polar opposite of politeness), irony and sarcasm (which display a contrast between the overt meaning, which is polite, and the covert one, which is not), and banter (the reverse of the latter type). The latter two are somewhat problematic because the surface linguistic material hides a reversed illocutionary aim, even though, given the intention behind the utterance, banter does not count as impoliteness. Indirect impolite strategies and irony are not likely to emerge from a keyword analysis (Section V.1), but will be unveiled through a qualitative analysis (Section V.2).

Several functions may coalesce in the same utterance. So in the situations in *The Young Pope*, the coercive and entertaining functions are exploited at the same time, the former aiming to direct the addressee's behavior, the latter to amuse the watching audience at home. Coercive impoliteness applies whenever

a powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite, because he or she can (a) reduce the ability of the less powerful participant to retaliate with impoliteness (for example through the denial of speaking rights), and (b) threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite in return (Culpeper 2011, 228).

The analysis that follows is meant to show that impoliteness of this kind is less clearly recognizable as a surface phenomenon, such as by employing swearing and strong or abusive lexicon, but more skillfully embedded in the threads that make up discourse. These aspects deserve to be pointed out to learners, as pragmatic competence is subtle and rather difficult to acquire.

IV. Corpus and Methodology

The Young Pope seemed to be eligible for analysis for a variety of reasons: It displays an official environment that requires in most cases formal interactions, but also more informal situations are shown. Furthermore, formality and politeness are not always in a biunique relation. In fact, many formal interactions presuppose power asymmetry, which often results in impoliteness. However, despite the manifest mismatch in power, there is little evidence on the surface level of impolite linguistic behavior, which is instead achieved by more indirect means. To analyze *The Young Pope*, I decided to rely on a mixed methodology, using both a corpus-

assisted and corpus-driven approach within a corpus-stylistic framework (see Bednarek 2010, 2012; McIntyre 2012).

Hence, first I took advantage of a website that offers transcripts of contemporary movies and TV products (http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_scripts.php) to download the transcriptions for all the episodes of the series. Since the dialogues are transcribed by fans, they are not always accurate, so I checked them against the series episodes (see also Schubert, this volume; Veirano, this volume). Furthermore, not all the episodes were transcribed in the same manner, that is to say following the same guidelines and specifying the same amount of contextual information, so I edited them and reduced or added this information where necessary. More specifically, I added the names of the characters and some crucial indications of the setting and the characters' non-verbal behavior for better qualitative analysis. For each episode, I prepared two different files: One with two columns, the first with the names of the characters and the setting, and the second with the dialogues, saved as a .docx file; and another file with the dialogues only that I saved as a .txt file. Finally, I created a .txt file with the dialogues of the whole series to be processed by means of *Wmatrix* (Rayson 2003). *Wmatrix*, is available online, and, among other functionalities, automatically runs a part-of-speech and a semantic tagger on textual data. What distinguishes *Wmatrix* from other tools is that it allows automatic semantic analysis of English texts. Thanks to this application, the key words and key semantic domains for *The Young Pope* could easily be visualized, by selecting both a reference corpus of TV series and a general corpus (the spoken part of the *British National Corpus* (BNC)) for comparison.⁴ The reference corpora are used in order to establish keyness. The

⁴ To carry out this comparison, I assembled a corpus of the dialogues from four TV series of different genres, namely *Desperate Housewives* (season one), *Gilmore Girls* (season one), *Grey's Anatomy* (season four), and *Veep* (season one). I transcribed the dialogues and stored them as .txt files, totalling 372,406 words.

software also features word lists and frequency, as well as concordances of node words. Then I concentrated specifically on the main character's speech.

The 'keyness' of words (key word clouds) and semantic domains (key domain clouds) in Wmatrix is related to the fact that they surface as 'key' elements in the corpus under investigation in comparison with a reference corpus. In the case of key domain clouds, the most relevant groupings of semantically related words are highlighted. The rationale behind the clouds is that the words with the bigger font size are those with the highest level of 'keyness' in the corpus. This result is calculated by the software by comparing the words that occur in the corpus under analysis against a large reference corpus (which can be chosen in a selection of proposed choices or added by the researcher). In the present case, since film scripts are planned to sound natural or at least plausible within their setting, the spoken section of the BNC appeared as the most suitable one.

This corpus-driven analysis is meant as a first step to ascertain if there are significant expressions and domains that are directly linked to the expression of (im)politeness, for instance instances of aggravated language. As McIntyre and Archer recognize in a similar analysis applied to a play (2010, 180),

an analysis of key domains exhibited in a character's speech or in narration may indicate a potentially deviant mind style [= a character's world view], but in order to confirm this, close textual analysis of a qualitative nature is needed.

The second step in the research was a character-based analysis centering on Pope Pius XIII. Since the main protagonist is an outstanding character, whose elusive identity is a landmark in the series, I decided to investigate his talk more closely in order to discover what makes it distinctive and if there is clear linguistic evidence of impoliteness. To this purpose, out of the

general corpus of transcripts of the series, I assembled a sub-corpus of 14,097 words from the Pope's dialogue with other characters (containing just the text of his turns, no characters' names and no stage directions). In addition, I selected some exchanges between Belardo and his favorite target, Voiello, that will be taken into account to better illustrate confrontational, aggravating behavior through qualitative analysis.

V. Analysis

V.1 Domain Clouds, Clusters, Keywords

First I carried out a comparison of *The Young Pope* as a whole against both the TV series reference corpus and the BNC to see whether linguistic expressions that signal impoliteness can be detected as 'key'. Evidently, keyness emerges in the religious themes of the series, in the names of the characters, in a few Italian and Spanish words, as a minor portion of the exchanges take place in Italian, the language of the Vatican, or Spanish among Spanish-speaking characters, but nothing obviously related to aggressiveness or hostility, for example taboo language, appears (see Figure 11.1).

[Figure 11.1 about here] Key word cloud of *The Young Pope* (vs. the corpus of TV series)

So I decided to scrutinize the speech of the main character in more detail, with a view to ascertaining if some traits emerge that may confirm features of aggressiveness or arrogance reflected in his word choice.

[Figure 11.2 about here] Key word cloud of the Pope's speech (vs. the spoken BNC)

The key word cloud in Figure 11.2 shows that Pius XIII has a rather complex and troubled nature (see words such as *forgive*, *forgotten*, *orphan*). Apart from the names of the persons with which he frequently interacts, the cloud points at crucial nodes in his life, for instance his being an orphan and the consequent feeling of being “forgotten”, if not abandoned and deserted, and the sense of guilt that he feels for his mistrustful relation with God, which emerges in some of his provocative remarks throughout the series.

The key domain cloud (Figure 11.3) is more revealing, as it assembles related words together in homogeneous semantic domains

[Figure 11.3 about here] Key domain cloud of the Pope’s speech (vs. the spoken BNC)

Although conventionalized impoliteness formulae (for example swearing, threats, complaints, etc.; Culpeper 2011, 135–6) do not emerge from this corpus-driven search, attention can be shifted onto non conventionalized practices, or in Leech’s terms (2014, 89–90), more general conflictive cues. The domineering personality of the Pope is reflected in the label *In_power*, which includes items referring to the Vatican hierarchies, such as *Pope*, *curia*, *prefect*, *lord*, and terms such as *power*, *powerful*, etc. Interestingly, Pope Pius XIII uses the word *Pope* 48 times (see Figure 11.2), most often to talk about himself rather than describing other pontiffs, either reasserting his authority, as in (1), or referring to himself in the third person singular to sound detached but strongly authoritative, as in (2).

(1) I’m the Pope

(2) this Pope won’t be wasting time roaming the world

This is in line with the frequency results: If in TV series the pronoun *you* is the most frequent item of all (see Bednarek <http://www.monikabednarek.com/tv-series/>), in the Pope's speech the first in rank is *I*, followed by *the* and *you*. However, the preponderance of first person pronouns favor an interpretation of an evident self-concern, which is however counterbalanced by other semantic domains: *No_knowledge*, which conversely betrays the Pope's uncertainty, and *Evaluation:_true*, which evidences his obsession with the search for the truth. Another element, although in a smaller font (because it is not exclusive of the Pope's speech) is the label *Strong_obligation_or_necessity*, which includes various modal verbs such as *must, have to, need, should* and some other expressions such as *necessary, responsibility* etc. In conclusion, the many instances of *I* as a subject pronoun and of various modal expressions represent the Pope as a self-concerned and very powerful character, imposing duties and obligations on others.

If one observed the word clusters in the Pope's speech (Table 11.1), in fact, a trend that clearly emerges is related to deontic modality: *Have to, let's*, and to a certain extent also the negative expressions *no one* and *no longer*, qualify his speech as strongly assertive and one that assigns strong or mild obligations.

[Table 11.1 about here] Frequent word clusters in the Pope's speech

On the whole, obligation is assigned to others, as well as to himself personally (9 times), to himself as part of a larger group, *we* (4 times), and then to various addressees (2 times *you*, 1

they). When his own self is included in the deontic assignment, the content of the obligation is rather trivial in nature, as can be seen from the concordances in Table 11.2.

[Table 11.2 about here] Concordances for *have to*

In fact, he sometimes uses obligations as excuses to avoid doing something, or as banal explanations: See for example concordances 4, 6, and 14. When the action refers to a necessary transformation, the Pope uses an inclusive pronoun, *we* as in concordances 2 and 16.

Of the 15 occurrences of *let's* (see Table 11.3), most are located in his addresses to the crowd, so they are meant to direct the addressees' future action, sometimes disguising the sender's own identity within the plural *us*. On some occasions, *let's* is only a rhetorical device with which the Pontiff asserts his strong authoritative will, presenting it as that of a larger group, *we*, to be intended either as the church or the religious community. In this way, the speaker's strong will is somehow hedged or even disguised within a collective identity. In concordance 1, instead, the exhortation is directed at Domen, the Pope's butler, who is indirectly reprimanded. The Pope's utterance is only superficially polite, as he uses *we* but means *you*. So the real meaning of the utterance is "Domen, don't utter heresies any longer".

[Table 11.3 about here] Concordances for *let's*

These tendencies regarding modal expressions combine with other rather frequent expressions, which all point to the Pope's somewhat haughty assertiveness: *No longer, no one, right now* (which may strengthen an order or a request), and the semi-auxiliary *be going to* (used when something had already been decided or there are clear signs that it is about to

happen). As there is nothing openly connected with impoliteness in the cloud, such an analysis may be useful to show students how different grammatical or lexical elements can be employed in utterances to either increase or decrease the force of what is said, or to better achieve the utterer's perlocutionary aim. Similarly to more evident indexes of impoliteness such as taboo words, these elements too can function as emotional aggravators (Leech 2014).

When running an analysis of the Pope's speech as separated from those of other characters, I expected to find some traces of impoliteness. However, neither the word clouds nor the concordances have evidenced any superficial impoliteness markers. I therefore set out to see whether apparently neutral elements might be charged with aggressive overtones conveying impoliteness.

V.2 A Qualitative Analysis of the Speech of the Character Pope Pius XIII

From the analysis in Section V.1 the character of the Pope appears quite powerful but not particularly aggressive or disrespectful. However, when watching the first episodes in the series, one receives an impression of a confrontational and defiant behavior, especially when dealing with Secretary of State, Cardinal Voiello. Voiello maneuvered to get Cardinal Belardo elected as Pope because he thought he would be easily convinced and manipulated, only to discover shortly afterwards that this is not the case. Quite the contrary, the Pontiff makes it immediately clear that Voiello needs to recognize his authority. In what follows a selection of interactions between the two characters in the first episode of the series are discussed with a view to showing how impoliteness is often conveyed in subtle ways through strategies such as irony, insinuation, mockery and reticence (alone, or skillfully interlaced) especially towards the

beginning of the narrative (the first episode in particular), where a strong conflict emerges between the new Pope and Cardinal Voiello.

A useful instrument to get students to understand what counts as an impolite utterance is the simultaneous analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication⁵ In the case of the Pope, his expression is often defiant, a kind of confirmation of what his words convey. It is with Voiello, a powerful character, that the Pope's scathing attitude is displayed at its best.

[Figure 11.4 about here] Pope Pius XIII meets Cardinal Voiello, his Secretary of State

(3) (*bell rings*) VOIELLO: Allow me to say, Your Holiness, what joy! What joy! The Holy Spirit could not have illumined us in a better manner. In the name of the entire Church, welcome. May your pontificate be long, radiant, and fruitful.

POPE: Let's settle for long.

VOIELLO (*chuckles*): What a telling joke!

POPE: Jokes are never telling. They're jokes.

In example (3) Voiello first meets the Pontiff after his election and greets him extremely deferentially, asserting with emphasis how much he rejoices in his election, which is, however, not true, although neither the addressee nor the viewing audience are, for the time being, fully aware of this. He also wishes him a successful pontificate. To this wish, Pope Pius XIII answers dryly, in a manner that sets the trend for his linguistic behavior in the whole series and cuts off

⁵ A multimodal transcription integrating dialogues with prosodic and paralinguistic features and kinesic information (see, for instance, movements, gestures, gaze) would allow for a full semiotic analysis. It has been highlighted that loudness, pitch of voice, etc. often contribute to the expression of impoliteness (Leech 2014, 231).

Voiello's feigned expression of loyalty. Belardo makes it clear that he intends to be the Pope for a lengthy reign, but when Voiello comments by appreciating his wit, he contradicts him openly, stating that jokes are not revealing, they are simply jokes. By crossing out the reference to "radiant" and "fruitful" the Pope implies he did not believe these wishes to be honest, while by generalizing on jokes he also insinuates⁶ that what he said is not a joke but the truth about his commitment to be head of the church for a long time. Here again the Pope does not employ aggressive phrases, but by rejecting good wishes he threatens his interlocutor's face.

In example 2 there is a further example of how Pope Pius XIII is determined to unmask Voiello's sugared rhetoric and reveal his artificiality.

(4) VOIELLO: Well, Holy Father, first of all, a small piece of information of a practical and picturesque nature. Under your desk, on the right, you will find a button. If you feel that an encounter is becoming disagreeable or a waste of time, all you have to do is to press it discreetly, and an assistant will swiftly appear with some excuse, liberating you from your engagement.

POPE: He'll lie, in other words.

VOIELLO (*laughing*) (*voices become distorted*): Yes, but he'll have plenty of time and opportunity to repent. Well, Holy Father, if you agree, I would like to start with our top priorities. The most urgent of them all is your first homily in Saint Peter's Square. There is a great deal of agitation about it, something which I, in my long career, have never quite seen before. The entire office of the Secretary of State is working on it. I myself worked all night long on a rough draft, which I would like to submit you. The press and

⁶ In insinuation the speaker wants the hearer to know something but does not want the hearer to recognize this intention (see Bertuccelli Papi 1996).

the faithful who are coming here from every corner of the globe were all convinced that you were going to deliver your homily today. We did an excellent job at calming their spirits, but at the same time, Your Holiness, I am sorry to say that we can only delay for so long. Tomorrow would be ideal. There, this is the most pressing issue.

POPE: The most pressing issue is my need for a cup of American coffee. Would you make me one, Your Eminence?

VOIELLO: Certainly. Amatucci.

POPE I didn't ask him. I asked you.

The beginning of the exchange is once again built on insinuation, as the Pope establishes a logical reasoning: The hidden button to get rid of annoying visitors is a form of deceit, as someone will appear with an excuse. However, he does not bring the reasoning to its logical consequence (that is by saying that the author of this form of deception, Voiello, is despicable), but leaves it unsaid. Voiello tries to shift the topic of conversation by showing the Pope that he is thinking of how he can be of service in every possible way, but the Pope does not appreciate his contrived manners (as is evident from previous interaction) and retaliates shortly and brusquely, holding Voiello to ridicule and making him the object of the onlookers' laughter. Once more Voiello tries to change the topic and pushes the Pontiff to decide a date for his first homily in Saint Peter's Square. He details how much effort he put into drafting the text for the homily, thus depicting himself as meticulous and deferent. His attempt at convincing the Pope of the urgency of talking to the crowd is however hedged in various ways, as Voiello issues no direct order. In fact, he says "I am sorry to say we cannot delay for so long", in which an inclusive first person plural pronoun also removes part of the responsibility from the Pope

himself. He concludes his argumentation with an assertion that unambiguously identifies the homily as the most pressing issue to deal with. A deontic implication is thus implicitly hidden behind the polite, deferential surface. At this stage the viewing audience has already gathered some information on Voiello and his nature. In a previous scene Voiello boasts with his pupil Amatucci that another book has been written about him. The conversation between Voiello and Amatucci takes place in Italian, but the meaning of the book title is *The Man behind the Scenes*, which alludes to his scheming and plotting nature. The Pope, once more, exploits a partial repetition to depart from what Voiello suggests and re-focuses the discourse on his own needs, in this case a cup of coffee.

Teachers might show their students that the fact that he couches his request in polite language through an indirect request is only a superficial clue that needs to be integrated within a larger web of meaning making strategies. Facial and paralinguistic elements appear to be meaningful, as Pius XIII has a serious grimace on his face throughout his interaction with Voiello, who, on the contrary, occasionally laughs, as to favor a more relaxed atmosphere. At a certain point, during Voiello's argumentation, the Pope frowns, as he is disturbed and annoyed by his interlocutor's sermon, which he hears resounding in his head. The Pope's voice is also very dry and firm when he stops Voiello to ask for a coffee. Voiello turns to Amatucci for assistance, but here the Pope, again without using aggressive language, debases and humiliates him, asking Voiello himself to go and fetch his coffee. When Voiello accomplishes his duty and brings him a mug of coffee, the Pope has a satisfied look, pleased to have forced him to behave as his servant. The skirmish goes on, with Voiello trying to induce the Pope to answer his questions and the Pope confirming his will to postpone the issue of the homily. Voiello then proposes another matter, the choice of the Pope's special assistant.

(5) VOIELLO: And has the Holy Father already thought of some candidates for the delicate role of a special assistant?

POPE: I have an idea.

VOIELLO: I do too. Monsignor Gemelli comes to mind.

POPE: My idea is Sister Mary.

VOIELLO: An admirable idea, Your Holiness, and completely understandable. Allow me to add, however, that unfortunately, the Curia has complex mechanisms which might seem like astrophysics. Therefore, the Holy Father's inevitable lack of experience, together with Sister Mary's inevitable lack of experience would lead me to suggest an internal contribution. Of course I realize how central Sister Mary seems to you. We could invent a sort of ad hoc role for her. We won't lack for imagination around here.

POPE: Yeah. You're exactly right, Voiello. She's central. Sister Mary took me in at her orphanage when I was seven years old, she raised me and she loved me. She made me a good Christian.

VOIELLO: A great Christian! Monsignor Gemelli is experienced, I would rely on him.

POPE: Perhaps yeah. You're exactly right, Voiello. She's central. Sister Mary took me in at her orphanage when I was seven years old, she raised me and she loved me. She made me a good Christian, you didn't hear me correctly.

VOIELLO: Perhaps, Holy Father. My English does have its limits.

POPE: You'd better improve it then. Sister Mary will be my special assistant.

The Pope uses reticence, or underspecification, “I have an idea”, to make Voiello fall into a trap. So the Secretary of State ventures too far and proposes his candidate as the Pope’s personal assistant. The Pope puts forward his own choice, Sister Mary, and Voiello attempts to convince him that she is not a good choice, due to her (and the Pontiff’s) lack of experience. Voiello is being impolite in not acknowledging the Pope’s authority and in implicitly criticizing his choice. In this case disagreement (and thus impoliteness) intersects with power roles: Disagreeing openly with someone who is hierarchically superior is tantamount to a face attack (Culpeper 2011, 188–92). The Pope explains why he thinks of Sister Mary, and Voiello builds a new argumentative piece, in which he concedes that Sister Mary did a good job raising Pius XIII as a good Christian, but insists in proposing Monsignor Gemelli. The Pope puts an end to the discussion, first admitting that Voiello is right, but only in claiming that Sister Mary is central in his life, then insinuating that Voiello missed the rest. He provides him with an opportunity to save face, by suggesting that he might not have heard properly. Voiello accepts this and acknowledges that it might be because of his imperfect command of English. In fact, English is the dominant language in the series, with a few occasional switches to Italian, Spanish or to Latin, in ceremonial scenes. The economic profitability of this choice (since the product is available for English-speaking foreign markets) is reinforced by plausible diegetic reasons: Belardo is the first English-speaking Pope and, as such, all the cardinals, Italian or otherwise, must speak English to him. It is at this point that Pius XIII reasserts his authority, first imposing on Voiello a duty, that of improving his command of the language, and then rounding off the exchange by asserting that Sister Mary will be his assistant.

Shortly afterwards, in example 4, the Pope uses yet another strategy, irony, to trick Voiello into believing that he will concede to him some powerful responsibilities.

(6) POPE: You will be in charge of politics, finance, theology, appointments and promotions. I will take care of worldly matters, travel, adulation of the masses, celebrations.

VOIELLO: A most effective division of roles, Holy Father.

POPE: Your Eminence.

VOIELLO: Yes, Blessed Father?

POPE: I was just kidding. That wasn't obvious?

VOIELLO: Hardly!

[Figure 11.5 about here] The Pope revealing to Voiello that he was joking (example (6))

Voiello is too ambitious to think that there might be a trick, so he agrees to the Pope's proposal and even praises his choice. It is the Pope himself that calls him back to reality and brutally discloses the truth, by saying that he was ironic and deliberately misled him. The statement, continues the Pontiff, was so absurd and gross that Voiello should have sensed that it was ironically uttered. Admitting he did not sense the irony in front of a sneering Pius XIII (Figure 11.5), Voiello remains baffled and humiliated. Although the sequence contains no overt aggressive expression, it is clear that Pius XIII willingly deceived Voiello in order to show him a power differential that allows him to be imperative although not always explicitly. Voiello is thus debased and deprived of any form of power.

VI. Conclusions

The Young Pope, categorized as a series, but sharing the narrative techniques of a film, reconciles Sorrentino's artistic style with themes and elements that cater for a wide, popular audience, as is attested by the many references to icons of popular culture interspersed throughout the episodes and also by the fact that many of the Pope's one-liners went viral through the web.

Interestingly, although the Vatican with its majestic setting might suggest that most of the interactions are formal and ceremonial, the show accommodates a vast array of exchanges, ranging from the conventional to the familiar, from the public to the private. The scenes where the Pope is involved, some of which are the object of this study, show him not only in formal moments (perhaps the ones that the audience can imagine on the basis of ceremonies broadcast by the media), but also while he entertains informal relationships and switches from formal into informal and vice versa.

The enacting of impoliteness, in line with what typically happens in recent productions (see also Schubert, this volume) which revolve around controversial and provocative characters (see *House* and *Sherlock*), is often triggered by the main protagonist, Pius XIII. The illustrating analysis conducted, which could be expanded to other characters and to the rest of the series (where, interestingly, many of the characters change dramatically), demonstrates that the show lends itself to an interesting investigation of impoliteness between explicitness and indirectness, in the forms of irony, insinuation, reticence, and mockery. Conventional impoliteness, thanks to its frequent recourse to aggressiveness and offensiveness, is certainly more easily recognized. Several studies (see, among others, Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2011) have provided taxonomies of face-attack or impoliteness strategies, but Culpeper (2011, 115–116) rightly points out that linguistic formulae always need to be contextualized: What might at first glance appear as

offensive, could instead be friendly. A corpus-driven analysis of the key word and domain clouds of the main protagonist's speech has not shown explicit triggers of impoliteness, such as abusive expressions. However, there appear to be observable signs of modal implications: In the Pope's speech, the modal configuration of roles is quite clearly sketched, with the Pope as the one with the widest modal competence, and his various addressees as those that are attributed obligations and duties (in this contribution I have analyzed only the Pope's interaction with Voiello, who is hierarchically inferior but powerful and shrewd, but the first episode also shows the Pope retaliating against his service staff, for example the butler, the cook, etc.).

A qualitative analysis of his speeches, especially with his bitter enemy Voiello, reveals that impoliteness is more often embedded in communication in the form of indirect strategies, such as insinuation, irony, mockery. In this case, a multimodal text such as a TV series offers an excellent and true-to-life environment to show how all semiotic channels contribute to meaning making. When words seem to be neutral or not particularly scathing, gestures and gaze betray the real illocutionary intention behind them. A full multimodal transcription leading to a deeper analysis of some crucial scenes might show the semiotic correlates of impoliteness other than verbal.

The analysis in this work might be the starting point of a teaching program for advanced learners revolving around the teaching of impoliteness strategies. For proficient speakers of a foreign language it is crucial to manage communication correctly and strategically, which means being able not to violate norms of interaction, or if they do, do so willingly and aware of the possible repercussions. As Brown (2011, 2) remarks, interlanguage pragmatics has evidenced that acquiring knowledge regarding what counts as (im)polite is a rather demanding

task for various reasons: first a tendency to transfer linguistic and pragmatic information from the first language and consequently to over- or under-generalize this knowledge, and secondly the limited coverage of pragmatic features in the language classroom. Very often, in fact, textbooks are either too hasty or simplistic in treating pragmatic issues, which instead would largely benefit from the use of telecinematic material. Using excerpts from TV series such as the ones analyzed in this contribution has the merit of showing contextualized impoliteness and subtle pragmatic strategies that are enacted through combined verbal and non-verbal strategies. In this way, by means of an integrated semiotic analysis, learners may be made aware of some of the most convenient means to behave in conflictive interactions.

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Filmography

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