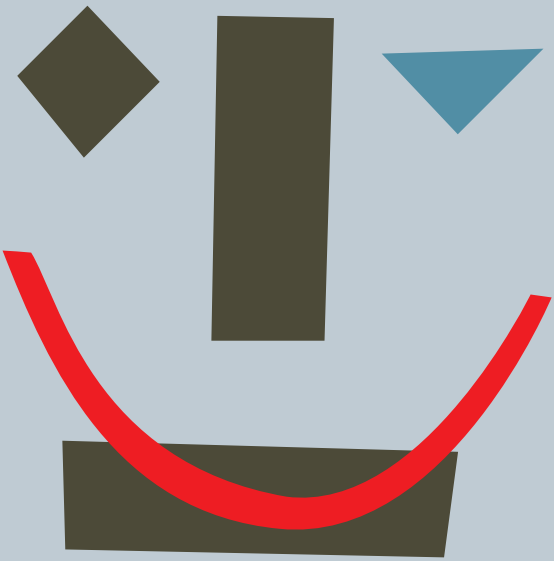
Topics in Humor Research 8

Conversational Humour and (Im)politeness

Valeria Sinkeviciute



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EBSCO Publishing : eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) - printed on 2/10/2023 5:47 AM via
AN: 2294305 ; Sinkeviciute, Valeria.; Conversational Humour and (Im)politeness : A Pragmatic Analysis of Social Interaction
Account: ns335141

Conversational Humour and (Im)politeness

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Topics in Humor Research (THR)

ISSN 2212-8999

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Volume 8

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A pragmatic analysis of social interaction

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John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam / Philadelphia

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The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

DOI 10.1075/thr.8

Cataloging-in-Publication Data available from Library of Congress:
LCCN 2019028750 (PRINT) / 2019028751 (E-BOOK)

ISBN 978 90 272 0413 4 (HB)
ISBN 978 90 272 6211 0 (E-BOOK)

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Acknowledgements

The bulk of the research reported in this book is based on my PhD thesis that was supported by a grant from the University of Antwerp, Belgium (IWS BOF UAntwerpen 2012) and by a travel grant for a research stay in Australia from the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO – V4.301.14N). I cannot express enough gratitude to Professor Jef Verschueren for all the opportunities with which he provided me, all his support and belief in me. I am also indebted to Associate Professor Marta Dynel and Professor Michael Haugh for their valuable suggestions and interest in my work.

I would also like to thank everyone at the former *IPrA Research Center* and the University of Antwerp, my friends worldwide, those who have agreed to be interviewed, and, of course, my family for letting me fly so far away to my new (academic) home and always being there for me.

Different parts of this volume have already been published as articles or chapters. I am grateful to *Elsevier*, *John Benjamins* and *De Gruyter* for granting me the permission to include that work in this book.

Finally, I would like to thank the editorial team of the *Topics in Humor Research* series and an anonymous reviewer for useful suggestions.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In order to give the reader an idea of what this book is about, I would like to start the first chapter with the following example that perfectly illustrates the (meta-) pragmatic phenomena that will be found on the pages of this volume. This excerpt from the 2012 British version of *Big Brother* begins with Sara (a housemate from Scotland) introducing the topic of the Loch Ness monster:

```
Sara:          do you think the Loch Ness monster is a snake
               = like a huge huge snake =
Caroline:      = [shakes] =
Adam:          (it's) a big snake
Sara:          there is definitely something in there
               it's a loch that goes-
Caroline: →    how funny is it that Sara is {[giggling] talking
               about the Loch Ness monster} [hehe]
```

Not providing a full analysis of this and the subsequent interaction, I would like to briefly go through a couple of relevant points here (marked with an arrow in the transcriptions). While the topic of the conversation – the Loch Ness monster – has been treated in a serious way in the first turns, Caroline seems to see the funny side of the situational context, i.e. 'Sara […] talking about the Loch Ness monster'. She seems to be pointing out that the funniness is created by a link between Sara and the Loch Ness monster. Is what Caroline suggesting really funny? Is it only Caroline's perception of what is funny? Will other housemates see the 'funny' side of Caroline's utterance? Will it be laughed at by everyone else? Or is it possible that her attempt at humour might fail and Sara could be offended by it? The continuation of the interaction can provide us with some answers:

```
Sara:      →   = what- =
Scott:         = maybe it's a bracket? () =
Caroline: →    = [hehe] =
Sara:      →   Caroline why are you laughing?
Caroline: →    cause the Scottish housemate is talking about
               the Loch Ness monster
```

While some of the readers might have found Caroline's turn humorous and would find it harmless, when dealing with humour in multi-party interactions, there is

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no guarantee that one's utterance is to be perceived as funny by everyone, especially the target. That is why it is essential to observe how attempts at humour are received. In this case, Sara does not seem amused and appears to challenge Caroline by first uttering 'what' and then explicitly asking Caroline 'why are you laughing?'. Such Sara's reaction (as opposed to, for example, her joining in the laughter) indicates that she does not share Caroline's understanding of what is 'funny' in this particular situation ('the Scottish housemate [...] talking about the Loch Ness monster'), probably because she perceives herself as the target (as well as taking herself maybe a little bit too seriously) and evaluates what was said as something disrespectful and offensive to herself.

Taking these several points into consideration, it is essential to mention at this stage that this book does not provide analyses of canned jokes, nor does it explain why a particular utterance might be regarded as funny or what cognitive mechanisms are involved in the interpretation of humorous practices (the fundamental work in that area is done by Attardo and Raskin among others). Rather, this book, as will be pointed out in the following sections of this introductory chapter, focuses on how humour works in its mysterious ways in interaction and how the interlocutors negotiate its presence, which inevitably manifests itself through their evaluations and the verbal choices they make based on those evaluations.

1.1 The scope of this book

This book lies in the area sociopragmatics and examines jocular behaviours in relation to the phenomena of politeness and impoliteness, two areas - humour and (im)politeness - that have been the focus of much independent research, but only recent years have seen an increasing interest in the benefits of their combination, which has marked the beginning of systematic book-length analyses (e.g. Taylor, 2016). It also focuses on interpersonal pragmatics, in which the emphasis is on people's social relationships, their attitudes and evaluations of one another's verbal behaviour negotiated in interaction (see Culpeper & Haugh, 2014; Chapter 7).

Every jocular verbal act analysed in this book is part of a larger discourse that inevitably plays a significant role in how the interactants (re-)construct and negotiate meanings, try to build or maintain good relationships or sometimes use humour to question and challenge the relationships that they have already formed. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that much of interactional behaviour bears upon social norms: some forms of talk are acceptable or even highly appreciated, while others are not, and all of this is dependent on specific aspects of context. As a result, this book is not only about jocular interactional practices and (im)politeness, but also about the understanding of those sociopragmatic practices as part

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of a broader cultural context and the impact of those practices on interpersonal relationships.

The focus of this study is limited to potentially jocular practices from Australian and British cultural contexts. Although particular similarities or differences have been observed during the analysis and will feature on the pages of this book, it should be mentioned that the primary aim here is not to contrast or compare the two cultural contexts. Rather, this book serves to explore how jocular verbal acts and the evaluations thereof, which are approached in terms of the phenomena of (im)politeness in interaction, manifest themselves in particular situations in each of the two cultural contexts in question. Having said that, the data comparison is, however, inevitable, and some parts of the book will focus on it.

The theoretical framework employed here brings together a combination of different views on (im)politeness and humour research. This means that some parts of the analysis propose models and classifications, while others examine instances of interactional behaviours, which follows the tradition of discursive approaches that, even though selectively, have been adopted for the purpose of this research. Most importantly, this analysis is empirically driven and largely qualitative in nature. It is based on three different data sources: corpora, reality television discourse and qualitative interviews. Working with various types of data means that a variety of approaches to data analysis need to be used. Irrespective of the data type, jocular verbal behaviours are seen here as context-specific with their own situational boundaries. In other words, the behaviours that have been analysed and will be presented in this book are determined by their situational contexts and the participants involved. Thus, what is suggested here or could be deduced from the analysis yields no general claims about why a particular interactional behaviour should necessarily be funny in Australian and British cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the findings do reflect some widespread views, opinions or attitudes towards recognisable verbal behaviours in those contexts.

1.1.1 Why analyse two English-speaking cultural contexts?

So far, intercultural and cross-cultural humour has been studied primarily across different languages and cultures (for an overview, see Sinkeviciute & Dynel, 2017). It is, then, quite easy to imagine that due to cultural and linguistic variability, jocularity in those contexts is differently conceptualised and perceived. However, we should not forget that our verbal decisions related to interactional practices can also significantly vary among the speakers of the same language used in different cultural contexts. This happens because we share particular ways of thinking that are inevitably reflected in our ways of speaking (Wierzbicka, 2002). Also, these ways are pertinent to communicative norms in concrete cultural contexts

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that "encourage some forms of communicative behaviour and discourage others" (Peeters, 2004b, p. 72).

Analysing conversational humour practices and the phenomena of (im)politeness in the same language spoken in different cultural contexts presents a number of challenges, primarily due to many similarities of interactional practices shared by language users. It also serves to illustrate that a variety of communicative patterns does not depend entirely on the interlocutors' language, but rather on their cultural background and expectations related to it. Indeed, cultural peculiarities can be reflected in the way one communicates. For the English, for instance, it is natural not to "start 'talking business' straight away", but to "procrastinate politely with the usual weather-speak, enquiries about journeys […]", which can be totally inappropriate for Canadians (Fox, 2004, pp. 185–186). Similarly, explicitly stating one's personal achievements and being "fond of the 'self'" seems to be valued in an American cultural context; however, from "an English English and Australian English point of view, [such] statements […] are liable to violate cultural proscriptions" (Goddard, 2012, pp. 1044–1045, Sharp, 2012, p. 349) and result in an identification of the speaker as someone full of self-adulation, i.e. a "tall poppy" or a "wanker" (Peeters, 2004a, 2004b; Stollznow, 2004). Another example refers to the larrikin or rowdy nature of the Australian culture (that includes such Australian characteristics as "non-conformity to social rules and authority, […] and upside-down humour […]" (Ardington, 2011, p. 267; Rickard, 1998; Sharp, 2012, p. 94]). This can be seen in the international advertising campaign *So where the bloody hell are you?* (for a detailed analysis, see Ardington, 2011). After being launched by Tourism Australia, this campaign became quite controversial and, due to the word *bloody*, was banned from British television.

Looking at what has been done in the area of conversational humour and (im) politeness, we are inevitably faced with the fact that even though much theory-oriented work has been based on the English language, there is obvious lack of the metapragmatically-oriented studies of the language users', particularly those of different varieties of English, conceptualisations of what they do in interaction (Culpeper et al., 2019). This book-length analysis is only the first step to bring us closer to systematically exploring not only different linguistic environments, but also culture-specific interactional preferences that can be observed in (the language about) language use by speakers of Australian and British English. As a result, to some extent, the book also seeks to contribute to *intracultural* (behaviours in one cultural context), *intercultural* (the interactants' evaluations of the other cultural context) and *cross-cultural* (similarities and differences between the two cultural contexts) research into jocular social interaction in the English language.

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1.2 A note on the transcription conventions

In this book, an analysis of three datasets will be presented and the transcription conventions used will differ between some of them. The corpus data has been reproduced the same way that it appears in the corpora, i.e. without any specific transcription conventions. On the other hand, all examples from the reality television discourse and interview data have been transcribed using transcription conventions described in Gumperz and Berenz (1993), as indicated in Table 1:

Table 1. Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions	
=	overlapping speech
==	latching
(.) (..) (…)	pauses of different length
::	lengthened segments
?	rising or question intonation
–	word or utterance cut-off
CAPS	markedly louder
[ ]	non-lexical phenomena, both vocal and non-vocal
{[ ] text}	non-lexical phenomena, both vocal and non-vocal, that overlay the lexical stretch
( )	unintelligible speech
(text)	a good guess at an unclear word
text	additional information
→	special attention should be paid to these utterances
[laugh], [giggle]	a laughter type
[hehe], [haha]	audible separate laughter particles

1.3 A note on the terminology used

Most of the conversations presented in this book are multi-party interactions with *ratified participants*, i.e. the ones who are entitled to participate in a conversation (Dynel, 2010, 2011a and references therein). In this analysis, they are:

– the *instigator* (a person who produces jocular behaviour, also referred to as a *face-threatening act* or an FTA),
– the *target* (a person at whom an FTA is directed) and

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– the *unaddressed ratified hearers* or *the third party* (a person who has a right to listen to a conversation and evaluate it).

When referring to the interviewees the term *non-participants* is used in order to differentiate them from the participants in the interactional practices in the reality television game show. Unlike the viewers of television discourse, the interviewees are not referred to as *recipients* of the televised product (Dynel, 2011c, 2013a),[1] since it is not in their role as viewers that they were approached and positioned themselves.

1.4 The research questions

From the onset of this research, a number of questions were raised and needed to be answered. Below is a list of the key research questions, with references to the chapters that tackle them:

i. What are the attitudes of users of Australian and British English towards jocular verbal behaviours? (see Chapters 5 and 8)
ii. How are attempts at humour constructed? What can be the reason behind jocularity in interaction? (see Chapters 4 and 7)
iii. How do the targets react to jocular verbal behaviours, especially when they do not appreciate them? Do they show negative emotions and/or claim offence? (see Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)
iv. How are jocular verbal practices conceptualised and judged by the interactants (the targets, the instigators, the third party) and non-participants? (see Chapters 4, 7 and 8)
v. What makes a jocular verbal act impolite? (see Chapters 5 and 7)
vi. To what extent can conversational behaviour in reality television discourse be representative of real-life interactions? (see Chapter 4 and 8)
vii. To what extent is it possible to observe similarities and differences in interactional preferences between the speakers of Australian and British English in the context of reality television? How are those similarities and differences reflected in the qualitative interview data? (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8)

1. Cf. the situation if the interviewees were the viewers of the interactions when they were broadcast.

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1.5 The structure of the book

This book is divided into nine chapters. Chapters 2–4 are almost entirely theory- and data description-oriented (with an exception of a production-evaluation model in 4.4. and a corpus analysis in 4.5), presenting theoretical approaches to (im)politeness and conversational humour, and the datasets analysed. Chapter 5 introduces the two cultural contexts on which this research focuses. The second half of the book (Chapters 6–8) reports the results of the empirical analyses of the main data source, *Big Brother*, and the complementary data, qualitative interviews. Below is a more detailed description of each chapter.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the phenomena of (im)politeness. It concisely presents the development of (im)politeness research from the main traditional theories that were largely based on the classic pragmatic theories (e.g. Grice's Cooperative Principle as well as Austin's [and later Searle's] Speech Act Theory) to discursive approaches offering a critical reaction to the classic theories. Alongside the discussion of such a critique, some possible drawbacks of the discursive turn are also mentioned. Finally, the last subsection of the chapter outlines the view of (im)politeness that I take in this book.

Chapter 3 introduces the datasets used in this research. After presenting the two corpora, we turn to a more detailed description of reality television, the epitome of which – *Big Brother* – is the main data source in this book. The two datasets are carefully introduced with special attention paid to the local cultural contexts. The following section starts with a discussion of performances in both reality television and real life. This discussion is followed by an overview of a link between reality television, impoliteness and humour, which serves to see whether *Big Brother* is primarily a confrontational format. In the last part of the chapter, the complementary data, which comes from qualitative interviews, and its use are described.

Chapter 4 is a combination of theoretical and empirical work. First, an overview of approaches to jocular verbal behaviours is provided. It is followed by a differentiation between *face-threatening* and *face-supportive* verbal acts and the role that context and contextual cues play in them. Furthermore, an attempt is made to propose a production-evaluation model for potentially jocular verbal behaviours. Finally, this chapter presents a corpus-assisted study of teasing that is based on the data from the *British National Corpus* and *Ozcorp*, the largest corpus of Australian English. The analysis focuses on different ways in which teasing is constructed, its functions, the target's reactions as well as some major cross-cultural differences between the British and Australian corpora.

In Chapter 5, the readers will be able to familiarise themselves with Australian and British cultural contexts, especially in relation to jocular verbal behaviours. In

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the discussion, some interactional preferences are revealed, which leads to the introduction of the concept of *the preferred reaction* that can be primarily observed in public verbal behaviours. This concept refers to the target being able to project his/her appreciation of an attempt at humour or at least his/her being able to conceal hurt feelings in front of other interactants and to laugh off a jocular verbal act that has been directed at him/her. Thus, a distinction is also made between public and personal offence, where the former is analysed in terms of laughter and *funniness*.

Chapter 6 draws on the work of Goffman and further explores public and personal interactional behaviours in the context of *Big Brother*. Here, different settings for frontstage (public) and backstage (personal) interactions are presented. It is widely believed that reality television (and *Big Brother* as its best illustration) should be seen as an entirely frontstage performance, since the viewers are exposed to the housemates' behaviours in various settings. However, it is claimed here that also in reality television discourse it is possible to observe a clear difference between frontstage and backstage performances and perceptions if the focus of analysis is the housemates' interactional behaviour.

While in Chapter 6 empirical evidence is provided for the existence of the preferred (positive) reaction that is projected frontstage, Chapter 7 examines negative evaluations of jocularity in the Australian and British *Big Brother* houses from both intracultural and cross-cultural perspectives. All the instances of explicit negative perceptions have been analysed in order to investigate what general and specific issues occasion those perceptions. The analysis is primarily based on the housemates' frontstage and backstage reactions as well as their meta-talk on jocular episodes. Interestingly, some specific issues that generate negative evaluations have only been encountered in one of the datasets. Finally, all of the specific issues are divided into three categories, based on the nature of the targeted issues, whether person-, social harmony disruption- or topic-related.

Chapter 8 reports the results of the analysis of qualitative interviews and, in its entirety, focuses on metapragmatic comments. A variety of perspectives from which the interviewees assess the video material from the *Big Brother* houses shown to them is observed. Importantly, these perspectives play a crucial part in how funniness is conceptualised by the interviewees, whether from the participants' or the non-participants' point of view. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses the results of the analysis of the interviewees' evaluations of two episodes that present different situations in terms of the number (two- or multi-party interaction), cultural background (Australian or British) of the housemates involved and the target's reaction to a jocular verbal behaviour (positive or negative). The analysis examines the interviewees' evaluations of the instigator's comment, the target's reaction, the interviewees' own feelings if they were the targets and their potential reactions. Attention is also particularly drawn to some tendencies in the

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evaluations of the Australian vs British interviewees. The final subsection presents the Australian and British interviewees' intracultural and intercultural evaluations of a particular jocular comment involving both Australian and British housemates.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the book. There, I give an overview of the contributions this analysis of interactional puzzles makes to the areas of conversational humour and (im)politeness and suggest directions for future research.

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CHAPTER 2

Meanwhile in the world of (im)politeness

> Social interaction is remarkable for its emergent properties which transcend the characteristics of the individuals that jointly produce it; this emergent character is not something for which our current theoretical models are well equipped.
> (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 48)

This chapter focuses on the area of linguistic (im)politeness, namely, on its development from the classic theories to current discursive approaches. It presents a summary of the key points of the main traditional theories and outlines the major critique levelled at the most popular one, i.e. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Even though most attention was paid to politeness in the early years, at the end of the 20th century, right before the era of discursive approaches started to dominate the arena, impoliteness research made first attempts to disengage from the association with politeness and to analyse impolite verbal behaviours in their own right. Although the biggest part of this chapter will be devoted to the characteristics of the discursive tradition that has been promoting a further development of a focus on the phenomena of (im)politeness, some critical moments will also be pointed out. Finally, the view of (im)politeness that is adopted in this book will be presented at the very end of the chapter.

2.1 Traditional approaches[2] to politeness and impoliteness

This section opens with a brief overview of the traditional politeness theories that "provide the fundamental starting point for understanding the field" (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 13), in the centre of which lies the seminal work by Brown and Levinson (1987). The prominence, to which the work about universal politeness principles rose several decades ago, can be easily observed in the theory's wide application. Even today, although the theory has been heavily criticised for years,

2. Here I disregard Werkhofer's (1992) distinction, where the traditional view centres around social identity, order and normative aspects of respect, while the modern view (based on Gricean notions) is individualistic. In this book, such a distinction is not made. As generally used, the terms *traditional* or *classic* approaches refer to the first attempts to systematically study the phenomenon of politeness.

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it is still possible to notice its long-lasting impact, e.g., at international conferences at least several papers will still follow this "classic treatment on [sic] politeness in communication" (Gumperz, 1987, p. xiii).

2.1.1 Classic politeness theories and major critique of Brown and Levinson's model

Given the ever-present real-life significance of politeness in communicative processes and in life in general, it seems quite surprising that special scientific interest in this field emerged only a little bit less than half a century ago, which immediately resulted in a tremendous number of books, chapters, articles as well as conferences. Needless to say, it does not mean that such concepts as *politeness*, *polite* or any related terms did not exist before that. The idea behind what is polite behaviour was well explored and described in etiquette books. Although much that was written referred to non-linguistic politeness, verbal behaviour undoubtedly played an important role in a "polite society". For example, Hartley (2014 [1860]) dedicates the first chapter of *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* to the rules of politeness in conversation. Interestingly (and quite different to the present-day interpretation of politeness as essentially strategic, not only by scholars but also laymen), politeness is considered to be 'true politeness', i.e. not "a mask […] [or] merely hypocrisy and dissimulation" (Hartley, 2014 [1860], p. 6; cf. Chapter 6; for more on historical politeness, see Ehlich, 1992; Sell, 1992; Culpeper & Kádár, 2010; Bax & Kádár, 2011; Terkourafi [2011, pp. 163–176]; Bax & Kádár, 2012; Kádár, 2013).

Even though varying in their epistemological status, the classic theories of politeness[3] – Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) (to be briefly discussed below; for detailed overviews, see Kasper, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Eelen, 2001; Culpeper, 2011b) – "conceptualize politeness as strategic conflict avoidance" (Kasper, 1990, p. 194) and, thus, primarily focus on how social harmony can be maintained and promoted via language use, which illustrates a pragmatic view of politeness (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, p. 202). It should be noted, however, that Lakoff, Leech and Brown and Levinson (see below) seem to have misinterpreted Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) when they assume that CP stands for clearly and unambiguously communicating the message and being polite would inevitably flout the maxims. However, as Grice (1975, p. 34) himself holds, "the hearer

3. Although Goffman did not propose a theory of (im)politeness, his work on face-to-face communication, its ritual and interactional order, and especially the introduction of the term 'face' (1972 [1967], 1983) made him to be generally considered "the founding father of the field of (im)politeness research" (Bax & Kádár, 2011, p. 14).

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is entitled to assume that a maxim, or at least the overall Cooperative Principle, is observed at the level of what is implicated", which includes being informative at the level of implicature (for an extended critique, see Dynel, 2009c, 2013b). Nevertheless, the classic theories laid the foundations of politeness research.

Lakoff (1973) mentions two rules of pragmatic competence, namely, 'be clear' and 'be polite', with the rules of clarity already found in Grice's (1967) work on conversational maxims. This way, connecting politeness with Grice's CP, she explains the connection between 'being clear' (the rules of conversation) and 'being polite' (the rules of politeness):

> […] if one seeks to communicate a message directly, if one's principal aim in speaking is communication, one will attempt to be clear, so that there is no mistaking one's intention. If the speaker's principal aim is to navigate somehow or other among the respective statuses of the participants in the discourse indicating where each stands in the speaker's estimate, his [sic] aim will be less the achievement of clarity than an expression of politeness, as its opposite.
>
> (Lakoff, 1973, p. 296)

Even though admitting that sometimes "clarity is politeness", Lakoff (1973, p. 297) argues that when clarity conflicts with politeness, most of the time the latter "supersedes", since avoiding offence is a more important element in interaction.[4]

Similarly, Leech's (1983) proposed Politeness Principle (PP) is strongly reminiscent of Lakoff's idea in that it is also on a par with Grice's CP, both of them being "regulative principles, which can be violated" (Leech, 2014, p. 86). Thus, if a maxim of the CP is flouted, it is most probably generated by the willingness to uphold the PP and vice versa. This way, according to Leech, this politeness framework clearly complements Grice's CP, since "the PP provides a theory of politeness, which CP does not" (Leech, 2014, p. 86).

Rightly labelled the most influential of the traditional approaches to politeness, Brown and Levinson's (1987) work offers a fully-fledged model of politeness – as part of rational and purposeful communication – that is based on the flouting of Gricean conversational maxims and revolves around the concept of 'face' derived from Goffman (1972 [1967]).[5] Two *faces* are distinguished: *positive face* ("the want of every member that his [sic] wants [actions, values] be desirable

4. Lakoff (1973) proposes three rules of politeness ('Don't impose', 'Give options' and 'Make A feel good – be friendly'), which can overlap and, in different cultures, the order of precedence will differ as well. She also suggests that the rules of clarity (the rules of conversation) are "subcases of Rule 1", i.e. 'Don't impose' (1973, pp. 303, 305).

5. Note, however, that Brown and Levinson's understanding of 'face' is not equivalent to Goffman's original ideas (see discussion in Bargiella-Chiappini [2003, pp. 1459–1461]).

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to at least some others" [Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62) and *negative face* ("[the] want to have […] freedom of action unhindered and […] attention unimpeded" [Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129). It is a comprehensive theory of face-threatening acts that might threaten one or both *faces* and, thus, are mitigated in the form of redressive strategies of positive politeness, negative politeness as well as off-record strategies through which social goals are achieved "with a minimum of social friction" (Watts 2005: xii). What has been attracting much attention to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, as Gumperz (1987, p. xiii) puts it, is "the fact that an abstract theoretical framework has been proposed" which is exemplified by the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural data (however, see the critique below) and is easy to test independently.

Taking into consideration particular tendencies in sociolinguistics at the time of Brown and Levinson's work (e.g. emphasis on quantitative research) (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, pp. 209–210) as well as rapid developments in the field of linguistics where new datasets and methods were introduced, it is quite clear that what once appeared to be supported by previous studies (e.g. the claim that on-record irony operates as a positive politeness strategy cited in Brown & Levinson [1987, p. 28]) could be rejected by further analyses. This, undoubtedly, only covers part of the criticism levelled at Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which they were quite aware of in their 1987 revised edition.

Although in an increasing number of empirical studies has identified many a shortcoming of the traditional theories, and particularly of that of Brown and Levinson, probably the biggest issue which the face-threat mitigating theory faced is its claim to universality (for more detailed critique, see Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). Examples come from three unrelated cultures and languages (English, Tamil and Tzeltal), and arguing that "the degree of detail in convergence lies far beyond the realm of chance", Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 59) decided to hypothesise about "universals in verbal interaction". Despite the proposed variability, the model's emphasis on the 'desires' of "a characteristically Western, individualist *persona*" (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003, p. 1454, emphasis original) is quite obvious. Scholars from non-Western cultures, especially those from Japanese and Chinese cultural contexts, continuously accuse the theory of this Western bias, arguing that the individualistic interpretation of the notion of 'face' (especially negative face that suggests "the want […] that [someone's] actions be unimpeded by others" [Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 62]) has no reflection in those cultures (see Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Bousfield, 2008a, pp. 36–38; Matsumoto, 1989; Ide, 1989). For instance, Japanese language and society, where "group membership is regarded as the basis for interaction" (Ide, 1989, p. 241), are sensitive to social context (Matsumoto, 1989). Thus, "the position in relation to the others in the group and [a person's] acceptance by those others" is of prime importance (Matsumoto, 1988,

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p. 405; 1989) and using polite (formal) forms – observing 'discernment'[6] – a person acknowledges this importance and "submit[s] passively to the requirements of the system" (Hill et al., 1986, p. 348), thus further maintaining it (Ide, 1989). Taking this into account, Matsumoto (1988) suggests that if the notion of 'face' were described in terms of 'socially given self-image', it would more successfully depict various types of politeness systems (see Mao's [1994] relative face orientation). In the same vein, Gu (1990, p. 242) rejects the idea that politeness, which is treated by Brown and Levinson in terms of face-wants, is merely instrumental and suggests that "the normative aspect of politeness" should not be ignored.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's model (as well as other traditional theories) views politeness almost exclusively from the speaker's linguistic behaviour, i.e. analysing the language producer's intentional appeal to communicative norms. This suggests that polite behaviour should be seen as a production concept (Eelen, 2001, p. 96; Culpeper, 2008, p. 18). The role of the hearer, on the other hand, is not explicitly stated on the theoretical level. Thus the hearer's interpretation and his/her role in interaction are ignored.

Finally, examples in Brown and Levinson's theory do not provide background information and seem to be taken out of context. This poses a major problem. It has been quite systematically argued that no individual words, phrases, utterances or languages are inherently polite or impolite (Culpeper, 2005; Fraser & Nolen, 1981, p. 96; Fraser, 1990, p. 233), which makes Brown and Levinson's examples not the most convincing illustration. This is directly linked with another issue, i.e. a necessity to "go beyond the single speaker's utterance, lexically and grammatically defined" (Culpeper, 2005, p. 37), which is one of the main characteristics of discursive politeness research (see Section 2.2).

In order to overcome issues with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory listed above, some scholars proposed their own models of politeness. For instance, Fraser and Nolen (1981) introduce the *conversational-contract view* that is based on rights and obligations that determine expectations in a particular interaction. The terms of the 'contract' can be renegotiated depending on context, but what does not change is the fact that what participants orient to is polite behaviour (that is seen as the norm and goes unnoticed), while impoliteness arises if the conversational contract is violated (see also Fraser, 1990). Another model is proposed by Watts (1989) who argues for the notion of *politic behaviour*, an unmarked form of verbal behaviour wherein "polite verbal behavior must be embedded" (Watts, 1989, p. 131). It includes highly ritualised, formulaic behaviour, conventionalised linguistic strategies, indirect speech strategies as well as highly codified honorific

6. Discernment (*wakimae* in Japanese) is "the practice of polite behavior according to social conventions" (Ide, 1989, p. 230).

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language usage (Watts, 1989, p. 136). This marks the transition phase from the classic theories to the so-called discursive approaches, which I will discuss in Section 2.2 after briefly introducing the beginning of linguistic impoliteness research in the next subsection.

2.1.2 A note on the onset of linguistic impoliteness research

Impoliteness, which not long ago was seen as "rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances" (Leech, 1983, p. 105; Kienpointner, 2008, p. 244) or "violation of the constraints of politeness" (Leech, 2005, p. 18) and received far less attention than polite verbal behaviour, has become one of the most prolific areas in linguistic as well as interdisciplinary studies in the 21st century. However, before impoliteness came into being on the pages of many linguistic journals, the phenomenon was not entirely ignored. Rather, it was touched upon in a slightly different manner, i.e. the behaviour analysed was characterised as aggravating language, conflict, rudeness as well as aggression (Tedeshi et al., 1974; Lachenicht, 1980; Lakoff, 1989; Kasper, 1990; Beebe, 1995 among others; for a very comprehensive overview of impoliteness research, see Dynel, 2015).

In the last decade, the attention that once was almost entirely given to politeness research has gradually been moving towards impoliteness. Taking into consideration such a path of development, it is not surprising that the first attempts "to build an impoliteness framework" – Culpeper's (1996) or Bousfield's (2008a) – were to a greater or lesser degree inspired by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Culpeper (1996) proposes a very similar framework, where he identifies five "superstrategies": bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness and withhold politeness.[7] With the exception of mock politeness (or sarcasm) and withhold politeness, the remaining strategies are mirror strategies of Brown and Levinson's framework.

Later, Bousfield (2008a, p. 94) suggests that the positive/negative face dichotomy should be avoided, since different 'positive' and 'negative' face strategies are regularly combined in interaction (e.g. Sinkeviciute, 2010). However, Bousfield's model still presents the politeness/impoliteness opposition, since in his definition "impoliteness [is] the broad opposite of politeness", where instead of mitigating FTAs, the communication of intentionally conflictive FTAs would take place (Bousfield, 2008a, p. 72). As a result, he distinguishes between only two tactics of impoliteness: *on record* (explicitly designed strategies) and *off record* (including sarcasm and withhold politeness) (Bousfield, 2008a, pp. 95–96).

7. As pointed out by Bousfield (2008a, p. 83), Culpeper was not aware of Lachenicht's (1980) model that has the same point of departure, i.e. Brown and Levinson's theory.

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Indeed, how we understand impoliteness today – a phenomenon with specific interactional goals that can and should be studied in its own right – is different from how it was originally seen. It has gradually moved away from a more traditional model (Culpeper 1996) that mirrored the strategies of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to models that integrate a more elaborated understanding of *face* (Culpeper [2005] incorporates Spencer-Oatey's [2002] concept of "rapport management"[8]), present no positive/negative face distinction (Bousfield, 2008a) or offer a prototype understanding of impoliteness and rudeness (Bousfield, 2008b; 2010).

Impoliteness, whose research trajectory started with discourses found in military training (to which it is particularly central), is "ubiquitous across and within virtually all modes of human communication" (Bousfield, 2008a, p. 51) and has been a topic of interest in such areas as workplace relationships (Schnurr et al., 2008; Mullany, 2008, 2011), political discourse (García-Pastor, 2008; Kienpointner, 2008; Taylor, 2011), legal discourse (Archer, 2008; Harris, 2011), humour (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Dynel, 2013a), and media discourse (Culpeper, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009; Dynel, 2012b; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013). Needless to say, due to the nature of some discourses, e.g. military training, police work or exploitative TV shows (Culpeper, 1996, 2005, 2011a; Culpeper et al., 2003; Bousfield, 2008a, 2008b; Limberg, 2008; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009; Culpeper & Holmes, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2013), impoliteness is expected to occur and can be easily sanctioned. The question whether it, being an expected and appropriate behaviour, is also neutralised is still discussed (Mills, 2002; Culpeper, 2005, 2011a; Watts, 2003; Harris, 2001; Tracy, 2008), but it does not change the fact that the targets can still show that they take offence at a later time (see Culpeper, 2011a, p. 217; Chapters 4 and 5).

2.2 (Im)politeness in the era of discursive approaches

In the traditional theories, politeness and impoliteness are seen not only as opposites, but, most importantly, as having unequal status, for example regarding impoliteness as a marked undesired phenomenon, for which theories could not

8. Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2002, 2005) concept of "rapport management" comprises two components: face (later subdivided into quality and social identity face) and sociality rights (subdivided into equity and association rights) (in Culpeper, 2005, p. 40). Although her model incorporates Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative and positive face, it goes further rejecting the emphasis given to the individual in the earlier face-work model and strengthening the role of the society.

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offer "a real explanation […] in the same way as they [did] for polite behaviour" (Eelen, 2001, p. 101; see Leech, 1983). The willingness to avoid this binary opposition, account for impolite behaviour on the theoretical level and blur rather clear-cut boundaries established in the classic theories led to the development of discursive approaches, where both phenomena started being equally described as interactional behaviours with their own interpersonal functions and communicative goals (Sell, 1992, pp. 115–116). This, however, also means that no study can deal entirely with either politeness or impoliteness as its main focus. As Mills (2011, p. 40) puts it, "[a]nalysing politeness in isolation from impoliteness is not justifiable, since politeness takes its meaning from the potentiality of impoliteness." Indeed, although such edited volumes as *Situated Politeness* (Davies et al., 2011) and *Discursive Approaches to Politeness* (LPRG, 2011) exclude the term *impoliteness* from their titles, the papers therein necessarily analyse both linguistic phenomena.

The term *discursive approach* serves as an umbrella term for various perspectives and forms of analysis "beyond the constraints of a speech act theory, universalist paradigm" (van der Bom and Mills [2015, p. 181]; Haugh [2007, pp. 297–298]).[9] As the term suggests, contrary to the classic theories, this approach favours an analysis of longer stretches of discourse and primarily focuses on contextual judgements and potential interpretations of situated behaviours (Mills, 2013; Culpeper & Haugh, 2015). These and other features will be explained in more detail below.

Even though quite a different view of (im)politeness has been taken in the discursive era, Watts (2005, p. xi) in his introductory chapter to a second edition of *Politeness in Language* (Watts et al., 1992) quite pessimistically points out that "research into linguistic politeness has not progressed much" after Brown and Levinson's popular politeness theory. In the same vein, Culpeper and Haugh (2014, p. 214) rightly observe that despite all the criticism that has been levelled at the classic theories, no new "replacement model has yet emerged". Terkourafi (2005, pp. 242, 246) goes further suggesting that "[t]he study of politeness is now placed firmly within social theory, and accounting for aspects of politeness as a social phenomenon takes priority over accounting for its pragmatic aspects" (cf. Culpeper and Haugh's [2014, pp. 228–229] concern that more interest has been shown in social than pragmatic aspects of (im)politeness). Taking into account such remarks and a diversity of elements in discursive theorising, sometimes it might seem that what all discursive approaches have in common (and succeed

9. Alongside discursive approaches, the term *post-modern approach* is used quite interchangeably in the literature. However, to avoid being drawn into a lengthy debate on some of the terminological issues, this book will persist in employing the term *discursive approach*.

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in) is their critique of the classic theories on the basis of which they have been developed. It is beyond the scope of this book to describe all the characteristics at length here, but I will focus on the most relevant ones to the present analysis (for thorough overviews of the elements, see Haugh, 2007; Mills, 2011; van der Bom & Mills, 2015; Culpeper & Haugh, 2014).

While trying to move beyond (and away from) Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and its universal and generalising nature, scholars that are involved in the discursive turn in (im)politeness research certainly do not attempt to construct a theoretical replacement for the classic theories, whether as a descriptive or cross-cultural theory of politeness (Mills, 2011, pp. 20, 28, 34; Haugh, 2007). Instead, the interest lies in "a more contingent type of theorising which will account for contextualised expressions of politeness and impoliteness" (Mills, 2011, p. 35) and "neither prediction nor generalization can, or should, be aimed at" (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 238). This unwillingness to make any predictions, even those based on situated behaviours promoted by discursive scholars, poses an important issue, since this way "the possibility of theorizing about politeness at any level" is denied (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 245) and what prevails is uncertainty (Mills, 2013).

It becomes obvious that what plays a crucial part in discursive approaches are meanings that are emergent in context, which, in turn, is seen as "creat[ing] the rules of interpretation and appropriateness" (Mills, 2011, p. 45). Prosody, which is entirely overlooked in the classic theories plays a significant role here. The way something is said, for example, can be a key factor in generating evaluations of impoliteness (Culpeper et al., 2003; 2011b). In addition, in order to develop a more contextualised analysis that reveals communicative patterns and appropriate norms of behaviour within a particular group of people, the notion of *community of practice*, introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), has been widely applied in discursive (im)politeness research. Apart from an emphasis on the community of practice being seen as part of social structure with determined boundaries (Clark, 2011, p. 113), this approach allows us to see how the category of membership is constructed through language use (Schnurr et al., 2008, p. 213).

Furthermore, special attention is directed to the participants in interaction (see Subsection 2.2.2 for the discussion of first-order and second-order terms), especially their evaluations and judgements of verbal behaviours that, according to discursive theorists, are the main source of how the (im)politeness phenomena manifest themselves, i.e. by being constructed during the interactional process (Mills, 2011, pp. 35, 41–42). This, consequently, leads to a more hearer-oriented approach, as opposed to the speaker-oriented perspective in the traditional theories (but see the production-evaluation model in 4.4), where (im)politeness is located in the hearer's evaluations rather than the speaker's intentions, which also should help to avoid the predictive nature of the traditional theories (Eelen,

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2001, pp. 107–109). In other words, it is via the hearer's evaluations that verbal behaviour can be seen "as act of politeness or not" (Watts, 2005, pp. xv-xvi). It is suggested that the interactants' perceptions and interpretations become more accessible via an analysis of longer stretches of interaction, since utterances are inherently neither polite or impolite (Culpeper, 2005; Locher, 2006, p. 251; Locher & Watts, 2008, p. 78) and only with the help of discourse analysis can (im)politeness manifest itself. The weakness here, however, is that it is not clearly stated how to access those evaluations, which poses a rather serious methodological problem (Xie et al., 2005 in Haugh, 2007, p. 302).

Since most discursive scholars focus on situated interactional contexts in which behaviours are judged and can be evaluated as (im)polite by the very participants, it is quite obvious that a vast majority of studies are of qualitative nature, with an emphasis on the micro-analysis that does not often go beyond localised interpretations (Terkourafi, 2005; Mills, 2011). However, a discursive tendency towards discouraging quantitative research and ignoring its value, because of its focus on more isolated elements (Mills, 2011, pp. 28–29) and final interpretations offered by the analyst rather than by the participants, has also been criticised (Holmes, 2005; Terkourafi, 2005). In the current discursive turn that (im)politeness research has taken, quantitative analysis has been viewed as "essentially normative" (Mills, 2003, p. 43), and, as Holmes (2005, p. 110) points out, a norm is considered "a potentially misleading abstraction from which important variability has been excised". This assumption, however, leads to a paradox, namely, generalisations made from analyses of large samples have been dismissed due to the fact that counter-examples have been found, while claims based on personal observations or the participants' own generalisations are somehow deemed more valuable (Holmes, 2005, pp. 111–112).

This debate between '*socio*-pragmatic extremists' and '*pragma*-linguistic defenders'[10] has its own benefits, since it stimulates more research. However, as Holmes (2005, p. 115) argues, "the constant rug-pulling [is] counter-productive" as well. In recent years, this idea of everything being relative and that it is quite impossible to know for sure what happens in interactions (Holmes, p. 2005) has been at least slightly pushed aside. The fact that a number of recent analyses started revisiting Brown and Levinson's model has indeed somewhat changed the views

10. Leech (2014, pp. 13–18) writes at length about a distinction between pragmalinguistics (and pragmalinguistic politeness) and sociopragmatics (as well as sociopragmatic politeness), where the former focus of linguistic (lexico-grammatical) resources of language, their frequency, etc., whereas the latter analyses judgements and evaluations that arise in context (see also absolute and relative politeness in Leech [1983, pp. 83–84, 102]). In (im)politeness research, it is essential to observe "how they interconnect: how the pragmalinguistic resources of a language enable cultural values to be expressed" (Leech, 2014, p. 15).

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of the fierce opponents of a systematic analysis who now begin to realise that "the discursive approach seems too difficult to use as an analytical approach" (van der Bom & Mills, 2015, p. 180).[11]

Needless to say, during the discursive era, (im)politeness theories have been developing in different ways. As mentioned above, a prevailing emphasis has been placed on context, negotiability of situated evaluations and "the instant-stable meanings" (Mills, 2013; Eelen, 2001; Locher & Watts, 2005; 2008; Mills, 2003; 2011; LPRG, 2011; van der Bom & Mills, 2015). As Gumperz (1992, p. 39) rightly claims, the way we use language "is ultimately socially motivated" and it is our socio-cultural knowledge and interactive history that "determine what we perceive as linguistic reality" (Gumperz, 1992, p. 50; cf. Bousfield, 2010, p. 119). This does not mean, however, that some understandings and perceptions cannot be more stable, since after all "the only way that [im]politeness can be understood is because it exists as a system" (van der Bom & Mills, 2015 on Agha, 2006). Indeed, in the course of time, some expressions become largely conventionalised. This line of reasoning can be found in Terkourafi's (2003, 2005) and Culpeper's (2010, 2011) works on conventionalised (im)politeness.

Terkourafi (2003, 2005) advocates a frame-based view on politeness and suggests that it [politeness] lies in "the regular co-occurrence of particular types of contexts and particular linguistic expressions" (2005, p. 248). Those expressions invite "preferred" interpretations in a minimal context, resulting in generalised implicatures of politeness (pp. 254–255). In Terkourafi's (2003, p. 150; emphasis original) own words, "an implicature will be *generalised* if the speaker uses an expression which is conventionalised for some use relative to the (minimal) context of utterance". Similarly, Culpeper (2010, 2011a) analyses conventionalised impoliteness formulae in British English that in different contexts are typically associated with impolite evaluations. They include insults (e.g. 'you are so stupid'), dismissals (e.g. 'get lost') and threats (e.g. 'I'm gonna box your ears if you don't [X]) (for a more complete list, see Culpeper, 2011a, pp. 135–136). The items on the list refer to expressions that have "a more stable relationship with (im)politeness contexts" (Culpeper, 2011a, p. 127). In other words, language users tend to place them on the impoliteness end of the continuum in a number of different contexts since the meanings of those expressions are associated with similar backgrounds and contextual assumptions typically evaluated as rather impolite.

11. While discursive approaches as a response to the classic theories have been used as a deconstructing mechanism, it has also been claimed that some research has been moving towards a post-discursive view (probably neo-Brown and Levinson approach), i.e. attempting to construct an alternative to the classic theories (Kádár 2013).

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Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of (im)politeness is a form of social action, which alongside pragmatic meaning is "interactionally achieved by participants" (Haugh, 2013, p. 56). It should also be stressed that our understanding of (im) politeness is "socially acquired" and such concepts are "to a high degree socially *shared* even if ultimately individually *produced* and *spun*" (Bousfield, 2010, p. 119; emphasis original). Therefore, due to shared communicative practices and background assumptions, it is not surprising that Culpeper's suggested conventionalised formulae tend to evoke evaluations of impoliteness and there are expressions that have "preferred" interpretations in a minimal context (frame) (e.g. for analyses focusing on genuine impoliteness, see Bernal, 2008; Sinkeviciute, 2015). However, this holds true "*unless* there occurs to the hearer a reason to the contrary" (Terkourafi, 2003, p. 152). Thus, one should always bear in mind that those expressions are not (socio-culturally) context-free and could still be interpreted as non-(im) polite in a particular situated discourse (see Chapter 4; see also Section 6.5 on genuine and mock impoliteness in Culpeper, 2011a, pp. 207–215).

2.2.1 In search of a definition of (im)politeness

Even though at first it seemed rather difficult to describe impoliteness (see Eelen, 2001), one of the most problematic tasks for discursive theorists is to propose a definition of politeness. Interestingly enough, already several decades ago it was suggested that scholars could not reach an agreement of how to define politeness "as an object of study" (Janney & Arndt [1992, p. 22]; Watts et al. [1992, p. 6]). Watts (2005, p. xvi) goes even further and questions the very appropriateness of the notion of politeness in relation to verbal behaviours, claiming that "the central issue is whether or not we should call whatever it is that helps us to [avoid interpersonal friction, to avoid conflict, to minimise possible antagonism, to foster mutual comfort and promote rapport] 'politeness'."

While the term *politeness* has not been abandoned, it appears to be slightly losing its place as a focus of research, especially because of a constant reminder (that sometimes functions as a disclaimer as well) that an understanding of politeness varies from one linguistic and cultural environment to the other and that it is "defined differently by certain communities" (Mills, 2011, p. 38). Thus, it becomes practically impossible to indicate what behaviours would count as polite. In order to avoid this confusion and explain how individuals negotiate relationships with each other, the alternative term *relational work* has been proposed, which includes a spectrum from impolite to polite behaviour (Locher & Watts, 2005, pp. 9–10; Locher, 2006). Mills (2013), however, argues that 'relational work' is different from 'politeness', since it is a broader concept that encompasses everything individuals do when they interact and not only the matters of politeness. Undoubtedly,

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it is quite obvious that the essence of the phenomenon of politeness does not become more self-explanatory and comprehensible only due to the shift in its terminology. Those who attempt to define it, focus primarily on social harmony. For instance, Holmes et al. (2012, p. 1066) refer to politeness as behaviour that is used to "maintain harmonious relations and avoid conflict with others". What has not been captured by such definitions focusing on harmony is that politeness is an evaluative phenomenon and can be closely linked with positive emotions (e.g. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010 in Culpeper, 2012, p. 1130; Culpeper, 2012, p. 1129). Regardless of attempts to describe the situated phenomenon of politeness accurately, all explanations tend to point to one or more features of what is understood as 'politeness' at present, i.e. that it is a result of dynamic activity in social interaction (see Janney & Arndt, 1992, p. 22) and can be a mediator "between the individual and the social, motivating and structuring courses of action" (Werkhofer, 1992, p. 156).

However paradoxical it might sound, proposing a useful definition of impoliteness has been a more doable task. After several different definitions suggested by Culpeper (2005) and Bousfield (2008a), the current widely used description of the phenomenon is as follows (see also 4.4.1). Impoliteness

> […] is 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.
>
> (Culpeper, 2011a, p. 23)

Furthermore, it is also clear that impoliteness research has been further promoted and new ways of looking at verbal behaviours that generate social disharmony have been suggested. While it is clear that the notion of *offence* is one of the key elements in impoliteness research (Culpeper, 2011a; Haugh, 2015), it has not been examined in depth. Impoliteness, as suggested by Culpeper (2011), describes "attitudinal stance on the part of speakers", whereas offence should be seen as "an emotional response on the part of recipients that varies in degree of intensity" or as an actual "source of such feelings" (Haugh, 2015). Furthermore, causing offence and taking offence should not be equated, for the former is exercised by the speaker and the latter is "initiated by the recipient [who] construes the

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actions or conduct of the prior speaker […] as offensive" (Haugh, 2015, p. 37). Indeed, not all seemingly impolite behaviours cause offence and offence is not always taken to ostensibly impolite triggers, but can also be caused by ambiguous verbal behaviours or those that are polite on the surface (see e.g. Culpeper et al., 2017 for (im)politeness and mixed messages; Taylor, 2015a, 2015b, 2016 for mock politeness; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2014 for research on jocular behaviours). Also, it is easy to conceive of interactions where no obvious offence is taken when someone was impolite and meant to cause it (see Bousfield, 2008a; Culpeper, 2011a; Haugh, 2010b, 2015). On the other hand, the targets can (claim to) take offence to something jocular and explicitly project it in public, even if the instigators do not mean to cause offence. Thus, some attempts (although not many in pragmatics; but see Haugh & Sinkeviciute, 2019) have been made to make a (theoretical/philosophical) distinction "between meaning to offend, actually giving offence, and behaving in a manner likely to cause offence; between feeling upset and taking some formal action; between what is offensive to some, to all, and in itself" (Barrow, 2005, p. 265). In the area of interactional pragmatics, focusing on taking offence in initial interactions amongst American and Australian speakers of English, Haugh (2015, p. 41) holds that "taking offence constitutes a pragmatic act that is both afforded and constrained by the activity type in which it arises". Indeed, it is essential to keep in mind variability in interactional practices and differences between what can be regarded as potentially offensive in itself (e.g. conventionalised impoliteness formulae) and at what the interactants themselves signal that they have taken offence.

With a wide spectrum of behaviours and almost an impossible task to classify them as polite or impolite, new types of (im)politeness have been put forward. Those mainly deal with mock politeness and mock impoliteness. While not many studies concentrate on the former (however, see Taylor, 2009, 2011, 2015a, 2015b and Subsection 4.4.3), the latter has been used, especially in relation to different types of conversational humour. As Haugh and Bousfield (2012, p. 1103) argue, mock impoliteness should not be regarded as an evaluation that is always subsumed under politeness or impoliteness, but, on the contrary, has to be seen as "something conceptually distinct". The term itself refers to potentially impolite verbal behaviour, for instance, jocular mockery, teasing or banter, that instead of leading to impolite evaluations occasions non-impolite ones (see 4.4.2, Chapters 5 and 6).

2.2.2 First-order and second-order concepts

Back in 1992, the question of first-order and second-order politeness was explicitly raised for the first time by Watts, Ide and Ehlich. In order to be able to shift away from an analytical model of politeness towards the participants' perceptions

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thereof, they argue that there is a need to make a distinction between "the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of socio-cultural groups [and] a theoretical construct" (Watts et al., 1992, p. 3). In the course of time, the idea behind first- and second-order (im)politeness has been specified. This way, first-order concepts do not simply refer to lay notions (Eelen, 2001), but specifically are highly individual, emphasising the participants' personal experience. On the other hand, second-order terms refer to the scientific conceptualisation of those experiences and "should retain a stable meaning" (Terkourafi, 2011, p. 161). Undoubtedly, this reference to stability is the main reason for the discursive scholars to primarily shift their focus to first-order (im)politeness, i.e. (im)politeness1.

Even though the need for a rather clear theoretical distinction between the two concepts has been emphasised, it is still not always obvious whose evaluations we, as analysts, are analysing. While paramount importance is given to lay conceptualisations that form "the rockbed [sic] of a postmodernist approach to the study of linguistic politeness" (Watts, 2005, p. xxi), "the notion of participant itself has generally been relatively under-theorised" (Haugh, 2013, p. 54) and it seems quite difficult for (im)politeness1 to "be pinned for study" (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 243). The argument for the participants' evaluations being the main source of evidence of (im)politeness does not seem watertight and definitely not most suitable as a basis for a theoretical framework, for the participants themselves are often not quite sure how to evaluate particular verbal behaviours (Haugh, 2007, p. 308).

In addition, Terkourafi (2005) voices certain concerns about the major importance given to politeness1 terms and explanations, which could be promoted to a second-order, politeness2, definition (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 243; Haugh, 2013). In the same vein, it can be easily noted that when it comes to defining the phenomenon of politeness, the way it is done is via technical analytical terms, even though "Politeness 1 and Politeness2 have different conceptual origins, historically, and serve different purposes socially and epistemologically" (Terkourafi, 2011, p. 161; for different stances in discursive approaches on (im)politeness1 and (im)politeness2, see Haugh, 2007).

Nevertheless, the evaluative terms related to (im)politeness (*polite*, *impolite*, *rude*, etc.) that are open to discursive negotiations by the interactants have been analysed (see Watts, 2003; Haugh & Hinze, 2003; Culpeper, 2011a; Haugh, 2018; Culpeper et al., 2019). Despite these analyses and a variety of lay terms, researchers do not seem to have reached a consensus on second-order terms, especially impoliteness2. Culpeper (2008) and Bousfield (2010) explain impoliteness as an 'intentional face-attack', whereas Terkourafi (2008, pp. 61–62) argues that "in impoliteness the face-threat is taken to be accidental, i.e. attributed to the speaker's ignorance or incompetence". Once again (as with impoliteness strategies),

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Culpeper (2008) seems to be primarily basing his view on the speaker's intentions, while Terkourafi (2008) emphasises the process of inferring the speaker's intention as a not face-threatening one. Contrary to both of the aforementioned views, Archer (2008) places impoliteness within "verbal aggression", suggesting that impoliteness strategies should analyse Goffman's (1972 [1967]) distinctions of face-threats: intentional, incidental and unintended.

2.2.3 The metapragmatics of (im)politeness

In the area of (im)politeness research, metapragmatics has been attracting considerable attention since the emergence of discursive approaches to the (im) politeness phenomena that advocate the use of emic lay terms to understand interactional processes. Indeed, the advantages offered by a metalinguistic approach, especially the use of non-technical terms, can "provide a strong foundation for the development of a comprehensive theory of politeness" (Haugh & Hinze, 2003, p. 1600). While focusing on behaviours that are evaluated as (im)polite, scholars use a variety of different methodological approaches, namely, moving from close-ended questionnaires (Ide et al., 1992) to corpus analysis (Culpeper 2011a) to more open-ended short reports (Pizziconi, 2007; Culpeper, 2011a) and interviews with native speakers (Obana & Tomoda, 1994; Spencer-Oatey, 2011; Fukushima & Haugh, 2014). Furthermore, it is known that approaches to the (im)politeness phenomena were developing in a particular way, i.e. at first politeness research enjoyed most attention and impoliteness was largely ignored, and the primary focus was on Western cultural contexts (see criticism of Brown & Levinson's [1987] work in Eelen, 2001). Thus, it does not come as a surprise that most work on metapragmatics in this field has been done with reference to polite behaviour and, coincidentally or not, in order to investigate or compare English (American, Australian or British) and Oriental (mainly Japanese or Chinese) polite behaviours (see Culpeper et al., 2019).

From several studies, it can be observed that polite behaviour correlates with 'considerate', 'friendly' or 'kind' in different varieties of English, while Japanese speakers tend to associate politeness not only with honorifics but also with modesty and 'humble', 'reserved' or 'discreet' behaviour (Ide et al., 1992; Obana & Tomoda, 1994; Pizziconi, 2007). Indeed, more often than not, particular differences have been outlined in metapragmatic research in those cultural contexts. Nevertheless, Haugh (2004), revisiting the conceptualisation of politeness in English and Japanese, also observes a common aspect. He points out that in both cultural contexts politeness involves self-oriented politeness (showing that one's opinion of oneself is not too high) and other-oriented politeness (showing that one thinks well of others). Similarly, looking at politeness practices in English and Japanese

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that manifest themselves "when a speaker [should] show a positive evaluation of someone else through his or her behaviour", Haugh and Hinze (2003) illustrate four types of politeness present in both cultural contexts: 'compensatory politeness', 'stasis politeness', 'enhancement politeness', and 'demeanour politeness'.

Furthermore, some research has also been done on (im)politeness-related concepts. For instance, working on interviews with Japanese and Taiwanese Mandarin Chinese participants, Fukushima and Haugh (2014) concentrate on the emic understandings of attentiveness, empathy and anticipatory inference, concepts that are closely associated with the phenomena of (im)politeness. Although reflecting some cross-cultural and cross-generational differences, these inter-linked notions are mostly associated with positive evaluations, which might be "treated as a 'politeness' concern" (Fukushima & Haugh, 2014, p. 177). Also, examining emotions and (im)politeness judgements that emerge during metapragmatic workplace interviews with British and Chinese participants, Spencer-Oatey (2011) observes that the interviewees provide more references to personal emotional reactions than "their evaluative judgements of others' (im)politeness" (Spencer-Oatey, 2011, p. 3576). Interestingly, in this study, positive evaluative comments are all made in relation to other people, while 'impolite' remarks mostly refer to the self.

In order to see how impoliteness metalanguage functions "as representations of evaluations that certain behaviours count as impolite" (Culpeper, 2011a, pp. 73–74), Culpeper (2011a) conducts a corpus-based analysis of different labels that can be found in the impoliteness-related literature as well as in reports data provided by students. While in academic texts the terms 'impolite(ness)' and 'rude(ness)' are hardly used compared to 'verbal aggression' and 'verbal abuse', searching for the impoliteness-related terms in the *Oxford English Corpus*, Culpeper (2011a) noticed that 'rude' is the most frequently used metalinguistic label, while 'impolite' is encountered more than twenty times less often. Furthermore, in the reports describing impoliteness events, six main categories emerge referring to behaviours that make the participants feel bad, i.e. *patronising*, *rude*, *inconsiderate*, *aggressive*, *inappropriate* and *hurtful*. These metalinguistic labels are also mapped in conceptual space, where, for example, 'inconsiderate' is seen as a negative evaluation of interactions between family members and close friends, whereas 'rude' is used to judge the behaviour of out-group members. Finally, Culpeper (2011) analyses not only metalinguistic labels (as discussed above) but also more descriptive metapragmatic comments and he looks at the case of over-politeness as well as at metapragmatic comments that function as prescribed rules whether in institutional and public or more private settings.

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2.3 The view of (im)politeness taken in this research

With such a variety of views and elements that discursive approaches promote, it is not surprising that it is difficult for scholars to place their own research within one or the other current tradition. Since this book analyses potentially jocular verbal behaviours and uses different kinds of data – corpus, naturally-occurring conversations and interviews – more than one approach will be followed in this work.

A number of ideas promoted in discursive theorising will be adopted here. For instance, much attention will be paid to context and the interactants' judgements of verbal behaviour. On the other hand, some ideas will be discarded or modified for the purposes of this analysis. For example, representing the core elements of discursive approaches, Eelen's (2001) and Locher and Watts' (2008) work seems to give priority to the participants' judgements and strongly criticise the politeness2 approach due to its tendency to become not a descriptive but a prescriptive practice (Eelen, 2001, pp. 82, 87). Even though there is indeed a continuous discussion as to which of the two orders of (im)politeness "should form the basis of a theory of im/politeness" (Terkourafi, 2011, p. 180), one may wonder why only one-choice option is encouraged. Thus, the most suitable approach seems to be the interactional approach, which is part of integrative ("middle ground") pragmatics introduced by Culpeper and Haugh (2014, 2015). Importantly, it does not only focus on politeness1, but also acknowledges the benefits of politeness2 definitions (Grainger, 2011, pp. 183–184; Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, pp. 228–232).

Indeed, as Haugh (2007, p. 311) rightly claims, "[t]o rely only on what participants might say about the interaction in assessing the (im)politeness implications of such evaluations only serves to reify the lay perspective, elevating it to the status of a theory of (im)politeness" (see also Terkourafi, 2005). Also, Christie (2015, p. 363) poses an essential question at the end of the epilogue to the tenth anniversary issue of *Journal of Politeness Research*: "since […] the pragmatics and the sociolinguistics of 2015 have arrived at a point where both focus on the dynamic and local generation of meaning, has this led to an over-emphasis on what is dynamic and local about the process of meaning-making rather than on what is social and shared about the process?" As a result, even though concentrating on how the very participants understand and negotiate meanings in interaction, one should not misjudge the usefulness of combining this type of discursive approaches to analysis with second-order analytical concepts, which might consequently result in broader frameworks (if not theories) encompassing a wide range of studies in the area of (im)politeness. In other words, "[im]politeness2 should no doubt be *about* [im]politeness1, the concepts developed in a theory of [im]politeness should be able to *explain* the phenomena observed as [im]politeness1" (Eelen, 2001, p. 44, emphasis original). Indeed, the use of those emic evaluations and

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conceptualisations are at the core of many etic (second-order) approaches that should not and "do not disregard first-order notions" (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, p. 5; see also Haugh, 2007; Bousfield, 2010; Terkourafi, 2011; Clark, 2013; van der Bom & Mills, 2015). Similarly in this book, my aim is two-fold: (i) to explore the participants' judgements and evaluations of (im)politeness in jocular interactions, and, in view of emerging patterns, (ii) to make an attempt to group and classify those practices, while using (at least partially) second-order notions.

Furthermore, neither speaker nor hearer should be given unconditional priority. Writing on the topic of intentions, Terkourafi (2008, p. 57) rightly observes that even if the speaker's intentions have been recognised by the hearer, "it is not enough to convince the hearer that the speaker is [im]polite". Indeed, as Locher (2006, p. 263) stresses, "the ultimate say in what is considered impolite, non-polite or polite remains with those interactants who are part of a group of interactants who form a discursive practice" (e.g. community of practice; Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, p. 228). In the same vein, I see (im)politeness as a product of social interaction and not what only the speaker or the hearer *does* (e.g. Culpeper, 2010, 2011a; see Subsection 4.4). This does not mean, however, that some expressions cannot be seen as more (im)polite (e.g. conventionalised (im)politeness expressions), but on their own they do not result in (im)politeness which is an outcome of evaluative interactive process (Culpeper, 2011a; see also Sinkeviciute, 2015). There is still a discursive struggle that inevitably takes place between the interlocutors.

It is also important to mention that, even though this book does not engage in a theoretical discussion of *face(work)* and the issues related to its various applications and re-definitions (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Arundale, 1999, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2002), (im)politeness as well as all the interactional practices analysed here are broadly conceptualised in terms of *face*. The notion has been predominantly used with reference to (im)politeness, but it should not be limited to it. *Face*, then, as it is viewed here, is as an interactional phenomenon, both existing prior to the interaction with others as well as emerging during it (Haugh, 2009) and linking the individual and the society (Arundale, 2006, 2009). Also, for the purposes of this research, *face*, where used, especially in such terms as *face-threatening* and *face-saving* acts, is referred to as an analytical concept (for an emic perspective, see e.g. Haugh & Hinze, 2003; Haugh & Watanabe, 2009).

Finally, what this analysis aims to do is focus on both pragmatic and social aspects of verbal, in this case potentially jocular, communication that in different contexts occasions evaluations of politeness, mock politeness, mock impoliteness or impoliteness.

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CHAPTER 3

Data

From corpora to reality television to interviews

> You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. […] But […] reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind […]; only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal.
> (Orwell, 1950 [1949], p. 189)

This chapter introduces three types of data analysed in this research, namely, two corpora, the reality television game show *Big Brother* and qualitative interviews. After the presentation of the corpora in 3.1, *Big Brother* as an epitome of reality television discourse is introduced in 3.2. The following sections cover the format of the show with particular attention paid to performances in reality television and real life, and to a relation between reality television, impoliteness and humour as well as to the question whether *Big Brother* is a form of confrontational discourse. Finally, the complementary datasets from qualitative interviews and their use in this book are presented.

3.1 Corpora: The British National Corpus (*BNC*) and the *Macquarie Dictionary* database of Australian English (*Ozcorp*)

The first dataset used in the analysis of the verbal practice of teasing for the description of and approaches to teasing, see 4.1) in British and Australian English that is discussed in Section 4.5 are two corpora: the British National Corpus (*BNC*) (Davies 2004) and an Australian corpus *Ozcorp*.[12] The *BNC* is a 100-million word corpus consisting of 90% of written material (such as newspapers, journals, fiction, letters, essays) and a small part of spoken material. It represents the usage of British English from 1964 to 1994, when the corpus was completed and no new texts have been added since.[13] *Ozcorp*, the largest corpus of Australian English

12. I would like to express my gratitude to the editor of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, Susan Butler, who kindly provided me with the search results from *Ozcorp*.

13. For the information about the *BNC*, visit the website http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml.

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developed by the publisher of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, contains approximately 25 million words, with predominantly contemporary material (fiction, non-fiction and newsprint), although some texts date back to the 19th century. The corpus also includes a small number of "letters, advertisements, and some spoken transcriptions" (Delbridge & Butler, 1999, p. 167). It is obvious that both corpora consist largely of written texts in two varieties of the English language. Therefore, as will also be seen from the analysis in 4.5, more similarities than differences were expected to be found.

In order to see how teasing is conceptualised in British and Australian English, i.e. teasing1,[14] and in which situations language users (here writers, journalists, etc.) use the term, a number of lexical searches were run on the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*. After excluding phrasal verbs (e.g. tease out), non-verbal teasing and lexical items having other meanings, the analysed data amounts to 689 and 454 instances of potential verbal teasing found in the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*, respectively (see Table 2). Most of these teasing instances appear in the extracts from popular fiction, newspapers, biographies, university essays, etc. Interestingly, as shown in Table 2, even though the *BNC* is a bigger corpus, more instances of teasing were found in *Ozcorp*, which indicates that the usage of different lexical forms of 'teasing' was more frequent during the period when the texts were written.

Table 2. Frequency of the forms of tease in British English and Australian English (ratio 1:2.64)

	BNC	***Ozcorp***
total no. of instances	689	454
no. per million	6.89	18.16

Employing such written corpora when dealing with topics related to conversations, and especially when they involve humour, the analyst can face several challenges. It is not always possible to know what exactly has been uttered, since no exact wording is to be found in every search result. Also, there is a limited access to verbal or non-verbal contextual cues, such as prosody or paralinguistic features, and the information on the level of the interactants' interpersonal relationships, which are normally available in naturally-occurring conversations and play an important part in understanding teasing (e.g. Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 279; Heerey et al., 2005, p. 56). However, such corpus analyses prove extremely useful as complementary to direct empirical studies of interaction. Even though

14. Similar to the (im)politeness research, teasing1, referring to laymen's understanding and use of the term, is distinct from teasing2, i.e. its scientific conceptualisation (for this distinction and a list of evaluative stances used in technical definitions of teasing, see Haugh, 2017a).

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sometimes an instance of a potential tease could not fit into any major category proposed (see 4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.3), it still provides a valuable insight into what laymen are referring to when using such words as *teasing* or *tease*. Consider the following examples:

(1) She pointed at Algernon Peckham, who was merrier than Auguste had ever seen him, teasing Emily to Heinrich's disapproval. (BNC:H8A)

(2) "I never know if you're teasing me or not" (BNC:HGY)

(3) Every day of the six months they had been separated she had been able to imagine him as clearly as if he had been with her, laughing and fooling and teasing, as he had been in their brief time together. (Ozcorp 16272500)

(4) And Mike; always so good to her, teasing her, making her feel special … (BNC:H9V)

(5) It was bad enough being mercilessly teased and tantalized, without having to listen to this sort of humbug. (BNC:BMR)

(6) He was a tease with an uncanny knowledge of his victim's weak spots. (Ozcorp 1672600)

(7) "[T]easing shouldn't contain too much truth or it isn't teasing any more, it's… it's…" "Bullying?" (BNC:H9H)

In (1), no particular information about a teasing episode is presented (apart from knowing that it was done 'to Heinrich's disapproval'). It is not clear in which form it occurred, what the meaning behind the tease was, nor how it was perceived. Conversely, the remaining examples indicate an emic understanding of what teasing might be. The main effect that teasing creates is interpretative ambiguity (e.g. (2)), which perfectly explains considerable confusion it generates for both laymen and analysts. Furthermore, the multi-facetedness of teasing is illustrated in (3) – (7), where it first appears in the close proximity of 'laughing and fooling' and 'making [one] feel special', but then is claimed to produce negative feelings because of 'being merciless' and seeing the target as a 'victim' whose 'weak spots' are used to hurt him/her. Finally, an essential distinction is drawn between teasing and bullying in (7), which puts the former in a humorous (though not less ambiguous) frame, whereas the latter is to be judged very seriously.[15]

15. Cf. ragging (bullying) has been declared a criminal offence in India. For more details, see sections 29 and 116 of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983 (Karnataka Act No.1 of 1995) http://dpal.kar.nic.in/.%5C1%20of%201995%20(E).pdf and Desai (2009).

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Indeed, one has to acknowledge considerable benefits offered by this type of corpus-assisted analysis (see Taylor, 2016; Haugh, 2018).[16] Since written texts, especially fiction, prevail in the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*, through the narration it is possible to access characters' thoughts and feelings (see Examples (8) to (11)) that could be concealed from the participants in a real-life conversation.

(8) […] they laughed and talked about me, and I didn't like their teasing remarks. Besides that, it made me feel like a down-and-out bum and dirty. (Ozcorp 15060100)

(9) One neighbourhood policeman was known among colleagues (and some members of the public) for his proclivity for dispensing parking tickets. This was something about which he was continually teased, as a means of exerting informal pressure on him to desist. (BNC:A5Y)

(10) She used to laugh at his teasing, but never liked it. (Ozcorp 16398600)

(11) She knew he was laughing at her. […] and was teasing her like a cat playing with a mouse. Somehow containing her fury, she flashed him a smile […] "How thoughtful." (BNC:H7W)

This meta-language provides a valuable source of possible intentions and evaluations of teasing (see also Chapter 8). For instance, while (8) clearly shows one's hurt feelings ('it made me feel like a down-and-out bum and dirty') that are generated by teasing, (9) illustrates that the reason behind the tease is to criticise someone and change his/her behaviour (for functions, see Subsection 4.5.2). In (10) and (11) the character's real perception is presented ('never liked it' and 'somehow containing her fury'), which is totally opposite to how she decides to respond to the tease, i.e. smiling or laughing (for more details on after-tease and fake laughter, see Subsection 4.5.3; for differences between possible perceptions and reactions, see Chapters 6 and 8).

Undoubtedly, a corpus analysis is only one of the sources of the participants' evaluations and their metapragmatic comments. Such data as reality television discourse, to which I turn to in the next section, provides yet another illustrative example thereof.

16. Similar to data taken from film discourse (see Dynel, 2013a), the *BNC* includes much relevant information, that is hardly ever available in naturally-occurring conversations, and which can be employed as research data.

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3.2 Reality television: Introducing *Big Brother*

The concept of reality television or reality programming that stands for many popular factual TV genres (Kilborn, 2003, p. 55) existed before the end of the 20th century in the form of documentaries (e.g. *Civilization* [1969], *Wildlife on One* [1977]), first attempts at docu-soaps (e.g. *The Family* [1974], *The Doctor* [1990], *Airport* [1996]) and game shows (e.g. *Expedition Robinson* [1997], also known as *Survivor*) (see also Hill, 2015, pp. 27–29). Nonetheless, the rise of the reality television era was marked with *Big Brother*, a new format introduced by *Endemol* in the Netherlands in 1999. Immediately after its appearance on television screens, the format was successfully sold to many countries in the world. However, there was still a question whether this new form of entertainment was to be perceived more as a disaster or as a step forward after the success of docu-soaps to promote new ways of consuming entertainment products (Kilborn, 2003, pp. 15, 58). Incidentally, the idea of producing *Big Brother* in the UK was at first rejected since it was doubtful that the format "could sell on to commercial television" (Bazalgette, 2001 in Sparks, 2007).[17] Nevertheless, it did, and today *Big Brother*, that has acquired "the cult status" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 79) and become part of "television's cultural heritage" (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 225), "represents a major milestone in the development of factual TV programming" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 83).

What *Big Brother* offers is "the original and unparalleled social experiment" (Endemol Australia), which involves both the contestants and the audience. It would be fair to say that what attracts the viewers' interest is an emphasis put on ordinary people,[18] whose participation is fundamental to such a media event (Roscoe, 2001, p. 479; Turner, 2010, pp. 5, 12–13).[19] Although it is debatable what *ordinary* refers to in a broadcast context, Bonner (2003, p. 29), following the tradition in communication and cultural studies, suggests that it stands for 'everyday' and maybe more importantly, 'familiar', i.e. people that you "meet in the community" (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 232). Thus, it is possible to distinguish between professionals (or *special people* in Bonner's [2003, pp. 64–88] terms) – hosts, reporters, experts, actors – and *ordinary people* – participants, the studio audience or active

17. For the perceptions of the first series of *Big Brother* in different countries, see Biltereyst, 2004; see also an overview of reality TV around the globe (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1346936.stm).

18. Note, however, that there also exists a Celebrity *Big Brother* version that has been aired 19 times (in some cases twice a year) in the UK, but in Australia it did not return after the first series in 2002.

19. As will be seen from the analysis, being 'ordinary' is also highly appreciated in the analysed *Big Brother* houses (see Chapter 7).

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viewers (Bonner, 2003, pp. 88–97), i.e. those who are 'just like us' or should and could be recognised as such (Bignell, 2005, pp. 66–67). Knowing that thousands of people (who eventually become viewers) apply for participation in *Big Brother* every year, it is easy to imagine that the ones who manage to become housemates are "in some sense, acting vicariously on the viewers' behalf" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 80), representing them in public spheres (Coleman & Ross, 2010 in Hill, 2015, pp. 19–20). Also, the viewers can certainly recognise their own everyday private life activities (sleeping, cooking, washing, conversations) and other "seemingly unimportant experiences and worries [that have been transformed] into a daily public spectacle" (van Zoonen, 2004, p. 17; Thornborrow, 2015, p. 149; Hill, 2007, p. 141; Hill, 2015, pp. 43–46). Importantly, what the game show offers the viewers is not only the experience of watching 'ordinary' people being integrated into an entertainment format, often with "humorous interplay" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 80), and observing their actions in mundane but partly contrived situations (Culpeper, 2011a, pp. 234–235). It is also an opportunity to be "engaged in critical viewing of the attitudes and behaviour of ordinary people" (Hill, 2004, p. 37; see Chapter 8).

Not surprisingly, most research on reality television game shows concentrates on its impact on multi-media culture or new media as well as the audience's reactions (Jones, 2004; Mathijs & Hessels, 2004; Bignell, 2005, p. 144; Hill, 2007). Without a doubt, identifying and conceptualising audiences "allows the show to be put into respective cultural contexts" (Mathijs & Jones, 2004, p. 2). However, referring to reality television, and specifically *Big Brother* as a mere televisual event and a product of the producers' manipulation process, the way it has been analysed in the field of media and cultural studies, and entirely focusing on the perceptions of the viewers might deprive us of an opportunity to see the whole picture. Rather, a more language-based approach to this type of discourse could enrich our understanding of how it functions (Garcés-Conejos Blitvitch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2013, p. 10). Thus, reality television discourse could be regarded as an illustration of a communicative event different levels of which should be analysed in their own right. This is the way how *Big Brother* will be approached in this book, where the contestants' interactional practices are considered the main priority. This, however, does not mean that other levels will not be acknowledged where relevant. Nevertheless, I feel that if one starts constantly referring to the fact that the participants are watched by millions of viewers, it will limit the research into the housemates' communication as well as into the possible reasons behind its variability. Thus, the view advocated in this book is that *Big Brother* is "an illustration of contemporary society" (Meers & Van Bauwel, 2004, p. 87) in the sense that its contestants are engaged in ordinary interactive practices that can be recognised by the viewers even if they are aware of the contrived environment in which those interactions take place.

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3.2.1 *Big Brother*: The format and some local differences

The main data analysed in this research comes from the broadcast material of two national versions of the reality game show *Big Brother* 2012: Australia and UK. The format follows the same pattern in every country where it is televised, i.e. strangers are locked in a house without any contact with the outside world and compete for the prize money. On a regular basis, i.e. every week, the housemates anonymously[20] nominate each other for eviction.[21] Even though the essence of the nomination process is the same, the procedure differs in the two houses. While in the Australian house it is constructed as a collective experience, with all the housemates sitting in the same room while one of them nominates in a sound-proof box, the nominations take the whole day in the British house with each housemate being individually called to the diary room. The week following nominations, one housemate (or two housemates in the case of a double eviction) is evicted. This is decided via the viewers' voting to save. Viewers are also the ones who ultimately choose the housemate that wins the prize money (for more information on the format, see Mathijs & Jones, 2004). This pattern of neither the producers nor the housemates nor the audience having total control has been called "a triangle of control" by Conrad Green, one of the producers of the British *Big Brother* (Wells, 2001).

Structurally, the programme is said to resemble soap opera, but with the difference that "there is always a potential element of unpredictability", since the housemates "themselves write the script" (Roscoe, 2001, pp. 480–481; Tolson, 2013, p. 266). As has been already mentioned, taking into consideration the fact that the housemates are surrounded by (hidden) cameras, microphones, production crew and the viewers watching them, an element of performance always exists in such a show. Nevertheless, Centorinno (2004, p. 156), discussing the Italian version of *Big Brother*, rightly observes that after many years of the show being broadcast the contestants hardly notice the cameras and are "used to the rituals of the house". Thus, the *Big Brother* format can be said to represent a 'real' part of televised discourse where, in spite of an at least partially unnatural setting or circumstances, face-to-face communication is still easily recognisable as resembling real-life communicative behaviour (see (101)).

The *Big Brother* series is undoubtedly a global phenomenon, but there is also a strong "nexus of the local and the global" (Roscoe, 2004, p. 182). Indeed, as Bignell

20. Contrary to the normal procedure, in the *Big Brother* UK 2012 house, the housemates had to nominate face-to-face one time.

21. It should be pointed out that in *Big Brother* Australia 2012 the housemates could not discuss nominations at all. In the British house in the 2012 series, this rule was applied on day 16.

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(2005, p. 174) puts it, "*Big Brother* might look the same but it does not mean the same in different television territories and for different audiences". Since the national versions of *Big Brother* are produced with special attention paid to "local customs and values" as well as "national […] items of cultural, political or moral sensitivities" (Biltereyst, 2004, pp. 12, 14), they definitely "need to be approached as such" (Mathijs & Jones, 2004, p. 2). Here I would like to list some differences primarily between the Australian and British series in 2012.

The first element that indicates "screen-cultural" differences (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 232) and influences the nature of the programme broadcast is its timeslot. While in the UK, *Big Brother's* showing times have always been quite late, at 9 pm, 10 pm or even 11 pm (Hill, 2007, p. 35), the Australian version has been mainly scheduled for 7 pm, just before the famous family soap opera *Neighbours* and during some series "running against *Home and Away*" (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 232). This means that in Australia the game show should be suitable for all viewers, even though parental guidance can be recommended. Also, in the 2012 Australian series the housemates were not allowed to use any expletives and if they did, they were sent to the *Naughty Corner* where they received their punishment (e.g. cleaning shoes, ironing the laundry or writing an essay). This new rule was promoted by the *Nine* network for the 2012 series and the host Sonia Kruger confessed that "[i]t'll be more engaging and appealing to a broader audience because children will be watching and, because Nine is running it every night at 7 pm, it has to be family-friendly" (Lewdon, 2012). Nevertheless, the show is not doing well in Australia, where after eight series it was cancelled in 2008, returned in 2012 for three years and was cancelled again. At the moment, there's a little chance of *Big Brother's* return in the near future.[22] On the other hand, although reality television can be seen as "a fading phenomenon" (Hill, 2015, p. 7), in the UK, this BAFTA (The British Academy of Film and Television Arts) winning series was "a hit across TV, online and social media as well as generating front page headlines" (Endemol UK). It survived for nineteen series, but was officially announced to have ended in 2018.

Another related element is that of casting. It seems that the most widespread idea is that the housemates are chosen "so that different and larger than life personalities clash, where there is so little to do that arguments abound and negative emotions run riot" (Hill, 2007, p. 15). This might be the way the classic *Big Brother* is perceived and in some countries that is exactly how the participants are picked. *Big Brother* UK 2006 apparently followed this pattern, since for the viewers it felt

22. A similar format with people being locked in a house has been adopted in the BBC Two documentary *Muslims Like Us*, whose Australian two-part version was first broadcast on SBS in February 2018.

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"like being part of a secure mental health unit, only no one is taking their medication" (Hill, 2007, p. 15). Indeed, in order to recover the audience after the decline in ratings, "there has been an obligation to ratchet up the eccentricity of the cast of characters" (Sparks, 2007). It seems to have worked, since "[t]he calculation of conflict that had inspired the casting produced the expected rewards in terms of audiences" (Sparks, 2007). Similarly, in the analysed 2012 British series there were also a number of conflicts and cases of verbal aggression (for the analysis, see Sinkeviciute, 2015). This was also brought to attention by the host Brian Dowling who claimed that it was "the bitchiest and the [most] backstabbing house we have had for a while". On the other hand, it happens that the producers of the Australian version have a different opinion about conflictive situations. As Peter Abbott (executive producer of the first two Australian *Big Brother* series) explained, he wanted to cast people as if for a dinner party: "You might invite somebody to be provocative, but you would have to assume that the party was still going to be a pleasant experience for everybody… It was a failure in the American *Big Brother* that they cast too much for conflict and there was no sense of group" (quoted in Roscoe, 2001, p. 428). Here the distinction between something provocative and conflictive is made clear. Indeed, during the whole series of *Big Brother* Australia 2012, there was only one televised face-to-face encounter (Day 39) that could be labelled as genuinely impolite, where one of the participants (Angie), feeling the need to defend her behaviour, was really angry and quite aggressive in her verbal expression. After this incident, Angie felt that she was attacked and asked Big Brother to let her out. Her disappointment and (psychological) struggle explaining her willingness to leave the house can be illustrated by what she said in the diary room: "Call me stupid, but I actually felt like some of these people were like my family".

The participants' emotions running high can be understandable, especially taking into account that in the centre of the format is competition between the housemates to win the prize money (Hill, 2007, p. 52). This situation is double-sided as well. On the one hand, there is a number of individual challenges and tasks, but they are inevitably combined (or clash) with a common goal, thus promoting a sense of community (Cavender, 2004) or sometimes even "an idealistic collective solidarity" (Wilson, 2004, p. 197). For example, in the *Big Brother* Australia 2012 house, the housemates were even tricked into thinking that there was a second house and they had to unite to win challenges, which they successfully did. The collective part, however, is used "to achieve intermediate goals", while the final victory and the prize money are to be enjoyed by an individual participant (Centorrino, 2004, p. 152). In addition, the prize money, originally conceived of as the main goal of every participant, does not seem to be everyone's personal aim. For instance, in the analysed Australian house one of the housemates – George – was

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a multi-millionaire, which strongly suggests that he did not take part in the show because of the prize money.[23]

Interestingly enough, the reception of the housemates by the live audience during the launch and eviction nights differs in the two 2012 series as well. It has been suggested that *Big Brother*, among other things, is about humiliating people. For example, there is a tendency to boo or jeer unpopular contestants on eviction night (Hill, 2007, p. 197), which indicates the audience's disaffiliative stance on the participants and their behaviour (Romaniuk, 2013). Surprisingly, alongside eviction nights, the housemates were also booed during the launch night of *Big Brother* UK 2012, even though the public had only seen their self-presentation videos. Conversely, in the Australian series, only cheering was heard from the audience during the launch night and live eviction nights, which gave an impression that the audience was very supportive of every housemate. These differences in the audience's attitudes should not necessarily reflect their own perception; it also points at the behaviours that are condoned as well as promoted by the production crew.

The local context can manifest itself in some other different ways as well. For example, *Australianness* can be performed via relaxed lifestyle, outdoor activities and sunshine. Also, what makes it an Australian *Big Brother* is that "a certain conceptualization of Australian national identity" (Roscoe, 2001, pp. 475–476) is presented through the housemates and their relationships. One of the most important discourses in Australian culture is that of *mateship* that stands for support or help in difficult or emotional situations. Many of those working on the show note that mateship appears to be "at the centre of the *Big Brother* experience" (Roscoe, 2004, p. 184; for analysis, see Sinkeviciute, 2014). For instance, many challenges and tasks are designed so that the housemates could bond rather than stressing individual gain. Similarly, talking about the Australian version, Dave English, a day-producer on the first series, observes that "[t]hey [the participants] don't seem to give a bugger whether they won or lost", it was rather about doing it together (in Roscoe [2004, p. 184]). A good example of that is the fact that housemates in the 2012 series rejected one of the weekly tasks that was a meat-based task, because one of the housemates was a vegetarian. On the other hand, the British version has been often accused of becoming more extreme, where "the unpleasantness of the task [the housemates] must perform" increases, which also means that the contestants have more chance to "display themselves in situations ranging from the undignified to the grotesque" (Sparks, 2007). A good illustration from the British 2012 series is a weekly task where part of the housemates had to act as 'scientists' and, to win the task, they had to electrocute their fellow housemates who were referred to as 'lab rats'. The 'scientists', however, were unaware that the 'electrocute' button

23. The contestants also participate in the show because of a possibility to become celebrities.

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was not real and did not produce the said effect. Eventually, some of them reached for the maximum level, which one of them condemned saying, 'you're suspending all your values cause you're told to do this'. This clearly illustrates the nature of the tasks that the housemates had to do during the show and how it differs from the Australian series.

With some of the regional variations mentioned above, it can be said that the final product seen on television screens reflects not so much an attempt at international homogeneity as at local representations, since "there is no uniform text; it change[s] from region to region" (Mathijs & Jones, 2004, p. 3). That "indigenisation of an international 'reality TV' format" (Roscoe, 2004, p. 181), the embodiment of national characteristics, and the ability to speak to local viewers and their expectations conceptualise *Big Brother* as "a form of cultural expression" (Pitout, 2004, p. 168). This (at least partly) explains its popularity among the audiences (Kiliçbay & Binark, 2004, p. 142) and suggests that "the winner of a series of *Big Brother* represents the embodiment of a national standard of performance" (Carter, 2004, p. 254) and is "representative of the community's aspirations for themselves" (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 229).

3.2.2 *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012

As shown in Table 3, the Australian version was aired from August 13 to November 7, i.e. for 87 days, and its British counterpart was screened during 70 days, from June 5 to August 13, which corresponds to 58 and 55 hours of broadcast material, respectively. In the Australian version, there were two *intruders*, each entering the house on day 29 and day 36.

Table 3. *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012 broadcast data

	***BBAU* 2012**	***BBUK* 2012**
Broadcast dates	August 13 to November 7	June 5 to August 13
Days, hours	87 days, 58 hours	70 days, 55 hours
Number of participants	14 + 2 intruders	16 + 1 wildcard

It is a common practice in the format that new people chosen by the show's producers enter the house at a later stage, but "an intruder has never won *Big Brother* in its history" (Molloy, 2014), with most attention being paid to the original housemates. In the British version, an extra (wildcard) housemate entered the house on day 4, i.e. in the very beginning of the game, which still made her feel as part of the original group (for the analysis of group identity in the house, see Sinkeviciute, 2017d).

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Table 4. *Big Brother* Australia 2012 housemates

Name	Age	Occupation	Hometown/state	Evicted
Angie	21	Sales representative	Gold Coast, Queensland	Day 70
Ava (intruder)	29	Singer	Victoria	Day 51
Ben	32	Accounts manager	Victoria	Day 87 (winner)
Bradley	19	Supermarket checkout operator	Coraki, New South Wales	Day 56
Charne	31	Cabaret singer	Gold Coast, Queensland	Day 14
Estelle	24	Student	Victoria	Day 87 (third place)
George	25	Mining electrician	Western Australia	Day 42
Josh	28	Musician	South Australia	Day 60 (walked)
Layla	24	Unemployed beautician	Brisbane, Queensland (originally from Hambleton, UK)	Day 87 (runner-up)
Michael	26	Advertising copywriter	Brisbane, Queensland	Day 85
Ray	25	Veterinarian	Brisbane, Queensland	Day 35
Ryan	22	Model	Victoria	Day 21
Sam (intruder)	21	Waiter	Gold Coast (grew up in New South Wales)	Day 84
Sarah	30	Salesperson	Wagga Wagga, New South Wales	Day 28
Stacey	24	Accounts manager	Sydney, New South Wales	Day 77
Zoe	23	Student	New South Wales	Day 85

All the participants in the Australian *Big Brother* house are listed alphabetically in Table 4 with the information about their age, occupation, hometown and on which day they were evicted. The age varies from 19 to 32 years and, not surprisingly, most of the housemates come from Queensland, New South Wales or Victoria. Even though their socio-economic background was not explicitly specified, their occupations ranged from a student, singer, cabaret performer, model, and a salesperson to a mining electrician, advertising copywriter and an accounts manager. Josh was the only housemate who walked out of the house due to a family tragedy; all other housemates faced nominations and, eventually eviction, with Ben (the oldest contestant) becoming the winner on day 87. One participant – Layla – was not Australian, she grew up in the UK, but had been living in Australia for some time before the show started. Having her as a housemate and observing differences in her and other (local) housemates' reactions to (jocular) verbal behaviour was

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one of the main reasons behind a decision to talk to both Australians and the British living in Australia during qualitative interviews (for description, see 3.5).

Table 5. *Big Brother* UK 2012 housemates

Name	Age	Occupation	Hometown/region	Evicted
Adam	27	Reformed gang member	Los Angeles, USA (originally from Burton-upon-Trent, UK)	Day 70 (runner-up)
Arron	23	Model	Manchester, North West	Day 32
Ashleigh	20	Retail sales supervisor and barmaid	East London	Day 67
Becky (wildcard)	19	College student	Blackburn, North West	Day 60
Benedict	32	Teacher/stripper	Manchester, North West	Day 18
Caroline	20	Former boarding school student	Surrey, South East	Day 53
Chris	21	Doorman/bailiff	Luton, East of England	Day 11
Conor	24	Personal trainer and massage therapist	Londonderry, Northern Ireland	Day 60 (walked with money)
Deana	23	Model	Wednesbury, West Midlands	Day 70 (third place)
Lauren	20	Student	Jersey	Day 46
Luke A	31	Chef	North Wales	Day 70 (winner)
Luke S	24	Club promoter	Stoke-on-Trent, West Midlands	Day 70 (fifth place)
Lydia	25	Professional dancer	Cheshire, North West	Day 25
Sara	22	Model	Edinburgh, Scotland	Day 70 (fourth place)
Scott	21	Student	Macclesfield, North West	Day 67
Shievonne	28	Assistant manager	London	Day 39
Victoria	41	Glamour model	Reading, South East	Day 4

Table 5 provides the information about the British housemates. While the age range is from 19 to 41 and the winner – Luke A – was 31 when he won the show, it is important to mention that the two oldest contestants were evicted during the first three weeks. A majority of the participants were from England, with Conor representing Northern Ireland and Sara Scotland. Adam, originally from the UK, had spent a considerable amount of time in the USA, which could also be noticed in his accent.

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In both houses, a variety of (minority) groups were also represented. Ben, the winner of the Australian *Big Brother*, and Scott in the British house were identified as homosexual, while Luke A, the winner of the British series, was a transsexual housemate, born as a female. Finally, the shaded rows in Tables 4 and 5 indicate housemates that were present in the house during the second half of the show, already formed relationships and background knowledge about each other. Therefore, examples of their jocular verbal behaviours will be more frequently encountered on the pages of this book.

The analysis focuses on potentially jocular interactive behaviours (e.g. teasing, mockery, banter) in both *Big Brother* houses. In this book, verbal behaviour is labelled as jocular when either the instigator explicitly places it within a humorous frame and/or the target or a majority of the unaddressed ratified hearers (third party) evaluate it as such. All such conversations (whether instigator-target or multi-party) have been identified, amounting to a total of 231 interactions from the Australian house and 188 interactions between the British housemates. All of them have been transcribed using the transcriptions conventions described in Gumperz & Berenz (1993) (see the transcription conventions in 1.2).

3.3 Reality television, performance and real life

"All the world's a stage", wrote Shakespeare long before reality television gave ordinary people the chance and pleasure to observe other ordinary people. It has been widely claimed in articles and books on reality television that what we see there is "just part of the 'game'" (Blas Arroyo, 2013, p. 230) or a play, where "[t]hose who volunteer their services as participants […] will be expected to maintain a high level of performance" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 76), and that it is not how one behaves in real life. I believe that it is rather yet *another* form of *performing the real* that we encounter on our television screens or in online video streaming (cf. Corner, 2002). Indeed, as Park (1950) rightly observes, the very word *person*, which now merely refers to "a human being in general", derived from "[a] character sustained or assumed in a drama or the like, or in *actual life*" (COED, 1977, p. 724; emphasis added). Thus, one does not have to be part of a popular television project in order to act in front of other people (see also discussion in Chapter 6). Even if guided in a particular direction by the production crew, reality television performances are still improvised (Hill, 2004, p. 32) and are not "'put on' in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he's [sic] going to do" (Goffman, 1959, p. 73). In a way, this is, indeed, a (language) play, our never-ending performance in front of others and ourselves, "because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing" (Goffman, 1959, p. 72). Using the term *performance*, Goffman (1959, p. 22) refers

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to "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [sic] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". This line of argument can also be found in Park (1950, pp. 249–250) who points out that "everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role… It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. […] In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves […] this mask is our truer self […]" (see also Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 31). All this can easily characterise people's daily verbal behaviour, since it is mainly through interaction that one performs a role and has an impact on others in everyday life.

Much of the criticism directed at the level of 'reality' in reality television has concentrated on how *performances* watched on screen are entirely different from real-life (also *performative*) behaviour. Kilborn (2003, p. 88), for instance, admits that there might be parallels between how the participants in a game show, e.g. *Big Brother*, are voted off and how people are being hired and fired in "profit oriented Western society". However, he immediately refutes this point claiming that reality television programmes "remain essentially televisual events" and if one starts "interpret[ing] them in any other way", too much significance would be given to the power of television (Kilborn, 2003, p. 88).[24] Even though there is no doubt about game shows such as *Big Brother* or *Survival* being televisual events, it seems quite premature to entirely discard any possibility of their internal structural processes and behavioural patterns somehow resembling what happens outside their televisual borders. After all, daily life itself can be defined as an event that "had become a series of complex performances, self-scripted and self-surveilled, a desperate attempt to keep up appearances […]" (Clissold, 2004, p. 45), which is exactly what can be said about many reality television formats as well. Interestingly, even though the viewers do realise that elements of performance could be easily present in the behaviours of those on television screens,[25] they still evaluate performances negatively in what is supposed to be "factual television as true to life" (Hill, 2007, p. 119). Furthermore, not all the contestants are equally popular among the viewers. Those who "offer an effective performance of '*being themselves*' appear to be successful "in terms of moral 'worthiness' by the *Big Brother* audience" (Tolson, 2006, p. 169; emphasis added). Similarly, the viewers, who undoubtedly are thought to represent 'real' people as opposed to the contestants, are constantly

24. Peter Abbott, the reality television producer in Australia, voices his concern saying, "I don't know why many people in the academic community can't see the level of complexity in entertainment" (in Roscoe [2002, p. 230]).

25. Cf., however, research on reality television in China, where many viewers apparently believe reality television dating programmes to be real (Shei, 2013).

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involved in some sort of performative process while judging the level of reality shown on television screens. As Hill (2007, p. 144) accurately points out, "actuality is an ongoing product of performance, and no matter what their evaluative connotations of truth and reality, audiences are performing their understanding of these issues when they watch factual television".

Despite such claims about the relations between the participants not being based on "recognisable social formations in contemporary society" (Tincknell & Raghuram, 2004, p. 259), it seems that the viewers "may at least sometimes be seeking those onscreen who are in some sense a reflection of themselves" (Chandler & Griffiths, 2004: 58). My claim here is that the behavioural patterns shown in reality television can and *do* reflect a number of manifestations of people's behaviour. As Foster (2004, p. 280) suggests, "[j]ust as in real life, carefully chosen alliances and strategic friendships could bring success on *Survivor*".[26] Indeed, although perfectly realising that they are being filmed, the participants cannot ignore the communicatively recognisable structures and patterns that they are used to. Thus, they tend to "integrat[e] [their] actions and mak[e] them consistent with some recognized rule of life, not only in response to the expectations of other individuals and to the conventions of the society in which [they] live, but also in the interest of the ends that [they] as individual[s] choose to pursue" (Park, 1950, p. 362). In other words, they create the same or very similar settings/patterns in the house to the ones according to which they live in the outside world. It is not surprising then that reality television is entertaining due to "its likeness to what audiences recognize as *real*" (Culpeper & Holmes, 2013, p. 169), i.e. "the pleasure that audiences take in measuring the subjects' ability to generate an appropriate performance as a reflection of that real-life role-playing in which all of us are required to indulge on a daily basis" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 14). As a result, as in real life, in reality television it is possible to observe what one says/is allowed to say/think about other people when they are absent, but not in their presence because such behaviour would be inappropriate. Consider the following situations from *Big Brother* Australian 2012, where Angie makes a distinction between what can be said to someone's face as opposed to behind someone's back (e.g. 'some things you need to think but you don't need to say' in (12) and 'you would never say that to her face though' in (13); for more on this distinction and different settings where it occurs, see Chapter 6 and Sinkeviciute, 2016b).

26. Similarly, one *Survivor: Marquesas* contestant claimed: "'If I have to say something to someone and do the opposite… well, that's just the way it is, the way *life* is' (25 April 2002)." (Cavender, 2004, p. 166; emphasis added)

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(12) Day 51 (AU)
Angie retells what she says to Bradley when his behaviour is inappropriate:

```
Angie:      if he says a rude comment I'll be like don't Bradley
            no don't say that you know that's really rude or you know
         →  some things you need to think but you don't need to say
```

(13) Day 66 (AU)
Angie and Stacey talk about Layla:

```
Angie:       {[smiling] she doesn't just have normal friends}
Stacey:      I reckon she'll be a wag when she gets out
Angie:    →  {[smiling] oh you would never say that to her face though}
Stacey:      uh
Angie:       {[smiling] you'd never say that to her face}
             = she would hate that =
Stacey:      = no no no (she's not a wag) = but like
```

Indeed, however artificial the structure and the environment of the show might be, the participants enter it with their fully developed concepts about how communication functions and they follow particular patterns that are ingrained in their ways of being. Undoubtedly, one is not obliged to follow these patterns, but then it will not stay unnoticed even in a contrived environment such as the *Big Brother* house, which among other things, can occasion evaluations of impoliteness resulting in conflict.

3.4 Reality television, (genuine) impoliteness, entertainment and (failed) humour

Big Brother, that "has been hailed as the 'godfather of reality shows'" (Endemol UK), has been relocated from a mere reality game show "to an entertainment space" (Hill, 2007, p. 128; Hill, 2002, 2015). As Lorenzo-Dus (2009, p. 164) points out, "[a]cross reality television formats […] unmitigated face-aggravation […] acts as a regular ('unmarked') vehicle for entertainment". In many formats this "unmitigated face-aggravation" acts as a means of entertaining the public (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009, p. 164) and it is seen as an intentionally and deliberately constructed face-threat (Bousfield, 2007, pp. 2186–2187; Culpeper, 2008) or what can be called successfully communicated impoliteness (Bousfield, 2010) or genuine impoliteness (Bernal, 2008; Sinkeviciute, 2015). Such verbal behaviour also stands for what Culpeper (2011a) refers to as entertaining impoliteness, i.e. when the offender deliberately uses impolite language and behaviour so that the others, who "can understand the probable impoliteness effects for the target" (Culpeper,

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2011a, p. 234), could be amused. There are different reasons for the observers to be entertained by overtly impolite behaviour in reality television, e.g. emotional and voyeuristic pleasure (Culpeper, 2011a, pp. 234–235) or mirthful pleasure on the audience's part (Dynel, 2013a).

When the viewers are present, the interactive situation becomes more complex. As Scannell (1991) holds, broadcast talk – a general term for (studio) talk on radio and television – has a *double articulation*, i.e. the participants in a discussion or in interviews interact with each other, but the talk itself "is designed to be heard by absent audiences" (Scannell, 1991, p. 1). Many forms of broadcast talk are examples of institutional interaction and, as Tolson (1991, p. 179) claims, "they should be seen as institutionalized variants of 'conversation' as such". It is not surprising then that they often "involve a particular set of power relationships between the two participants" (Hutchby, 1996, p. 3), e.g. the host and the caller (Hutchby, 1991; 1996), the capitalist and entrepreneurs who need to prove in a competition show that they deserve the former's investment (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009) or in talk shows focusing on personal matters wherein the verbal behaviour "often takes the form of a series of aggravated personal confrontations" (Thornborrow, 2015, p. 121). When there is power imbalance, conflict is likely to occur. And when there is a broadcast conflict, the audience in the studio or the viewers at home might find it entertaining (e.g. television courtroom shows [Lorenzo-Dus, 2008] or political debates [Dynel, 2011d]).

Impoliteness in film discourse that, similar to broadcast talk, "operates on two communicative levels: i.e. that of characters and that of the viewer" (Dynel, 2011c, p. 1642), is a rich source of disaffiliative humour. Dynel (2012b, 2013a) points out that in this discourse impoliteness primarily "serves *viewers'* entertainment humour experience" (Dynel, 2013a, p. 106; emphasis added; see also Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Lorenzo-Dus, 2013, p. 15). As a result, the targets' perceptions are rarely available to the viewer, since an image of the target being offended might "decrease recipients' enjoyment" (Dynel, 2013a, p. 109). Indeed, watching reality television programmes some viewers express sympathy towards the participants who are unfairly treated or humiliated (Hill, 2007, p. 208), especially when they [viewers] believe that the targets "really felt insulted" (Blas Arroyo, 2013, p. 233). Along the same vein, it is not foreign for the third party involved in (potentially) impolite verbal behaviours to defend the target or even take offence to what has been said (see Chapter 6) or for bystanders to intervene (Kádár & Márquez-Reiter, 2015) (for examples outside the realm of reality television, see Dobs & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013).

Big Brother, which is a type of media discourse standing somewhere in between the real and fiction, is a clear illustration of a double articulation and interactions on two communicative levels. Yet, those levels are somewhat distinct from what

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many types of broadcast talk (e.g. debates, radio or news interviews) and film interactions offer us. First of all, even if the show structurally has much to share with soap operas, it is 'scripted' in a different way. What we observe are "unpredictable interactions in confined situations" (Tolson, 2013), where the producers have no "access control over the housemates" (Abbott in Roscoe, 2002, p. 231). Thus, the exact meanings are not pre-defined as in political interviews (Scannell, 1991, p. 2) or constructed for the recipients by the production crew through actors (Dynel, 2011a, p. 1642) but by the housemates themselves.

Furthermore, unlike in the film or drama discourse, where conflicts between the characters primarily generate viewers' interest and entertainment (Culpeper, 1998; Dynel, 2012b; 2013a, p. 106), genuine impoliteness in the house can amuse not only the audience but also the fellow housemates. The latter, however, do not seem to find impolite behaviours as entertaining as the viewers. For instance, after one housemate's insulting comments towards another housemate, Luke A confesses in the diary room:

(14) Day 21 (UK)

Luke A: in a verbal way it was more sort of he was calling him really offensive names it was really horrible to be around

Undoubtedly, entertainment is an indispensable part of the format (Kilborn, 2003, p. 60).[27] However, not all genuinely impolite behaviours are caused by the fact that the speaker thinks that they might entertain the audience (see Sinkeviciute, 2015). For instance, after a female housemate (Shievonne) had been arguing with another housemate (Deana), the latter claimed:

(15) Day 41 (UK)

Deana: she's trying to start an argument with me on purpose so that everyone will see it and I'll be up for nomination tomorrow

Indeed, it is understandable that in the *Big Brother* house, where each housemate tries to become the winner of the series, everyone (at least subconsciously) is primarily guided by the desire to (strategically) nominate someone else in order for that person to be eventually evicted (see Beebe [1995] on instrumental rudeness and Kienpointner's [1997, pp. 271–274] discussion on strategic rudeness). But at

27. Also, there is "the extensive use of playful humour and self deprecating irony in the narrational comments that are an integral feature of […] [reality television] formats" (Kilborn, 2003, p. 60).

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a higher level, the housemates are aware that their popularity among the viewers could be generated by the extent to which they are amusing.[28]

It should also be mentioned that even though the 'show'-oriented discourse and analyses of the *Big Brother* format have been the main focus of research, one should not forget about a potential 'reality' in the show – "the real reality" of which the housemates themselves "can be sincerely convinced" (Goffman, 1959, p. 17) – and allow for a possibility that the target at least for a moment after being seriously insulted feels *real* emotions, which can also be easily observed via his/her immediate body language and/or verbal reaction[29] (Culpeper, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Lorenzo-Dus, 2013, pp. 17–19).

Even though there are some parallels between reality game shows and talk-shows where aggravated personal confrontations are generated to entertain the public (Kilborn, 2003, p. 61), it is important to point out that *mitigated* face attacks can also be found in such reality television formats as *Big Brother*, *Survival*, *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here* that are not only based on challenges but also on interpersonal relations (for an analysis of conflicts related to judgement in such shows, see Thornborrow, 2015, pp. 132–148). The use of humour is an excellent way of mitigating a face-threat. Some analyses of English speaking cultural contexts show that most of the time no visible offence is publicly taken to jocular but at the same time face-threatening behaviours (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2011, 2014). Such reactions are at least partially conditioned by the proscription against taking oneself too seriously and a high value that is placed on a good sense of humour (Goddard, 2009; Fox, 2004; Martin, 2007; Bell, 2009a; 2009b; see also Chapter 5). This way, possible offence that could be taken is suspended in order for everyone to 'get a laugh' (Zajdman, 1995, p. 326). As will be mentioned in Chapter 5, such jocular face-threats lead to the evaluations of mock impoliteness rather than impoliteness, i.e. the target decides to show that she recognises and maybe even appreciates a humorous intent of a potentially impolite verbal act (for more on jocular behaviours and cultural values, see Olivieri, 2003; Goddard, 2009; Chapter 5).

Although the desirable outcome on the part of the speaker of any attempt at humour is indeed for it to be recognised and enjoyed, jocularity can still be not appreciated, which leads to failed humour (Bell, 2009a; 2009b), instances of which can be easily encountered in the realm of reality television discourse (see Chapters 6 and 8). In such cases, humorous remarks happen to be directly and seriously rejected, thus the reactions are po-faced (Drew, 1987; Bell, 2009b;

28. Ironically, Arron's (*Big Brother* UK 2012) practical jokes were not perceived as funny by most of the housemates or, apparently, the audience (he lost out in a four-way eviction).

29. On the other hand, it is possible to assume that the entire population *acts* 24/7.

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Haugh, 2010a; 2014; see Chapter 4), even though they can be preceded by laughter.[30] This tendency of combining the recognition of humorous intent (in the form of laughter[31]) and its non-appreciation (via a comment or silence) points to the target "index[ing] affiliative and disaffiliative stances" (Haugh, 2010a, p. 2110) and seems to be a good strategy for those who want to project that they have a good sense of humour and, thus, are "competent interlocutors" (Bell, 2009a; see also Drew, 1987; Holt, 2013). Nevertheless, via evaluative metalinguistic comments, it becomes quite evident that the comment lacks funniness (Bell, 2009a; see 5.2.2) or offence can be or has been taken (Haugh, 2015).

3.4.1 *Big Brother*: An impoliteness-oriented context?

There is a number of discourses to which impoliteness is likely to be pertinent, e.g. military and civilian police training, parking disputes and exploitative TV shows (for analyses, see Culpeper, 1996; 2005; 2011a; Culpeper et al., 2003; Bousfield, 2008a; 2008b; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009; Culpeper & Holmes, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2013). Due to the nature of these discourses and activity types therein, impoliteness can be referred to as "the normal and expectable communicative behaviour" (Kienpointner, 2008, p. 244) or "rule-governed rudeness" (Lakoff, 1989, p. 123) and, therefore, as sanctioned. Mills (2002) argues that in such cases, i.e. within a particular community of practice, impolite verbal behaviour should not be analytically "classified as impolite" (Mills, 2002, p. 79), even if perceived as such by the target, because it is "'appropriate' to the context" (Mills, 2002, p. 86) and is seen as a local norm. This type of behaviour indeed can result in the target not taking offence *publicly* (and it seems that this is exactly what Mills bases her argument on), but, as Culpeper (2005, p. 65, emphasis original) accurately points out, there is "the difference between *sanctioning* such [impolite] behaviour and *neutralizing* it". Even when aggressive behaviour is seen as appropriate and normal in a particular community of practice, people "do still take offence" (Culpeper 2011a, p. 217) (even though this might only be on a *personal* level and not publicly expressed) (see also Bousfield, 2010, p. 105; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Lorenzo-Dus, 2013, pp. 17–18; 5.2.2 and Chapters 5 and 6).

Without a doubt, reality television puts "a greater emphasis on interpersonal conflict, sexuality and emotion, and the staging of aggression" (Bignell, 2005, p. 173) and some forms of it (e.g. exploitative reality shows) "openly stage

30. But note that, as Bell (2009a, p. 1835) observes, "groaning and fake laughter, were among the least frequent reactions" to failed humour.

31. Indeed, laughter (not an obviously fake or nervous laughter) is "centrally bound up with notions of nonseriousness" in interaction (Holt, 2013, p. 73).

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maximally offensive face-threat" (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009, p. 166) and their "local norms […] allow, indeed rely on, precisely such behaviour" (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009, p. 176) (for more on reality television and aggression, see the chapters in Part III in Lorenzo-Dus & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013). Being not only the epitome of reality television but also at least partially reflecting daily life communication, *Big Brother* demonstrates a potential for verbal conflicts, arguments and other impolite behaviours. However, not all verbal arguments should be immediately associated with genuinely impolite behaviours (as described in 4.3.1). Furthermore, as already mentioned, the *Big Brother* format – a global phenomenon – is subject to some regional adaptations, and not all cultural contexts condone overt verbal aggression and massive conflict. As Peter Abbott (executive producer of the first Australian *Big Brother* versions) reveals,

> some *Big Brother* producers, notably the United States, […] have clearly cast for conflict … and watching those shows gave us a certainty that that was a bad idea because if there's not enough common ground and enough desire for people to make the relationships work, then they don't communicate and that's even worse television, so the process of watching people trying to maintain relationships is actually more interesting than people in conflict. (in Roscoe, 2002, p. 229)

This, however, does not mean that there are no discussions or arguments in the Australians houses (in particular in the 2012 house analysed), but they are of a more jocular nature and without the non-verbal cues (body language, prosody) that mark verbal behaviour as genuinely impolite.

Finally, not all the viewers enjoy arguments in reality television programmes. For example, while aggression and being offensive are seen as negative traits in the *Big Brother* characters, having a good sense of humour and being honest are the features that are most appreciated (Chandler & Griffiths, 2004, p. 53). Similarly, the very participants of *Big Brother* do not seem to be impoliteness-oriented in their vision of the relationships in the house. After a conflict with another housemate in *Big Brother* UK 2012, Arron confessed:

(16) Day 4 (UK)

```
Arron:    I am just trying to engage in happy
          conversations you can try and avoid other
          conversations but it's hard to try and
          avoid other conversations without being
          rude and that's what I don't wanna be
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All this suggests that even though there is a great potential for aggression and conflict in *Big Brother*, the discourse itself should not be seen as impoliteness-oriented, which is the case in many other reality television programmes. Furthermore, it also

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seems that 'being rude' is not the main goal per se in interactions in the *Big Brother* house but, undoubtedly, it can be employed for a number of different reasons (see Section 5 in Sinkeviciute, 2015).

3.5 Qualitative interviewing

The complementary data in this research comes from qualitative face-to-face interviews that have been carried out by the researcher in different locations in Australia and the UK. The interviewees were all native speakers of (Australian or British) English and lived in one of the countries at the moment of the interview. All thirty-five participants were voluntarily recruited (via random or snowball sampling) and there are approximately 31 hours of audio-recorded material. As shown in Table 6, the interview data is highly comparable across the two settings in terms of the number, gender, age and level of education of the interview participants.

Before each interview started, the participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their personal information, occupation, living location, any other place where they had spent a considerable amount of time and whether they had heard and watched *Big Brother* (see Tables 7 and 8). Also, all the interviewees have signed an informed consent form and have agreed to reveal their first names and other identifying information collected during the interviews.

Table 6. Overall overview of the interview participants in Australia and the UK

	Australian interviewees	**British interviewees**
Number	16	19
Gender	Male (8), Female (8)	Male (11), Female (8)
Age	19–61	22–56
Level of education	High School (2), Undergraduate (10), Postgraduate (4)	High School (2), Undergraduate (11), Postgraduate (6)

Tables 7 and 8 provide lists of the Australian and British interview participants in the order of them being interviewed. No interviewee was familiar with the analysed series and only two Australians – Colleen (61) and Amanda (35) – and three British – Anita (43), Michele (51) and David (48) – stated that they had not watched *Big Brother* at all.[32] Everyone, however, was fully aware of what kind of reality show it is, since as a cultural phenomenon, reality television shows are more

32. This was a purely informative question. The interview participants were not chosen based on whether they had watched *Big Brother*.

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Table 7. Australian participants interviewed in Australia and the UK

Name	Age	Occupation	Living location	Grew up or long time spent in another location (in years)	Seen *Big Brother*?
Michael (BB*)	28	Radio Broadcaster	Melbourne, VIC	Brisbane (26)	yes
Benjamin	36	Project manager	Brisbane, QLD	UK (11)	yes
Kylie	40	Project officer	Brisbane, QLD	n/a	yes
Michael (B)	40	Maintenance Planner	Toowoomba, QLD	Sydney (10, grew up), Canberra (4)	yes
Dale	19	In a burger shop	Brisbane, QLD	n/a	yes
Colleen	61	Team leader	Melbourne, VIC	Wycheproof in Mallee, VIC (14, grew), Bendigo (3)	no
Christine	54	Dog minder	Melbourne, VIC	New Zealand (3)	yes
Michael (M)	53	Financial planner	Melbourne, VIC	Cambridge, UK (2.5)	yes
Amanda	35	Nurse, martial arts instructor	Brisbane, QLD	London (4)	no
Alicia	20	Student	Brisbane, QLD	n/a	yes
Clare	52	Exhibition curator	Melbourne, VIC	n/a	yes
Peter	31	Interior designer	Sydney, NSW	n/a	yes
Hannah	27	Campaigns	Melbourne, VIC	n/a	yes
Ben	31	IT	London, UK	Sydney (25)	yes
Dan	38	Communications manager	London, UK	Sydney (29)	yes
Rachel (AU)	25	Youth worker	London, UK	Sydney (24)	yes

* The abbreviations 'BB', 'B' and 'M' are used in order to differentiate between three interviewees named Michael, where 'BB' stands for Big Brother, since this interviewee was a housemate in the 2012 series, 'B' for Brisbane and 'M' for Melbourne.

often "overshadowed by talk about them" than actually them being watched (Hill, 2015, p. 4). Furthermore, as Hill (2007, p. 192) righty suggests, even if people can "lack knowledge of specific production practices in reality television [it] does not stop them from judging participants".

Another piece of essential information that can be seen in Tables 7 and 8 is that not only Australians have been interviewed in Australia or the British in the UK, but also several British people living in Australia and a couple of Australians residing in the UK. This way a more versatile perspective was sought and more diverse opinions were expressed that could shed light on how speakers of the two

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Table 8. British participants interviewed in the UK and Australia

Name	Age	Occupation	Living location	Grew up or long time spent in another location (in years)	Seen *Big Brother*?
Jon	33	Manager	London	n/a	yes
Ashley	22	Plant operator	Leicestershire	n/a	yes
Simran	23	Banking	London	n/a	yes
Darren	32	Operator	Southampton	n/a	yes
Anita	43	Technician	Southampton	n/a	no
Una	56	Factory operator	Southampton	n/a	yes
Rachel (UK)	37	Freelance editor	London	Lancashire (18, grew up), Glasgow (4.5)	yes
Matt	34	Creative director	London	North Yorkshire (18, grew up), Newcastle upon Tyne (4)	yes
Andrew	35	Director	London	Yorkshire (15)	yes
Danielle	28	Graphic designer	London	Doncaster (grew up), Edinburgh (1.5)	yes
Damian	41	Programmer	London	Japan (18 months)	yes
Nancy	40	National Health Service Manager	Manchester	Newcastle (14, grew up), London (6), Sheffield (4)	yes
Rowena	27	Research Associate	York	West Sussex (19)	yes
Stephen	34	Academic integrity manager	York	China (5)	yes
Deborah	30	Communications	Edinburgh	England (19, grew up), Sheffield (3)	yes
Raymond	53	IT solutions architect	Brisbane, QLD	UK (20)	yes
Michele	51	IT consultant	Brisbane, QLD	Kent, UK (14, grew up) Wellington (15)	no
David	48	Community visitor coordinator	Melbourne, VIC	Liverpool, UK (35)	no
Alistair	34	Student	Brisbane, QLD	Glasgow (26, grew up), London (4)	yes

varieties of English as their first language perceive both cultural contexts (see, especially, 8.5). Furthermore, some participants, primarily those from Australia, have also spent some longer periods of time in the UK (e.g. Benjamin (36) and Amanda (35) had lived there for 11 and 4 years, respectively).

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As Leech (2014, p. 251) rightly points out, "the interview's aim is to elicit subjects' judgements or perceptions of pragmatic behaviour". This type of data, i.e. non-participants' evaluations, has several advantages for my purposes. First of all, unlike the very participants (either instigators or targets), non-participants have no personal attachment to the jocular episodes shown (but similar situations have been recalled) and have no need to primarily try and defend their own verbal behaviour.

Furthermore, even though contextual background information is crucial and was provided to the interviewees as much as possible, the lack of shared interactional history is also beneficial for this study, since the interviewees did not tend to over-analyse the housemates' behaviour. Finally, although not evaluating their own behaviour (but frequently referring to it), the interviewees have ingrained knowledge about the cultural context and the social reality that is inevitably sometimes (re-)constructed during the interview. As a result, working with non-participants' data allows for a more versatile view on the interactional situation.

During each interview, everyone was shown the same video materials comprising conversations of the Australian and British housemates. One of the aims of these interviews (as well as of this research, see Chapters 7 and 8) is to gain a better understanding of why some jocular interactional behaviours occasion negative reactions and/or offence. Thus, four (most controversial) videos providing this type of reactions had been chosen from each series. However, in order to break this rather 'offensive' pattern, an extract showing potentially impolite jocular verbal behaviour but with a seemingly positive perception/reaction was included. Furthermore, each of these potentially jocular episodes (five in total) was divided into two parts, where, in the first part, only the instigator's comment was available for the interviewee's evaluations, while the second part revealed the target's and/or the third party's (present co-participants) reaction. Every interview was semi-structured with a pre-determined set of questions and follow-up questions in case those were relevant to the research in general. All the questions (whether general or more specific) were aimed at eliciting responses to the instigator's comment or the target's reaction. Table 9 presents the list of the main questions that in some cases were merged or omitted if an answer had already been provided:

Table 9. A set of the main questions used in the qualitative interviews

Part one: the instigator's jocular comment	**Part two: the target's/third party's reaction**
What do you think of A's comment?	What do you think of B's reaction?
Was it appropriate?	Was it reasonable/justified?
Was it humorous/jocular?	How would you react?
How would you feel?	

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After the data collection, the interviews have been transcribed following the transcriptions conventions described in Gumperz & Berenz (1993) and analysed, primarily using the qualitative software package *NVivo*. A number of relevant categories relating to the questions above have been coded in the process, the major results of which will be reported in Chapter 8, although some extracts from the interview materials are also frequently used in other parts of the book.

3.5.1 The use of qualitative interviewing in this research

In this subsection, I would like to have a brief look at some issues that one can face working with qualitative interviews and to specify my approach to this type of data. Interviewing language users is undoubtedly a rich source of information for empirical analysis and can "guide researchers to understand specific phenomena" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 1). While those who work with fully structured (survey) interviews tend to minimise the researcher's influence on the data and see interviewing more as a quantitative research imitating process (Miller & Crabtree, 2004, p. 186; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 113; see also Gorden, 1971 [1969], pp. 1–7), a more qualitative approach to interviewing involves semi-structured (as in this analysis) and open-ended interviews. Those scholars who advocate more open-ended in-depth interviewing that results in long narratives about one's life experiences as well as social worlds, primarily concentrate on "establishing a rapport, trust and commitment between interviewer and interviewee" (Alvesson, 2011: 14; Miller & Glassner, 1997; Keats, 2000, pp. 22–27; Miller & Crabtree, 2004; Silverman, 2014 [1993], pp. 177–178). Although some (especially fully structured) interviews can primarily aim to "establish a context-free truth about what is really 'out there'" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 11; Silverman, 2014 [1993], p. 174), qualitative interviewing seems to share quite a lot with the discursive turn that (im)politeness research has taken. It primarily emphasises a situation-specific context where an interview takes place and states that it should be analysed in its own right as a situational behaviour and not as only providing information "for developing knowledge about broader phenomena" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 20; Roulston, 2010, pp. 218–219; see also Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; for overviews of methods in qualitative interviewing, see Silverman, 2014 [1993], pp. 172–188; Roulston, 2010).

Irrespective of which approach one follows in analysing interview data, it is important to bear in mind that the interviewer, the interview and the situation can be seen as sources of 'problems' (Alvesson, 2011, p. 27). The interviewer's style and the way questions are asked can significantly influence the answers of interviewees who otherwise might have told a different story (Charmaz, 2003, p. 317). Even though the interviewer's conduct during an interview is essential, maintaining

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control over the situation should not be seen as the interviewer's key duty (see Gorden, 1971 [1969], pp. 274–291). Sometimes, for the purpose of eliciting more useful insights, the interviewee should feel that she is not constrained by an interview design. Interestingly, during some interviews in this research, it was noticed that if an interviewee was telling something, but the interviewer wanted to guide him/her in a different direction, the questions would be answered only briefly or even largely ignored, and the interviewee would resume telling his/her story.

In addition to the interviewer's problematic position, the interviewees themselves raise a number of issues (Alvesson, 2011, pp. 29–32). If one approaches the role of the interviewee from a situation-specific perspective, she immediately ceases to be seen as an honest, truth-telling and reliable subject. Indeed, interviewees might improvise different roles (Wengraf, 2001, pp. 16–19; Miller & Crabtree, 2004, p. 198), try to give the interviewer the answers that, according to them, she expects or, on the other hand, they might not be willing to talk or not know what to say (see Gorden, 1971 [1969], pp. 291–305). However, focusing on interviewing as a local discourse, these issues should not be seen as problematic. In the present interview data, some interviewees indeed expressed their uncertainty about what was expected from them, e.g. 'I don't know what you want me to say' or even asking in a whisper whether something should be said 'do you want me to say […]?'. This happened in the very initial stage of an interview, where some of them thought of an interview process more like an experiment or where they were not sure how openly they could share their opinion. This problem was easily resolved by the interviewer's indication that it is their opinion that was important and that there was no correct or incorrect answer. Another issue mentioned above refers to the interviewees not knowing something or being unwilling or incapable to formulate their thoughts. Once again, such indications are definitely not seen as problems, but rather as excellent material for pragmatic analysis. One Australian interviewee, for example, even emailed the researcher her post-interview comments about what she saw in the videos, saying that she had 'some interesting after thoughts [sic]', which shows that after the interview was finished, the evaluation process continued on the part of the interviewee.

The final issue that can influence the interview process is the situation itself (Alvesson, 2011, p. 32). Sometimes (or often) people are unmotivated and talking to a stranger about something, especially if it is more personal or emotional, can be complicated. The present interview form and design, however, could quite successfully avoid these difficulties. Since the interviewees were shown videos from a well-known reality television game show, they immediately had something to tell about other people rather than about themselves. From the very beginning, it was mentioned that what the interviewees had to do was give their opinion on the video material. For some interviewees, this was the main reason they agreed to

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participate, since what they were afraid of was that an interview would become too personal and they were reluctant to open up (see Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). Interestingly enough, with the help of the videos that also served as a positive distraction from the fact that interviews were official (an informed consent form was signed) and audio-recorded, even though quite informal, all the interviewees referred to their personal and sometimes hurtful past experiences.

Taking all the above into consideration, interviewing is undoubtedly a complicated process that, even if structured, can always go wrong. In this book, qualitative interviews are approached from various perspectives. The analysis primarily concentrates on localised reconstructions of interactional behaviours, whether via the interviewees' own personal experience or those seen in the video fragments. It is important to remember that the interviews were not heavily structured and the questions allowed the interviewees to provide their insights and negotiate meanings while producing discourse. Finally, what is also significant is that, despite largely referring to locally produced and situation-specific knowledge, the present interview data exhibits indications that the interviewees themselves *believe* that their reconstructions reflect possible real-life interactional patterns followed by other members of society (see, in particular, Chapter 8), which is one of the main focuses of this book.

3.6 Summary

This chapter was dedicated to the three datasets analysed in this book. First, the two corpora – the *BNC* and *Ozcorp* – were presented. Then, the two national versions of the 2012 Australian and British *Big Brother* series were introduced with attention paid to some local differences. In order to familiarise ourselves with the realm of reality television, the main emphasis was on performance and the 'real' as part of any televisual event. As part of entertainment, reality television features aggression (whether mitigated or not) as well as jocular behaviours that are an indispensable part of many formats. The reality television game show *Big Brother* is not an exception. While it is frequently suggested that impoliteness-oriented discourse prevails in such programmes and some offensive behaviours seen on the television screens provide evidence thereof, the housemates do not seem to condone conflictive situations in the house, even if it is sometimes inevitable that those happen. Finally, information about the participants in qualitative interviews was provided, and the process of the interviews was thoroughly explained.

The following chapter looks at the key research topic – different types of conversational humour – and how they can result in (mock) (im)politeness. Furthermore, the results of the analysis of teasing in the two corpora will be presented,

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where we will see how this humorous verbal practice is produced, what functions it performs as well as what is the variability of the target's reactions.

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CHAPTER 4

Conversational humour

Jocular verbal behaviours

> Life would […] be an endless interchange of stylized messages, a game with rigid rules, [if] unrelieved by change or humor. (Bateson, 1987 [1972], p. 198)

The term *conversational humour*[33] is an umbrella term for a variety of verbal behaviours, e.g. teasing, banter, putdowns, self-denigrating humour (for an overview, see Dynel, 2009a; Sinkeviciute & Dynel, 2017; Dynel & Sinkeviciute, forthcoming). It has been studied in different written or spoken discourses, whether face-to-face or computer-mediated. Taking many forms and guises, it serves multiple communicative purposes and performs a number of interpersonal functions, for example, bonding and solidarity building, or, by contrast, promoting animosity and hostility. Bearing this wide spectrum in mind and in order to distinguish between forms of *aggressive* or *disaffiliative* humorous behaviours (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Dynel, 2010; 2012b; 2013a) and those that are first and foremost constructed, conceptualised and/or evaluated as *playful* by different interactants, this chapter (as well as the whole book) concentrates on the latter type, which is labelled here as *jocular* verbal behaviour, that is directed at someone present in interaction (as opposed to anecdotes or puns).

Probably seen as an epitome of conversational humour and the most analysed communicative behaviour is the verbal practice of *teasing*. Pawluk (1989, p. 145) suggested more than three decades ago that "part of the problem […] results from a lack of conceptual clarity", which means that teasing is sometimes merged with other forms of jocular behaviour (e.g. banter). Indeed, despite many analyses, it has not been unequivocally defined. Since this research does not aim to conceptually isolate teasing, but rather to regard it as part of conversational humour or, as in this chapter, observe the ways in which it is conceptualised by language users, alongside *teasing*, the more inclusive term *jocular verbal behaviour* will be primarily used.

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33. The term *conversational joking* has also been used by various scholars (Norrick, 1993; Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997) to refer to jocular behaviours such as sarcasm, mockery, joint narratives, teasing, etc.

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This chapter starts with an overview of approaches to a particular form of jocular behaviours – teasing – also closely related to banter, jocular mockery or jocular abuse, and with a note on intracultural and intercultural research into humour. In the following subsections, an attempt will be made to (i) describe teasing that can be constructed as a face-threatening as well as face-saving verbal act (4.3), (ii) introduce the importance of context and contextual cues in the discussion of potentiality and genuineness (4.3.1), and (iii) propose a production-evaluation model for potentially jocular behaviours (4.4). Finally, a corpus-assisted study of teasing will be presented in Section 4.5. Based on the teasing episodes found in the British National Corpus (*BNC*) and an Australian corpus (*Ozcorp*), different categories of *doing* teasing, its functions as well as the target's reactions will be observed and some major differences between the British and Australian corpora will be pointed to.

4.1 Overview of approaches to teasing – the epitome of jocular verbal behaviours

Since its appearance in linguistic and, particularly, sociolinguistic scientific works, teasing has been viewed as an extremely confusing and paradoxical phenomenon (for a thorough overview of the verbal practice of teasing, see Haugh, 2017a; for a brief etymological review, see Pawluk, 1989). The very problem lies in the fact that in teasing "antagonistic discourse structures carry a metamessage of rapport" (Straehle, 1993, p. 228) and it combines "a pretence of hostility and a real friendliness" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, p. 196), face threat and face enhancement (Geyer, 2010, p. 2120), and it can be interpreted as "a competitive or prosocial behaviour" (Tragesser & Lippman, 2005, p. 256).

There is a variety of commonly accepted definitions of teasing. In the analyses of children's and teenagers' communication, for example, teasing tends to be limited to hostile taunting or tormenting and is portrayed as "a subtype of bullying and provocation" (Lightner et al., 2000, pp. 404, 14; Espelage & Asidao, 2001). However, teasing among children qualitatively differs from that among adults (Kowalski, 2004; Lightner et al., 2000). Only in adulthood, when the ability to produce and interpret intentions, non-literal communication, pretence and social contexts has been developed, does the dual nature of teasing manifest itself, thus creating ambiguity (Bollmer et al., 2003; Heerey et al., 2005).

The majority of other context-related definitions of teasing also include its negative side (Pawluk, 1989, pp. 148–151). For instance, it has been suggested that "the first element of teasing is a face-threatening act" (Keltner et al., 1998, p. 1232), "teases are face-threatening by design" (Alberts et al., 1996, p. 338) and that "the

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truthfulness of the insult [is] inherent in the tease" (Alberts et al., 1996, p. 340). However, as Keltner et al. (2001) claim, certain forms of verbal aggression should not be considered teasing. The verbal practice that is meant to denigrate and occurs repeatedly should be characterised as bullying (e.g. Beck et al., 2007) and repeated acts causing mental pain should be referred to as taunting, tormenting, pestering, etc. (Pawluk, 1989).

On the other hand, a playful element inherent in teasing has been grasped in a number of works. Here researchers elaborate on particular types of teasing,[34] namely *jocular mockery* (when the speaker deliberately reduces the importance of something relevant to the target) (e.g. Haugh, 2010a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Goddard, 2012) and *jocular abuse* (when the target is being insulted) (e.g. Pawluk, 1989; Hay, 1994; Holmes, 2000; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). The key concept *jocular* points to the non-seriousness of an act which is meant to be perceived as verbal play, i.e. where playful "actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these [playful] actions denote" (Bateson (1987 [1972], pp. 185–186). In other words, verbal behaviour projected as play should not "carry the 'serious' consequences it might otherwise" (Glenn, 2003, p. 137). From this perspective, teasing is considered inherently playful, when no offence is meant by the teaser, and thus humorous force should be appreciated by both interlocutors (Dynel, 2009a, p. 1293). However, teasing – that is constructed around the question "is this play?" (Bateson 1987 [1972], p.188) – does not only present a combination of seriousness and non-seriousness (Holt, 2013) or humorous and non-humorous frames (Dynel, 2011a, p. 232) but also flirts with the fine line between what is socially appreciated and what goes too far.

Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) suggest that teasing operates on a continuum where 'biting', 'nipping' and 'bonding' are the three possible, yet, not mutually exclusive strategies behind a tease (see also Bateson, 1987 [1972]). The first two are closely related since they indicate verbal aggression, but, due to appropriate cues, they produce different perceptions. While 'biting' refers to only slightly mitigated verbal aggression, 'nipping' displays a contextually mitigated, playful and thus not genuine aggression. Furthermore, both 'biting' and 'nipping' potentially occur when a tease is directed at a participant. On the other hand, 'bonding' is likely to be the result of teasing humour directed at all the participants in a conversation, which "creates a bond of solidarity" (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, pp. 291–292),

34. Jocular mockery and jocular abuse are sometimes also referred to as types of banter. Since both teasing and banter share the potential to operate in a playful frame, these terms are often used interchangeably (e.g. see Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). For reasons of clarity, jocular mockery and jocular abuse are presented as types of teasing in this book.

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or at a non-participant (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 279). This does not mean, though, that a bite or a nip cannot serve to bond. For instance, a bite occurring among intimates or members of the same community of practice may have a bonding capacity (e.g. Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr & Chan, 2011).

Since teasing displays various degrees of ambiguity (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 278) and the target has to figure out whether the message is to be perceived as humorous or as serious, almost all the time the teaser provides the listener with particular contextual cues (e.g. prosody, paralinguistic features, linguistic cues, etc.) that should help to correctly interpret a tease (e.g. Kotthoff, 2007; Dynel, 2011a). However, it should be pointed out that these cues only *direct* the target towards the intended message but they *do not* guarantee successful communication, i.e. a playful character of a message can fail to be perceived (see 4.3.1). As Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997, p. 280) claim, depending on contextual cues, a tease interpretation *can* move from a bite to a nip or vice versa. In addition, the target's perception highly depends on a number of contextual cues. For instance, with no or minimal contextual cues teasing is more likely to be perceived as literal, direct and aggressive, whereas with different playful cues, it will be interpreted as humorous and playful (Keltner et al., 2001).

It is quite evident that most teasing instances lie in between humorous and non-humorous frames (Dynel, 2011a, p. 232). While by his/her utterance, the teaser can intend to create a humorous frame, the target could easily refuse to enter it and perceive the message as part of a serious frame (e.g. Drew, 1987). Much other research, however, has shown that the target tends to react (or pretend to react) to a tease in a playful way (e.g. Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; see Chovanec, 2011, p. 258). Zajdman (1995, p. 326) suggests that it is done because "S[peaker] and H[earer] tacitly agree that face demands be suspended for the sake of the other interest, which is 'to get a laugh'" (see Chapter 5). Also, until relatively recently it has been argued that the main condition for teasing to be successful is that the target should react in a playful way (Voss, 1997, p. 241). On the other hand, the teaser can benefit from the ambiguous situation and try to convey a serious meaning within a humorous frame (Dynel, 2011a). This can be observed in cases of reprimands, criticism or power display (e.g. Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Kotthoff, 2007; Schnurr et al., 2008; Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr & Holmes, 2009).

Teasing performs a number of functions, the prevailing ones being power- and solidarity-oriented. Different forms of teasing have been employed to maintain power or create leader identities. Even though such a form of teasing can be observed among friends (Hay, 2000; Zajdman, 1995), the most illustrative examples come from the workplace (Schnurr, 2009; Schnurr et al., 2008, pp. 220, 224). In order to display power, the speaker can choose to use jocular abuse or 'biting' teasing

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which would not be generally accompanied by joint laughter (Schnurr, 2009, pp. 1129, 1136). However, also some mocking but, at the same time, partly supportive remarks and 'bonding' comments can serve to portray the teaser as a leader in a particular community of practice or situation (e.g. Schnurr & Chan, 2011).

Indeed, more often than not teasing has been characterised as a bonding ritual showing affection and increasing intimacy (Alberts et al., 1996; Eisenberg, 1986; Keltner et al., 1998; Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Zajdman, 1995). That is why teasing is most frequent among family members and peers who are less concerned about acts threatening their face and, therefore, can feel freer with their behaviour (Keltner et al., 1998; 2001; Kowalski, 2004). Thus, the majority of researchers seems to agree with the claim that teasing is "inherently devoid of genuine aggressiveness" or of a "truly abusive or downgrading potential" (e.g. Dynel, 2008, p. 241), or that teasing should not be considered impolite behaviour among members of a particular community (see Schnurr et al., 2008). As a result, teasing can function as a promoter of socialisation, thus reducing social distance and pointing to growing intimacy between participants (Partington, 2008; Haugh, 2010a).

While Tragesser and Lippman (2005) suggest that it may not be teasing that leads to closeness in the relationships, but that people in relations where the degrees of power and social distance are low are allowed to tease, Haugh (2011) points out that certain types of humour (e.g. teasing, banter) do not necessarily have to arise among participants who are familiar with one another. In some cultural contexts (e.g. in Australia), humour plays an important part in people's getting acquainted and it is quite natural for interactants to tease or jocularly mock one another (Haugh, 2011, pp. 171–172; Goddard, 2006). Even though the content of utterances can be particularly face-threatening, "permitted disrespect" manifests itself in such jocular situations where the speaker seems to be allowed to "make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, p. 195). Evidently, the participants' perception of a humorous frame prevails, which leads to the establishment of a friendly rapport (Haugh, 2011, pp. 172, 177).

However, teasing should not be limited to the appreciation of humour and, consequently, positive emotions. Indeed, it has been erroneously assumed that laughter is a token of humour and humour is equal to solidarity and functions as a politeness strategy in a conversation (e.g. Kotthoff, 1996; Bell, 2009b; see also Subsection 5.2.2). Having in mind the face-threat manifesting itself in many types of teasing (e.g. jocular mockery, or jocular abuse) and since it could be an intentionally communicated face-threatening act or the target could perceive or construct it as such (see the definition of impoliteness in Culpeper, 2005, pp. 38; 2011a, p. 23; see also 4.4.1), it might be said to lead to impoliteness. However, one cannot simply label teasing as impolite, since the jocular elements present in teasing might play an essential part. As Kotthoff (1996, p. 309) claims, "[h]umour

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can be non-polite or impolite, but nevertheless relationship-affirming". Similarly, as Haugh (2011, p. 180) accurately points out, laughter functioning as a positive response to a tease or a mocking comment suggests that a potentially face-threatening verbal act should not be necessarily perceived as impolite, which helps to go beyond a direct connection between face-threat and impoliteness. Needless to say, the target's laughter, in this case, might not be genuine, but employing it, she decides to conceal true feelings and signal the entrance into a humorous frame (see Subsection 5.2.2).

Taking into consideration that "[t]he humorous can be located at all points on a scale from politeness to impoliteness" (Kotthoff, 1996, p. 306) as well as the multi-facetedness of teasing, it should reside somewhere in between or alongside politeness and impoliteness. Haugh & Bousfield (2012) seem to have found an appropriate analytical explanation for two types of teasing – jocular mockery and jocular abuse – in Australian and British English. They present a possible evaluation of particular verbal acts in a humorous frame that should not be subsumed under politeness or impoliteness (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, pp. 1099, 1103). In the case of jocular mockery or jocular abuse, the target is exposed to the content of a message that is impolite per se. However, realising that a particular verbal act is to be interpreted as jocular, i.e. non-serious, the evaluations shift from impolite to non-impolite. Indeed, if the target manages to perceive that the instigator's utterance is non-serious, it allows a potentially impolite verbal act not to be evaluated as such. Thus, this non-impolite interpretation is technically labelled as mock impoliteness (for a more detailed elaboration, see Subsection 4.4.2).

It is quite clear that teasing produced within a humorous frame has been predominantly researched and the pro-social side of teasing is highly appreciated, whereas the potential of teasing to 'go too far' and to be perceived as such has been mostly excluded from the analyses (see Haugh, 2017a).

4.2 A note on the intracultural and intercultural research into humour

It is easy to conceive of how differently jocular interactions can be conceptualised and perceived by the speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. *Intercultural* humour research, which primarily deals with interactants communicating in a lingua franca, can be divided into two main groups: non-native – non-native speakers' communication and native – non-native speakers' interactions. The former seems to be a particularly under-researched area with only a couple of studies representing it. For instance, the analysis of the data from the workplace interactions has shown that humour among non-native speakers includes witty quips, sarcasm, (self-)mockery and is used to manage power relations, promote

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solidarity and reduce distance (Pullin Stark, 2009). Furthermore, Walkinshaw's (2016) study of teasing among Asian speakers of English reveals that such verbal practices as jocular mockery, banter and jocular agreement are commonly used. In the study, it has also been observed that interactants tend to avoid causing or taking offence and their attempts at humour are produced and perceived as highly jocular.

The studies of the native – non-native speakers' communication have shown that humour can generate difficulties for both participants, especially when the situation involves culture-specific topics, but, importantly, many language learners, even at a beginner's level, can recognise and construct humorous exchanges (Davies, 2003; Bell, 2005). Interestingly, humour can also be produced by non-native speakers as a result of the lack of proficiency, in which cases they can jocularly attempt to make the native speakers responsible for difficulties in understanding a foreign language (Davies, 2003). Indeed, in native – non-native speakers' interactional situations, native speakers should be willing to accommodate their non-native interlocutors, the failure of which can result in unpleasant situations. For instance, if native speakers do not acknowledge the language learner's attempts at making a jocular contribution, the learner can feel marginalised as the other (Bell, 2006). Yet, despite different degrees of engagement in a jocular conversation, intercultural humour should not be seen as inherently problematic, but rather as a jointly constructed interactional practice (Cheng, 2003).

Another type of humour research pertinent to this analysis is *intracultural* research that illustrates native speakers' use of their language. With a few exceptions (e.g. Antonopoulou & Sifianou, 2003; Priego-Valverde, 2006; Geyer, 2010), a large proportion of such research has focused on the English-speaking cultural context. For instance, studies of conversational humour used by speakers of Australian English mainly examine the role of such interactional practices as teasing and banter in interaction (Haugh, 2010a; 2011; 2014) and suggest that those practices are recognisable and frequently used by native speakers. Furthermore, the findings also show that such verbal behaviours tend to be positively evaluated with the target seemingly not being upset or taking offence. Another significant contribution to the intracultural research into humour is related to the area of gender identity and workplace communication. The analyses reveal that the use of humour at work serves a variety of purposes, e.g. bonding and promoting solidarity (e.g. Pullin, 2011; Schnurr & Chan, 2011), but also displaying power (Schnurr, 2009), contesting colleagues (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Pullin, 2011) or making fun of someone (Holmes & Schnurr, 2005).

The existing research clearly indicates that there is lack of (i) intercultural analyses of forms of conversational humour in different cultural contexts where the same language is spoken, and (ii) studies that are oriented towards possible culture-specific preferences and explanations of particular instances of

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humorous exchanges. These are yet another two areas to which this research aims to contribute (see 8.5).

In the following subsection, a differentiation between two form/content-related types of *teasing* (as part of its description) will be made. This will be especially relevant to the production-evaluation model as well as the corpus analysis presented in this chapter.

4.3 Jocular face-threatening and face-supportive acts

Jocular verbal behaviours, whether *teasing*, *mockery*, *pulling someone's leg* or *taking the mickey*, can be constructed in different ways by the instigator and, undoubtedly, re-constructed in a number of ways by the target. Even when unaddressed ratified hearers are present, they do not always become involved in the verbal activity and/or the metalanguage about it; however, that does not change the fact that the instigator and the target are aware of their presence.

For the purpose of this research, especially its corpus-related analysis in 4.5, a characterisation of *teasing* proposed here is as follows:

> Teasing is a deliberate (or deliberately implied) jocular verbal behaviour directed at a target. Its production (in terms of form/content) can be limited to a *face-threatening* (FTA) or *face-supportive* (FSA) verbal act. Regardless of the contextual cues pointing to the presence of jocularity, the target can evaluate an FTA and FSA positively (the preferred reaction) and negatively (the non-preferred reaction). In the case of a positive (preferred) reaction, the target decides to enter the humorous frame prepared by the teaser, despite the fact that s/he might realise that the message behind an FTA or FSA is non-humorous. In the case of a negative (non-preferred) reaction, however, the target refuses to participate in the teaser's humorous frame and only the non-humorous message prevails in his/her evaluations. In this situation, the teaser can always claim the *untruthfulness*[35] of an FTA and the *genuineness* of an FSA in order to cancel a presumed non-humorous message.

In order to illustrate what this description suggests, consider the following examples from the reality television game show *Big Brother* (for more examples, see 4.4):

35. I use the terms *untruthfulness* and *genuineness* here that, with reference to jocular interactions, broadly stand for *non-seriousness* and *seriousness*, respectively.

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(17) Day 44 (UK)
Ashleigh is choosing what to wear:

```
Scott:      oh Ashleigh
Becky:      whose funeral is it
Conor:      [laughs]
Becky:      (only) joking
Ashleigh:   Becks (.) you make me really insecure sometimes
Becky:      you know somebody-
Scott:      == {[giggling] tell me about it}
Ashleigh:   {[showing Becky her hand] (stop) fuck off}
```

(18) Day 3 (AU):
Michael is posing like a girl:

```
Ryan:       you've gotta put your eyes out there
            you know it's a great feature of yours
Michael:    [does a gesture of dropping his eyes on Ryan]
            thank you [laughs] I'll take that
Ryan:       == {[smiling] (I'm) just being polite}
Michael:    == I'll take that it's nice
```

While in (17), Becky humorously criticises Ashleigh's outfit, in (18), Ryan (who is a model) jocularly compliments Michael's eyes. In both situations, either the target or other housemates present (the third party) find the comment funny. The teaser, however, realises that the target might not appreciate what has been said. Therefore, in (17) Becky tries to claim untruthfulness (non-seriousness)[36] of the verbal act, indicating her humorous intent by saying that she is '(only) joking' (Skalicky et al., 2015; Haugh, 2017a; 2017b). On the other hand, in (18), although Ryan's '(I'm) just being polite' does not unequivocally point to the seriousness of his compliment on Michael's appearance, he still manages to claim genuineness[37] of his good intentions, which seems to cancel any negative non-humorous message on the part of the target who apparently accepts it as something 'nice'. This, however, does not always have to lead to the targets' positive reactions (e.g. Ashleigh is still quite annoyed), but at the same time, the targets' negative perceptions do not make a verbal act less teasing. What can help *teasing* to qualify as such are context and non-verbal cues, which is the subject of the following subsection.

36. *Non-seriousness* (as in non-serious talk, see Vincent Marrelli 1994) technically refers to *overt non-truthfulness*, i.e. when the speaker's "super-goal is not-deceptive" (Vincent Marrelli 2006 [2002]), but rather *pretence* is in place (see Dynel, 2011b; 2018a, 2018b).

37. Even though Ryan's claim might seem ironic, knowing his personality (he is not a funny character, but rather the one that other show participants tease) revealed in the series, it is highly unlikely that he would be insincere.

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4.3.1 Potentiality and genuineness (context and non-verbal cues)

Despite different but complementary views on *context* (for a review, see Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; for the role of contextualisation in language, see Auer & di Luzio, 1992), the notion is indispensable for a pragmatic perspective on meaning. Since context is broad and multi-faceted (apart from linguistic context, physical, social and mental worlds can be distinguished), only the relevant elements towards which the discourse itself orients us should be taken into account (Verschueren, 1999, pp. 109; 2014). Indeed, not all contexts are salient in all interactional scenarios and contextualisation cues – "empirically detectable signs" (Gumperz, 1992, p. 42) – limit "the range of possible understandings" (Gumperz in Prevignano & di Luzio, 2003, p. 10). Even though salient contexts should help us grasp the current meaning of linguistic expressions more easily, it is interesting to observe how sometimes newly-formed contextual information prevails over the already established knowledge or behaviour patterns, consequently misleading the hearer in his/her interpretation. A case in point is deadpan humour, where no jocular non-verbal cues indicating that there is humorous intent are present, but a (potentially impolite) message should be taken humorously. Goddard (2006, p. 86) suggests that in context (i.e. an Australian cultural context) it should be perfectly clear that, for example, deadpan jocular irony is "a light-hearted ironic comment, not to be taken seriously".

However, it seems that not everyone, even in the same cultural context, can unequivocally position (or even recognise) deadpan humour in a non-serious frame or be sure that what has been said is actually a joke. Here, I would like to give two examples from different discourses: the first one is from the American crime television series *The Inside* and the second one is closer to home, i.e. from a course I attended.

Example (1). The Los Angeles Violent Crimes Unit is having a meeting and one of the agents is late because his wife is pregnant and he had to go to Lamaze (childbirth) classes. The supervisor, who does not seem to be a humorous character, says: "It's the longest nine months since Martha Stewart went inside". Agent Melody Sim is quite nonplussed and asks: "Did you just make a joke, sir?"; to which he answers: "No". She looks puzzled.

Example (2). During a three-day course on methodology from time to time the lecturer used deadpan humour towards participants. At one point, when a girl came in several minutes late, the lecturer in a serious voice said that a note from the headmaster was required. Even though it produced laughter from other participants, the target was not sure whether she could sit down. On the last day of the course, there was no place in the room for the tea/coffee service, so some people brought cups with tea/coffee from the corridor and the lecturer, directing

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a message at a British participant, said: "Apparently they don't allow liquids in the room, so you will have to take it outside." The target hesitated and then asked whether it was meant seriously because he was not "good at deadpan humour".

It seems that for the interactants in both examples the context(s) that they choose to foreground is/are not sufficient to correctly interpret whether what is said is meant as humour. In the first example, doubt about the presence of humour is caused by a clash between the already available background knowledge (that includes the 'unfunny' personality of the supervisor) and the interlocutor's understanding of what is 'a joke'. The second example also presents the uncertainty about the interpretation even though the earlier instances of deadpan jocularity have already been observed. Most interestingly, it seems that in both examples the 'here-and-now' context (that directs the hearer to a specific interpretation of the content of the linguistic expressions) is more dominant than background information and previous experience. This divergence of interpretations (and not communicative failure per se), however, should help to combine more than just one level of analysis, this way pointing to the inseparability of context and linguistic structure and a constant negotiability of their interrelationships. As a result, it would be possible to see "context as a parameter of stability at a different level", "whilst allowing for the variability of the meanings of linguistic forms" (Verschueren, 1999, p. 9). In the same vein, even though acknowledging that context adds "a necessary corrective to some older models of communication" (see discussion in 2.2), Culpeper (2011a, p. 116) suggests that its unquestionable superiority "give[s] the erroneous impression that it does not matter what you say".

These considerations are of prime importance in the area of linguistic (im)politeness as well. As already mentioned, I see (im)politeness as a product of social interaction between the speaker (the instigator) and the hearer (the target). Thus, it is impossible to refer to the production part as the only one generating the evaluations of (im)politeness without taking into consideration the contextualisation cues and the target's response.[38] In order to try to dissect genuinely impolite behaviour, for example, a good point of departure is to look at the form and semantic content of a message. Even if we take an example that includes conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2010; 2011a), it would be a precipitate decision to label the whole interaction as genuinely impolite. That is why at this first stage I am referring to verbal actions as *potentially (im)polite*. Undoubtedly, context (or

38. Cf. Bousfield's (2010) prototype understanding of impoliteness and rudeness, where he also takes into consideration the speaker and the hearer and identifies twelve possible scenarios. However, he does it from a slightly different perspective, concentrating on the speaker's intent and awareness of possible face-damaging effects as well as the hearer's re-construction of the speaker's intent and his/her face being actually damaged.

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contexts) and the presence of particular non-verbal cues (that similar to communication and language themselves can be context-dependent and/or context-creating [Prevignano & di Luzio, 2003, p. 9; Culpeper, 2011a, p. 196]) are crucial for the target to realise how s/he *is supposed* to take the message. This, however, does not mean that the target *will* interpret the message the way s/he is supposed to only because context and other cues apparently dictate so. For instance, as Culpeper (2011a, p. 113) suggests, "the negative effects of impoliteness formulae and behaviours, especially when highly offensive and thus salient, are not easy to eliminate by means of the context" (for po-faced responses to teasing, see Drew, 1987). But let's now consider the following example where non-verbal cues play an important part in strengthening the already existing understanding of the context:

(19) Day 16 (UK)
Becky is winding up Scott:

```
Becky:      {[smiling] ba:h ba:h}
Scott:  →   you bitch {[putting a pillow on Becky's
            face] stop it you know how it irritates me
            (..) fucker (fuck) (…) STOP IT} [puts his hand
            over Becky's mouth]
Becky:      = {[smiling] Scott you don't (fuck) () someone}    =
Scott:      = [smiles] {[smiling] = I do (…) you can
            breathe through your nose} (..) no that's
            it {[smiling] STOP IT (…) STOP IT} you're such a ()
            a look on her face (that's what's
            annoying) (..) ok that's it I'm not even
        →   bothering I'm not bothering you're a
            fucking weirdo I hate you
Becky:  →   [smiles]
```

First, it should be mentioned that Scott and Becky get along well and call each other friends, which is part of the social context in the *Big Brother* house. All Scott verbally does in this extract is use conventionalised impoliteness formulae (e.g. 'you bitch', 'you're a fucking weirdo') when referring to Becky. Even though in a minimal context such verbal action would be highly offensive and regarded as insults (see Culpeper's [2011a, p. 135] list of insults), it is not how Becky takes it. The jocularity that the non-verbal cues point to – Scott is constantly smiling while using potentially impolite expressions – is likely to show Becky that Scott's (projected) intention is not to insult her. This 'banterish' behaviour, apparently, does not clash with her expectations taking into consideration their relationship (social context). This also leads to her decision to follow the cultural proscription against *taking oneself too seriously*, thus she is able to see the funny side of her being the target of this potentially impolite verbal behaviour (Goddard, 2009; see

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Chapter 5). As a result, no public offence[39] is taken and the relationship between Scott and Becky remains the same.

In summary, (19) illustrates the importance of non-verbal cues (alongside the presence of the social context) in showing the target that there is an extra or even primary (jocular) meaning added to the semantic content of utterances. Similarly, non-verbal cues (e.g. the tone of the voice, facial expression and other types of body language) can point in the opposite direction and the same message can be interpreted as genuinely impolite. What is interesting is that, in that scenario, the cultural (collective) injunction against taking oneself too seriously could possibly be ignored and preference could be given to the personal perceptions and the subsequent action, i.e. the obvious public offence being taken (see Sinkeviciute, 2015; see Chapters 7 and 8).

4.4 Production-evaluation model

From the previous sections, it becomes obvious that many jocular verbal behaviours and especially teasing are to be encoded and/or decoded within a humorous frame, i.e. as a non-serious conversation event.[40] However, as humour is not always equal to something pleasant and polite, the perceptions of a tease as well as other forms of jocular verbal behaviour can vary. Since conversational humour resides on a scale or continuum from politeness to impoliteness, I find it essential to propose a production-evaluation model that could explain how and why jocular verbal behaviours could be regarded as a polite, non-polite, non-impolite, as well as impolite verbal action (see Table 10).[41]

39. For the difference between public (frontstage) and personal (backstage) offence being taken at a potentially impolite verbal action, see Chapters 5 and 6.

40. See an example from the *BNC* (BNC:JY4): "No smiles now, no mockery or teasing. Only deadly *serious* intent" (emphasis added).

41. Analysing humorous FTAs, especially canned jokes, Zajdman (1995, p. 333) proposes four possible configurations of agreement and disagreement of appreciation that could arise between the speaker and the hearer in terms of the speaker's intention, the hearer's interpretation, the expectations and the hearer's reactions. It is a good attempt to take into consideration both participants in a joke, despite the claim that in some cases the speaker seems to genuinely *expect* to insult the hearer and, when the latter is still amused, "S simply has to try harder".

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Table 10. Production-evaluation model for potentially jocular verbal behaviours

Production (form/content)	Evaluation (target's reaction)	Potential jocularity results in
FTA (potentially impolite)	impolite	impoliteness
	non-impolite	mock impoliteness
FSA (potentially polite)	non-polite	mock politeness
	polite	politeness

Discussing Fraser and Nolen's approach to politeness, Eelen (2001, p. 14) stresses: "No matter how (im)polite a speaker may attempt to be, whether or not he or she will be heard as being (im)polite ultimately depends on the hearer's judgement." Here, however, (im)politeness is seen from the point of view of evaluative behaviour (see, e.g. Terkourafi, 2008, p. 57) and not only on the basis of what the speaker (i.e. not inherent in a linguistic form) or the hearer *does* (e.g. Culpeper, 2010; 2011a). Thus, the current model is divided into three parts: the instigator's production, the target's evaluation and the subsequent analytical interpretation of jocular interactive behaviour.

When dealing with the production part, it has been decided to focus on the form and content of a jocular act. Since the target cannot have access to the instigator's real intent, and "intentions often cannot be 'proved'" (Zajdman, 1995, p. 333), what s/he can be sure of is the form/content in which the jocular verbal act is produced.[42] Thus, the form/content can be either face-threatening (i.e. *potentially* impolite) or face-supportive (i.e. *potentially* polite). This constituent of a jocular behaviour, although not referring to concepts such as politeness or impoliteness (that here denote only the overall interpretation), is a necessary step that will subsequently lead to one of the analytical interpretations.

Undoubtedly, the contextual cues (e.g. grins, winks, etc.) in a jocular episode can be of extreme importance, for they help to place an utterance within a humorous frame. Indeed, these playfulness-oriented cues function as a bridge between the serious and jocular elements present in an utterance, thus being able to, at least partially, affect the target's perceptions. However, it should be noted that the presence of playful cues does not guarantee that a jocular verbal act will be positively perceived or that the connotations typical of particular words would be reversed. For instance, if with a smile on the face and in a mocking tone, someone tells a friend "Really, you're the stupidest person I've ever met", it is doubtful that s/he,

42. This view will undoubtedly attract criticism from those who advocate a more intent-oriented approach to interaction (e.g. see Dynel, 2016, p. 121). The question, however, remains whether recognising or attributing intentions will make the target perceive a communicative act the way it has been (claimed to be) constructed by the speaker (see Terkourafi, 2008, p. 57).

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as the target, would be able to appreciate the humour of this mocking episode as though s/he had forgotten the exact words of the utterance (see (132)).

While sometimes contextual cues are not explicitly provided (or no evidence is given in a written source, such as fiction) and ambiguity can still be present in a jocular episode, the target's evaluation in the form of an after-tease or meta-language provides valuable data for analysis. Finally, in order to label the production, as well as the evaluation, of jocularity (see the first and the second columns in Table 10), the second-order concepts (for more details, see Eelen, 2001, Chapter 2; Subsection 2.2.2) are employed and the overall interpretation of jocular verbal behaviour in this section (which is, nevertheless, based on the laymen's notions) is purely analytical.

4.4.1 Impolite jocular behaviour

The first interpretation of jocular behaviour refers to the concept of impoliteness. From the model, it follows that an attempt at jocularity could be labelled as impolite only if the instigator encodes his/her message in the form of an FTA, i.e. the form/content of the utterance is likely to produce negative perceptions, and if the target's reaction demonstrates that a jocular episode has been evaluated as such. Consider the following example:[43]

(20) "You want to be careful," Jenna said seriously. "I thought you came fast enough on the way here." "Ah! You would care if I had an accident?" He was back to teasing again and Jenna's serious looks changed to flustered annoyance. "I was thinking about your mother," she snapped. (BNC:HGD)

In this conversation between a man and Jenna, she appears to be in a serious mood while saying that he should be careful on the road. He, on the other hand, decides to tease her about this and asks if she would actually care if something happened to him. Jenna seems to be really concerned about his driving, whereas he suggests (e.g. 'Ah!') that he would be surprised by this fact. Thus, the content of his question-statement is potentially face-threatening to Jenna who is genuinely worried. In addition, there is no textual indication of a smile on his face or any other contextual cue that would direct Jenna to a jocular form of the question. Thus, she changes her 'serious looks […] to flustered annoyance' and snaps back, which shows her negative evaluation of the tease.

The definition of impoliteness, mentioned already in 2.2.1, is repeated here in full, since it presents a valuable description of the phenomenon. In Culpeper's words, impoliteness

43. In this subsection, all the examples are taken from the British National Corpus (*BNC*).

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> […] is 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.
>
> (Culpeper, 2011a, p. 23)

In (20), Jenna's verbal reaction to the tease and her meta-language indicate that her attitude towards this particular situated behaviour is negative and involves emotional involvement (e.g. 'flustered annoyance'; see also (42)). Furthermore, it seems to conflict with what she expects in this situation, i.e. the seriousness on the man's part and not some jocular comments on her genuine concerns.

4.4.2 Non-impolite jocular behaviour

Another type of jocularity encoded by a potentially impolite verbal act can lead to quite a different target's evaluation and result in an independent phenomenon of mock impoliteness. As Haugh and Bousfield (2012, p. 1103) argue, mock impoliteness should not always be subsumed under politeness or impoliteness, but, on the contrary, has to be seen as "something conceptually distinct". The term itself describes potentially impolite verbal behaviour that instead of generating impolite evaluations, occasions non-impolite ones. In other words, verbal behaviours that could easily be evaluated as impolite in a particular context are not perceived as such by the target. This especially happens when one is not supposed to take oneself too seriously (for a detailed analysis of this culturally prescribed behaviour, see Goddard, 2009 and Chapter 5). Also, Haugh and Bousfield (2012) distinguish between two-participant and multi-party interactions (see also Chapter 8). While in the former both interlocutors are supposed to evaluate verbal behaviour as non-impolite for it to be labelled as mock impoliteness, the latter does not require such a pre-condition (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, pp. 1104–1105). Consider the following example:

(21) "So you've been here for two years," teased Tony as she looked for her key and opened the door, "and still no boyfriend?" Rachel went up the communal stairs. "No one could replace you, Tony!" she teased. He roared with laughter, tickling her. (BNC:JYD)

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This conversation presents a two-participant teasing episode. Tony, who has come to visit Rachel, starts to tease her because she does not have a boyfriend. His mentioning of a two-year period and adding 'still' suggests that it is something that he would consider as a deviant situation for Rachel's personal life. Since the target's private (and probably emotional) life is being verbally attacked, Tony's teasing could be easily evaluated as impolite. However, Rachel's evaluations shift from potentially impolite to non-impolite in this situation (cf. if the after-tease was "Don't you think it's none of your business?") and she decides to tease her friend back, which produces Tony's laughter and shows that both participants enter a humorous frame and regard this situated behaviour as non-impolite. Although in this case, teasing back serves as a shift from impolite to non-impolite evaluations, every explicitly humorous reaction to a potentially face-threatening utterance (e.g. with laughter, smiles, teases back or any other verbal reaction pointing to the appreciation of playfulness) also occasions mock impoliteness (see 4.5.2).

4.4.3 Non-polite jocular behaviour

Although Keltner et al. (1998, p. 1232) define "the content of teasing as intentionally face-threatening verbal or non-verbal action", I would argue that, since it is hardly possible to be absolutely sure of intentionality behind the tease, its content can as well be face-supportive. This, however, does not indicate that the target will appreciate a humorous attempt for it is known that "a polite manner can be experienced as impolite" (Sell, 1992, p. 115). The following examples illustrate this scenario:

(22) "Now there's a pretty sight," he said, as he began to undress. "You look like a princess, so you do!" "Stop your teasing," she told him. "You're only saying that because Gloria did my hair so nicely this morning." (BNC:FPM)

(23) "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were in truth sisters!" "Wonderful indeed!" Joan's tone was a little mocking. "A tale from the land of marvels". "Tease all you will but we are alike – everyone says so!" (BNC:CCD)

In these two examples, teasing is produced with the help of exaggeration and, most certainly, irony ('You look like a princess' and 'A tale from the land of marvels'). The wording, however, is not face-threatening in itself (one could easily be glad to be admired (e.g. (22)) and excited about having a sister (e.g. (23); see Culpeper, 2011b, pp. 75–77). Thus, I label such teasing episodes as face-supportive in their form/content. Definitely, there is almost always something more present in a context or co-text that can help the target to evaluate the tease as insincere (e.g. the contextual cue in (23) 'Joan's tone was a little mocking'), which would suggest

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the presence of surface politeness (e.g. Culpeper, 1996; Taylor, 2009; 2011; 2016). However, even with all the information available to the targets, they can still perceive a potentially polite behaviour as polite (see 4.4.4) or, as in these interactions, shift their evaluations to non-polite. In this case, *mock politeness*[44] is constructed, where the form and the subsequent evaluation stand in opposition, thus creating "polite[ness] for impolite[ness]" (e.g. Taylor, 2009).

Interestingly enough, an explicit reference is made to the very teasing in both after-teases (e.g. "Stop your teasing"). Therefore, an overt acknowledgement of teasing might be yet another element pointing at the target's refusal to participate in a humorous frame (see also (26)).

4.4.4 Polite jocular behaviour

The last interpretation of a jocular verbal act relates to polite verbal behaviour, which, as defined by Holmes et al. (2012, p. 1066), is discursive behaviour that is perceived by the participants "as having been used in order to maintain harmonious relations and avoid conflict with others". Indeed, what most references to polite behaviour and politeness stress, whether in the classic theories or their discursive successors, is its orientation towards harmony and rapport. In addition, what seems to pertain to politeness is the relation between politeness and emotions (e.g. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010 in Culpeper, 2012, p. 1130). Thus, polite behaviour can be also "[…] characterised by positive emotion" (Culpeper, 2012, p. 1129). Consider the following example:

(24) Fabia was watching absolutely fascinated when, in a window above these other two windows, the run was completed by a golden cockerel shaking its wings and crowing. "Wasn't that terrific?" she turned to Ven to eagerly exclaim […] A second or two later though and she realised that she must have been mistaken, for his look was suddenly more mocking than anything when, "In a word," he lobbed back at her, "fantastic." Her heart steadied and, deciding that she quite liked being teased by him, she smiled. "Thank you, anyway – it was great!" (BNC:JYF)

In this extract, Fabia's question 'Wasn't that terrific?' gives rise to Ven's teasing when he eventually replies. His answer does not carry any negative message in itself, since he, saying 'In a word […] fantastic', practically paraphrases Fabia's words. Yet, the meta-language is very valuable in this example for Fabia's thoughts are revealed and it is clear that she realises that she has been teased. However,

44. Note that here *mock politeness* can but should not necessarily stand for *sarcasm* (however, cf. Culpeper, 1996; 2005; Bousfield, 2008; Taylor, 2015a).

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she does not decide to react to this potentially polite verbal behaviour with 'stop your teasing' (as in (22)) and, enjoying Ven's teasing ('she quite liked being teased by him'), enters the jocular frame. The importance of emotional involvement can also be observed not only due to the meta-language but also to the contextual cue, i.e. Fabia's smile.

What I aimed to achieve in this section was to show that it is generally impossible to arrive at politeness, impoliteness, mock politeness or mock impoliteness only basing the analysis on the teaser (the speaker) or the target (the hearer). Even though some terms in Table 10 coincide (e.g. the tease form/content and the target's evaluation can both be regarded as impolite or polite), the production of the tease will always be a necessary pre-condition for the evaluation of teasing, which, in its turn, can be absolutely distinct depending on the teaser (e.g. only an impolite form can eventually cause a non-impolite evaluation). Therefore, it is the interaction between the teaser and the target that leads to such an analytical conclusion.

4.5 A corpus-assisted study of teasing: Evidence from the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*

Corpus-based methods can open new ways for analysis in various research fields (e.g. Culpeper, 2011a on impoliteness; Goddard, 2009 on cultural scripts; Kohnen, 2009 on speech acts and text; Jucker et al., 2008 on compliments; Taylor, 2016 on mock politeness). Since texts available in most corpora are not taken from scientific journals nor are written by analysts, it is also a possible source of first-order definitions based on laymen's usage, understanding and interpretation of particular terms (Haugh, 2018). As has been mentioned, first-order terms are those used by language users (e.g. in real-life conversations or by authors in fiction) when they refer to a particular concept (e.g. polite or politeness). The understanding of these terms, however, may significantly differ when they are used by researchers. Therefore, undoubtedly, analytical terms used in this chapter are referred to as second-order terms (for more explanation, see Eelen, 2001, Chapter 2).

The data used in this chapter comes from the British National Corpus (*BNC*) and *Ozcorp*. Both of them consist largely of written material, such as fiction and newspapers, and give access to the writers' and journalists' understanding of the verbal practice of teasing. Taking into consideration the fact that there is much useful information available in the texts from the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*, I have decided to find the answers to a few questions about teasing: (i) how? (ii) why? and (iii) what happens after a tease has been produced? These questions are answered in the following subsections.

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4.5.1 Teasing how? Ways of doing teasing

Since teasing is a multi-faceted ambiguous verbal practice, the more teasing situations there are, the more different types of teases are created. In this subsection, three broad content-related categories are presented that do not reflect any particular wording pattern or strategy. For instance, irony or exaggeration is not considered to be a basic level category (see Table 11) that has a greater degree of inclusiveness; rather, they are strategies that can be employed in any of the three categories, outlined in Table 11 (see also Kotthoff, 2007, p. 274; Sinkeviciute, 2013).

Table 11. Ways of doing teasing and their frequency

	UK	AU
Present true information in a mock-serious way	51%*	52%
Point out that the target or something related to the target is deviant	35%	35%
Say something that is untrue	25%	33%

* Due to the overlap of the strategies in each classification (see also Table 12 and 13), the overall percentage amounts to more than 100%. Furthermore, all the values should be regarded as approximate.

Here it should be mentioned that all the categories describe the teaser's perspective and/or the target's thoughts about how s/he has been teased. For instance, a few meta-comments are available about the teaser not telling the truth or the target him/herself being sure that the teaser's utterance is overtly untruthful[45] (see (25) and (26)).

(25) [S]he said when he went back that she was only teasing about the baby not being his. (BNC:G16)

(26) "Must you tease so?" asked Joan, not believing a word of it. (BNC:CCD)

First of all, teasing can be generated through concealing true information, thoughts and feelings behind a humorous frame. Indeed, particular forms of conversational humour cannot be entirely devoid of seriousness and, therefore, they do not function only within the humorous frame (Dynel 2011a). Since teasing is recognised as quite a non-serious and non-truthful verbal practice (see (7)), the speaker, who aims to criticise the hearer or suggest something that could be rejected (which would threaten his/her own face), is more likely to merge the non-humorous and humorous frames, especially taking into consideration that contextual cues (e.g. smiles, intonation) and the absence of immediate real-world relevance

45. Although (un)true/(un)truthful, and truth/truthfulness are not, technically speaking, synonymous (cf. Dynel, 2011b and references therein), they are here used synonymously.

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(Lampert & Tripp, 2006) should lead the target towards the non-seriousness of an utterance in any case.

(27) Carnelian even teased him with the truth, assuming that Jaq would fail to perceive it. (BNC:CM4)

(28) I fell asleep, and later they all teased me for sleeping the whole time with my mouth lolling open. I was embarrassed, and even angry at them. I hate being teased. (Ozcorp 2445700)

(29) "I'll bet you did!" Her tone was teasing. "No wonder they were giving me funny looks!" He continued to smile across at her. […] "You have no choice but to marry me." He smiled at her, teasing her. "You owe it to Kirsty. She needs a mother and a father." Then his expression sobered. "Besides which, my dear Shiona, I've waited long enough for you, and I've just come all the way from Lock Lomond to propose to you." (BNC:JXS)

Examples (27) and (28) clearly state that the truth can be part of a tease. While in (27) the teaser believes that due to the non-serious context of a conversation it [the truth] would not be perceived, in (28) the target realises that s/he is being teased with what has actually happened, which s/he does not enjoy. In addition, in (29) the importance of contextual cues can be observed. First, the speaker uses a teasing tone and then a non-verbal element (i.e. a smile) is involved. What proves interesting in this example is that a seemingly non-serious statement is uttered ('You have no choice but to marry me'), but later a sober explanation follows ('I've just come all the way from Lock Lomond to propose to you'). This nicely illustrates the overlap of the humorous and serious frames and an important part contextual cues play in teasing.

Another productive way of teasing is highlighting some deviations present in the target's behaviour, appearance, speech or anything that goes beyond social standards (Keltner, 1998, p. 1232; Voss, 1997, p. 243; Kotthoff, 2007, p. 274). Heerey et al. (2005, p. 56) hold that "understanding social norms and the actions that violate them is a central element in the provocation of a tease". Since this understanding is generated in relatively early stages of children's development (e.g. Keltner et al., 2001, pp. 238–239), it could explain the fact that this way of teasing is more typical of children's and teenagers' verbal behaviour[46] and is more easily recognised by the targets. Also, it produces more negative perceptions (e.g. exclusion as in (31), see Subsection 4.5.2 on functions) than when it is done in other ways.

46. The majority of examples in this category represent schoolchildren being teased.

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(30) They tormented her enough on the grounds of her pale skin, her thin body and her grandmother's pretensions to gentility and the shoes only gave them another cause to tease. (BNC:APU)

(31) By then she had acquired a distinctive Geordie accent and she was upset when her friends at school teased her about her rounded vowels and up and down, sing-song voice. She felt excluded. (BNC:ABV)

(32) They were proud of her, although they teased her about being a women's libber and for having only two children. (Ozcorp 10239000)

In these examples, 'pale skin, her thin body and her grandmother's pretensions to gentility', 'a distinctive […] accent' or 'being a women's libber' and 'having only two children' are all deviations either directly related to the target's physical characteristics (e.g. body, accent), ideas ('a women's libber') or to somebody else related to him/her (e.g. her grandmother in (30)). In (31), the description also provides information about how the target felt – not only was she upset, but she also 'felt excluded' (for functions, see 4.5.2). On the contrary, teasing is not seen as a primarily offensive verbal act in (32), where it is produced by people who are "proud of" the target, but who, with the help of teasing, point to the things that distinguish her from the mainstream.

Finally, teasing can also be produced by deliberately saying something untrue, which, unlike other categories, scored higher in the Australian corpus.[47] The presence of playful contextual cues should facilitate the target's perception of such a tease as overtly untruthful. Although the process of encoding, in this case, is similar to that seen in the previous examples, the target has to be able to recognise that, instead of hearing truth (e.g. (29)), s/he is exposed to a false statement which, however, is not meant to deceive him/her. Consider the following examples, where untruthful information is presented in order to criticise one's behaviour (in (33) and exaggeration (as in (34)) serves as an intensifier and an extra means of presenting untrue information in teasing (in (35)):

(33) "Then what will you give me?" "Nothing." Maud laughed. "If you are so unkind, I shall take this," Maud teased, touching a marble that the little girl was carrying. (Ozcorp 10475900)

(34) "How much further is it to Kinsai?" "Oh, a day's march or so," Burun exaggerated, teasing her. (BNC:FSE)

47. E.g., an entry from *Ridgey Didge Oz Jack Lang* by Ryan Aven-Bray (1983) found in *Ozcorp*: Gee Up – To tease a person with a lie. (Ozcorp 17804800)

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(35) "Oh, you are awake, then." "I was only thinking." "Do you always snore while you think?" "I wasn't snoring! I don't snore – I wasn't asleep. I don't think I snore." He laughed. "I'm just teasing." (BNC:JY0)

Even though this classification into three categories could be mistakenly regarded as clear-cut, where one category would exclude another, on a number of occasions, the categories overlap or it is unclear how teasing is done. As might be expected, the category of pointing to something deviant about the target could be sometimes merged with that of hiding the real message behind a humorous frame (e.g. (36)). Indeed, most of the time deviation could be something real. However, it is often presented as something amusing to others or hurtful to the target and not as something non-serious (which is the key point of the first category). Similarly, the truth behind a humorous frame is not always likely to be a case of deviation; instead, it can simply be pointing at one's cloaked intentions (e.g. (29)) or an annoying habit (e.g. (9)). Finally, due to the lack of contextual information and the fact that "the exact message cannot be interpreted without encoding/decoding the metamessage" (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 279), sometimes it is impossible to include an example in any category (e.g. (22)).

4.5.2 Teasing why? Functions of teasing

The functions of humour range from affiliating and maintaining intimacy to criticising and expressing hostility (e.g. Bell, 2009a, pp. 147–148). Similar functions are attributed to teasing. Being ambiguous in nature and having both bonding and aggressive capacities (Dynel, 2008), teasing moves along "a continuum of bonding to nipping to biting" (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997, p. 279). It can function as a solidarity or amusement marker (Culpeper, 2011a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012), but it often also involves hidden coercion (Holmes, 2000), or criticism levelled at the target's deviance or his/her way of being, or a desire to change something in the target (e.g. Keltner et al., 1998; Keltner et al., 2001, p. 236). Thus, the functions of teasing can be divided into affective, instrumental and interpersonal, where affective functions include entertainment as well as the target's annoyance or irritation, instrumental functions involve a form of social control, moral transgressions as well as compliments, criticism and complaints, and, finally, interpersonal functions refer to teasing being used to form alliances or exclude as well as claim or ascribe identity (for a more detailed description, see Haugh, 2017a).

Table 12 provides a classification of the functions of teasing as found in the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*. Here it should be pointed out that, since the least information was available about the teaser's intentions or the target's understanding of those, some of the functions could be illustrated only with a few examples. Also, from

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the extracts available for this corpus-assisted analysis, it is not always clear what interpersonal relationships the characters have, even though, as the examples show, it can be seen that most encounters are among already acquainted parties, friends or family members. Nevertheless, some differences can be observed in the two corpora. While more instances of criticising and amusing have been found in the Australian corpus, the *BNC* has presented more examples of teasing being used in order to maintain close relationships as well as annoy or irritate the target.

Table 12. Functions of teasing and their frequency

	UK	AU
Criticise/challenge	52%	59%
Build or maintain close relationships	25%	16%
Exclude/show superiority	15%	18%
Amuse	10%	20%
Annoy/irritate	8%	2%

Similar to the previous section, here I have also decided to incorporate the target's perceptions of what could have been intended and, thus, how s/he feels after a teasing episode (e.g. (37) and (40)). Most of the functions listed in Table 12 coincide with those suggested in other research on conversational humour mentioned before.

(36) Sam gave her a hard look, "You know I cannot provide for two homes, or I would." "You probably do as it is," Henny teased. "No. I know you; you haven't the guts for it. You just keep them tailing along." (Ozcorp 8461600)

(37) "And how's my little horse-thief?" Topaz knew that he was teasing her and her first nervousness was gone. (BNC:EVC)

(38) Even on Anzac Day,[48] when you wear the medals on your left breast as do all the other kids of returned men. When you are in your teens, those kids whose fathers hadn't gone tease you, "Think you're smart don't you! We know why your father went to the war! […]" (Ozcorp 16025500)

(39) […] we all rode off as hard as we could because we were bursting with laughter –" Alexandra said quietly, "Poor man." "Poor?" They chorused. "To be teased." Rose giggled. "Don't you like fun?" "I don't know," Alexandra said, "I didn't know that's what fun was." (BNC:H8X)

48. *Anzac* stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Anzac day is celebrated on 25 April every year in Australia. "It commemorates the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli" (http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/anzac-day).

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(40) "Friends?" The soft drawl was teasing, the grey eyes now unreadable. "How come I didn't get prior warning of a major development in our relationship?" "Well… we're hardly strangers any more, are we?" she demanded, thrusting her hands into her pockets and eyeing him with a trace of annoyance.
(BNC:JY3)

Apart from being a perfect tool for criticising the target for his/her behaviour or attitude (not being able to 'provide for two homes' in (36) and sometimes being 'a social corrective' (Zajdman, 1995, p. 332) (e.g. (9)), teasing is widely used in order to build or maintain friendly relationships (e.g. (37)). It can also serve to show superiority and exclude the target from the group as in (38), where 'those kids whose fathers hadn't gone' to the war were teasing the one whose father did not return. This, however, happens almost exclusively when there are more than two participants present in a teasing episode, i.e. constructing a multi-party interaction (e.g. 'her friends' in (31)), where the potential threat for the target tends to increase. Thus, in-group relations are built between the teaser and the hearers (other than the target), while the target is an outsider (see disaffiliative humour in Dynel, 2013a). Definitely, in a multi-party discourse, teasing can also function as a means of amusing other people, yet once again at the expense of the target (e.g. (39)). Finally, some teases can simply annoy or irritate the targets (e.g. (40)), thus moving towards a non-humorous frame and leading to the targets' impolite or at least non-polite beliefs (see 4.5.3), especially when they assume that this is what the teaser has intended to do.

Despite the clear differences, some functions can coincide. Criticism or challenge could overlap with relationship enhancement, especially in those teasing episodes where *a priori* or potentially *a posteriori* friendship exists (e.g. (21)). In (40), however, the annoyance *produced* by the tease seems to be the result of the teaser's idea of building friendships. The extract itself indicates that the topic of the conversation is the present relationship escalation to the 'friends' level and this could be the exact reason why the instigator takes the liberty to tease, which, unfortunately, is negatively perceived by the target.

4.5.3 Teasing and what then? After-teases

Not only are the form of the tease and possible functions behind it important, but it is also essential to take into consideration how the target verbally reacts to it. For example, Bousfield (2008a, pp. 188–203), elaborating on Culpeper et al. (2003, pp. 1562–1568), presents the choices that the hearer has when facing an offending event. He suggests that the target can decide to either respond or not respond. In the case of the former, the hearer can choose from an offensive or a

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defensive strategy (e.g. dismiss, ignore or offer an account). Although teasing is not always an overtly offending event, some targets' choices coincide with those previously proposed. All the after-teases from the *BNC* and *Ozcorp* were divided into six categories[49] (see Table 13).

Table 13. After-teases and their frequency

	UK	AU
React seriously	26%	36%
Refuse/be insulted	26%	45%
Accept	23%	17%
Retaliate/tease back	18%	5%
Explain/defend yourself	9%	5%
Ignore/change the topic	7%	11%

It is interesting to observe that the Australian corpus data shows the preference to react seriously, refuse a tease and rather not tease the instigator back (however, cf. the results in the following chapters). On the other hand, the results reveal that there are more instances of a tease being accepted and, especially retaliated in the *BNC* data. Consider the following examples:

(41) "You wouldn't go native, suddenly?" she teased him. "I would indeed," he said seriously and began again to outline his ideas, return to nature, phalanstery, peace, industry, love, law-abiding. (Ozcorp 8486800)

(42) When Harry walked in with crumpled footsteps on his cap she called out, "Hello! What's this? Dag's liberation?" Harry teased her back. "Is it natural?" he asked, pointing at her hair. She was offended. "That's none of your business," she told him […]. (Ozcorp[50])

(43) "You sit down and make a good breakfast. You won't get much at the reception. The bride never does." "Oh," said Fran, faintly. "Don't tease her, Alan, this is her wedding day. She's nervous." (Ozcorp 16272600)

(44) "Goodness," she said. She opened her eyes wide at him, teasing. "Maybe we even passed each other in the supermarket. Or got on the same bus. Or parked – wow! – in the same car park." "Come on," he said, laughing. "You can't deny it's a bit of a coincidence." (BNC:GV8)

49. Cf. taking into consideration the reactions of the target (recipient) and the third part (audience), Pawluk (1989) divides teasing into three categories, when both accept, both reject it or mixed reactions are witnessed.

50. Not all material in *Ozcorp* has a unique number.

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(45) "I don't suppose you've seen many such splendid sights," Googol teased. "You, from your poky little caverns." "Splendid?" queried the Squat. "Do you rate such a farrago as splendour? You with your eyes forever trained on the gloomy sludge of the warp?" "Touché!" applauded the Navigator. (BNC:CM4)

(46) Seeing him in good spirits now, Boswell teased him for his earlier hesitancy, called him "a delicate Londoner… a macaroni", and Johnson defended himself with an unserious disingenuousness by saying he had only feared not finding a horse able enough to carry him. (BNC:G1Y)

(47) "I haven't forgotten how the Dalesfolk talk, you see, Mam," she teased, as she sat down on the bench next to her mother". "We'aven't seen thoo since t'funeral." Annie tried not to sound reproachful.' (BNC:C98)

On the basis of the teasing episodes analysed, it can be claimed that in both corpora most of the time the target chooses to react seriously (e.g. (41)) or refuse the tease, showing that s/he is insulted (e.g. (42)). Here, it is important to point out that on a number of occasions, the third party refuses a tease in *Ozcorp*, which was observed only in a couple of texts in the *BNC*, especially where children are involved. In the Australian corpus, on the other hand, this behaviour is also encountered among adults, particularly the third party, who seem to feel the necessity to step in and show the instigator that his/her tease is inappropriate (in (43)). When a tease is accepted (as in (44)), the target (besides his/her verbal appreciation) tends to laugh or smile, which would show that s/he recognises that what has been uttered belongs to a humorous frame. Similarly, the target can decide to participate in this non-serious frame and tease back, thus becoming the teaser him/herself (e.g. (45), (21)). Those who do not opt for either laughing or explicitly protesting against teasing, are likely to try to offer an explanation about what has been mentioned in the tease (e.g. (46) or ignore it, changing the topic (e.g.(47)).

These results emphasise that in both corpora the targets tend to respond seriously and refuse teases, i.e. producing po-faced receipts (e.g. Drew, 1987; Bell, 2009a). Furthermore, after-teases, as well as the ways of doing teasing, and functions can sometimes overlap and include two different strategies. For example, in (35) the target's use of a high-pitched tone (exclamation marks) can indicate that he refuses the tease, intends to increase the distance and is more emotional (see Culpeper et al., 2003, pp. 1572, 1575; Culpeper, 2005, p. 53), but eventually his laughter suggests the opposite.

In addition, even though the target responds in a particular way, pretence can always be present in after-teases, especially when the target seems to accept the tease or at least not to explicitly refuse it (e.g. (48)), since having a good sense of humour and getting a good laugh could be more appreciated in a given situation

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(Bell, 2009a, p. 148; Zajdman, 1995, p. 326; see Chapter 5). Due to the meta-language available in the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*, it was possible to trace several examples where teasing produces fake laughter or smile (e.g. (10) and (11)). Alongside an explicit verbal refusal, fake laughter could be another representative marker of failed humour (Bell 2009a).

(48) She was greeted with raillery from her fellow workers, but Jason surprisingly wasn't around. It wasn't easy to pretend to be casual under their teasing, but she hoped she managed to conceal her real feelings. (BNC:HGM)

Finally, it can be noticed that silence as a response has not been mentioned as a separate category. The reasons for that are that (i) all the after-teases presented in this subsection offer a verbal response and (ii) silence can function as an additional intensifier of the target's response of ignoring the tease, reacting seriously, refusing what has been directed at him/her or even "'get[ting] back at initiators"[51] (Lytra, 2007, pp. 396–400; for more on different communicative functions of silence, see Jaworski, 1993; for more on silence in intercultural communication, see Nakane, 2007).

4.6 Summary

This chapter attempted to elaborate on the multi-facetedness of jocular verbal behaviours and their interpretation in the light of various analytical approaches and theories. The verbal practice of teasing has been used as a viable testing ground.

First, a distinction between face-threatening and face-supportive verbal acts has been drawn, and the importance of context and contextual cues for the target's evaluations of jocular behaviours was pointed out. Also, a clash between the form/content of a jocular verbal act and the target's interpretation was introduced, which directly led to the development of a theoretical production-evaluation model for teasing. While the production of jocular behaviour happens to be limited to either an FTA (potentially impolite verbal act) or an FSA (potentially polite verbal act), the target can choose from a range of possible evaluations that are defined as impolite, polite, non-polite or non-impolite. Thus, four possible production-evaluation combinations with subsequent analytical interpretations were proposed.

Furthermore, in order to find out how the verbal practice of teasing is conceptualised in British English and Australian English, a number of teasing episodes

51. Note, an example from the *BNC* (BNC:G13): "Then I shall continue to tease you." There was silence. Conchis was away far too long for the excuse he had given. Her eyes sought mine, a shade uncertainly, but I kept silent, and she looked away.

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taken from the *BNC* and *Ozcorp* were analysed. Attention was primarily drawn to three components of teasing, namely (i) how it can be done, (ii) what functions can be attributed to it, and (iii) what type of after-teases the target chooses to use. The results once again emphasised the ambiguity inherent in teasing not only due to the fact that the teaser can decide to hide false information or truth behind the tease but also because the target can possibly be pretending when accepting the tease or can refuse a (seemingly playful) verbal action. It should be mentioned, however, that unlike the categories of the ways of *doing* teasing, its functions and after-teases, which could be said to be quite fixed and re-usable in future analyses, the differences in the labelling of the verbal practice of teasing in British English and Australian English (albeit valuable) should not be taken as a clear reference point, especially taking into consideration that primarily written material from the 20th century is represented in both corpora.

Finally, as has already been frequently suggested, jocular verbal behaviours do not have to depend on either the teaser or the target. Conversely, their mutual involvement in a humorous episode is what allows the analysts to determine where potential jocularity could be placed on the continuum of four independent and conceptually different interpretations: *politeness*, *mock politeness*, *mock impoliteness* and *impoliteness*.

While this chapter focused on a corpus-assisted study and presented rather quantitative results of how the verbal practice of *teasing* (via its lexical components) is conceptualised in mainly written texts in British and Australian English, the following chapter will be devoted to a more detailed view on Australian and British cultural contexts, where the proscription against *taking oneself too seriously* functions as cultural ethos. This will be directly linked to the notion of *the preferred reaction* to jocular verbal behaviours, a difference between public and personal offence as well as laughter and funniness.

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CHAPTER 5

Jocular verbal behaviours in Australian and British cultural contexts

> A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs.
> It's jolted by every pebble on the road. (Henry Ward Beecher)

One of the most important elements in the English-speaking world seems to be the injunction against taking yourself too seriously. Even though it is a shared cultural ethos, there seems to be a difference in the degree to which one is not allowed to take oneself seriously. For example, Docker (2005) confesses that the "idea that stands out now is that going to America helped me understand Australia better. I now value much more than I did Australians' sense of humour, not taking oneself too seriously, a sardonic take on the world, an ability to have fun […]". Such, undoubtedly generalising, claims show how different cultural values can be perceived in two countries where the same language is spoken.

The first part of this chapter will present an overview of a connection between jocular verbal behaviours and some cultural attitudes towards humour, which can, consequently, explain at least some of the interlocutors' interactional preferences (see Chapter 8 for an empirical analysis of qualitative interviews regarding how language users evaluate jocular interactional practices). It should be mentioned that those preferences are what we see being projected in public, but they may not correspond to what the interactants' personal attitudes really are (see also Chapter 6). After providing some examples of the public vs personal offence distinction, the concept of *the preferred reaction* will be introduced and followed by a discussion of a differentiation between laughter and *funniness* in relation to public offence.

Finally, even though many jocular behaviours described in the following section can be regarded as at least slightly generalised and stereotypical,[52] as the examples from the interviews in this Chapter and Chapter 8 will show, these are the terms in which language users conceptualise such interactional practices.

52. Cf. as Sharp (2012, p. 143) points out, "[a]s ever with all stereotypes, where there is smoke, there is at least a little fire".

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5.1 Jocularity, cultural values and interactional preferences

As Chapter 4 showed, jocular verbal behaviours such as teasing, banter, jocular mockery or jocular abuse have been extensively studied in the last few decades (e.g. Straehle, 1993; Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Keltner et al., 1998; 2001; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Lytra, 2007; Schnurr, 2009; Haugh, 2010a; 2014). The topicality of such types of conversational humour lies in their nature, since they combine affiliative and disafilliative elements of interactional behaviour (Haugh, 2010a), seriousness or non-seriousness (Holt, 2013) or humorous and non-humorous frames (Dynel, 2011a, p. 232). Although largely referred to as playful verbal acts, teasing or jocular mockery also exhibit the presence of verbal (but most likely not genuine) aggression (e.g. Alberts et al., 1996; Keltner et al., 1998; Norrick, 1994). Indeed, some studies have demonstrated that the targets tend to reject teases and feel insulted rather than to accept them (e.g. Drew, 1987). However, unlike genuine aggressive putdowns or bullying that primarily exhibit disaffiliative elements and are used to denigrate or belittle an individual or a social group, which can be amusing for the third party or the viewers of telecinematic discourse (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Ferguson & Ford, 2008; Dynel, 2010; 2012a; 2013a), teasing mockery, even if not always enjoyed by the targets, still has a powerful jocular element and has been primarily regarded as a relationship-affirming verbal practice. In some cultural contexts, e.g. Australian, it is "a recurrent and recognizable practice in interactions" (Haugh, 2014, p. 78) and it is quite natural for even strangers to jocularly mock each other in the process of getting acquainted (Haugh, 2011; Goddard, 2006).

In general, there exists an expectation among speakers of different varieties of English that the responses to jocular mockery or teasing should be non-serious (Haugh, 2014; Goddard, 2009; Fox, 2004). Many analyses of naturally-occurring conversations have indeed shown that this playful side of affiliative humour is its main characteristic, since it successfully stresses the non-seriousness of a verbal act by which no offence has been meant or at which none has been taken (Haugh, 2010a; 2014; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Dynel, 2008; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). This can be said to be quite strongly related to a tendency not to make a scene and be able to take a joke. While the former seems to be rather equally prominent in the British and Australian context (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 12; Tan, 2008, p. 58), the latter, as will be seen below, appears to be almost a pre-requisite for surviving in an Australian cultural context (Penney, 2012, pp. 39, 157; see also (60)). Consider several examples from the interviews and *Big Brother* data:

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(49)

Interviewer: how would you react if you didn't like a comment?
Jon (UK): → […] I'd be really angry but I wouldn't show it
Interviewer? why
Jon (UK): → {[laughing] cause that's how we are} […]
you get really angry and all you'll do is just
think bad things in your head and won't do anything
about it […]
[…]
→ you're taught to be calm composed and
→ non-emotional in erm situations public situations
(.) that's that's a fact [he] {[smile voice] I'm
not sure that's a theory but that is a fact} […]

(50)

Interviewer: when is it appropriate to take offence?
Alistair (UK): when is it appropriate (.) it's appropriate
when it's just you and the other person
→ you should never do it in public with other
people around because they might then you cause
→ a scene and you draw attention to yourself
→ all these very British things you don't want
to happen it's better to do one on one […]

(51) Day 46 (UK)

Luke A: I believe in having an argument or a
confrontation in private

(52)

Alicia (AU): in a public setting generally most comments
are quite humorous perhaps it's because you don't
→ wanna make a scene in a public you don't want
you know to cause a kerfuffle or anything

(53)

Alistair (UK): as long as you as long as you can find it
you can take a joke you will be fine

(54)

Hannah (AU): well you don't wanna look like you can't
take a joke

(55)

Michael (M)(AU): […] Aussies I think tend to look for the funny first
to see ah actually they're making a joke here […]

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These extracts clearly refer to the preference not to show one's negative emotions, whether offence or anger. The British interview participants (Jon and Alistair) in (49) and (50) as well as Luke A from *Big Brother* UK in (51) claim that one is 'taught to be calm, composed and non-emotional in […] public situations' and 'hav[e] an argument or a confrontation in private', i.e. 'caus[ing] a scene and […] draw[ing] attention to yourself' is not one of the British features. Similarly, in (52) Alicia from Australia stresses that 'in a public setting' one does not want to 'make a scene' or 'cause a kerfuffle'. While this feature seems to be shared, being able to take a joke has been mentioned by the interviewees only in relation to an Australian cultural context. In (53), Alistair, who had lived in Australia for almost two years at the time of the interview, holds that those who 'can take a joke […] will be fine' in Australia. This correlates with what Hannah in (54) points to, i.e. the importance of not looking like 'you can't take a joke', even if it means that you laugh and pretend that no offence has been taken (for more examples, see 5.2.1). Finally, Michael (M) holds that 'Aussies tend to look for the funny first', i.e. not to immediately think that someone is trying to personally attack them or aggressively put them down. This is seemingly the key element for someone to be able to take a joke.

5.1.1 *Not taking yourself too seriously*

This brings me directly to the cultural ethos that is widely spread in mainstream English-speaking societies, namely, the proscription against *taking oneself too seriously*. Descriptions of this notion, cultural preference or ethos can be found in various research areas outside the scope of linguistics and cultural studies (e.g. Terry, 2007 on multicultural management; Maples et al., 2001 on counselling or Law, 1997 on marketing, among others). This cultural proscription (that is strong in Australia, the UK, the USA and New Zealand) manifests itself in a number of communicative situations. One of the key elements of 'not taking oneself too seriously' suggests that people can recognise the playful nature of verbal behaviour and "appreciate the 'funny' side" of what has been uttered (Goddard, 2009, p. 40), which is supposed to be shared by the speakers of other varieties of English. It also describes why humour is valued and one can, or even should, find almost every situation worth mocking and laughing[53] in many English-speaking societies. Elaborating on humour in English conversation, Fox (2004, 61; emphasis original) writes: "Humour rules. Humour governs. Humour is omnipresent and

53. Although the author is aware that laughter does not always function as an indicator of humour (see 5.2.2), laughter is still the most common and explicit indicator thereof (Glenn & Holt, 2013, p. 2).

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omnipotent" and that "the real 'defining characteristic' is the *value* we put on humour, the central importance of humour in English culture and social interaction". Similar to England, where "brains are optional but a sense of humour is compulsory" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 53), in an Australian context, if one has a choice, one would always choose humour, especially because "there is very little that Australians do not make fun of" (Penney, 2012, pp. 156, 39). One exception, however, would be jocularly targeting certain minority groups, or those who are not able to defend themselves, which is likely to be "considered offensive" (Penney, 2012, p. 156), since it would go against a tendency to project equality and fair play in interaction (e.g. Goddard, 2009).[54]

Goddard (2009, p. 38) argues that "*not taking yourself too seriously* is more highly proscribed by mainstream communicative norms in Australia than it is in the USA, and perhaps even in the UK". Indeed, it seems that in an Australian cultural context, simply associating this cultural ethos with humour, or even a sardonic sense of humour, does not seem to suffice. Being "part of the [Australian] national self-image" (Goddard, 2009, p. 31), the injunction against 'taking yourself too seriously' has been addressed in some studies of normative (verbal) behaviour and interactions in mainstream Anglo-Australian culture (Wierzbicka, 2002; Goddard, 2009; 2012; Haugh, 2010a; 2011; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). Goddard (2009) claims that there are two different cultural attitudes in Australia involved in 'not taking yourself too seriously': humour- (to be discussed in more detail in the next subsection) and egalitarianism-related.

The latter cultural attitude, which makes the proscription against 'taking yourself too seriously' stronger in Australia than in the UK and the USA, is not

54. As Goddard (2009, p. 50) suggests, in Australia additional value could yet be placed on humour, thus also including "a reaction to personal misfortune, even personal tragedy". For example, Bryson (2000, p. 200) in his book *Down Under* retells a joke:

> "A man arriving for the Grand [footy] Final in Melbourne is surprised to find the seat beside him empty. Tickets for the Grand Final are sold out weeks in advance and empty seats unknown. So he says to the man on the other side of the seat: 'Excuse me, do you know why there is no one in this seat?'
>
> 'It was my wife's,' answers the second man, a touch wistfully, 'but I'm afraid she died.'
>
> 'Oh, that's terrible. I'm so sorry.'
>
> 'Yes, she never missed a match.'
>
> 'But couldn't you have given the ticket to a friend or a relative?'
>
> 'Oh, no. They're all at the funeral.'"

Interestingly, a similar tendency has been also observed in Native Americans. 'Not taking themselves too seriously' "has served as one of the many useful coping methods for generations of Native people who have learned how to survive in the face of persecution, exploitation, and genocide" (Maples et al., 2001, p. 55).

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laughter/humour-related, but rather refers to an Australian "egalitarianism of manners", i.e. the tendency to "blot out differences when people meet face to face" (Hirst, 2009, p. 301; Goddard, 2009, p. 41). In other words, it is all about how people relate to one another and it is considered "extremely poor manners to show any sign that one person is better than another" (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 32). It could already be noticed at the end of the 19th century when class differences became significant, but "[i]n face-to-face encounters Australians gradually dropped old-world formality and deference and spoke to each other as equals. This is an egalitarianism on which Australians have come to set great store. […] Everyone was 'mate'" (Hirst, 2009, p. 17). This egalitarianism of manners has a strong connection with the unique cultural concept of *mateship*, whose understanding is "crucial to understanding the Australian character" (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 11). It stands for loyalty to one's mates, support in difficult situations as well as not being seen as superior (Penney, 2012, p. 67; Sharp, 2012, p. 95; Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 11; for an analysis of mateship in relation to jocular verbal behaviour in an Australian cultural context, see Sinkeviciute, 2014; for a comprehensive overview of ways in which ideas about 'mateship' were formulated and how they shaped the Australian history, see Dyrenfurth, 2015). Indeed, there is a tendency among Australians to promote this feeling of equality and discourage feelings of specialness,[55] i.e. not trying to project that one is a high achiever or a tall poppy (Goddard, 2009, p. 42; see also Wierzbicka, 2002, pp. 1194–1195; Peeters, 2004a; 2004b). A similar tendency for not showing off can be observed in a British cultural context, where the speakers might feel extremely uncomfortable if they have to "trumpet their accomplishments" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 14; Ross, 2013). What seems to be a difference is that while in Australia and the UK it is not a common practice to praise yourself, when it is done, in Australia it tends to be confronted by taking the piss out of that person, which can be seen as a social sanction against culturally inappropriate behaviour. Consider the following examples from the interviews and *Big Brother* Australia 2012:

(56)

Dale (AU): […] if you are taking yourself too seriously
then your opinion of others and their ability to
work with you is harder because generally you then
→ if you take yourself to seriously you get the whole
→ I'm better than you I know more of what I'm doing and

55. Being pretentious in an Australian cultural context is "the most severe form of social bad manners" (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 32). If someone has illusions of self-importance, they should "keep [them] to themselves or share [them] (cautiously) only with the like-minded" (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 32).

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then you're less open to sort of erm open to suggestions
and that kind of thing you'll be less open to it generally

(57)

Hannah (AU): I guess if you've achieved something in
Australia that's quite big you might you might
→ be more likely to make a joke about it because
→ you don't wanna appear like a tall poppy […]

(58) Day 68 (AU)
Ben is talking to Michael about Layla (a British participant):

Ben: she's now starting to be I deserve things and I
get them
[…]
Michael: → I don't like thinking that anyone here isn't as
→ equal as the others
Ben: neither I find that repels me I'm repelled by
→ people who think that they are better in some
way and they deserve more

All of these illustrations, whether from the housemates or the interviewees, clearly point to the existence of the non-appreciation of someone explicitly celebrating their achievements, thinking 'I'm better than you' and, thus 'deserv[ing] more'. This tendency shows a propensity for feeling equal, which characterises Anglo-Australians as a "horizontal" society, i.e. one in which people show their preference for being socially similar (Goddard, 2012, pp. 1039–1040). The same implications can be observed in the Australian folk comment about a "Pom",[56] i.e. an Englishman, quoted in Wierzbicka (2002, p. 1195): "he thinks he is better than me". The idea of promoting presumed social similarity and social equality in interaction, i.e. "not [being] above someone" (Goddard, 2012, p. 1040), moves one step further and indicates how a specific cultural attitude manifests itself in interaction. Its importance is also reflected in the mutual understanding of the participants in interaction that both of them should project social equality.

56. The origin of this reference to the English seems to be obscure (Penney, 2012, p. 42), although several probable explanations have been offered. The most popular one suggests that the word *Pom* is a shortened form of *Pommie* that derived from POHMIE (Prisoners of His Majesty in Exile) emblazoned on clothing worn by first arrivals (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 4; Sharp, 2012, p. 56). On the other hand, Baker (1945) in the book on the Australian language claims that 'pommy' came from 'jimmygrant' that rhymes with 'immigrant' and later was shortened to 'jimmy'. Then it was "merged by rhyme into *pomegranate* […] and subsequently clipped back to *pommy*" (Baker, 1945, p. 185). He also refutes the claims that 'pommy' was a long-established word in Australia, referring to the work by Stephens and O'Brien (1910) who, being "keen observers", at the time of writing only noted the references to 'jimmy' or 'jimmygrant'.

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Thus, 'not taking yourself too seriously' can be characterised as a public (self-) image in conversational practices. It is exclusively public, I argue, because in order 'not to take oneself too seriously', there has to be someone else one would want to show his/her equality to and that someone is the person who could evaluate whether one is taking oneself too seriously after all. As a result, the concept can operate both ways: the speaker can check his/her own behaviour against normative behaviour and the hearer is likely to compare the speaker's verbal behaviour to a culturally preferred communicative norm.

5.1.2 Self-deprecation

Broadly speaking, what is understood as humour as well as a good sense of humour in Australian and British cultural contexts has more shared elements than differences. Writing about the quirks and habits of the English people, Fox (2004, p. 61) holds that "the most noticeable and important 'rule' about humour in English conversation is its dominance and pervasiveness […] and most English conversation[57] will involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, mockery or just silliness". Similar to their British ancestors, Australians "are blessed with a limitless capacity for self-mockery" (Sharp, 2012, p. 88; Penney, 2012, p. 35; Haugh, 2010a, 2014).

In both cultural contexts, there is a prevailing tendency to associate the injunction against 'taking oneself too seriously' (elaborated on in 5.1.1) with self-deprecation, more precisely one's ability to be self-critical, make one's personae (and achievements) unimportant, and thus be able to laugh at "one's own foibles and weaknesses" (Martin, 2007, p. 16; Fox, 2004). Australians and the British (the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish and the English) tend to target their own idiosyncrasies, whether personal or societal (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 53; Ross, 2013, p. 33; Winterson Richards, 2014, p. 6; Penney, 2012, p. 39; Norbury, 2011, p. 66; Sharp, 2012, p. 41; Tan, 2008, p. 56),[58] and this self-deprecating sense of humour is seen by the speakers themselves "as the ultimate proof of their good nature" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 3). Consider the following example, where Deborah from the UK talks about what is shared among Australians and the British in terms of humour:

---

57. A sense of humour or a sense of irony is also broadly referred to as a British feature (e.g. Norbury, 2011, pp. 65–66).

58. Interestingly, when outsiders begin to laugh at Australian and British foibles, they can feel how "the ground rules have suddenly shifted" and that might not be found amusing at all (Sharp, 2012, p. 41; Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 52).

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(59)

Deborah (UK): […] on the most part we will find a lot of the same jokes funny I think we are able to laugh at ourselves and our cultures […] self-deprecating […] we have that in common […]

This ability not to take oneself too seriously and be able to laugh at oneself is also referred to as a laudable personality trait (Kuiper & Martin, 2007; Goddard, 2009) and a positive social quality (Cann & Calhoun, 2001; Chandler & Griffiths, 2004, p. 40). Indeed, a good sense of humour offers a number of advantages, e.g., "one may be pardoned for all manner of social sins if one is able to laugh about them" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 52).

What is interesting about the ability to laugh at oneself, though, is that it can manifest itself in two distinct ways. Most of the time, and what can certainly be observed in both cultural contexts, it refers to you "tell[ing] jokes against yourself, your country, and the way you speak" (Penney, 2012, p. 39). It means being willing to engage in self-targeting jocularity or recognise yourself in humour directed at the whole nation's traits and idiosyncrasies:

(60)

Rachel (UK): you have to be able to laugh at yourself and maybe it is something that we're brought up (.) with […]

Another way in which being able to laugh at yourself reveals itself is when one becomes a target of someone's jocular verbal behaviour and actually manages to take a joke (i.e. not to take offence or not to show that offence might have been taken) or even come back with a jocular comment him/herself. In this respect, some differences seem to appear between preferences in interactional behaviours among Australians and the British. Consider the following examples:

(61)

Amanda (AU): if they're having a laugh at your expense and then you say something back even if you did find it offensive and it wasn't
→ that offensive then other people were gonna
→ () the same just have a go at you for taking yourself too seriously

(62)

Rachel (UK): I think people like people that can laugh at themselves (..) who have a sense of humour and can recognise (.) but it's depends
→ if you're being- (..) if it's a joke if someone's
→ joking with you or if it's a joke at your expense […]

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Even though both interviewees refer to people being able to laugh at themselves, Amanda in (61) points out that if someone is 'having a laugh at your expense' and you cannot take a joke, but rather explicitly show that you found it offensive, 'other people were gonna […] have a go at you for taking yourself too seriously'. In other words, if someone cannot take a joke, i.e. laugh at oneself, other conversation participants are likely to criticise this behaviour (see the discussion of 'taking the piss out of someone' in 5.1.3). On the contrary, Rachel distinguishes between 'joking with' someone and joking 'at your expense', where the latter is referred to as quite a disaffiliative practice (e.g. showing the lack of consideration, solidarity or sympathy towards the target, see Glenn, 2003, p. 30) and it seems that in such circumstances laughing at yourself could be suspended without social consequences contrary to a tendency observed in an Australian cultural context (see (61) and (68)). Indeed, laughing at someone (e.g. using teasing) can suggest superiority and promote distance between the participants, whereas laughing with someone is generally considered a bonding activity (Glenn, 2003, pp. 112–121; see also (214)).[59]

Indeed, it can be observed that targeting someone else and targeting yourself follow similar interactional patterns and cultural expectations in Australia. The following extracts from the qualitative interviews show a combination of both ways in which Australians tend to laugh at themselves:

(63)

Amanda (AU): […] you can take the piss out of other people and everyone can have a laugh and you can take the piss out of yourself and have a laugh

(64)

Kylie (AU): […] on the whole we're pretty self-deprecating as well and it's kind of balances it out you know what I mean it's sort of like the amount of crap
→ we're willing to put on someone else we're willing
→ to take it and also put on ourselves
[…]
if I am offended I don't usually show it but I will give as good as I've got […]

What the extracts from Amanda's and Kylie's interviews suggest is that Australians do not only make themselves the butt of jocular verbal behaviours but also jocularly target other people, whether they have been targeted first, rightfully for being

59. Depending on the situation and the participant's perceptions, laughing with someone could also be interpreted as laughing at someone (Jefferson, 1972; Glenn, 2003).

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a tall poppy, or not. Indeed, it seems that in Australia "it is mandatory to be able to take a joke" (Penney, 2012, p. 157, see (53) and (54) and, especially, Chapter 8).

However, if one cannot take a joke, s/he is "marked down as serious or – even worse – taking yourself too seriously" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 53) and it could be detrimental to the existing relationship (Haugh, 2010a, p. 2116). For instance, an Australian interviewee in (65) labels seriousness as 'a conversation stopper':

(65)

Alicia [AU]: I suppose it from the Australian point of view
it seems like a conversation stopper
the seriousness and we don't like that
we like to trail on and on [he]

The ability to laugh at oneself, whether self-directed or manifesting itself through being able to take a joke, is related to another conversational practice that, albeit slightly differently, is also prominent in Australian and British cultural contexts and will be elaborated on in the next subsection.

5.1.3 *Taking the piss/mickey out of someone* and *rubbishing your mates*

With a few exceptions (see Haugh, 2010a; 2011; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Sinkeviciute, 2014), the importance of 'not taking yourself too seriously' and 'taking the piss' out of someone has been scarcely emphasised in conversation or discourse analyses. Analysing interactional practices in Australian and British English, Haugh and Bousfield (2012) suggest that 'taking the piss/mickey' in the form of jocular mockery or jocular abuse occurs if the target "over-does" or exaggerates his/her importance or that of his/her actions or "takes, his [or her] own perspective too seriously" (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1006; for the script, see Sinkeviciute, 2014). Such verbal behaviour could be easily interpreted as impolite, since the speaker either "diminishes something of relevance" to the target (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1105) or insults the target "explicitly associat[ing him/her] with a negative aspect" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 348). However, what was observed is that the target tends to interpret such potentially impolite jocular behaviour as non-impolite (which, as already mentioned, is theoretically termed *mock impoliteness*), since being able to laugh at oneself even when faced with jocular mockery or jocular abuse shows "one's adherence to not taking oneself too seriously" (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1112).

The interactional practice of *taking the piss/mickey* out of somebody is frequently associated with teasing or mockery either by jocularly making the target

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believe something that is untrue (as in (66)) or, more frequently, by sending somebody up, i.e. making the target look silly (as in (67); see also the analysis in 7.2.1.3).[60]

(66) Day 9 (UK)
Caroline and Chris do not get on well with each other. Some housemates together with Chris decide to tease Caroline and make her believe that Chris is interested in her. After some time listening to the housemates' arguments in favour of a private meeting, Caroline does not believe it is true.

```
Chris:        I'm not gonna lie I'm so attracted to you yes
Caroline:  →  = you're joking you're obviously joking =
HM:           = [laughs] =
Chris:        you're my type I like posh girls sorry I do like
              a posh girl and = that's why I like your (outfit) =
Caroline:  →                  = are you all taking the piss? =
Lydia:        honestly Caroline
Chris:        it's hurting me now cause if you find it funny
[…]
```

What can be seen from this extract is that Chris, with a deadpan expression on his face and a serious voice, tries to convince Caroline that he is 'so attracted to [her]'. She, however, finds it hard to believe and several times raises a question whether he (and other housemates) are 'obviously joking' and 'taking the piss' out of her. The housemates succeed in convincing Caroline that Chris is being serious and this charade continues leading to Caroline and Chris's meeting in private, which undoubtedly becomes a disaster.

Another way of how taking the piss out of somebody can be constructed is by making someone look stupid.

(67) Day 49 (UK)
Adam, Deana and Luke A are talking about Luke S. They remember a prank that was played on him and he was lead to believe that a model agency was interested in him. The housemates found it hilarious, but Luke S was not amused. Luke A shares his opinion:

```
Luke A:     he couldn't even see the funny side of that like
            as in taking the piss out of him (..) it can be like
            because he's taking himself so = seriously =
Adam:                                      = seriously = yeah
```

60. Writing about Australian speech acts, Olivieri (2003, pp. 65–84) differentiates between 'taking the piss' and 'sending someone up' that have much in common. Here, based on the data, 'sending someone up' is seen as a way in which 'taking the piss' out of someone could be accomplished.

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From (67) it becomes obvious that the ideas behind 'taking the piss', 'taking oneself too seriously' and 'seeing the funny side' are connected. Evaluating Luke S's reaction to the prank, Luke A criticises him for not 'see[ing] the funny side' of the situation that made Luke S look silly (for the interaction, see (149)). During his bogus audition with a media company, of which Luke S was not aware, he had to pose for a calendar and was asked to choose between his future career and his relationship with Ashleigh, his fellow housemate. When in front of all the housemates Luke S realised that it was a fake audition, he tried to pretend that he knew about it, smiled, but, undoubtedly, it made him feel stupid (see (150)). Also, he was extremely worried that Ashleigh would eventually find out that he chose a career opportunity over her.[61] While other housemates thought it was funny, the target of the prank did not feel amused, which is criticised by Luke A who claims that Luke S could not appreciate the funniness of the piss being taken out of him. As a result, Luke A together with Adam arrives at the conclusion that Luke S is 'taking himself so seriously'.

While this use of 'taking the piss/mickey' out of someone seems to be widespread in the English-speaking world (Olivieri, 2003; Plester & Sayers, 2007; Goddard, 2009; see also the use of the notion in the interview data), it is interesting to observe how an additional understanding of this interactional practice can be seen in an Australian cultural context, where it can function as a form of social corrective. Indeed, especially in Australian communicative situations, if someone seems to be acting pretentiously, other interactants might try to warn the speaker that his/her behaviour is inappropriate and the retaliatory practice of 'taking the piss/mickey' is likely to be provoked. This happens in the form of ridicule, jocular mockery or teasing that arises from "an alleged infringement of normative behaviour on the part of the target" (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1106) so that the target could realise that s/he has been taking him/herself at least a little bit too seriously (Goddard, 2009; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Olivieri, 2003).

A possible (and probably the most common) interactional scenario in relation to 'not taking yourself too seriously' and 'taking the piss' is presented in a simplified version here: if one takes oneself too seriously → the piss/mickey is likely to be taken, i.e. one is to be jocularly mocked or abused → that someone should be able to see the reason behind that particular verbal behaviour → one evaluates it as non-impolite because of value placed on normative behaviour (i.e. one should not take oneself too seriously), thus allowing the participants to "reinforce their mutual commitment to not taking themselves too seriously" (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1110). And it is thought that taking the piss/mickey out of someone is "a

61. Ashleigh was shown an extract from that bogus audition when she was evicted from the house.

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useful and desirable social action" that should be taken "in '*good humour*'" (Olivieri, 2003, p. 70; see (189), (190)). It can be seen as a form of social corrective that "restor[es] the 'natural balance' of egalitarianism" (Olivieri, 2003, p. 75). It refers to people being almost entitled to show the target that s/he should be someone similar to other interactants (e.g. cutting down tall poppies) and the target is aware why it is done and, thus, should not take offence to that. Consider the following extract from one of the interviews where the interviewee shares her experience related to taking herself too seriously and how other interactants try to show it to her by 'touching the subject in a joking way' until she 'got over [herself]':

(68)

```
Alicia (AU):     well actually there's yeah something at work
                 a couple of months ago someone tried to make
              →  a joke can't remember what it was but I didn't
                 take it well but they kept sort of not not as heavily
              →  as the initial joke was but lightly touching
                 the subject in a joking way and we're ok now erm but
                 yeah they did keep like pushing it in a way until
              →  I guess I got over {[smile voice] myself} [hahahaha]
              →  I got over the seriousness of myself in a way
```

Similarly, the following interaction from *Big Brother* Australia 2012 illustrates a housemate's failure to adhere to normative behaviour (i.e. she is taking herself too seriously), which is the reason why some other housemates decide to take the piss/mickey out of her.

(69) Day 38 (AU)
Angie and Josh are not in the house. Ben is talking about moving Angie's things. Bradley, Zoe, Estelle, Stacey and Layla are listening:

```
Ben:             when Angie and Josh come out of the Captain's
                 quarters, we should set it up so that you two
                 over there in that bed together
*Big Brother
speaks*
Bradley:         Ben, = no =oo, we moved her stuff on that first
Ben:                  = no? =
Bradley:         == day and she came up to me and she was like
              →  how DAre you throw my stuff around it's MY
                 photos I'm not gonna change beds ever and
                 I was like o::k
Ben:          →  == so sounds like that's a sore point, so I
                 think we move her stuff
Bradley:         == [hhh]
*part of the
```

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```
conversation
omitted*
Estelle:          don't be so evil Benjamin
Ben:          →   == only just for giggles
Estelle:          == don't be e::vil
*Bradley does
the deed*
```

In this extract, Ben suggests fooling around with Angie's personal things, but Bradley points out that she would not appreciate it, remembering what she said the last time it happened. Her reaction ('how dare you throw my stuff around') indicates that she was taking herself too seriously, i.e. being superior to other people who should not have even thought about touching her things and, apparently, not having a good sense of humour (for an elaborate cultural script describing 'taking yourself too seriously', see Olivieri [2003, pp. 9–10]). A clear manifestation of these unfavourable qualities functions as a stimulus for Ben "to exploit this for […] own amusement, and so [he] mildly harasses [Ange] about it" (Olivieri, 2003, p. 10; e.g. 'only just for giggles'). Claiming that 'that's a sore point', Ben indicates that he is aware that it might make Angie upset, but taking into consideration her non-adherence to cultural preference, he encourages further action in order to show his disapproval of Angie's behaviour (i.e. taking the piss/mickey out of her). This can also be similar to Stollznow's (2004) argument that "Australian culture disapproves of the vain, useless *wanker* with 'superior' airs, instead valuing and glorifying figures of tangible success and humility such as the *unsung hero* and the *quiet achiever*". Only Estelle's comment, however, indicates that she thinks that Angie might not find it amusing after all, but everyone else does not see it as something negative or offending.

Now consider Angie's reaction when she finds out the prank has been played on her:

(70) Day 38 (AU)
Angie, Zoe and Estelle are in the kitchen. Ben comes into.

```
Angie:          why did you move my stuff?
Ben:            I didn't move your stuff
*part of the conversation omitted*
Ben:            Bradley (.) and it was a joke that I said when
                I was lying next to Zoe
Angie:          == so Bradley moved the stuff?
Ben:        →   == yeah I condone it I think it's funny
Angie:          I don't think it's funny at all *part omitted*
            →   to me is offensive (.) you know we came in
                here like so excited to see everyone and now
                I find that people have been touching my
```

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```
                personal belongings and having a giggle behind
                my back that = doesn't sit = sit well with me
Ben:                          = what if people () =
                == do you not join in having a giggle at
                other people's expense?
Angie:          I'm not I'm not saying that I never touch
                someone's personal stuff
*part of the conversation omitted*
Zoe:            I thought it was funny in a way it was said
                but not done
Angie:          == I'm struggling to find exactly what part
                about me being moved was funny
Zoe:            == no no it wasn't that it was () your
            →   reaction that we thought was gonna be funny
                when = you came in =
Angie:      →        = ok so = you knew I was gonna be offended
                by = it = and you thought that that was gonna
Zoe:               = not offended =
Angie:          == be funny = or you knew that = I was gonna have
Zoe:                         = not offended at all Ange =
Angie:          == a negative reaction to it and that was gonna be funny
```

This extract shows how offended Angie is because of a non-verbal jocular action towards her. She does not recognise it as taking the piss/mickey out of her but instead takes herself even more seriously than earlier. Even though Ben and other housemates try to explain that it was/is funny (Ben: 'I condone it, I think it's funny' or Zoe: 'your reaction that we thought was gonna be funny'), Angie's metapragmatic comments overtly indicate that she has taken offence ('to me [it's] offensive', 'you knew I was gonna be offended') and that she ascribes intentions to offend her to other housemates. Despite Zoe's claims that the housemates' intention was not to cause offence, Angie leaves the kitchen deeply upset. This nicely illustrates a distinction between causing offence (Culpeper, 2011a) and taking offence described more in detail in Haugh (2015) and Haugh and Sinkeviciute (2018; 2019). Finally, as a result of ignoring the cultural injunction, Angie's evaluation of the jocular event is clearly that of *impoliteness*.

Another verbal practice closely related to 'taking the piss/mickey' and sometimes equated with it as well as jocular abuse is banter (see Plester & Sayers, 2007; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). It generally refers to humorous insults that constitute an extended sequence of instances of jocular verbal behaviour, are used among friends for the purposes of bonding and mutual entertainment and are considered devoid of aggression (Leech, 1983; Norrick, 1993; Dynel, 2008; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). Banter, which primarily leads to positive rather than negative evaluations, can be encountered in what is referred to in an Australian cultural context as

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rubbishing your mates (Goddard, 2006; Haugh, 2010a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012 and examples therein). While engaging in this interactional practice, the instigator seems to denigrate the target by directly insulting him/her. However, the speaker also implies that this behaviour should not be taken seriously (Goddard, 2006, p. 92). In the same vein, focusing on the use of profanities and other potentially offensive language, McGregor (1966 in Hirst, 2010, p. 172) holds that "much Australian humour is based upon the shock tactic: the most typical jokes are those which both revolt and amuse at the same time". Indeed, writing about larrikins, Rickard (1998, pp. 82–83) stresses that "a gift for colourful insult" is highly valued by larrikins and "the violence and the anger of larrikinism could be effectively contained by humour" (see also Olivieri, 2003, p. 4). Interestingly, it is claimed that insults can be seen as terms of endearment. For instance, *bastard* is a word that can lead to misunderstanding. In Australia, "it is used affectionately" (Sharp, 2012, p. 334).[62] Similarly, the terms *Pommy Bastards* and *Whingeing Poms*[63] that are used to refer to the British, and more precisely to the English, should rather be seen as "consistent with Australian humour" and with "non-hostile, playful and often affectionate intentions" (Sharp, 2012, p. 56).[64] Here it is important to point out that Australians will "only insult a friend" (Hunt & Taylor, 2013, p. 4). Consider the following extract from an interview with an Australian participant that illustrates how, depending on a situational context and closeness of interlocutors, Australians' interactional behaviour can range from 'extremely rude' with 'people they know really well' to 'very polite' with strangers to 'ultra mega polite' with someone that they extremely dislike::

(71)

```
Michael (B)(AU):     Australians generally tend to be very polite
                     to others to other Australians they don't know
                  →  rude to Australian they know well extremely
```

62. *The Lonely Planet guide to Australian Language & Culture* (2013, p. 36) illustrates four uses of the word *bastard*. It can be employed (1) in an affectionate way ('G'day, you old bastard!'), (2) in a compassionate way ('Poor bastard lost his job'), (3) to describe something annoying or someone vile ('I can't fix this bastard of a thing!' or 'He's a mean bastard'), and (4) to describe anyone, as in 'Should that bastard be fishing there?'.

63. It is sometimes suggested that Poms are referred to as whingeing because of the English who in the early postwar years "were placed in some pretty awful new towns […], where they gained a reputation for 'whingeing' (grumbling) that thing were not the same as they were back home" (Penney, 2012, p. 42).

64. Even though the British do claim that the term is offensive and discriminatory, "the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has considered whether 'Pom' is derogatory twice and dismissed the complaints both times" (Gosch, 2007).

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→ rude to people they know really well and ultra mega polite to people want to rip the throat out of it's it's a social cue

Contrary to 'taking the piss/mickey', 'rubbishing your mates' is not a direct verbal reaction to someone taking him/herself too seriously. Even though 'taking the piss' and 'rubbishing your mates' involve potentially impolite face-threatening verbal acts, 'taking the piss/mickey' does not have to be limited only to jocular abuse or jocular mockery (see the example of face-supportive teasing that could also possibly accomplish this interactional practice in 4.3). Also, although different departure points and/or pre-conditions 'taking the piss' and 'rubbishing your mates' share the cultural preference in Australia, i.e. projecting similarity, being ordinary and equal to other people (Goddard, 2006; 2009).

This subsection showed that such conversational practices as 'taking the piss' out of someone (and 'rubbishing your mates', especially in Australia) are recognisable interactional practices and are likely to be evaluated as mock impoliteness rather than impoliteness (see Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). However, it is essential to pay attention to the idea that refers to the target's potentially prevailing positive feelings/reactions, when faced with jocular verbal behaviours. Taking into consideration the "strongly mandated cultural" proscription against 'taking yourself too seriously' (Goddard, 2009, p. 47), it could be erroneously assumed that the target feels obliged to experience positive feelings. Just like with teasing and mocking (Haugh, 2010a, p. 2107), this cultural tendency does not indicate that if the target is faced with 'taking the piss/mickey' or 'rubbishing your mates', s/he cannot be upset or offended both publicly and personally and evaluate a verbal act as rude or aggressive rather than friendly and jocular. However, in public that does not appear to be a most common pattern in either Australian or British cultural contexts.

5.2 Public offence and/vs personal offence

Although I claimed in 5.1.1 that 'not taking yourself too seriously' refers exclusively to a public (self-)image, it is also true that the target's evaluations can change over time and differ depending on people present. Thus, it seems essential to make a distinction between public (immediate) and personal offence (for a more elaborated view on this distinction, see Chapter 6). Depending on the type of data, access provided to a researcher can be limited and it may not go beyond the actual interaction (e.g. conversation analysis). Undoubtedly, this does not imply that such analyses are inaccurate. However, their claims and generalisations could be incomplete due to the fact that the instigator's and, especially, the target's evaluations of a particular

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utterance do not stop at a precise moment and can be further elaborated on or even shift over time. Thus, the metalanguage (if) provided at a later moment could show some changed attitudes and acknowledgement of its presence can certainly complement and enrich the findings (for more on metapragmatic comments, see Chapter 8).

In this section, attention will be paid to concrete examples where a clear difference can be observed between the target's public reaction and his/her personal feelings presented in subsequent communication with other housemates as well as in a post-episode interview. Due to the presence of metalanguage, particular verbal practices will be seen to occasion slightly or totally different evaluations. Consider the following interaction from the Australian series of *Big Brother* 2012:

(72) Day 2 (AU)
Ben, a new housemate, enters the house. The boys are showing him around.

```
Ben:                  are the girls fun?
Bradley:              yeah they're all right
Michael:              == I have a feeling that you and Stacey just
                      gonna get on like = a house on fire =
Male housemates:                        = [hahaha] =
Michael:              == because she's just the most fantastic girl
                      in the world
Ben:                  == so if you keep pigeonholing me as being
                      a gay can I (can) pigeonhole you as being
                   →  like a bogan because you've got a big
                      weird hair? [Michael is surprised]
Male housemates:      O::H
Bradley:              snap snap = someone get him a fire extinguisher
Michael:           →            = {[laughing] he just (went) there he
Bradley:              == he's just got = bu::rnt
Michael:              == just (went) there} =
All HMs:              [laugh]
```

In (72), after Michael's seemingly innocent comment about Ben and Stacey 'get[ting] on like a house on fire', Ben (who was immediately recognised as gay by the housemates and did not hide it) explicitly claims that Michael is 'a bogan'. This usually pejorative term is used in Australian and New Zealand English referring to "people of working-class origin, people considered 'rough' and uncultured" with "a lack of education and taste" (Gibson, 2013, pp. 62–63; Rowen, 2017).[65] Most

65. The term was included in the Oxford English Dictionary's list of new word entries for June 2012. Although the definition elicited some objections (see http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/9341563/Bogan-included-in-Oxford-English-Dictionary.html) and bogans who have a heart of gold can be seen as lovable characters, for the purposes of this analysis it is sufficient to know that largely the term is quite pejorative.

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certainly Ben thought that Michael's remark pointed to his gayness and, thus did not follow the behavioural norms ascribed to the cultural and interactional value of being seen as equal. As a result, Ben decides to take the piss/mickey out of Michael using verbal (jocular) abuse. Interestingly enough, Michael's public reaction is in accordance with evaluations of mock impoliteness. Since his apparently genuine laughter "can be observed by other people, […] it provides public evidence" that the target's amusement is present (Chafe, 2007, p. 2). The fact that he has not taken public offence, even though being 'pigeonhole[d] […] as being like a bogan' (which could potentially claim that he is not equal to the other housemates who are not pigeonholed as such) indicates that Michael, not being a newcomer as Ben, might have already formed bond with the other housemates and/or does not want to make a scene in front of everyone.

However, compare Michael's public reaction in (72) to his conversation with Sarah (who was not present during the episode) in (73), when he does not hide that he is 'upset' and offended by having been called a bogan. In his meta-talk, Michael states that he does not understand why Ben reacted that way because he [Michael] was trying to be his 'friend' while mentioning his potential friendly relationship with Stacey (and 'not being a jerk', i.e. not saying that Ben was not like other housemates). This shows that, for the target, Ben's comment was most probably perceived in terms of 'rubbishing your mates' and Michael was willing to show that publicly he did not take offence when he heard it, which clearly clashes with his personal re-evaluations of the verbal behaviour in (73), where he positively replies to Sarah's indication that he could not 'take that offensively'.

(73) Day 2 (AU)
Michael, Sarah and Bradley are sitting outside.

```
Michael:    →  I'm just still upset about Ben (.)
               [Hhh smiling] that's ok I'll get over it
               I'll move on
Sarah:         == why are you upset?
Michael:    →  he called me a bogan
Sarah:      →  = [HAHAHA] =
Michael:       = [looks at her smiling] =
*later*
Sarah:         {[laughing] you could not get to take
               that offensively}
Michael:    →  yes I a:m
Sarah:         == no::
Michael:    →  I'm the opposite {[laughing] I hate bogans}
Sarah:         {[smiling] no you're not a bogan}
Michael:       == thank you (.) I was just being like I was
               like you're gonna love the girls there and
```

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```
                he was just oh if we're making assumptions
                then I guess you're the house bogan
            →   = I'm just like Oh my god I'm your friend =
Sarah:          = o::h o::h =
                I'm actually = not the one who's gonna have problems =
Michael:    →                = I'm not being a jerk =
Sarah:          ==( ) gonna be a good one
```

At the same time, Ben is talking to Charne who mentions Michael's hurt feelings (74). Afterwards, Ben decides to apologise (75):

(74) Day 2 (AU)
Ben and Charne are talking in the lounge:

```
Ben:        I'm sometimes if people if I get a bit nervous
            I can be a little bit like [heee] and so
            I think I was a bit cutting to-
Charne:     == yeah I do the same
Ben:        == a few people
Charne:     you called Michael a bogan = [he] =
Ben:                                   = () yeah =
Charne:     he's so upset about tha[ha]t
Ben:        == really?
Charne:     he's like he called me bogan he called me
            a bogan I'm like oh {[laughing] gosh}
```

(75) Day 2 (AU)
Ben sees Michael entering the lounge:

```
Ben:        excuse me (.) sorry (..) can we kiss and
            make up? I'm so sorry I called you a
            bogan [smiles]
Michael:    {[smiling voice] it's all right I'm just
            like the anti-bogan}
```

When Charne points out to Ben that Michael has actually taken offence, Ben apologises and no further consequences to this are seen during the whole series (Ben and Michael become good mates). Though for Michael it did not seem to be 'all right' (cf. his comments in (73)), uttering this, he shows his adherence to "the culturally endorsed minimising of 'bad feelings'" (Goddard, 2006, p. 72). What is worth mentioning here is that the male housemates present in (72), as well as Sarah in (73) and Charne in (74), are laughing, which means they are not upset about Ben's comment and evaluate it as non-impolite.

This is in line with what Michael, the target of Ben's comment, revealed during the interview. Among other things, he shared his opinion on why (i) Ben would jokingly attack him, referring to him as bogan ((76)), (ii) this term in particular

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was perceived as undesirable by the target ((77)) and (iii) the target did not show his negative attitude immediately after Ben's comment ((78)).

(76)

Michael (BB): he just said that […] I was getting pigeonholed and I wanted to make sure I wasn't pigeonholed as a gay guy on the show

[…]

he was trying to find his place in that group […] if you might () cornered in a social situation […] or maybe if he thought that I was the alpha male and he wanted to just try and take down the person he thought was at the top […]

(77)

Michael (BB): the bogan is very specific it would have to be something there's nothing else that would have me react like you know

[…]

bogan is definitely a societal stigma on that I don't that I don't wanna associate with

(78)

Interviewer: what would be your preferred reaction to such humorous comments?

Michael (BB): oh with humour back always with humour back never I'm I'm rarely () serious cause it doesn't help anyone not getting (in an) argument

[…]

I think so it's better to not react and then (.) be a sook and talk to Sarah later on eventually [hehe]

Much of what Michael refers to seems to be strongly related to the Australian cultural values discussed above. First, explaining why Ben could have mockingly attacked him, Michael says that Ben did not want to be 'pigeonholed as a gay guy on the show', which would put him in a different group and separate from the rest (see 6.2.2). Also, according to Michael, Ben might have thought that Michael was 'the alpha male' and being aware of a tendency to cut the tall poppies or just someone aspiring to be better to size, it should not be surprising that Ben chose to do that. Second, Michael also clarifies why he found the term bogan offensive. He refers to it as 'very specific' and 'a societal stigma' that he does not 'wanna associate with', since this way he would also be placed in a separate group (see Rowen, 2017; Rowen & Haugh, 2017). Finally, the interviewee mentions his preferred reaction in case something jocular but offensive is directed at him. He unequivocally answers that such verbal acts should always be met with humour, since 'getting in an

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argument' or making a scene does not bring any benefit. What one could still do is 'not react' and in a different setting become 'a sook' and complain to other people about one's face concerns. This is directly related to the concept of 'the preferred reaction' that manifests itself in public.

5.2.1 The preferred reaction

As the previous sections showed, there seems to exist a particular preference among the speakers of English immediately after they are faced with a jocular but potentially impolite comment, i.e. to show that they have a good sense of humour and are able to recognise a joke. In this subsection, I will explore this preference, which is labelled here as the *preferred reaction*,[66] its importance as well as the benefits it offers.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that even though the term *preferred reaction* was introduced by the present researcher during the interviews with Australian and British native speakers (whether as a new question or as a description of what the interviewees mentioned previously), it did not seem to pose any problem for the interviewees, which can be noticed in quite a consistent use of particular phrases in order to refer to the concept of the preferred reaction. For example, Clare, answering a question as to whether people normally take offence to something potentially humorous, said:

(79)

```
Clare (AU):     yeah maybe the majority wouldn't maybe
                the majority would kind of just (.)
                and it's maybe that is kind of like a
              → social norm kind of thing about just
                sort of keep the light atmosphere
                […]
```

In (79), it is essential to observe that Clare not only suggests that there is 'a social norm' followed by 'the majority', but she also tends to hedge her opinion a lot ('maybe'), which indicates both her awareness of a particular norm but also the variability of individual preferences (however, see (92)–(94)). Alongside alluding

66. The term *preferred reaction* should not be confused with *preference* (an analytical term related to the organisation structure of turns in interaction) that has a long history in conversation analysis (CA) (see e.g. Bilmes, 1988; Pomerantz, 1984; Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013). While different reactions to attempts at jocularity could undoubtedly be analysed in the CA terms (e.g. laughter as a preferred action), the concept 'preferred reaction' used in this book is approached somewhat differently, i.e. primarily focusing on interactional values encountered in the cultural contexts analysed as well as the interactants' own predispositions, preferences and communicative choices as illustrated in their (meta-)pragmatic practices.

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to 'a natural reaction' or 'a normal reaction' or something that is 'mainstream', other interviewees also mentioned that the target is 'supposed to' react in a particular way, which is expected by the instigator:

(80)

Ben (AU): the person that makes a joke expects a certain behaviour to be returned and might be upset if they don't get a laugh

(81)

Damian (UK): they think that you would laugh along with them and they'd be surprised if they took offence

Even though the interviewees referred more to the target's behaviour in terms of the preferred reaction, Ben in (80) and Damian in (81) point out that when the instigator 'makes a joke', s/he has a particular expectation, i.e. that the target would 'laugh along'. What is more interesting, though, is that if this expectation is not fulfilled and the target shows s/he took offence, the instigator would 'be surprised' or even 'might be upset'. This suggests that the preferred reaction for which the target is responsible can have an influence on the instigator's emotional state. Thus, quite a paradox can be observed here, namely, that the target carries the burden of double accountability not only for showing that s/he has a good sense of humour and wishes not to ruin a jocular mood, but also for not upsetting the instigator who with his/her jocular comment has probably managed or could have even wished to upset the target in the first place.

All the target's reactions mentioned by the interviewees can be divided into two types, the ones pointing to his/her thoughts and feelings, and those referring to his/her verbal reaction. Even though thoughts and feelings were quite frequently commented on, it was mainly done by the Australian interviewees:

(82)

Christine (AU): you're supposed to think it's funny you're supposed to think it's funny and laugh it off and you know whatever but erm a lot of it isn't funny […]

(83)

Benjamin (AU): in general yeah I guess the preferred reaction is is that they recognise () good humour and they don't take offence to it

Christine stresses the importance or even an obligation to see the funny side of things ('you're supposed to think it's funny') (see Goddard, 2009; Sinkeviciute,

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2014), which adds an extra layer to a verbal projection of the appreciation of funniness in public (cf. (84) and other examples below). In (83), Benjamin, apart from mentioning that the targets should recognise humour, also touches upon the notion of offence. Interestingly, he does not primarily suggest that visible offence should not be publicly claimed (as in (86), (87), (89); see Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Haugh, 2011; 2014; 2015), but, referring to the target's feelings, holds that s/he should not 'take offence' to jocular verbal behaviour, i.e. his/her public reaction would coincide with his/her feelings.

Now consider some examples of the verbal reaction suggested by the interviewees:

(84)

Michael (B) (AU): […] the most common public reaction would be either to brush off the comment and pretend it didn't exist or to respond using humour or yeah in a way () that intended as an attack back […]

(85)

Christine (AU): […] yeah you're supposed to be all light-hearted and banter and have some witty comment to come back with

(86)

Hannah (AU): yeah you're meant to laugh
Interviewer: why?
Hannah (AU): well because it's meant to be funny
Interviewer: even if you don't find it funny
Hannah (AU): yeah even if you don't find it funny

(87)

Danielle (UK): how are you supposed to react it would be like to joke about it as well and (not) take it too serious
Interviewer: even if you took offence
Danielle (UK): yeah {[smile voice] pretty much}

Michael (B) in (84) provides a whole range of 'the most common public reaction[s]' varying from 'brush[ing] off the comment' or laughing it off, thus 'pretend[ing] it didn't exist', to retaliating with humour. Furthermore, while in (85) Christine puts extra value on 'banter', 'light-hearted' or 'witty comment[s]' to be used as a comeback, Hannah from Australia in (86) and Danielle from the UK in (87) refer to a very similar reaction, i.e. 'you're meant to laugh', 'joke about it' and 'not take it too seriously'. What makes their comments even more informative is that both of them claim that the jocular reaction should be present even if 'you don't find it

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funny' or 'if you took offence' (cf. (83)). This, undoubtedly, does not only illustrate the appreciation of jocularity but also introduces a difference between what the targets project in their reaction and what they might feel (for a discussion of this distinction, see Chapters 7 and 8). More examples pointing to this difference are presented below:

(88)

Deborah (UK): guess the expectation is to laugh with a joke […] if someone's made a joke about you […] you don't laugh but you play along […] to show […] that you're engaging in a joke I guess is expected […] you're playing your role as well […] maybe just to avoid social awkwardness that moment of having to confront things […] I think of so many situations where one of my friends […] a close friend has made a comment to me and I've laughed at a time and then gone back to them like an hour later […] you know I actually found that a bit offensive […]

(89)

Matt (UK): like a normal reaction […] the easiest reaction is to laugh it off […] I think it's harder for your (..) emotions […] and actually be genuinely honest […] mask how they're really feeling through a giggle or a laugh […] the way they've said it is made out to be a joke

Deborah in (88) claims that when 'a joke [is] about you', 'you don't laugh but you play along' ('laugh off' in (89)) and after some time you could still reveal that you 'actually found that a bit offensive'. This means that the target decides to show that s/he is 'engaging in a joke', which 'is expected' as part of a role that s/he is 'playing'. Indeed, this reference to 'play' does not only suggest a non-serious nature of the reaction (Bateson, 1987; Glenn, 2003) but also clearly shows that what is being 'played' can be only a projection of one's adherence to culturally valued behaviour that could 'avoid social awkwardness'. In the same vein, Matt in (89) distinguishes between laughing off a humorous comment, which is 'a normal' or 'the easiest reaction', and what it masks, i.e. 'how [the targets]'re really feeling'. Also, this points to another tendency noticed during the interviews, namely that showing one's emotions and, thus being 'genuinely honest', is not the first thing that tends to be publicly shown. Yet, it seems that the application of the preferred reaction actually brings some advantages to the target. Consider the following extract from the interviews with Michael and Deborah:

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(90)

Michael (M)(AU): yeah it's erm it's erm erm erm if you laugh it go- it's it's (.) the dagger doesn't go in so it's it's like (..) erm (…) (..) {[lower voice] how can I put it} (.) it's like you're throwing a bucket of hot water straight at ya and she's been able to put a piece of plastic by laughing like that and () have let it dissipate or not actually hit her by laughing (.) if she didn't laugh it would've been ooph fuck that hurt […]

(91)

Interviewer: if you are the target do you tend to show that you took offence?

Deborah (UK): oh no a 100 per cent every time laugh along with it even if you're offended especially in a group situation because if I (.) act like I'm offended and the whole group has laughed then suddenly like I'm the outsider so I've been the victim of a joke and now I'm also the only one that's reacting like wrong to a joke whereas if you laugh along then you're still the victim of a joke but hey you're still part of this group [hehehe] […]

In (90), it is possible to observe how the interviewee tries to explain why it is beneficial to laugh in case a comment hurts you. What he does is compare a jocular comment to a 'dagger' or 'a bucket of hot water' that the instigator is throwing at you, while laughter stands for 'a piece of plastic' that makes the comment 'dissipate' and 'not actually hit' the target. On the other hand, as Deborah in (91) suggests, especially in a group situation, if the target decides to explicitly show offence that s/he took and do it with no witty comeback (see (85)), then it would be even more painful for the target, who apart from being 'the victim of a joke' would also feel like an 'outsider' in a group of people who are laughing and you are 'the only one that's reacting […] wrong to a joke'. In addition, by showing that offence has been taken, the target would reveal his/her vulnerability and sensitivity to other participants (which has been mentioned as a negative trait by the interviewees, see, for example, (202)), thus, being hurt personally and also in the eyes of the people around.

Finally, what only Australian interviewees mentioned while discussing the topic of the preferred reaction was their reference to not belonging to the 'mainstream', since they tend to show individual variability in their responses to

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potentially jocular but also impolite verbal comments, i.e. they do not react in a joking way. Indeed, as Mills (2011, p. 48; emphasis original) observes, an understanding of "how people *should* behave play[s] a major role in interactants' judgements […] [and] those who do not conform to these behavioural norms may be judged as aberrant and impolite." Consider the last examples:

(92)

Alicia (AU): […] I know I would see that as not appropriate for the situation but that's just me so I'm probably dif- I'm way different probably from many other people [hahaha]

(93)

Interviewer: do people know how they are supposed to react to something funny?

Christine (AU): == yes yes I know what you mean yes no I think it's very true I think you are supposed to react in a certain way and I don't think I do so that makes people think I'm weird […]

(94)

Clare (AU): yeah there's that sort of mainstream (.) cause I don't feel like I fit the kind of you know mainstream for various reasons but erm

The reference to being 'different', 'weird' or not 'fit[ting]' found in the extracts above seems to suggest not only the existence of jocular verbal responses that constitute the preferred reaction but also its importance (if not a certain prescription) at least in an Australian cultural context. What (92) through (94) point to is the extent to which the language users are aware that if they do not conform to the preferred jocular reaction, they might be seen as outsiders in their own cultural context. Even though this tendency should be further analysed in order for such claims to be fully supported, the fact that in my data the interviewees decided to touch upon this topic cannot be merely ignored.

5.2.2 Laughter and funniness in relation to public offence

Although laughter can definitely be a sign of humour recognition (Glenn & Holt, 2013), the research into humour in social interaction has severed "the longstanding link between humor and laughter, which was previously thought to be the norm" (Bell, 2009b, p. 1826) and it has become evident that "there is no inherent correlation between humour and laughter" (Dynel, 2009b, p. 53 on Suls, 1983; see Attardo, 2003, p. 1288). Still, some links between the two can be easily traced.

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Even if the targets faced with a jocular utterance do not find it funny, their reaction tends to involve fake laughter, which indicates their acknowledgement of the attempt at humour but not genuine amusement (Bell, 2009b; Hay, 2001; Drew, 1987 among others). Similarly, Partington points out:

> Laughter may signal simple recognition that a breakdown has occurred and been noticed but does not necessarily entail anything more. Glenn notes how 'in response to teases and improprieties, laughter shows willingness to go along but (by itself) stops short of outright affiliation with what is going on' and also that 'recipient laughter can show appreciation only […] rather than affiliation with what the laughable is doing' (2003, p. 122, a *laughable* is anything than occasions laughter). (Partington, 2006, p. 93)

Indeed, even if no laughter after an utterance produced within a humorous frame could mean "the insufficient hilarity of the proposition or the hearer's lack of comprehension" (Dynel, 2007, p. 1873), the absence of laughter should not necessarily point to the failure of humour. In the same vein, the presence of laughter can (but does not have to) indicate that humour is enjoyed. Consider the following example from the *Big Brother* UK 2012 house:

(95) Day 59 (UK)
Luke S and Connor are competing in the White Room in order to win a prize. Luke S has lost one of the tasks and was angry about it. Big Brother is asking Conor about how Luke S feels. The phone conversation is in the same room where Luke S is lying on the bed and listens to it. Conor's answers are mocking Luke S, especially when he refers to him 'smell[ing] like onions', which was previously suggested by Luke S's girlfriend Ashleigh and upset Luke S. Here is the final part of Conor's conversation with Big Brother on the phone:

```
Conor:          {[laughing] this is Ashleigh's gonna punish him
                if he continues to smell like onions}
Luke S:         you're fucking
Conor:          (it's) so much anger built up inside of him
                because he can't see her and give her a big
                squeezy hug (.) it's not = nice seeing a (roommate) like
                that lose his temper and cry over as we say
                spilt milk it was ok you know he dealt with it like a man
                he felt sleeping (.) he may (be) weep some more
                but that's understandable if I- I am here if
                he () =
Luke S:      →                          = [smiles] =
Conor:          = Luke I'm here if you need a hug I'm here it's
                ok to cry =
Luke S:      →  = [laughs] =
Conor:          [hehe]
```

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```
Big Brother:      thank you Conor
Conor:            [approaches Luke S's bed]
Luke S:       →   you can fuck off
Conor:            [haha] = {laughing] [climbs onto Luke S to hug him] =
Luke S:       →           = dick =
```

This extract presents an interesting scenario, where Conor, while speaking to Big Brother on the phone, actually directs his message at Luke S, who is both the recipient and the target of Conor's teasing mockery (see Dynel, 2011c). From the very beginning, Luke S is not amused by what is said, but a shift from a more serious to a humorous frame can be observed when Luke S starts smiling in the middle of Conor's discourse. At the very end, Luke S cannot avoid laughing, albeit silently, while lying on his bed and body movements produced by laughter can be observed. This suggests that in this case laughter does indicate a degree of funniness. This, however, does not mean that the target is happy with the content of the message, which can be seen in a number of derogatory terms directed at Conor (e.g. 'you can fuck off' or 'dick'). Thus, this extract nicely illustrates a complexity of the presence of laughter, the appreciation of humour and the appreciation of the message.

Since humour "can be used to refer to a stimulus (e.g., a comedy film), a mental process (e.g., perception or creation of amusing incongruities), or a response (e.g., laughter, exhilaration)" (Martin, 2001, p. 505), the term *funniness* ("a gradable category describing the degrees of appreciation of humour as perceived by individuals" [Dynel, 2012a, p. 84]) is thought to be more appropriate to be used here (although humour and funniness can be considered synonymous [e.g. Carrell, 1997, p. 176]). Funniness, contrary to laughter that can be fake, reflects a degree of the target's appreciation of humour, i.e. his/her genuine perceptions. Hay (2001, p. 76), on the other hand, suggests that "[y]ou can laugh, and then deny agreement, but you can't laugh, and then deny appreciation". Yet, she points out that at least "a bored 'ha ha ha'" indicates that "the humor is not found very funny" (Hay, 2001, p. 70). Here, however, laughter is not considered indicative of appreciation in every situation (for more on the concept of funniness, see 8.3). Consider the following extracts from the Australian *Big Brother* house:

(96) Day 13 (AU)
All the housemates are having dinner. Bradley brings up a topic of alliances in the house:

```
Bradley:      yeah I'm fine with Josh you know you know
              he's a part of the original crew
Ben:          who?
```

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```
Bradley:      (…) Josh we have a slight rift with with
          →   the people who came in late {[smiling Bradley
              pats Ben on the shoulder] we just don't like
              them as much as the others}
Ben:          [throws a glass of water in Bradley's face]
HM:           Be::n
Angie:        oh my god something's just happened
Ben:          {[with a mocking smile] I don't know how much
              I can take}
Bradley:      == {[laughing] that's commitment to a joke} [he]
Ben:      →   [slightly laughs] [smiles]
```

(97) Day 13 (AU)
Ben is talking to Bradley in private:

```
Ben:          […] did you not think I'd be upset when you said
              that at the table?
Bradley:      == it was a JOKE
Ben:          yeah I know it's a joke but how h how do I
              get (.) it's not my job to teach you this
              but how are you supposed to work out what
              the difference between a joke is with someone
              and what's actually hurting someone's feelings […]
```

(98) Day 14
The following day Ben talks to Bradley again admitting that throwing a glass of water was not appropriate. He continues:

```
Ben:          there's a small part of me that thought that
              was funny (.) and there's a large part of me
              that did it because I was frustrated with you
```

In (96) Bradley is teasing Ben, but he does provide clear contextual cues that should indicate that his remark is within a humorous frame, namely smiling and patting him on the shoulder. The question that arises then is: why cannot Ben take a joke in this situation? (cf. his conversation with Angie in (70) where he explains that his own prank was funny). It is true that there is the presence of a smile/laughter since it is possible to see a tricky smile on Ben's face and hear his laughter, which, undoubtedly, could also be considered fake laughter (Bell, 2009a; 2009b), but in the context of this episode it seems to be at least purposeful (see (98)). On the other hand, Ben's non-verbal behaviour could have easily been provoked by the fact that he did not perceive Bradley's utterance as highly humorous. What Bradley is pointing out in this extract is that Ben (who came later into the house) is not liked as much as the other housemates. This directly threatens equality and solidarity valued in an Australian cultural context (see also examples in 7.2.2.1),

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which results in Ben's non-verbal immediate reaction that shows that he has taken offence and interprets Bradley's tease as impolite. Although being offended, Ben still smiles and even laughs[67] after a jocular verbal act directed at him. (97) and (98) provide valuable metalanguage that shows that Ben has taken offence not only publicly (throwing a glass of water), but also personally ('did you not think I'd be upset when you said that at the table?'), which indicates that humour in terms of funniness did fail in this conversation. Furthermore, his meta-talk clearly shows that he is aware of the utterance being a tease produced within a humorous frame ('yeah I know it's a joke'[68] in (97)). However, what is also available is the target's explicit mentioning of him being upset ('frustrated with you') and how he conceptualises his own (re-)action ('[t]here's a small part of me that thought that was funny' in (98)). Finally, the combination of Ben's public reaction and the fact that potential jocularity was not recognised does not indicate that the attempt at humour was not recognised or the joke was not understood (e.g. Eisterhold, 2007 in Bell, 2009b, pp. 1826–1827). Rather, it points to a non-adherence to cultural expectations of projecting social equality in interaction that appears to be highly valued in an Anglo-Australian cultural context for a more extended analysis of this situation in terms of 'mateship', see Sinkeviciute, 2014).

In this subsection, I drew a distinction between laughter and funniness in relation to public offence. Similar to other studies, what has been observed in my data is that laughter is not a clear indicator of whether the target found jocular behaviour funny. Indeed, it could be erroneously assumed to suggest that, opting for laughter, the target would always be amused and not (personally) offended (e.g. (96) and Chapters 6 and 8). More importantly, even if funniness that seems to be the target's genuine feeling is present, s/he can still indicate that s/he is (at least partially) publicly offended (e.g. (95)). Thus, the differentiation presented in this subsection reveals that neither laughter nor funniness has a direct link with whether public or personal offence is taken. It is something that always depends on the contexts and could be more clearly observed during an analysis of longer stretches of discourse.

67. It is worth noting that laughter could as well have been occasioned by the target's own non-verbal reaction.

68. Even though both the instigator and the target employ the laymen term *joke*, there is a theoretical difference between (canned) jokes and conversational humour (see Dynel, 2009a), the latter being the subject in question.

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5.3 Summary

This chapter focused on jocularity in Australian and British cultural contexts and has surveyed various interactional preferences that can be observed there. There is a commonly known proscription against 'taking yourself too seriously', which refers to the ability to laugh at oneself. This self-deprecatory sense of humour that can primarily be encountered in verbal behaviour directed at the self, can also manifest itself in a different way, i.e. when one can take a joke directed at him/herself by other interactants. This tendency seems to be more clearly reflected in interactional practices among speakers of Australian English, who seem to be able to more easily appreciate the funny side of both laughing with someone and laughing at someone.

'Not taking yourself too seriously' is also directly linked with another conversational behaviour encountered in Australian and British cultural contexts, i.e. 'taking the piss/mickey' out of someone. As the literature as well as the data analysed show, it is primarily achieved via ridiculing the target. However, as Olivieri (2003, p. 66) points out, equating 'taking the piss' to making the target look silly does not capture its entire nature and importance in an Australian cultural context, i.e. projected equality in interaction. Those who fail to seem ordinary (even though unique) and appear pretentious (tall poppies) will be inevitably warned and, most probably, cut down. This is done with the help of the interactive practices of 'taking the piss' out of someone that, even though including mockery and potential offence, is still valued by the speakers. Furthermore, an important distinction between public and personal offence was drawn (for a more elaborated version thereof, see Chapter 6). While, due to the avoidance of making a scene, 'the preferred reaction' in public includes laughter (even if fake) and no apparent offence or hurt feelings, the target's evaluation of the same jocular verbal act can be differently projected at a later stage.

Finally, the relation between jocularity and laughter is far from being unequivocal. While the latter can indeed be present in many communicative situations and be almost an automatic response to a humorous attempt, humour can undoubtedly be appreciated to various degrees. Interestingly enough, the recognition of funniness can be present even in those cases when offence (at least partially) has been taken. This (as well as other interactional preferences and expectations) can be more easily observed via the meta-language available in discourse, which will be illustrated in the next chapter by an analysis of how jocular behaviours are perceived and interpreted frontstage and backstage.

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CHAPTER 6

Frontstage and backstage reactions to jocularity

> Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is. (Goffman, 1959, p. 243)

Interaction offers an endless source of research questions in many areas and especially in pragmatics. One of them pertains to the fact that, if one goes beyond the analysis of conversations and also observes the interactants' retrospective metalinguistic behaviour, one might encounter a significant shift in attitudes and opinions as well as different evaluations of the communicative situation in question, especially if that situation involves jocular verbal behaviour that is directed at someone else. This chapter aims to show that difference between how one verbally acts in front of other people and when they are not present. In order to illustrate this, it explores jocular interactions in *Big Brother* Australia and UK that offer some striking similarities as well as differences. More precisely, I will look not only at public (frontstage) manifestations of the target's reactions that tend to be governed by culturally valued behaviours discussed in Chapter 5, but also at the target's personal (backstage) evaluations of the same event that are accessible via metatalk (for more on the metapragmatics of jocular verbal behaviours, see 8.1).

To this end, this chapter is structured as follows. I start by briefly summarising the main characteristics of Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation and discussing the notions of performance, frontstage and backstage, especially in relation to reality television and particularly to *Big Brother*. After presenting different settings for frontstage and backstage interactions in the *Big Brother* house and participants involved, the distinction between frontstage and backstage perceptions of the same verbal event as well as some similarities and differences between the Australian and British interactional behaviour will be exemplified with extracts from both datasets.

6.1 Goffman, the presentation of self and reality television

In order to illustrate people's behaviour in different situations or settings, Goffman (1959, p. 127) proposes two regions that present "the reference point of a particular performance": a front region and a back region. The performance of individuals in

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a front region (or frontstage) and in a back region (or backstage) differs, especially due to the audience for which a verbal act is prepared. It is essential to emphasise that while frontstage, the interactants tend to project their social front, i.e. when a performance or verbal behaviour is "modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35) and "embodies certain standards [that] are sometimes referred to as matters of politeness" (Goffman, 1959, p. 107). This means that every time an individual is in front of others, his/her "performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). For instance, as has already been alluded to in Chapter 5, in the English-speaking cultural contexts, one will show the preference to adhere to the cultural proscription against 'taking yourself too seriously' as if projecting a cooperative effort to maintain an unwritten rule or consensus. Indeed, as Goffman (1959, p. 217) suggests, teasing can be employed in order to test one's capacity to "'take a joke', that is, to sustain a friendly manner while perhaps not feeling it". In other words, an individual "can suppress his [sic] spontaneous feelings in order to give the appearance of sticking to the affective line, the expressive status quo" (Goffman, 1959, p. 217).

This is exactly what distinguishes frontstage from backstage. While a particular verbal behaviour that should be appreciated by the society is projected in a front region, a back region presents verbal behaviour that is related to the one performed in public, but often is "inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 134).[69] Thus, backstage is a place where the individual performs a different role, i.e. s/he is able to share his/her personal and not societally imposed attitudes (that, undoubtedly, could coincide), voice his/her thoughts and tell what s/he 'really' believes. It should be mentioned that no claim is made about individuals not performing backstage or being honest, but that these performances are delivered in order to project one's (allegedly) real self as opposed to one's social self as seen frontstage. Consider two brief interactions from the *Big Brother* Australia house:

(99) Day 31 (AU)
In the presence of Layla and Stacey, Ben, thinking that Estelle is asleep, reveals his attitude towards her:

```
Ben:    {[whispering] now I'm like I don't know her I'm like
        you are weird (.) go and sit in the weird corner
        [smiles]
```

69. E.g. Dubois (1818, p. 235; quoted in Goffman, 1959, p. 42) writes: "They [the Hindus] conform to all their customs, while they are seen, but they are not so scrupulous when in their retirement."

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(100) Day 32 (AU)
Ben talks to Estelle. Ava, Estelle's friend, is present:

```
Ben:        […] I don't find you to be any more estranged to me
            than anyone else (.) I find I will only do
            what I can do to make sure that you're ok
```

What can be observed in (99) is that Ben in a humorous manner secretly shares his thoughts about Estelle with Layla and Stacey. The target is in the same room, but the housemates think that she is asleep, which allows them to engage in a backstage conversation that would not have probably taken place in front of the target. An entirely different social performance, however, is witnessed in (100), where Ben, as a caring housemate and virtually a reformed character, initiates a talk with Estelle, where he projects 'explicit positivity' that is highly characteristic of the Australian housemates' face-to-face interactions. Not only does Ben claim that Estelle is not 'any more estranged to [him] as anyone else', but he also offers his support and commitment to 'make sure that [Estelle is] ok', which is clearly quite opposite to his 'real' attitude towards Estelle projected in (99).

However hypocritical this might seem, this change of interactional patterns observed in (99) and (100) and an opportunity to show "suppressed facts" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112) and finally "drop […] the expressive mask" (Goffman, 1959, p. 121) should not be perceived as a negative characterisation of an individual, but rather as a fundamental part of human communication in (at least Western) societies. That is essential not only for establishing but also for maintaining social relationships (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004, p. 248; Blum Kulka, 2000). Consider the following extract, where Michael explicitly points out that talking behind people's backs (that happens backstage) is 'a normal [and] social behaviour':

(101) Day 72 (AU)
The housemates discuss talking behind people's backs:

```
Michael:      there is no social circle that does not say
              things behind people's backs (.) it is human
              nature
*part of the conversation omitted*
              it's a normal thing it's a social (..) behaviour
              and I think it would be odd of us not to talk
              about each other behind each other's back
```

As Scannell (2002, p. 278) argues, "[i]n all societies, all members are, and know that they are, open to the scrutiny and assessments of others". Many people, however, would prefer not to know what is told behind their backs and even what friends and family say about each other backstage can be quite incompatible with what they express in face-to-face interaction:

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(102) Day 19 (UK)

Lydia: I'll tell you what people can say two-faced or talking behind people's backs is hell a lot better than treating people how I've just been treated face-to-face and I assure you of that

(103) Day 56 (AU)

Zoe: would you prefer if the people around you came up to you individually and told you what problems they have with you (.) I don't think anyone would like that I think no one would cope with something like that

In (102) and (103) it can be observed that it is commonly known that what is said backstage is not (entirely) reflected frontstage behaviour where people present different selves in front of different participants and in different circumstances. Most importantly, what Lydia and Zoe suggest is that it is not desirable that backstage behaviour should be revealed face-to-face, even if that sort of behaviour would be labelled 'two-faced'. On the other hand, it is easy to conceive of gossiping or bitching behind one's back not being verbally condoned, but it seems to be just one of those right things to say, but not to follow. A good example thereof can be illustrated by how one of the British *Big Brother* contestants criticises the other participants' behaviour and then clearly exhibits that sort of behaviour herself:

(104) Day 41 (UK)
Some housemates talk in the lounge about other housemates:

Caroline: they are so so horrible about other people and so nice to their faces it's so disgusting

After several moments Caroline impersonates Lauren (one of those 'other housemates') who is not present:

and she was like {[screaming and laughing like a horse] yeah yeah [haha] ha} fuck off so annoying (..) she'll come to me like {[in a soft voice] oh darling great nails oh love you you have such a unique personality}

Even though reference to Goffman's work can be found in many analyses, the idea of front and back regions has not been largely applied in the realm of reality television. When it is, a (technical rather than a methodological) distinction between frontstage and backstage is only briefly mentioned (e.g. Hill, 2004; 2015 and Thornborrow, 2015) and no elaborate discussion follows. For instance, Thornborrow (2015, p. 57) links the concept of backstage to only one physical location (the diary room), where housemates' conversations are not performed in front of the in-house audience. Here it *is* claimed that it is possible to analyse interactions in

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reality television programmes in terms of what happens frontstage and backstage. While there should be no doubts about the existence of a public front region in such programmes, one can easily question the presence of backstage if one literally interprets Goffman's (1959, p. 113) idea that "the entire back region [is] kept hidden from [the audience]". Firstly, a simple terminological explanation is needed. What Goffman (1959) refers to as the audience in everyday life conversations is not the viewers at home, but the people present frontstage, here the very participants in a *Big Brother* show.[70] Secondly, the concept of backstage might seem irrelevant in the context of reality game shows, each moment of which can be viewed, thus allowing "[t]hings that were once kept in the "backstage" area life […] [to be] thrust into the public arena" (Meyrowitz, 1985, pp. 2–3; Hill, 2015, p. 6). Indeed, while the contestants are not aware of all the actions or performances by other housemates, the viewer is the one who witnesses both "the 'front' and 'backstage' behaviour of the housemates" (Hill, 2004, p. 36).[71] Thus, backstage indeed becomes "a significant 'front-stage' discursive space" (Thornborrow, 2015, p. 40) if one looks at it from the viewers' point of view. However, as Meyrowitz (1985, p. 320), writing about the impact of the new media on social behaviour, points out, even though "the dividing lines" have changed, "social behavior continues to be based on projecting certain impressions and concealing others". Thus, it is argued here that at the level of show participants' (housemates') communication rather than at the housemate-viewer level,[72] there is a back region, which the following subsection aims to illustrate.

6.2 Frontstage and backstage in the *Big Brother* house

This qualitative analysis draws heavily on Goffman's (1959) concepts of a front region (or frontstage) and a back region (or backstage) that play a crucial role in the way the participants behave in interaction and, subsequently, react to each other's utterances. In order to examine possible differences in the targets' perceptions of jocularity, a number of situations from the *Big Brother* Australia and *Big Brother* UK houses have been thoroughly analysed. In addition, linking the notion

70. Cf., however, the term *audience* being extended to include also a 'live' audience or people listening to the radio or watching TV in a different work by Goffman (1979).

71. A case in point is Nick, a housemate from the first series of the British *Big Brother* version, who was a friendly housemate in front of other housemates but was actually manipulating the unaware housemates, which was "revealed [as] a devious back-stage self to audiences" (Hill, 2015, p. 71).

72. For more on two communicative levels in film and television discourse, see Dynel, 2011c; 2012a; 2013a.

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of frontstage to the cultural proscription against taking oneself too seriously in the English-speaking countries (here Australia and the UK) provides an opportunity not only to observe the targets' public attitudes towards jocular behaviour, but also shows a clear difference between how the participants are expected to act frontstage and what they uncover backstage, when the instigator is not present. For this purpose, all the interactions in the house have been divided into four categories representing a public act frontstage and personal attitudes backstage (see Table 14). It should be mentioned, however, that the housemates' frontstage and backstage verbal interactions and attitudes should not necessarily differ, but this chapter concentrates on the occasions when they do not show similarity.

As Table 14 shows, there are four main interactional settings in the house that stand for the concepts of frontstage and backstage. It should be emphasised that frontstage and backstage settings are not directly linked to a physical location (except for the diary room conversations), since "it is not the physical setting itself that determines the nature of the interaction, but the patterns of information flow" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 36) as well as the participants involved.

Table 14. Frontstage and backstage interactions in the *Big Brother* house

	Frontstage or the public	**Backstage or the personal**
I	Housemate – housemate (jocular episodes; meta-talk)	Housemate – housemate (voiced thoughts; meta-talk)
II	Housemate – the viewers (meta-talk; live nominations)	Housemate – *Big Brother* (meta-talk; diary room)

The frontstage or public verbal action occurs during (i) jocular episodes, i.e. when all the parties (the target, the instigator and/or the third party) are present, or if the instigator and the target resume their communication later, and (ii) live nominations, i.e. interactional space that is explicitly constructed for addressing the viewers. There the housemates have to give valid reasons for someone to be evicted, i.e. they should be able to convince the viewers of their right choice that needs to be grounded in other housemates' inappropriate behaviour. The backstage or personal attitudes towards other participants manifest themselves mainly through metalanguage between (i) the housemates, when the target discusses what has happened with the third party or retells the situation to a non-participant in a jocular episode; and (ii) the housemate and Big Brother in the diary room, a small room used for confidential talks to Big Brother, where the housemates can choose whether to show "the representation of a sociable self […] or of a competitive self" (Thornborrow, 2015, p. 43). Irrespective of their choice, the housemates tend to show their allegedly 'real' faces and, in the case of jocular verbal behaviour, explain how they actually felt and why they decided not to show that to the instigator (for

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a short analysis of performances in the *Big Brother* diary room, see Thornborrow [2015, pp. 40–44]). In addition, it should also be mentioned that even though backstage evaluations are accessible via metalanguage, backstage should not be seen as synonymous with meta-talk. For instance, the latter between the same participants that were involved in the initial frontstage interaction is not referred to as a backstage conversation, but rather as a continuation of frontstage discourse that has been suspended by backstage interactions of which neither of the parties should be (but indeed could be) aware.

Furthermore, in this analysis of jocular behaviours directed at the (present or not) target,[73] there are three participant groups in frontstage I and backstage I housemate – housemate interactions (see Table 15). Reactions observed in backstage I, frontstage II and backstage II are directly related to the jocular episodes from frontstage I; however, not all the subsequent stages should be present or available for analysis. Also, if frontstage I and backstage I present different combinations of the housemates' interactions, due to their settings (individual live nominations and conversations in the diary room), frontstage II and backstage II involve only one participant at a given time, but there might be more than one

Table 15. Frontstage and backstage participants in the *Big Brother* house

Frontstage I (the public; meta-talk)	**Backstage I (the personal; meta-talk)**	**Frontstage II (nominations)**	**Backstage II (diary room)**
instigator target third party	instigator target/third party* non-participant	instigator/ target/ third party/ non-participant	instigator/ target/ third party/ non-participant
instigator third party	instigator third party* non-participant target†		
instigator target	instigator target* non-participant		

* indicates the housemate that is more likely to initiate meta-talk

† very unlikely to be involved in meta-talk at any time[6]

73. Some forms of conversational humour (e.g. teasing) can be realised through self-mockery (see Haugh, 2010a; 2014; Olivieri, 2003; Norrick & Spitz, 2008; Grindsted, 1997), but in this case backstage re-evaluations would not be likely to occur.

74. Unless a clear group division exists in the house (e.g. as in *Big Brother* UK 2012), and the instigator and the third party belong to different groups, while the target and the third party are members of the same group. In that case, the third party is very likely to re-tell the target what s/he has heard. (for the group identity construction in the *Big Brother* houses, see Sinkeviciute, 2017d)

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housemate referring to the same jocular episode. Finally, even though all the interactional settings provide extremely useful information, the housemate-housemate in frontstage I and backstage I interactions are used as primary and the other two as complementary empirical evidence.

6.3 From frontstage to backstage, from mock impoliteness to impoliteness

This section aims to present the housemates' frontstage and backstage attitudes towards jocularity. Not all of the three main scenarios that can occasion meta-talk on jocular behaviours were equally exemplified in both or either of the data sources, e.g. only little evidence (the lack of actual jocular episodes) is available for the second scenario when the target is absent. Interestingly, there were only a couple of jocular conversations found between the instigator and the target, i.e. with no third party around (see 8.4.1). This could be explained by the tendency of jocular verbal acts (e.g. teasing) to function as a source of entertainment for other people (e.g. Eisenberg, 1986, pp. 185–188; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). Since this chapter in general and this section in particular focus on observing differences between frontstage and backstage interactions, the most common scenario will be illustrated, i.e. when the target, the instigator and the third party are present during a jocular episode.

The results of this study show that the target's and/or third party's positive reactions to attempts at jocularity can be observed frontstage (immediately after a humorous episode), i.e. the evaluations are those of mock impoliteness. Empirical evidence also reveals that they tend to change from mock impoliteness to impoliteness when the instigator is not in the vicinity. Despite the fact that the instigator and the target do not ignore each other and continue communicating, which represents a continuation of frontstage interaction between them, it is somewhat unlikely that they discuss the jocular episode (but see some cultural differences below). Rather, the target tends to express his/her feelings to the third party that was present during the jocular episode (e.g. (106)) or open up to a non-participant in order to seek his/her support or advice (e.g. (115) and (116)). Furthermore, apart from some minor differences in the Australian and British datasets (mainly relating to the number of housemates involved in meta-talk), particular cultural trends appear to evolve. If the British fellow housemates (third party or a non-participant) engage in meta-talk, they tend to speak to the target (e.g. (115), (116) but see (117)), while their Australian counterparts not only show their support for the target (e.g. (106)), but also let the instigator know that the target is hurt and the instigator's verbal behaviour was inappropriate (e.g. (108)). Finally, the target in *Big Brother* UK is more likely to eventually confront the instigator in order to

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deal with the situation, even if it does not seem to change the dynamics between the two and construct a friendly relationship (e.g. (120)), whereas the participants from the Australian version tend to contribute to further interactions as if there is nothing that has bothered them (e.g. (112)). Subsections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 present an elaborate example from each dataset.

6.3.1 *Big Brother* Australia: "Everything he says to me it's like he stabs me in the face"

In this subsection, the first scenario where the target, the instigator and the third party are present will be illustrated with an example from the Australian data, which can be summarised in Table 16.

The situation is as follows: all the housemates are having dinner in the kitchen. Stacey starts teasing Bradley, who in turn teases Stacey about her age. Everyone, including the target, seems amused. However, after dinner, it is possible to observe that Stacey has been hurt (a week later she even nominates Bradley for eviction because of his comments; see (110)) and other housemates (except Ben) remark that Bradley's behaviour has been indeed inappropriate. Interestingly, at the end of the day, Stacey does not express her hurt feelings to Bradley, but rather behaves as if nothing has happened between the two. Here, attention should be drawn to the fact that the interaction takes place on day 3, i.e. the very beginning of the series and the housemates have not bonded yet. Although much potentially jocular verbal behaviour would be more likely to be evaluated as non-impolite when the relationship between the interactants is quite close, as will be seen from this analysis, it should not be the only case in an Australian cultural context, as speakers of Australian English can and do indicate that offence has been taken (see also Haugh, 2011; 2015; Goddard, 2006; Sinkeviciute, 2017a; Chapter 7).

6.3.1.1 *Frontstage I (1)*

(105) Day 3 (AU)

```
Bradley:        hey Stacey
Stacey:         hey Bradley how are you
Bradley:        I'm good Stacey how are you
Stacey:         == I'm good I just wanna let you know that erm
          →     you're really a great guy eh
Angie:          = [laughs] =
```

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Bradley: = {[smiling] yes yes I feel like a victim = cause
→ she's so much older than me I'm just gonna
like (prey)}
Stacey: == what the fuck do you mean I'm () so much older
than you I'm like 2 years older
Bradley: how old are you
Stacey: 22 20
Bradley: really
Stacey: 18
Angie: how old did you think she was
Stacey: == 16 [giggles]
Bradley: == 26
Stacey: == (sixty six clickety clix) = [laughs] =
Angie: = [laughs] =
Bradley: → yes she's five years older than me so it's like
preying on me
Stacey: == and you call that old do you
Bradley: == I do call that old
Stacey: do you
Bradley: == older than me
Stacey: really?
Bradley: yeah
part of the conversation omitted
Stacey: everyone thinks I'm so old
Bradley: → are you 24? you're only one year older than (..)
Estelle
part of the conversation omitted
Bradley: → {[smiling] there are like three girls in this house
that are the same age and they look completely
different ages it's very confusing}
part of the conversation omitted
Angie: hey guys give it a rest come ON
Stacey: why don't you (wanna) be my friend
Bradley: I don't want you to deflower me Stacey
Stacey: I don't wanna deflower you mate
Bradley: → {[smiling] that's the message I'm getting from
this the winks across the table the () = looks = }
Stacey: = [laughs] =
Angie: {[smiling] what's going over here}
Bradley: → {[smiling] I feel very exposed when you're
around Stacey}

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Table 16. Frontstage and backstage evaluations of jocularity in *Big Brother* Australia 2012

Interaction space	**Frontstage I (1)**		**Backstage I**			**Backstage II**	**Frontstage II**		**Frontstage I (2)**	
participants	target	third party	target	third party	instigator	instigator	target	third party	target	non-
evaluations	impolite	non-impolite	impolite	(non-) impolite	non-impolite	non-impolite	impolite	impolite	non-impolite	

* refers to the original target in frontstage I (1)

Table 17. Frontstage and backstage evaluations of jocularity in *Big Brother* UK 2012

Interaction space	**Frontstage I (1)**			**Backstage I**			**Backstage II**	**Frontstage I (2)**	**Frontstage II**	
participant	target	instigator	third party	target	non-participant	instigator	target	target	target	non-participant
evaluations	(non-) impolite	(non-) impolite	non-impolite	(non-) impolite	(non-) impolite	(non-) impolite	impolite	impolite	impolite	impolite

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What can be seen in this extract is how Stacey's face-supportive teasing, jocular praise of Bradley ('you're really a great guy'), triggers Bradley's expression of almost deadpan humour about Stacey's age and appearance. Throughout the conversation, which seems to amuse other housemates, even though at some point they think it should stop (e.g. Angie's 'hey guys give it a rest come ON'), Bradley refers to Stacey looking older than other girls of the same age in the house. Stacey seems not to take that seriously and verbally plays with Bradley, who eventually jocularly accuses Stacey of her willingness to 'deflower' him, because of her verbal and non-verbal behaviour towards him. Stacey smiles and laughs during the whole jocular episode, but while seemingly projecting an obvious encouragement of Bradley's jocular behaviour, she does not seem to particularly enjoy Bradley's comments. Stacey's dissatisfaction (e.g. 'why don't you wanna be my friend'), however, is rather implicit (see Haugh 2015), since on the surface she tries to project that she is not hurt or insulted. Thus, her evaluations of the jocular episode can be marked as non-impolite. However, an entirely different reaction is seen backstage.

6.3.1.2 *Backstage I*

(106) Day 3 (AU)

```
BB:              Stacey's been upset by Bradley's dinner table comments
Stacey:     →    I reckon I didn't see it he's just so like he hates me
Angie:           [silent hahaha]
Stacey:          he hates me
Josh:            no he doesn't hate you
Stacey:     →    HE DOES HE HATES ME = he's hated me the whole =
                 time
Josh:                                 = he doesn't know- =
*part of the conversation omitted*
Josh:            he doesn't know how to interact with females
Angie:           that's what I just said
*part of the conversation omitted*
Stacey:     →    he just kept like digging a hole like
                 really like being mean to me (.) so
                 I've set to like keep doing it back
Michael:         oh yeah
*part of the conversation omitted*
Stacey:     →    everything he says to me it's like he
                 stabs me in the face
```

If Stacey's frontstage reactions suggested that she was willing to enter the humorous frame, her backstage comments show a totally different attitude. She does not only refer to Bradley's verbal behaviour as something she does not enjoy but also claims in a very emotional way that he extremely dislikes her ('he's hated

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me the whole time'), 'he just kept like digging a hole' and that 'everything he says to [her] it's like he stabs [her] in the face'. Here a clear shift of evaluations from non-impolite to impolite can be easily seen. Even though realising that Bradley's behaviour is inappropriate, the fellow housemates ascribe it to his immaturity and the lack of interaction with women, which suggests that he, as a beginner, might be given "extra consideration" (Goffman, 1959, p. 232). This opinion is clearly stated in Ben's comment in (107) where he is certain that Stacey should recognise Bradley's intentions not to hurt her and should not be bothered by the situation, which is not the case, as observed through her meta-talk in (106).

(107) Day 3 (AU)
Ben is talking to Bradley after his comments to Stacey:

```
Ben:        don't be hard on yourself about having that
            conversation with Stacey Stacey's a big girl you
            had no intentions of hurting Stacey's feelings
            she will recognise that
```

What (107) and (108) show – and it is what generally the Australian data demonstrates – is the third party's voiced concern for harmony in the house and their interactions with the target as well as with the instigator. While in (107) Ben states that Bradley's jocular behaviour was not harmful (and thus non-impolite), Angie in (108) points out that Bradley 'can't do that' (as in "it is proscribed") and that he has crossed the line and even Stacey, who's 'joking all the time' has a 'breaking point' and 'she is genuinely upset now', which suggests jocular behaviour has occasioned evaluation of impoliteness.

(108) Day 3 (AU)
Angie is trying to explain to Bradley why his comments were inappropriate:

```
Angie:    →   dude you can't do that
*BB:          there's a post family dinner problem Stacey's
              been upset by Bradley's dinner table comments*
Angie:        you were winding her up and she she is
          →   genuinely upset now
Bradley:  →   but this is a joke
Angie:        no I know but a girl like Stacey she's
              so quick and witty and she you know she's joking
              all the time (.) that sometimes like people
          →   forget that she's got that breaking point
              and and that was her breaking point babe definitely
              so take it easy go and have a drink or something
              bloody hell
```

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6.3.1.3 *Backstage II*

Furthermore, the Australian data provides us with an opportunity to witness the instigator's evaluation of his own jocular behaviour in the diary room. Bradley, even though he apologised to the target, definitely does not interpret his teasing as impolite, since he is 'not still quite sure what it actually was that [he] said that offended' Stacey. Interestingly, the instigator himself conceptualises the target's perceptions as those of offence that, according to the instigator, were not caused by something offensive he said. It, thus, shows that in the emic understanding in this case, interactional behaviour should not be necessarily offensive in order to cause visible offence (Barrow, 2005). In any case, Bradley avoids teasing Stacey again (cf. (121)).

(109) Day 4 (AU)

```
Bradley:        I'm not still quite sure what it actually was
                that I said that offended her but I (went and)
                apologised to her and I think we're all quite good
                no::w
```

6.3.1.4 *Frontstage II*

Nominations are a very good opportunity for every housemate to express their attitude towards the fellow housemates, while presenting arguments in favour of someone's eviction. Sometimes, those arguments are based on non-verbal issues, e.g. not helping with the cleaning. But if they are about interactions, housemates tend to be very specific and nominate in accordance with cultural expectations in order to prove their point. A negative perception of Bradley's verbal behaviour manifests itself also during live nominations in the house that took place ten days after the jocular episode. During that period, Bradley managed to produce hurtful remarks more than once, which seems to be the reason for Stacey (and other housemates) to publicly express their non-jocular attitude towards Bradley, while nominating him.

(110) Day 14 (AU)

```
Stacey:           and he has been from the start I feel
          →       kind of directly erm quite mean to a lot
                  of people I know that sometimes that's a little
                  bit defence mechanism but I just think he's being
          →       kind of quite rude to people and mean
*part of the conversation omitted*
                  like in the first week we were sitting at the dinner
          →       table erm and he just kept picking erm things
                  at me when I was erm just trying to make
                  him feel better
```

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(111) Day 14 (AU)

```
Angie:          things that he has said erm have been interm-
                interpreted I'm sure in a wrong way but that's
        →       still being offensive to unfortunately other
                housemates
*part of the conversation omitted*
        →       when I see my friends unhappy I do take offence
                to that because I think that some things
        →       that he's said is inappropriate
```

While Stacey partially tries to defend Bradley, suggesting that his jokes can function as 'a little bit defence mechanism', she still refers to him as 'rude' and 'mean', remembering the jocular episode between two of them. Another housemate's – Angie's – nominations are more abstract, but claiming that she does 'take offence' when she 'see[s] [her] friends unhappy' points to a tendency among the Australian housemates to take care of their mates (see also Bednarek, 2013). This is also an explicit reference to offence (as compared to feeling uncomfortable, for example), which shows Angie's moral judgement of Bradley's behaviour and how it can influence other people's emotional state (e.g. Sinkeviciute, 2018; Haugh & Sinkeviciute, 2019). Interestingly, it is the third party who claims it, which suggests collective taking of offence, where the target (Stacey) and the other housemates (here Angie) share their attitude towards the instigator's (Bradley's) jocular behaviour.

6.3.1.5 *Frontstage I (2)*

As has already been illustrated, there is a wide preference among the housemates not to get offended by comments in public and reveal their hurt feelings when they are backstage with other housemates that they feel they can trust. Thus, when the target meets the instigator again but in a different frontstage situation, their relationship does not have to be spoilt, but rather is further maintained in a jocular way. Consider the following excerpt:

(112) Day 3 (AU)
The housemates are in the bedroom before going to sleep:

```
Stacey:         hey Brad
Bradley:        yes Stace
Stacey:    →    you look so pretty today
Bradley:   →    oh as do you Stacey I act- act- actually think
                your hair looks really nice
*part of the conversation omitted*
Stacey:         [to Bradley]
           →    do you wanna join my coalition? (..)
                it's called batman rules alcohol drools
```

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```
Bradley:        YES LET'S
Michael:        is that coalition of the willy?
HMs:            [laugh]
Bradley:   →    I love that batman rules alcohol drools that's-
Stacey:         you can have them back
*part of the conversation omitted*
Stacey:         night Brad
Bradley:        night Stace
Stacey:    →    loving you sick babes
Bradley:   →    loving you too [serious face]
```

This final extract from the Australian house presents another frontstage situation between Stacey and Bradley and shows how the former decides to stay in the humorous frame promoting a jocular relationship without openly stating that she was (or still is) hurt. The instigator from the previous frontstage interaction – Bradley – becomes the target in this situation, and even though he knows that Stacey did not enjoy his comments and can easily realise that she is not being absolutely genuine (e.g. his facial expression at the end of the conversation), he plays along, accepting her proposition to join the 'batman rules alcohol drools coalition'. This can be seen as Stacey's attempt to bond more with Bradley, since *Batman* is his favourite fictional character. All in all, this frontstage-backstage-frontstage scenario illustrates not only the housemates' preference to have a laugh and not to take oneself too seriously during the jocular episode, i.e. frontstage, even at initial stages of the show, but also different frontstage and backstage attitudes towards jocular behaviours by the target and the third party as well as the return to frontstage dynamics during another frontstage situation between the instigator and the target. The following subsection presents an example of a similar scenario from the British data.

6.3.2 *Big Brother* UK: "[S]he keeps winding me up about what happened the other day"

Structurally, a similar situation with not only housemate-housemate frontstage and backstage comments but also additional follow-ups was analysed in the British data (see Table 17).

Contrary to the example from the Australian data that took place in the very beginning of the game show, day 3, the British data comes from the last stage of the series. At this stage, several housemates were given an opportunity to walk out with a portion of the prize money and Conor took fifty thousand pounds. What they had to do was push the button while a sum of money was increasing on the screen. Since they did not know when it would stop and they would lose the challenge, they waited until the very last moment.

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Unfortunately, Luke S pushed the button too late and returned to the house. He seems devastated since he did not win the money. Deana starts teasing Luke S about the button but he tries to play along. The following extracts present how non-participants react to this teasing, how the instigator and the target try to solve the issue and how it becomes a valid reason to nominate. It should be mentioned that the *Big Brother* UK house is clearly divided into groups and Deana is not in the same group as Luke S, which means they do not have a close relationship and might slightly dislike each other (for group identity construction in the two houses, see Sinkeviciute, 2017d).

6.3.2.1 *Frontstage I (1)*

(113) Day 61 (UK)
Deana teases Luke S about his failure to push the button and win a lot of money. Sara is present.

```
Deana:        →    = {{laughing] push the button quicker} =
Luke S:       →    = [smiles] =
Deana:             [laughs and roars]
*part of the conversation omitted*
Deana:             actually it's alright you're gonna deal with it anyway
                   {[smiling] just a second faster just a second and
              →    [buzzing sound]} usually in competitions and games
                   you're actually you're very good usually
Luke S:            (…) {[smiling] I know}
Deana:        →    {[smiling] it only was a banter banter banter}
                   [hehe] [chuckles] I'm joking it's only a bit
                   of banter
Luke S:       →    {[smiling] I don't need to be reminded}
Deana:             [keeps laughing]
```

Taking into consideration that Luke S could have won fifty thousand pounds (half of the prize money of the show) but he did not push the button, Deana decides to tease him about it. Luke S does not seem to be extremely upset, he smiles all the time, but does not say much. To make sure that the target is not offended inside, Deana praises Luke S for being good at competitions, labels her verbal behaviour as banter and saying 'I'm joking' makes claims to humorous intent (Haugh, 2016). Luke S keeps smiling, though he remarks that he does not 'need to be reminded'. It is also important to mention that the third party – Sara – is present during this jocular episode. Earlier in the show, she claimed that she would always express her opinion if she thought someone was doing something wrong. Here, however, she appears not to find it insulting and, similar to the target, evaluates this verbal act as more non-impolite than impolite.

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6.3.2.2 *Backstage I*

While in the example from the Australian data backstage I conversations predominantly involved the third party and the target or the instigator, in the British house a number of non-participants are engaged in backstage interactions, first with the instigator and later with the target.

(114) Day 61 (UK)
Deana is in the smoking area with other housemates and mentions her jocular verbal behaviour:

```
Deana:            I think I may have said something to upset Luke
                  cause ()
Ashleigh:         what did you say
Deana:            I just said that maybe he should've pressed the button
                  quicker [laughs]
Scott:       →    that's not = upsetting =
Ashleigh:    →                = you've said = that before
Deana:            yeah but just to see if he's alright
Scott:            that's not upsetting
Ashleigh:    →    == he's over it
Deana:            are you sure are you sure
Ashleigh:         == yeah one hundred per cent
Deana:       →    LUKE S I WAS JOKING
```

It is interesting to observe how the instigator – Deana – initiates the meta-talk with non-participants and shows her concern for the target's possible negative reaction to her teasing, thus evaluating her own jocular behaviour as somewhat impolite. Ashleigh, who is Luke S' girlfriend in the house, is sure that 'he's over it', and Scott seems to be certain that Deana's jocular verbal behaviour is 'not upsetting'. Thus, non-participants choose to evaluate Deana's verbal behaviour as non-impolite. This evaluation, however, slightly changes when the non-participants talk to the target (for a similar tendency in interviewees' evaluations, see Chapter 8). Consider the following interactions:

(115) Day 61 (UK)
Adam comes to the kitchen to talk to Luke S:

```
Adam:             she pissed you off
Luke S:      →    yeah a little bit
Adam:             uh
Luke S:           a little bit
Adam:             (…) what did she say?
Luke S:           something about last night
Adam:             uh-um
Luke S:           ( ) I don't need to be reminded of
Adam:        →    {[smiling] right emotions high on that}
```

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(116) Day 61 (UK)
Luke S and Ashleigh are talking about Deana's earlier outburst, Scott is present:

```
Ashleigh:   →    she's just so fucking patronising
Scott:           oh she's just joking she's just joking she never
                 says anything serious I wouldn't worry about that
Ashleigh:        [pretends to giggle]
*part of the conversation omitted*
Scott:      →    she's not = being serious =
Ashleigh:                = she's being = sarcastic
*part of the conversation omitted*
Scott:      →    she's not actually horrible she's just being
                 sarcastic
Ashleigh:        [a bit surprised] she is not being sarcastic she is
                 being very devious
```

While Adam's and Scott's perceptions could be said to stay on the non-impolite side of the continuum (e.g. Adam's smiling and seemingly finding the situation amusing and Scott's 'she's not actually horrible she's just being sarcastic' indicate that Deana's teasing should be taken as not serious), Ashleigh shows a shift from her non-impolite evaluation to frustration and she accuses Deana of being 'patronising' and 'very devious'. Definitely, Ashleigh is the closest person to Luke S in the house and it seems natural that she would defend him. However, it is interesting that she, disliking Deana most of the time, did not opt out for a similar reaction in front of Deana and other housemates in (114), but rather showed her certainty that the jocular episode was not offensive. A reason for such a shift could be influenced by the instigator's and other housemates' presence and their humorous reaction during the backstage meta-talk, which was the first time when the non-participants found out about the jocular episode (see also (91)). This greatly resembles frontstage settings, thus it could explain why the reactions of the hearers seem to follow the preferred pattern, i.e. not taking oneself and things too seriously and being able to see the funny side.

Even though the Australian data indicates a clear tendency of the third party to talk to the instigator in order to make him/her aware of how inappropriate his/her verbal behaviour was, in this situation, it is possible to observe how also the *Big Brother* UK non-participants advise the instigator to be more compassionate, but at the same time, they do not seem to condemn her behaviour. It should be noted that these non-participants are the instigator's friends (see Sinkeviciute, 2017d) and, even though they suggest that teasing should stop, they do not find it impolite or offensive (e.g. smiles on their faces; see Haugh, 2015).

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(117) Day 61 (UK)
Deana is outside with her friends in the house, Adam and Luke A:

```
Deana:          because it's not even a big deal
Adam:           no
*part of the conversation omitted*
Adam:           {[smiling] think about compassion with Luke S just
                for bringing it up}
```

6.3.2.3 *Backstage II*

Luke S's attitude towards Deana's teasing can be observed via his meta-talk in the diary room. During two sessions he focussed on the jocular episode, referring to it as a joke and, similar to his conversation with Deana in (120), indicates that 'she didn't understand when to stop' (see also Scott's comments in (123)), which seems to be suggesting that teasing exceeds its limits when it focuses on the same topic for too long.

(118) Day 61 (UK)
Luke S is talking about Deana:

```
Luke S:         it's just something I don't need to be reminded of
                (…) I don't appreciate jokes about last night
                at all
```

(119) Day 62 (UK)

```
Luke S:         she slightly irritates me *part omitted*
                she didn't understand when to stop
```

6.3.2.4 *Frontstage I (2)*

In the British data, two types of further frontstage interactions between the instigator and the target can be observed. The first one refers to the main teasing event in (113), while the second one, similar to the Australian example, presents a different frontstage situation where the participants do not engage in the meta-talk on the jocular behaviour.

The following morning (in (120)), a continuation of the frontstage conversation between Deana and Luke S can be observed. During this re-encounter, Deana tries to admit or project in front of the target that she was 'a bit insensitive' and offers Luke S her apology. Even though the target seemed insulted in the diary room before, he keeps smiling while talking to Deana, minimises the impact of her teasing, saying that she was 'just a little bit' insensitive and remarks that jocular behaviour was not a problem per se, but rather its continuity. Interestingly, the same reference to continuous teasing can also be seen during other interactions in different settings (see (126) and (141)).

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(120) Day 62 (UK)

```
Deana:     →    Luke was I a bit insensitive lasts night
Luke S:    →    {[smiling] just a little bit}
Deana:          == sorry sorry that wasn't very nice of me
                honestly I won't = say it again =
Luke S:                          = {[smiling] that's alright
           →    I accept = your apology} (.) I didn't mind it
                in the beginning but then it was like a continuous
```

Furthermore, unlike in the Australian example and other instances of jocularity in the data, Deana, who promised not to tease Luke S again about not pushing the button quickly enough, creates a new name for him that is related to money: Charlie, a character from a children's book, who had a golden ticket. She continues referring to the golden ticket for some time and, although the third party does not seem to take it seriously, the target eventually snaps at her, saying that he 'can't wait to nominate' her,[75] which is undoubtedly one of the biggest offences in the house (see Deana's reaction in (121)). Similar to the Australian data in (112), this conversation is seen as yet another frontstage rather than backstage of the first frontstage situation, since it is not based on the initial jocular episode, but, instead, presents a new conversation between Luke S and Deana.

(121) Day 63 (UK)
Deana has a pet name for Luke S:

```
Deana:            {[smiling] Charlie can I have the gold ticket}
*part of the conversation omitted*
          →       {[smiling] I'll buy it off you please 50 k} [haha]
Later Deana continues teasing Luke S:
Deana:            Luke I know what you could play to be entertaining
                  (.) Charlie and the Chocolate Factory {[screaming]
                  I want the ticket I want the ticket}
Luke S:    →      {[leaving to the garden] can't wait to nominate your ass}
Deana:            == I want the ticket (…) {[laughing] eh fuck off}
                  [keeps laughing]
```

6.3.2.5 *Frontstage II*

Finally, the day of nominations comes and it is a good opportunity for housemates to express their negative attitudes towards other fellow housemates. While in the Australian frontstage II example, the target's and the third party's perspectives could be observed, here the evaluations of the target and the non-participant will be illustrated. Interestingly, not only Luke S in (122), but also Scott in (123) refer

75. Note that the housemates are not allowed to talk about nominations.

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to Deana 'taking it too far'. Luke S's evaluation of Deana's behaviour is clearly that of impoliteness, which was occasioned not so much by her initial teasing in (113), but rather her subsequent jocular mockery after having already apologised to Luke S in (121), promising not to tease him again. Even though during the nominations Scott decides to label Deana's verbal behaviour as 'heartless', it should be pointed out that he was not sure if he should nominate Deana at all, since he, unlike Ashleigh, seems to believe that Deana's initial verbal behaviour was more like teasing than a putdown. However, his reference to a continuous mockery that crosses the boundaries of teasing shows that it is a valid reason to nominate someone for eviction and that he is leaning more towards the evaluation of impoliteness rather than mock impoliteness as was seen in (116).

(122) Day 63 (UK)

Luke S: Deana cause she's doing my head in recently
Deana of everyone I find more irritated really
you know we don't have loads in common she she
→ keeps winding me up about what happened the other day

(123) Day 63 (UK)

Scott: Deana because sometimes she's upset people
and I don't think I think everyone should
be equal in the house and no one should
be talked down to and I notice a joke and
banter and all that but if I is upsetting
someone and you know it and then you carry
→ on taking it too far it can be a little
heartless

In 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, I presented examples of the most frequent scenario of jocular verbal behaviour in the *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012 house, i.e. when during a jocular episode, the instigator, the target and the third party are present, with their subsequent backstage and frontstage re-evaluations of that initial situation. The examples from both data sources suggest that the targets as well as (to a lesser degree) the third party show a change in their perceptions of jocularity. Furthermore, the targets clearly tend to follow the cultural proscription against 'taking oneself too seriously' in public, i.e. frontstage, whether at initial or final stages of the show, and reveal their personal emotions in some more private settings.

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6.4 Summary

Humour is not only "the balm that makes life bearable" (Miall & Milsted, 2014, p. 53), but also an interactional preference in some societies. Indeed, there is a strong tendency not to take oneself too seriously and see the funny side of many everyday life situations in the Australian and British cultural contexts. But this preference primarily manifests itself in public. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) concepts of front and back regions, in this chapter, I attempted to show that the distinction between frontstage and backstage reactions to jocularity can also be applied to reality television programmes, namely, *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012. Even though not much has been written on the similarities of real life and reality television and much research has focused on the performance that allegedly prevails in the latter, it is erroneous to assume that the element of performance is absolutely foreign to our ordinary communication. It is rather the lack of evidence of everyday life performance that suggests its absence, while the abundant presence of that evidence in reality television programmes, which "make[s] performing yourself centre stage" (Hill, 2015, p. 21), seems to corroborate the existence of performance there. After all, what is seen on *Big Brother* (even if one calls it staging) "involves use of *real* techniques – the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations" (Goffman, 1959, p. 255).

The main focus of this chapter was on jocular episodes and the difference between the target's and the third party's frontstage and backstage reactions to jocular behaviour. The most illustrative examples come from interactions between the instigator, the target and the third party, which was the most frequent scenario in the data giving access to frontstage and backstage reactions to jocular behaviour. The results from both cultural contexts showed a particular tendency among the targets (and partially among the third party) to change their evaluations of teases from non-impolite (frontstage) to impolite (backstage) and the instigator's inner refusal to genuinely acknowledge the inappropriateness of jocularity, but at the same time his/her adherence to the social expectations.

Furthermore, even though situational behaviours in the two versions of the *Big Brother* series in the two cultural contexts seem to share a lot in relation to the production and reactions to jocular verbal behaviour, especially the preference for not taking oneself too seriously, the data analysis also appears to have presented some differences. As could be observed in the examples illustrated, the British housemates were more likely to initiate backstage communication with the target and, in some cases, it was noticed that the target would be willing to talk to the instigator about the jocular episode. The latter was hardly seen in the Australian data, where Australian housemates (the third party), unlike their British

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counterparts, tended not only to show support to the target backstage but also often tried to explain to the instigator why his/her verbal behaviour might have been perceived as inappropriate and rude. These differences, however, should be further examined in order to see if they could also be found in different series and outside the realm of *Big Brother*.

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CHAPTER 7

Negative evaluations of jocularity

> [P]eople very often take offence for no particularly good reason, sometimes on the basis of faulty reason, and sometimes when, regardless of their reasoning, to take offence is unreasonable. (Barrow, 2005, p. 272)

In the previous chapters, particular preferences manifesting themselves in Australian and British cultural contexts were discussed and illustrated. In both contexts, a lot of interactional work is influenced by the cultural proscription against taking oneself too seriously, which involves the ability to laugh at oneself, and which can be mostly observed in frontstage verbal behaviours. It has been suggested that when one is faced with jocularity "the preferred reaction" in public refers to the avoidance of explicitly showing that offence (if any) is taken (see also Haugh, 2015, p. 41; 2017b; Mitchell & Haugh, 2015). Whether in jocular situations or not, if someone sanctions offence in a conversation, they, as targets, undoubtedly hold the other person responsible for causing offence, but at the same time "can themselves be morally accountable for this taking of offence" (Haugh, 2015, p. 37). Thus, given a preference for agreement among speakers of English, especially while getting acquainted, and the targets' possible belief that "pointing out that someone has been impolite may itself be impolite" (Sacks, 1992, p. 705), we can observe that it is through rather implicit ways that one signals that offence might have been taken (Haugh, 2015; see also Sacks, 1987).

Indeed, albeit true in many communicative situations, the preference for not taking oneself too seriously cannot be claimed to govern all interactional behaviours. The aim of this chapter is to explore which aspects present in jocular episodes happen to be those issues that cross the line and conflict with one's expectations, which makes the target and/or the third party evaluate jocular behaviours as impolite and/or explicitly claim offence, especially frontstage. As was mentioned in Chapter 3, reality television can be a source of aggression and the participants might be interested in creating conflicting situations in order to receive more attention (e.g. Lorenzo-Dus, 2009; Culpeper & Holmes, 2013; Sinkeviciute, 2015). Yet, the number of negative evaluations of jocular behaviours was quite low in the *Big Brother* data – approximately accounting for 15 per cent of all the responses to jocular conversations, which suggests that creating conflict is not the main interactional goal, at least in the houses analysed, and points to the housemates' tendency to adhere to the cultural preferences discussed in Chapter 5.

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Similar to other chapters, here a combination of first-order and second-order approaches will be used (see integrative pragmatics in Culpeper & Haugh, 2014; 2015). In other words, the analysis is primarily based on the participants' own evaluations, whether immediately after a jocular episode or via meta-talk and backstage comments. Also, since, unlike the previous chapter, this chapter primarily focuses on the *reasons* for the participants' negative evaluations of jocular behaviour, no distinction has been made between their immediate reaction and their assessments available through meta-talk. That is, the same value has been given to negative comments produced immediately after a teasing episode and to those revealed via meta-talk later in the show. Finally, while being based on the participants' assessments, particular categories of the issues that (might) cause evaluations of impoliteness will also be grouped using (at least partially) second-order labels (see Eelen, 2001; Haugh, 2007; Locher & Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield, 2010; Terkourafi, 2011; Clark, 2013; Christie, 2015; van der Bom & Mills, 2015).

The second-order term *impolite* used here is an umbrella term for the occasions when jocular face-threatening verbal behaviour clashes with the participants' expectations, thus causing negative evaluations. The term *impolite* has not been used once in either of the datasets, which, as Culpeper (2011, p. 24) claims, makes it a very good candidate for a second-order term referring to behaviours that produce (emotionally) negative effects on the participants (see also Leech 2014, pp. 47–48). On the other hand, such terms as *offensive*, *nasty*, *rude*, *inappropriate*, *disrespectful*, *inconsiderate*, *horrible*, *mean*, *upset(ting)* have been employed in order to refer to negatively-viewed jocular episodes as well as to the instigators thereof.

During the analysis of the participants' evaluations of jocular comments, two different groups of issues occasioning negative evaluations of jocularity emerged (see Table 18). The first group refers to more general aspects of jocular conversations and their nature, i.e. it is based on the participants' rather vague comments (see 7.1). On the other hand, the second group represents more specific issues that point to a concrete remark and are of primary importance in this chapter (see 7.2).

7.1 General issues

As shown in Table 18, there is a number of general issues that (might) cause negative reactions to jocular comments. While in the British data all of the categories are mentioned not more than twice, half of the complaints about jocular verbal behaviour being inappropriate in the Australian data refer to having a laugh or amusing the third party or oneself at the expense of someone else (see (124) and (125)). Undoubtedly, most of the time jocular remarks, be it teasing, jocular mockery or jocular abuse, do have someone to target (Hay, 1994; Haugh, 2010a; 2014;

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Table 18. General and specific issues occasioning the evaluations of impoliteness after a jocular episode in *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012

Impolite jocularity (*BBAU*)	Impolite jocularity (*BBUK*)
General	
amusing the third party/oneself at someone's expense; no 'affectionate' delivery; consecutive jokes (AU);* the target is non-present (AU).	amusing the third party/oneself at someone's expense; 'cruel' delivery; banter (UK); ridicule, belittling (UK); personalised jokes (UK).
Specific	
association with a negative name/person/group/activity; breach of 'social norms'/taboo topics; shifting the facts (on purpose); excluding (AU); (singling out someone as) being better (AU).	association with a negative name/person/group/activity; breach of 'social norms'/taboo topics; shifting the facts (on purpose); criticising one's body/personal items (making one insecure) (UK); reminding of a painful experience (UK).

* AU and UK indicate those specific issues that have only been encountered in one of the datasets. It should be mentioned, however, that if there was an issue identified, for example, only in the British data, it does not mean that such aspects of jocular interactions could not be present in the Australian data. It only suggests that those issues were broadcast and occasioned evaluations of impoliteness in that dataset.

Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; see 4.5), but not all of them are used in order to amuse someone else or make oneself look better (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012; Yu, 2013). Consider the following examples from the Australian data:

(124) Day 63 (AU)
Estelle is nominating Stacey:

I feel like her jokes are either at the expense of someone in the house or outside of the house and I think they are often tactless

(125) Day 28 (AU)

Ben about Bradley:

he needs to learn that saying a smart comment to make you boys laugh is not appropriate

(126) Day 14 (AU)
Ray about Ben:

it's a little bit too far when you make ten consecutive jokes in a row

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(127) Day 55 (AU)
Angie is talking to Michael about the change in Josh's behaviour:

the thing is before he would dig at me but he would like have a bit of like [smiling bumps into Michael] like you have a dig at me {[hugging Michael] but then you go oh just joking} you know give us a little and I'm like {[smiling] oh just joking like cause you've got that affectionate thing going to (.) while Josh is doing the dig but he's
→ not doing the affectionate thing and I'm just sitting here going erm um how do you want me to take this

(128) Day 14 (AU)
Ray about making fun of Ryan:

→ we all like to have a bit of a joke at (old mate) Ryan but I think he took things a bit too far like you know it's one thing to (pay him out) about the chilli that sort of thing
→ but to make it personal jokes when he's not around it's just bullying

The presence of consecutive jokes directed at the same person was singled out by different housemates and referred to as 'going too far' ((126)). Furthermore, the lack of 'affectionate' delivery, which stands for body language and facial expression ((127)), and targeting a non-present participant cause negative comments and show the hearers' discomfort and willingness to end jocular interactions. Interestingly, a jocular verbal act per se is not seen as something out of the ordinary, but making such remarks when the target is not around is labelled more like bordering on bullying rather than something humorous in the Australian data ((128)).

Even though some of the categories from the Australian data can also be found in the British version (amusing someone at the target's expense or 'cruel' delivery), some issues were mentioned only by the British participants. Consider these examples from the data:

(129) Day 21 (UK)
Arron about his own behaviour:

trying to have a laugh and obviously me doing that () a laugh ('ve) upset a few people or erm (.) it's all harmless banter as far as I'm concerned

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(130) Day 51 (UK)
Sara about Caroline's jocular behaviour:

I just don't understand why you feel the need to belittle people it's not nice to tell makes me feel really upset Caroline

(131) Day 8 (UK)

Aaron:

I don't mind having a joke but when a joke's on me that's a different story

(132) Day 18 (UK)
Shievonne is insulted by Adam jocularly proposing to her. She tries to explain why the joke was offensive:

Shievonne: → so when you personalise a joke now you see what I'm trying to get at
part of the conversation omitted
don't patronise me I'm so fucking pissed off I don't
→ even know who you are at this point
part of the conversation omitted
you can't walk around and well I apologise () it's
→ done it's done what just because you apologise () beep and the memory is gone (..) no

The categories found only in the British data refer to the occasions when jocular comments are used in the form of banter ((129)), in order to ridicule or belittle ((130), see also 7.2.1.3), and as a personalised joke ((131) and (132)), the latter being an important factor in evaluating a jocular comment (see 7.2.2 and 8.4.2). Indeed, (132) not only illustrates the difference between 'just' a joke and a personalised joke but also shows that an apology or the acknowledgement of a wrong-doing does not change the fact that jocular behaviour caused offence (even though in many cases these feelings will be left unexpressed). Alongside these general issues, the primary interest and a more thorough analysis are devoted to the specific issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness in the datasets.

7.2 Specific issues

In the following subsections, similar as well as different specific issues generating impolite evaluations will be illustrated and discussed. In 7.3, this discussion will be followed by a brief overview of a division of those specific issues into three categories relating to personal aspects, the disruption of social harmony and a topic/subject matter.

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7.2.1 Similarities in the Australian and British *Big Brother* houses

During this cross-cultural analysis, three out of five specific issues in Table 18, to which the participants refer as the ones producing evaluations of impoliteness, coincided in both datasets. Those were (i) associating the target with a negative name/person/group/activity, (ii) breach of 'social norms' and taboo topics and (iii) shifting the facts, whether deliberately or not. In the following subsections, each of them will be illustrated with examples from both datasets.

7.2.1.1 *Association with a negative name/person/group/activity*

The biggest jocular 'sin' in both houses seems to be to associate someone with something negative, whether a name, a person, a group or an activity. First, consider the following excerpts from the Australian dataset:

(133) Day 2 (AU)
A new housemate comes into the house and meets the housemates:

```
Stacey:          what's you name?
Ray:             Ray-Ray
Stacey:    →     {[smiling] Ray-Ray like a stingray}
Ray:             {[moving to another housemate and frowning a bit]
           →     no:: don't call me that}
```

(134) Day 10 (AU)
Bradley and some other housemates are in the kitchen and have just discovered that Estelle hid honey. Charne says that they did it together but it was not done to hide but to make it last longer. Bradley starts messing with her:

```
Bradley:          yeah yeah yeah = yeah yeah =
Charne:                          = no no no no no =
Bradley:          = yeah yeah yeah =
Charne:           = no no no no no =
Bradley:          = {[smile voice] don't cut me off do not become completely} =
Charne:           = [smiles and laughs pointing at Bradley] =
Bradley:    →     == like Estelle
Charne:           [surprised face]
HMs:              o::h
```

(135) Day 10 (AU)
Michael who was present during the episode retells other housemates what happened:

```
Michael:    →      and then it turned into conflict
                   and I ran away
```

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In (133), during the introductions, Ray refers to himself as 'Ray-Ray', which due to the rhyming immediately provokes Stacey's comparison of Ray to a stingray. A stingray is only one of many venomous creatures residing in Australia,[76] but even for a tough and stoic Australian bloke (Sharp, 2012) it might be something undesirable to be associated with. His refusal, that can also be occasioned by the fact that he might have heard it too many times already, is seen in his quick movement towards another housemate and a serious rejection of such a reference 'no:: don't call me that'.

Not as poisonous as a stingray but a seemingly equally or even more effective way to offend someone is to associate the target with a person whose persona does not carry positive connotations. In (134), after joking-around turns between Bradley and Charne, the former decides to move further claiming that Charne's cutting him off suggests that she becomes 'completely like Estelle'. Estelle is referred to as an extremely strange character in the house, someone who has seven personalities and the housemates never know what kind of Estelle they will see the next morning. Also, much negative talking is done behind Estelle's back (something that is not done face-to-face; see (99) and (100)) and Charne is aware of it. Interestingly enough, Charne's reaction to Bradley's jocular claim is non-verbal. What can be observed is how her state of laughing and being amused shifts to being surprised. Furthermore, the first audible reaction to Bradley's accusation is that of the other housemates present in the kitchen. It is possible to hear quite a long low-pitched falling 'oh'. It partly displays surprise (that coincides with the target's non-verbal reaction) (Heritage, 1984; Local, 1996; Reber [2012, Chapter 6]), but what it shows more prominently is disapproval and criticism of the previous turn, i.e. it indicates that Bradley has crossed the line. This is reflected in Michael's comment in (135) as well where he labels what happened next as a conflict that was most probably generated by Bradley associating Charne with Estelle.

Now consider a short example from the British data:

(136) Day 22 (UK)
Caroline is telling her fellow housemates about her gap year in Thailand. She is humorously referring to herself as being able to irritate 30 people who were claiming that Caroline had ruined their holiday because she was pointing out something obvious about their appearance. After hearing that, Adam comments:

76. Steve Irwin, founder of the Australia Zoo and better known as the 'Crocodile Hunter', died in 2006 when a stingray's barb pierced his heart (http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/crocodile-man-steve-irwin-dies/2006/09/04/1157222051494.html).

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```
Adam:          so you've always been mean to people
Caroline:      {[seriously] no I'm not a bully at all}
Ashleigh:      {[smiling] no}
Adam:          [HAHAHA]
```

Having listened to Caroline's self-deprecating comments that point to her ability to irritate people,[77] Adam asks whether she has 'always been mean to people'. The adjective 'mean' alongside 'rude' and 'cruel' as well as a number of other ones clearly points to the evaluation of something or someone in a negative way (e.g. Bubel & Spitz, 2006; Haugh, 2010a). Caroline, who is the initiator of many jocular face-threatening comments in the house (see (141)) and in this case was the one presenting other people's negative opinion of her as a laughable, however, immediately associates 'mean' with 'bully' and finds it non-humorous. Since Adam has already formed a negative opinion of the target, Caroline's serious rejection seems to amuse him as he bursts into loud laughter.

7.2.1.2 *Breach of 'social norms'/taboo topics*

The second type of the special issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness mentioned by the participants refers to the breach of social norms and engaging in taboo topics. However broad these concepts are, the participants seem to know exactly which lines one should not be crossing when talking, for example, about one's family or intimate relations. Extract (137) shows a conversation among the Australian housemates, one of whom – Ava – is a vegetarian.

(137) Day 32 (AU)
Every week the housemates order food. Unfortunately, they forgot to order tofu for Ava. When she comes into the kitchen, George breaks the news:

```
George:          I've got some bad news there's no tofu
Angie:           so they () all the tofu
Bradley:         it could have been worse your whole
            →    family could have died [points at Ava]
Ava:             a::h
Angie:      →    Bradley shut stop just stop Bradley for one minute
Ava:             == yeah it's serious
```

Although many earlier extracts present instances of multi-party interaction, what this example allows to observe is that in a short period of time all the interactants become involved in the conversation. While Angie wants to talk about the food problem in a serious way, Bradley, who is known for his deadpan jocular comments,

77. Caroline has been known in the house as a very sarcastic person and due to her comments characterised as being nasty and bitchy.

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decides to lighten the situation presenting a much worse scenario, i.e. Ava's 'whole family could have died'. Undoubtedly, Bradley meant it in a non-serious manner, as he usually does, later claiming that that was a joke (see also (97)). Ava's immediate reaction is somewhat ambiguous, since she is not verbally showing her disapproval of it. Rather, she uses the interjection 'a::h', which in its 'flat-falling and low' form displays her disappointment and the inappropriateness of what has been uttered (Couper-Kuhler, 2009 in Reber, 2012, pp. 209–222). Angie, on the other hand, directs her evaluative comment towards Bradley, this way negatively assessing his attempt at humour. Interestingly, after the third party's concern, which seems to be a tendency among the Australian housemates (e.g. (108)), similar to Angie, Ava (the target) enters the non-humorous frame herself. She finally claims that the matter is 'serious', which suggests that she recognised Bradley's comment as jocular or at least that that was how she reconstructed his intention.

The following example from the British house illustrates a different taboo topic, namely, sexual relations, between Ashleigh and Luke S, who are a couple in the house.

(138) Day 9 (UK)
The housemates are in the garden. Adam broaches the subject of Ashleigh and Luke S's relationship:

```
Adam:              we are finally fucking there right
HMs:               =  [laugh] =
Ashleigh:          =  {[louder] we're not gonna fuck in the fucking-} =
Adam:                 ok
HMs:               =  [laugh] =
Ashleigh:    →     =  {[louder] no no no Adam Adam (there's) a line and you've
                      just crossed it} =
Adam:              == all right
Luke S:      →     =  [giggles] =
Ashleigh:          =  yeah I'm not going to fuck that's all =
HMs:               =  [laugh] =
Adam:              == but if you do
Luke S:               {[to Ashleigh] we're not a (goose)}
Ashleigh:             no
Adam:              == let me know so I can write one off (.) please
Luke S and
HMs:         →     == [burst into laughter]
Shievonne:   →     oh my god
[…]
```

First of all, it is interesting to observe that initiating his provocative and jocular remark, Adam opts for 'we' instead of 'you' to refer to Ashleigh and Luke S having intimate relations, as if including himself and other housemates in the activity

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and claiming that the house is a collective place and what happens to one of the housemates has a direct impact on all the rest. This immediately produces other housemates' laughter and at the same time Ashleigh's negative evaluation. Raising her voice, she contradicts Adam ('no no no') and explicitly states that '(there's) a line and [Adam's] just crossed it'. Even though Luke S is also present, he, laughing together with other housemates, does not seem to see himself as a target, but as a third party, and, unlike Ashleigh, does not contradict Adam (cf. (137)). Ashleigh's reaction, on the other hand, shows that she did not appreciate the humorous potential and, even if she recognised the humour, she decided not to display it. This, alongside Shievonne's reaction ('oh my god') pointing to her being surprised and shocked (see Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2006), might suggest a gender difference in taboo topics as well.[78] Furthermore, in addition to her initial outburst, at the end of the day Ashleigh is quite upset and shares her thoughts with Luke S and Conor:

(139) Day 9 (UK)

```
Ashleigh:    →    what Adam said today like oh you two are fucking
                  I'm gonna wake up I don't need to hear that
                  = you know what I mean my mum and dad are watching
             →    this that is disgusting =
Conor:            = [nods] =
```

Her metapragmatic comments clearly indicate that she took offence to Adam's remark and that it was socially inappropriate and 'disgusting', both because intimate relations are supposed to be private and it could involve her parents who 'are watching' the show and evaluating their daughter's moral behaviour.

7.2.1.3 *Shifting the facts*

In the last category of special issues that could be found in both datasets the teaser changes, reinvents or introduces something additional to the target's offered facts, ideas or opinion. Consider the following example from the Australian house:

(140) Day 15 (AU)
Some housemates are talking about their ideal partners. It is time for Angie to share her view. She mentions that she likes big guys, then she is asked whether they should have tattoos, to which she positively responds. Josh decides to tease Angie about that fact:

```
Josh:      →     Southern Cross
Angie:           no::
Josh:      →     neck tat
```

78. Due to a different focus, this book does not discuss gender differences (but see Hay, 2000; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Holmes, 2006).

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```
Angie:      →     {[smiling] shut u::p}
Josh:             (bob wire)
Angie:      →     do you wanna know or not? so ok I thought
                  you guys wanted to know but now I realise
                  that you don't wanna know you just wanna
            →     make fun of me I'll be quiet [does a gesture
                  for a shut mouth] thanks for that
Stacey:           let her speak
Josh:             = footy club footy club logo () =
Angie:            = that's ok () = my type
            →     {[leaving the room] oh why do I bother}
Stacey:           let her speak
Josh:       →     = footy club footy club logo premier () =
Angie:            = that's ok () = my type
            →     {[leaving the room] oh why do I bother}
Zoe:        →     what did you say to her Josh?
Ray:              {[seriously] did you break her heart?}
[…]
```

While Angie openly presents the features of her 'Mr Perfect', Josh decides to elaborate on one of the aspects that she mentioned – tattoos. First, he suggests that Angie would like a guy with a 'Southern Cross' tattoo, and she immediately rejects it with a long 'no'. The Southern Cross, "[o]nce a popular symbol of patriotism and egalitarianism" (Olding, 2010), has been largely used not only to point to bogan culture but also as a symbol of nationalism rooted therein (McSween et al., 2011; McSween et al., 2013, see also (72)). Although being perfectly aware of these pejorative connotations, Josh does not drop his teasing and pushes further, which makes Angie behave in a defensive way. At first, she still protests with a smile on her face and silences Josh ('shut up') (see Culpeper, 2010; 2011). Then she moves into a more serious frame and explains that she was trying to have a serious conversation in which the other housemates were interested ('I thought you guys wanted to know'). It can be suggested that this way Angie claims offence, especially since she abruptly drops the topic indicating that now '[she]'ll be quiet' and sarcastically thanks the housemates for ruining the conversation. Furthermore, after realising that Josh does not stop teasing her ('footy club logo'), Angie leaves the room.[79] What is also important to notice in this extract is that after Angie has

79. Interestingly enough, when after a short time Angie has a re-encounter with Josh and he apologises, she does not want to return to the topic and makes a joke, trying to restore friendly relationships between the two. Thus, it remains unclear whether Angie was indeed offended by Josh's comments, but then decided to adhere to the cultural preference not to take oneself too seriously (Goddard, 2009; Haugh, 2010a; Sinkeviciute, 2014), or rather she pretended she took offence but was only irritated and displeased with the housemates' remarks.

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left, other housemates seem to recognise a possible tension in the house and show their concern about the target (see Zoe's and Ray's reactions).

Something similar can also be observed in this longish interaction from the British house:

(141) Day 51 (UK)
The housemates are outside. Luke S mentions that he wants to see the pyramids to which Sara (a Scottish housemate) says that she has seen them and that there is a McDonald's next to one. Some housemates try to question this claiming that it cannot be very close to the pyramids. Caroline also jumps into the conversation:

```
Caroline:     →     but Sara you said it was on the pyramids
*** part of the conversation omitted*
Sara:         →     Caroline I didn't say they built McDonald's on
                    the pyramids
Scott:              but you know = until the early twenties-=
Caroline:                        = I thought it was on it=
Sara:               l I didn't say that
Caroline:     →     I thought they had a a Burger King there's a
                    fast food sort of like arcade of fast food joint
Scott:              [haha]
Caroline:           () not?
Scott:              {[giggling] on the side of the pyramids}
Caroline:     →     not on it (.) like when you get to the top and
                    they built a shopping arcade
Scott:              {[smile voice] right balance on top}
Caroline:           well yeah that's what I thought that's what
                    I thought
Sara:         →     {[sharply] what because of what I said that's what you
                    thought Caroline}
Scott:              [giggles]
Caroline:     →     {[smiling] yeah I thought you were getting
                    yourself a cheeseburger on the top of the
                    pyramid}
Sara:         →     {[louder] I didn't say I didn't say that McDonald's was
                    on the pyramid}
Caroline:     →     == I know you didn't
Sara:         →     {[louder and very sharply] (it was next to them) and
                    actually
              →     it upsets me when somebody tries to belittle me like that
                    please don't do it to me again () a hundred
                    times in here I don't appreciate it}
Caroline:           ok (..) {[laughing] but imagine there was like}
Becky:              () Caroline
```

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```
Caroline:     →     {[laughing] I'm not taking the piss out of Sara but
                    imagine there was a takeaway shop on the pyramid}
                    Scott and
Caroline:           = [haha] =
Caroline:           [bursts into laughter again] sorry sorry sorry
Sara:         →     {[seriously] I don't take the piss out of anybody I just
                    don't understand why you feel the need to belittle
              →     people it's not nice at all it makes me feel
                    really upset Caroline}
Caroline:           now but imagine if imagine if someone ordered
Sara:               == it's not nice when I'm explaining a story
                    and you just like and you're just taking the piss out
                    of me
Caroline:           I'm not
Sara:         →     == you're supposed to be my friend so why are you
                    = doing that =
Caroline:           = I'm not taking the piss out of you = if someone ordered
                    a pizza and = they have to climb down =
Sara:                           = yet Caroline but you've done it =
              →     so many times that it's just not nice at all it
              →     {[sharply] makes me feel horrible makes me feel so
                    small it makes me feel really really upset}
Becky:              alright alright Sara just ()
```

As can be seen in the extract, Caroline starts by claiming that Sara actually said that a McDonald's 'was on the pyramids', which immediately receives Sara's rejection ('I didn't say they built McDonald's on the pyramids'). Nevertheless, Caroline continues her quest adding more details to the story. She does not limit herself only to McDonald's, but also mentions Burger King and a whole fast food and shopping arcade being built on the top of the pyramid. Although Scott (another housemate sitting between Caroline and Sara) seems to enjoy Caroline's joking around, Sara starts to lose her temper and raises her voice when she directly confronts Caroline asking 'because of what I said that's what you thought'. Interestingly enough, Caroline (as well as Scott who starts to giggle) does not seem to recognise or merely ignores Sara's message for the sake of a good laugh that she has initiated and confirms that her ideas are rooted in what Sara said. When it produces a further outburst in Sara, Caroline stops shifting Sara's contribution to the conversation and says 'I know you didn't' in quite a serious voice that clearly indicates that she was just being jocular and Sara failed to recognise that. Caroline then immediately claims that she is 'not taking the piss out of Sara', i.e. not trying to ridicule her, but is rather amused by the situation (see 8.4.2). This admission, however, does not bring relief to Sara. On the contrary, she refers to Caroline's seemingly constant behaviour as an attempt at belittling, which is not appreciated. However, Caroline

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does not seem to be willing to give up and, apparently indulging in her own funniness, keeps on talking about 'a takeaway shop on the pyramid', but in this case clearly stating that it is not directed at Sara. This produces her and Scott's laughter followed by several 'sorry', which indicates her awareness of the potential face-threat occasioned by her jocularity. In turn, Sara's loud contributions in a very sharp voice indicate that she is extremely upset. This unpleasant situation forces her to open up and offer her metapragmatic evaluations of Caroline's behaviour that according to her is inappropriate, taking into consideration that Caroline is 'supposed to be [her] friend'.[80] Finally, Sara's final comments uncover her strong emotions due to the fact that she found Caroline's behaviour extremely impolite and offensive: 'it's just not nice at all it makes me feel horrible makes me feel so small it makes me feel really really upset' (for the interviewees' evaluations of this and other instances of potential jocularity, see Chapter 8).

In this subsection, I illustrated three specific issues that were common among the Australian and British housemates: (i) associating the target with something negative, (ii) breaching social norms or engaging in taboo topics, and (iii) (non-) deliberately shifting the facts, ideas or opinions. In the following subsection, the specific issues that were only encountered among Australian or British participants will be presented.

7.2.2 Differences between the Australian and British *Big Brother* houses

As seen in Table 18, there are some specific issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness that could only be observed in one of the datasets. In the Australian data, those issues referred to excluding someone and projecting that one is being better/superior or singling out someone else as being better. The two groups can undoubtedly be related, but due to the nature of the examples found in the Australian data, here they have been differentiated. While the examples indicating exclusion present only the other-oriented jocular behaviour that primarily carries negativity directed at the target (see (142) and (143)), the category referring to someone being better can be self-directed (i.e. explicitly or implicitly stating that one is better) (see (145)) or other-directed (i.e. projecting that the target is better or superior) (see (144)). The function of the latter, as will be seen below, is not to explicitly exclude the target from the group. However first, let's move to the following subsection that focuses on the housemates' claims that a particular jocular behaviour excludes the target from a bigger group.

80. Cf. Australian tendency to *rubbish the mates* that leads to evaluations of mock impoliteness (5.1.3; Goddard, 2006; Haugh, 2010a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012 and examples therein).

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7.2.2.1 *Excluding (AU)*

As was mentioned in Chapter 5 and seen in the discussion following (96), one of the cultural preferences in an Australian cultural context is to project equality in interaction, which means that social exclusion of someone is not appreciated and is condemned. Consider the following examples:

(142) Day 18 (AU)
Previously to this conversation, Ray jokingly called Ben (who is gay) a poof. They have not talked for a few days and Ben decides to confront Ray, who evaluates his own behaviour:

```
Ray:    →   I thought you'd laugh it off but you kind of then
        →   it separated you a bit from the group and I felt
            really really horrible about it and I apologise with
            all my heart and I'm sorry I did it
```

(143) Day 14 (AU)
Zoe is explaining why she nominates Bradley:

```
Zoe:        when the boys had a joke about Layla being
            from England and you know oh you're on Big Brother
            Australia how funny he turned around and said
        →   yeah Layla why don't you just go back to your
            own country which I just thought was inappropriate
        →   and rude in- at the time
```

Here it is important to stress that, unlike in cases of projecting one's own superiority or singling out someone as being better (as will be seen in (144) and (145)), in potentially jocular interactions that refer to someone's exclusion, negative jocular abuse that could easily make the target an outsider has been used (see disaffiliative humour in Dynel, 2013a). What is valuable in (142) is that we are presented with the teaser's self-reflection and the assessment of his own jocular behaviour. Ray, using the pejorative term *poof*, made a joke and hoped that Ben would 'laugh it off'. Even though his joke undoubtedly targets Ben's identity, Ray conceptualises it as a socially-oriented issue and confesses that it 'separated [Ben] a bit from the group'. The teaser himself offers exclusion as a valid reason for someone to evaluate a joke as an impolite verbal act and to take offence to it. Furthermore, Ray does not try to claim that it was just a joke and to defend himself (cf. (141)), but uncovers his own emotions towards his jocularity ('I felt really really horrible') and apologises 'with all [his] heart'. In (143), Zoe tries to explain why she has nominated Bradley for eviction. She recalls a situation (where she was the third party), where the male housemates 'had a joke about Layla being from England' but taking part in the Australian series. While continuing a jocular interaction, Bradley suggested that Layla should 'go back to [her] own country'. This extremely negative suggestion

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produced in a humorous frame could have easily made Layla feel like an outcast in the house, which Zoe evaluates as 'inappropriate and rude' and sees as a sufficient reason to nominate Bradley.

7.2.2.2 *Being better (AU)*

Extracts (144), (145) and (146) deal with an idea of being different in terms of being/feeling better or superior. In an Australian cultural context, there is a tendency to promote feelings of social equality and discourage feelings of specialness and pretentiousness in interaction (Goddard, 2009, p. 42; see also Wierzbicka, 2002, pp. 1194–1195; Peeters, 2004a; 2004b). It is easy to conceive that jocular verbal behaviours that involve someone being pretentious or suggesting that someone else is somehow better are primarily person-oriented. However, it should be pointed out that this idea is also closely related to promoting presumed social similarity and social equality in Australian interaction (Goddard, 2009; Hirst, 2009).

(144) Day 7 (AU)
Before coming into the house, every housemate had a secret. After two weeks all them were revealed. Michael's secret was that he has an IQ of a genius. Bradley decides to tease him about it:

```
Bradley:              I just can't get over how smart you are
                →     Michael you're a genius you- [haha]
Michael:        →     Bradles now you're walking = a fine line =
Bradley:                                         = you're like =
                      Einstein you-
```

(145) Day 46 (AU)
Housemates talk about the week's task they have just passed where all but one housemate (Sam) could party and feast on chocolates and lollies. Angie, Bradley, Estelle, Michael and Sam are in the lounge. Angie says that she would be very upset if it had been her who missed all the fun and sweets. Estelle seems not to have enjoyed the chocolate.

```
Estelle:        →     I need more vegetables
Angie:                uh
Estelle:        →     you may survive on sugar I don't
                      (.) = I mean I'd survive but (.) =
Angie:                    = I don't () survive on sugar =
Estelle:              == I mean it's not luxury
Angie:          →     == I'm pretty sure my body needs something
                      other than sugar pr- possibly protein and
                      = () =
Michael:        →     = [hehehe] =
Estelle:        →     {[playful smile voice] you're a sugar fairy (though)}
```

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```
Angie:              →      I don't think I am
Estelle:            →      you are a sugar fairy
Angie:                     I enjoy sugar
Michael and Sam:           [leave the lounge]
Bradley:                   you know do you wanna (go) to the kitchen and make
                           some food?
Angie:                     yeah ok
Angie and Bradley:         [leave the lounge]
Estelle:                   [stays alone in the lounge, lying on the floor]
```

(146) Day 46 (AU)
Angie is talking to Bradley in the kitchen:

```
[…] she's like I know that you only rely on sugar
but I need something else I'm like
you're not better than me just because
I appreciate the funny things in life […]
```

With Michael being the only housemate with a very high IQ, it is not difficult to imagine that he would be seen as different and, obviously, more intelligent than other housemates. Bradley's suggesting that Michael indeed should be praised for being very special (with only 2% of the population with that high an IQ) and that he is 'a genius', puts the target in a position of a potentially superior housemate. Michael does not take direct offence to that but he clearly indicates that it is not an appropriate comment and Bradley should not go further because he is 'walking a fine line'. If in (144), it was Bradley who suggested that the target was somehow better, in (145), the instigator projects her own superiority while directing teasing criticism at the target. Even though the housemates present do not hide their enjoyment of chocolates and lollies, it is mainly Angie who voices her happiness, while feeling sorry for Sam who missed it. Estelle, on the other hand, claims that she needs 'more vegetables' and tries to criticise Angie, claiming that, unlike herself, the target 'may survive on sugar'. Michael, the third party, finds the conversation funny and it is possible to observe that the instigator tries to make it light-hearted and jocular, especially when she, in a playful voice, refers to Angie as 'a sugar fairy'. Since it is not the first time that Angie has heard Estelle's healthy eating message, she does not seem to find it amusing. However, the target does not start an argument with the instigator. Rather, she quite calmly disagrees with Estelle ('I don't think I am'), which shows her po-faced receipt of the instigator's attempt at teasing mockery (Drew, 1987), and then she takes the first opportunity (initiated by Bradley) to leave the room. Even though it is Angie who is targeted, the situation also seems to make the other housemates feel uncomfortable (without saying a word, Michael and Sam withdraw from the lounge), which is a possible source of ruining the harmony in the house (see (58)). In addition, it should be

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emphasised that, contrary to (142) and (143), Estelle cannot possibly exclude Angie from the group, since it is the instigator herself who is the only housemate who does not share positive emotions towards chocolates. What she tries to point out is her being better in understanding the benefits of healthy eating and taking care of her body. Interestingly enough, several minutes later in (146), Angie, who did not explicitly confront Estelle in (145), talks to Bradley in the kitchen and reveals how she interpreted Estelle's verbal behaviour and what she felt like saying to her, i.e. 'you're not better than me'. This clearly shows that Angie thought that Estelle, choosing her as a target among the housemates, was being condescending and tried to project her healthy eating superiority.

7.2.2.3 *Criticising one's body/personal items (UK)*

If the specific issues in the Australian house refer to singling out someone as better and to social equality and harmony in interaction, the British housemates seem to be more concerned with their personal issues and possessions, which can be seen as the major source of offence in impoliteness events (Culpeper, 2011a, p. 47). Those specific issues generating the evaluations of impoliteness after a jocular event among the British participants present criticism of one's body or personal items and remind someone of a painful experience (see 7.2.2.4). Let's have a look at the following examples:

(147) Day 44 (UK)
Ashleigh is choosing what to wear:

```
Scott:              oh Ashleigh
Becky:        →     whose funeral is it
Conor:              [laughs]
Becky:        →     (only) joking
Ashleigh:     →     {[slightly smiling] Becks (.) you make me really
                    insecure sometimes}
Becky:              you know somebody-
Scott:              == {[giggling] tell me about it}
Ashleigh:     →     {[showing Becky her hand] (stop) fuck off}
```

(148) Day 44 (UK)
Later that day Ashleigh speaks to Scott, sharing her feelings:

```
Ashleigh:     →     sometimes she can make you feel like so small
Scott:              I know because she said she didn't like my jeans
              →     and I got really upset about it
Ashleigh:           she does make you feel like like you're a piece
              →     of shit she won't say it in a nice way she'll
                    say it in the most cruellest way ever
```

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In (147), when Ashleigh tries a new outfit, Becky humorously asks if she is going to the funeral, which produces Conor's immediate laughter. Becky, as if realising that her comment might be inappropriate, tries to claim its untruthfulness ('(only) joking') (Skalicky et al., 2015; Haugh, 2016; 2017b). The target smiles showing that she recognises the humorous potential, but comments that it is not the first time that Becky has made her 'insecure'. This indicates that the target expresses both affiliative and disaffiliative stances towards the instigator's jocular comment (Haugh 2010a). Scott, albeit giggling,[81] also agrees with Ashleigh, who finally shows her disapproval and silences Becky. Later, when Becky is not present, Ashleigh and Scott share their emotions towards Becky. This metalanguage shows Ashleigh's negative evaluations of Becky's jocular comment in (147) and her verbal behaviour that targets Ashleigh's looks in general ('she can make you feel like so small' and 'she does make you feel like like you're a piece of shit'; see also (141)). Also, Scott seems to share Ashleigh's negative evaluations and assesses Becky's criticism of his personal items as 'upset[ting]'. Interestingly, even though both Ashleigh's and Scott's explicit reactions to Becky's jocular remarks slightly vary in (147) and (148), in both instances they clearly refer to impoliteness.

7.2.2.4 *Reminding of a painful experience (UK)*

Finally, the evaluations of impoliteness after a jocular verbal act can be caused by reminding the target of a painful experience. A good example of a painful experience was given in Chapter 6, where in (113) after Luke S failed to push the button and win a big sum of money, he was teased by Deana about this failure. The following example, coincidentally, also involves Luke S who was led to believe that a media company was interested in hiring him. During his fake audition, he had to pose for a calendar. Later in the evening, when Luke S found out that it was a bogus career opportunity, all the housemates could have a look at his photos.

(149) Day 40 (UK)
Housemates scream and laugh watching Luke S's photo shoot. Luke S smiles at first, but after a few moments covers his face with his hands:

```
Adam:            {[smiling and pointing at the screen} oh my god
                 oh my god}
Conor:           {[laughing] the tennis () was disgusting}
*part of the interaction omitted*
Conor:           {[laughing] tennis was the worst}
Luke S:    →     {[screaming] turn them off}
Adam:            () all night all night long
```

81. Similar to the viewers at home, the third party can also be amused by potentially impolite verbal behaviour but at the same time evaluate it as impolite.

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```
Ashleigh:        {[smiling] they are so funny}
Luke S:          no far from it
Ashleigh:        I love them
Luke S:    →     I fucking (hate them)
Ashleigh:        shut up
Luke S:    →     I've never been so embarrassed in my life
Conor:           [hehehe] {[laughing] the worst I've ever seen}
```

(150) Day 40 (UK)
Luke S is upset and comes to the diary room:

```
Luke S:            I just wanted to come and swear at you
Big Brother:       why do you want to swear at Big Brother?
Luke S:       →    cause you made me look stupid
```

It is quite clear from (149) that all the housemates are extremely amused by a prank played on Luke S. During the episode, their screaming and almost hysterical laughing as well as some mocking comments about Luke S's photos can be heard, e.g. Conor keeps saying that the photo with a tennis racket is 'the worst'. It is interesting to observe how these jocular remarks do not directly target Luke S sitting next to them, but rather his earlier self during the photo shoot. This, however, does not change Luke S's hurt feelings that are not generated by the housemates' laughter and comments or the photo shoot taken separately, but by a combination of the two. At first, he tries not to show his vulnerability, but after a few moments, the target covers his face with his hands in order not to look at the pictures. Finally, he cannot control his frustration and screams to Big Brother 'turn them off'. Although the housemates keep repeating that the whole situation is 'so funny', Luke S does not try to hide his emotions and overtly states that he has 'never been so embarrassed in [his] life'. Later, as seen in (150), he even comes to the diary room to 'swear at' Big Brother for 'ma[king him] look stupid'.

7.2.3 Division of the specific issues into categories

As has been seen in the previous subsections, there is a variety of specific issues that during or after a jocular face-threatening episode generate evaluations of impoliteness. As a result of the analysis, all of them could be divided into three different groups, depending on the nature of those issues, i.e. whether they are related to a person (or something personal), social harmony disruption or the topic of the conversation (Table 19).

It should be mentioned that some specific issues, e.g. breach of social norms or associating the target with something negative, clearly refer to the categories of the disruption of social harmony and person, respectively. Other examples, however,

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can easily relate to more than one category. For example, singling someone out as different can point both to a personal trait being targeted as well as to causing social disharmony in the *Big Brother* house (e.g. (145)).

Table 19. Categories and frequency of specific issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness after jocular behaviour in *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012

	Person	Social harmony disruption	Topic
BBAU	36% (12)	46% (15)	18% (6)
BBUK	59% (13)	14% (3)	27% (6)

The results reveal that offence has been taken more often to jocular behaviour (that is thought to be) targeting something personal (body, characteristics, etc.) by the British housemates (59% vs 36%) (as in (147)). On the other hand, teasing that could possibly generate the disruption of social harmony and group dynamics in the house was much more frequently referred to as impolite by the Australian housemates (46% vs 14%) (as in (142), (143), (144)). These results show a link with a tendency to promote social equality and minimise exclusion in an Australian cultural context, as observed in Chapter 5. Finally, the topic/subject matter-related category did not cause much offence. However comparing the frequency in the same dataset, it still generated more evaluations of impoliteness than the category related to social harmony disruption in the British house (27% vs 14%) (as in (141), (149)). This could be explained by the tendency of the British housemates to perceive much of teasing as primarily a personal attack, whether it referred to the topic of conversation or their personalities/possessions (see (141), (144); see the interviewees' opinions in Chapter 8). In order to illustrate such a tendency, consider the following interaction, where the third party takes offence to a topic of conversation, since she believes that this way it is her prepared food that is targeted:

(151) Day 17 (UK)
Most of the housemates are eating the meal prepared by Lydia. Adam and Deana, who are in the same group in the house, sit next to each other. Deana has tried to lean over Adam to take some salt, to which Adam reacted saying that 'it's rude'. Deana, in her turn, jocularly targets Adam:

```
Deana:        →    Adam's acting like he's on his period today
                   [laughing and pushing Adam]
Adam:         →    {[surprised] ooh ooh}
Housemates:        [laugh]
Deana:             [hehehe]
Lydia:             oh god
Deana:             we're joking
*part of the interaction omitted*
```

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```
Lydia:      →    {[sharply] it's so disrespectful after I've cooked all
                 this meal oh they're taking the piss now}
Deana:           I didn't think you guys could hear me I was talking to Adam
Lydia:           what you said () talking about things that are kind of
            →    disgusting
*part of the interaction omitted*
Lydia:      →    {[louder] cause you've never cooked for this many people
            →    it's disrespectful at the table}
Deana:           == {[high pitch] why start an argument over it why couldn't
                 you just say Deana
[…]
```

What is particularly interesting in this extract is that it starts with Deana jocularly targeting Adam for pointing out her bad table manners. The fact that Deana mentions the word *period* produces a double-edged effect among the housemates. Adam, who is a direct target here, expresses his surprise but takes it humorously. However, Lydia, sitting at the other end of the table, chooses her cooking and herself as a target and, as a result, takes obvious offence to the topic of conversation. Lydia's frustration generates a loud argument where she publicly accuses Deana of being 'disrespectful after [she's] cooked all this meal', which clearly indicates that Lydia ascribes a new meaning, as well as an additional target, to Deana's comment (for accusations and offence, see Haugh & Sinkeviciute, 2018). This way, the topic of conversation – the period – occasions offence being taken at a personal level.

7.3 Summary

Even though there is a tendency among the speakers of English to laugh or, more frequently, merely laugh off jocular but potentially face-threatening verbal behaviour, it is also clear that there is a borderline between what can be considered as a joke and what goes too far. In this chapter, I attempted to see what issues generate negative evaluations of jocular verbal behaviours in a specific community of practice – the reality game show *Big Brother* 2012 in Australia and the UK.

First, some general issues were observed. They include amusing the third party at the expense of the target, making consecutive jokes about the same person and lacking 'affectionate' delivery. As regards the special issues, while in both cultural contexts associating the target with something negative, breaking 'social norms' and shifting the facts of someone's story are not condoned, it was also possible to observe some differences. Australians seem to take offence more often to issues related to the disruption of social harmony (e.g. someone's exclusion), which, at least in the context of the Australian *Big Brother* series, is seen as one of the most important elements of life in the house. The British housemates, on the other

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hand, are more likely to find comments criticising their personality insulting. Even in situations when their personal belongings or a topic of conversation are jocularly mocked, the housemates tend to evaluate such comments as targeting their personality or identity.

Finally, more future research should be done in order to explore the reasons behind one's taking offence to jocularity in different contexts. The results presented in this chapter are based on the housemates' interactions and perceptions thereof in a particular community of practice, i.e. reality television discourse. Interestingly, they will also be seen to significantly correlate with the interviewees' negative evaluations of jocularity in Chapter 8.

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CHAPTER 8

Interviewees' attitudes to jocularity

> While naturally occurring talk and interaction may appear to be more spontaneous, less 'staged' than an interview, this is true only in the sense that such interaction is staged by persons other than an interviewer. Resulting conversations are not necessarily more 'realistic' or 'authentic'. They simply take place in what have been recognised as indigenous settings. (Hostein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 126)

Stepping entirely into the realm of metapragmatic comments, this last empirical chapter examines a variety of perspectives from which the *non-participants*, i.e. the interviewees, choose to assess a potentially jocular and potentially impolite interaction. They provide not only their account of particular verbal situations but also a broader understanding of how one is expected to behave when being a target of a jocular comment. I will start by briefly introducing the notion of *metapragmatics*, especially in relation to jocular verbal behaviour. In the process of analysing the interview data using *NVivo*, quite a number of categories were coded. In Sections 8.2 and 8.3, the analysis will present part of the coded data that focuses on the variability of interviewees' perspectives and its impact on how *funniness* is perceived and conceptualised. Following the analysis and discussion of the main perspectives (the target's, the instigator's and the non-participant's), from which the interviewees tend to evaluate attempts at jocularity, the ways in which *funniness* is conceptualised by the interviewees will be examined. I will focus then on two different episodes from the *Big Brother* series that were shown to the interviewees and their subsequent evaluations of the instigator's comment, the target's reaction as well as their own feelings and reactions. The final section will be dedicated to the interviewees' intracultural and intercultural evaluations of a jocular remark produced by an Australian housemate and a po-faced reaction to it by a British housemate.

8.1 The metapragmatics of jocular verbal behaviours

Although such labels as metalanguage (Jakobson, 1960) and reflexivity (Lucy, 1993), which have been present in the literature for some time now, reveal the essence of *metapragmatics*, the term itself appears to be somewhat new. Nonetheless, it has

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already invited various readings (Caffi, 1994; Verschueren, 2004; Bublitz & Hübler, 2007). In this book, *metapragmatics* is referred to as "the speaker's competence which reflects the judgements of appropriateness on one's own and other people's communicative behavior" (Caffi, 1994, p. 2461). The users of language constantly conceptualise their (linguistic) practices (Verschueren, 1999, p. 195) and "it is in the interplay between usage and social evaluation that much of the social 'work' […] is done" (Jaworski et al., 2004, p. 3). Indeed, people are aware of how they use language and what the expectations of the hearers could be, even if language could undoubtedly be employed ignoring those expectations or breaking communicative rules. The reflexive or metapragmatic awareness is essential in order to be able to understand, describe and explain language use and verbal behaviour, since "like any other form of social action, language use is always *interpreted*" (Verschueren, 2004, p. 59). Thus, it is inevitable that there exists a pragmatics-metapragmatics (or language-metalanguage) relationship, for "[m]etacommunicative and metalinguistic activity takes place at the time to help structure ongoing linguistic activity" (Lucy, 1993, p. 18; Silverstein, 1993; Verschueren, 2004). In other words, metapragmatics offers an emic view and evaluation of pragmatic behaviour.

Needless to say, metapragmatic awareness, i.e. the ability to interpret linguistic behaviour, is not always articulated or is accessible to the researcher (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, p. 258) and should not coincide with the analysts' conceptualisations or perspectives. It manifests itself in various ways, for instance, through indicators such as contextualisation cues, pragmatic markers or metapragmatic commentary (for a more comprehensive list, see Verschueren [2004, p. 61] or Culpeper & Haugh [2014, p. 241]). Descriptive metapragmatic comments are undoubtedly a rich source of "assessments of the communicative status and meaning of the described speech events" (Verschueren, 2004, p. 64), since they provide valuable information about participants' attitudinal and emotional evaluations in interaction.

As we saw in 2.2.3, a number of studies have focused on the metapragmatics of (im)politeness, but such verbal practices as teasing, banter or mockery "have arguably only been addressed in passing from an emic, cultural insider's perspective" (Haugh, 2017b). Although there have been but a few studies that deal with the lay terms for those potentially jocular behaviours and other types of mixed messages, e.g. irony or sarcasm (Taylor, 2015a; 2015b; see also Culpeper et al., 2017; Dynel, 2017), they are essential if we want to understand the relationship between such phenomena and evaluations of (im)politeness (Culpeper et al., 2017). Some corpus-assisted analyses have focused on how ironic and sarcastic behaviour is evaluated. For instance, as Barbe's (1995) analysis of "explicit irony" markers ("isn't it ironic?") shows, "an additional semantic feature *coincidence* may appear" (Barbe, 1995, p. 132). Simpson's (2011) work reveals that the users of language show an elaborate understanding of the degree of irony and a variety of evaluative stances

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("heavy irony", "bitter irony", "delicious irony"). Furthermore, concentrating on the adjectives *ironic* and *sarcastic* in English and Italian and on verbal behaviours that these terms describe, Taylor (2015a; 2015b) investigates whether these lay terms correlate with the analyst's notion of mock politeness. She argues that *sarcasm* should not be equated with mock politeness, even if it can be the realisation thereof, and provides cross-cultural metalinguistic evidence that *irony* (in English) and *ironico* (in Italian) are conceptualised differently (Taylor, 2015a; 2016).

Work on the conceptualisation of jocular verbal behaviours like teasing and "taking the piss/mickey" in interview narratives has looked at how humour can be central to the construction of identities (Plester & Sayers, 2007; McCann et al., 2010). For instance, examining the role jocular verbal behaviours play in claims to identity as well as in the attribution of identity to others via their interactional behaviour, Sinkeviciute (in press) explores the ways in which collective, individual and situated identities are ascribed to various humorous practices. Metapragmatic research also indicates that even though jocular practices are commonly regarded as non-serious, they can still be used to show criticism or disapproval of some sort (Partington, 2008; Olivieri, 2003; see also Sinkeviciute, 2013; 2017b; 2017c). In the case of attempted humour, especially canned jokes, metalinguistic evaluations, such as "that's not very funny", "what the hell kind of joke is that" (Bell, 2009b, pp. 1828–1829) or "I'm so confused", "are you kidding me, this is stupid" and "is this a real joke or just a joke to make me feel dumb?" (Bell, 2013, pp. 181–182, 184) clearly indicate that the humour failed and was not appreciated. Finally, recent studies of "just kidding/joking" (Skalicky et al., 2015; Haugh, 2016; 2017b) provide empirical evidence that such claims to non-serious intent not only help protect the speakers from a possible negative reaction (Skalicky et al., 2015), but can also function as offence-blocking mechanisms, since taking oneself too seriously is negatively valued among the speakers of some varieties of English (Haugh, 2016; 2017b). In order to illustrate how one's jocular behaviour can be labelled and negotiated via metapragmatic comments, consider an example from the American television sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*. In this episode, Debra (Ray's wife), who is well-known for not being a good cook, has finally made a very tasty dish that everyone in her family has been praising. Her husband's friend Andy comes by and she wants him to try it too, but he does his best to avoid it because Raymond (the husband) has been making jokes about Debra's bad cooking. Andy finally tries it:

(152)

Andy: [stares at Debra in shock] run away with me
Debra: {[happy and smiling] really? you like it}
Andy: {[eating] oh my god it's fantastic (..)
mmm Debra I don't know what Ray's talking about
Debra: what do you mean talking about?

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```
Andy:      {[keeps eating] nothing he was just trying to be
       →   funny at work
Debra: →   funny about what? (.) was he making fun of my braciole?
Andy:      [realises that he may have said too much and stops eating]
*part of the conversation omitted*
Debra:     Andy what did he say about the braciole?
Andy:  →   I did not find it funny
Debra:     ANDY
Andy:      {[very fast] he said it was Italian for roadkill}
           = please don't hurt me =
Debra:     = [extremely surprised] = roadkill?
Andy:  →   he was just kidding around like he always does
Debra: →   {[frustrated] he always does this?}
```

(*Everybody Loves Raymond*, season 4, episode 18 "Debra makes something good")

In this extract, even though we have no access to Raymond's exact wording, Andy's comments point to his reconstruction and conceptualisation of Raymond's verbal behaviour, i.e. him 'trying to be funny at work'. Interestingly enough, Debra immediately associates 'funny' with 'making fun of' her cooking, thus indicating that the most salient interpretation of Raymond's jocular comments is that of impoliteness accompanied by negative emotions. When Andy realises that he has revealed too much, he decides to protect himself and claims that he *did* not evaluate it as 'funny'. Nevertheless, the fact that what Raymond said *was* (meant to be) funny still remains. Desperately trying to help the situation, Andy labels Raymond's constant linguistic behaviour as jocular ('kidding around as he always does'), which, instead of blocking the offence (see Haugh, 2016; 2017b), makes it even worse. Thanks to Andy's metapragmatic comments, Debra realises that her husband (who later claims he 'love[s] [her] braciole and [he is] not lying today') has been making fun of her in front of other people.

This illustration and a brief overview of some research conducted in the area of the metapragmatics of conversational humour shows that it is undoubtedly a field that deserves further exploration, to which this chapter aspires to contribute.

8.2 Different perspectives in the interviewees' evaluations

The analysis of qualitative interviews in this chapter reveals that it is possible to differentiate between three main perspectives that the interviewees opt for while evaluating the potentially jocular episodes shown to them: the target's, the instigator's and the non-participant's. Moreover, the understanding and conceptualisation

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of 'funniness' (see 8.3) seem to shift as well, depending on the perspective from which the situation is judged.

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the interviewees were not explicitly asked to provide their evaluations from different perspectives. Rather, they spontaneously referred to how a jocular verbal act could be understood and evaluated from various points of view while providing their answers to the questions in Table 9. Thus, this also means that most of those points of view could only be grasped after the analysis of longer stretches of discourse. Interestingly enough, the interviewees tended to change their perspectives, shifting from that of the instigator to that of the target within several moments, without thinking that they were inconsistent in their evaluation (see also Currie & Ichino, 2013). This nicely points to the ability of individuals to have access to different points of view at the time of speaking when evaluating (jocular) comments, even though only one perspective can be chosen to be foregrounded. Some interviewees also explicitly showed their awareness of the presence of various participants who can evaluate a verbal act. Consider the following example:

(153)
Alicia (AU): probably to him he probably thinks it's a great comment erm but not on the receiving end at all and from a third person point of view it's not not a joke to other people

(154)
Interviewer: was it humorous?
Ben (AU): […] as to watch (.) or if I was an observer of that conversation? yes because she's probably gonna snap and that'll be hilarious too [haha]

Providing her opinion on a jocular remark, Alicia first looks at it from the instigator's point of view, claiming that 'he probably thinks it's a great comment'. Then after a moment of hesitation, she starts interpreting it from the target's perspective, which seems to be a total opposite, i.e. not a great comment. Finally, she introduces 'a third person point of view' (understood by the interviewees as a present observer or a non-participant) claiming that what was said is 'not a joke to other people'. Importantly, in (154), Ben makes a further distinction between possible ratified hearers. After being asked if he found the behaviour from a video fragment humorous, Ben wants to clarify whether he should evaluate it from the viewer's (i.e. a non-participant's) or an observer's (technically, the third party's) point of view. He then immediately decides to give his opinion (from probably both perspectives that seem to collide here), suggesting that seeing the target 'snap' would 'be hilarious too' (see also Dynel, 2013a).

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While providing their evaluative metapragmatic comments, most interviewees, however, tended to concentrate on the instigator's or the target's perspectives, while sometimes also combining them. In any jocularly intended verbal interaction, it would be fair to say that the instigator is a participant who means something jocular or at least pretends s/he intends it as such, while the target is primarily the person at whom the jocular comment (whether (c)overtly critical or offensive) is directed. Thus, it is not surprising that the interpretations of the interviewees tend to be more positive if they look at a jocular situation from the instigator's point of view, but more or even extremely negative if they are more likely to evaluate it from the target's perspective or imagining themselves as the target thereof.

8.2.1 From the target's point of view

Consider the following interview extracts that illustrate the target's (or target-to-be) perspective:[82]

(155)

Colleen (AU): if somebody is opening up to you about their weight […] someone who's having an intimate discussion about their weight you don't you don't use erm backhand humour at that moment […] I think it's insensitive

(156)

Alicia (AU): that was so inappropriate for the situation (.) (was) bad I would not react well if I was her

It is clear that Colleen in (155) focuses on the target and her emotional state, pointing to the fact that she was opening up about her weight. This moment seems to be crucial and was mentioned by a number of Australian interviewees, namely, if a person moves from the 'default' joking mode and reveals his/her emotions, it should be an indication that humour should be postponed, especially if it is 'backhand humour' that can be seen as a dig at someone's confidence. Similarly, Alicia in (156) evaluating the same situation, not only labels the instigator's behaviour as inappropriate, which is done from the target's point of view, but also makes her claim stronger and more personal by revealing that she 'would not react well' if she was the target.

---

82. It should be pointed out that this section does not aim to present evidence of clear differentiation between Australian and British cultural contexts via the interviewees' metapragmatic comments. Thus, for instance, the examples of the target's perspective provided from the Australian interview data are not in any way indicative of any tendency among Australians to evaluate jocular behaviour from the target's perspective, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

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8.2.2 From the instigator's point of view

Secondly, the interviewees also evaluate the jocular situations shown to them from the instigator's point of view. Doing that, they try to justify the instigator's verbal actions or at least imagine what the reason behind jocularity could be. Consider the following examples:

(157)
Andrew (UK): well in his eyes it was obviously appropriate […] their relationship is at the stage where he can […] they can […] joke about each other

(158)
Matt (UK): {[laughing] it might be something I would say} […] it's a bit of banter […] not irritate someone but trying (.) get a rise of them for fun

In (157) Andrew clearly decides to evaluate a jocular comment from the instigator's perspective. While suggesting that it was 'appropriate', the interviewee adds that the nature of the relationship between the instigator and the target (they have known each other for quite some time) allows for jocular behaviour without it being perceived as offensive. In (158), Matt tries to defend the instigator in case his potentially jocular but impolite comment would be interpreted as offensive, and labels it as 'banter' that is not meant to 'irritate someone'. The interviewee's choice of perspective seems to be conditioned by his understanding that 'it might be something I would say'. This suggests that, referring to the instigator's verbal behaviour as jocular, the interviewee primarily defends himself as an instigator-to-be. Similar to Alicia's opinion from the target-to-be perspective in (156), this points to the interviewees' ability to imagine whose role they would perform in a similar situation, which, undoubtedly, has a significant impact on the evaluations they provide.

8.2.3 From the non-participant's point of view

Finally, in very rare cases the interviewees show that they look at the situation from the non-participant's point of view. This is mainly done when they do not want to choose the instigator's or the target's perspective and try to justify their own jocular reaction (e.g. (165)) or their hesitation in evaluating the comment.

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(159)

Ray (UK): I have a different sort of opinion when I'm a third party I mean observe than I would have as a participant because I don't have to erm take myself seriously or not seriously cause I'm just judging the situation

In (159), Ray explicitly dissociates himself from both the instigator and especially the target, claiming that since he is an external observer, his situation is different. This shows his understanding of how the evaluations of the same potentially verbal behaviour can vary depending on who judges the situation. Interestingly, in his explanation, Ray refers to the cultural proscription against taking oneself too seriously that, according to him, is a very important element that plays an essential part in the target's evaluation of something jocular and his/her subsequent reaction (Goddard, 2009; Haugh, 2010a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012).

8.3 Funny$_{p}$ vs funny$_{n\text{-}p}$

The three perspectives illustrated in 8.2 have the influence on the conceptualisation of *funniness* as well. Although humour and funniness are sometimes considered synonymous (e.g. Carrell, 1997, p. 176), as mentioned in 5.2.2, the term *funniness* better captures various degrees of appreciation of humour (Dynel, 2012a, p. 84). A distinction between two types of 'funny' the interviewees refer to has been made: 'funny' from the point of view of the participants, i.e. the target (or more rarely, the instigator) – *funny*$_{p}$ –, and 'funny' from the non-participant's perspective – *funny*$_{n\text{-}p}$. The evaluative adjective *funny* is frequently used by the interviewees, and without analysing longer stretches of discourse (here the interview data) it would be quite impossible to observe, for instance, how and whether at all 'funny' mentioned as an evaluation of someone's behaviour refers only to the non-participants' perception, but not to the actual utterance generating positive feelings and appreciation of humorous attempt.

First, let's have a look at how 'funny' is conceptualised by the interviewees from the participants' perspective, i.e. either the instigator's or the target's. In general, from the analysis, it appears that when 'funny' is mentioned in the context of the instigator meaning his/her jocular comment to be funny, it is not intended to offend the target, but rather to be enjoyed and laughed at. Similarly, if the interviewee mentions that the target finds a jocular remark funny, s/he suggests that the target does not take offence to it, can enjoy it and it can easily produce laughter. It should be pointed out, however, that laughter is not an indication of the appreciation of an attempt at humour (e.g. fake laughter, Bell, 2009a), but if

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a jocular remark *is* appreciated, i.e. the target can see the funny side and most probably enjoy it, laughter is likely to be present (cf. work on laughter carrying negative assessment in non-humorous interactions Clift, 2012; 2016; Holt, 2012). Now consider the following examples:

(160)

Dale (AU): that is something I'd find reasonably funny
if it was me doing it because it's their stating (.)
the obvious and that's like oh yeah ok [laughs]
[…]
he's trying to be humorous and lighten the
mood I think that's sort of where I think that
comment was aimed at was just taking the obvious
and making a joke on it and not trying- not meaning
to be offensive or anything just to be a little bit
→ funny

(161)

Deborah (UK): I can see him making a joke and thinking
→ it's a funny joke and I can see her like laughing
→ and be like hey yeah that's funny but [hehe]
{[smile voice] you know you're kind of making fun of
me} [hehe] […]

In (160), Dale evaluates a jocular comment from the instigator's (-to-be) point of view. First, he refers to the episode he has seen as 'reasonably funny if it was [him] doing it' and then suggests that the instigator is 'trying to be humorous and lighten the mood' as well as 'not meaning to be offensive' and 'a little bit funny'. Interestingly enough, when Dale (but also other interviewees in their interviews, e.g. in (158)) claims that a remark was not meant to be offensive, at the same time his metapragmatic comment points to a potentially offensive nature of jocular verbal acts, which, however, should not be seen as salient, but rather priority should be given to 'the funny side'. In (161), Deborah first presents the instigator's perspective, which is similar to Dale's, and later turns to the target's point of view, namely, conceptualising a message behind the target's laughter, which shows a more complex side of the target's perception and reaction. It refers to the target seeing the funny side, while at the same time realising that the instigator is 'making fun of' her (see the example in 8.1). In other words, even if the target can enjoy a joke, s/he can still be aware of covert criticism that, however, should not stop the target from appreciating a jocular comment.

A more straightforward conceptualisation of 'funny' is from the non-participant's perspective – $funny_{n\text{-}p}$. It mainly refers to a jocular comment being enjoyable and worth laughing at. While, as has been mentioned, the target's laughter can be

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easily seen as fake (see Subsection 5.2.1), the interviewees, not being related to the episodes themselves, do not seem to have a reason or need to conceal their enjoyment that mostly manifests itself through laughter or smile voice. This tendency of the interviewees to immediately associate 'funniness' with laughter demonstrates that even though laughter can be used for different purposes in interaction, it is still "the most common, overt indicator of the presence of humor" (Glenn & Holt, 2013, p. 2; Holt, 2013). This can be seen in (162) where Christine provides her metalinguistic description of her own evaluations ('it made me laugh'). Similarly, in (163), Darren not only claims 'it's quite funny', but is also laughing while thinking of the instigator's jocular comment. Furthermore, when asked why he found it funny, the interviewee merely refers to the comment (that he himself 'would've said') making him 'laugh'. This also correlates with a tendency to defend the point of view of the participant (whether the instigator or the target), especially if the interviewee is aware of him/herself behaving in a similar way (e.g. (158)).

(162)

```
Christine (AU):   it made me laugh when I saw it but if someone
                  said it to me I wouldn't let it go
```

(163)

```
Darren (UK): →  yeah [haha] {[laughing] it's quite funny actually}
Interviewer:    why
Darren (UK): →  {[laughing] I don't know it just makes me laugh}
             →  […] I thought it was quite funny actually I
                would've said the same thing
```

Finally, probably the best way to see the difference between the two conceptualisations of 'funny' is when the interviewees refer to both $funny_{p}$ and $funny_{n\text{-}p}$. This is perfectly illustrated in the following examples:

(164)

```
Kylie (AU): →   [laughs] [hahahahaha] that was funny […]
            →   I'd probably laugh and just pretend I thought it was
            →   funny but probably deep down I'm just going
                you bitch
```

(165) After the video has been shown:

```
Michele (UK):   [laughs]
                […]
Interviewer:  → do you find it funny?
Michele (UK):   no I would find it hard to laugh at that
Interviewer:    you were laughing
Michele (UK): → no yeah I'm laughing because I'm not sitting
                there
```

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While immediately after the instigator's jocular comment, Kylie in (164) burst into laughter saying 'that was funny' (*funny*$_{n\text{-}p}$), when asked how she would react as a target, the interviewee revealed a different type of 'funny'. In this case, she claims that she would 'probably laugh and pretend [she] thought it was funny' (*funny*$_{p}$). Interestingly, after being asked whether she found the jocular behaviour shown to her funny, Michele in (165) interprets the situation as well as the reference to 'funny' from the participant's, in this case, the target's point of view, which also explains non-consistency between her immediate reaction, i.e. laughter, and her claim to the contrary later. Thus, similar to Kylie in (164), Michele makes a clear distinction between her laughter as a non-participant ('I'm laughing because I'm not sitting there') and as the target ('I would find it hard to laugh at that'). This once again shows a direct relationship between *funny*$_{n\text{-}p}$ and laugher and the lack of this connection in the case of *funny*$_{p}$. Most importantly, this also refers to the concept of 'the preferred reaction' as a most valued response to a jocular but potentially offensive behaviour directed at someone, discussed in 5.2.1.

8.4 Tendencies in interviewees' evaluations of jocularity and impoliteness in the *Big Brother* houses

This section presents two different situations shown to the interviewees. The main purpose here is to explore general tendencies in the interviewees' evaluations of jocular episodes as well as similarities and differences between how the housemates – the instigator, the target and/or the third party – and the interviewees evaluate the same jocular situations.

The following subsections illustrate two different interactional scenarios from the *Big Brother* houses in terms of (i) cultural contexts involved (whether Australian or British), (ii) the number of participants present (whether two-party or multi-party interactions), and (iii) the reactions that are explicitly projected in the video fragments (negative and positive). While the first one in 8.4.1 concentrates on a two-party interaction from the Australian house, Subsection 8.4.2 shows how meanings are negotiated in multi-party interaction from the British house. Each of these interactions has been assessed by the interviewees, and in this chapter, four types of results will be examined: (i) the interviewees' opinion on the instigator's comment, (ii) the interviewees' evaluation of the target's reaction, (iii) the interviewees' feelings if they were the target, and (iv) the interviewees' reaction if they were the target. As will be seen from the analysis, sometimes it is possible to observe how evaluations of the target's reaction and the interviewees' own reactions could be influenced by the target's reaction itself. In other words, since in the beginning of each fragment the interviewees were exposed to the instigator's

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comment and judged the situation with only this information being available to them, their evaluations could sometimes shift or be re-negotiated depending on the target's reaction and whether they found it reasonable (see, in particular, 8.4.2.4). Furthermore, for the purposes of this study (see also 5.2 and Chapter 6), it was essential to differentiate between the interviewee's potential backstage feelings and their frontstage reactions. Interestingly enough, the former posed some issues for the majority of the interviewees, since after hearing the question 'How would you feel if someone said something like that to you?', they tended to indicate their verbal or non-verbal reactions and not to reveal their feelings (see (203)). This immediate unwillingness to focus on emotions found during the interviews could be explained by the preference of speakers of Australian and British English not to show their emotions in public, but rather to keep the frontstage façade for the purposes of a non-conflictive communicative situations (see Chapter 5).

Unlike most other sections that presented detailed analyses of a number of extracts from *Big Brother*, examining the interview data, this section primarily serves to illustrate the variability of patterns and preferences in the interviewees' evaluations of the potentially jocular behaviour in the episodes from the *Big Brother* houses. Thus, in order to try to observe those tendencies, quite a large number of examples will be encountered in the following pages.

8.4.1 Two-party Australian interaction: "The treadmill"

The first interaction is a conversation between two Australian housemates, Zoe and Ben. It is day 77, which means that the housemates have spent almost three months in the house and have formed bonds. Zoe and Ben consider each other friends. Prior to this interaction, during a task, Michael and other housemates found out that Zoe really liked Michael. She did not expect that footage to be shown and is still reeling after the task. She reveals how she feels to Ben while talking to him in the backyard. Ben tries to convince her that no one thought it was embarrassing, but rather endearing. Zoe, sitting on a treadmill, continues with a reference to her appearance:

(166) Day 77 (AU)

Zoe: you know what now I think about it and I've put
it in context and taken a deep breath and I've
listened to you I'm not worried about my
appearance I'm not because I'm happy with who I am
I sorted it out I worked it out I'm happy like yeah I could lose a
little bit of () my weight
but who couldn't you know everyone could lose a shit of kilo or two
(.) whatever

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```
Ben: →  {[smiling] it's probably a good thing considering
        that you are just sitting on the treadmill and not
        running on it [he] [points at Zoe]
Zoe: →  [looks down] {[looking up laughing] shut up come on}
Ben:    = [laughs] =
Zoe: →  = [hehehe] =
Ben:    {[laughing] what were you gonna say}
Zoe: →  {[laughing] shut up (.) I hate you}
Ben:    [hehe]
```

Ben's jocular comment towards Zoe could definitely be seen as potentially offensive, since Zoe is not a very slim girl and does not spend much time exercising. What Ben does is use the fact that Zoe is sitting on the treadmill as a basis for his attempt at humour. Also, it is possible to label his behaviour as taking the piss out of Zoe, who complains about the embarrassing situation in which she found herself, but does not seem to be doing anything to change it (see 5.1.3). Ben might want to point this out to her and chooses to do it in a jocular way. It is interesting to observe that in this two-party situation with no other housemates being ratified hearers, Zoe, after a moment of looking down (as if slightly embarrassed), immediately looks up and starts laughing, which seems to indicate the recognition of the humour of her sitting on a treadmill and talking about losing weight. However, while acting in a humorous frame, she also implicitly lets Ben know that what he said might be at least a bit hurtful ('shut up, I hate you'). Yet, it is accompanied by a lot of laughter and visible amusement for both parties.

8.4.1.1 *Evaluations of the instigator's comment*

Table 20. Overview of the interviewees' evaluations of the instigator's comment

Instigator's comment	Potentially offensive/inappropriate/rude
	Justified: (i) triggered by the target's behaviour; (ii) based on the fact; (iii) avoidance of sensitive topic
	Appropriate if close relationships
	Australian-like
	Inappropriate because of a taboo topic – female weight (male interviewees)
	Situation-inappropriate (AU†*‡)

† In Tables 20–27, AU or UK stands for the situations where particular evaluations were encountered only among the Australian or British interviewees.

‡ In Tables 20–27, the symbol '*' indicates that evaluations were presented by the majority of the interviewees (in general, Australian or the British).

In this subsection, evaluations of Ben's jocular comment by the Australian and British interviewees are presented (for an overview, see Table 20). What is important to mention here is that this jocular episode was the third one to be watched by the interviewees after they had already seen two other video fragments where

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the target's and the third party's reactions were negative. Taking this tendency into consideration, some interviewees seemed to expect yet another negative reaction, thus their evaluations of the comment could be influenced by it. Whether because of this or not, a majority of the interviewees point out the potentially offensive nature of the remark, but also refer to the presence of jocularity. Consider the following examples:

(167)
Darren (UK): this is humorous but […] a vicious dig
at what she looks like […] quite an underhand
comment

(168)
Dale (AU): it's a little bit harsh
but it's also (meant) as a bit of a joke
at the same time so it's probably acceptable

(169)
Alistair (UK): I would say his comment is is inappropriate
→ it's it's not to say it's not funny
→ but it's inappropriate because the chances
of someone reacting negatively to that
and making them feel bad outweighs the potential
(.) potential laugh that you'd get over yeah erm
it's a type- it's humour by attacking some-
by somebody seeing them being attacked
which is not particularly sophisticated

(170)
Deborah (UK): [hahahaha] {[laughing] that's really funny but it's
→ really mean} […] {[smile voice] serious heart to
heart with him} […] {[laughing] he is just mocking
her for not exercising}

(171)
Christine (AU): {[smile voice] oh my god that is rude that's
just outrageous (.) oh my god that's terrible}

From the examples, we can clearly see how the evaluations are conceptualised in terms of jocularity and impoliteness. While labelling Ben's comment as 'a vicious dig', 'a little bit harsh', 'inappropriate', 'mean' and even 'outrageous', the interviewees in one way or another also admit that it is 'humorous', 'funny' and is meant as 'a joke', which, as Dale puts it, makes it 'probably acceptable'. Alistair's explanation in (169) is of particular importance, since not only does he refer to Ben's jocular behaviour as 'humour by attacking' someone (cf. (141)), but also draws a line between appropriateness and potential funniness. According to him, a verbal act

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becomes inappropriate when 'the chances of someone reacting negatively to that and making them feel bad outweigh the potential […] laugh that you would get'. Finally, Deborah in (170) and Christine in (171) negatively evaluate the instigator's comment, but seem to be amused from the non-participant's point of view, i.e. it is possible to hear their smile voice and even laughter.

Those who do not immediately condemn Ben's attempt at jocularity, indicate that it is not what he said but rather the situation that made it inappropriate.

(172)

Alicia (AU): erm that was so inappropriate for the situation […] she seemed to be getting pretty emotionally erm vulnerable and deep about it and then he just made a joke about it

(173)

Amanda (AU): [giggles] oh that's a bit funny {[giggling] harsh but a little bit funny}
[…]
yeah yeah but I don't know if erm she was
→ clearly upset so it probably wasn't good timing but it was a bit funny

(174)

Colleen (AU): → in the context of how she was speaking (.) to him he's responded in a way that is (.) on a totally different level to how she was communicating I think he's got a cruel streak

(175)

Stephen (UK): […] it's not necessarily the best timing […] he's again trying to diffuse that situation with humour […] he's trying to cheer her up […]

Even though part of both the Australian and British interviewees suggest that Ben is 'trying to cheer […] up' Zoe, the majority of those who referred to him choosing 'bad timing' are the former. In their interpretations, the interviewed Australians concentrate on the fact that at that moment Zoe was 'vulnerable', 'upset' and 'emotional', which means that Ben's changing the frame from the serious one to the humorous one is 'on a totally different level'. This shift in an interaction in which someone opens up appears to be an element that makes the comment situation-inappropriate (see also (215)).

Furthermore, some interviewees try to justify Ben's jocular behaviour by either concentrating on the level of friendship between the instigator and the target ((176), (177)), claiming that what he said was obvious or the truth ((178)–(180)), accusing Zoe of moaning ((181) and (182)), or suggesting that the comment

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allows Ben to avoid an uncomfortable situation ((183) and (184)). Consider the following examples:

(176)
Benjamin (AU): I think it was appropriate (.) I'm assuming that he knows her well enough to understand that she'll take it as a joke erm otherwise they wouldn't have been having this deep and meaningful- […]

(177)
Deborah (UK): {[laughing] they have that relationship but if not that's so harsh} […]

Both Benjamin and Deborah mention that Ben's comment can be seen as appropriate 'assuming that he knows [Zoe] well enough' and knows how she could take it and what her potential reaction could be. Otherwise, the comment would immediately be classified as 'so harsh' and be placed on the negative side of the continuum. This particularly emphasises the importance of the mutual background knowledge and relationship history that, according to the interviewees, plays an important role in the extent to which jocularity might be allowed (see Tragesser & Lippman, 2005).

(178)
Benjamin (AU): what he said wasn't about her appearance that was just the fact that she's sitting on the treadmill at the time of talking about it

(179)
Peter (AU): he's probably just being ironic you know she's sitting on a treadmill not not doing any exercise and then talking about her weight

(180)
Kylie (AU): he's just being catty (.) but like I said it's just I mean she's there talking about her weight sitting on a treadmill gold you know how can you resist that (.) so {[smile voice] I don't blame him}

Furthermore, what Benjamin, Peter, Kylie as well as quite a number of the interviewees notice about the instigator's comment is that Ben constructs his jocular remark on the basis of 'the fact' ((178)), i.e. Zoe is indeed 'talking about her weight sitting on a treadmill' ((180)). Thus, Kylie, being rather amused herself, claims that

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she '[doesn't] blame [Ben]', since this situation is 'gold' and it would be difficult for someone like herself to 'resist' making a comment.

(181)

```
Michele (UK): → [laughs] [haha] he's he's very insensitive given
                that the girl was obviously quite upset
                {[laughing] about her weight} [hahahaha]
                but I would say in that situation day 77
                he's probably heard it so often she is
                probably very insecure and self-conscious
                about it so there's always the comment
                where he's going the same as I would
              → think don't whinge about it […]
```

(182)

```
Danielle (UK):  he's just joking around making
                it a bit-trying to make it like a funny situation
                instead of her just like moaning about her weight
```

In addition, while Michele thinks that Ben is 'very insensitive' and Danielle refers to his comments as 'joking around', they both see Zoe's behaviour as 'moaning' or 'whinge[ing]'. According to them, it becomes a valid reason for Ben to jocularly stop Zoe's complaining and engage in a 'funny situation' instead (e.g. 'taking the piss'). It should be mentioned that Michele's laughter should not be seen as an indication of her appreciation of Ben's comment, but rather as her reaction to the situation from the non-participant's point of view (for more evidence, see (165)).

(183)

```
Matt (UK)          (…) erm (..) well they're obviously close
                   […] he is reacting in a way (..) that someone
                   would react if they were feeling awkward about
                 → the topic of conversation […] so he's making a joke (..)
                   she seems pretty (.) down about the stuff so maybe the joke
                   isn't that appropriate but I think […] his way of coping
                 → […] he's reacting with humour to kind of help him feel
                   more comfortable in a situation
```

(184)

```
Michael (B)(AU):   […] he's trying- he's aware there's an emotional
                 → moment going on he's feeling a bit uncomfortable
                   and is trying to use humour as a way of
                 → distancing himself from that
```

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Finally, Matt and Michael (B)[83] see Ben 'feeling awkward' and 'uncomfortable' about Zoe being emotional. Thus, his decision to enter the humorous frame is primarily used 'as a way of distancing himself from that' and 'coping' with the situation.

On the other hand, some interviewees immediately claim that any negative comment about a female's weight or in general her appearance can be a dangerous topic:

(185)

```
Michael (B)(AU):  it's more joking around with the woman
                  about her weight or her appearance
                  can be very very socially dangerous
```

(186)

```
Michael (M)(AU): → it's still harsh like a woman's weight is is
                   a really (tricky) subject to talk about (.)
                 → so you just can't come in and punch her
                   in the guts like this (.) that's pretty
                   harsh
```

(187)

```
Alistair (UK):  → [laughs] again there's a British thing
                  erm you don't make comments about wo- especially
                → woman's weight specially woman's weight
                  woman's age weight don't even go there
                → because you're gonna get yourself into
                  trouble and- no matter how good-natured
                  the remark can be or funny it could be
                → the person is most likely to take offence
                  so {[louder] don't do it}
```

It is interesting to observe how the male interviewees conceptualise taboo topics, in this case, a woman's weight and appearance, that can be 'very very socially dangerous'. According to Michael (M), for instance, negatively implying that a woman should lose weight equals to 'punch[ing] her in the guts'. Alistair goes further and suggests that not mentioning a 'woman's age [or] weight' is 'a British thing'. He believes that it is a taboo topic in a British cultural context and people know that if they 'go there', they are 'gonna get […] into trouble […] no matter how good-natured the remark can be or funny'. Importantly, no female interviewee claimed this vulnerable position to herself, thus, no criticism of the instigator's comment has been levelled because of this.

Finally, similar to Alistair's mentioning in (187) that the British would not generally make such a comment, some interviewees suggested that Ben's (who is

83. Michael (B) also suggested that, among other things, Ben could be seen as 'being a bit bitchy'.

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Australian) behaviour could as well be 'an Australian thing' or at least something that would be recognised as one of the typical interactional practices in an Australian cultural context (for more intracultural and intercultural evaluations, see 8.5).

(188)

```
Jon (UK):        → […] but that's more of an Australian thing
                   I think
Interviewer:       Brits wouldn't say that
Jon (UK):        → only if you really knew someone really well and
                   you were quite funny anyway not all people would
                   think to make a joke like that
```

(189)

```
Christine (AU):    she's already she's kind of given him
                   permission in a way because she's just said I don't
                   care (..) and and in a way I suppose he is
                 → testing that he says oh well well if you don't
                   care what about this thing and he's waiting
                   to see if she'll drown (.) I think he's being
                 → very provocative
Interviewer:       something Aussies would do?
Christine (AU):    a lot of people would do it yeah I think
                 → I think that is quite Aussie
```

Jon, who has spent some time working and travelling in Australia, seems confident that Ben's jocular comment reflects Australian interactional behaviour. When asked whether the British would behave the same way, he does not claim they would not, but adds, similar to the interviewees in (176) and (177), that it would only happen if the two people 'knew [each other] really well'. Interestingly, Christine, who was very critical of Ben's comment in (171) (see also her negative reaction in (228)), seems to be looking at the situation from the instigator's point of view. According to her, the target has 'given [Ben] permission' saying that she did not care about the issue, which Ben used in order to test Zoe's reaction and 'to see if she'll drown'. This type of provocative behaviour, Christine thinks, 'is quite Aussie' and could be characteristic of 'a lot of people' in an Australian cultural context (see Peter Abbott's quote in 3.2.1).

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8.4.1.2 *Evaluations of the target's reaction*

Table 21. Overview of interviewees' evaluations of the target's reaction

Target's (positive) reaction	Not genuine (frontstage reaction)
	Influenced by close relationships
	Adhering to 'not taking yourself too seriously' (AU)

Since video fragment (166) presents the target's positive reaction that suggests that Zoe could see the funny side of the situation, it is understandable that the interviewees could not be expected to condemn such a reaction (for an overview, see Table 21). However, because during the interview the previous fragments portrayed negative reactions, the interviewees might have thought that the same pattern would be followed in this fragment as well. Thus, some of them appear relieved and even express a surprise at Zoe's reaction:

(190)

Kylie (AU): [laughs] she reacted really well I have
→ even more respect for her
[…]
she took it really well she took it I guess as
→ an Australian would usually [laughs] do you know
like () I'm gonna kill you later or
whatever erm you know but still taking
it very well the thing is how I feel
towards her having that reaction is just
like this chick's actually quite cool
cause you know I like her (.) didn't have
any feeling about her towards just her
well reaction to that probably my percentage
of my opinion of her probably went up
→ by a 100 per cent so cause she took it really well
and found a humour in it

(191)

Alicia (AU): → {[smile voice] well I'm so put off} [hahahaha]
→ that's weird that's weird they must a really
good relationship
[…]
→ I'm surprised she took it
really well cause it looked like she's about
to cry before [hahaha] I'm really surprised
→ by her reaction but I'm glad [haha] I'm happy
for them [hahaha]

What is essential in Kylie's comments in (190) is how she starts identifying the target as part of an Australian cultural context ('she took it I guess as an Australian

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would'). Also, Zoe's positive reaction made Kylie 'have even more respect for her' and her opinion of Zoe 'went up a 100 per cent'. All these positive feelings that Kylie shares were occasioned by Zoe who 'took [Ben's jocular behaviour] really well and found a humour in it', which shows how important it is not to project that one has taken offence to jocularity in an Australian cultural context. Alicia, on the other hand, is really nonplussed by Zoe's reaction, which could be explained by the interviewee's critical view on the comment (see (172)). Apparently, she expected a totally different reaction, since she believes that 'it looked like [Zoe]'s about to cry'. Her claim that she is 'so put off' is said in a smile voice and also immediately produces laughter, as if she would realise that, since the target does not show that she took offence, many other people might not have been offended as well, which suggests that what Alicia offers is not a common opinion (see (92)). This can also be seen at the end of (191), where, after having labelled the target's reaction as 'weird', Alicia decides to express her joy for Ben and Zoe, saying that she is 'happy for them' and their 'good relationship'.

Indeed, many interviewees understand that Zoe projects a laughing reaction since she and Ben are close friends in the house, and since she can see that Ben is right about the situation.

(192)

```
Benjamin (AU):    good it shows that they've got a level of
                →  friendship where they would understand that
                   that wasn't a nasty comment he's trying to make
                   he's just trying he's trying to make light
                   of the situation that's how I read it anyway
                   and it looks like that's how she took it
```

(193)

```
Dale (AU):        she saw the funny side of it {[smile voice]
                   she- the shut up is more like} like shut up for
                →  pointing out the obvious than than that was rude
                   it was just more like that's funny and damn
                   you for saying that kind of thing (.)
                   erm so yeah I think she took it pretty much how
                   I would
```

(194)

```
Matt (UK):      →  […] they know each other […] obviously what
                   she expected […] she found it funny
                   […]
                →  […] a warm feeling […]
                   when someone makes a comment that you recognise
                →  to be (..) something that is true about you […]
```

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In (192), Benjamin explains that 'a level of friendship' that Ben and Zoe have allows her to 'understand that that wasn't a nasty comment' and that Ben is 'trying to make light of the situation'. In (193), Dale appreciates that the target 'saw the funny side' and draws attention to Zoe's verbal response – 'shut up' – saying that it does not refer to Ben's comment being 'rude' but to Ben 'pointing out the obvious'. Similarly, in (194), Matt alludes to Ben knowing Zoe really well and his jocular comment being something 'what she expected'. Importantly, Matt also suggests that 'when someone makes a comment that you recognise to be something that is true about you', it produces 'a warm feeling', which Zoe must have felt and, thus could find the comment not offensive but rather 'funny'.

Several Australian interviewees referred to the cultural proscription against taking oneself (and a situation) too seriously. Alicia, who is surprised by Zoe's reaction in (191), tries to explain why Zoe did not take offence to Ben's comment. She suggests that maybe '[Zoe] realised that she was taking herself too seriously' that, as described in 5.1.3, could easily produce the jocular interactive practice of taking the piss out of that person. According to Alicia, Zoe must have understood that and is willing to laugh at herself. Amanda in (196) also mentions the importance of not taking a situation 'too seriously'. She suggests that even if recognising that the other person is 'right', the target should still be able to just have 'a little laugh'.

(195)

```
Alicia (AU):     maybe because she realised that she was
            →    taking herself too seriously and his
                 comment even though it seemed to
                 be really appropriate erm inappropriate
                 it lightened up the situation and she sort of
                 saw that she was like ok why not let's laugh
                 I'm taking myself way too seriously that kind
                 of feeling I think
```

(196)

```
Amanda (AU):     ok that's good she just reacted like I think
                 he wasn't so serious about it but you
            →    know she didn't take it too seriously
                 you know had a little laugh like ok like
                 you know you're right but that's fine
```

On the other hand, a number of the interviewees also believe that Zoe's reaction is not genuine and she could possibly be or actually is hurt. Indeed, while Danielle in (197) and Darren (198) suggest that despite a 'light-hearted' reaction Zoe could have 'taken a little bit offence' or 'been a bit hurt by it', Christine in (199) and Clare in (200) appear to be certain that 'she was really cut' and 'a bit shocked', which, however, does not stop her from 'react[ing] lightly […] on the surface'. Basing their

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opinions on the episodes they have seen, the interviewees seem to recognise interactional patterns in different settings (frontstage vs backstage). Thus, this suggests that they feel that they know how the participants in those situations might feel and, apart from sharing their views on the situations themselves, the interviewees also tried to reconstruct some missing pieces or even construct a new reality that would be pertinent to those interactional patterns of which they are aware.

(197)
Danielle (UK): yeah ok that's good […] that's the way I think
she should've reacted just like light-hearted
[…]
she has probably taken a little bit offence to it […]

(198)
Darren (UK): she laughed at it but I think deep down she might
have been a bit (.) hurt by it […]

(199)
Christine (AU): I think she was really (cut) and laughed
to try and cover it up
[…]
it's easier than showing that it hurt

(200)
Clare (AU): I think she's a bit shocked you know
I think she's a bit taken aback and I think
she's kind of just trying to react lightly
now on the surface but I think you know I think
it has cut a bit deep

As was suggested in 5.2 and, especially, in Chapter 6, there is a clear difference between interactional patterns preferred frontstage as opposed to backstage in the *Big Brother* house. Here, consider the following examples in which the interviewees reveal such a difference between the target's projected frontstage reaction and her real backstage feelings:

(201)
Colleen (AU): Zoe's reaction I would imagine is how Zoe
→ often reacts when people make jokes about
her weight or her lack of exercise it's
→ a defence mechanism she will laugh but inside
→ probably feel very hurt and embarrassed
→ so it's an outward behaviour but it doesn't
it doesn't depict what she is feeling inside
there's a disconnect between how she is
→ outwardly behaving and how she is inwardly
feeling

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(202)

```
Peter (AU):     well her reaction was kind of I think that
             →  she was maybe a little bit (hurt) but
             →  she's laughing it off pretending
             →  that doesn't bother her while it really
                does
                […]
                I guess maybe cause they're friends
                and erm yes she didn't wanna seem that she
                was too sensitive I guess
Interviewer:    why wouldn't she want to seem like that?
Peter (AU):     we::ll it's to seem to like to seem to be
             →  too sensitive it's not really an attractive
                trait
```

Basing her opinion on the video fragment watched, Colleen in (201) presents her understanding of 'how Zoe often reacts when people make jokes about her weight'. The interviewee sees the target's laughter as primarily 'a defence mechanism' that, as an example of 'an outward behaviour', hides 'what she is feeling inside', i.e. being 'very hurt and embarrassed'. Peter, while also mentioning that Zoe only laughs off the comment 'pretending that [it] doesn't bother her', suggests that the reason behind it is that the target 'didn't wanna seem […] too sensitive', which does not seem to be 'an attractive trait' in an Australian cultural context (see also 5.2.1).

8.4.1.3 *Interviewees' feelings*

Table 22. Overview of interviewees' feelings if they were the target of the comment

Interviewees' feelings	Negative (upset, hurt, offended)
	Not offended, but not amused
	Negative, personal (UK)
	Negative, but acceptable and useful (AU)
	Friends – not offensive (UK*)
	Strangers – offensive (UK*)

Similar to the frontstage and backstage behaviour analysed in the *Big Brother* houses (see Chapter 6), it is possible to observe how the interviewees exhibit the same behavioural patterns. In this subsection, backstage feelings are explored (for an overview, see Table 22). It should be mentioned that, answering the question about how they would feel if someone said something similar to them, almost every interviewee (after every fragment) immediately refer to their reaction, rather than feelings. It should not be surprising, since, as Alvesson (2011, p. 21) points out, "it is sometimes easier to report on […] one's behaviour than to describe feelings, cognition and personal experiences". For instance,

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(203)

```
Interviewer:   how would you feel?
Simrad (UK):   if they were all mates yeah I'd just laugh
```

Indeed, even if many interviewees claim that they would laugh (see 8.4.1.4), as the results in this section show, some of their feelings appear to be more on the negative side. But first, let's look at some more positive feelings that the interviewees claim for themselves, especially if a similar jocular remark were produced by a friend.

(204)

```
Ashley (UK):     yeah I mean it depends who it came from if it's
             →   from a complete stranger someone I don't know very
                 well then maybe I would take offence but erm if
             →   it's just a friend you know things things get said
                 like that all the time
```

(205)

```
Matt (UK):   →   if you're close to someone and they make a joke
                 like that then maybe that's fine […] a casual
                 conversation […] so I probably wouldn't find
                 it offensive
```

Both Ashley and Matt make a distinction between friends and strangers. If the comment was produced by the former, then it could be 'fine' and not perceived as 'offensive', since such 'things get said […] all the time'. However, if 'a complete stranger' would make such a jocular remark, there is a good chance that the target 'would take offence' to it. This is in line with what Tragesser and Lippman (2005) hold, namely that if people have close relationships, then more jocularity could be allowed due to a low degree of social distance.

Furthermore, although half of the interviewees from each cultural context claim that they would not be offended if they heard Ben's comment directed at them, it is too precipitate to suggest that they would feel good about the comment. Consider the following examples:

(206)

```
Dale (AU):       erm (…) in that circumstance that's
                 that's a fairly funny comment and I'm generally
             →   (.) pretty good with seeing the funnier side of comments
                 like that so I'd probably have a little bit of giggle and take
             →   it then just not take it as offensive but just funny
```

(207)

```
Darren (UK):     […] I'd take it as a joke because I appreciate
                 friends' honesty […] I personally wouldn't be
                 offended by it […]
```

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(208)

```
Michele (UK): →  I don't let it totally get to me
                 but that's because I'm not insecure
                 […]
                 for me it wouldn't bother me because like I
                 say I'm not in that position
```

(209)

```
Benjamin (AU):   if I was having a deep and meaningful () someone
                 said something about my weight or appearance
              →  or something () I'd recognise it they're just
                 making a flipping () remark trying to you know
                 lighten the situation
```

Even though in all the extracts above interviewees claim that they would recognise that the comment was made to 'lighten the situation' and, thus would be able to see the funny side of it, there seems to be a difference between enjoying a comment and being able to find it funny and, consequently, take no offence to it. None of the interviewees in the examples above referred to the comment as being positive in itself. Instead, what can be observed is a systematic mentioning of such words as 'offensive', 'offended' or 'wouldn't bother', which strongly suggests that the comment could primarily be seen as offensive and bothering, but due to the situational and cultural expectations it is reconceptualised as primarily not possessing those negative features.

The other half of the interviewees, however, explicitly pointed out that the instigator's comment would make them upset, hurt or angry.

(210)

```
Rachel (AU):     […] I'd be upset […] I would be upset in private […]
```

(211)

```
Damian (UK):     […] I would be saddened […] I would feel slightly offended […]
```

(212)

```
Clare (AU):      I think if I was her in that situation it was me
                 erm erm and again you know maybe it's {[smile voice]
                 just be being sensitive} but I would take it
                 to heart […]
```

From the extracts it is possible to see that taking the role of the target, the interviewees would feel 'upset', 'saddened', 'slightly offended' or 'would take it to heart'. It is important to emphasise that Rachel in (210) explicitly draws attention to

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the fact that she would be upset but 'in private', i.e. backstage,[84] which shows the interviewee's understanding that there is a difference between what one feels and what one projects in front of other people. Interestingly, Clare seems to be trying to justify her negative emotions, namely, suggesting that 'being sensitive' might be her personality trait and not a general tendency (see also (94)). Furthermore, quite a number of interviewees not only mention how they would feel but also try to explain why they would feel that way. Consider several examples below:

(213)

Nancy (UK): I think even if a good friend said it to me
I would take it personally (..) I wouldn't think
[…] that was funny […]

(214)

Ray (UK): […] if that was sort of erm an example of his
general behaviour then I would be quite upset
and I would think he is a bit of a dick ()
Interviewer: why wouldn't you enjoy it?
Ray (UK): → erm because it's personal (…) erm so I
think I think humour about the world in general
is a good thing very good thing and humour
when you're the best of friends and you've
known each other for a long time is a great
thing erm but humour for its own sake when
→ it comes of the expense of somebody that's
not a good thing so () is not () ()
because it tends to work on a personal level
so there's always a scapegoat and I don't
I don't like anything that's a scapegoat

(215)

Alicia (AU): I'd feel pretty crap about myself and I'd
probably wanna get really angry at other
person because if I was getting emotionally
→ sort of bear with someone and they're
making jokes that are negative I wouldn't
→ react well () you're not taking me seriously
probably {[smile voice] swear () go off}
I would not take it well
[…]
→ yeah we like to () of Australians like to
obviously not take ourselves too seriously

84. Mentioning her frontstage reaction, Rachel said that she would act as Zoe – 'laughing on the outside'.

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→ but when we do it means a lot cause we
don't do it a lot so it's sort of special
() when you {[lower voice] open up
to someone} and blah blah blah so
for someone to be joking when you're
doing it with someone is not appropriate
→ at all it'd probably end a relationship

Both Nancy in (213) and Ray in (214) clearly state that their negative feelings towards the comment would be occasioned by them thinking that 'it's personal'. Furthermore, Nancy is the only interviewee who claims that she 'would take it personally' and would not think 'that was funny' even if 'a good friend said it to [her]'. Ray in his explanation makes an essential distinction between humour directed at someone and humour between friends or 'humour about the world in general' (see also (61) and (62); Glenn, 2003). While the latter is a 'great thing', the former 'tends to work on a personal level' and would not be appreciated (however, see (248)–(251)). In (215), Alicia, who says that the comment would make her 'feel pretty crap about [herself]', offers a more drastic and culture-oriented perspective. She mentions that 'Australians like to obviously not take [themselves] too seriously', but then holds that in those cases when they do, it becomes 'sort of special' and not a laughing matter. If they are jocular in such situations, Alicia believes that 'it'd probably end a relationship'.

Finally, even if not liking the comment, some (mainly Australian) interviewees still manage to appreciate the remark recognising its usefulness. Consider the following examples:

(216)

Amanda (AU): yeah I mean personally I'd laugh with them
because I appreciate when someone is
→ taking the piss out of me and probably
→ for a good reason you know if I'm doing
something stupid

(217)

Kylie (AU): erm ok I have been in that situation
erm (.) exactly so like (.) […]
you're sort of you're annoyed
→ you're kind of annoyed at them but you're
→ also thankful in a way because whenever
there's been a situation when someone
like pointed out the obvious as mu- as
annoyed as I can be with them at that
point in time that's also been fuel for
→ me to fix whatever the crap () anyone

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can make that comment to me you know what
I mean it's sort of like it's not life
→ crashing it's something she should already be
aware of and erm and it's just you know
→ I wouldn't like it but I'd appreciate it so

It is interesting to see how Amanda's and Kylie's explanations are in line with Australian cultural and interactional preferences discussed in 5.1.3. Amanda explicitly points out that she 'appreciate[s] when someone is taking the piss out of [her]', since it most probably indicates that she is 'doing something stupid'. Furthermore, in (217) Kylie shares her personal weight-related experience, where she felt 'annoyed' at those who made a comment, but also 'thankful', since they 'pointed out the obvious' and it could function as 'fuel […] to fix' the situation. Thus, even though she 'wouldn't like [the comment]', she would still 'appreciate it'. Along the same lines, in Zoe's case, what Ben pointed out is probably not something which Zoe is not 'aware' of, which means that it should not be seen as a 'life crashing' verbal act.

All the examples in this subsection focused on the interviewees' feelings. The following subsection, on the other hand, will illustrate what kind of frontstage reaction they would project.

8.4.1.4 *Interviewees' reaction*

Table 23. Overview of interviewees' reaction if they were the target of the comment

Interviewees' reaction	Laugh (off) *
	Claim offence
	Ignore (UK*)

Indeed, a clear distinction between the interviewees' claimed feelings and their subsequent reactions if they were the target could be observed (for an overview, see Table 23). While half of the interviewees express their negative emotions towards the jocular comment in (166), almost all them in both datasets claim that they would react the same way Zoe, the target, did, i.e. laugh at the remark or laugh it off.

(218)
Simrad (UK): I'd laugh definitely I would not take any
offence to that

(219)
Dale (AU): pretty much exactly the same pretty much
shut up and laugh erm yeah that's pretty much
it she reacted exactly how I would

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While Simrad in (218) and Dale (219) claim that they would laugh, Darren in (220) and Kylie in (221) mention that they would also say something back, whether '[having] a bit of a dig' or 'mak[ing] some derogatory comment back' in order to, in their turn, 'have a jab' at the instigator.

(220)

```
Darren (UK):    […] {[smile voice] I probably would've laughed}
                […] just have a laugh […] I would've had a
                bit of a dig […]
```

(221)

```
Kylie (AU)      […] it's sort of like
                I'd probably just go oh yeah [hahaha]
                and just you know (..) erm so and
             →  probably make some derogatory comment
                back kind of thing sort of to just have
             →  have a jab at him that kind of thing
                but yeah she took it very well probably
                better than I would take it
```

It could also be noticed that in a number of instances, the interviewees openly admit that they would not publicly reveal their personal negative feelings generated by the comment. Consider the following examples:

(222)

```
Michele (UK):    erm I'd probably respond the same I don't know that
                 I would presume I would respond the same cause you
              →  wouldn't admit that you took offence to it that
                 you're insecure about it
```

(223)

```
Clare (AU):      I would laugh it off at the time and then
              →  I would probably just go away and go all that
                 you know that kind of hurt
```

(224)

```
David (UK):      (…) (..) be- she has behaved in a way that
            →    I would and I hate about myself in that I would
                 love [clicks his fingers] to snap and smack
                 the fucker but what she's doing and that's
                 what I do I go oh ok () when really I should
            →    I should've (cracked) it I should react quicker
                 and more aggressively to that cause he is he is
                 just a horrible man
                 […]
            →    she is probably being culturally
                 programmed to not immediately become angry
```

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and smack the bastard because wouldn't you
just love to make him lose teeth

(225)

Colleen (AU): well I hope I would have the confidence
to say I find that hurtful please don't joke
about my weight that way

Michele and Clare acknowledge that they would feel 'hurt'. However, they 'wouldn't admit [to the instigator] that [they] took offence to it', but rather project the preferred reaction, i.e. to laugh off the jocular comment. David in (224), even though also pointing out that Zoe's reaction resembles his own, regrets it and emotionally suggests that he 'should react quicker and more aggressively' to such remarks. In addition, he also thinks that the targets who offer a laughing (off) reaction are 'probably being culturally programmed to not immediately become angry', which clearly shows his reflection on his own (British) as well as an Australian cultural context. A similar struggle between personal feelings and societal expectations is seen in (225), where Colleen confesses that she 'hope[s] [she] would have the confidence' to confront the instigator, since most probably that is not the way she usually reacts.

Furthermore, some of the interviewees said that they might opt out for ignoring the comment ((226) and (227)) and only a few interviewees showed consistency with their negative feelings and claimed that they would react negatively, explicitly trying to show that they were hurt ((228) and (229)).

(226)

Nancy (UK): I'd probably just go alright and then just
move on

(227)

Ray (UK): […] be similar or I would I would move on
change a conversation to something else

(228)

Christine (AU): → I'd tell him to fuck off
[…]
{[smile voice] well I'd say who who do you
think you are} you know who are you to
give you know a comment you know (..) what
you know what made you so perfect or
something like that

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(229)

Damian (UK): […] {[smile voice] my reaction won't be good I actually would be honest} erm offended yeah and I'd make that (.) quite clear […] let's not talk about it any more […]

It is interesting to observe that even though both Christine and Damian claim that they would refute the jocular comment by explicitly claiming offence (e.g. telling the instigator 'to fuck off'), part of their discourse is produced with a smile voice. This, definitely, does not suggest that they present a fake opinion. The reason behind it could be them imagining how it would look in public and, since it is not the preferred interactional practice, it could produce unexpected surprise laughter from other hearers (see 3.4). Also, it could be the case that what the interviewees present here is their desired reaction rather than the reaction that they would actually show.

Finally, some interviewees could not give one answer and provided different response scenarios, mainly related to the degree of relationship between the instigator and the target ((230) and (231)) or depending on their personal or interactional goals ((232) and (233)). This can also indicate both cultural and individual variability of possible reactions.

(230)

Michael (B)(AU): if a friend of mine did that I'd probably laugh as well

(231)

Alicia (AU):
→ erm if I was in their type of relationship from what I've seen I would probably laugh
→ if if was kind of good relationship and we've like really bonded erm I'd probably laugh make a joke of it come back to the seriousness later
→ on it erm but if I didn't really know that person too well and I was like emotionally opening up to them and they said something like that and I was really () about what I say I
→ wouldn't react well I'd probably just walk away end the conversation and never speak again […]

Michael (B) and Alicia conclude that if the participants in a jocular episode have 'really bonded' and already have a good relationship (being friends or close to each other), then they would 'probably laugh'. On the other hand, as Alicia puts it, she 'wouldn't react well', but rather 'probably just walk away, end the conversation and never speak again' to the instigator. Here, interestingly, Alicia presents a more situation-specific evaluation than what was seen in (215).

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(232)

```
Michael (M)(AU):     (.) like I said before if I wanted to
                     deal with it (.) I'd I'd go what do you
                     see what do you see you know (.) what
                  →  what what are you seeing that I'm
                     not seeing (.) erm but if I didn't wanna
                     deal with it {smile voice] yeah yeah right
                  →  yeah good idea} (.) and I would laugh it off
                     too if I didn't wanna deal with it
```

(233)

```
Hannah (AU):         (..) we::ll it would depend what I wanted if I just
                   → wanted to not talk about it I'd probably laugh
                   → (..) if I wanted to hurt his feelings too
                     I'd say oh well you know (.) guess it's like
                     it's like how you're not reading books
                     to improve your dumbness or whatever that's
                   → stupid but it would just depend on what I wanted
                     to to convey and I guess if he was a really close
                     friend I () actually that hurts my feelings
                   → but would be in a context of like close friends
                     where you could (.) could say that
```

Michael (M) in (232) offers a scenario where his reaction would depend on whether or not he 'want[ed] to deal with [the issue]'. If it was important to him, then, he says, he would confront the instigator. Otherwise, he could just 'laugh it off'. Similarly, Hannah in (233) would laugh if she was not willing to 'talk about' the issue. However, if she wanted to show that she took offence and, in her turn, 'hurt [the instigator's] feelings', she would try to be a bit jocular and witty, for example, saying 'it's like how you're not reading books to improve your dumbness'. Finally, Hannah also suggests that if that was 'a really close friend' who made the comment, she would reveal that 'that hurts [her] feelings', because according to her, it could be said 'in a context of […] close friends'.

This subsection illustrated the interviewees' views on a two-party interaction from the Australian *Big Brother* 2012 series that showed the target's laughing reaction to a jocular comment. The next subsection will concentrate on a multi-party interaction from the British house and on how the interviewees evaluate it when they see a different situation with a negative response from the target.

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8.4.2 Multi-party British interaction: "McDonald's on the pyramid"

This subsection will present one of the most controversial episodes, a multi-party interaction from the British *Big Brother* house. It was already used in an analysis in 7.2.1.3, but for the reader's convenience, it is repeated here in full:

(234) Day 51 (UK)
The housemates are outside. Luke S mentions that he wants to see the pyramids to which Sara (a Scottish housemate) says that she has seen them and that there is a McDonald's next to one. Some housemates try to question this claiming that it cannot be very close to the pyramids. Caroline also jumps into the conversation:

```
Caroline: → but Sara you said it was on the pyramids
            *part of the conversation omitted*
Sara:     → Caroline I didn't say they built McDonald's on
            the pyramids
Scott:      but you know = until the early twenties-=
Caroline:                = I thought it was on it=
Sara:       well I didn't say that
Caroline: → I thought they had a a Burger King there's a
            fast food sort of like arcade of fast food joint
Scott:      [haha]
Caroline:   () not?
Scott:      {[giggling] on the side of the pyramids}
Caroline: → not on it (.) like when you get to the top and
            they built a shopping arcade
Scott:      {[smile voice] right balance on top}
Caroline:   well yeah that's what I thought that's what
            I thought
Sara:     → {[sharply] what because of what I said that's what you
            thought Caroline}
Scott:      [giggles]
Caroline: → {[smiling] yeah I thought you were getting
            yourself a cheeseburger on the top of the
            pyramid}
Sara:     → {[louder] I didn't say I didn't say that McDonalds was
            on the pyramid}
Caroline: → == I know you didn't
Sara:     → {[louder and very sharply] (it was next to them) and actually
          → it upsets me when somebody tries to belittle me like that
            please don't do it to me again () a hundred
            times in here I don't appreciate it}
Caroline:   ok (..) {[laughing] but imagine there was like}
Becky:      () Caroline
```

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```
Caroline: → {[laughing] I'm not taking the piss out of Sara but
            imagine there was a takeaway shop on the pyramid}
            Scott and
Caroline:   = [haha] =
Caroline:   [bursts into laughter again] sorry sorry sorry
Sara:     → {[seriously] I don't take the piss out of anybody I just
            don't understand why you feel the need to belittle
          → people it's not nice at all it makes me feel
            really upset Caroline}
Caroline:   now but imagine if imagine if someone ordered
Sara:       == it's not nice when I'm explaining a story
            and you just like and you're just taking the piss of
            out me
Caroline:   I'm not
Sara:     → == you're supposed to be my friend so why are you
            = doing that =
Caroline:   = I'm not taking the piss out of you = if someone ordered
            a pizza and = they have to climb down =
Sara:                   = yet Caroline but you've done it =
          → so many times that it's just not nice at all it
          → {[sharply] makes me feel horrible makes me feel so
            small it makes me feel really really upset}
Becky:      alright alright Sara just ()
```

It is day 51 and the housemates have known each other for almost two months. They are all in the backyard. Sara, Caroline, Scott and Becky are in close proximity, while the other housemates are several steps away. After Sara mentions an interesting fact about a McDonald's restaurant built next to one of the pyramids, Caroline starts claiming that what Sara actually said is that a McDonald's is on the pyramids. This produces some laughter from the third party (primarily, Scott) as well as the instigator herself, but an extremely negative reaction from the target (for a full discussion of this episode, see 7.2.1.3).

8.4.2.1 *Evaluations of the instigator's comment*

Table 24. Overview of the interviewees' evaluations of the instigator's comment

Instigator's comment	Stupid, not jocular (UK)
	Stupid, but not offensive (AU)
	Taking the piss (personal) (UK)
	Taking the piss (non-personal attack) (AU)
	Justified
	Negative (rude, bullying, belittling) (UK)

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In this situation, no interviewees seem to support Caroline's attempts at jocularity (for an overview, see Table 24). All other evaluations of the instigator's comment can be divided into several categories, ranging from negative to stupid to even justified. Most of the British interviewees, as will be seen in the following examples, are extremely critical of Caroline's remarks and saw nothing particularly humorous about them.[85]

(235)

Ashley (UK): she's sort of taking the mickey out of her
[…]
she probably found it funny in her head […]
I think she's just trying to single her out

(236)

Nancy (UK): […] she's taking the piss out of her really
[…]
the other one is trying to make her feel stupid

(237)

Rowena (UK): […] I don't think her and Sara get on very well […] I think she is almost taking the mickey a bit out of erm Sara […] trying to make her look a bit silly […]

Ashley, Nancy and Rowena describe Caroline's verbal behaviour as taking the mickey out of Sara, more precisely, 'trying to make her look a bit silly' and 'make her feel stupid' (cf. an additional meaning of 'taking the piss' in an Australian cultural context described in 5.1.3; see also (217)). Interestingly, this is exactly how Caroline conceptualises the interactional practice that she claims she does not engage in and of which Sara herself later accuses Caroline. In addition, the British interviewees in (238) – (241) evaluate the instigator's comments even more negatively.

(238)

Matt (UK): → oh she is just a dick (..) honestly
[…]
she's trying to make a joke out of
[…] what Sara was saying […] it was a little
→ bit rude […] she's trying to make a joke out of
it […]

85. Several interviewees did believe that Caroline made attempts at humour, but failed:

Jon (UK): she is trying to be funny but she's not funny

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(239)
Andrew (UK): → I think she's being erm dick
[…]
→ trying to belittle the Scottish housemate
[…] what the Scottish housemate is saying […]

(240)
David (UK): […] she's just trying to put her down
she's trying to be nasty […]

(241)
Stephen (UK): […] over-bullying I would say definitely
[…]
it's crossing the line […] taken a bit too far

Both Matt and Andrew label Caroline as being 'a dick' as well as being 'a little bit rude' (in (238)) and 'trying to belittle the Scottish housemate' (in (239)). David and Stephen go even further, where the former claims that Caroline is 'trying to be nasty' and 'put [Sara] down', while the latter refers to the comments as 'over-bullying' so that they 'cross the line' (cf. (270)).

Another big part of the interviewees primarily thought that Caroline's comments were stupid:

(242)
Alistair (UK): […] I didn't realise that was her attempts
at humour […] I thought she was just being stupid

(243)
Benjamin (AU): erm they are not my humour I mean I don't
particularly see anything funny more silly
really […]

(244)
Peter (AU): […] she is kind of just sort of taking the piss and
just you know erm exaggerating the story erm to make it
sound a lot more sillier- a lot more silly than she was
trying to say

Alistair in (242), for example, states that he 'didn't realise that was [Caroline's] attempts at humour' and suggests that 'she was being stupid'. The same opinion can be observed in Benjamin's comment where he refers to the instigator's comments as not 'funny more silly really'. Peter, similar to the interviewees in (235) – (237), claims that Caroline was 'taking the piss' out of Sara and 'exaggerating the story' in order to deliberately 'make it sound a lot more sillier'. Interestingly enough, some Australian interviewees who labelled Caroline's behaviour as stupid, still do not think it was offensive. Consider the following examples:

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(245)

```
Amanda (AU):      I think she's being a bit of a dick [laughs]
                → I think she tried to make a joke and nobody
                  got the joke so she's being defensive
                  and just being a bit stupid to try and
                  bring herself back up again
                  […]
                → I don't think it was an offensive comment in
                  itself it was just a bit of a pointless comment
                  in my opinion
```

(246)

```
Christine (AU): → […] I mean it wasn't offensive or anything I
                  didn't really get the point
                  […]
                  {[smile voice] oh my goodness that was just
                → so dim} […]
```

(247)

```
Colleen (AU):     […] I didn't see anything offensive about that
                  or dramatic or (..) that reminded me sitting
                  around the dinner table at work […]
```

In (245), Amanda, even though thinking that Caroline is 'being a bit of a dick' and 'stupid', claims that her behaviour is directed towards her own failure in order to amuse the housemates and it reflects her attempt to 'bring herself back up again'. Thus, Amanda does not refer to the instigator's comment as 'offensive' to the target (see also (250)). In the same vein, Christine evaluates the comment as 'dim', but not 'offensive or anything'. Finally, the whole situation reminded Colleen of 'sitting around the dinner table at work', i.e. a casual situation that should not be seen as 'offensive' or 'dramatic'.

Importantly, the Australian interview data reveals that even though Caroline's behaviour was not extremely jocular, what she did should not be conceptualised as a personal attack on Sara. Consider the following examples:

(248)

```
Clare (AU):    […] I don't think there's anything
               inappropriate about it
               […]
               I don't think she's kind of having a go at her
               or anything
```

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(249)

Dale (AU): […] she's just trying to be stupid and make
it funny and see the funny side of it like
→ not like in she was trying to attack Sara or
anything erm but trying to make fun of herself
[…] and then turning that into a joke to sort of
→ take the piss out of herself a little bit […]
it's just her making fun of herself to make
everyone else laugh which then means they'd
possibly forget how stupid she was about
two seconds ago

(250)

Amanda (AU): […] I don't think she was actually directly
taking the piss out of her she was just taking the
piss out of the situation like the thought of
McDonald's sitting on top of the pyramid […]

(251) Imagining her as the instigator and talking to the target:

Kylie (AU): […] I just had that idea
in my head I just thought just the concept
that was so funny I wasn't laughing at you
I was laughing at the concept […]

While Clare does not see the comment as 'inappropriate' or 'having a go at [Sara]', Dale in (249) not only states that Caroline 'was [not] trying to attack Sara', but also claims that it was herself out of whom she was 'tak[ing] the piss' (see also (245)). He mentions that the instigator could 'see the funny side of' her own played stupidity, while at the same time aiming to 'make everyone else laugh' (see also (244)). Similar thoughts can be observed in (250) and (251), where both Amanda and Kylie suggest that Sara was not the target ('I don't think she was actually directly taking the piss out of her' in (250) or 'I wasn't laughing at you' in (251)), but it was rather 'the concept' or 'the situation' that was targetted, i.e. 'the thought of McDonald's sitting on top of the pyramid' (see also (273) and (332); cf. (151)).

Furthermore, some interviewees tried to justify Caroline's making fun of Sara, claiming that the target deserved to be mocked:

(252)

Simrad (UK): {[smile voice] that's funny really sarcastic
that's hilarious}
[…]
it's not appropriate but it's funny still
→ she's winding her up […] cause she said a
stupid comment

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(253)

Clare (AU): […] the story seemed a bit show off
kind of situation originally and the others
were kind of just sort of pulling her down a
peg […]

(254)

Hannah (AU): I think she's winding up the other girl
Interviewer: was it appropriate?
Hannah (AU): {[smile voice] well the other girl was being}
→ a bit like oh well I've seen them they're right
nearby I don't think it's very nice () perhaps
→ it's not appropriate […] like I could see why
she would wanna wind her up

In (252), Simrad refers to Caroline's behaviour as 'sarcastic' and even if 'not appropriate', still 'funny' and even 'hilarious' (most probably, to the third party and non-participants). In addition to that, he accuses Sara of having 'said a stupid comment', which is the reason why Caroline was 'winding her up'. This is in line with a common Australian interactional practice of cutting tall poppies, the reference to which can be observed in (253) and (254) (Peeters 2004a, 2004b). Clare suggests that Sara's story 'seemed a bit show off' and Hannah tries to criticise Sara's behaviour, since she, being the only housemate in that situation who has seen the pyramids, puts herself above the rest of the interactants ('oh well I've seen them they're right nearby'). This behaviour suggesting that Sara is projecting her superior position seems to be the reason for the Australian interviewees to believe that Sara needs to realise that she is not that important. Thus, they 'could see why [Caroline] would wanna wind her up' and 'pull her down a peg' (see the discussion in 7.2.2.3).

Finally, even though the interviewees evaluate particular short situations in the house and most of them only try to judge the situation in context, some still cannot resist making generalisations about Caroline:

(255)

Ray (UK): I would think of Caroline as being somebody
who's quite rude or I'd probably think of
her as somebody who didn't have much in
a way social skills and not really a conversationalist

(256)

Kylie (AU): [laughs for 10 seconds] […] has an amazing
sense of humour {[smile voice] and she's just
loving a fact that she's just digging a hole
digging a hole} […]

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Extracts (255) and (256) show two opposite generalising evaluations of Caroline. Ray seems positive that Caroline is 'somebody who's quite rude' and lacks 'social skills'. Kylie, on the other hand, shows her appreciation of Caroline's 'amazing sense of humour' and how she does not take herself too seriously, i.e. 'she's just digging a hole' for herself, even though realising that the consequences might be quite negative.

8.4.2.2 *Evaluations of the target's reaction*

Table 25. Overview of interviewees' evaluations of the target's reaction

Target's negative reaction	Over-reaction *
	Unreasonable
	Reasonable (UK)
	Non-Australian (AU)

Even though many interviewees evaluate the instigator's comments negatively, not all of those interviewees thought that the target's reaction is reasonable and entirely support her. Those who do, happen to be British:

(257)

David (UK): → I think it's exactly right for somebody who is […] in their early twenties […] I think her reaction was appropriate and I think what she
→ did made the other blond girl look stupid […]
→ she didn't want to be belittled she didn't want other people to think that she was just somebody you can walk over […]

(258)

Ashley (UK): I think she's right […] she showed her character she got of- defensive […]

(259)

Michele (UK): […] {[laughing] I think she's being very very honest} [hehe] I think it's probably built up for a while […] and I agree with everything she said […]

(260)

Una (UK): […] enough is enough […] there's a difference between not taking yourself too seriously and when somebody's just constantly taking the mickey […] makes you feel bad about yourself

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(261)

Damian (UK): → good good for her […] good stand up for yourself
and make a point […] she's not particularly
aggressive there […] or offensive to her
[…]
→ it's quite hard to see the funny side of
someone taking the mickey out of you […]

What all the interviewees in Examples (257) – (261) share is that they tend to agree with Sara's reaction or at least justify it. David entirely supports the target, saying that 'her reaction was appropriate' and even 'made the other blond girl [Caroline] look stupid'. This shows how he looks at what happened from the target's perspective only. Similar to David who also pointed out that Sara had to stand for herself and not let anyone 'think that she was just somebody you can walk over', Ashley, in (258), also believes that 'she's right' and was defending herself. Interestingly enough, what Ashley seemed to be saying first was that Sara became 'of[fensive]', which suggests that even though in this situation supporting her, the interviewee still thought that such a behaviour could be easily labelled as offensive in a different context. Furthermore, Michele, apart from 'agree[ing] with everything [Sara] said', also mentions that her reaction is a result of something that 'probably built up for a while'. Indeed, as has already been mentioned, many *Big Brother* housemates, as well as the interviewees, seem to negatively evaluate continuous jocular behaviour (see (126), (275) and (277)). Also, it is important to notice that while saying that she 'think[s] [Sara's] being very very honest', Michele is laughing. This type of laughter can be characterised as a nervous or surprise laughter (which can also be heard in her voice), which suggests that 'being very very honest' is not something that people display on an everyday basis. Una in (260) also pays attention to continuous joking and claims that 'there's a difference between not taking yourself too seriously and when somebody's just constantly taking the mickey'. This seems to be an important distinction, especially in a British cultural context (see 5.1.3), where the former refers much more to self-deprecatory interactional practices and not being targeted by someone's jocular mockery. Indeed, while Damian approves of Sara's reaction that shows that she can 'stand up for [herself] and make a point', he explicitly claims that it is difficult 'to see the funny side of someone taking the mickey out of you' (cf. (216) from the Australian data).

More interviewees, however, believe that Sara over-reacted. They could be divided into two groups: (i) those who can understand the reasons for such a reaction and seem to appreciate the target's ability to voice her concerns, and (ii) those who merely do not share the target's decision to react negatively. Below are the examples illustrating the answers of those interviewees who suggest that the reaction is exaggerated, but still sympathise with the target.

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(262)

Ray (UK): → erm a bit overdone erm I I I think she should
→ I think she's right to feel a bit offended
[…]
I (..) personally think that she hasn't
→ done us any favours by becoming temperamental
about so if she'd had erm a cooler away of dealing
with it what she said I think is quite right

(263)

Alistair (UK): (..) I don't like it but I kind of have a bit of
sympathy […] I have a little bit of sympathy but
it still completely it's awful to watch it's awful
[…]

(264)

Colleen (AU): → erm it's a strong reaction (…) erm it's
about much more than an immediate exchange
[…] she is catastrophizing she is making
it much worse than what it is having said
→ that you know I understand why she'd be upset
[…]

(265)

Rachel (UK): {[laughing] blimey} (..) erm (..) I mean like good
→ for her for kind of sticking up for herself […]
I think she's () taking the whole thing a bit too
seriously
[…]
→ I think it's a bit over the top
[…]
→ […] she reacted in a very genuine way
[…] not everybody has the confidence to say
that you've upset me […]

(266)

Clare (AU): […] a bit precious you know and a bit sort of
a bit over-reaction […] it's probably a good
thing that she kind of articulates erm that
thing […]

All of the interviewees in the examples above express their negative attitude towards Sara's reaction, stating that it is 'overdone', 'extreme' and that such 'a strong reaction' 'hasn't done us any favours', but rather 'catostrophiz[es]' and makes the situation worse. On the other hand, all of them also express their understanding of why she might have reacted like that. While Ray states that 'she's right to feel a

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bit offended' and Colleen suggests that she 'understand[s] why [Sara'd] be upset', Alistair expresses his sympathy towards Sara's situation, which, as he points out, is 'awful to watch'. This can suggest that in this situation Sara's behaviour does not coincide with Alistair's expectations, and on a personal as well as a societal level (Alistair is Scottish), he is not accustomed to observing such verbal reactions. In (265), Rachel, even though being surprised ('blimey') and pointing out that Sara's reaction is 'a bit over the top', seems to almost admire that 'she reacted in a genuine way', since 'not everybody has the confidence to say that you've upset me' (see also (225)). This line of thinking can be found in (266), where Clare voices her doubts about whether 'articulat[ing]' one's hurt feelings is 'a good thing'. Indeed, although most of the interviewees who can understand Sara's reaction would not react similarly in her place (see 8.4.2.4), they undoubtedly see her honest reaction as something they would like to do, but due to cultural expectations might not dare to.

Apart from those understanding why Sara reacted in a negative way, many interviewees appear to think that her reaction is unreasonable, even if they would not entirely condone Caroline's comments. Consider the following examples:

(267)

```
Ray (UK): → for me she lost out in the situation
            by having a tempter a tantrum about it
          → so you know from a group perspective she's
          → she is she is the victim twice kind of
            because the conversation ruined and
          → she's victimised herself by by () herself
            to be a bit the tantrum ()
```

(268)

```
Christine (AU): → well it's a massive over-reaction I would've
                  thought
                  […]
                → I don't know why you'd feel belittled
                  by that at all that just seemed- that really
                → is surprising to me I mean it's stupid
                  but why did Sara take it about thing about her
                  it's more Caroline had some stupid thought
                  you know like oh yeah whatever but Sara
                  is really erm (..) really got into it
```

(269)

```
Benjamin (AU):    over the top yeah yeah […] it certainly
                  doesn't seem that's how you would react if
                  someone did what the other girl did
```

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(270)

Michael (BB)(AU): → typical middle class boring out of suburbia shitheads […] I hate people who do shit like that in front of everyone […] we get it people put each other down
→ it's how the world works like the world literally works- Big Brother literally only exists because people put each other down because it's funny because when you get
→ put down it allows you to sort of you know spar back with them […]it's the logical fallacy of people to assume that you can't put people down or that putting
→ people down is inherently wrong it's not it allows you () boxing () spar with them […] I hate people like that cause what they have done instead taking the logic of
→ bullying which is any sort of conversation which makes someone feel bad just because you're offended it doesn't mean you're right […]
→ everybody in the room now feels shit like the vibe's gone everyone's like all right how about you just have some fun with the Sc- with that Caroline oh yeah
→ just banter and be a normal human […]

It is interesting to observe that even though in (262) Ray mentions that Sara has the 'right to feel a bit offended' and is 'quite right' in what she said, in (267) he primarily concentrates on evaluating her reaction in a public frontstage situation. Looking at it 'from a group perspective', he suggests that due to her reaction, Sara 'is the victim twice', since 'the conversation is ruined and she's victimised herself [because of] the tantrum' (see (91)). This public display of negative, even though apparently genuine, emotions does not seem to be appreciated, regardless of whether or not the interviewees think that what the target said is right. In addition, Christine and Benjamin do not think that Sara's reaction was reasonable. While the reaction 'is surprising to [Christine]' who cannot understand the reason why Sara would 'feel belittled', Benjamin labels the target's behaviour as 'over the top', adding that taking into consideration the instigator's comments, 'it certainly doesn't seem that's how you would react'. Michael (BB) goes even further and due to Sara's reaction expresses strong feelings towards people like her that he refers to as 'typical middle class boring out of suburbia shitheads'. He especially focuses on the negative side of such a reaction produced 'in front of everyone' and explains why it is wrong to react like that and not to appreciate someone putting you down. Michael (BB) generalises claiming that it is not only in *Big Brother* that 'people put each other down', but 'it's how the world works'. Furthermore, he holds that 'it's funny' from the target's perspective, since 'it allows you to […] spar back with [the instigator]', which apparently is extremely valued by Michael (BB) himself. In

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order to support his opinion even more, he claims that not every putdown 'is inherently wrong' and condemns people who 'tak[e] the logic of bullying' and apply it to such (humorous) putdowns. In doing that, those people believe that if 'you're offended it […] mean[s] you're right', of which Michael (BB) highly disapproves.

Finally, it could be observed how some of the Australian interviewees not only criticise Sara's reaction but also refer to an Australian cultural context and to how the situation could have unravelled there.

(271)

Kylie (AU): the thing is I think it was
→ I'd probably put it down to a cultural difference
perhaps I don't know
[…]
the other one is just erm probably
feeling sensitive for other reasons I wouldn't
see it as a reflection on myself […]

(272)

Michael (B)(AU): […] if she was an Australian I'd say yeah
she her reaction wasn't quite reasonable […]

(273)

Dale (AU): […] a very good example of difference in humour
→ if that if that had been in Aussie because (..)
like the statement erm she doesn't like taking
the piss out of anyone doesn't find it funny
that's the difference in humour is because
→ we're brought up with it here we find that funny
and we don't see any harm in it […]
→ it's just a joke they can take the piss out of
you you can take the piss out of them
[…]
→ if that was in an Australian Big Brother or even
in a group of friends here that would not be an
→ issue that would be something that would be laughed
at and and it's taking the piss in a funny way
erm but because their humour is slightly different
over their they don't find that so funny and they
→ find that offensive instead erm which is which is
why her reaction is probably ov- it's acceptable
there but as far as that reaction here would you'd
→ get looked at a little bit weird it's like you
took that a little bit too seriously kind of
it was a joke lay off a little bit

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Kylie, even though in doubt ('I'd probably'), suggests that Sara's reaction could probably be explained by 'a cultural difference'. She tries to find a valid reason for Sara not to take Caroline's comment jocularly, thinking that she was 'probably feeling sensitive for other reasons', since the comment itself could not have produced such a negative reaction. Kylie, finally, claims that Sara's verbal behaviour is not 'a reflection on [herself]', which suggests that she tries to disassociate herself, as part of a broader understanding of a cultural context, from the target's reaction. Furthermore, Michael (B) suggests that if Sara 'was an Australian' he would think that 'her reaction wasn't quite reasonable'. This way he points out not only that there is a difference between interactional behaviours and expectations in Australian and the UK, but also that he is aware of it and can evaluate such behaviours accordingly. Finally, Dale in (273) presents a rather detailed account of possible differences between the two cultural contexts. First, he claims that Sara's reaction is 'a very good example of difference in humour'. He disapproves of Sara's behaviour, since 'she doesn't like taking the piss out of anyone' and 'doesn't find it funny' when someone else takes the piss out of her, the two practices frequently encountered in Australian social interaction. Dale strongly suggests that this might be the main difference, since Australians are used to perceiving taking the piss out of somebody as 'a joke' and they definitely do not mind the piss being taken out of them (see (216), (217); cf. (260), (261)). Furthermore, he tries to imagine this situation 'in an Australian Big Brother or even in a group of friends', where in both cases it 'would not be an issue', since people would be able to see the funny side of it and laugh. According to Dale, the British, however, 'don't find that so funny and they find that offensive instead', which could make Sara's reaction 'acceptable' in a British cultural context. In an Australian context, on the other hand, she would 'get looked at a little bit weird' and it could be suggested that she should not take herself too seriously and 'lay off a little bit'.

8.4.2.3 *Interviewees' feelings*

Table 26. Overview of interviewees' feelings if they were the target of the comment

Interviewees' feelings	Negative *
	Funny, not offended (AU)

Similar to the interviewees' evaluation of the instigator's comments, their feelings towards Caroline's jocular remarks are primarily negative (for an overview, see Table 26). Consider the examples below:

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(274)
Michael (B)(AU): pissed off actually […]

(275)
Alicia (AU): → oh I'd get really frustrated and annoyed with the person
[…]
→ I'd get very annoyed so it's frustrating because they're not taking you seriously they don't see what you're saying as valid in a way cause it's like
→ oh I just knock you down there oh knocked you down again yeah it'd be so frustrating I'd get really angry actually I think [haha]

(276)
Colleen (AU): […] probably in that situation ignored and slighted I would think it was deliberate

(277)
Michael (M)(AU): […] if they didn't shut up […] I'd feel they didn't respect what I had to say yeah but I wouldn't really worry that much

(278)
Hannah (AU): erm (..) I would be offended and I wouldn't think it was very polite because they're not really listening to my story […] like she was just being quite rude […]

(279)
Andrew (UK): honestly I'd probably shut up and inside fume

(280)
Stephen (UK): you'd feel bad […] you're the focus of the joke there

(281)
Deborah (UK): […] assuming that Caroline's joking […] I would feel quite annoyed like actually quite angry […] they're implying I'm stupid […] that's not what I said […]

As can be observed from (274) – (281), the interviewees' evaluations range from being 'pissed off' to being 'annoyed' and frustrated', 'ignored and slighted' to 'offended' and 'angry'. Alicia in (275), for example, explains that her annoyance and frustration would be caused by the instigator not taking her seriously and

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continuously trying to 'knock [her] down'.[86] The same reference to continuous behaviour can be seen in Michael's (M) discourse, where he mentions that such a behaviour would make him think that the person 'didn't respect what [he] had to say'. In addition to Hanna's evaluation of someone not 'listening to [her] story' as 'rude' and, thus making her feel 'offended', Stephen would 'feel bad' being 'the focus of the joke' (see also (261); cf. (273)) and it would make Andrew 'fume' inside.

Several Australian interviewees, however, suggest that they would not think that Caroline's behaviour is offensive or would find it funny.

(282)

Amanda (AU): […] I just would feel that's a bit dumb but she's a bit if an idiot that would- I don't think I would've taken (.) any big offence or anything or () really upset

(283)

Dale (AU): […] as far as the Macca's bit no I'd just find that funny because yeah that's just {[smile voice] stupid}

(284)

Clare (AU): […] telling a story and they're challenging me about aspects of it I wouldn't be too concerned […]

(285)

Kylie (AU): → I think it's funny I would I would cause you know I've had blond moments […] I just
→ I just think it's funny cause you know I give as good as I get and vice verse so yeah I don't I just like go oh good on you [hehehehe] I'll get you later [hehehe]

What Amanda and Dale concentrate on is the instigator's comment that they label 'dumb' and 'stupid'. These properties of the comment, however, do not make them feel bad (at least that is what they suggest), but rather not offended or 'upset' and even amused. Unlike the interviewees in (275), (276), (277), Clare does not seem to be 'too concerned' if someone would 'challeng[e] her about aspect of [her story]'. Finally, Kylie's discourse illustrates an interesting situation, since she claims that she, as a target, would find the situation 'funny' because she can remember herself as an instigator of similar comments, i.e. having 'had blond moments' and being silly. The fact that in such situations one can 'give as good as [one] get[s]' adds to

86. As could be observed in other examples (see (92), (172)), Alicia seems to be a person who tends to take herself a bit too seriously.

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the funniness to which Kylie refers. This, similar to Michael BB in (270) and Dale in (273), suggests that these Australian interviewees appear to be amused by the fact not only that someone takes the piss out of them, but also that they could mock those people back.

8.4.2.4 *Interviewees' reaction*

Table 27. Overview of interviewees' reaction if they were the target of the comment

Interviewees' reaction	Confront, claim offence
	Avoiding the argument: (i) ignore, (ii) laugh off *
	Retaliate *
	Extend a joke (AU)

Contrary to the majority of the interviewees expressing negative feelings to the instigator's comment if they were the target thereof, their reactions are not unequivocally negative (for an overview, see Table 27). They vary from being similar to Sara's to avoiding an argument to joining in or retaliating what the instigator said. First, consider some examples illustrating the interviewees' negative reactions:

(286)
Alicia (AU): […] I'd probably react in the same way […] probably not as sharp […] but I would defend myself […]

(287)
Ashley (UK): yeah I would've said the same thing

(288)
Damian (UK): […] I would react like that […]

(289)
Michele (UK): […] if someone's interrupting me I just shut up and walk off […] I'll say something derogatory back to let them know I didn't appreciate it

(290)
Darren (UK): […] I would've told her to shut up […] we didn't ask for your input […]

While Alicia, Ashley and Damian merely say that they would react the way Sara did, Michele and Darren would also confront the instigator either with a 'derogatory' comment directed at him/her or explicitly telling him/her 'to shut up', since they 'didn't ask for [his/her] input'. Such reactions would definitely not carry any jocularity in themselves, rather, using at least partially conventionalised

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impoliteness formulae ('shut up'), the interlocutors would intend to attack the instigator of the previous comment in turn (see Culpeper, 2010; 2011).

Another reaction offered by a number of the interviewees would primarily be constructed in order to avoid an argument. This can be done by merely ignoring the instigator's attempts at humour, as (291) and (292) show:

(291)
Benjamin (AU): not like that I'd I'd (..) erm (.) I wouldn't have reacted at all I wouldn't have said anything no

(292)
Stephen (UK): I'd probably leave […]

A more typical response scenario, however, seems to be trying to avoid a public conflict by laughing off the comment or talking to the instigator in private (see 5.1).

(293)
Hannah (AU): […] well if it happened a lot of time probably in a similar way […] I'd potentially hopefully be a bit more reasonable and talk to her in private
→ {[smile voice] rather than in front of this big group people} […] they both look stupid

(294)
Deborah (UK): → I think probably I would've laughed it off earlier than she did so they wouldn't have got to a point they all were taking the piss out of me […] that's a tricky one […] I haven't ever got that like out loud frustrated with someone for taking the piss out of me like this but I felt it so maybe that's why I'm on her side because
→ she's just vocalising what I have wanted to vocalise

Although Hannah in (293) mentions that her reaction would be similar to Sara's, she also hopes that she would 'be a bit more reasonable and talk to [the instigator] in private', which once again points to the frontstage-backstage difference and the preference not to make a scene in public (the preferred reaction; 5.2.1). The same is mentioned by Deborah, who believes that she 'would've laughed it off' but probably earlier in interaction in order to reduce a possibility for Caroline to actually take the piss out of her. What is important in Deborah's discourse is that even though she would not react as Sara did, she is 'on her side because she's just vocalising what [Deborah] ha[s] wanted to vocalise'. This idea is reflected in many other comments made by the interviewees (e.g. see (224), (225), (265)) and is the

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reason why many of them support Sara and even admire her for doing something that they would like to do but probably never do.

Finally, given the preference not to show hurt feelings but to display the appreciation of humour in public, most of the interviewees would try to project a (genuinely) humorous reaction or extend the instigator's jocular comment.

(295)

```
Simrad (UK):    I'd genuinely laugh […]
```

(296)

```
Matt (UK):      for the record I wouldn't react like that
                […]
                it's funny though cause it would irritate me […]
                I wouldn't personally be upset by that […] I'd
                probably make a joke back […]
```

(297)

```
Jon (UK):   →    […] I'd probably go against my rule of erm of
                 not saying anything
                 […]
                 I would actually say something I'd be
            →    challenging them […] and put them in their place
                 [hehe] hopefully in a mildly amusing way […]
Interviewer:     you wouldn't like it but you'd still make a joke (.) why?
Jon (UK):   →    {[slightly smile voice] cause I've been taught not to do that
                 […]
            →    to keep it inside most of the time […]
```

While Simrad stresses that he 'would genuinely laugh', Matt claims that he would 'probably make a joke back'. Interestingly, while watching Sara's reaction, Matt, who quite negatively referred to Caroline's comment (see (238)), immediately points out that 'for the record [he] wouldn't react like that'. This suggests that even if understanding why the target might be hurt, he tries to dissociate from such a drastic reaction himself. Jon's answers are of particular interest, since it is possible to observe how negatively he evaluates the instigator's comment, primarily because in that situation he would 'probably go against [his] rule of […] not saying anything'. This once again refers to the cultural preference not to have an argument in public. Jon then claims that he would 'be challenging' the target, but would do it 'in a mildly amusing way'. After the interviewer's question about why, not appreciating the comment, Jon would still not be explicitly confrontational (as the interviewees in (286)–(290)), he reveals that this is something he has 'been taught not to do'. In other words, if someone has hurt feelings and has been offended, it seems to be known that it is better 'to keep it inside most of the time' (cf. the preferred reaction).

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In addition to the British interviewees' reactions in (295)–(297), some Australian interview participants would primarily extend a joke:

(298)

Ben (AU): I would probably (.) consider which pizza I'd be
getting at the top of the pyramids

(299)

Kylie (AU): I wouldn't look like that [HAHA] I myself I would
I would join in on that […] I'd say () I've
→ been to Burger King at the bottom of the Loch Ness
as well did you hear about that
[…] cause when the conversation gets silly you
just gotta go with it […]

(300)

Dale (AU): generally it's have a laugh and have a crack back
at them like erm (..) so so see the funny side
of what they've said and and then (..) and then
→ have a crack like a whole erm pyramid food […]
you just make a joke out of their stupidity

Ben, for example, would 'consider which pizza [he'd] be getting at the top of the pyramids', while Kylie would suggest that she's 'been to Burger King at the bottom of the Loch Ness'.[87] She explains her choice for such a reaction, saying that 'when the conversation gets silly you just gotta go with it'. Similarly, Dale who generally tends to 'see the funny side' of many potentially jocular behaviours, claims that he would also 'have a crack back', which would serve as taking the piss of the instigator's stupidity, which s/he may recognise and appreciate.

Finally, an important shift in the interviewees' reactions could be observed. Some of them suggest how they would react before having watched Sara's reaction (i.e. when answering the question about their feeling). However, after having been exposed to her verbal behaviour, they seemingly change their mind. Consider the last examples in this subsection:

(301)

Before watching Sara's reaction:
Una (UK): […] it's not gonna make me stand up […]
I don't wanna get into an argument
and I don't wanna blow out of proportion yeah

87. Prior to the interaction about McDonald's being on the pyramid, Sara talked about the Loch Ness monster, of which the interviews were also aware (see the example in the introductory chapter).

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After watching Sara's reaction:
Una (UK): I would've probably reacted the same way
I would've said exactly the same […]

(302)
Before watching Sara's reaction:
Michael (BB)(AU): […] I would react accordingly to bring
it back to the positive by either making them
look good or or finding a fault in what they've said
→ and pointing that out to make them look discredible
or non-credible () discredible is a word yeah to
→ take the credibility away from what they say

After watching Sara's reaction:
Michael (BB)(AU): I'd join in on the joke I would extend
the joke […]

(303)
Before watching Sara's reaction:
Michael (B)(AU): […] upset with that person saying hey I- I was doing
something and you totally derailed the conversation
you get angry a bit about that or you just disengage

After watching Sara's reaction:
Michael (B)(AU): → (…) (…) I'd probably try and continue a joke
a little bit more saying yeah it balanced on top
of the pyramid there yeah like a great () pizza
→ pie erm erm and then try to take it off the
conversation oh yeah anyway anyway forgetting
about that McDonald's is bouncing on top and
then call break that into the story

For Una in (301), who previously to observing Sara's reaction claims that she does not 'wanna get into an argument and […] blow out of proportion', the target's reaction seems to have functioned as an illustration of a possible genuine response and served as permission to suggest that she 'would've probably reacted the same way'. A reverse situation can be seen in (302) and (303). Both Michael (BB) and Michael (B) claim that they would confront the instigator either 'tak[ing] the credibility away from what they say' or saying to the instigator 'hey […] I was doing something and you totally derailed the conversation'. These ideas, however, entirely change after these interviewees watched Sara's reaction. Both Michael (BB) and Michael (B) then reveal that they would 'join in on the joke [and] would extend [it]', which might make it easier to eventually 'take [the topic] off the conversation'. It can be suggested that Sara's reaction presents them with a chance to see how a negative reaction or a confrontation would look like and, contrary to Una, makes

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them change their mind if not about how they would feel, but definitely about how they would react if they were targets.

This section illustrated the interviewees' judgements on a British multi-party interaction that occasioned the target's negative reaction. The next section will be devoted to a mixed (Australian-English) conversation, which gives an opportunity to observe the interviewees' intracultural and intercultural evaluations.

8.5 Multi-party Australian-British interaction: Intracultural and intercultural evaluations

During the interviews, the interviewees not only make comments on jocularity and its evaluation in terms of (im)politeness, but also refer to cultural differences (Sinkeviciute, 2017c). This is particularly observed in the analysis of the interviewees' evaluations of one of the extracts that illustrates how jocular verbal behaviour, precisely jocular abuse or banter – a widespread verbal practice in different varieties of English (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012, p. 1100) – functions as a means to lighten a negative situation (in a seemingly friendly environment) and how differently it can be interpreted by speakers of Australian and British English. In (304), Bradley has just found out that he is nominated for eviction again. George, who is with Bradley in the bathroom, decides to bring up the topic. Layla, a British housemate, is also present.

(304) Day 21 (AU)

```
George:    →    {[smiling] Bradles you bloody nom-nom victim are you}
Bradley:        == yeah
George:    →    == that's all you bloody are
Bradley:   →    {[smiling] but I've got less points than last time}
George:         ()
Layla:          what did you get this time
Bradley:        13 last time I got 16 {[smiling] that could be
                one less person}    = [laughs] =
George:    →                        = {[laughing] one less person
                who hates you ()} =
Bradley:   →    = {[laughing] one less person that absolutely
                hates me} [smiling looks around as if looking for
                those people] =
George:         = [hahaha] =
Layla:     →    {[concerned] no no one hates you}
Bradley:        we're = () =
George:    →    = {[smiling] I hate you} =
Bradley:   →    [points at George and smiles]
Layla:          [seriously] no (.) silly sausage
```

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The extract begins with George claiming that Bradley is a 'bloody nom-nom victim'. It is essential to remind the reader that being nominated is a serious matter in the *Big Brother* house. Not only can it be seen as a personal insult (a lot of housemates start wondering who nominated them and why people dislike them), but it can also have an enormous impact on one's participation in the show and make one lose an opportunity to win the prize money. Thus, at a broader level, George's comment can easily seem to be inappropriate and impolite. However, this tendency to push further and challenge the target might be ascribed to Australian humour. Indeed, as was seen in the previous chapters, this type of jocular behaviour is easily recognised and even encouraged in an Australian cultural context (Goddard, 2006, p. 82) and it is likely to occasion the evaluations of mock impoliteness rather than impoliteness (Haugh, 2010a; Haugh & Bousfield, 2012).

Although the intensifier *bloody* seemingly has more negative connotations in British English, it can also function differently in various Australian speech practices and everyday linguistic behaviour (Wierzbicka, 2002, pp. 1194–1195; Ardington, 2011; Sharp, 2012, p. 334).[88] The non-offensive nature of George's teasing banter can also be clearly observed from Bradley's reaction that suggests that the target evaluates such behaviour as non-impolite rather than impolite. Also, Bradley's interactional behaviour suggests that he does not take himself too seriously and finds the insult humorous.

Furthermore, answering Layla's question about the points he received, Bradley tries to see the positive side of the situation saying that he 'got less [sic] points than last time', which means he was most probably nominated by one less person. This, in turn, functions as another trigger for George and he laughingly suggests that there must be 'one less person who hates [Bradley]'. What seems to be very Australian in this sequence of jocular insults is that Bradley picks up on George's comment and joins in with self-deprecating humour, namely jocularly claiming that there might be indeed people who 'absolutely hate' him. In this situation, this verbal practice should be primarily regarded as bonding and good-natured, since in Australian interactions it is not unusual to show your positive attitude towards someone while saying something potentially offensive (see Goddard, 2006). When Bradley tries to show his suspicion that someone in the room might hate him, he

88. In an Australian cultural context, the word *bloody* "hardly raises an […] eyebrow" (Sharp, 2012, p. 334). In addition, Wierzbicka (2002, pp. 1194–1195) suggests that the "b-word" represents the idea of being "like other people" or a sign of belonging that is valued in Anglo-Australian culture (see also Ardington 2011). This could be especially observed "[w]hen a Prime Minister or a university professor makes a point of using bloody in public discourse", since "[t]he combined use of abstract intellectual vocabulary and of the bloody routine seems at times to send an appeasing message to the "man-in-the-street": 'don't think that because I use words like this I think that I am not someone like other people'" (Wierzbicka 2002, pp. 1194–1195).

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humorously looks around. This jocular mode is interrupted by Layla who decides to avoid a humorous frame and seriously reassures Bradley that 'no one hates [him]'. This non-humorous (and quite po-faced) intervention, however, does not make George withdraw from the jocular remarks and he immediately says that he hates Bradley, which, on the one hand, occasions the target's laughter and, on the other hand, Layla's suggestion ('silly sausage') that Bradley is being silly thinking that someone hates him.

The fact that George's mixed message was not recognised by a non-Australian might be explained by the variability of individual characters, but, also, it should not come as a surprise. As McGregor (in Hirst, 2010, p. 173) puts it, "[…] many Australian jokes […] might shock an outsider as being unforgivably vicious and obscene, whereas an Australian would see its blatant viciousness and obscenity as part of its humour". Undoubtedly, Layla's reaction in this particular situation does not provide sufficient evidence to claim that there is a general tendency among the speakers of British English not to understand Australian jocular insults. However, this is one good example of what might be a difference in the use and especially perception of humour by Australian and British English speakers, which will be touched upon in the following section.

8.5.1 Intracultural evaluations

All the interviewees' evaluations of the jocular interaction in (304) are divided into intracultural (evaluations inside one's own cultural context) and intercultural (evaluations of interactional practices from another cultural context). In this section, the focus is on intracultural evaluations (for an overview, see Table 28). Although it would be too precipitous to claim that the different housemates' reactions seen in (304) could be ascribed to the cultural background and gender of the participants, the interviewees do tend to make references to these issues. In the following subsections, the perspectives of cultural insiders (people born and raised in a particular cultural context and being familiar with interactional behaviours pertinent to that context) and outsiders (people commenting on a cultural context other than their own) are illustrated. First, this section presents the intracultural evaluations of George and Bradley's jocular interaction by the Australian interviewees (8.5.1.1) and Layla's remarks by the British interviewees (8.5.1.2). Then, in 8.5.2, attention is paid to intercultural perceptions, namely, how the British interviewees evaluate the jocular interaction between George and Bradley (8.5.2.1) and what the Australians think of Layla's interactional behaviour (8.5.2.2).

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Table 28. Overview of the interviewees' intracultural evaluations

	Australians about Australians	The British about the British
Behaviour in (304) conceptualised as	'banter', 'taking the piss'; situation- and culture-appropriate	(i) (conditionally) approved; (ii) situation-inappropriate

8.5.1.1 *Australians about Australians*

First, let's have a look at how the Australian interviewees evaluate George's jocular behaviour and Bradley's reaction to it. Consider an extract from an interview with another *Big Brother* participant:

(305)

Michael (BB)(AU): […] to me that's a very good social interaction between- a very Australian social interaction taking the piss erm a little bit of logic behind it erm I think it's erm there's nothing sinister in what anyth- yeah it's good […] it all works pretty well very Australian you taking the piss out of someone […] they are making light of a shit situation which is classic Australian sort of erm banter you know

It is interesting to observe how Michael (BB) insists on the interaction between George and Bradley being 'a very Australian social interaction' and 'classic Australian'. In addition, he also labels such jocular behaviour as 'taking the piss' and 'banter', which seem to be perceived as a bonding rather than an antagonising verbal practice and to immediately trigger the connection between these interactional practices and Australianness. Indeed, no Australian interviewee seem to consider George's behaviour as impolite or putting Bradley down (see, however, (322), (323)).

It was also noticed that evaluating the housemates' behaviours, the interviewees tend to look at them from different perspectives, for example, the instigator's (George's) or the target's (Bradley's). Consider the following examples:

(306)

Colleen (AU): […] I think I would see that as
→ banter nothing more than banter
[…]
I wasn't observing any aggression between
→ the two guys I wasn't observing an intent
to put one person down […] there wasn't
→ a nastiness in a voice […] I just picked up
joking […]

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(307)

Michael (B)(AU): (…) using humour to defuse the situation
[…]
he's stating the obvious (..)
erm so that sort of gives him room social
room to respond in a light-hearted way
[…]
I'd say it's a fairly neutral comment
it's mentioned in a light-hearted way [….]

(308)

Benjamin (AU): erm I think it was appropriate because
you know Bradley joined and takes the piss
out of himself so I guess he's sort of
opening himself up to to a comment […]

We can see that Colleen in (306) and Michael (B) in (307) primarily focus on George's behaviour. Both of them consider the comment 'neutral' and devoid of 'nastiness'. While, similar to Michael (BB) in (305), Colleen labels George's behaviour as 'nothing more than banter' and claims that she 'wasn't observing any aggression between the two guys', Michael (B) adds a social dimension to the jocular remark, i.e. that George provides Bradley with 'social room to respond in a light-hearted way' about the unpleasant situation of him being nominated. Looking at the situation from Bradley's perspective, Benjamin in (308) suggests that it is the target's reaction that points to the appropriateness of the instigator's comment (cf. Fraser, 1990; Eelen, 2001, p. 14). In other words, Bradley's willingness to join in and 'take the piss out of himself' indicates (at least on the surface) that he is not offended and also welcomes such a comment that is likely to be conceptualised as jocular.

Irrespective of the perspective that the Australian interviewees take, a particular tendency can be observed once again, i.e. a number of them concentrate on the situational context of the jocular episode, namely, what George is trying to do is to see the funny side of Bradley's situation. Knowing that Bradley could leave the show, it might indeed seem inappropriate to make jocular comments about the situation. However, in an Australian cultural context, humour can be used as "a reaction to personal misfortune, even personal tragedy" (Goddard 2009: 50), which also manifests itself in the Australian interviewees' evaluations.

(309)

Kylie (AU): I I actually think it's humorous he's making
light of it
[…]
so that he can talk about it it's probably actually

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a good thing cause gives him Bradley the opportunity
just to you know oh yeah you know say what he needs
to say rather people just sort of just tiptoeing
around which I think is much much worse

(310)

Peter (AU): erm I just guess I just guess he's just
being (.) funny (..) about him being nominated
so f- so many times
[…]
it's just one of those- I guess one of those things
when you're just trying to make light of the situation and
using humour to do that maybe to make him feel better

Kylie in (309) holds that George's jocular comment offers Bradley a chance to talk about the situation rather than having people 'tiptoeing around'. Indeed, jocularity can be advantageous for both the instigator, who can voice his/her concerns about the target or the situation, and the target, who can humorously address those concerns without losing face. It seems to provide an opportunity to wrap serious matters in jocularity, thus handling the situation as well as resolving some issues that might not have been resolved in a serious frame. In the same vein, Peter in (310) sees funniness in the situation itself, i.e. Bradley 'being nominated […] so many times', and if Bradley manages to see the funny side as well, it will probably 'make him feel better'. Importantly, this tendency among the Australian interviewees to suggest that it is the situation, rather than the participants, that is being targeted and how it brings social benefits seems to be one of the differences in the conceptualisations of jocularity and its appropriateness in Australian and British cultural contexts.

8.5.1.2 *The British about the British*

While in their intracultural evaluations the Australian interviewees recognise George's jocular comment as situation- and culture-appropriate, the British interviewees are divided in their opinion on their culture-insider's – Layla's – reaction. Their evaluations range from (conditional) approval of Layla's serious intervention ((311), (312)) to negative assessment ((313)–(315)). Consider the following extracts:

(311)

Stephen (UK): […] a bit more in tune with erm with the way
he's really feeling about the situation […]
she's reading between the lines […]

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(312)
Michele (UK): I think it's good that she was trying to reassure him but I wouldn't have done it in front of another bloke cause that's a blocky thing having a bit of a laugh so she's probably embarrassed him more […] she's belittled him in a male's world […]

If Stephen in (311) positively evaluates Layla's ability to 'read between the lines' and react according to how Bradley actually felt, Michele in (312) provides somewhat mixed evaluations. First she shows her appreciation of Layla's reaction ('it's good that she was trying to reassure him'), but then points to gender-specific differences in interaction, namely criticising Layla's reassurance-oriented remark for 'belittl[ing] [Bradley] in a male's world' (for more gender-related comments, see 8.5.2.2). Quite similarly, although not referring to gender roles and behaviours, many British interviewees expressed their negative evaluations of Layla's seriousness.

(313)
Alistair (UK): […] she's actually making it more serious by making it seem oh hate hate is a real thing […]

(314)
Damian (UK): I'm not really sure she read the situation […] I don't think he actually cared that much […] she looks like she's about to take it far too serious […]

(315)
Ashley (UK): I think it brought the mood down a bit I think it made it sound worse than it actually was […]

As can be seen, all the examples above indicate that Layla's behaviour is situation-inappropriate. Alistair in (313) states that Layla's reaction made a jocular 'hate' situation 'a real thing', i.e. as if she had suggested that there indeed were people who really hated Bradley. This can also be observed in Damian's comment, implying that Layla misread the situation (cf. (311)). Similarly, Ashley in (315) mentions that Layla's contribution to the interaction 'brought the mood down' and 'made it sound worse than it actually was'. Interestingly, it might seem that criticising Layla's serious reaction, the British interviewees claim that they recognise non-offensive nature of George's jocularity and unnecessary seriousness on Layla's part. However, when asked about their own potential reactions as the third party,

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only few interviewees suggested that they would join the instigator in banter, with the majority being willing to support Bradley and confront the instigator (see Sinkeviciute, 2016a, Section 7.4.3.4). This clearly shows at least partial inconsistency between the evaluations of verbal behaviours of other people and one's own verbal contributions in the same situation. Furthermore, importantly, unlike in intracultural evaluations by the Australian interviewees, none of the British interviewees commenting on Layla's serious remark attribute it to their cultural context (cf. 8.5.1.1 and 8.5.2). Rather, they claim that jocularity is a highly appreciated interactional behaviour that should be easily recognised and, unlike in Layla's case, appropriately (positively) responded to (see 5.2.1). As Glenn (2003, p. 115) holds, failure to understand a joke or react in a jocular way "may convert a *laughing with* context into a *laughing at*", which is not generally seen as a desirable outcome.

While this section focused on intracultural evaluations of the participants' contributions in the jocular episode in (304), the following section provides an intercultural look at the same situation.

8.5.2 Intercultural evaluations

In this section, I examine the interviewees' intercultural evaluations of the jocular episode in (304) (for an overview, see Table 29). In general, intercultural interactions are associated with the situations that bring together interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds and in which they would use a language that is not their native one as a medium of communication (see also Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini, 1997, p. 6; Bell, 2006; 2007; Kecskes, 2017a; 2017b). Here, intercultural evaluations are not based on encounters between people from different cultural contexts. Rather, this analysis presents a variation of what can broadly be referred to as intercultural communication, i.e. it concentrates on the evaluations of a particular interactional situation by the people that share the same language but not necessarily cultural expectations and values (see also Sinkeviciute & Dynel, 2017). In other words, the Australian and British interviewees provide their metapragmatic comments on the housemates' interactional behaviours from their own as well as another cultural context. Since the jocular remark in (304) is produced by an Australian housemate, first let's have a look at how the British interviewees assess that comment.

Table 29. Overview of the interviewees' intercultural evaluations

	Australians about the British	**The British about Australians**
Behaviour in (304) conceptualised as/ in terms of	gender differences (typically female behaviour); culture differences (situational humour misconceptualisation)	UK-based: 'banter', 'a sarcastic comment' and situation-appropriate Australia-based: (i) 'putdown'; (ii) situation-appropriate

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8.5.2.1 *The British about Australians*

Here we can make a distinction between the British interviewees who do not live in Australia and those who had spent more than a year there at the moment of their interview. Similar to Australians in 8.5.1.1, the British interviewees from the UK do not consider George's comment as an intentional putdown, rather they claim that it was George's way to 'mak[e] light' of the unpleasant situation. Consider the following examples:

(316)

Danielle (UK): […] it just feels he's making a joke out of the situation because Bradley is making a joke out of situation […] he feels quite terrible about it but he's obviously making light of it so people around are making light of it as well

(317)

Deborah (UK): e:rm I think he's making light of what is quite difficult situation for Bradley […] Bradley's already making light of it […] it's a horrible thing but we're just gonna joke about it

(318)

Darren (UK): I think it's a bit of a dig I don't think he sort of meant it intentionally […] this is a sarcastic comment […] it's banter really it's joking around they've got to make light of the fact they've been nominated […]

(319)

Jon (UK): […] I think he's trying to cheer him up […] I do think it's again an Australian thing when they can they can say stuff like that and people are ingrained in their background and know that that's a joke not an offensive thing

Danielle in (316) and Deborah in (317) suggest that George's comment echoes Bradley's intention to make light of the situation and 'joke about it'. Concentrating on the target, it seems that the interviewees try to justify George's jocularity and absolve him of any responsibility for potentially hard feelings that Bradley could have. Even though Darren in (316) also interprets the comment as a form of 'making light' of the nominations, he labels it as 'a dig' (even if unintentional), 'a sarcastic comment' and 'banter', which emphasises its potentially face-threatening nature. All these emic conceptualisations of George's verbal behaviour suggest

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that the comment thus could possibly be perceived negatively, but the emphasis is put on the situation, which makes George's comment an instance of 'joking around' rather than an offensive remark. Furthermore, Jon in (319), who has spent several months in Australia and seems to be quite confident of his knowledge about the cultural context, refers to George's behaviour as 'an Australian thing'. What he seems to mean is that such potentially offensive verbal behaviours are seen as 'a joke […] and not an offensive thing', since such interactional patterns 'are ingrained in [people's] background'. Incidentally, this is also in line with what the Australian interviewees suggested in their intracultural evaluations of the jocular extract in 8.5.1.2.

Interestingly, the evaluations of the British interviewees who have spent significant time in Australia are not as unanimously positive as those of the British living in the UK. Consider the following extracts:

(320)

Alistair (UK): I think I think it's perfectly acceptable because it's clear by Bradley's reaction that's completely fine because he's laughing along with it and he's genuine and they are they are riffing off each other

(321)

Michele (UK): […] it's not intended as a nastiness it's not intended as a putdown it is intended just purely as a conversation and making making a joke of it […]

Similar to Daniella in (316) and Deborah in (317), Alistair in (320) primarily focuses on the target's immediate reaction. He suggests that 'it's perfectly acceptable' because 'Bradley's reaction is completely fine' and 'genuine'. Michele in (321) does not see the comments 'as a putdown', but rather 'as a conversation' that is intended to be jocular. Also, the reason why the interviewees evaluated the instigator's comments as jocular can be also explained by the fact that they recognise the interactional behaviour produced by George as well as a tendency to react jocularly thereto. Nevertheless, several British interviewees living in Australia presented somewhat negative evaluations:

(322)

Ray (UK): I think that's erm that comes across to me as being very smug and erm very egotistical and also () a little bit of that scapegoating where you know if you're not the weakest person in the room so you're () any () you wanna get rid of […]

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I think it was erm erm it was it was it was
sort of erm putdown aggressive I mean he phrased
it in a humorous way […]

(323)

David (UK): […] he was a bastard to have been putting
this other guy down because a lot
of people identify with him I identify with him
[…]
oh yeah put the poor- put the erm the poor little
ugly guy down that guy on the right is very Australian

Ray in (322) strongly criticises George's behaviour saying that the instigator is 'being a very smug and […] very egotistical', because he tries to find 'the weakest person in the room' to comment on. Even though Ray admits that George's delivery is jocular ('phrased it in a humorous way'), the interviewee still sees it as 'aggressive' and as a 'putdown'. Along the same line, David in (323) expresses a very strong criticism of George's comments. Apart from referring to the instigator as 'a bastard', which was clearly not meant in an Australian way (see 5.1.3), he, similar to Ray, sees Bradley as 'the poor little guy' that is being put down by someone who is physically stronger. In addition, David claims that this interactional pattern, i.e. deliberately putting down a more unfortunate party in an interaction is 'very Australian' (see (319)). It is fair to say that such strong criticism could be at least partially explained by the fact that during the interview David seemed to be highly critical of the reality game show *Big Brother* as well as of an Australian cultural context where he had been living for some time only because his wife is Australian. This, undoubtedly, shows how individual preferences and variability influence one's conceptualisations of a cultural context in which interactional practices take place.

8.5.2.2 *Australians about the British*

As seen in 8.5.2.1, the British interviewees offer either positive or negative evaluations of George's verbal behaviour, but do not tend to primarily point out particular differences between Australian and British understandings of jocularity. On the other hand, a particular tendency can be observed in the Australians' evaluations, i.e. quite similar to comments on their cultural insiders' interactional behaviour in 8.5.1.1, evaluating cultural outsider's – Layla's – behaviour, the Australian interviewees touch upon gender and, more often, culture-specific issues.

For instance, a number of the interviewees seem to differentiate between male and female communicative patterns and explicitly claim that Layla's behaviour is more typical of a woman:

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(324)
Michael (B)(AU): […] more typical of female response I think […]

(325)
Colleen (AU): yeah yeah that's that's erm that's something women do and would do […]

(326)
Amanda (AU): I think it was kind of it seemed to be like quite a female response to the whole thing like they're nurturing […]

(327)
Hannah (AU): […] kind of playing gender roles so they're being a bit jocular and matey whereas she's playing erm I don't know a traditional consolatory female role […] maybe if she went into the joking mode then she'd look like a bitch whereas he can get away jocular and jokey about it because of that sort of (…) I guess context in Australian culture where men do joke in that way […]

Apart from Michael (B) in (324), who generally characterises Layla's verbal behaviour as 'more typical of female response', all other interviewees relating Layla's reaction to her being a woman happen to be females. While Colleen shows certainty ('yeah yeah that's') in Layla's behaviour reflecting what can be ascribed to females, Amanda is more hesitant ('it was kind of it seemed') in her evaluation, but eventually links Layla's response to what she refers to as a female feature, i.e. being 'nurturing'. In addition, Hannah in (327) provides a more detailed explanation suggesting that it was a case of 'playing gender roles'. She points out that the two male interactants play their role, i.e. being 'jocular', while Layla's part could be seen as 'a traditional consolatory female role'. Also, Hannah claims that adopting features of a different gender role might cause criticism and disapproval. For instance, if a male jocularly teases the target as George in (304) does, it will most probably be seen as a way in which 'men […] joke'. On the other hand, as Hannah suggests, 'if [Layla] went into the joking mode then she'd look like a bitch'. This quite clearly points to possible gender-related expectations and differences in interaction.

Most of the Australian interviewees level criticism at Layla's serious reaction and concentrate on some cultural differences that could possibly explain her behaviour. Some of them seem to be nonplussed by what Layla said. Consider the following examples:

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(328)

Peter (AU): […] she took his comments a little more serious than the other guy yeah I'm surprised by her reaction I thought she would be a little more light-hearted about it
[…]
maybe the British humour is not as sarcastic and erm light-hearted as the Australian

(329)

Alicia (AU): she seems really concerned about him that's really strange
[…]
I do think they take themselves more seriously in areas where we don't

Peter in (328) does not hide his surprise, since it is clear to him that George and Bradley were engaged in 'banter'. He also reveals his expectations that Layla should not take it so seriously and suggests possible differences between the Australian and British humour, namely that the latter 'is not as sarcastic and […] light-hearted as the Australian'. Similarly, Alicia in (329) does not hide her surprise ('that's really strange') about Layla showing her concern for Bradley. She tries to explain it in terms of cultural differences and, while making her claim more prominent ('I do think'), suggests that the British 'take themselves more seriously in areas where [Australians] don't', in this case in a situation of jocular abuse, where Bradley is being targeted for having been nominated.

In addition, most Australian interviewees explicitly point out that Layla's reaction is generated by situational misunderstanding and misconceptualisation of this type of jocular interactional practice as it tends to be used in an Australian cultural context:

(330)

Michael (M)(AU): it's banter she is taking it not as banter
[…]
I don't know they just they just don't understand Aussie humour […]

(331)

Kylie (AU): […] she's obviously not getting in on a joke you know what I mean () how Australians communicate to each other
[…] that's a way of showing affection
[…] it's another typical thing that we tend to do

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(332)

Dale (AU): […] in Australia we take the piss a lot so a lot a lot of jokes are based on people act- say if someone does something stupid then you make a joke about it whereas they I think- that's one difference is their humour they don't do that as much there's there's (..) they don't they don't sort of (..) not attack or it's not attacking but erm they won't use someone else as a point of humour as much as say an Australian does like we'll we'll use friends anyone basically anyone we can use as a joke we can we will not as in being rude to them but that's just how it works we crack jokes about stupid stuff basically

Michael (M) in (330) immediately labels the interactional practice between George and Bradley as 'banter', which Layla apparently fails to recognise. This results in his suggestion that the British 'just don't understand Aussie humour'. In the same vein, Kylie in (331) also argues that Layla misunderstands communicative patterns that are likely to be easily recognisable by cultural insiders, i.e. when some seemingly aggressive verbal acts are used as 'a way of showing affection'. Furthermore, Dale in (332) labels George and Bradley's verbal behaviour as 'taking the piss', a recurrent practice in interaction in Australia. He explains that it is done by targeting somebody, but such verbal behaviour would not be perceived as offensive, whereas the British seem to conceptualise it as an 'attack' and 'being rude' to the target (see Chapter 7).

Needless to say, some generalisations that the interviewees make in their evaluations might not be entirely based on the housemates' behaviours in the video, but reveal a more general stereotypical thinking about the differences between Australian and British cultural contexts on the part of the interviewees. In other words, irrespective of the level of awareness of own and other cultures, the interviewees – as any other person – have subconsciously formed general ideas and categorisations about other social and cultural contexts that can quite automatically be used when referring to those contexts (for analyses see Bucholtz, 2004; Ladegaard, 2011).

Finally, in order to find out whether this is the only case when Layla reacted seriously to Australian jocularity, the interviewed housemate, Michael (BB), was also asked whether he noticed anything specific Layla's reaction to interaction involving Australian humour. Thus, an interesting account of this situation and

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a broader view on Layla's behaviour is presented in (333), where Michael (BB) shares his opinion about her:

(333)

Michael (BB)(AU): {[smile voice] oh Layla Layla is an idiot like Layla is the biggest idiot in the world} I love her but she doesn't get it she's not Australian she doesn't understand Australian jo- like sort of erm the humour that we have she doesn't get it she doesn't get it a lot of the time and I think it's a classic example of her not getting a fun little Australian I guess dualism between you know two blokes […] I think it's just a bit of cultural erm (…) lost in translation

Having more background knowledge and experience communicating with Layla, Michael does not hesitate and immediately suggests that she 'is an idiot'. It is said, however, in an affectionate smile voice (see 'rubbishing your mates') and is complemented by the explicit reference to emotion ('I love her'). What he claims is that Layla's serious reaction in the episode shown is only one of the instances when Layla did not perceive this type of jocular interaction between Australian males as something humorous, which he labels as 'cultural […] lost in translation'.

8.6 Summary

This chapter contributes to the exploration of the area of metapragmatics in relation to interactive jocularity. Based on qualitative interview data, it focuses on the non-participants' evaluations of potentially jocular verbal behaviours of the participants from the Australian and British versions of the reality television game show *Big Brother* 2012. The metapragmatic comments provided by the interviewees from Australia and the UK function as a necessary tool in order to be able to better describe and explain the emic understanding of various verbal practices.

The chapter aimed primarily at examining (i) a variety of perspectives from which the interviewees evaluated potentially jocular but at the same time offensive behaviour as well as how these perspectives influenced the way 'funniness' is conceptualised, and (ii) the interviewees' evaluations of jocular face-threatening verbal acts from the *Big Brother* series.

The results of the first two parts reveal that the interviewees tend to judge the situational behaviour from three different perspectives – the instigator's, the target's and the non-participant's. While the first two were referred to in a majority of cases, the last one was mainly used as a way-out when the interviewees had difficulties to choose either the instigator's or the target's perspectives. Needless

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to say, the interviewees' comments from the instigator's point of view involved positive evaluations, mainly suggesting that the instigator did not mean to offend anyone and his/her comment was light-hearted. On the other hand, if looked from the target's perspective, the evaluations shifted dramatically, projecting a negative attitude towards a jocular remark.

Furthermore, regarding the way 'funniness' is conceptualised, it was possible to distinguish between two ways in which the interviewees used the evaluative adjective *funny*: 'funny' from the point of view of the target (or more rarely, the teaser) – $funny_{p}$ – and 'funny' from the non-participant's perspective – $funny_{n\text{-}p}$. While there is no correlation between the interviewees' or the target's laughter and a jocular behaviour being labelled as funny from the instigator's or the target's point of view (cf. fake laughter), quite a direct connection can be observed between the interviewees' laughter and 'funny' from their own point of view. Furthermore, the interview participants alluded to a tendency of the target reacting positively even though a jocular behaviour was not appreciated. This is strongly related to the concept of 'the preferred reaction' that was also explored in 5.2.1.

Section 8.4 focused on three different interactional situations in the *Big Brother* houses (a two-party Australian interaction, and a multi-party British interaction) and their evaluations by the interviewees. The results reveal a considerable variety of views as well as particular interactional tendencies and preferences. Assessing the two-party interaction, for example, many interviewees tended to mention that their evaluation of the instigator's comments as well as their own reaction would highly depend of the level of the relationships between the instigator and the target. Another common feature between the Australian and British interviewees was that they would laugh off the instigator's comment, rather than show their hurt feelings. This is directly related to a frontstage/backstage distinction discussed in Chapter 6. Interestingly, many Australian interviewees referred to the cultural proscription against taking yourself too seriously, when they evaluated the target's seemingly positive reaction in the two-party situation. In addition, they even pointed out the usefulness of the instigator's jocular comment, since if someone takes the piss out of you, it probably means that you are doing something stupid. Realising that, the target should be able to appreciate it, which could be observed in the interviewees' reactions as well.

Evaluating the multi-party British interaction, where the facts of the target's story were shifted, many interviewees were critical of the instigator. However, unlike the British interview participants, a number of Australians claimed that what the instigator was mocking was not the target herself, but rather the situation or her own stupidity. This less disapproving opinion of the Australian interviewees could also be observed in their evaluations of the target's negative reaction. While quite a number of the British interviewees could be seen supporting the target

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having claimed offence, the Australians referred to it as not reasonable, especially if this interactional situation had happened in an Australian cultural context. Furthermore, only the Australian interviewees suggested that if they were the target, they would extend the joke and not show their frustration or merely laugh it off.

As regards the last Australian-British interaction that was shown to the interviewees, all the evaluations were divided into intracultural and intercultural. The findings show that both Australians and the British conceptualised the instigator's attempt at humour as banter or 'taking the piss' out of the target and a majority of the interviewees claim that it is not malicious or aggressive. What is interesting, however, is that the Australian interviewees seemed to be quite unanimous and tended to refer to some culture-specific differences in their evaluations. While providing their opinion on the British participant's serious reaction, they tried to explain its inappropriateness by pointing out some differences in the sense of humour in both cultural contexts. On the other hand, the British interviewees showed a clearer variability in their evaluations, but did not seem to differentiate between their own and Australian sense of humour (even though some of them regarded the instigator's behaviour as a putdown), but rather emphasise the importance of jocular reactions to attempts at humour in general.

Finally, although illustrating particular situation-specific (*Big Brother* and interview) scenarios, these findings reveal the language users understanding of jocular interactional practices in their own as well as the other cultural context. This is, indeed, an interesting area for further research that, if grounded in metapragmatic commentary, could shed light on a better understanding of different cultural contexts and the conceptualisation of everyday verbal practices by language users.

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CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

The essence of this sociopragmatic research can be summarised in a nutshell. It deals with verbal practices, i.e. *what* people say (form and content), *when* they say it (context), *how* they say it (contextual cues such as prosody) and *who* says it to whom and in whose presence (the participants).

More precisely, the analyses found on the pages of this book focused on jocular verbal behaviours in relation to the phenomena of (im)politeness in two cultural contexts, Australian and British. Bearing more similarities than differences, jocular interactional practices in the two contexts were primarily explored separately in each cultural context (which represents an intracultural perspective) in order to gain a better understanding of how those practices are conceptualised and evaluated by the interactants as well as non-participants (the interviewees). Indeed, this book did not aim to primarily contrast the ways in which the users of Australian and British English behave in interaction. Rather, the main objective was to analyse interactional practices in specific discourses (written corpora, reality television, interviews) in the two varieties of English. However, the data comparison was inevitable. Some similar as well as different preferences were revealed by the results of the corpora analysis, the housemates' behaviour and the evaluations of the language users that participated in qualitative interviews (intercultural and cross-cultural perspectives). Furthermore, some clear instances of different verbal behaviours could be observed. These, undoubtedly, were touched upon and brought to the reader's attention.

Instead of offering a long summary of what each chapter of this book concentrated on, the key contributions of this research are listed below. Then, the very last section will be devoted to some ideas for future research and new questions that this book has raised.

9.1 Contributions to the field

Whatever the topic of research and the type of analysis are, each study enriches our knowledge of language use in one way or another. I also hope that this research contributes to the area of pragmatics in general and, in particular, to the fields of

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conversational humour and (im)politeness as well as intracultural, intercultural and cross-cultural research into interactional behaviour in the English language in a number of ways.

Exploring jocular verbal behaviours in relation to (im)politeness in Australian and British cultural contexts, this book offered an analysis of a combination of datasets. Even though thematically related, each dataset has been approached in a different way and has significantly enriched the analysis. First, three different data sources were used. A corpus-assisted study was an example of a quantitative analysis based on the instances of 'teasing' found in the two corpora (the *BNC* and *Ozcorp*) of primarily written texts. The findings largely corroborated the results found in previous research (e.g. Drew, 1987). This corpus-based analysis also contributed to a production-evaluation model for jocular behaviours that can result in politeness, mock politeness, mock impoliteness and impoliteness. Apart from this more formal study, the main analysis, which focused on the national versions of the reality television show *Big Brother* 2012 as well as the complementary examination of qualitative interviews, represents a qualitative research tradition.

While reality television discourse has been used as data in a number of impoliteness studies (Culpeper, 1996; 2005; 2011; Bousfield, 2008a; 2008b; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009 among others), whether or not due to a widespread prejudice against interactions in reality television that are believed to be pre-constructed by the producers or lack the taste of naturally-occurring conversations, it has not attracted much attention of researchers working in the area of conversational humour. Among other things, this research tried to fill this gap. In both series of *Big Brother*, quite a significant number of jocular verbal interactions was produced by the housemates (231 interactions in the Australian house and 188 interactions in the British house). Undoubtedly, these were the results of the Australian and British versions, and, in these cultural contexts, jocularity plays an important part. Whether in other national versions a considerable number of jocular verbal acts is to be encountered remains an area to be explored in future research.

Primarily focusing on interactions in *Big Brother*, what this book aimed to investigate were the interactional practices inside the house (as opposed to many analyses that focus on the link between reality television discourse and the viewers). Thus, it was possible to draw a very important distinction between different behavioural patterns and the target's (re-)evaluations of a jocular episode. This frontstage/backstage distinction is directly linked with the concept of *the preferred reaction* that has been alluded to not only in various popular as well as scholarly texts on the behaviours of English-speaking people, but also by the interviewees from the two cultural contexts. The importance of different reactions that are projected depending on an interactional setting (i) revealed a tendency among the housemates (and later the interviewees) to conceal their hurt feelings in order

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to show that they can take a joke and recognise an attempt at humour, and (ii) pointed out that those frontstage reactions, which most analyses take into account, might not represent the target's 'real' feelings that, it seems, tend to be suppressed in a public setting.

Having said that, the analysis also indicated that in some situations the targets do show their non-appreciation of jocularity, annoyance and occasionally claim offence. The empirical study of the *Big Brother* data revealed that apart from common issues generating negative evaluations of attempts at humour (e.g. associating the target with something negative or shifting the fact), there are some specific differences observed in the Australian and British datasets. Those in the British house were more person-oriented and referred to jocularity criticising one's body or possessions and reminding the target of some painful previous experience. Contrary, the Australian housemates seemed to orient themselves more towards social harmony-related issues and showed their negative feelings if a jocular verbal act was used to exclude the target or single out someone as being better. Thus, these findings not only contribute to the emic conceptualisations of potentially impolite verbal behaviour but also explore possible differences between perception of jocular interactional behaviours in Australian and British cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this book presented an opportunity to see how Australians and the British look not only at themselves, but also at each other. This became possible, since one of the housemates in the Australian *Big Brother* house was from the UK and some (at least minor) misunderstandings were seen on screen. This influenced the decision to recruit, for qualitative interviews, local native speakers as well as those who were from another cultural context (Australian and British), but resided in Australia or the UK. Chapter 8 presented the results of several exploratory studies into how Australians and the British see themselves, evaluate and judge jocular verbal behaviour of Australian and British housemates.

Finally, qualitative interviewing, which in recent years has been increasingly used in pragmatic research, offered a valuable contribution to the analysis of jocularity and (im)politeness. Not only was it possible to observe how the language users interviewed looked at a jocular episode from different perspectives (the instigator's, the target's or the non-participant's), but also how their conceptualisations of funniness shifted, based on those perspectives. The work done with all these types of data shows that particular interactional practices can be analysed from different angles, which significantly contributes to their understanding.

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9.2 Future research directions and raised questions

Interaction is a very complex human activity. Even though it seems that there is nothing else that can be produced so easily between two or more people, it is the ever-present negotiation of meanings (meaning potential) that makes interaction a never-ending source of research data.

When dealing with such topics as humour and (im)politeness and undertaking a qualitative analysis, one cannot avoid the impression that there is always much more that can be said about any illustrated extract. Thus, it is obvious that more academic work can be carried out in order to better understand how jocular verbal behaviours are produced and whether and when they are perceived as impolite, offensive, non-impolite or bonding. While it is true that a significant number of empirical analyses concentrate on interactions in a particular community of practice, (with only a few exceptions) the results of those analyses do not tend to be linked to communicative patterns and preferences in the cultural contexts where those interactions occur. Such a tendency in current research is, undoubtedly, influenced by the methodological directions promoted by discursive approaches. However, one has to realise that it is also essential for any type of pragmatic research to contribute to an understanding of a broader context within which interactional behaviours take place, by which they are influenced and which they influence in turn.

Furthermore, from the combination of first- and second-order approaches used and from the analytical concepts employed alongside emic notions primarily available via metapragmatic comments, it is clear that the two understandings of the same phenomenon do not necessarily coincide (see e.g. Culpeper, 2011a; Taylor, 2015a; 2015b). Thus, it seems to be one of the fundamental tasks to look at and assess the parallelism (or absence thereof) between laymen's and analysts' concepts of not only (im)politeness1 and (im)politeness2, but – for the same reason – also of such kinds of jocular verbal behaviours as teasing and banter.

Finally, quite a number of questions have been raised by the findings of the present research:

Why is there a noticeable difference between the results of the corpus-assisted analysis of written texts and the interactional patterns analysed in the *Big Brother* house and evaluated by the interviewees? Is it due to the nature of the discourse, written vs spoken? Is it related to the term *teasing* that was analysed in the corpora? If so, can it be claimed that the term carries a primarily negative emic understanding, contrary to 'taking the piss', 'having a dig', etc. used by the housemates and the interviewees as meta-labels for non-impolite jocular behaviours?

Why do the targets tend to project a positive or at least hide a negative reaction to a jocular verbal act? Is this tendency occasioned by a common understanding

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between the speakers of Australian and British English of what is a preferred reaction or do language users attribute this preference more to individual variability? Having this in mind, why would some jocular conversations still cause offence or at least, why would offence be claimed by the target? Is it possible to draw a clearer line in a particular cultural context between when a joke is a joke and when it goes too far?

What would be the findings of similar research based on a different community of practice in Australian and British cultural contexts? Would the same interviewees' evaluations differ? If so, would they mainly depend on the type of discourse (whether reality television or video-taped conversations)? If not, would it be a step further to be able to suggest that particular verbal behaviours that are constructed as jocular by the instigator trigger the idea on the part of the target as well as the observer (e.g. the interviewee) that a particular reaction is expected, even if one is not formally obliged to project it?

Undoubtedly, it is a question in itself whether any of these questions will ever be answered. The only certain thing is that if one does not venture this path, cultural contexts will remain a topic of popular travel books and a gap in the academic literature.

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Conversational Humour and (Im)politeness is the first systematic study that offers a socio-pragmatic perspective on humorous practices such as *teasing*, *mockery* and *taking the piss* and their relation to (im)politeness. Analysing data from corpora, reality television and interviews in Australian and British cultural contexts, this book contributes to cross-cultural and intercultural research on humour and its role in social interaction. Although, in both contexts, jocular verbal practices are highly valued and a positive response – the 'preferred reaction' – can be expected, the conceptualisation of what is seen as humorous can vary, especially in terms of what 'goes too far'. By examining how attempts at humour can occasion offence, presenting a distinction between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' perceptions of jocularity and looking at how language users evaluate jocular behaviours in interaction, this study shows how humour and (im)politeness are co-constructed and negotiated in discourse. This book will be of interest to scholars and students in pragmatics, conversational humour, (im)politeness, intercultural communication, discourse analysis, television studies and interaction in English-speaking contexts.

"Trailblazing, to say the least!"

Jonathan Culpeper, *Lancaster University*

"I highly recommend Valeria Sinkeviciute's work to everybody interested in cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies on conversational humour and (im)politeness."

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