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“Will you fuck off please”. The use of *please* by London teenagers**“Jódete, por favor”. El uso de *please* (‘por favor’) por parte de los adolescentes londinenses**

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Abstract: The paper investigates how the politeness marker *please* is used by young people to distinguish themselves from adults and create an identity of their own. The analysis of *please* is based on the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT). The distribution and uses of *please* in COLT are compared with similar data from the British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB). We can recognize several functions of the “impolite” *please* in the COLT Corpus. To begin with, it is used strategically to establish or confirm harmonious relationships between the speakers (rapport-strengthening impoliteness). Secondly, “mock impoliteness” may be understood in a positive way because it is amusing or entertaining. In young people’s circles entertainment skills are for example highly valued (entertainment impoliteness). Finally, impoliteness is used creatively in interaction by the participants who use repetition, reformulation and escalation to construct ritualized sequences of apparent insults (creative impoliteness).

Keywords: Corpora, Mock Impoliteness, Please, Youth Language

Resumen: Este artículo investiga cómo los jóvenes usan el marcador de cortesía *please* (‘por favor’) para diferenciarse de los adultos y crear una identidad propia. El análisis se basa en el Corpus Bergen del lenguaje adolescente de Londres (COLT), y la distribución y uso de *please* se compara con datos similares del apartado británico del Corpus Internacional del Inglés (ICE-GB). En el corpus COLT reconocemos diferentes funciones del *por favor* “descortés”. En primer lugar, es usado estratégicamente para establecer o confirmar relaciones armónicas entre los hablantes (se trata de una descortesía de fortalecimiento de relaciones). En segundo lugar, la *descortesía burlesca* debe entenderse de forma positiva, ya que es divertida o entretenida, pues en los círculos juveniles las habilidades para crear entretenimiento

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están muy bien valoradas (por tanto, es una descortesía de entretenimiento). Finalmente, la descortesía es usada de forma creativa en la interacción mediante el uso de la repetición, la reformulación y la intensificación, a fin de construir secuencias ritualizadas de aparentes insultos (se trata de una descortesía creativa).

Palabras clave: Corpus, Descortesía Burlesca, Lenguaje Juvenil, *Please* ('Por Favor')

1 Introduction

The inspiration for this study comes from the observation that *please* was very frequent in a corpus of teenage speech but that it was used in unexpected ways, as in the following example:

Craig: Yes I'm gonna say that and something big.

Peter: Oh bollocks.

Craig: Right that's what I'm gonna say I'm gonna say Ross can you fuck off please and I'm gonna say Jock you don't mind do you?

Peter: I'll just make sure I'm not in here, that's what I'll do.

(42001a-09-M-14-16-He-?)

Please is an expression of politeness. However, in the example above it is used together with the impolite 'can you fuck off' as a rude way of asking the other person to go away. Such examples are not unexpected in adolescent language. The question arises why the speakers use impolite language and why *please* is sometimes used with a negative or impolite meaning.

Young people seem to use rude language differently from adults. Andersen (2001) has studied how teenagers use pragmatic markers such as *like* in contexts which seem strange to speakers who are not in the peer group. He suggests that "more generally, it is of interest to investigate whether adolescence and adulthood are essentially different with respect to interactional and politeness principles" (Andersen, 2001, p. 307). Teenagers seem for instance to "pay less attention to politeness and phatic language than adults do." Interruptions are frequent and they are often accompanied by "mock insults."

The aim of the present study is to investigate how the politeness marker *please* is used by young people to distinguish themselves from adults and create an identity of their own. The analysis of *please* will be based on the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT),¹ a corpus of half a million words

¹ A similar corpus is COLA (Corpus Oral de Lenguaje Adolescente), which is built up along roughly the same principles to study Spanish youth language in Madrid and in other capitals of Spanish-speaking countries (see Hofland et al. 2005).

of conversations among young boys and girls, mainly between 13 and 16 years of age from different London boroughs. The young people know each other well and they speak on a large number of different topics (see further Stenström et al., 2002). The recordings can be listened to but the conversations have not been prosodically transcribed. The distribution and uses of *please* will be compared with “adult data” from the British component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB) (see Nelson, Wallis and Aarts, 2002).

The structure of the paper is as follows: The theoretical frame will be discussed in Section 2. Section 3 deals with *please* in previous work. Section 4 compares *please* in the COLT Corpus with its uses in other corpora. In Section 5, I discuss the teenagers’ strategic uses of *please* to create a certain image or identity of themselves. In Section 6, I draw some conclusions from the data about the functions of impoliteness in teenage language.

2 Theoretical perspectives

Brown and Levinson’s influential theory of politeness (1978, 1987) relied on the notion of face: “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself (sic)” (Brown and Levinson, 1978, p. 66). The focus is on how speakers use special strategies to save their own or the hearer’s face if threatened. For example, if the speaker asks somebody to do something, they may use a strategy mitigating the illocutionary force of the face-threatening action.

Brown and Levinson’s model of politeness has been criticized because “it focused on harmonious interactions, and, thus, quite understandably, ignored impoliteness” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 6). Human beings do not always behave in a polite way. They use rude language such as swearing and express their annoyance or irritation both verbally and non-verbally. Other types of impoliteness in conversation are irony and banter.

Conversational impoliteness has been studied from different perspectives in pragmatics and discourse analysis. Traditionally the emphasis in pragmatics has been on the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) and how it is used by the addressee to derive the speaker’s intended meaning by inferencing (“implicatures”). Leech gives the following illustration of how implicatures apply to the interpretation of an imperative (what Leech refers to as a “mand”):

For example, a primary step in pragmatically interpreting the mand “Just pay me the money you owe me” is to derive the implicature that *S*’s [the speaker’s] communicative goal is to get *H* [the hearer] to pay the money – that is, to interpret the mand (by default) as a directive. Only if *H* judges that this implicature is false, that is, if the Maxim of Quality is judged to be violated – will *H* access other interpretations, such as that *S* is indulging in playful banter. Leech (2014, p. 71).

Researchers who have criticized the Gricean approach have suggested that Relevance Theory offers a better method of deriving the inferences that are necessary to evaluate the discourse as polite or impolite (as ironic, joking, etc.) (cf. Watts, 2003, p. 26).

In recent discussions of impoliteness, it has been claimed that impoliteness can be strategic and systematic and that it should be studied in its own right (Culpeper 2011). Some uses of impoliteness are, for example, conventionalised and do not depend on inferencing.

Both politeness and impoliteness can be expressed by specific conventionalised formulae and strategies which can also be used in novel ways (Culpeper, 2005, 2011). Interpretations involve “matching information encoded in the formal features of the utterance with the pragmatic context” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 166). The information encoded in the formula can however be at odds with the surrounding context, with the result that inferencing is more complex. The following example illustrates a mismatch between the context and impolite expressions:

As Francesca and John left the house, she came back to give Mum a kiss and they said goodbye in the way they often did. ‘Bye, you bitch.’ Francesca said. ‘Get out of here, go on, you bitch’, replied Mum. (From *It’s in the blood: My life* by Lawrence Dallaglio, former English Rugby captain. The example has been shortened.) (Culpeper, 2011, p. 207).

In the mother’s direct speech we find an insulting vocative “you bitch” following what Culpeper (2011) refers to as a “dismissal” (*get out of here*). These expressions do not seem to match the situation in which they are uttered (a conversation between family members). However, in their context they signal “a strong family unit”. According to Culpeper (2011, p. 207), “[T]he recontextualisation of impoliteness in socially opposite contexts reinforces social opposite effects, namely, affectionate, intimate bonds among individuals and the identity of the group.”

In the example just given, the mismatch is external (mismatch between a lexical expression and the context). Other cases involve internal mismatches, i. e. mismatches created out of conventionalised politeness formulas in the context of an impoliteness expression (Culpeper’s 2011 paradigm example is *Could you please fuck off*) (See Culpeper, 2011, p. 166 and Section 5.1.)

Bernal’s study (2008) of “genuine versus non-genuine politeness” in colloquial Spanish is of interest because it deals with another language than English. Bernal (2008) observed that in Spanish society certain expressions which were used for mocking or insulting in certain contexts could have the effect of producing “an *affiliative social effect*, strengthening feelings of solidarity within a group and of closeness between interlocutors” (2008, p. 781). Bernal studied expressions in Peninsular Spanish which could have both impolite or negative effects (authentic impoliteness) and less conventionalized

readings implying “apparent impoliteness only” (non-authentic impoliteness; Bernal, 2008, p. 782). Bernal also pointed out the importance of the interpretation a receiver makes of the situation, for example how “impoliteness can be entertaining”. The discussion is based mainly on negative expressions such as swearing. We can however assume that Spanish and other languages also use inherently polite expressions in impolite ways for mock impoliteness or banter.

Recently, we have witnessed the publications of many books and articles about impoliteness. However, we do not know enough about different types of impoliteness and how to describe them. The term banter is for example used broadly both about teasing or mocking a particular target and “to refer to insulting others in a ritualised manner” (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012, p. 4). It is therefore important to discuss the different functions of im / politeness in actual discourse in as many settings as possible (and in several different languages).

3 Previous work

Culpeper (2011, p. 130) describes *please* (and *thanks*) as “icons of English politeness” closely associated with social norms and habits in English society. You are for example supposed to say *please* when you ask for something at the dinner table in an English middle class family. Biber et al. (1999) mention *please* as an example of “primarily polite speech act formulae” occurring typically in exchanges such as “Can I have a-another two Diet Cokes please? Thank you” (Biber et al. 1999, p. 1093). The authors regard *please* as an “insert”, so called because it is only loosely associated with the sentence.

Wichmann’s articles on *please* (2004, 2005) are a contribution to the study of the association between intonation and attitudes. It is shown that *please* “is not always a neutral courtesy marker as suggested by Biber et al.’s analysis but, depending on its intonational realization, can convey meanings at the more emotional end of the interactional spectrum” (2005, p. 248). Perceived attitudes include interpersonal meanings such as being rude, humorous, ironic, etc. As shown by Wichmann, attitudinal meanings are not only carried by lexical and grammatical means but are also signalled non-verbally and prosodically.

Wichmann’s study is based on naturally spoken data from ICE-GB. In Section 4, I will compare the distribution and uses of *please* in the COLT Corpus with data from Wichmann’s analysis.

Leech (2014, p. 75) suggests that *please* as an isolate has a conventional meaning which can perhaps best be described performatively: “S (hereby) utters a somewhat polite directive.” It is assumed that it can be derived by pragmaticalization from the

structure *if it please you, if you please* and that “it has reached a formulaic extremity on the scale of pragmaticalization, so that any supposition that the present-day speaker or addressee inferentially ‘works out’ its meaning from an antiquated expression such as ‘if it please you’ would be absurd” (Leech 2014, p. 76). The interpretation depends very much on the context:

At one end of the scale it is almost indispensable as a marker of routine politeness in non-sentential requests such as *Tickets please* or answers to offers: *Would you like some more? Yes, please*. At the other extreme, especially when *please* is pronounced with an emphatic falling intonation or is used as an isolate... it can be an insistent reinforcement of the directive (Leech 2014, p. 162).

Sato (2008) focused on the functional equivalences of *please* in different positions within turn-constructive units in American English and New Zealand English. In turn-initial position, *please* expressed various emotions “such as the speaker’s wish, the sense of urgency, and enthusiasm” (Sato 2008, p. 1275). The medial position was closely associated with maintaining “an agreeable and cordial interaction with the participant(s)” (Sato 2008, p. 1275). The final position was shown to be “the locus in which the linkage between the speaker and the social situation is sought and acknowledged” (Sato 2008, p. 1276).²

Most attempts at defining the functions of *please* refer to its politeness use in connection with requests. An exception is De Felice and Murphy (2015, p. 87) who mention the possible rudeness of *please* (especially in American English): “However, some informal claims have been made (Trawick-Smith, 2012; Murphy, 2012) that the presence of *please* requests can seem less polite in American English than the equivalent request without it, emphasizing social power differences and expressing impatience.”

4 Types of utterances with *please*

The high frequency of *please* in the COLT Corpus is striking in comparison with its use in other corpora. In the London-Lund Corpus (LLC) (representing data from the 1960s and 1970s) there were 75 examples of *please* (Aijmer, 1996), and

² *Please* has also been studied in different cultures and language communities. Comparative studies are among others House (1989) English and German, Sato (2008) American and New Zealand English, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2005), English and Greek, Aijmer (2010) English and Swedish. In addition, we find the following comparative studies on English and Spanish: Reiter (2000), Dumitrescu (2006), Félix-Brasdefer (2008), Stenström and Jörgensen (2008), De Pablos-Ortega (2010) and Maíz-Arévalo (2015), among others.

Wichmann (2004, p. 1529) found 84 examples of *please* in the more recent (spoken part of the) British Component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB). Table 1 compares the frequencies of *please* in the three corpora:

Table 1: *The frequency of please in COLT, LLC and ICE-GB (The frequencies have been normalized to 100,000 words).*

COLT		LLC (Aijmer 1996)		ICE-GB (Wichmann 2004)	
Raw	Normalized	Raw	Normalized	Raw	Normalized
369 ³	74	75	15	84	14

Please was used slightly more often by boys than by girls (boys 195 examples; girls 164 examples).⁴

The meaning of *please* depends on sentence type, the degree of directive force, and position in the utterance. *Please* can be inserted into many types of sentence (declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, imperatives). It can also be used alone without an explicit request.

All tokens of *please* co-occurred with a directive (cf. Wichmann, 2004). A basic distinction can be made between directives in the form of commands (expressing strong directive force in the form of an imperative) and (indirect) requests. Indirect requests include interrogative sentences, modal interrogatives (*can you, could you*), declaratives with modals (*I can*) and elliptical constructions. In addition, *please* can stand alone (including *yes please* and *no please*). See Table 2:

Table 2: *Utterance types co-occurring with please in the COLT Corpus.*

Utterance type	No of occurrences
Indirect requests (modified by <i>please</i>)	179
Commands (modified by <i>please</i>)	151
Free-standing <i>please</i>	39
Total	369

Indirect requests modified by *please* were more frequent than modified imperatives both in the COLT Corpus and in Wichmann’s data from the ICE-GB Corpus (2004, p. 1530).

³ 30 of the examples were due to the teacher in classroom conversations.

⁴ Girls and boys contributed roughly the same amount of text in COLT. However the gender of the speaker could not always be identified in the recordings.

In both corpora there were few syntactic constraints on *please*. *Please* was found in final, initial and medial position. Table 3 compares *please* in different utterance positions in indirect requests and commands:

Table 3: Utterance positions of *please* in requests and mitigated commands in the COLT Corpus.

	Final	Initial	Medial	Total
Indirect requests	173 (96.6%)	4	2	179
Commands	80 (62.6%)	48 (37.5%)	0	128

In indirect requests, *please* was nearly always in final position (but less often in ICE-GB: 76%, Wichmann, 2004, p. 1529). In commands, *please* was more frequent in final than in initial position (final 62.6%; initial 37.5%). In ICE-GB, commands showed a greater tendency to use *please* in initial than in final position (Initial 77%).

Table 4 lists the patterns (including the imperative) mitigated by *please* in the COLT Corpus:

Table 4: Patterns with direct and indirect requests mitigated by *please* in the COLT Corpus.

Imperative	128
Can I	61
freestanding	39
Can you	37
Declarative	16
Wh-question	14
Yes (yeah) please	12
Elliptical	20
Can we	7
Repeated please	5
No please	3
Yes-no question	3
Could you	6

The following patterns occurred once or twice only: pretty please (2), could I (2), will you (2), I wanna (2), would you (1), will somebody (1), you can (1), may I (1), I would like to (1), you wanna (1), can someone (1), you may (1), everybody else can (1), do you think you can (1), I think people can (1)

Imperatives modified by *please* were more frequent than interrogative structures or declarative sentences. *Can* was preferred as a modal auxiliary in modal interrogative structures. There were 113 examples of *can/could* to be compared with

will/would, 2 examples, and *may*, 1 example. The subject of *can* was most frequently the first or the second person. *Can I* modified by *please* was the most frequent pattern after imperatives.

According to Wichmann (2005, p.232) *can you* or *can I* are formulaic or “emotionally neutral”. *Please* is said to be socially appropriate and indexed to situations where the imposition is minimal or socially sanctioned (among friends sharing a known set of rights and obligations). It was typically used in requests where the imposition was low (*Can I have a glass of water please? Could we have the first question please*; Wichmann, 2004, p. 1531). In the COLT Corpus it was also used when more emphasis or annoyance is involved:

(1)

Craig: good! When you go don't forget me. Send me a card.

Peter: I'm not going!... They just send it to me, I send it back.

Craig: Oh!

Peter: Can you get off please? Pop my microphone.

Craig: You never know <unclear>

Peter: Six other people. Thirty people all over London.

Craig: That's good! That is really good. I'm

(32905a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3)⁵

Please in declarative sentences illustrates “please-requests with ‘attitude’” (Wichmann, 2005, p. 244). *Please* expresses an appeal or a plea:

(2)

Peter: He goes, he thinks you're, he thinks you're so funny <unclear> I can't <unclear> I do it in music.

Josie: No, I wanna see, I've never seen you do it, please?

Peter: I don't flirt! I just, [you've seen me flirt!]

Josie: [<unclear>]

(32901a-02-F-14-16-Ha-?)

The high number of examples of free-standing *please* reflects the fact that *please* is typically used to express emotion. When *please* occurs alone (“as an isolate” Wichmann, 2004, p.1539), it has an exclamatory quality and “[t]here is no request which it might appear to modify or reinforce”. We therefore have to see

5 For transcription conventions, see Appendix. The code (32905a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3) gives the number of the conversation, the identification of the personal recruit (01), sex (F=female), age (14–16), the London borough where the school is located (Ha=Hackney), social group (3=low). For additional information, see *Users' manual to accompany The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language (COLT)* (Stenström et al. 1998).

them as “complex but elliptical requests in their own right” (Wichmann, 2004). The free-standing *please* is illustrated in (3):

- (3)
 Peter_ watch with me. I wanna watch [<unclear>]
 Grace: [Well], just tell them what one you want, I mean
 Peter: See I wanna see Accidental Hero.
 Grace: Please!
 Peter: That looks good.
 Grace: I know, but I mean, come on!
 Peter: Well what else is on actually?
 Grace: There's the Jungle
 (32503a-01-M-14-16-Ha-2)

To summarize, the COLT speakers use *please* more frequently than the speakers in the ICE-GB. Both groups of speakers used *please* more frequently to modify requests than commands. *Please* could be placed almost anywhere in the sentence. However, its placement depends on utterance type. In the COLT Corpus (but not in ICE-GB), there was a tendency to use *please* finally in commands. In the COLT Corpus, *please* was frequently used for exclamation and attitude (besides politeness), especially when it occurred alone.

5 The uses of *please* by speakers in the COLT Corpus

Please has several functions in the COLT Corpus. It is used for bantering or for irony, it is found in mock disputes, and in emotional narratives. In order to analyse what *please* is doing we have to look at larger stretches of discourse where the impoliteness only becomes evident in the on-going interactions.

5.1 Verbal formula mismatches

In the following example from the COLT data the polite interpretation of *please* is not tenable. *Will you please* is a polite, mitigated request which co-occurs with the impolite *fuck off*:

- (4)
 Josie: Go on
 Craig: <shouting> Ross </>

Ross: No, don't. You bastards.
 Craig: <nv> laugh </nv>...
 Ross: Yeah?
 Craig: Will you fuck off please?
 Ross: You don't even know what I said to her last night [do you?]
 Craig: [Fuck off.] Fuck off.
 Ross: I got you off
 (42003a-09-M-14-16-He-?-)

Culpeper discusses similar “impoliteness events” (Culpeper, 2011, p.166) characterized by a mismatch between polite and impolite items. *Go to hell please*, said to get rid of somebody, might well be considered interpersonally negative, despite the fact that a conventional politeness marker has been used. In fact, this particular utterance achieves its power, because politeness is part of the conventionalised meaning of *please*. Leech (2013, p.238) refers to “attitude clashes”: “an attitude clash is a case where the overt ‘polite’ meaning and the ‘impolite’ meaning of irony occur side by side in the same piece of language.”

In (5) the use of *please* and the impolite command *can you pack yourself off* in the same utterance is characteristic of non-genuine impoliteness, i. e., both speakers are aware that no real rudeness or aggression is intended in the context. The lack of politeness is used strategically to emphasise values such as solidarity and intimacy.

(5)
 Peter: It's on two tapes.... It's a bit boring though. Boring.... (5)
 Cassie: Right, can I have these sets of sheets back, please and can you pack away now! The next two Mondays we're not gonna have humanities because we're off!
 (32803a-04-F-????-Ha)

5.2 Banter or mock impoliteness

A banter can for example involve an insult which is not to be taken seriously. However, banter can also be understood more broadly. Culpeper (2011, p.208) considers mock impoliteness [banter] as involving the cancelling of impoliteness perlocutionary effects flowing from a conventionalised impoliteness formula when an obvious mismatch emerges with the context it is used in. Requests with *please* which are apparently impolite can be used in a humorous way for teasing or ‘banter’.

In example (6) Peter asks for a pen (*give me your pen please*). *Please* conveys the expectation that the hearer will comply with the request in a positive way. However the hearer responds in a rude manner (*fuck off*). The banter is complex since it depends on what is said in the next turn:

(6)
 Peter: In the science thing. <unclear> who is it, then.
 Anthony: Cyper and Sid, with the first that came to school....
 Peter: Kate give me your pen please.
 Richard: Fuck off.
 Peter: <nv> laugh </nv>
 Richard: I gave you the little pen.
 Peter: Who bet who?
 Cassie: Today the twenty fourth of the fourth of the
 (34401a-01-M-14-16-Ha-3-)

It is often difficult to know if the adolescents are angry with each other or not. Richard understands Peter's request as offensive although it contains *please*. He therefore responds in a rude way. However, laughter makes it clear that the exchange is non-serious.

Example (7) is similar. *Please* is not taken seriously since it receives a rude response:

(7)
 Selum: Your rooms
 Peter: What we do it
 Selum: Oh you do it.
 Peter: Yeah I know
 Matthew: Can I give you two tomorrow then when I've got it changed
 ^many <unclear>
 Matthew: Please look I can't pay you
 Peter: Shut up you fat bastard
 ^many <unclear>
 Peter: I'll give you two for that <unclear>
 Matthew: No, I won't, I won't. Two for a
 (41204a-18-M-14-16-He-?)

Matthew uses the polite *please* but gets an impolite answer in return. The rudeness is in line with the humorous and mocking character of the exchange. Real anger is not expressed although Peter reacts by shouting (*shut up you fat bastard*). The lack of politeness can be associated with banter and with solidarity in the peer group.

Similarly, in (8) politeness is only apparent:

(8)
 Peter: <nv> laugh </nv> Oh someone give me some money Cath give me some money.
 Josie: <unclear>
 Peter: Hello Vicky. Catherine give me some money please.
 Robert: I haven't fucking got any.... (5) <whining> What? </>

Peter: <laughing> nothing
(33704a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3)

The hearer is not assumed to take what is said as serious but as joking on the basis of the hearer’s response to what was said, prosody, the use of *please* with an imperative, etc.

The episodes in this section illustrate what Kienpointner (1997) refers to as “sociable rudeness” (and I have referred to as an evaluation of what is said as mock impoliteness). Treating what is said as mock impoliteness rather than as “face-threatening” is “allowable” if participants orient to the offence as joking and “as being relationship-supportive.” In Haugh and Bousfield’s comparative study of male-male interactions among speakers of British and Australian English, mock impoliteness was for example seen as “reflective of one’s adherence to not taking oneself too seriously”, which is something positively valued by both the British and Australian speakers (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012, p. 19).

5.3 Pattern-forming impoliteness

The following example illustrates banter stretching across several conversational turns. First one person says something which leads to a rejoinder from the other speaker resulting in pattern-forming, “characterised by repetition, reformulation and escalation” (cf. Culpeper, 2011, p. 243 “pattern-forming impoliteness”):

(9)

Peter: Give me a bit of Kit Kat. Give me a bit of Kit Kat. Can I have a bit Peter darling?

Michael: Don’t you ever say please?

Peter: Please.

Michael: How rude can you get. Give me a bit of Kit Kat. How rude.

Peter: Come on fucking give some more right now Can I can I have a bit please.

Michael: <unclear> this rude English baby here <unclear>

Peter: Can I have a little bit please?

Michael: I might give you some <unclear>

Peter: <shouting> Can I have a bit please </>

Michael: Ask nicely.

Peter: Please can I have a bit of Kit Kat?

Michael: Pretty please.

Peter: Pretty please.

Michael: Sugar on top.

Peter: <laughing> sugar on top </>

Michael: With lots of sugar.

Peter: <giggling> lots of sugar </>
 Michael: A cherry.
 Peter: <giggling> a cherry as well </>
 Michael: Not my cherry, <unclear>
 Peter: <nv> laugh </nv>
 Michael: Give me another please, give me another please, I'm [<unclear>]
 Peter: [Please] <laughing> just fucking give me some </>
 Michael: <nv> laugh </nv>
 Peter: <mimicking> and after all I've done for you
 (33704a-08-M-14-16-Ha-?-)

Peter asks for a Kit Kat not using a form with *please*. Michael, however, provokes him (*don't you ever say please*). Peter is told to “ask nicely” and uses the polite *Please can I have a bit of Kit Kat* ironically or non-seriously followed by the even more polite *pretty please* (“an extra cute way to say please”, according to Urban Dictionary⁶). The conversational exchange is characterised by escalation culminating in the “impolite” *Please just fucking give me some*.

The exchange suggests “ritualised competition in a pretend, mock frame” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 244). Shouting, giggling, laughing and mimicking add to the humorous quality of the exchange. Moreover, the co-constructed impoliteness is associated with affection and affiliation rather than real impoliteness: “it is a way of reinforcing in-group solidarity, it is a way of saying ‘We do not need to be polite to one another: I can insult you, and you will think it is a joke. This proves what good friends we are.’” (Leech, 2014, p. 19–20).

5.4 “Mock disputes”

In a mock dispute, speakers engage in a dispute or quarrel for humorous purposes. *Can I have a tiny sip please* is a conventionalized request asking for something to drink. However, the answer is non-cooperative, suggesting that the exchange is a “mock dispute” or banter. The little ritual is repeated across several turns. However, the disagreement between the participants is only apparent and reflects the non-serious character of the exchange:

(10)
 Peter: Boo <nv> scream </nv>
 Josie: Oh no.
 Peter: Do you want not want the rest then? Let me have the rest. Can I have a tiny sip please.
 Josie: No.

Peter: Please, look I gave you some crisps <unclear>.
 Robert: No.
 (33704a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3)

The expected responsive action is an agreement. *No* introduces what would be analysed as a dispreferred turn in Conversation Analysis since it is associated with disagreement.

In (11), Craig makes a polite request expecting a positive answer. Peter's *no* is therefore a provocation. The request is repeated. Peter's *no* is this time accompanied by laughter, which suggests that the non-compliance should be taken as a jest.

(11)
 Peter: <nv> scream <singing> Yeah. Thinking of you </>.
 Craig: Can you keep an eye on him while I'm doing this dinner please?
 Peter: No.
 Craig: Please?
 Peter: Mum. <laughing> No </>!
 Craig: Well, ^1 I don't want to look a=, he's a pain in
 (39601a-09-F-30-59-Ba-2)

5.5 The exclamative *please*

Please (free-standing or initial) expresses the speaker's active involvement in the discourse. *Please* has meanings such as urgency, annoyance and irritation. These uses are compatible with the high involvement style favoured by teenagers (also reflected in swearing, taboo words and other negatively coloured words co-occurring with directives). By using *please* with a command, the speaker strengthens rather than weakens the impositive force of the imperative. The speaker's behaviour can be perceived as impolite or face-threatening.

In (12), *please* is found in a lively narrative (*and he goes*). The speaker wants the truck driver to stop so that he can look at “that woman”:

(12)
 Peter: ah look at that woman! Ah! Yes! Oh what a lovely body! And, and he goes no we can't, can we stop? Please! Please! Stop! Stop! Stop! And the guy driving the truck says, no we can't we've got an important meeting. Okay, so the driver says, oh my God! There she is again! She's, she's got this fa=, how the hell did she get in front of us? Come on, please, the driver says I know, I know, speed up, let's test her stamina.
 Grace: <nv> laugh </nv>
 Peter: Stopped her dead.
 (32503a-01-M-14-16-Ha-2)

Please, especially if repeated, is used for emotional intensification rather than as a politeness marker. However, the effect is playful rather than serious. This is indicated by the fact that the hearer (Grace) laughs.

Please can have the function to catch the hearer's attention (*please listen, please look, oh please, come on please, no please*). Through repetition, *please* comes to express a higher degree of urgency:

(13)

Peter: Look, no it's for you, [it might look, cos that's the thing for <unclear>]

Grace: [Come on, please please please] come on

Peter: No, no, no, [screw you]

Grace: [Come on, oh come on ^1 <shouting> No! </>

(32503a-06-M-14-16-Ha-?)

Please conveys playful and exaggerated emotions co-occurring with non-verbal signals such as laughter and with shouting. It can be repeated and may be preceded by *oh* (3 examples). In (14), the speaker tells a joke about a man who goes into a pub where there is a bear. *Please* exaggerates the danger of the situation the man is in:

(14)

Peter: </nv> And he goes, he goes to the bartender. He goes <nv> panting </nv> <nv> rasp-berry </nv> help me, help me please please please, get this bear away from me, please, get the bear away from me and the bear goes grrr! And the bear's behind

(32701a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3)

In (15), *please* is emotional and underlines the speaker's plea to watch Chelsea play:

(15)

Robert: Ossie, Ossie and <name> were both pissed out of their fucking faces and come in yeah, right we're not having this bloody football on, no I just wanna watch the Chelsea, please can I just watch Chelsea, no piss off. Please just let me watch Chelsea, please, football on, no I just wanna watch the Chelsea, please can I just watch Chelsea, no piss off. Please just let me watch Chelsea, please, just once let me watch Chelsea, and they turned the telly off I said right you either turn the channel over or the telly doesn't go (42105a-03-M-14-16-He-?)

Different speakers are represented although the change of speakers is not marked explicitly by a reporting verb:

A: we're not having this bloody football

B: please can I just watch football

A: piss off

In (16), *please forgive me* exaggerates the speaker's emotions. Crying and laughing suggest that the apology is insincere and that the speaker is only teasing the hearer.

(16)

Peter: [Shut up <unclear>]

Craig: <nv> laugh </nv> Sorry Jock. <laughing> Forgive me </>? Please forgive me! <crying+laughing> It's not worth dying for, please forgive me </>.

Peter: Now you're being sad.

Craig: <nv> laugh </nv> <nv> clears throat </> I'm really jealous Jock.

(41801a-09-M-14-16-He-?-)

5.6 Please expressing negative attitudes

In addition to rudeness, *please* can express negative attitudes such as scornful disagreement, disapproval or disbelief. *Please* was used with negative imperatives (*don't do this*) as well as with *stop it*, *shut up*, *come on*, *listen* which have a negative effect on the hearer (i. e., they are impolite and involve a possible conflict) (25 examples).⁷ *Please* expresses the speaker's annoyance:

(17)

Cassie: No, I was gonna say I feel fine.

Peter: Oh! Please!

Cassie: Don't do that please. It doesn't hurt.

Peter: [<laughing> Yes it does hurt.]

Cassie: <nv> laugh </nv>

Peter: I was right </>.

Craig: Alright.

Peter: I <mimicking girlie voice> <??> choked </> you </>.

(39706a-01-M-14-16-Ba-1)

According to Culpeper, “[d]irectives, such as telling the opponent to go away or shut up are not normally mitigated by *please*.” *Stop bouncing*, for example. “projects opposition as non-negotiable” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 199). *Please* is not mitigating but expresses anger or annoyance:

(18)

Peter: Oh! Here he goes again with his ball.

Josie: Oh stop bouncing please. Is dad here?

Robert: Yes.

Peter: Oh hold on.

Josie: [I might get some meat and that for tomorrow.]

^? [<unclear>]

(35602a-02-F-30-59-To-3)

⁷ In Wichmann's data, negative commands were frequent especially in private conversation (Wichmann, 2004, p. 1534).

In (19), the speakers are discussing how much they get paid an hour (for being recorded?). Josie's reaction is a surprised exclamation when she is told that Claire gets paid more than Barry. Peter has just asked Barry how much he gets paid an hour:

- (19)
 Barry: Two fifty.
 Peter: Two fifty? I thought you got three quid. Claire gets more than you then.
 Josie: Oh please let me sit [down.]
 Barrie: [Claire?]
 Peter: Mm.
 Barrie: How much do you get an hour?
 (35802a-02-F-17-19-To-?)

In all the examples, *please* is not only coercive and negative but it is used in a jocular way.

5.7 Emotional narratives

Adolescents talk about what other people have said (or about their own experiences) and imitate or characterise the speakers for ridicule or humour. *Please* can be combined with mimicking. In (20), the speaker imitates what another person says in a singing voice (*sit down please*). The effect is funny because everyone has already sat down (*it was well funny*).

- (20)
 Anthony: and he goes <singing> sit down please </> <nv> laugh </nv> <laughing> did you see about half the people <unclear> sat down before he [<unclear> </>]
 Cassie: [I know.] And then everyone stood up again. It was well funny.
 Anthony: He goes <mimicking> now you may sit down please </>.
 (42104a-05-M-14-16-He)

Mimicry is closely associated with humour (telling a joke). In (21), an American accent is imitated and the quoted person ridiculed. The effect is achieved by the polite *excuse me* and *please* together with the informal and rude *park your ass* (mixing polite and impolite expressions):

- (21)
 ? one </>. <unclear> one's in [<unclear>] ^? [<unclear>]
 Josie: Excuse me, no, please, <mimicking American accent> park your ass </> <laughing> <unclear> like that </>... please.
 Anthony: <mimicking> Sorry. Sorry. </>
 Cassie: Here's another
 (42601a-02-M-14-16-He-?-)

“When a speaker ‘quotes’ she does not simply speak but invites her interlocutor to inspect her speech as performance; and the performance carries its own space” (Haviland, 1989, p. 302). In quoting, speakers can use *please* in new ways and for special effects. There were 34 examples where *please* was a part of the quotation (in 19 examples the reporting verb was a form of *go*). In (22), the polite *please* contrasts with the impolite command (*go away, I want to go to bed with you*). By adding *please*, the teller heightens the emotional effect of the narrative and makes it more amusing:

(22)

Robert: </> And he goes no, fuck off, get into bed you dirty little shit! ^many <nv> laugh </nv>
 Peter: And he goes please! He goes no you're <unclear> go away. No, I want to go to bed with you! <unclear> So he goes all right! Just
 (32701a-01-F-14-16-Ha-3)

In (23), the speaker gives a lively description of what he is going to tell Ross when he sees him (Ross has poured water over some papers that the speaker has been writing on). *Please* is combined with the impolite *can you fuck off*:

(23)

Michael: ‘bout all you could. <unclear>
 Craig: Yeah.
 Michael: ^1 Go do.... ^
 Craig: Well what I'm gonna do is gonna say Ross can you fuck off please and if you're in here I'm gonna say, you don't mind do you Jock, and you'll say no. Okay?
 Peter: Oh no,
 (42001a-09-M-14-16-He-?)

In (24), the polite *please* has been added because it makes the rest of the story more humorous (the speaker had asked politely for a ticket to Hereford but been made to pay the price for adults):

(24)

Richard: forgot to say what ticket ordered and they automatically give you an adult don't they?
 Peter: Yeah, yeah, you save yeah, I know.
 Richard: And I say can I go to Hertford please and they didn't ask me how old I was they just like, the next thing I knew I was, this six hundred quid ticket.
 Peter: I know, and you don't feel like arguing cos there's like a massive queue behind [you.] ^7 [Yeah] and then out
 (41604a-07-M-14-16-He-?)

In (25), the mimicking of the polite request is important for getting the point of the story. The mentally handicapped person asked politely for an ice-cream

(*can I have an ice-cream please*) and was shot by the owner of the ice-cream van (I thought they were making fun of me):

(25)

Peter: I can't hear!

Robin: three spastics and they went to the ice-cream van. One went <mimicking mentally handicapped> can I have an ice-cream please? </> and the man shot him <unclear> died. But erm, the next one went <mimicking mentally handicapped> can I have an ice-cream please? </> and the the man hit him over the with the head with a baseball bat and he died. The other The other one goes <mimicking mentally handicapped> can I have an ice-cream please? </> and like stabbed him and he died. Policeman come over and said why did you kill all these three <unclear>, these three spastics. And he goes <mimicking mentally handicapped> I thought they were taking the micky out of me.

(32701a-23-M-10-13-Ha-?)

The high frequency of *please* in the stories told by the adolescents is striking. It is used for exaggeration, for humour and entertainment.

6 Conclusion

We can recognize several functions of the 'impolite' *please* in the COLT Corpus. To begin with, it is used strategically to establish or confirm harmonious relationships. According to Leech (2014, p. 239), "if two or more people find it possible to exchange insults and other impolite remarks, and at the same time to treat these as non-serious or even amusing, they share a powerful way of signalling their solidarity". Young people do not feel threatened by the impoliteness of their peers and they do not think that impoliteness is bad (rapport-strengthening impoliteness).

Secondly, "mock impoliteness" may be understood in a positive way because it is amusing or entertaining. In young people's circles, entertainment skills are for example highly valued (entertainment impoliteness). *Please* is appropriate because it lends itself to mock politeness and banter which are experienced as entertaining (as well as creating rapport). Speakers also engage in "emotional narratives" using *please* for more involvement and as a strategy, making the story come alive.

Finally, impoliteness is used creatively in interaction by the participants who use repetition, reformulation and escalation to construct ritualized sequences of apparent insults.

In this paper, I have drawn attention to how explicit politeness markers such as *please* can be used strategically for opposite effects. The study suggests that

we need to study explicit politeness or impoliteness formulae in many different contexts and discourses to understand what they are doing and the norms for using them. We also need to study politeness and impoliteness markers in more languages in order to get a better understanding of how they are used and who uses them.

Appendix

Symbol	Comment
, . ? !	sentence-like boundaries
CAPS	sentence beginnings
,	brief pause
.	medium pause
...	long pause
<nv> yawn </nv>	non-verbal sound
<unclear>	unintelligible speech
[text]	single overlap
(5)	pause of five seconds
<singing> text</>	paralinguistic features

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