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What makes teasing impolite in Australian and British English? “Step[ping] over those lines [...] you shouldn’t be crossing”

Abstract: Even though in English-speaking cultural contexts a humorous reaction to teasing seems to be highly valued, jocularly can and does sometimes occasion evaluations of impoliteness. This paper aims to examine what makes the targets and/or other ratified hearers (the third party) evaluate teasing as impolite and to observe how impoliteness (as an evaluative situated phenomenon) functions in jocular interactions in two cultural contexts – Australian and British. The data comes from two national versions of the same reality gameshow – *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012. The results from both data sets reveal that teasing is often negatively evaluated when it is meant to amuse the hearers at the target’s expense or it is delivered in a non-affectionate way. Furthermore, some cultural differences have been noticed. While British housemates do not particularly appreciate jocular comments that target some personal characteristics or one’s personal items (i.e. seen as a personal attack), Australians tend to label jocular verbal behaviour as inappropriate when it is used to exclude the target or when it disrupts social harmony in general.

Keywords: teasing, impoliteness, Australian English, British English, *Big Brother*

1 Introduction

Teasing, a form of conversational humour that flirts with the fine line between what is socially appreciated and what goes too far, has been extensively studied in the last few decades (for overviews, see Haugh 2010a, 2014; Sinkeviciute 2013). This type of jocular verbal behaviour can serve different purposes – such as to criticize, amuse, bond – but it also seems that more often than not the target should be able (even if pretending) to ‘treat it as jocular’ (Radcliffe-

Brown 1940: 195; Zajdman 1995: 326; Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Dynel 2009; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Haugh 2014: 78). This can be observed in some English-speaking cultural contexts where a humorous reaction to teasing is more highly valued than a possible (or actual) negative interpretation thereof. For instance, not taking yourself too seriously is referred to as a positive feature in mainstream Australian and British societies (Goddard 2009; Haugh 2010a) and jocular mockery is often to be evaluated as non-impolite (Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Haugh 2014), i.e., no offence is taken afterwards. Indeed, especially when surrounded by the ratified (as well as non-ratified) hearers the targets tend to project that they recognize an attempt at humour by laughing or smiling (Haugh 2011; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Sinkeviciute 2014, 2017; Maíz-Arévalo 2015).

Nevertheless, at least sometimes the participants seem to decide to ignore the cultural ethos of ‘not taking oneself too seriously’. In those cases, teasing can easily occasion explicit evaluations of impoliteness, which happens when situated behaviours “conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be” (Culpeper 2011: 23). Thus, the main objective of this paper is to explore which aspects present in teasing episodes happen to be those issues that conflict with one’s expectations, which makes the target and/or the third party evaluate jocular behaviours as impolite. I start by briefly overviewing the most influential developments in the area of (mock) impoliteness, reality television and (failed) humour. In Section 3, I introduce the data and describe the reasons for using the first-order approach and complementing it with second-order notions. Section 4 is dedicated to the results and discussion of the findings of this study. Apart from touching upon general issues that are claimed to cause offence during a teasing episode, closer attention is paid to other issues that point to specific reasons why the participants decide to negatively evaluate someone’s jocular behaviour. The paper concludes with the division of all the specific

issues generating negative reactions into three groups, related to person, social harmony disruption and topic.

2 (Mock) impoliteness, reality television and (failed) humour

Even though not so long ago impoliteness was seen as “rather marginal to human linguistic behaviour in normal circumstances” (Leech 1983: 105), in the last decade, the attention that once was almost entirely given to politeness research has gradually been moving towards impoliteness, which has become one of the most prolific areas in linguistic as well as interdisciplinary studies. Taking into consideration such a path of development, it is not surprising that the first impoliteness models – Culpeper’s (1996) or Bousfield’s (2008a) – were to a greater or lesser degree inspired by Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. 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 analyzed was characterized as aggravating language, conflict, rudeness as well as aggression (Tedeschi, Smith and Brown 1974; Lachenicht 1980; Lakoff 1989; Kasper 1990; Beebe 1995 among others).¹

Up to this moment, different ways of looking at impoliteness have been suggested. A special emphasis has been placed on context, situated evaluations and social action (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003, 2011; Locher and Watts 2005, 2008; LPRG 2011; van der Bom and Mills 2015). Indeed, as Gumperz (1992: 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: 50; see also Bousfield 2010: 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

¹ For a very comprehensive overview of impoliteness research, see Dynel (2015).

as a system” (van der Bom and Mills 2015 on Agha 2006). In the course of time some expressions become largely conventionalized (for more on the discussion of conventionalized (im)politeness, see Terkourafi 2003; Culpeper 2010, 2011). We can find this line of reasoning in Culpeper’s (2010, 2011) works on conventionalized impoliteness formulae that in different contexts are typically associated with impolite evaluations. In British English, 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 2011: 135–136). Such items refer to expressions that have “a more stable relationship with (im)politeness contexts” (Culpeper 2011: 127). In other words, in a number of different contexts native speakers tend to associate them with similar backgrounds and contextual assumptions that are typically evaluated as rather impolite. Undoubtedly, negative interpretations of verbal acts are largely situation-dependent and it is quite impossible to list all linguistic behaviours which would unequivocally cause offence. In order to illustrate cross-cultural variation in offence types, Culpeper (2011) draws on Spencer-Oatey’s (2002) framework of ‘rapport management’. His analysis shows that threats to quality face (personal qualities, such as abilities, appearance), equity rights (being treated fairly and not imposed upon) and association rights (an appropriate level of behavioural involvement and sharing of interests, feeling and concerns) are the main sources of offence (Culpeper 2011: 43-47). What has also been observed is that when verbal acts are perceived as deliberate and intentional, they are more likely to be seen as impolite and offensive (Graham 2007; Haugh 2010b; cf. Culpeper 2011: 53).

In his recent study, Haugh (2015) concentrates on the notion “offence” in relation to impoliteness. While it is clear that giving and taking offence represent much of what impoliteness research stands for, the notion has not been examined in depth. Impoliteness, as suggested by Culpeper (2011), describes “a particular 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: 36). Indeed, not all seemingly impolite behaviours cause offence and offence is not always taken to ostensibly impolite triggers. It can also be caused by ambiguous verbal behaviours or those that are polite on the surface (see Culpeper et al. forthcoming for (im)politeness and mixed messages; Taylor 2015 for mock politeness; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Haugh 2014; Sinkeviciute 2014, forthcoming for research on jocular behaviours). In this paper both concepts are merged in that “impoliteness” is used as a technical second-order term referring to the interactional practices to which the target and/or other participants (show that they) take offence (for a detailed description of the approach adopted in this paper, see section 3).

Needless to say, due to the nature of some discourses, e.g., military training, police work or exploitative TV shows (Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2011; Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann 2003; Bousfield 2008a, 2008b; Limberg 2008; Lorenzo-Dus 2009; Culpeper and Holmes 2013; Lorenzo-Dus, Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013), impoliteness is expected to occur and can be easily sanctioned. The question whether it, being an expected and appropriate behaviour, is also neutralized, is still discussed (Harris 2001; Mills 2002; Watts 2003; Culpeper 2005, 2011; Tracy 2008), but it does not change the fact that the targets can still show that they take offence at a later time (Culpeper 2011: 217; see also Sinkeviciute 2014, 2017; Haugh 2015).

It is obvious that impoliteness can be a great source of entertainment for those observing such behaviour (Culpeper 2011: 234–235; Dynel 2013).² In film discourse, for instance, it produces disaffiliative humour that “serves viewers’ entertainment and humour experience” (Dynel 2013: 106; see also Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Lorenzo-Dus 2013: 15). Various

² Note that much entertainment is generated when the target’s reactions are not available in film or reality television discourse (Dynel 2013). When the perceptions can be observed, some viewers express sympathy towards the participants (Hill 2007; Blas Arroyo 2013: 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 at what has been said (Sinkeviciute 2014, 2017) or for bystanders to intervene (Kádár and Márquez-Reiter 2015). For examples outside the realm of reality television, see Dobs and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013).

reality television programmes can also be blamed for generating the audience's voyeuristic pleasure in this way. Furthermore, it is easy to conceive of conflictual situations in broadcast talk, where the power relationships are imbalanced (Hutchby 1991, 1996; 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: 121). Indeed, in many such formats "the unmitigated face-aggravation" acts as a means of entertaining the public (Lorenzo-Dus 2009: 164). Also, it is seen as an intentionally and deliberately constructed face-threat (Bousfield 2007: 2186–2187; Culpeper 2008) or what can be called successfully communicated impoliteness (Bousfield 2010) or genuine impoliteness (Bernal 2008; Sinkeviciute 2015).

Yet, it is important to point out that mitigated face attacks can also be found in such reality television formats as *Big Brother*, *Survival*, and *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here* that are not only based on challenges but also interpersonal relations (for an analysis of conflicts related to judgement in such shows, see Thornborrow 2015: 132–148). The use of humour is an excellent way of mitigating a face-threat. Some analyses of English speaking cultural contexts show that mostly no visible offence is publicly taken to jocular, but at the same time face-threatening, behaviours (Haugh 2011, 2014; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Sinkeviciute 2014). Such reactions are at least partially conditioned by 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: 705). In addition, it can also be explained by the proscription against taking oneself too seriously and the high value that is placed on a good sense of humour (Fox 2004; Martin 2007; Goddard 2009; see also Bell 2009a, 2009b). This way, "face demands [can] be suspended for the sake of the other interest, which is 'to get a laugh'" (Zajdman 1995: 326). As a result, such jocular face-threats lead to evaluations of mock impoliteness rather than impoliteness, i.e., the target

decides to show that s/he recognizes and maybe even appreciates the humorous intent of a potentially impolite verbal act (for more on jocular behaviours and cultural values, see Olivieri 2003; Goddard 2009; Sinkeviciute 2017).

Although the desirable outcome on the part of the speaker of any attempt at humour is indeed for it to be recognized and enjoyed, jocularities can still be not appreciated, which can lead to failed humour (Bell 2009a, 2009b) or offence (claimed to be) taken. Consequently, reactions to humorous remarks happen to be po-faced, e.g., comments can be directly and seriously rejected (Drew 1987; Bell 2009b; Haugh 2010a, 2014; Sinkeviciute 2013), even though they can be preceded by laughter.³ This tendency of combining the recognition of humorous intent (in the form of laughter⁴) and its non-appreciation (via a comment or silence) points to the target “index[ing] affiliative and disaffiliative stances” (Haugh 2010a: 2110). Also, it 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; Sinkeviciute 2014). Nevertheless, with the help of evaluative metalinguistic comments it becomes quite evident that the comment lacks funniness (Bell 2009a) or offence can be or has been taken (Sinkeviciute 2014, 2017; Haugh 2015).

3 Data and methods

The data analyzed in this study comes from the broadcast material of two versions of the reality gameshow *Big Brother* 2012: Australia and UK. The format of the shows follows the same pattern, i.e., ordinary people are locked in a house with no access to the outside world until they are evicted/voted out from the house (for more information on the format, see Mathijs and Jones 2004). The Australian version was aired from August 13 to November 7, i.e., for 86 days,

³ But note that, as Bell (2009a: 1835) observes, “groaning and fake laughter, were among the least frequent reactions” to failed humour.

⁴ Indeed, laughter (not an obviously fake or nervous laughter) is “centrally bound up with notions of nonseriousness” in interaction (Holt 2013: 73).

and its British counterpart was screened during 69 days, from June 5 to August 13, which is estimated to be 58 and 55 hours of broadcast material, respectively.

First, all jocular episodes and metapragmatic comments (if available) were identified and transcribed. In this study only the situations that were evaluated or characterized as negative in an explicit way, were analyzed. As has been mentioned, reality television can be a source of aggression and the participants might be interested in creating conflicting situations in order to receive more attention (Lorenzo-Dus 2009; Culpeper and Holmes 2013; Sinkeviciute 2015). Nevertheless, the number of negative evaluations of jocular behaviours was quite low in this data – approximately accounting for 15 percent of all the responses to jocular conversations. It suggests that creating conflict is not the main interactional goal, at least not in the houses analyzed.

The approach that is followed here is first-order, i.e., the analysis is primarily based on the participants' own evaluations, whether immediately after a teasing episode or via meta-talk and backstage comments.⁵ However, as Haugh (2007: 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.”⁶ Thus, 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 approach to analysis with second-order analytical concepts. Such combinations 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

⁵ Since this study 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. For analyses taking into account such a distinction and pointing to the differences of the participants' evaluations, see Sinkeviciute (2014; 2017).

⁶ Note a question that Christie (2015: 363) poses 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?”

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: 44, emphasis original).⁷ Indeed, the use of emic evaluations and conceptualizations are at the core of many etic (second-order) approaches that should not and “do not disregard first-order notions” (Locher and Bousfield 2008: 5; see also Haugh 2007; Bousfield 2010; Terkourafi 2011; Clark 2013; van der Bom and Mills 2015). Similarly in this paper, based on the participants’ assessments, an attempt is made to group and classify particular categories of the issues that (might) cause evaluations of impoliteness using (at least partially) second-order notions and/or labels.

4 What makes teasing impolite?

The 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’ was not used once in either of the data sets, which, as Culpeper (2011: 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: 47–48). On the other hand, such terms as ‘offensive’, ‘nasty’, ‘rude’, ‘inappropriate’, ‘disrespectful’, ‘inconsiderate’, ‘horrible’, ‘mean’ and ‘upset(ting)’ have been employed in order to refer to negatively-viewed teasing 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 teasing emerged. The first group refers to more general aspects of jocular conversations and their nature. It is based on the participants’ rather vague comments and will only be briefly touched upon here. Consider some examples:

⁷ For different stances in discursive approaches on (im)politeness1 and (im)politeness2, see Haugh (2007).

(1a)

Estelle 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

(1b)

Ray about Ben:

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

(1c)

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

In the data, many complaints about teasing being inappropriate involve having a laugh or amusing the third party or oneself at the expense of someone else (as in [1a]). 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; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Sinkeviciute 2013, 2014), but not all of them are used in order to amuse someone else or make oneself look better (Haugh and Bousfield 2012; Yu 2013). Furthermore, the presence of consecutive jokes directed at the same person has been singled out by different housemates and referred to as 'going too far' ([1b]). Finally, the lack of 'affectionate' delivery, which stands for body language and facial expression ([1c]), seems to cause negative comments.

On the other hand, the second group represents more specific issues that point to a concrete remark and are of primary importance in this paper (see Table 1).⁸

Table 1. Specific issues occasioning the evaluations of impoliteness after a jocular episode in *Big Brother* Australia 2012 and *Big Brother* UK 2012 and their frequencies

Impolite jocularities (<i>BBAU</i>)	Impolite jocularities (<i>BBUK</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - association with a negative name/person/group/activity; - breach of ‘social norms’/taboo topics; - shifting the facts (on purpose); - excluding (AU)⁹; - (singling out someone as) being better (AU). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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).

4.1 Specific issues

As has been mentioned, in this paper the primary interest is devoted to the specific issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness in the data sets. In the following subsections, similar as well as different specific issues generating impolite evaluations will be illustrated and discussed. It will be followed by a brief overview of those specific issues and their division into three categories relating to personal aspects, the disruption of social harmony and a topic/subject matter.

4.1.1 Similarities in the Australian and British *Big Brother*

During the qualitative analysis, three specific issues to which the participants refer as the ones producing evaluations of impoliteness coincided in both data sets. Those were (1) associating

⁸ 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 data set.

⁹ AU and UK indicate those specific issues that have only been encountered in one of the data sets.

the target with a negative name/person/group/activity, (2) breach of ‘social norms’ and taboo topics and (3) shifting the facts, whether deliberately or not.

The biggest jocular ‘sin’ in both houses was to associate someone with something negative. First, consider two examples from the Australian data set:

(2a)

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}

(2b)

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
(housemates): {[falling tone] o::h}

Michael who was present during the episode, retells to the other housemates what happened:

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

In (2a), during the introductions, Ray refers to himself as ‘Ray-Ray’, which, most probably due to the rhyming, immediately provokes Stacey’s comparison of Ray’s name to a stingray. A

stingray is only one of many venomous creatures residing in Australia¹⁰, but even for a tough and stoic Aussie bloke (Sharp 2012) it might be something undesirable with which to be associated. His refusal, that can also be occasioned by the fact that he might have heard it too many times already,¹¹ 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 (2b), after joking-around turns between Bradley and Charne, the former decides to move further and jocularly claims 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 (see also [11a]), 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) 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 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:

¹⁰ 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>).

¹¹ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

(3)

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:

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 people¹², 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 (Bubel and Spitz 2006; Haugh 2010a). It should be mentioned that the target has been the initiator of many jocular face-threatening comments in the house (see [7] in this subsection). In this situation, she is the one presenting other people's negative opinion of herself as a laughable. Nonetheless, when she hears Adam's comment, she 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.

The second type of special issue occasioning evaluations of impoliteness mentioned by the participants refers to the breach of social norms and engaging in taboo topics (see Culpeper 2011: 42, 45–47, 142). 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 (4) shows a conversation among four Australian housemates, one

¹² Caroline was known as a very sarcastic person in the house. Due to her comments she was frequently characterised as nasty and bitchy.

of whom – Ava – is a vegetarian. Unfortunately, they forgot to order tofu for her. Ava comes into the kitchen and George breaks the news:

- (4)
- 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: → {[low] a:h}
Angie: → Bradley shut stop just stop Bradley for one minute
Ava: → == yeah it's serious

We can see that several housemates are involved in this conversation. While Angie wants to say something in a serious way, Bradley, who is known for his deadpan jocular comments, decides to lighten the situation presenting a much worse scenario, i.e., if 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. 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-Kuhlen 2009 in Reber 2012: 209–222). Angie, on the other hand, directs her evaluative comment towards Bradley, trying to silence him ('shut stop just stop'). This way she shows that she negatively assesses his attempt at humour. Interestingly, after the third party's intervention, which seems to be a tendency among the Aussie housemates (see also [2b]), similarly to Angie, Ava (the target) enters the non-humorous frame herself. She finally claims that the matter is 'serious', which suggests that she recognized 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.

- (5a)
- 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 humorous remark, Adam opts for 'we' instead of 'you' to refer to Ashleigh and Luke S having intimate relations. It seems that he includes himself and other housemates in the activity and claims 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 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. [4]). Ashleigh's reaction, on the other hand, shows that she did not appreciate the humorous potential and, even if she recognized 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.¹³ Furthermore, the inappropriateness of Adam's

¹³ Due to constraints of space, this paper does not discuss gender differences (but see Hay 2000; Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Holmes 2006).

comment seems to bother Ashleigh and at the end of the day she is seen to be quite upset and shares her thoughts with Luke S and Conor:

(5b)
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 at Adam's remark and that it was socially inappropriate and 'disgusting'. The reason for that could be that intimate relations are supposed to be private and the fact that her parents could be 'watching' the show and evaluating their daughter's moral behaviour.

In the last category of special issues that could be found in both data sets, 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:

(6)
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
Angie: → {[smiling] shut u::p}
Josh: (bob wire)
= bob wire? =
Angie: → = {[quite sharply] do you wanna know or
not? = so ok I thought you guys wanted to know but
now I realize that you don't wanna know you just wanna
→ make fun of me {[looks at Josh] I'll be quiet
→ [does a gesture for a shut mouth] thanks for that
Stacey: let her speak
Josh: → = footy club footy club logo premier () =
Angie: = that's ok () = my type

Zoe: → {[leaving the room] oh why do I bother}
 → 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 culture¹⁴ but also as a symbol of nationalism rooted therein (McSween et al. 2011, McSween et al. 2013). 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 realizing that Josh does not stop teasing her (‘footy club logo’), Angie leaves the room.¹⁵ What is also important to notice in this extract is that after Angie has left, other housemates seem to recognize a possible tension in the house and show their concern about the target (see Zoe’s and Ray’s reactions).

¹⁴ 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 paper it is sufficient to know that largely the term is quite pejorative.

¹⁵ 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.

A similar situation when a housemate shifts the facts of someone's story can also be observed in this longish interaction from the British house:

(7)

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 McDonalds 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 McDonalds 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
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 ()

As can be seen in the extract, Caroline starts by claiming that Sara actually said that a McDonalds 'was on the pyramids', which immediately receives Sara's rejection ('I didn't say they built McDonalds on the pyramids'). Nevertheless, Caroline continues her quest adding more details to the story. She does not limit herself only to McDonalds, 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 recognize 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 recognize that. This admission, however, does not bring relief to Sara. On the contrary, she, in a very sharp

voice, refers to Caroline's seemingly constant behaviour as an attempt at belittling, which is not appreciated. However, Caroline 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'.¹⁶ 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'.

In this subsection, I illustrated three specific issues that were common among the Australian and British housemates: associating the target with something negative, breaching social norms or engaging in taboo topics and (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.

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

As seen in Table 1, there are some specific issues occasioning evaluations of impoliteness that could only be observed in one of the data sets. 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

¹⁶ Cf. Aussie tendency to *rubbish* (insult) *the mates* that leads to evaluations of mock impoliteness (Goddard, 2006; Haugh, 2010; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012 and examples therein).

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 [8] and [9]), the category referring to someone being better can be self-directed (i.e., explicitly or implicitly stating that one is better) (see [11]) or other-directed (i.e., projecting that the target is better or superior) (see [10]). The function of the latter, as will be seen below, is not to explicitly exclude the target from the group. But first, consider the following examples where the housemates claim that a particular jocular behaviour excluded the target from a bigger group:

(8)

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

(9) Zoe is explaining why she nominates Bradley:

Zoe: when the boys had a joke about Layla being
 from England and you know oh like 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 [10] and [11]), 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 2013). What is valuable in (8) 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 conceptualizes 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. [7]), but uncovers his own emotions towards his jocularity (‘I felt really really horrible’) and apologizes ‘with all [his] heart’. In (9), 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 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.

Extracts (10), (11a) and (11b) deal with an idea of being different in terms of being/feeling better or superior. In the Australian cultural context, there is a tendency to promote feelings of social equality and discourage feelings of specialness and pretentiousness in interaction (Goddard 2009: 42; see also Wierzbicka 2002: 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).

(10)

Before coming into the house, every housemate had a secret. After two weeks all of them were revealed. Michael’s secret was that he has the 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-

(11a)

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)}
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]

(11b)

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 [...]

In (10), with Michael being the only housemate with an IQ that high, 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 (10), it was Bradley who suggested that the target was somehow better, in (11a), 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 criticize 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 takes the first opportunity 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.¹⁷ In addition, it should be emphasized that, contrary to examples (8) and (9), 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 (11b), Angie, who did not explicitly confront Estelle in (11a), talks to Bradley in the kitchen and reveals how she interpreted

¹⁷ Michael and Ben express their negative attitude towards anyone feeling better than other housemates:

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

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 trying to project her healthy eating superiority.

If the specific issues in the Australian house refer to singling out someone as better and 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 2011: 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. Let's have a look at the following examples:

(12a)

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}

(12b)

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

In (12a), 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 realizing that her comment might be inappropriate, tries to claim its non-seriousness ('only joking'). The target's smile shows that

Ashleigh recognizes the humorous potential, but she still draws Becky’s attention to the fact 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 giggling¹⁸, also agrees with Ashleigh, who finally shows her disapproval and silences Becky. Later, when the instigator is not present, Ashleigh and Scott share their emotions towards Becky. This metalanguage shows Ashleigh’s negative evaluations of Becky’s jocular comment before in (12a) 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’). 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 (12a) and (12b), in both instances they clearly refer to impoliteness.

Finally, the evaluations of impoliteness after a jocular verbal act can be caused by reminding the target of a painful experience.

(13a)

Conor and Luke S had an opportunity to leave the house with a very large amount of money. What they had to do was push a button. Conor succeeded and walked out with 50 thousand pounds, whereas Luke had to go back to the house with nothing. In the evening, Deana starts teasing him about his failure to win the money:¹⁹

Deana:	→	= { [laughing] push the button quicker } =
Luke S:	→	= [smiles] =
Deana:		[laughs and roars]
		part of the conversation omitted
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]

¹⁸ Similarly 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.

¹⁹ For a full analysis of this interaction, see Sinkeviciute (2017).

- (13b)
- 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}

In this last extract, Deana teasingly refers to Luke S's failure to win the money. Even though knowing that he was extremely upset and angry with his house-friend Conor, Deana keeps laughing about him not 'push[ing] the button quicker'. Luke S, who is obviously not amused, attempts smiling but keeps silent. Indeed, silence can function as an additional intensifier of the target's response, whether s/he decides to ignore a tease, react seriously, refuse what has been directed at him/her or even "get back at initiators" (Lytra 2007: 396–400; for more on different communicative functions of silence, see Jaworski 1993). Despite Luke S's silence, Deana keeps jocularly mocking him and labels her own behaviour as 'banter', which suggests that banter never causes offence or hurt feelings. Luke S finally voices his non-amusement and replies that he does not 'need to be reminded', which, however, does not make Deana's laughter stop. Moreover, the following day Deana cannot drop the topic of her amusement²⁰ and now claims that in order for Luke S to be entertaining (and as a consequence, more popular among the viewers) he should play Charlie who had a Golden Ticket. This seems to be the last straw for Luke S who, leaving the kitchen, warns Deana about his nomination choice. It should be mentioned that in the house, it is prohibited to talk about nominations and even hint at for whom the housemate might vote. Moreover, since being nominated means that a housemate's *Big Brother* experience might potentially end, it is seen as an ultimate offence in this community of practice. Thus, by referring to Deana as his nominee number one, Luke S not

²⁰ Deana and Luke S belong to different groups in the house, thus they are not close, act more like rivals and occasionally try to put each other down (face-to-face or behind their backs).

only breaks the rule in the house but also clearly shows his attitude towards Deana’s jocular behaviour that he undoubtedly finds impolite.

4.2 Division of the specific issues into categories

As seen in the previous subsections, there are a variety of specific issues that during or after a jocular face-threatening episode generate evaluations of impoliteness. During the analysis it became clear that 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 a topic of conversation (Table 2).

Table 2. 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
<i>BBAU</i>	36% (12)	46% (15)	18% (6)
<i>BBUK</i>	59% (13)	14% (3)	27% (6)

It should be mentioned that some specific issues in Table 1, 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, 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., [11a]).

The results reveal that offence has been taken more often to humorous behaviour (that is thought to be) targeting something personal (body, characteristics, etc.) by the British housemates (59% vs 36%) (as in [12a]). 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 [8], [9], [11a]).

Finally, the topic/subject matter-related category did not cause much offence. However comparing the frequency in the same data set, it still generated more evaluations of impoliteness than the category related to social harmony disruption in the British house (27% vs 14%) (as in [7], [13a]). 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 [7], [12a]).

5 Concluding remarks

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, see Haugh forthcoming). Despite the fact that much has been written on the topic and the functions of teasing, indications of what oversteps the boundaries has been only scarcely mentioned, merely referring to conflictive topics (e.g., Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; cf. Plester 2009; Sinkeviciute 2014). This study presented the analysis of jocular behaviours in two cultural contexts, Australian and British. Even though there is a tendency among the speakers of English to laugh or, more frequently, simply laugh off jocular verbal behaviours, it is also clear that there is a borderline between what can be considered as a joke and what goes too far.

As Culpeper (2011: 23) suggests

[s]ituated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered ‘impolite’ – when they conflict with how one expects them 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.

It was the aim of this paper to observe what issues conflict with the target’s expectations and generate negative evaluations of the verbal practice of teasing in a specific community of practice – the reality gameshow *Big Brother* 2012 in Australia and the UK.

First, some general issues have been 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 in the house (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 hand, are more likely to find comments criticizing 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. Undoubtedly, it should be borne in mind that these are the results of reality television discourse and more future research should be done in order to explore the reasons behind one’s taking offence to jocularity in other contexts.

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

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Bionote

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