

## A theoretical approach to the relationship between impoliteness and conflict, with some examples from the Spanish-speaking cultures

Una aproximación teórica a la relación entre descortesía y conflicto, con algunos ejemplos de culturas de habla hispana

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### Abstract

Although impoliteness implies conflict, the opposite may not necessarily be true: a conflict can be resolved in a friendly way, while impoliteness triggers conflict or makes it worse. The existing research on impoliteness in the Spanish-speaking cultures does not deal specifically with theoretical discussions about impoliteness and conflict, possibly because impoliteness usually leads to conflict as an associated concept. This relationship between impoliteness and conflict is embedded in the realms of impolite disagreements, impolite clashes and similar negative occurrences of verbal aggression. Hence, the prevailing attitude among researchers of impoliteness both within and outside the cultural context of Spanish has been to perceive conflict as something intrinsic to impoliteness, and thus the concepts of impoliteness and conflict have been approached in the same way. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the common ground between both concepts as well as their main differences, illustrated with examples taken from social interactions of Spanish-speaking cultures. This question is worth looking into, for it has received little attention in the literature to date. Besides, it is also interesting to note that despite the characteristics that impoliteness and conflict have in common, they are not the same phenomenon in terms of the effects caused in interaction by each one of them.

**Keywords:** impoliteness; conflict; similarities; differences; fustigation impoliteness; dominating-style conflict.

### Resumen

Aunque la descortesía implica conflicto, lo contrario puede no ser necesariamente cierto: un conflicto puede resolverse de manera amistosa, mientras que descortesía

desencadena el conflicto o lo empeora. La investigación existente sobre la falta de cortesía en las culturas de habla hispana no se ocupa específicamente de las discusiones teóricas sobre la descortesía y el conflicto, posiblemente porque la descortesía generalmente conduce al conflicto como concepto asociado. Esta relación entre descortesía y conflicto está incrustada en los reinos de desacuerdos descorteses, enfrentamientos descorteses y ocurrencias negativas similares de agresión verbal. Por lo tanto, la actitud predominante entre los investigadores de la falta de cortesía, tanto dentro como fuera del contexto cultural del español, ha sido percibir el conflicto como algo intrínseco a la descortesía y, por lo tanto, los conceptos de descortesía y conflicto se han abordado de la misma manera. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este artículo es analizar el terreno común entre ambos conceptos, así como sus principales diferencias, ilustrado con ejemplos tomados de interacciones sociales de culturas de habla hispana. Vale la pena analizar esta pregunta, ya que ha recibido poca atención en la literatura hasta la fecha. Además, también es interesante notar que a pesar de las características que la descortesía y el conflicto tienen en común, no son el mismo fenómeno en términos de los efectos causados en la interacción por cada uno de ellos.

**Palabras clave:** descortesía; conflicto; similitudes; diferencias; descortesía de fustigación; conflicto de estilo dominante.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, both conflict and impoliteness have been separately given great attention. Conflict has been mainly the focus of sociological and social-psychological studies (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Coser, 2001; Geen, 2001; Collins, 2008; Kelman, 2010; Rahim, 2011), whereas impoliteness has been profoundly examined within linguistic pragmatics for the past three decades (e.g. Bousfield & Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 1996; Kaul de Marlangeon, 1995; Kienpointner, 1997; Mills, 2003). However, there is still a lot of room for further investigation on these topics, and what results especially interesting is the fact that the joint consideration of impoliteness and conflict can shed more light on the former phenomenon, which by its nature requires a multidisciplinary approach. Thus, this study scrutinizes the relationship between impoliteness and conflict. Although impoliteness implies conflict, the reverse may not necessarily be true because conflict can be resolved positively, and, even if conflict persists, impoliteness may not happen. Thus, despite an initial divergence of opinion among participants of a potential conflict and even when this divergence intensifies, it does not necessarily fall into a conflict and can be resolved amicably, either due to the fact that one of the antagonists takes other's position -for true conviction, convenience, whatever their motivation- or to parties being discouraged from asserting their claims and reaching an agreement. But impoliteness triggers conflict or makes it even worse, because impolite opposing parties take mutually incompatible positions, as will be shown below.

It is known that conflict is a characteristic feature of social relations and a possible consequence of human interaction. As has just been said, not every conflict involves perceived divergence of interests or goals, and therefore some conflicts can be managed constructively (Tjosvold, 2006). Conflict can thus take a constructive or a destructive course. It is also known that impoliteness is an individual or group social behaviour and a trait of everyday life. The question we

are trying to elucidate here is how individuals and groups of people choose to manage conflict and how this results in impoliteness or not.

Human actions have always been oriented towards achieving success in everyday life; this is the reason why the majority of polite behaviours have been appropriately internalised into automatisms. When people or situations jeopardise peaceful coexistence, impolite speakers fall back on vital mechanisms used to face the emerging challenges and threats, and thus use aggressive strategies to confront them. Hence, in the arena of impoliteness, conflict is competitive and negative, or even more, it constitutes a violent and destructive event (Kaul de Marlangeon, 1995).

On the basis that impoliteness is an idiosyncratic and variable phenomenon of every culture, this paper offers examples from social Spanish-speaking interactions, with their own characteristic features and contexts. The current phenomenon of increased use of impoliteness tends to be a habit and is now seen as a natural thing in some contexts within the Spanish-speaking world, especially the mass media. Therefore, this work necessarily adopts a pragmatic-socio-cultural framework (Bravo, 2009; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2005a) to describe the situated use of impolite linguistic resources within their specific socio-cultural context. Indeed, this discursive approach considers the socio-cultural variability that enables the analyst to identify the shared knowledge within the speaking community itself, in addition to the contextual factors of the communicative situation.

This article is organized as follows. First, it considers the concept of conflict according to the purpose of the study; second, it examines the concept of impoliteness within the scope of the work; third, it discusses the relationship between conflict and impoliteness and, finally, it presents some concluding remarks.

## 2. Locating Conflict within the Framework of the Study

The study of conflict has attracted the interest of researchers from many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, biology, among others. As a consequence, there are many ways to describe conflict. That is why there is no commonly used definition of conflict, as is also the case with the definition of impoliteness. Thus, conflict has been interpreted in different ways by researchers from different fields. Social-psychologists have moved beyond the analysis of internal conflict within a person to the study of social conflict. The goal here is the comprehension of human behaviour that displays conflict among individuals and groups. Sociologists analyse conflict as a normal part of social and daily life rather than an abnormal occurrence, and see conflict theories as perspectives that emphasize the social, political, or material inequality of a social group. In general, conflict theory seeks to explain conflict and its effects on society.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “conflict” is defined as “A serious disagreement or argument, *typically a protracted one*<sup>1</sup>”, for example ‘the eternal conflict between the sexes’. Indeed, it is interesting to know that the concept of conflict, as defined by the Oxford dictionary is in line with the definition given by Rahim (2011, p. 16), “conflict is defined as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etcetera)”. According to Rahim (2011,

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<sup>1</sup> Italics mine.

p. 1 ), social relationships may become incompatible, disagreeable or dissonant when two or more interacting individuals have different interests, attitudes, values, goals, beliefs or emotions. Rahim (2011, p. 19-22) highlights many types of conflict conforming different circumstances (i.e. substantive conflict, affective conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, institutionalised conflict, among others), or according to the organizational levels at which it may originate: intra-individual, interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup conflict. In view of this, many types of conflict can be associated with impoliteness, except for intra-individual or intra-personal conflict that cannot be applied in the impoliteness field since intra-individual or intra-personal conflict take place in the person’s mind when the person interacts with himself/ herself because of an internal problem. For example, a person could have a conflict of values or priorities, but there are no observable utterances to perform the analysis. When reliable data are available, the analyst could explore such data as a case of self-impoliteness, that is to say, self-image impolite activities (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2015).

By contrast, interpersonal conflict (a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals) is the most studied of these types of conflict in relation with impoliteness. As human beings, we all belong to a group, and interpersonal conflict is an inherent part of any group. Furthermore, interpersonal conflict is one of the most common situations people manage every day, though it is not necessarily negative; on the contrary, it may allow for social change and offer an opportunity to build relationships and work out differences. In most situations, differences and even conflicts tend to disappear when people discover the sources of conflict were due mainly to a misunderstanding. In such instances, people generally recognise another’s point of view and, consequently, avoid making generalisations or giving critical opinions that could raise suspicion and distrust by the other. On the contrary, when interlocutors choose to deliberately clash and overtly seek confrontation and conflict, impoliteness appears, especially of the *fustigation* type (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2008). Table 1 summarizes the elements of conflict as described by Rahim (2011):

Table 1. Elements of conflict (in general), according to Rahim (2011, p.15).

– Conflict includes <i>opposite interests</i>
– Such opposed interests <i>must be recognized</i> for conflict to exist
– Conflict involves <i>beliefs, by each side, that the other will thwart its interests</i>
– Conflict is a process
– Conflict implies actions by one or both sides (a field of actions)
– Conflict can be intraindividual, interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup conflict
– Conflict may be placed along a <i>continuum from cooperative conflict to competitive conflict</i>

### 3. Locating Impoliteness within the Framework of this Study

The existing research on impoliteness in the Spanish-speaking world does not deal specifically with theoretical discussions of how conflict and impoliteness are related. This is surely because impoliteness inevitably leads to its associated concept of conflict, embedded in the realms of impolite disputes, impolite clashes and similar negative occurrences of verbal aggression. Despite the progress made in the study of impoliteness, the prevailing attitude among researchers both within and outside Spanish cultural contexts has been to perceive conflict as something intrinsic to impoliteness. This is an interesting starting point for this study because

the concepts of conflict and impoliteness have been addressed jointly, as some authors have considered (Bousfield, 2008; Graham & Hardaker, 2017; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009). For example, Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) analyse how on-line conflicts begin, unfold and end in multi-participant interactions on YouTube. They extract their data collected from Spanish, based on a multi-layered framework *drawing primarily on conflict and impoliteness scholarship*<sup>2</sup>. On page 12, the authors say: “Regarding the unfolding nature of conflict, we applied Dobs and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich’s (2013) model of responses to impoliteness to the analysis of the data so as to incorporate responses by third parties.” As can be seen, this research treats conflict and impoliteness as if they were the same, even applying to conflict the results of impoliteness theory.

Another aspect of the extent and complexity of impoliteness phenomena has been reported by Culpeper (2011, p. 3), who points out that the field of impoliteness research is a multidisciplinary field of study that can be approached outside the realm of linguistic pragmatics, within the field of sociology, social psychology and conflict studies, among others disciplines. It is important to note that Culpeper (2011, pp. 4-5) highlights that these non-linguistic studies neither use the term impoliteness nor investigate what verbal violence consists of. They do not explore how verbal expressions interact with the context, and furthermore, they present little detailed work on language.

In addition, as is the case with many other languages, the Spanish language has a number of synonyms to communicate the notion of impoliteness: *descortesía* (impoliteness), *violencia verbal* (verbal abuse), *agresividad* (aggressiveness), *falta de respeto* (lack of respect), including meaning of *desprecio* (disregard), *confrontación* (confrontation), *incivilidad* (incivility), *grosería* (rudeness<sup>3</sup>), *desconsideración* (inconsiderateness), *insolencia* (insolence), *hostilidad* (hostility). It should be noted that all of these expressions entail conflict and many studies refer to this fact. Just to give a few examples:

Cuando hablamos de descortesía, estamos hablando de un fenómeno comunicativo que está íntimamente relacionado con situaciones de conflicto y polémica (Alcaide Lara, 2011, p. 28).

[When we discuss impoliteness, we are talking about a communicative phenomenon that is intimately bound up with situations of conflict and controversy].

[...] en los estudios recientes sobre la (des)cortesía se ha desatado un verdadero interés por ciertos tipos de discurso en los que la actividad verbal esperable por parte de los participantes es la agresividad verbal y el conflicto [...] (Blas Arroyo, 2014, p.18).

[[...] recent studies on (im)politeness have demonstrated a great interest in certain types of discourse in which the verbal activity expected by participants is verbal aggression and conflict [...]].

Additionally, one of the most challenging aspects in the process of defining all characteristics of impoliteness is found in the wide spectrum of meanings covered by this behaviour. This has given rise to different definitions of impoliteness, which in turn show the difficulty of finding a common definition

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<sup>2</sup> Italics mine

<sup>3</sup> Terkourafi (2008, p.60-61) notes that although English makes a distinction between impoliteness and rudeness, Spanish, Italian and Greek, do not. The author suggests that the lack of a distinction since both phenomena share the same interactional space: that of face-threatening behaviour.

accepted by all scholars. However, there is consensus in considering face aggravation as a common denominator: “Impoliteness is behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context” (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, p. 3).

In view of this complexity, it may be useful to recall Kaul de Marlangeon’s (2008) *endecatomic definition of impoliteness*, which considers eleven instances of impolite behaviour and provides a classification of its discourses according to the kind of impolite phenomenon they communicate. The heart of this typology is described in Kaul de Marlangeon & Alba-Juez (2012), where it is applied to English cultures.

This is a *second order approach* definition which is based on a *first order approach* (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, p. 5), since the users of a language have at their disposal -in a somewhat rudimentary way and as a component of their own communicative competence- a typology of impolite forms of behaviour which allows them to express and evaluate both their own and other people’s impolite acts.

Impoliteness occurs in any of the following eleven instances:

A) When the speaker (S):

- 1) tries to be polite to the hearer (H), but for H, S's manner of expression is reminiscent of improper, indecorous or disrespectful language.
- 2) involuntarily offends H by:
  - 2.1.) committing a gaffe or faux pas, or
  - 2.2.) stinting on the politeness norms
  - 2.3.) ignoring politeness norms.
- 3) deliberately uses offensive language toward him/herself with different motivations.
- 4) is very polite or excessively polite to the hearer, in order to hurt or mock him/her.
- 5) voluntarily stints on the politeness expected by H.
- 6) deliberately offends H with a purpose that may:
  - 6.1.) damage H's face.
  - 6.2.) defend S's face.

B) When the hearer (H):

- 1) interprets S's behaviour as an intentional face attack that induces him/her to accept the attack or reject it through defence or counter-attack.
- 2) remains silent intentionally, in order to indicate disagreement/discontentment with S's utterance.

Possibilities A1, A2, A3 and A4 in this definition (concerning the speaker), do not lead to a conflict due to the lightness of the impolite intention behind their respective utterances. In these cases, impoliteness lacks the distinctive characteristic of conflict: persistence. Moreover, to ensure that impoliteness leads to a conflict, the following two conditions are needed: 1) a previous awareness between the interacting impolite parties about their discrepancy and 2) a persistent discrepancy. The analyst infers conditions 1) and 2) on the basis of the utterances after the initial impolite utterance.

The remaining instances of the endecatomic definition of impoliteness contribute directly to conflict:

- Instance A6 in its two variants: A6.1 to damage hearer’s face and A6.2 to defend the speaker’s face.

- Instance B1, when the hearer interprets the speaker's behaviour as an intentional face attack and responds unkindly to him/her.

These three instances (A6.1, A6.2 and B1) are included within the type called *fustigation impoliteness* (which literally alludes to the act of whipping somebody). This type expresses the maximum intensity in the degree of damage inflicted on the hearer's face. This degree is determined by the analyst considering socio-cultural conventions of the text and its context. But such three instances A6.1, A6.2 and B1 of fustigation impoliteness still lack the iterative character; it is only when iteration takes place that conflict comes about. It is important to remark that an isolated insult is only a case of fustigation impoliteness because of the intensity of the damage that the hearer interprets the speaker has inflicted, but an isolated insult lacks the distinguishing feature of 'process', present in the definition of conflict. In the case of a conflict, the acts of fustigation impoliteness aggravate the existing conflict because they highlight the aspect of iteration, that is to say, increase the persistence of conflict. This persistence ensues from the fact that the use of fustigation impoliteness frequently causes the immediate hearer's response, which normally escalates the pre-existing conflict. The presence of negative emotions and negative appraisals involved in the use of fustigation impoliteness exacerbates this conflict.

In short, the interrelation between fustigation impoliteness and conflict can be summarised as follows:

- A single impolite utterance does not necessarily initiate a conflict.
- An escalation of fustigation impoliteness establishes conflict because its reiteration feeds the persistence of a conflict and adds an emotional aspect to the conflict.

For this reason, it is worth noticing that the concept of *fustigation* encompasses the following characteristics: the *repetition* of the fustigation act and the *intensity* of this hostile behaviour intended to cause harm to the hearer.

The dictionary (i.e. *Collins* and *Merriam Webster*) defines the verb *fustigate* as 1) *to beat with or as if with a cudgel*, which captures both aspects of fustigation: an intensive one present in *cudgel* and a repetitive one present in *to beat*; and 2) *to criticise severely*, which alludes to the metaphorical use of the term.

From a socio-cultural point of view, this type of impoliteness act consists of a voluntary and strategic behaviour intended to damage the hearer's face with the purpose of confronting a challenging situation or becoming involved with it. These acts of fustigation impoliteness tend to secure confrontation in discourse because the intention behind them is to offend, lambast, belittle, humiliate, exasperate, denigrate or intimidate the hearer.

Fustigation impoliteness as a type of impoliteness act recognises two essential motivations: *refractoriness* and *exacerbated affiliation*. Refractoriness to a certain group is defined as the exacerbated autonomy of considering oneself and being considered by the members of that group as its opponent, whereas exacerbated affiliation to a certain group involves considering oneself and being considered by the members of this group as one of its members, with the right to choose impoliteness in defending the in-group. Each one of these motivations can be seen from either an offensive or a defensive perspective.

- If the impolite speaker is refractory to the group, he/she attacks the hearer when he/she interprets affiliation to the in-group on the part of the hearer.

There is simultaneously, on the part of the speaker, a primary attack towards the values of the hearer's group and an implicit defence of the values of his/ her own group.

- If the impolite speaker is a member of the group, s/he attacks the hearer when s/he interprets certain attitudes and behaviours on the part of the hearer as exhibiting great autonomy with respect to the group or in opposition to it. Simultaneously, on the part of the speaker we find defence of the values of his/her own group and rejection of those of the hearer's group.

Summarising, fustigation impoliteness takes place when the individual perceives himself/herself and is perceived by others as an opponent of the group (refractoriness) or as a member of the group (exacerbated affiliation) and this is determined by individual and variable sociocultural factors.

Example (1) illustrates the type of fustigation impoliteness described above:

- 1) “El pichón de Pinochet, Piñera en Chile, que se las da de un gran líder, fracasado también y en su segundo período peor que nunca, es repudiado por el pueblo chileno”, afirmó Maduro en una conferencia de prensa. (www.lanacion.cl 10/01/2019).

[‘Pinochet’s disciple, Piñera in Chile, who claims to be a great leader, is also a loser, who is doing worse than ever in his second term, repudiated by the Chilean people’, Maduro pointed out in a press conference].

Example (1) is a case of fustigation impoliteness on the part of Nicolas Maduro, Venezuelan president, by refractoriness to the Lima Group. This group includes representatives of many American countries who seek to find a peaceful solution in Venezuela and call for a change of power without the use of force and the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid. Sebastian Piñera, the Chilean president, is an ideological representative of this group.

The new dimension of this example in the context of Spanish speaking cultures is the lack of respect shown in an institutional context by one president to another, which could have led to an armed conflict between the two nations if this situation had escalated. Furthermore, this example exhibits how impoliteness becomes more frequent in a context of highest spheres of power with the consequent institutional degradation due to the current trend of radicalization which makes it difficult to reach a friendly dialogue between the political actors. The strategic use of insults and disqualifications reflects Maduro’s refractory attitude of being an opponent of the Lima Group.

- 2) “En lugar de insultar a un presidente electo democráticamente como Sebastián Piñera, le sugiero preparar mejor su defensa ante la Corte Penal Internacional por las violaciones a los derechos humanos que perpetra contra su propio pueblo”, respondió Roberto Ampuero por Twitter. (Sputnik 10/01/2019).

[‘Instead of insulting a democratically elected President like Sebastian Piñera, I suggest you make a better preparation of your defence before the International Criminal Court for human rights violations, which perpetrates against your people’ Roberto Ampuero responded on Twitter].

In this tweet, Chilean Chancellor Ampuero, responsible for external relations, interprets Maduro’s behaviour as an intentional face attack on President Piñera,

which induces him to reject it by making a counter-attack in the form of a threat. The Chilean Chancellor strongly condemned what he called an insult, but contrary to Maduro, the Chilean Chancellor behaves within the diplomatic practices in the context of an international institutional framework.

Example (1) is linked to instance A6.1 and example (2) is related to instances B1 and A6.2 and, *a fortiori*, these instances pertain to fustigation impoliteness.

In light of the above, it is clear that the best way of acting aggressively is through the use of fustigation impoliteness, which will most surely result in a conflict, both from the speaker who purposefully offends the hearer and from the hearer that chooses to interpret speaker’s behaviour as intentional face attack with the purpose of harming him/her. Table 2 summarizes the elements of fustigation impoliteness.

Table 2. Elements of fustigation impoliteness

– Fustigation impoliteness is intended to <i>offend, lambast, belittle, humiliate, exasperate, denigrate or even, cancel out the hearer.</i>
– Fustigation impoliteness is associated with a <i>total lack of politeness.</i>
– Fustigation impoliteness is a verbal aggression from speaker to hearer.
– Fustigation impoliteness establishes a <i>disparity of power in favour of the speaker.</i>
– Fustigation impoliteness is on the part of the speaker a <i>voluntary and strategic behaviour intended to damage the hearer’s face.</i>
– Fustigation impoliteness is on the part of the hearer an awareness of speaker’s behaviour and an evaluation of it.
– Fustigation impoliteness tends to secure <i>discursive confrontation.</i>
– Fustigation impoliteness has the highest level of emotional intensity on the part of the speaker, who whips first.
– Fustigation impoliteness is on the part of the hearer a possible response depending on their abilities of emotional self-control.

Instances A5 (voluntary stints on the politeness expected by the hearer) and B2 (when the hearer remains silent intentionally, in order to indicate disagreement with the speaker’s utterance) remain to be considered. These instances are eventually related with conflict. In A5, when the hearer interprets the act of the impolite speaker as stinting on the politeness expected and, in turn, responds in an impolite way, both are caught in a conflict. If, instead, the hearer turns a deaf ear, the conflict does not occur. Instance B2, when the hearer does not respond as the speaker expects and takes an intentional silence, it makes the speaker feel embarrassed. It is only when the speaker criticises the hearer that a process of may conflict start. Otherwise, there is no conflict because there is no persistence in the discrepancy between the parties.

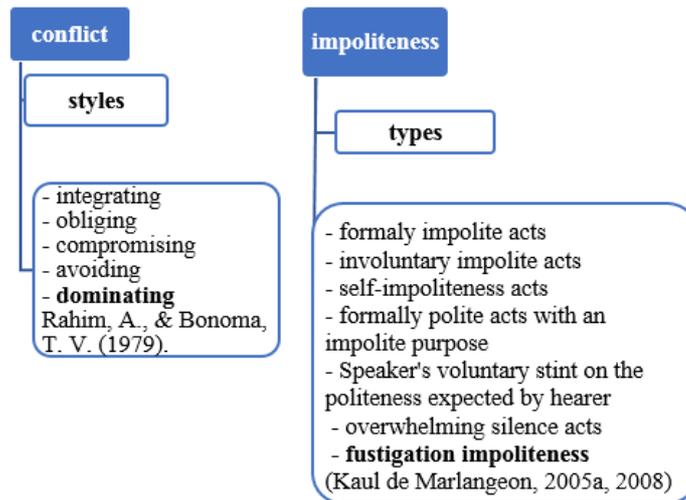
#### 4. The Relationship between Dominating - Style Conflict and Fustigation Impoliteness

In order to establish the relationship between conflict and impoliteness, it is first necessary that conflict, and in particular the dominating style of conflict, be viewed from the perspective of interpersonal interaction (Rahim, 2011, p. 28). This style is the predominant one used for handling interpersonal conflict. Among the various existent types of impoliteness, the one that corresponds most closely to dominating-style conflict is fustigation impoliteness.

While conflict could be seen as a matter of content, and impoliteness as a matter of emotionality about conflicting positions, both concepts, dominating-style

conflict and fustigation impoliteness can be compared in order to perceive their similarities and differences. This is perfectly consistent with the definitions of each concept already given. Figure 1 illustrates this fact.

Figure 1. Styles of conflict, types of impoliteness and the relationship between dominating-style conflict and fustigation impoliteness.



- Dominating style has been identified with win-lose orientation or with forceful behaviour to win one’s position (Rahim, 2011). A dominating person wishes *to win at any cost and ignores the needs or expectations of the other party*.
- A speaker using fustigation impoliteness seeks to prevail over the hearer at any cost, *totally neglecting the hearer’s face wants*.
- A speaker takes a dominating position when s/he uses his/ her power to impose his/ her will on the hearer.
- The impolite speaker has/shows the ability to subordinate the hearer. Therefore, impolite behaviour introduces high levels of aggressiveness into social relations.

Human *aggression*, as defined by Anderson & Huesmann (2003, p. 298), is a behaviour “directed toward another individual carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm”. This definition falls within the concept of impoliteness by Kaul de Marlangeon (2005a) as “verbal aggression from speaker to hearer that consists of wilful, conscious and strategic behaviours aimed at hurting the interlocutor’s face to respond to a confrontational situation or challenge, or in order to initiate it”. Consequently, (intentional) impoliteness has a negative impact because it disrupts social relationships and is often associated with *symmetrical escalation* of a conflict or with a *complementary rigidity* (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 2011). These authors explain that all normal communication is either symmetrical or complementary: “Symmetrical interaction is characterized by equality and the minimization of difference, while complementary interaction is based on the maximization of the difference” (Watzlawick et al, 2011, p. 69). However, the escalation in symmetry and rigidity in complementarity are considered pathological behaviours by Watzlawick et al. (2011). To express it in other words, Hawes (2015, p.165) clarifies that when aggression is met with

aggression, which, in turn, is met with more aggression, and so on indefinitely, the pattern is symmetrical, but when aggression is responded to with submission, and so on indefinitely, the pattern is complementary.

The pathological behaviour mentioned above leads to an imbalance in power relationships, a breeding ground for impoliteness. Thus, the dominant presence of impoliteness ensures the occurrence of the pathology of symmetrical escalation, which is caused when the rude and impolite exchanges are the only components of the relationship. For example, social media foment symmetrical escalation of insults between members of antagonistic groups. The dominant presence of fustigation impoliteness also ensures the pathology of complementary rigidity. This happens when the verbal alternation is abandoned, i.e. the speaker that produces the main tension is always the same during the interaction, without the other speaker having the opportunity to change the role. For example, within abusive families or abusive relationships where one member maintains financial control and power on the rest, s/he may act extremely rudely all the time.

These are two elementary characteristics of typical communicative impolite behaviour, which may also encourage certain persistent patterns of behaviour to become more established (for example, patterns of verbal and social bullying, through either physical presence or virtual media). These patterns may take the form of cultural behaviour, and, as noted above, may become a new natural environment for impoliteness.

Fustigation impoliteness implies strong negative emotions (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2017, 2018), misperceptions, stereotypes and lack of communication that lead to negative behaviours. It might be useful to recall here that impoliteness may imply a conflict, but the reverse is not true. In contrast, impoliteness triggers conflict or makes it worse.

The adherence to social norms and respect for them is a distinctive feature of politeness behaviour. On the contrary, impoliteness does not have norms to be respected. There are no bounds to creativity in impoliteness behaviour, and the same applies to dominant-style conflict.

Table 3 presents the common traits between conflict and impoliteness when conflict takes a destructive course in a dominating style.

Table 3. Common traits emergent of dominating-style conflict and fustigation impoliteness

- They are a part of everyday life
- They are co- created in interaction
- They are socially constructed between two or more parties, individuals or groups
- They may convey themselves through other channels as visual-gesturing communication
- They create antagonism, animosity, intimidation, aggressiveness
- Their participants reflect feelings of discomfort and negative emotions like anger, hate, fear, etc.
- There is a prevalence of personal factors in developing them, especially the power that each party exercises to take their place
- They imply confrontation that can lead to further escalation
- They are not regulated by norms
- Both processes can be interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup

As seen in Table 3, to some extent the dominating style of conflict is the mirror image of fustigation impoliteness and vice versa. Despite this common ground, they are not equivalent, but complementary, as explained below.

The definition of conflict (Rahim, 2011) does not include impoliteness, but rather ideas of incompatibility or disagreement. The definition of impoliteness adds an explicit reference to its participation in a conflict because impoliteness assures a discursive confrontation.

Impoliteness is always seen as a premeditated behaviour except for the case of the unintentional gaffe, while conflict can be triggered without premeditation between the parties. This happens as a result of different cultures, ideologies or interests. Even more, under an identical ideology, a conflict may occur because the parties defend conflicting interests. In addition, conflict must be considered as a conscious interference with the attainment of the other’s goal. Also, conflict may be a pre-existing situation that instigates the occurrence of impoliteness, which at the service of the escalation of that conflict. For example, in an electoral struggle, an impolite fustigation act can turn out into something much worse, which entails a further escalation of the previous conflict.

Impoliteness just emerges when the impolite speaker does his /her first speech act, unless this is a counterattack on the part of the hearer, related with a previous impolite exchange.

Conflict can develop with forceful arguments, while the impolite speaker is not interested in arguments, nor is s/he listening to the other party.

Impoliteness is inseparably linked to arrogation of power on the part of the speaker and can be a recurrent pattern of behaviour in a given *impolite community of practice* (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2010, 2014) such as footballing events, when sides shout against each other. Conflict is the essential core of the shared practice within these communities. There is an underlying cultural and diffuse motivation for making one’s view of the world prevail.

Table 4 provides a summary of the main differences between conflict and impoliteness.

Table 4. The differences between dominating-style conflict and fustigation impoliteness

Dominating-style conflict	Fustigation Impoliteness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ it does not necessarily imply discursive confrontation.</li> <li>▪ it can be triggered without premeditation between the parties.</li> <li>▪ it may appeal to impoliteness.</li> <li>▪ there is usually a problematic situation within a given course of action.</li> <li>▪ it develops the argument “do it my way”.</li> <li>▪ it displays an attempt to gain power at the expense of the other party.</li> <li>▪ it is a competitive process/phenomenon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ it implies discursive confrontation.</li> <li>▪ it always constitutes premeditated and intentional behaviour.</li> <li>▪ it emerges by the fact that the impolite act is carried out.</li> <li>▪ there is a precipitating and personal factor, but not necessarily a previous problematic situation.</li> <li>▪ there are no arguments, because the impolite speaker is unwilling to listen to the other party.</li> <li>▪ it grants the speaker’s power for the prevalence of their own worldview or their own face wants.</li> <li>▪ it presents a recurrent pattern of behaviour in a given community of practice.</li> </ul>

## 5. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

This work has examined the relationship between impoliteness and conflict. Up to now, specialists in impoliteness in the Spanish speaking world had not discussed its relationship theoretically, taking conflict as a topic of research; they have considered conflict as something intrinsic to impoliteness instead.

The present discussion has shown that there is a common ground between these phenomena; however, they are not equivalent but rather complementary because they have mutually reinforcing goals.

Fortunately, impoliteness research is currently expanding, generating new topics of interest. More research and analysis are needed to examine the relationship between impoliteness and conflict explored herein, especially in the field of applied research. In this way many different social contexts could be scrutinized and compared, such as neutral vs. aggressive ones, public and formal vs. private and informal ones, international and regional ones.

Many types of conflict (especially interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup conflict) can be associated with impoliteness. Interpersonal conflict is the most widely studied of these types in relation to impoliteness. However, intragroup or intergroup conflict has not been studied in depth, and since they respond to social and cultural factors, it seems clear that the analysis of conflict and impoliteness requires a pragmatic sociocultural approach to describe and explain the social motivations that underlie and promote them.

A further joint investigation of impoliteness and conflict could go in the direction of how those sociocultural motivations of behaviours satisfy interests of a given impolite community of practice. In the case of a pragmatic sociocultural approach, not only the text should be taken into account but also its level of contextual organization, which means that the text should be taken as a social construction of reality, a range within which the complete text is a unit consisting of sociocultural practices. Results could be drawn from analyses of intragroup and inter-group impolite relationships that take place within a certain impolite and conflictive community of practice (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2010, 2014). In the case of intragroup relationships, these practices should be discussed as a case of individual vs. individual relationships (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2005b). In the case of intergroup relations, these practices should be considered as an instance of fustigation impoliteness between groups.

Moreover, the impolite and conflictive recurrent practices that are characteristic of a given community could also be analysed. This could provide a useful topologic perspective to examine the functioning of different impolite and conflictive communities of practice.

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