Editorial

Introduction: Im/politeness and globalisation

Research on politeness has witnessed an immense expansion over the last forty years with impoliteness gaining ground over the last fifteen (Brown and Levinson, 1978/1987; Culpeper, 2011; Culpeper et al., 2017; Eelen, 2001; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010, 2013; Grainger and Mills, 2016; Kádár and Haugh, 2013; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983, 2014; Locher and Watts, 2005; Mills, 2003, 2017; Sifianou, 1992; Terkourafi, 2005; Watts, 2003; to mention but a few), although issues of im/politeness have been of concern to people for centuries. Despite the voluminous research, definitions of both politeness and impoliteness are still tantalising researchers. For instance, Watts (2003:11, 12) talks of the "elusive" nature and "bewildering ambiguity" of politeness and elsewhere (Watts, 2005: xiii) of "a slippery, ultimately indefinable quality of interaction". The same is true of impoliteness whose definition is "a real challenge" (Culpeper, 2011:22).

For its part, globalisation is a term that has gained increasing momentum relatively recently, even though as Eriksen (2014:1—2) argues various parts of the world have been interconnected before and people were "thinking and theorizing about global interconnectedness in earlier periods" (see also Blommaert, 2010; Turner, 2010). Even though "globalization is certainly not without precedent, its scale and scope *are* new and detectable in changes over recent decades" (Coupland, 2010:4, emphasis in the original). The concept is complex and multi-faceted involving a number of controversial issues. Broadly speaking, it refers to "transnational connectedness and encompasses important economic, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions" (Eriksen, 2014:1). Bartelson (2000:181) argues that sociopolitical concepts, like globalisation and one might add politeness here, "are like sponges: they are able to soak up and contain a variety of meanings as a result of being used in different contexts for different purposes. It is this sponginess that makes concepts increasingly ambiguous".

Similar to globalisation, both politeness and impoliteness have been seen in both positive and negative terms (see, e.g., Kienpointner, 1997; Watts, 2003). There is no doubt then that the multifaceted, contested and complex nature of im/politeness and globalisation along with their ideological underpinnings highlight an equally complex relationship among them. Thus, even though the relationship between im/politeness and globalisation is undoubtedly significant, it is anything but straightforward and clear and constitutes an intriguing area for exploration. This special issue is one of the first attempts to investigate and offer some insights into aspects of their complex interrelationship and possibly trigger further research in this largely unexplored terrain. It should be borne in mind, however, that the papers in this issue are case studies and do not claim to provide an exhaustive coverage of the variety and complexity of the issues that arise in relation to im/politeness in the era of globalisation.

As regards globalisation, on the one hand, it has been assumed that it will lead to the homogenisation of every aspect of people's lives (e.g., Coupland, 2003, 2010; Fairclough, 2006; Held et al., 2003), thus threatening the local and jeopardising individual and local autonomy since power is accumulated in specific places and decisions are taken in far-off lands. This negativity resonates in terms like Americanization, westernization and McDonaldization which have been used as rough equivalents to globalisation. On the other, however, it is assumed that increasing global interconnectedness provides more opportunities and options for everyone to share information, goods, and new technologies. Ease of travel and new forms of technologically-mediated communication may indeed enrich our knowledge of other peoples and cultures with whom we can sustain continuous contact. Moreover, we can appreciate and bring to the fore the local by being exposed to what may be different. As Salazar (2005:629) observes "[p]aradoxically, the increased interest in global forces and flows has pushed notions of the local more than ever to the forefront of scholarly analyses" and further argues that the 'local' does not refer to a spatially bounded locality but to "a space inhabited by people who have a particular sense of place, a specific way of life, and a certain ethos and worldview". Johnstone's (2010:387) explanation for this "renewed attention to the local is not a nostalgic or desperate *response* to globalization but an inevitable *result* of globalization" (emphasis in the original).

Nevertheless, many scholars would argue that the situation is not that simple and cannot be reduced to polar opposites. As Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997:145) suggested many years ago "[d]ualisation in Western social sciences has often led to polarisations which are then associated with, respectively, positive and negative values". Along similar lines, Turner (2010:6) cautions us against espousing such simple dichotomies adding further that we should not fail to see the complexities of the process and the interaction between local cultures and global processes, resulting in a new dynamic between the local and the global (see also Blommaert, 2003; Eriksen, 2014). In Coupland's (2010:5) words, globalisation is better seen as "a complex of processes through which difference as well as uniformity is generated, but in relation to each other". Moreover, globalization is "*not* uniformly and (ironically enough) *not* universally and *not* globally experienced" (Coupland, 2010:5, emphasis in the original). For Blommaert (2003:609), a realistic look at globalisation processes indicates that not everybody is part of such processes but only particular mediating actors. For inhabitants in the economically privileged parts of the world, globalisation entails gains and activities which know no borders given the expansion of advanced technologies, whereas for the majority of the world's population, it may mean worsening their life conditions (Block, 2004:14–15). One cannot but notice here another similarity between globalisation and politeness studies. In much the same way that the gaze of globalisation scholars "has been quite firmly on urban environments" (Wang et al., 2013:4), politeness researchers have mostly concentrated on elite discourses, unintentionally marginalizing or even excluding from consideration non-elite ones (Mills, 2017), that is, those mostly located outside urban centres. However, as Lakoff and Ide (2005:12) note, "better communication across national and societal boundaries becomes increasingly essential" in the era of globalisation and "now even the strongest powers are coming to realize that survival entails understanding their politically weaker interlocutors.

A salient feature of globalisation is the effacement of borders, frequently referred to as "the decline of the nation-state" (see Coupland, 2010:6). Quoting Appadurai (2001:5), Hodges (2010:305) states that "[n]ational borders no longer tightly constrain the movement of 'ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages'". No doubt, there are domains, such as transnational terrorism, mass unemployment and global warming, where nation states have only limited opportunities to act and to provide solutions on their own, even though national governments do continue to dictate certain policies within their confines (Coupland, 2010:6; see also Gordon Finlayson, 2005; Eriksen, 2014). Nation states are seen as being "threatened from without by globalization and world-economic pressures and threatened from within by multiculturalism" (Gordon Finlayson, 2005:124, drawing on Habermas). Multiculturalism has been commonplace in many parts of the world for years but has nowadays acquired a different sense. Given internet connectivity among other technological advances, minority groups are not isolated since they can "stay in close daily contact with each other or with events in their homelands and other diasporic locations". Such emerging networks "often ensure that common collective identities are maintained and enhanced" (Vertovec, 2010:89). This empowers "[m]arginalized groups and minorities [who may] fight for equal recognition and challenge the assumptions and certainties of the majority culture" (Gordon Finlayson, 2005). Moreover, these groups have gained access to public discourse and their voices along with their ways of speaking can be heard and may be different or even sound harsh or being interpreted as such by the dominant groups (Lakoff, 2005).

The complex interrelationship of the global and the local is frequently rendered with terms like 'hybridization' and 'glocalization'.[1] "Glocalization both highlights how local cultures may critically adapt or resist 'global' phenomena and reveals the way in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalization" (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007:134). Consequently, as Eriksen (2014:9) suggests, the effects of globalisation cannot be seen as holistically good or bad but rather as multi-faceted and complex affecting people's lives differently in different societies and even in different groups within the same society. This complexity is evident in that rather paradoxically, globalization is assumed to lead to homogenisation and simultaneously to 'superdiversity' or "diversification of diversity" (Vertovec, 2007, 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, this issue), that is, "a tremendous increase in the texture of diversity in societies such as ours" (Blommaert, 2013:4). As Blommaert adds, this increase is the result of two different but interrelated forces which hugely affect the way people organise their lives: unparalleled transnational mobility and increasing numbers of both traditional and novel interactions, along with the immense expansion of technologically mediated means of communication. These contribute, among others, to the construction of transnational identities, seen as membership in an expanded border-less community (see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Perelmutter, this issue). The much debated issue as to whether globalisation leads to homogenisation or hybridity and diversification, discussed earlier, significantly impacts on questions of identity (Turner, 2010:8; see also Ferenčík this issue).

Just like recent discursive approaches to im/politeness which find it difficult (if at all possible) to define culture, since cultures are not perceived as static homogeneous entities any longer (see, e.g., Mills and Kádár, 2011; Sifianou and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2017), familiar ascriptions of national or cultural identities have lost much of their meaning. As Thörn (2007:897) contends, even though many of the analytical tools of sociology refer to society explicitly or implicitly as 'national society', current social processes are increasingly stretching across national borders and with the aid of the explosion of digitally mediated communication, the growth of a transnational public sphere has emerged (see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Perelmutter and Vladimirou and House, this issue). Thus, it appears that our old conceptions of culture, identity and even politeness are inadequate to capture current complexity in a fast-evolving technologically-mediated world. Technologically-mediated means of communication play a crucial role in reshaping, and even changing, understandings of cultures, identities

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[1] Glocalisation is an awkward but widely used term for Coupland (2010:5).