

**Honour or face –  
which theoretical concepts should we use for the (diachronic) study of insults?**

Simon Meier (Universität Bern)

Insults belong to the central objectives of linguistic impoliteness research which mostly is defined as the study of face-aggravating language use. While early models of impoliteness tend to ignore the diachronic dimension, recent research takes into account historical impoliteness, too (Culpeper/Kádár 2011). However, much research on historical insulting practices has already been done by social historians who conceptualise insults as conflicts of honour rather than face attacks. In my presentation, I will argue that the concept of honour as elaborated by historians and sociologists can serve as a fruitful framework for the linguistic study of insults as well.

First, I will sketch out the explanatory potential of the concept of honour by an analysis of selected cases of insults that will reveal the communicative patterns underlying honour conflicts. The data are taken from court papers concerning libel actions from Middle Germany in early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jensen 2011). Second, I will show how this concept of honour can account for the social dynamics of insults that recent linguistic approaches claim to be crucial for today's forms of impoliteness as means for negotiating social norms and relationships (Locher/Watts 2008). Thus, the linkage of linguistic impoliteness research and sociohistorical research on honour conflicts can contribute to a better understanding of insults as culturally and historically situated practices and their diachronic development in general.

**References**

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