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**IMPOLITENESS AND TURN-TAKING IN CONVERSATION:
THE CASE OF *THE RANCH***

ABSTRACT. The present study investigates impoliteness and turn-taking as presented in the first season of *The Ranch*, the American TV series broadcast by Netflix in 2016. More specifically, the utterances spoken by Jameson “Rooster” Bennett, one of the main characters of the show, will be taken into consideration. The hypothesis underpinning this paper is that both conflictive language and turn(s)/floor-management affect Rooster’s personality as well as the relationship with his father and brother. The essay aims to expose the features of the above-mentioned pattern from a pragmatic perspective.

KEYWORDS: Impoliteness. Turn-Taking. Conversation Analysis. *The Ranch*.

Introduction

The present paper aims to demonstrate how impoliteness and turn-taking qualify as efficient, pragmatic devices to exert dominance in everyday conversation, as both the usage of courtesy and/or offence and conversation management are decisive in shaping hierarchies and strengthening/weakening bonds. The qualitative analysis this essay will provide focuses on selected excerpts drawn from the first season of the American TV series *The Ranch*, with special reference to the utterances spoken by Jameson Bennett – called “Rooster” by relatives and friends.

This contribution is divided into two sections, organized as follows. Section 1, the methodology, examines studies about turn-taking, with a particular emphasis on Sacks *et al.*'s publication, and introduces the concept of “face,” recalling the main theories about politeness and impoliteness from Brown and Levinson's and Culpeper's pivotal works. Section 2 focuses on Rooster's turn/floor-management and (im)polite speeches.

In the final remarks, I intend to verify whether the speakers' social, economic, and cultural backgrounds influence the relationships mentioned above; and how impoliteness generates humour in contemporary TV series.

1. Methodology

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, interactive communication became a privileged object of study in linguistic approaches such as Conversation Analysis (CA), which “starts with detailed analysis of the transitions from one person speaking to another; it stays very close to what participants do and show in the data, and does not allow for inferences about what they are thinking, or why they do what they do” (Myers 2018, p. 438). Studies that focused on speech exchange methods like “turn-taking” – what

Yngve (1970, p. 568) called “nearly the most obvious aspect of conversation,” and Duncan Jr. (1972, p. 278) defined as “one of a number of communication mechanisms [...] operating in face-to-face interaction” – flourished. Indeed, scholars were eager to investigate what patterns or rules people employ to speak; which sequences they shape in conversation; and how the social context and other factors influence the organisation of a speech,¹ given that

[...] when speaking occurs it does so within this kind of social arrangement; of course what is organized therein is not plays or steps or procedures or blows, but turns at talking. [...] the act of speaking must always be referred to the state of talk that is sustained through the particular turn at talking, and that this state of talk involves a circle of others ratified as coparticipants. [...] Talk is socially organized, not merely in terms of who speaks to whom in what language, but as a little system of mutually ratified and ritually governed face-to-face action, a social encounter. Once a state of talk has been ratified, cues must be available for requesting the floor and giving it up, for informing the speaker as to the stability of the focus of attention he is receiving (Goffman 1964, pp. 135-136).

A significant enhancement when determining the turn-taking/giving in conversation was perpetrated by the sociologists Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. In the conviction that “turns – lengthy utterances,

¹ “[...] a problem for research on actual conversation is that it is always ‘situated’ – always comes out of, and is part of, some real sets of circumstances of its participants. [...] Conversation can accommodate a wide range of situations [...] and it can be capable of dealing with a change of situation within a situation” (Sacks *et al.* 1974, p. 699).

phrases, clauses, or even single words – were systematically designed objects which performed activities in interactions” (Wooffitt 2005, p. 8), in 1974 they published “the simplest systematics”², namely a model that presented turn-taking as

a basic form of organization for conversation – ‘basic’, in that it would be invariant to parties, such that whatever variations the parties brought to bear in the conversation would be accommodated without change in the system, and such that it could be selectively and locally affected by social aspects of context (Sacks *et al.* 1974, p. 700).

Accordingly, turn-taking was context-free and context-sensible simultaneously; and it required specific criteria to allow the exchange of turn among an n number of parties. Hence, the scholars identified 14 general features that could potentially be applied to any conversation (see Sacks *et al.*, pp. 700-724), and a set of rules “governing turn construction, providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap” (Sacks *et al.*, p. 704).

² The scholars gathered and analysed a large corpus of phone calls – recorded in the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, where Sacks worked as a counsellor. The results of their research-in-progress were presented for the first time in 1973, at the Conference on the Sociology of Language and Theory of Speech Acts in Bielefeld (Germany). See Sacks *et al.*, p. 696.

Sacks *et al.*'s model proved to be a milestone in CA. Their pioneering research paved the way for numerous studies in the following years. Speech exchanges were fragmented in “turn construction units” (TCUs), with their terminal part being identified as the “transition relevance place” (TRP) and judged fundamental for talking in interaction, as “it is a place where turn-transfer may be initiated” (Wooffitt 2005, p. 27). Also, the definition of “turn” was refined and distinguished from that of “floor” – two terms that were occasionally used as synonyms. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the definition provided by Carole Edelsky in 1981:

I define *turn* as *an on-record “speaking”* (which may include nonverbal activities) *behind which lies an intention to convey a message that is both referential and functional.* [...] The definition of turn also attempts to incorporate the turn taker's intentions in relation to making meeting, conveying referential as well as functional messages. [...] *The floor* is defined as *the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space.* What's going on can be the development of a topic or a function [...] or an interaction of the two. It can be developed or controlled by one person at a time or by several simultaneously or in quick succession. It is official or acknowledged in that, if questioned, participants could describe what's going on (Edelsky 1981, pp. 403-405; italics as in the original).

Furthermore, several other phenomena related to everyday conversation drew academic attention, such as paralinguistic, back-channels, body language,

intonation, silences and pauses/lapses *inter alia*.³ Additionally, scholars emphasised the pragmatic function of turn-taking⁴ to study how speakers employ such a system to exert dominance⁵ in conversation.

‘Situated’ talking occasionally affects what Erving Goffman defined as “face”⁶ in the 1960s. As words might alter both the speakers’ and the hearers’ self-image, interactions were explored in-depth to determine potential strategies that would clarify the phenomena mentioned above. A significant accomplishment in this regard was the Politeness theory presented by Penelope

³ See, among others, Beňuš 2009, pp. 2167-2170; Harrigan 1985, pp. 233-250; Guaitella *et al.* 2009, pp. 207-222; Wilson and Wilson 2005, pp. 957-968. For reasons of space, we will not illustrate these theories in-depth, but we will recall them, to some extent, in Section 2, when analysing selected excerpts of *The Ranch*.

⁴ In this regard, Beňuš *et al.* claim that “Turn-taking is a cognitive, dynamically evolving, pragmatic system that is fundamental for human interaction. [...] [It] is also fundamentally cross-modal: it is pervasive in both speech and sign language and is strongly linked to paralinguistic domains such as gaze and gestures. [...] Broadly speaking, a turn-taking floor-management organization underlies the decisions of ‘who speaks when’ and must include at least three components: (1) way of signaling and perceiving cue for **transition-relevance places** (TRPs) and turn allocation among interlocutors [...], (2) ways of achieving suitable durations of latencies between turns, avoiding over-long overlaps or silent pauses, and (3) ways of resolving disruptions in the systems” (2011, pp. 3001-3002; bolds as in the original).

⁵ “We consider dominance as one instantiation of power that is mutually negotiating through the use of linguistic signals, and construe dominance as a communicative strategy [...] the dominance of an individual depends on the submissiveness of other participants as negotiated during a conversation” (Beňuš *et al.*, p. 3003).

⁶ “[A]n image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share” (Goffman 1967, p. 5).

Brown and Stephen Levinson. In their book, *Politeness. Some universals in language usage* (1978), they distinguished “positive” and “negative” face: the former indicated “the positive consistent self-image of ‘personality’”; the latter, “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction” (Brown and Levinson 1978, p. 61). They also introduced the concept of Face-Threatening-Acts (FTA) and theorised a series of strategies that aimed to “seek to avoid these face-threatening-acts, or [...] to minimize the threat” (Brown and Levinson 1978, p. 68): do/don’t do FTA; on/off-record; positive/negative politeness.

Nevertheless, in the long term, both Brown and Levinson’s model and strategies were judged inadequate to describe the variety of human interactions (see, among others, Arundale 1999, pp. 119-153); and to interpret utterances that aimed to damage or destroy someone’s face. Eventually, impolite language became the *fulcrum* of Jonathan Culpeper’s investigations that culminated in the following super-strategies:

BALD-ON-RECORD IMPOLITENESS: the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized.

POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee’s positive face wants,
[...]

NEGATIVE IMPOLITENESS: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants,

[...]

OFF-RECORD IMPOLITENESS: the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.

WITHHOLD POLITENESS: the absence of politeness work where it would be expected (Culpeper 2011, p. 352).⁷

His extensive studies on impoliteness proved to be vastly influential, as they undoubtedly contributed to fill a void in the linguistic field where, as Bousfield and Locher noticed, attention was predominantly devoted to politeness;⁸ and they shed light on conflictive utterances that, as Terkourafi asserts, “seem to be an integral part of constructing one’s identity and claiming membership in a group” (2015, p. IX).

The next section will determine how and to what extent im/politeness, combined with turn(s) management, affects Rooster’s conversations in *The Ranch*.

⁷ Moreover, he added a ‘meta-strategy’ called “mock impoliteness,” namely “impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence” (Culpeper 2011, p. 352). However, the concept draws from Geoffrey Leech’s definition of “mock impoliteness,” supposed as “an offensive way of being friendly” (Leech 1983, p. 144).

⁸ “In the face of this continual rise in interest for politeness phenomena, our understanding of impoliteness, by contrast, has merely crawled forward. [...] In connection with the need to address conflictive interaction in linguistic studies in general, we argue that it is also time to systematically look at impoliteness, the long neglected ‘poor cousin’ of politeness” (Bousfield and Locher 2008, p. 2).

2. The game of turns: analysis

The Ranch is a comedy-drama produced by Don Reo and Jim Patterson between 2016 and 2020. It consists of 4 seasons and 80 episodes broadcast by Netflix, and starred Ashton Kutcher, Sam Elliot, Danny Masterson and other talented actors.

The plot revolves around Colt Bennett, a young boy who leaves Garrison, his hometown, to pursue an athletic career and hopefully become a professional American football player. Unfortunately, after playing for 15 years in the semi-pro leagues, he fails to make any professional team. Thus, he returns home and starts to work in The Iron River Ranch, the family ranch run by his father, Beau, and his elder brother, Jameson. It is on the first season of the show and, more specifically, on Rooster and his compelling utterances,⁹ that I intend to centre the following sections, in order to understand how the dynamics he engages in discourses affect his personality as well as the relationship with his relatives; and how words mirror the mutability of his feelings.

⁹ <https://www.netflix.com/it/title/80077977> (accessed September 2021). The transcriptions of the dialogues and the timing are drawn by the official episodes broadcast by Netflix. If not otherwise indicated, the stage directions are mine.

2.1 “You don’t trust that guy”: floor-management

When Rooster is together with his father and brother, his words play opposite functions throughout the series: he can either ignite a quarrel between Beau and Colt, or moderate tension and lighten the overall mood by saying something humorous. Thus, his position on the floor is crucial to determining the flow of the dialogues. Such a peculiarity is immediately detectable in the pilot episode.

In the example that follows, we see the Bennetts walking into Maggy’s, a pub. Rooster has some urgencies to address; yet, he leaves both his father and brother with some ‘food for thoughts’:

ROOSTER: Hey, I’m gonna hit the head. But in case you guys run out of things to fight about... Colt’s jeans cost 85 bucks. [<i>fake laugh</i>]	[N13]
BEAU: What kind of dipshit pays 85 bucks for a pair of jeans? [<i>fake laugh</i>]	
ROOSTER: My work is done. [<i>fake laugh</i>]	

Table 1: Season 1, episode 1, *Back Where I Come From* (7:13-7:23).

By controlling the floor, Rooster sets the ground to attack Colt’s face publicly. As a matter of fact, he invades his brother’s privacy by revealing the price of the jeans he is wearing. Not surprisingly, the news antagonises Beau, who considers the purchase a waste of money and thinks less of his son – as he arrives to define him (although not overtly) as a “dipshit”. As a result, Rooster

shapes the conversation in accordance with his personal scopes – teasing his brother, in this case. The management is indeed successful, as he exclaims “My work is done” and exits, leaving Colt to face the consequences of his (Rooster’s) actions.

However, not only does Jameson instigate conflicts and calls for impoliteness; his magnetic personality is also employed to perform humour and create diversions that interrupt ongoing controversies, as the following example demonstrates:

COLT: Dad, I’m here, okay? I’m ready to work. Just tell me what to do.	
BEAU: Here’s the only thing I trust you with. <i>(hands him the coffee mug)</i>	
Get me some coffee.	[N12]
COLT: You’re kidding, right?	[P17]
BEAU: You don’t know how to make coffee?	[OFF-R]
COLT: Uh, look, I don’t mind mucking stalls or carrying wood or riding fence, but I’m not gonna be your servant.	[ON-R]
BEAU: If you don’t want to do the things I ask you to do... then I don’t need you on this ranch.	[ON-R] [P12]
COLT: I’m not gonna get you coffee!	
BEAU: Then get <i>the hell</i> out of here!	[ON-R]
<i>(silence)</i>	
ROOSTER: <i>(removing the circular saw)</i> I’m just gonna remove this here potential murder weapon up out of the way. <i>[fake laugh]</i>	
BEAU: Fine.	
COLT: Fine. I’m out of here then.	

Table 2: Season 1, episode 2, *Some People Change* (21:32-22:27).

In episode 2, the audience witnesses a bitter conversation between Beau and Colt: the boy shows up late at work (in the stables) because of some personal problems he had experienced the night before; as a punishment for his

lack of responsibility, Beau sends him to make coffee. The conversation escalates, as Colt feels humiliated. Their exchange is concise, although very intense: Beau uses straightforward language to scorn his son; on the other hand, Colt seeks disagreement and uses bald on-record impoliteness to express his resentment. For a brief moment, the two are face to face, breathing heavily and staring at each other with evil eyes; the tension is palpable, yet Rooster suddenly breaks the silence: by standing right in the middle of the two antagonists, he immediately focuses the attention of the audience upon himself and utters: “I’m just gonna remove this here potential murder weapon up out of the way,” referring to the circular saw at their feet. Unlike the previous example, in this scene, Rooster is not part of the “what’s-going-on” – as Edelsky would claim. Still, he deliberately takes the turn to perhaps stop the fight from degenerating – concomitantly, amusing the spectators with his inappropriateness. Nonetheless, versatility is also detectable in the relationship he engages in with his brother, which will be further explored in the following sections.

2.2 “I love you, big fella”: empathy

Jameson and Colt share an ambiguous relationship. When they are alone, they overwhelmingly express mutual affection and esteem; support each other; share secrets and ask for help whenever in need. Such sincere feelings are represented in the following example, drawn from the pilot:

COLT: If it's so bad here, why don't you just leave?	
ROOSTER: <i>(after sipping beer)</i> You're kidding, right?	
<i>(Silence for three seconds)</i>	
After you left, that wasn't much of an option. Dad needed someone here to help him run the ranch.	
<i>(Silence for one second)</i>	
COLT: <i>(stops thumbing the portfolio and stares at the table)</i> So, you felt like you were stuck? <i>(raises eyebrows very high)</i> Well, you must think I'm...	
ROOSTER: <i>(with a severe face)</i> ... Spoiled? Selfish? Irresponsible? Kind of a wuss? <i>[fake laugh]</i>	[MI]/[BR]
COLT: <i>(frowns)</i> Okay. I was gonna say “selfish” but...	
ROOSTER: ... Conceited? Stubborn? Full-blown alcoholic? <i>[fake laugh]</i> <i>(Colt frowns and sips beer)</i> But... <i>(heavily exhales)</i> you were a hell of a football player. And you had to go. I was proud of you. <i>(nods)</i> You're my little brother, amigo.	[MI]/[BR]
COLT: Thank you. You know, I'm proud of you, too.	[P3]

Table 3: Season 1, episode 1, *Back Where I Come From*, 17:11-17:53.

The brothers have an after-dinner talk in the kitchen, sip beer and replay what happened at the ranch that day. Speaking about the negative aspects of working in there, Colt asks Rooster why he would not leave if he did not like the job; Rooster's answer (“After you left, that wasn't much of an option. Dad needed someone here to help him run the ranch”) makes Colt realise that, by

leaving home when he was nineteen years old, he had deprived his elder brother of making any experience (“you felt like you were stuck?”), considering that somebody had to stay and help Beau. The utterance is furthermore remarked by the turns-organisation, as it is both preceded and followed by silence, so as to emphasise the seriousness of the matter. Moreover, Rooster’s earnest tone and body motion further confirm his point: he opens his arms – previously put on his tights – as to say there was no other option for him but to stay home and support the family activity.

Once acquainted with the truth, Colt suspects his brother has a negative opinion of him. He tries to verify this by hesitantly introducing the topic: “Well, you must think I’m...” His fears are partially confirmed when Rooster steals the turn twice: he interrupts the talk, without waiting for the speaker to conclude the sentence, and deploys a long chain of negative adjectives, “Spoiled? Selfish? Irresponsible? Kind of a wuss? [...] Conceited? Stubborn? Full-blown alcoholic?”; a bald-on record message that he conveys with an unperturbed face expression that lets the brother (and the audience) imply that his opinion about Colt is undeniably clear – and definitely not positive. Such an abundance of detail strikes Colt, who neither responds nor counterattacks; all he does is frown

and drink beer. Fortunately, the big brother restores harmony by concluding as follows: “But... you were a hell of a football player. And you had to go. I was proud of you. You’re my little brother, *amigo*.” Such sincere words exemplify Rooster’s positive politeness and declare his full support towards Colt. Surprisingly, he does not hold a grudge. Moreover, the so displayed approval allows for interpreting the negative adjectives mentioned above as mock impoliteness, as it is possible to assume that Rooster employed them with no intent to offend. Lastly, their bond is sealed with a Spanish term, “*amigo*,” that conveys the idea of trust and complicity.

2.3 “*A larger lack of concern*”: *ambiguity*

When in the presence of his father, Rooster gets defensive and takes every chance he gets to humiliate his brother, so as to draw Beau’s attention and be praised in comparison. The “totem speech,” drawn from episode 2, epitomises such behaviour:

ROOSTER: Colt, let me explain something to you, all right? Now, the three of us are like a totem pole. [*fake laugh*] Dad’s up on top. He’s an *eagle*, you know, [*fake laugh*] soaring above us all. He’s rare, but when you catch a glimpse, it’s magical. [*fake laugh*] (*slowly starts walking towards Colt*) [NI3]
Now, below him is me, the *rooster*. But, like, a badass rooster. I’m the first one up in the morning, and I’m on the label of hot sauce bottles. [*fake laugh*]
COLT: (*smiles, amused*) All right, what am I? Like, a wolf or... a lion? (*roars*)

and scratches air with his left hand) [fake laugh]

ROOSTER: **You're like a beaver, right?** *[fake laugh] (Colt's face shows disappointment)* Just swimming around, gathering the wood and the crap that the rooster and the eagle need to build the dam to keep the water out. **[OFF-R]**

Table 4: Season 1, episode 2, *Some People Change*, 3:13-3:53.

In this scene, Rooster gains complete control of the floor by taking the turn and initiating with “Colt, let me explain something to you, all right?” He dominates both the physical space and the conversation, speaking for more than 20 seconds without interruption. He also performs negative impoliteness, as he gradually approaches his brother. To deliver the message with confidence, his words are constantly accompanied by paralanguage – mainly hand gestures – and a persuasive tone.

Rooster attacks Colt's face by highlighting his inexperience and inadequacy as a rancher, claiming primacy in both the familial and professional hierarchy. According to the above-mentioned theory, Beau is a majestic bird of prey while Jameson is a dominant fowl, with both exerting control on the land they own. Colt, however, is merely a beaver, doing a subordinate job. The simile may be read as an FTA towards Colt, especially if we consider the symbolism related to the animals, with the eagle, as we know, the emblem of the Great Seal of America and standing for power, strength, focus and bravery, and the rooster symbolising masculine dominance and luck. On the other hand, the beaver

stands for creativity and teamwork, neither of which Colt can accomplish in his current condition, as he has lost his job and – with Jameson deliberately setting himself apart from Colt during work – he has no partner on the ranch. Furthermore, the simile can be read as off-record impoliteness that encapsulates Colt’s figurative alienation and emphasises his struggle to live on the ranch – supposedly the place where he belongs.

Rooster’s controversial feelings are thoroughly synthesised in the final minutes of the same episode:

ROOSTER: Man, it is good to have you back. Just like old times. Talking, having fun. Plus, when I sit on the porch and drink alone, I’m an alcoholic, but when you’re here, it’s just two brothers bonding. [<i>fake laugh</i>]	[P12]
COLT: Yeah. Bonding. Great. [...] (<i>Suddenly, Beau shows up in his underwear</i>)	[P3]
BEAU: Will you two shut the hell up? [<i>fake laugh</i>]	[BR]
ROOSTER: It was Colt. Yeah, Colt was talking. Want me to go inside and get your belt? [<i>fake laugh</i>] and your pants? [<i>fake laugh</i>]	[P1]

Table 5: Season 1, episode 2, *Some People Change* (14:14-14:34; 14:57-15:06).

The intimacy of the surroundings lets Rooster open his heart and claim common ground with Colt. Through Brown and Levinson’s positive politeness, the elder brother includes the younger one in activities. Their closeness is furthermore exalted by the word that closes the utterance: “bonding,” whose meaning is emphasised by Colt, who repeats it and judges it “great.” However,

the poignant moment is abruptly interrupted by Beau's reproach: "will you two shut the hell up?", to which Rooster reacts by switching to negative impoliteness, blaming Colt for the noise ("It was Colt. Yeah, Colt was talking"). He then displays positive politeness towards the father, attending to his needs and politely asking: "Want me to go inside and get your belt? And your pants?" Hence, he denies the bonding with Colt, as mentioned above, by taking sides with Beau, so as to be worthy of his father's consideration and fondness¹⁰. Nonetheless, throughout the season, the audience witnesses several sketches in which Jameson perfidiously derides his brother to be in the spotlight¹¹. The competition between the siblings reaches an apex in episode 5, *American Kids*.

¹⁰ Being a double-dealer, Jameson epitomises the mutability recalled by the title of the episode: *Some People Change*.

¹¹ For instance, in episode 2, Jameson and Beau have dinner while Colt oversleeps. When the boy wakes up and reaches the rest of the family downstairs, he does not like what he discovers: "COLT: You guys already ate? You couldn't have woken me? / BEAU: We eat dinner at 6:00. I got a lot of things to do around here, waking a grown man from his nap isn't one of them. / COLT: (*slaps Rooster's back part of the neck with his hat*) Why didn't you say anything? / ROOSTER: Well, I could have, but this way I got two steaks for dinner. Plus, I got to hear Dad make fun of your nap for dessert. So... / [...] COLT: The meat's gone? / [...] ROOSTER: Oh, man, am I full. I should not have eaten that second steak" (04:40-05:00; 05:08-05:09; 05:47-05:49).

In episode 5, Colt faces a harsh awakening: "COLT: Dude, you used all the hot water. / ROOSTER: I don't know, man. I just woke up, took my normal shower. I mean, I stayed in there a little longer 'cause it was hard to wake up this morning. / COLT: Yeah, you know what'll wake you up in the morning? A freezing cold shower. [...] / ROOSTER: But... you know what wakes me up? A nice hot cup of coffee. Oh, we're out, by the way" (*American Kids*, 03:20-03:30; 03:41-03:45).

When the hunting season begins, Beau traditionally spends the opening day with his firstborn in the woods. However, with Colt back home, Rooster must fight to earn (what was supposed to be) his privilege:

COLT: Yeah, I'm down to go hunting. [...]	
ROOSTER: That's true and all, but, unfortunately, the duck blind only holds two people. (<i>indicating Beau</i>) One. (<i>indicating himself</i>) Two. (<i>indicating Colt</i>) ... Sucks to be you. [<i>fake laugh</i>] {TRP}	[PI2] [BR]
COLT: Oh, come on, man! I ain't been in 15 years. Be nice to spend some quality time with Dad.	
ROOSTER: Well, I was gonna say no , but I can tell you really wanna go, so ... fuck, no. [<i>fake laugh</i>] {TRP}	[PI2] [BR]
COLT: Well, it's Dad's decision. You don't talk for Dad.	
ROOSTER: Well, actually, I do. See, that's the beauty of not abandoning your family.	[NI2] [NI4]

Table 6: Season 1, episode 5, *American Kids* (04:20-04:21; 05:02-5:33).

He tries to control the floor and stop Colt from interfering with his plan. By uttering “unfortunately, the duck blind only holds two people,” he performs positive impoliteness, excluding the brother from the activity. He then studies a rhyme to offend Colt: “One. Two. Sucks to be you.” Besides the offence – delivered on-record – it is crucial to analyse Rooster’s body language in this case: by indicating first the father, then himself and, lastly, his brother, Jameson once again emphasises the familiar hierarchy, as he did in the “totem speech.” The conversation goes on, with Colt protesting and asserting (somehow) the

right to spend such a special day with his father, seeing as he has been away from home (“I ain’t been in 15 years”). In reaction to his plea, Rooster sits at the table, between Beau and Colt – acquiring once again the centre of the scene – looks at the brother in the eyes and accurately prepares the TRC by delaying the end of his turn to raise suspense (“I was gonna say no, but I can tell you really wanna go, so...”), and finally denying, using both bald-on record impoliteness and the intensifier “fuck”. He then underlines the synchrony he shares with Beau (“Well, actually, I do”) by emphasising his relative power and severely damages Colt’s face by remarking on how he had left the ranch (“See, that’s the beauty of not abandoning your family”).

Eventually, the whole family takes part in the hunting opening day. While sitting in the duck blind with his brother, Rooster has one more chance to reprimand Colt for leaving:

ROOSTER: [...] I spent years earning everyone’s respect. Then you show up and all of a sudden you’re the favourite again? How does that work?

COLT: You know why I’m the favourite? I’ll tell you why. ’Cause I’m better. *[fake laugh]*

ROOSTER: You know what else you are? **You’re an asshole.** *[fake laugh]* Fifteen years, Colt. I had to shovel shit, **while you abandoned the family so you could travel the world... for 15 years.**

[BR]
[NI4]

Table 7: Season 1, episode 5, *American Kids* (19:45-20:05).

This time, the firstborn does not exploit the privacy to bond with Colt – as he did in the previous episodes. Conversely, he sets the ground for a verbal battle, accusing the brother of abandoning the family for a long time (“while you abandoned the family so you could travel the world... for 15 years”). Apparently, losing the privilege of spending the first hunting day with his father – and, more importantly, giving it to Colt – significantly hurt Rooster’s feelings and pride. He feels like the younger Bennett sibling has eclipsed him; he considers his brother a living threat, there to destroy everything he has achieved so far: his wholehearted support of and devotion to the family; the strenuous commitment at the ranch; and, above all, the relationship with his hero, his father. Consequently, he translates both the rage and the disappointment he feels in some rude, unsympathetic and harsh formulae addressed to Colt with no other intention than to hurt him.

Conclusions

To conclude, the present paper has approached *The Ranch* from a pragmatic perspective. The analysis of the excerpts was mainly centred on Rooster’s utterances. The emerging results show that he works the floor

effortlessly, shaping the conversation in accordance with his goals; he dominates the dialogues, either fueling or killing the overall tension; he exploits turn-taking and impoliteness to strengthen/weaken bonds with his relatives, in line with his feelings and mood. Such ambivalence is particularly evident in his relationship with Colt: when they talk privately, Rooster overwhelmingly cares about and supports his younger brother – with a few exceptions, as we have seen in episode 5. Conversely, in the presence of their father, the elder son openly and repeatedly threatens Colt's face – for instance, by emphasising his faults or judging specific choices he made in the past – to stand out and win Beau's approval and love. To pursue such a goal, his utterances are frequently combined with specific, emphatic gestures, delivered with a fierce tone of voice and combined with strategic pauses to manage the turns/floor sagaciously. Nevertheless, the im/polite interactions taken into examination so far serve as a base for further reflections upon 1) the most recurrent super-strategies employed by Rooster's respondents; 2) how and to what extent does the context shape the characters' daily conversation; and 3) whether rude and disrespectful utterances generate humour in contemporary audiovisual products.

The analysis presented here demonstrates that bald-on-record, positive and negative impoliteness are commonly employed by the members of The Iron River Ranch, although to achieve different aims. Beau often mistreats Jameson and Colt either by displaying indifference or swearing. However, his harsh words are not meant to offend his boys, but rather spur them into adulthood and awareness. Colt, on the other hand, is the privileged target of the others' attacks, while struggling to be accepted at home, where he belongs: he seeks for contradiction and openly affronts his interlocutors, in some instances.

In substance, impolite occurrences are more numerous than polite ones. However, the persistent resorting to offensive language in *The Ranch* may be explained by taking into consideration the social background of the speakers. As Gibson (2003, p. 1136) remarks, “[c]onversation [...] is a site for the differentiation of persons [...] along lines established by attributes, personalities, or positions”: the social status of the Bennetts exposes the family to an arduous life, constantly threatened by unexpected events (climate calamities, for instance) and precarious financial conditions¹². In this direction, it is fair to

¹² Throughout the show, the Bennetts frequently face hard times, as several inconveniences may jeopardise the result of their strenuous work: aridity, for instance, and therefore the lack of rain to irrigate the fields; the poisoning of the water that quenches the thirst of the livestock; the sudden death of calves that were supposed to be sold on the market; unfair

assume that being ranchers shapes their lifestyle, mindset and language, which is straightforward and deprived of any rhetorical artifice. It is a frank and (regularly) foul-mouthed language, ascribable perhaps to an American stereotype – that of Southern ranchers – but which nonetheless generates laughter when performed on television.

It is worth mentioning that, from the early 2000s onwards, the exploitation of impoliteness “shown to perform entertainment, being performed primarily for the viewers’ pleasure and even humour experience” (Dynel 2017, p. 460) has been extensively studied by eminent scholars (see, among others, Lorenzo-Dus 2009; Culpeper 2011; Dynel 2011), provided that “television discourse [...] has helped to determine the basic definitions and detailed mechanisms of impoliteness” (Dynel 2017, p. 459). The scripts of *The Ranch* confirm such a contemporary trend, as demonstrated by the numerous fake laughs disseminated in the excerpts here given. Indeed, such a peculiar combination proved to be successful for the TV series, as the first season of the show received some complimentary reviews online (see, for instance, Lawson 2016; Lloyd 2016;

competition among the ranchers. Such critical conditions forced the family to live miserably for months (without electricity, for example, as shown in episode 8).

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Paskin 2016), 7.5 stars out of ten on IMDb.com¹³ and scored 82% of positive feedback from the viewers who voted on rottentomatoes.com¹⁴.

¹³ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4998212/> (accessed 28 November 2021).

¹⁴ https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/the_ranch/s01 (accessed 28 November 2021).

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List of Abbreviations

B&L	Brown and Levinson
BR	Bald-on Record
CA	Conversation Analysis
FTA	Face Threatening Act
MI	Mock Impoliteness
NI2	Condescend, scorn, ridicule
NI3	Invade the other's space
NI4	Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect
OFF-R	Off Record
ON-R	On Record
P1	Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)

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- P3** Intensify interest to H
- PI2** Exclude the other from activity
- PI7** Seek disagreement
- TRP** Transition-Relevance-Place