

The Value of Impoliteness in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

Margaret Hostetler*

Department of English, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Corresponding Author: Margaret Hostetler, E-mail: hostetle@uwosh.edu

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: July 05, 2019

Accepted: August 12, 2019

Published: September 30, 2019

Volume: 8 Issue: 5

Advance access: September 2019

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

Despite extensive critical discourse on themes of power, conflict, and language in Octavia Butler's work, the impact of linguistic impoliteness on these themes has not been previously explored. This paper analyzes Butler's use of linguistic (im)politeness in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy finding that Butler undermines polite forms of communication thereby foregrounding power asymmetry between characters. Although dystopic literature creates an expectation of impoliteness and conflict, Butler relies on a normative framework of ordinary conversational politeness to heighten impoliteness effects so that they remain salient to readers. The spokesperson for this privileged view of confrontational verbal interaction is her main female character, Lilith Iyapo, whose focalized interactions allow Butler to connect impoliteness with key themes of the trilogy—truth telling and an authentic human identity.

Key words: Octavia Butler, Impoliteness, Reader response

INTRODUCTION

The question this research seeks to address is how Octavia Butler exploits conversational expectations of polite and impolite verbal interactions in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy to present readers with a positive value of the discomfort of impoliteness—thus deepening the moral ambiguity of the narrative's struggle between an eutopic and dystopic vision.

Studies of the critical dystopia have shown that “the conflict of the text turns on the control of language” (Moylan and Baccolini, 2003, p. 5).¹ As Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini argue, the underlying power structure of the dystopic world operates through “social, and anti-social...language” primed to coerce consent from the colonized subjects of the dystopia” (2005, p. 5). Thus, it is not surprising to note that Octavia Butler shows a special interest in language and communication in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy. She does, after all, create an alien form of communication that relies on sinking tentacles into bodies (both human and alien) to give and receive direct neuro-stimulation. This form of communication is set up in opposition to human verbal/written languages. This opposition thematizes not just inter-species communication problems but also the effortless control the aliens have over human bodies. Human natural languages therefore come to play a role in how human identity is represented and how humans resist alien colonization in the trilogy. As the embodiment of resistance, human languages are used to disagree, to argue, to register fear and anger, and other strong negative emotions. It is again not surprising that critics of Butler's work have commented on her use of character conflict to explore issues of power asymmetry. As

Butler has raised challenging issues in her fiction—slavery, colonization, eco-disaster, post-human evolution, biological determinism, misogyny, and racism—she shows that the language used to confront these topics is equally fraught.² Critics have suggested that Butler often raises these issues but is unable to resolve them.³ The goal of this essay is to argue that Butler's work is best understood as aiming to heighten the moral ambiguity surrounding the social issues she raises rather than to resolve them. Analysis of Butler's framework of (im)politeness, which has been lacking, not only underscores a view of politeness as powerfully linked to deception and hegemony but also lends new insight into how Butler forces readers themselves to take on hard moral choices and to face the discomfort that comes with fighting to uncover the truth of difficult realities.

CONVERSATIONAL AND DYSTOPIC NORMS FOR (IM)POLITENESS

In *Dawn*, the first book of Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the protagonist, Lilith Iyapo, makes clear that norms of polite behavior that apply in ordinary circumstances do not apply in the dystopian situation in which she finds herself: “She was a captive. What courtesy did a captive owe beyond what was necessary for self-preservation?” (Butler 1997, p. 63). This passage lays bare how power inheres in verbal interaction, connecting courtesy, or politeness, with the social power structure. These connections have long been recognized by linguists working on politeness and (cross)cultural interactions.⁴

Politeness is often defined as “minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse” (Lakoff 1989, p. 102), and a wide variety of specific linguistic forms or behaviors can contribute to this goal, everything from conventional American cultural routines such as saying “please” and “thank you” to the avoidance of giving insults or imposing on people. Yet research on politeness goes beyond commonsense views of polite behavior as simply being nice or respectful toward others to investigate exactly how and why people might be polite and how social context plays a role in norms of politeness behavior.⁵ Explaining how various linguistic interactions require different norms of politeness behavior, Robin T. Lakoff writes that there is often a trade off between situations that privilege informational exchange or conversational efficiency over the preservation of social harmony or individual speakers’ feelings of being valued (1989, p. 102).⁶ Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, in their foundational examination of politeness, for example, note that an emergency situation may suspend politeness norms (1987, p. 69). For example, if someone collapses, people may yell “call 911”—give a directive—without worrying that they will seem impolite. The situation in the dystopia, however, is different. Although for Butler’s humans their situation is an emergency, simply being impolite is not the new normal.⁷ Readers of *Xenogenesis* know why Lilith and the humans feel scared, angry, etc. and may express their views with bluntness or even rudeness, but Butler uses verbal (im)politeness strategically. Lakoff explains that contexts of politeness norms from non-emergency situations are always at work even in situations in which they might be reasonably suspended. We often use the norms and expectations of what Lakoff calls “ordinary conversation” (OC) to judge other types of linguistic interactions or “discourse genres” (1989, p. 102) because OC is

the form we all learn first, under the setting most conducive to comfort and familiarity, and the one we use the most. Hence it functions as a template for all others, which we experience in terms of their similarities to and differences from OC, and feel more or less comfortable with to the degree that they conform to our OC-based expectations. (1989, pp. 102-103)

In Butler’s trilogy the dystopic genre constitutes just such an emergency where norms of politeness must be renegotiated; that is, Lilith and other characters do not expect the same level of politeness in their interactions given their extraordinary situation. However, the situation is complicated because the OC norms of politeness still exist as a frame of reference that Butler uses to highlight impoliteness in her trilogy. If we assume that impoliteness is simply the new politic norm of the dystopia, then we disguise the role of language in the trilogy’s power struggles.

The dystopic plot of Butler’s trilogy creates a situation in which the human characters face a stark power asymmetry that overrides the typical politeness norms of an OC. However, the human characters, as well as the alien characters, necessarily draw on assumptions of politeness behavior. Especially in books one and two, *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*, politeness requirements are present but are less valued than

getting at the truth, which requires opposition and confrontation. Lilith assumes from the beginning that she cannot trust her captors’ version of the truth. This situation has more in common with Lakoff’s description of American courtroom discourse, which assumes that the truth will be concealed:

In the American courtroom, the dialog is adversarial: the uncovering of the truth will be damaging to at least one of the parties, who is therefore understood as likely to conceal any damaging admissions.... So because of the adversarial nature of courtroom discourse, informativeness is both strongly required and strongly assumed to be avoided. (Lakoff 1989, p. 108)

Butler’s aliens dole out information to the humans only when they feel the need.⁸ Even human characters distrusting each other will deceive and lie. Norms of politeness underlying an OC in Butler’s dystopia are disrupted by lack of trust and power asymmetry. What emerges in the trilogy is a mix of references to politeness behaviors that primarily serve to heighten awareness of conflicts by making readers more aware of the lack of politeness behaviors in pivotal character conversations or suspicious of polite interactions.

The *Xenogenesis* trilogy is full of references to a politeness framework that rely on an OC template. Speech acts such as asking whether someone is male or female—or human—are clearly considered at least awkward or socially risky, and politeness formulas are used to mitigate the imposition: “‘I don’t mean any offense,’ she said, ‘but are you male or female?’” (*Dawn* 1987, p. 11). When one of the humans asks Lilith if she is human, she acknowledges the impoliteness of her question: “‘There isn’t any nice way of saying this, but I’ve got to ask. Are you really human?’” (*Dawn* 1987, p. 180). Additionally, insults are acknowledged: “‘All right, I’m sorry you’re insulted,’ Tate rasped” (*Dawn* 1987, p. 210). And greeting rituals are observed: “‘I’m pleased to meet you,’ Jesusa lied politely” (*Imago* 1998, p. 134). Children are taught politeness basics:

“you want anything else to eat?” she asked.

“No.”

“No, what?”...

“No, thank you,” little one. Or “Yes, please.” (*Adulthood Rites* 1989, p. 112)

Even the alien characters seem to be familiar with the OC template of politeness. Kahguyaht, approaching Lilith after she has a confrontation with Gabriel, says to her “‘You could have avoided that’” (*Dawn* 1997, p. 240), suggesting that she escalated the confrontation. Butler also gives Lilith the awareness that her blunt, confrontational style may alienate others: “‘People avoided Lilith. She suspected they saw her either as a traitor or as a ticking bomb’” (*Dawn* 1997, p. 241). In this way, Butler creates a politeness norm modeled on an OC template that frames and highlights the moments when politeness forms are absent, and characters come into conflict.

POLITENESS IS PART OF HUMAN IDENTITY

Yet this OC foundation of politeness also signifies human cultural identity. In clinging to their politeness routines, humans are also seen to be trying to preserve pre-apocalyptic

human culture. This appears most clearly in Akin's experiences in the city of Phoenix where a lot of emphasis is put on what is "proper" or "improper" to reconstruct human pre-war society. Human resisters are generally associated with all that is negative about humanity including not just rape and murder but also impoliteness. When Tate schools Akin in the use of "please" and "Thank you," Akin's response demonstrates this: "I didn't know resisters said those things" (*Adulthood Rites* 1989, p. 112). Yet Phoenix comes closest to recreating and preserving pre-war civilization; they mint money, forge metal, mill wood, make glass, print books, build churches, dig for pre-war artifacts, and insist on OC norms of politeness. Although Phoenix seems to represent what was best about pre-war humanity, even banning guns, its eventual destruction proves a harsh critique. From the perspective of language, Butler uses OC politeness norms to critique the humans' unwillingness to adapt to the changes in their situation.

Butler creates an atmosphere in *Xenogenesis* in which conflicts and impolite behavior are salient—noted by characters with explicit comments on their conversations or on the emotional effects of their conversations and described by the narrator with affective language: "She said *coldly*"; "she asked *flatly*"; "*patronizing bastard*, she thought"; "She chewed and swallowed several peanuts, all the while staring at the ooloi, *making no effort to conceal her dislike*" (*Dawn* 1997, pp. 47-8 my italics). There are overt signals of negative emotional responses, such as profanity and exclamations, which are common features of American impoliteness: "'I don't give a shit about what you feel!' he said" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 240). For these textual features to signal impoliteness, we must recognize an OC baseline of politeness. Butler means for readers to note the conflicts and feel the absence of polite behaviors despite the dystopic situation that might normalize or excuse impolite behavior. The dystopic situation allows other types of verbal behaviors to be valued over polite interactions and heightens the confrontational tone of character interactions. Characters and readers understand why impoliteness is occurring, but Butler keeps them aware of it, arguably, to ensure that the OC norm of discomfort with impoliteness stays salient as well.

(Im) POLITENESS IS CONNECTED TO POWER

As politeness behaviors are closely associated with social power, they are implicated in the maintenance of power asymmetries: "They [politeness behaviors] may either constitute socially cohesive and cooperative action, or they may serve exploitatively strategic ends" (Chilton 1990, p. 205). Politeness "not only depends on existing power structures, but it also reinforces them and especially contributes to change and even [to] create new such structures" (Ermida 2006, p. 844). In the dystopian discourse genre, we see the normal politeness routines and cooperative behavior of an OC manipulated by the struggle for power.⁹ Politeness backed by the dystopic hegemony becomes a threat masking conflict and maintaining power asymmetry.¹⁰ Readers see the alien characters often wishing to

avoid conflict and confrontation. For example, when Tino finds out that his child, Jodahs, will become an ooloi, he is angry and demands an explanation. Nikanj extends his sensory arm to touch Tino to comfort him by communicating through neurosensory input, but Tino refuses the calming touch: "'No! Goddamnit, talk to me! Speak aloud!'" (*Imago* 1997, p. 19). However, it does not follow that because the aliens are usually calm, polite, even gentle, that the aliens therefore have less power and must defer to the humans for that reason. Rather confrontations with humans often reveal the aliens' control of the situation. If politeness is viewed as the norm that the aliens strive for, the marked position of impoliteness reveals how power inheres in the unmarked, naturalized norm.¹¹

The corollary of this position is that impoliteness becomes associated with the truths hidden by the power structure. Politeness in this context is implicated in deception. Butler provides explicit evidence that she positively values confrontation and believes that politeness can obscure the truth. Not only do we hear of Jesusa "I[ying] politely" (*Imago* 1997, p. 134), but when Lilith contemplates "Awakening" other humans that she must instruct and considers the personalities of her potential companions, she decides "[s]he needed people who could give her ideas, push her mind in directions she might otherwise miss. She needed people who could tell her when they thought she was being a fool—people whose arguments she could respect" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 117). Here the implication is that politeness might keep people from criticizing her—from calling her decisions "foolish." Butler also closely associates the Oankali aliens with behavior that privileges avoidance of conflict and confrontation. For example, the aliens are easily able to drug humans to keep them calm. Butler allows Lilith to consciously link the Oankali's non-confrontational behavior with their ability to control humans: "The Oankali had removed her so completely from her own people—only to tell her they planned to use her as a Judas goat. And they had done it all so softly, without brutality, and with patience and gentleness so corrosive of any resolve on her part" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 65). Gentleness and patience—attributes more in line with polite behavior than confrontation and conflict—have a "corrosive" effect whereas arguments can be respected. Even the rudest speech is respected for its honesty, as we see in Lilith's mental response to Gabriel's rude question: "It was probably the most honest question he had ever asked her—filled with hostility, suspicion, and contempt" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 216). Butler takes this position to the extreme when she has Nikanj reinforce the importance of his words by saying them so bluntly that they shock his listeners: "It¹² could not have gotten more attention if it had screamed.... 'There are easier ways to say these things,' it admitted. 'But some things shouldn't be said easily'" (*Imago* 1997, p. 43). Nikanj's comment clearly shows Butler's coupling of honesty/truth with conflict and difficulty. The truth needs not only to be said, but to be said in a way that makes clear what is at stake. Truth is often painful; articulating it should be painful as well so that it cannot be ignored.

POLITENESS IS CONNECTED TO SELF-DECEPTION

Similarly, this positive valuing of blunt and critical speech is tied to Lilith's unflinching position on self-delusion; it is not helpful to the human situation to look away from difficult truths. Lilith criticizes others who refuse to see the alien Oankali as they are: "That, Lilith thought, was a foolish way for someone who had decided to spend his life among the Oankali to think—a kind of deliberate, persistent ignorance" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 87). She forces others to face the truth of their situations (*Dawn* 1997, p. 131). She also forces people to face the consequences of their own actions:

"What happened to Derrick!" Jean Pelerin demanded.
 "He did something stupid," Lilith told her. "And while he was doing it, you helped hold me so that I couldn't stop him."
 Jean drew back a little, spoke louder. "What happened to him?"
 "I don't know."
 "Liar!" The volume increased again. "What did your friends do to him? Kill him?"
 "Whatever happened to him, you're partly to blame," Lilith said. "Handle your own guilt." (*Dawn* 1997, p. 173)

The rejection of self-delusion as a theme in the trilogy begins with Lilith because the narrative is focalized through her point of view. Her perspective—with its valuing of facing difficult truths—becomes key to understanding how humans react to their new life after the Oankali arrive. Butler criticizes those humans who pretend that things can go back the way they were while she valorizes those who recognize that going back is not possible. Lilith's perspective is echoed by other main characters—many of them women—throughout the trilogy. Tate, in book two, for instance, recognizes that others have a need to delude themselves, but she cannot: "Your people will come for you, Akin. I know that, and so do you. I like you, but I'm not good at self-delusion" (*Adulthood Rites* 1989, p. 138). Jesusa, in book three, is most closely associated with wanting to face the painful truth. She refuses to have the frightening truth mediated by the calming touch of the Oankali: "Her muscles wanted to move her toward me. My scent and her memory of comfort and pleasure drew her, but she moved deliberately away. 'Tell me,' she said. 'Just tell me. Don't touch me again'" (*Imago* 1997, pp. 115-6). Rejecting self-delusion means rejecting the artificial calm provided through the Oankali touch.

The aliens' calming the humans and making them feel good comes to be associated not only with delusion but also with harmonious social relations. Lilith immediately recognizes that the Oankali are coming to meet the humans when she feels extra relaxed: "Five days after Peter's healing, the evening meal was drugged. Lilith was not warned. She was aware as she ate of growing relaxation, a particular kind of comfort that made her think of—She sat up straight. What she felt now she had felt before only when she was with Nikanj..." (*Dawn* 1997, p. 182). Humans come to distrust their own feelings and what their bodies tell them when in contact with the Oankali, and their response is often

anger: "'Look at things from Curt's point of view,' Gabriel said. 'He's not in control even of what his own body does and feels.... It doesn't matter. It doesn't fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can't let them get away with that'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 203). Thus, calmness and peaceful interactions come to be associated with either a loss of human identity to the drugs of the aliens or a form of self-delusion. Humans who refuse to be polite and non-aggressive—refuse the Oankali touch—become the representatives not only of human identity but also of confrontational verbal demands for truth:

Tino shifted his attention to Nikanj. "Why don't you talk to me? Why do you leave her to tell me what's going on?"

Nikanj extended a sensory arm toward him.

"No! Goddamnit, talk to me! Speak aloud!"

"...all right," Nikanj whispered, its body bent in an attitude of deep shame.

Tino glared at it. (*Adulthood Rites* 1989, p. 19)

Just as it is Lilith, who sets up this form of interaction, her advice continues to resonate throughout the trilogy. Lilith's advice to Jesusa in the final book encapsulates this view of how to deal with alien interactions:

"Listen carefully. It will tell you what it wants you to know. It won't lie to you. But it will withhold information. Once you've heard what it has to say, get away from it. Get out of the house. Go to the river or a short way into the forest. Do your thinking there about what it's told you and decide what questions you still need answers to. Then come home and ask." (*Imago* 1997, p. 146)

The aliens will present their arguments in a persuasive, even seductive, way that is antithetical to the full truth. Lilith advises Jesusa to make her decisions away from the polite manipulation of the aliens.

LILITH'S SARCASM AS POTENTIALLY POWERFUL IMPOLITENESS

If the alien way to persuade humans is seductive and pleasant, Lilith's bitter and often sarcastic responses present an opposing style that requires maximum processing from readers, and challenges alien and human characters to reveal their bad behaviors or to face harsh realities. When Jdahya first comes into Lilith's room, her response is subdued but also sarcastic:

"I think," she said softly, "that you might be the last straw."

"I'm not here to hurt you," he said.

"No. Of course you're not." (*Dawn* 1997, p. 10)

In this initial confrontation, Lilith does not lose control in terror or anger, but she does not use a polite greeting. Rather she expresses an ironic/sarcastic acceptance of his assertion that he is not there to hurt her while also reminding him of how long and to what degree she has been mistreated by her captors (he is the "last straw"). Lilith's linguistic choices reflect her knowledge of the power imbalance while revealing how Butler has put her in an impossible situation; she must constantly choose between working for the aliens or resisting

them. Her impoliteness to characters such as Kahguyah serves to reinforce Butler's critique of those characters,¹³ yet Lilith's use of sarcasm complicates the meaning of her impoliteness and how readers respond to it.

Lilith's use of sarcasm is remarkable because she is the only character to repeatedly employ it and because sarcasm, as a type of indirect irony, is a riskier verbal choice that marks her out as appropriating the power of impoliteness. Sarcasm (and other indirect or implied insults) are examples of impoliteness behaviors that are more complex because their indirect nature requires the listener to figure out whether the person is being impolite or not. Extra mental processing time is needed.¹⁴ Sarcasm that expresses anger, disagreement, or other potentially impolite responses has been cited as both a more and less threatening choice in which to encode impoliteness. As a form of indirect communication, sarcasm may "mute the emotional impact of both criticism and praise" (Filik et al 2016, p. 2131). A study of third-party observers to angry exchanges found that "When anger is communicated through sarcasm its effects on observers are more positive" (Miron-Spektor, et al 2011, p. 3). Yet sarcastic insults are potentially riskier insults in the sense that once the person being addressed perceives the sarcasm they could feel the insult to be more damaging. Culpeper's work on impoliteness, for example, shows that "irony enhances the criticism conveyed by a more direct insult" (Culpeper 2011, pp. 167-8). And in a situation in which the power imbalance is extreme, such as in the dystopia, Lilith's use of sarcasm is an appropriation of linguistic power that could backfire on her. According to critical discussions of impoliteness,

"The salient literal meaning of irony functions as a reference point relative to which the ironicized situation is to be assessed and criticised.... The intended meaning is the realisation of the extent to which the state of affairs in question has fallen short of expectations usually made explicitly by what is said." (Rachel Giora 2003, qtd in Culpeper 2011, p. 168)

For example, Lilith's sarcastic agreement with Jdahya emphasizes how far from his "not hurting her" her experience has already been. Similarly, this effect is evoked when Nikanj criticizes its ooloi parent's view of how to deal with the trade partner species by saying that what they do is treating people as less than people, and Lilith replies with sarcasm: "Lilith laughed bitterly. 'Why would you suddenly start to worry about that?'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 77). Rather than treating Nikanj's comment as a positive step toward better human-Oankali relations, Lilith takes the risk of insulting it by suggesting how very bad those relations have been. Nikanj's response to Lilith's sarcasm is a threat that asserts the Oankali power over her. It responds simply, "'Do you want me to surprise you?'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 77). This scene illustrates not only Lilith's sarcastic impoliteness but also how Butler uses that impoliteness to keep the dystopic power imbalance foregrounded for readers. Lilith becomes a figure at the center of the complex interpretation of impoliteness in this text as her behavior is seen not merely as rudeness but as a verbal strategy in the dystopic struggle for power. The fact that research on sarcastic impoliteness shows it to be both

more and less damaging suggests that characters and readers likely have more freedom in how to respond to the impoliteness. Lilith's response to Nikanj's criticism of the Oankali is serious but also humorous. She laughs—albeit "bitterly"—and implies that the criticism is long, long overdue. Nikanj's response illustrates that it has taken her criticism seriously, but it also seems pushed by her sarcastic response to be more forceful but also similarly indirect. When it asks, "do you want me to surprise you?" it is making clear his power to "surprise" her, but the form of the interrogative makes this question/threat less direct. Lilith's sarcasm and indirectness cause other characters to respond in more intense and indirect ways as well.¹⁵ Sarcasm is also one way Lilith deals with the dystopic horrors she encounters while challenging readers to maximally process her position. Lilith's sarcasm demonstrates the flexibility of human verbal languages as well as allowing her to be impolite in ways that illustrate the complexity of using impoliteness for resistance.

CRITIQUE OF ALIEN NORMS OF COMMUNICATION WHICH DISREGARD HUMAN VERBAL CONSENT

The alien touch language offers a counterpoint to human verbal languages, but Butler undermines this representation of utopic communication in favor of flawed human language. The aliens can communicate directly by sinking their tentacles into the bodies of others; They can directly communicate experience through chemical neuro-stimulation. This way of communicating might be considered ideal since lying or even withholding information are impossible. Human natural languages, on the other hand, allow deception and confusion. Thus, the Oankali have been viewed as "a model of ...evolved, nonviolent communicators, who use their bodies and senses to connect in ways unattainable through words alone" (Broad 2011, p. 141). Yet it becomes clear throughout the trilogy that this gift of direct communication may not be so "ideal" as it serves the power asymmetry that the aliens maintain over the humans. It is a way of communicating that the humans do not have access to. Humans can be known biochemically by the Oankali, but they cannot know the Oankali in the same way. As shown above, human characters become deeply distrustful of alien touches and often assert their desires for verbal language protocols. This ability of the aliens to touch humans—and during these touches, to drug them, to feed off them, to alter their bodies, to give them pleasure or pain—becomes by the end of the trilogy explicitly linked to how the aliens are colonizing the humans: "'We feed on them every day,' Nikanj had said to me. 'And in the process, we keep them in good health and mix children for them. But they don't always have to know what we're doing'" (*Imago* 1997, p. 156). And this chemical seduction, which fully matures in the next alien-human hybrid generation, takes primary place in forcing the resisting humans at the end of the trilogy to stay with the Oankali. One of the old resisters, Francisco, directly addresses how the chemical "scent" of Jdahya has made him unable to feel the revulsion he used to feel: "'I can't even hate you,' he whispered. 'My god, if there had been people like you around a hundred

years ago, I couldn't have become a resister. I think there would be no resisters.' He stared at me a moment longer. 'Damn you,' he said slowly, sadly. 'Goddamn you'" (*Imago* 1997, pp. 214-215). Francisco's sad and whispered curses, however, illustrate how impoliteness is used to signal the humans' lack of consent to what is being done to them.

Indeed, human characters who are unwilling to give consent to the Oankali agenda represent another aspect of the theme of verbal conflict. Agreement and acceptance are politer than disagreement and rejection (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 38). Thus, disagreeing and refusing become potential disruptors of the conversational harmony. People held against their will might refuse to go along with their captor's plans, yet Butler highlights the issue of non-consent in the trilogy by showing it in contrast to the Oankali gentleness. Joseph, for example, is drugged and then shown the incomparable physical sexual pleasure that the Oankali can offer Humans ("I've never felt anything like that in my life," he shouted" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 170)), but when Nikanj invites him to participate a second time Joseph refuses: "'No!' he said sharply. 'Not again'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 188). Joseph withholds consent and argues with Nikanj as Nikanj strives to persuade him: "'He [Joseph] pulled his arm free. 'You said I could choose. I've made my choice!'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 189). Despite Joseph's verbal refusal, Nikanj "seduces"¹⁶ him by arguing that Joseph's body really wants the experience: "'Your body said one thing. Your words said another'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 190). Even though the humans in Butler's dystopia ultimately cannot control even their own bodies, they can still withhold verbal consent. It becomes a marker of human identity, of human refusal. As Joseph ultimately says: "'I can't give you—or myself—permission,' he said. 'No matter what I feel, I can't'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 190). This extended scene of Joseph's refusal to mate with Nikanj illustrates how Butler positions the human characters to resist and to refuse, from Joseph's shouted "No!" and physical struggles to his final quiet refusal to consent to what is done to him. But it also juxtaposes to the humans' emotions of fear, anger, and frustration the aliens' gentle language of choice that masks their complete control.

Lilith's refusal to give consent to the Oankali plan for her to bear hybrid alien-human children becomes a narrative touchstone that echoes throughout the trilogy.¹⁷ Lilith, set up by the Oankali and by Butler to be the first human mother of hybrid children, nevertheless voices from the very beginning her fear of this very thing. Her first conversation with Jdahya reaches its climax as Jdahya tells her of the alien plan to interbreed with humans. She shouts "No!" and refuses to walk any further with him. When she finds out how easily the Oankali can make changes to human bodies without their consent and without their knowledge, she tries to explain to them how afraid she is of being physically manipulated without her knowledge or consent: "'It scares me to have people doing things to me that I don't understand'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 31). And it is telling that after Nikanj refuses to "surprise" Lilith by altering her brain chemistry without her knowledge or consent, it then goes on to "surprise" her by making her pregnant against her express wishes: "'You said—' She ran out of breath and had to start again. 'You said you wouldn't

do this. You said—'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 246). Nikanj voices the fact that Lilith could never give verbal consent to bearing hybrid children: "'You could never have said so. Just as Joseph could never have invited me into his bed—no matter how much he wanted me there. Nothing about you but your words reject this child'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 246). Critics have often discussed Butler's "seduction" and even "rape" of human characters by the Oankali (Bonner 1990). The excuse Nikanj makes for making her pregnant, that Lilith's body "wanted" to have children, has been seen as a common response of rapists: that the person really "wanted" it. Thus, consent becomes an important theme in the trilogy. From the perspective of the "ideal" communicators, the aliens, who can read human and alien bodies, being able to read the body's desire is clearly privileged over mere verbal consent:

I might not have believed this if a Human had said it. Humans said one thing with their bodies and another with their mouths and everyone had to spend time and energy figuring out what they really meant. And once you did understand them, the Humans got angry and acted as though you had stolen thoughts from their minds. (*Imago* 1997, p. 27)

Here privileging the body's signals over verbal language is clearly presented as an ideal. Butler has Jodahs describe it as "figuring out what they really meant" as if that truth were the only real one and as "spend[ing] time and energy" to interpret their words as if the inefficiencies of verbal language were so onerous. Butler makes clear through Jodahs' discussion of verbal consent that Humans expect their verbal communication to be respected and are angry or afraid when the aliens do not do that: "Humans tended to misunderstand ooloi when ooloi said things like that. Humans thought the ooloi were promising that they would do nothing until the Humans said they had changed their minds—told the ooloi with their mouths, in words" (*Imago* 1997, p. 32). Here Butler highlights how the humans' wishes—contained in their verbal interactions—are not respected by the Oankali. She further undermines the calming, "consensus building" touch language of the Oankali, while valorizing the angry and impolite rejections of the humans to consent to the alien agenda.

The Oankali's disregard of verbal consent clearly contributes to the human's impolite reactions and keeps the power imbalance foregrounded. Refusing to give consent to the Oankali's plan and refusing the Oankali's calming touch are behaviors that, while impolite or at least awkward in an OC situation, appear in Butler's trilogy as the less impolite way to resist. The human characters who resist by trying to kill the aliens or other humans are viewed as extreme, while refusing consent is understood and easily forgiven by the aliens, who simply do what they like despite the lack of verbal consent. Seeing polite or harmonious interactions—between humans or between humans and aliens—as masking a silent resistance to the alien agenda upends the OC valuing of polite interactions. However, Butler does not place unequivocal value on the impolite end of the spectrum. Characters such as Curt and Peter who act out aggressively against the aliens are not characters to be emulated because they do not survive, but Lilith voices Butler's urge to valorize the "pure" human identity their behavior signals: "Curt and Gabriel were still

drugged along with a few others. Lilith worried about these. Oddly, she also admired them for being able to resist conditioning. Were they strong, then? Or simply unable to adapt? (Dawn 1997, p. 201). Similarly, Lilith defends the behavior of Paul Titus, the man who tried to rape her, placing blame instead on the Oankali, who isolated the humans from each other: “‘He did what you and his so-called family set him up to do!’” (Dawn 1997, p. 100). Although this violent behavior is not seen as a real answer to the humans’ situation, it is explained and tolerated by Lilith.¹⁸ Other sympathetic human characters at times also respond with aggression or violence that is tolerated. The characters who refuse to give consent to the Oankali or refuse their touches in favor of exclusively verbal interaction are often given more information, as in Jesusa’s case: “‘Your people are not usually told this at all. I...I should not tell it to you, but I think I have to!’” (Imago 1997, p. 115). Or they are allowed to experience their human emotions without the mediation of the aliens, signaling a stronger link to human identity (e.g. Tino’s anger (Dawn 1997, pp. 19-20)). Thus, the refusal of consent is a nod not only to the adversarial courtroom stance toward getting at the truth, but also to a philosophical refusal to look away from difficult truths, which maps onto a particularly human identity.

(Im) POLITE VERBAL INTERACTIONS HEIGHTEN CONFLICT AND MORAL AMBIGUITY FOR READERS

Butler certainly raises difficult truths for her readers to confront, but most often the “truth” itself is in conflict. Refusing to give consent aligns the Humans with impoliteness and resistance to the dystopic situation generally, but it is also through the conflicts between individual characters that we see how Butler uses impoliteness (and the corresponding OC politeness framework as a norm) to heighten moral ambiguity in characters arguments. Butler creates conflict between characters to position readers at the crux of the moral ambiguity of the issues she raises.

One of Lilith’s confrontations with Gabriel, for example, illustrates the ways in which Butler uses confrontation to heighten moral ambiguity—in fact, to reveal ambiguity as a form of truth—of the situations her characters inhabit. When Gabriel insinuates that Lilith might be an Oankali herself, Lilith starts the confrontation:

Lilith sighed. “Okay, Gabe, what have you got? Questions, accusations or condemnations?”

“Maybe all three.”

“Well?”

“You didn’t fight. You chose to stand with the Oankali!”

“Against you?”

Angry silence.

“Where were you standing when Curt hacked Joseph to death?”

Tate laid her hand on Lilith’s arm. “Curt just went crazy,” she said. She spoke very softly. “No one thought he would do anything like that.”

“He did it,” Lilith said. “And you all watched.” (Dawn 1997, p. 238)

Gabe raises the overarching issue, that Lilith chose the side of the Oankali over humans. But Lilith suggests that Gabe’s accusation may be founded in his own human desire for status, to be leader of the group. Then she refuses to let any of the humans excuse themselves from complicity in Joseph’s death. Here the critique of violent, fearful, hierarchical human nature is clear. Gabe continues the confrontation, however, raising again the issue of why Lilith allowed Nikanj to use her body to heal itself:

“But why should you want to help it?” Gabriel whispered harshly. “Why didn’t you just let it die?” Every Oankali in the area must have heard him.

“What good would that do?” She demanded. “I’ve known Nikanj since it was a child. Why should I let it die, then be stuck with some stranger? How would that help me or you or anyone here?”

He drew back from her. “You’ve always got an answer. And it never quite rings true.” (Dawn 1997, p. 239)

Gabriel’s comment that Lilith’s pat answers do not “ring true” hints at what readers and characters both feel in this dystopic situation: yes, the humans want all the aliens to die—every alien that dies is one less to trouble humankind, but Lilith’s point is also true—the Oankali have all the power. Killing or allowing Nikanj to die would probably not tip the balance. Lilith’s personal situation may even be worse if Nikanj dies. But further, her comment that she has known Nikanj since it was a child reminds readers that the aliens are also individuals whom humans can come to care for. And readers come to care for Nikanj, thus, making it more difficult to side with Gabriel about letting it die.

Lilith’s interactions with Nikanj are, in fact, central to the ongoing themes/conflicts of the trilogy. As the parents of the protagonists of the next two books in the trilogy, Lilith and Nikanj continue as significant characters throughout the series. The complicated relationship they form in *Dawn* influences reader identification not just with these two characters but also with the moral positions they take up and clash over. Through Lilith and Nikanj, readers intimately experience an individual human and an individual Oankali coming to care for each other despite opposing positions. Readers identify with Nikanj because it does seem to listen to Lilith and to treat her with more respect than other Oankali do; their relationship is also distanced from the overarching power asymmetry of the trilogy as Nikanj is shown to have opinions that differ from the Oankali “consensus.” An examination of Lilith’s and Nikanj’s conversations therefore offers the best illustration of how Butler uses moral conflict to affect readers’ identification with her themes. In their interactions readers see how Butler makes Nikanj sympathetic but implacable, an ally but also an enforcer of the alien agenda. In these fraught conversations, moral ambiguity is heightened as readers experience the characters’ emotional overload.

Nikanj speaks openly to Lilith about what the Oankali want to do to her, and it is the first to disagree with how the Oankali treat her (and the other humans):

“Now I must tell you something.”

“What?”

“Ooan wanted me to act and say nothing...to...surprise you. I won’t do that.”

“What!” (Dawn 1997, p. 73 emphasis in original)

Despite Nikanj's reasonable-sounding arguments that she would have better access to her memories, Lilith exclaims in fear and flees this encounter in mid-conflict to hide in the bathroom. When Nikanj joins her and refuses to leave despite Lilith's shouted "Get out of here! Get away from me!" (Dawn 1997, p. 77), it explains that it needs to be able to talk to her: "Ooan says humans won't be worth talking to for at least a generation, Its tentacles writhed. 'I don't know how to be with someone I can't talk to'" (Dawn 1997, p. 77). Readers are here meant to sympathize with Nikanj's position. It is trying to understand and get Lilith to trust it. But even as Lilith's characteristic bitter wit lightens the mood briefly when she answers that "'brain damage isn't going to improve my conversation'" (Dawn 1997, p. 77), Nikanj softly and calmly reasserts the power asymmetry: "'You know you must accept me or ooan'" (Dawn 1997, p. 77). Readers are thus reminded that Lilith does not have the choice to resist being altered; she only has the choice of who will do the alteration. When Lilith continues to resist, Nikanj offers her the only thing it can, that it will not act without her knowledge:

"But you must trust me or let ooan surprise you when it's tired of waiting."

"You won't do that yourself—won't just spring it on me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There's something wrong with doing it that way—surprising people. It's...treating them as though they aren't people, as though they aren't intelligent." (Dawn 1997, p. 77)

Although Lilith responds to this final comment with a sarcastic remark, she makes the decision to let Nikanj change her (Dawn 1997, p. 78). Although Lilith's "choice" is overdetermined, and readers see how she really has only a choice between two evils, this interaction allows readers to see Nikanj as an ally. This gives its arguments in future conversations more weight with readers.

After Lilith is attacked by Paul Titus, she and Nikanj engage in another prolonged, emotionally overwrought conversation about how Lilith and the other humans are treated—isolated, cloned, and bred without their consent or even knowledge. Lilith has been badly beaten, almost killed by Paul, yet she argues that the Oankali are responsible because they isolated him from other humans. She also demands to know if humans have been cloned and bred and if it will happen to her. The interaction is punctuated by meta-commentary on how Lilith is reacting to the conversation; she first is amazed at how she is unable to get Nikanj to understand her point of view:

She stared at it, feeling more strongly than ever, the difference between them—the unbridgeable alienness of Nikanj. She could spend hours talking to it in its own language and fail to communicate. It could do the same with her, although it could force her to obey whether she understood or not. Or it could turn her over to others who would use force against her. (Dawn 1997, p. 96)

But then Nikanj seems to take her need to know harsh truths (that she will be cloned) to heart:

"Did you really need to know that?" it asked. "Should I have told you?"

It had never asked such a question before....

"Yes," she said. "It concerned me. I needed to know."

It said nothing for a while and she did not disturb its thoughts. "I will remember that," it said softly, finally.

And she felt as though she had communicated something important finally. (Dawn 1997, p. 98)

Butler has Lilith remark on the change in Nikanj's behavior—it has asked a new type of question. Both key statements end with the word "finally," underscoring the discourse boundary. And Lilith's position that she cannot communicate with Nikanj is contradicted. This again gives Nikanj more credibility. As the conversation continues, however, Nikanj uses the term "family" to describe alien-human mating, and this causes Lilith to rage against its use of that term. In this case Lilith's emotional outburst is not met with Nikanj's understanding but with a gentle, firm denial of her position:

"He has *nothing!* He has no one to teach him to be a man, and he damn sure can't be an Oankali, so don't talk to me about his family!"

"Yet they are his family," Nikanj insisted softly. "They have accepted him and he has accepted them. He has no other family, but he has them." She made a sound of disgust and turned her face away. (Dawn 1997, p. 99 emphasis in original)

This interaction ends with Nikanj agreeing that the Oankali were responsible for her beating because of their inability to predict human behavior. However, Nikanj's position that humans now have no other "family" except the Oankali resonates with poignancy. Butler has made Nikanj more sympathetic and allowed it to voice the hopeful, utopic argument that we can make new loving, if unlikely, hybrid post-human families. The positive tenor of this argument is naturally sympathetic to readers and, thus, it is Lilith's position that disrupts reader identification with the utopic vision. Whom does Butler want readers to believe? Placed in an ethical holding pattern, readers are led to identify with the twists and turns of conflicting interactions and to feel pulled toward agreement with both Lilith and Nikanj even though nothing is resolved or changed.

CONCLUSION

Is reader trust in Lilith's judgement undermined as she cannot see the eutopic possibilities? This interaction with Nikanj, typical of those in the trilogy, does not allow readers to rest easy in their identification/sympathy with any one character. Nikanj ultimately breaks his promise to Lilith that it will not "surprise" her by impregnating her against her express wishes at the end of *Dawn*. Similarly, Lilith is impolite and unrelenting in foregrounding the harshest truths. Butler's choice to have Lilith betray Jesusa in the final book of the trilogy demonstrates Lilith's ambiguous position throughout the narrative. As readers have identified with Lilith's perspective from the first book, they must confront the knife-edge that separates utopia

and dystopia in this text. This paper has argued that Lilith's impolite approach is valued by Butler's intent for *Xenogenesis* because it challenges reader identification and heightens moral ambiguity surrounding the difficult issues she raises. Naomi Jacobs supports this argument when she sees connections between humanist formulations of power or agency and conflict or disruption as necessary for new understandings:

When power is understood not as a monolithic structure that immobilizes all within its reach, but rather as a constantly shifting interplay of forces and tendencies, the self must be seen as a hybrid of many conflicting discursive formations; as a result of those very conflicts, spaces can open up for resistance, spontaneity, self-creation. (Jacobs 2003, p. 95)

The position that conflict opens spaces for the new is also at the heart of the dystopia. Both dystopia and verbal conflict/impoliteness have the power to move readers/speakers outside norms of behavior and thought that can inhibit the discovery of new answers to seemingly intractable problems. Butler manipulates the comfort readers feel in an OC framework of politeness. I have argued here that the trilogy plays with OC norms of politeness to show how characters cling to familiar verbal protocols as part of holding on to a fossilized and sterile human identity. Likewise, readers must embrace their discomfort at conflict and impoliteness to identify with Lilith and see that her angry, bitter, and long-suffering responses to being colonized by the Oankali are necessary to Butler's thought experiment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my generous and encouraging friend and mentor, Paul Klemp, for reading the endless drafts as this article took shape. The remaining faults are all my own.

END NOTES

1. On the critical dystopia see also Baccolini (2000) and Sargent (1994). See Ildney Cavalcanti's (2000) essay on feminist utopias and language for the claim that "Futuristic Dystopias are stories about language" (152). For the foundations of language and utopian theory see Barnes (1975), Meyers (1980), and Sisk (1997).
2. For example, Lilith's aggressively direct or sarcastic responses combined with her subaltern status appear to flout Brown and Levinson's basic politeness formulation that those with less power owe deference to those with more power (1987). The use of irony/sarcasm to insult or criticize is an exercise of power, but also an indirect one, complicating how politeness and impoliteness are used to make meaning in this dystopic text.
3. For example, Naomi Jacobs makes several comments that readers are left without clear direction: "Where, then, are we left in Butler's ambiguous work?" (Jacobs 2003, p. 108) and "As is typical of Butler's work, this trilogy will arrive at only a qualified resolution of the problems it raises" (Jacobs 2003, p. 102). Sharon DeGraw is explicit that Butler's progressive vision fails: "...a cyclical pattern emerges of possible or realized progressive social change ultimately undermined or completely destroyed by conservative, retrogressive forces" (DeGraw 2004, p. 219). See also Frances Bonner (1990), Molly Wallace (2009), Peter Sands (2003), and Jennifer S. Nelson (2007) for the work readers must do to puzzle out Butler's vision.
4. See for example the arguments of Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher (2009) in their introduction to *Impoliteness in Language: Studies into its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*.
5. See Shoshana Blum-Kalka's (1990). Brown and Levinson also remark on the centrality of sociological factors in their theory of politeness (1987, p. 15).
6. This positive valuation of a person is referred to as a person's "face" (see Goffman 1982).
7. Richard Watts' (1992) tripartite model with politeness and impoliteness at either end of a continuum and "politic" behavior that is neither overly polite nor impolite as the norm may help analyze this situation. I will argue that the "emergency" state of the dystopia may instill a slightly more "impolite" (from a non-emergency perspective) politic norm. However, for characters, and readers, of Butler's dystopia, movement between polite and impolite is heightened by meta-commentary on characters' emotional states that relies on non-emergency politeness norms for reference.
8. Lilith asks Kahguyah't for information: "'Look, I thought I was supposed to be learning. I can't learn without asking questions and getting answers.' 'You'll get them eventually—as you need them'" (*Dawn* 1997, p. 50).
9. "To be sure, the official hegemonic order of most dystopias (from Forster's machine society to Piercy's corporate order) rests, as Antonio Gramsci put it, on both coercion and consent." (Baccolini and Moylan 2003, p. 5)
10. Isabel Ermida finds a similar situation in her discussion of George Orwell's *1984* arguing that "politeness should also be regarded as being aggressive and enhancing power relationships where domination and manipulation occur" (2006, p. 848). In Orwell's dystopia, language becomes a weapon: "...much of the linguistic dynamics at work in the dialogues between Winston and O'Brien is meant to maintain authority and distance, as well as to enhance dissimulation and deception...[T]he linguistic politeness action in those exchanges conceals a conflictual dimension which is rendered, on the surface structure level, as seemingly benign..." (Ermida 2006, p. 849).
11. For a discussion of markedness theory as embedded in social interactions and identities see Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004).
12. Ooloi characters, such as Nikanj, are non-gendered and Butler uses "it" to refer to them.
13. Kahguyah't treats Lilith with contempt, and she responds in kind: "...she did not like the ooloi. It was smug and it tended to treat her condescendingly... 'I don't know,' she said coldly. 'No one would tell me what it was.' Kahguyah't missed or ignored the anger in her voice" (*Dawn* 1997, pp. 46-47). Butler's critique of Kahguyah't's colo-

nialist attitudes are clear: “‘Ooan [Kahguyaht] says humans—any new trade partner species—can’t be treated the way we must treat each other’” (*Dawn* 1997, p. 80).

14. Culpeper discusses indirect impoliteness: “...the more indirectly the impoliteness is triggered the greater the offense taken” (Culpeper 2011, p. 185). Culpeper suggests that the reason for this may be “due not just to the cost of extra processing but by the fact that one is forced to dwell on the impolite expression in order to work it out” (2011, p. 185). However not all studies of sarcasm or indirect impoliteness have found that the insult is exacerbated (see Culpeper 2011, chapter 5).
15. Kahguyaht, for example, gives Lilith the silent treatment (*Dawn* 1997).
16. “Rape” is also an appropriate term here. Use of “seduction” rather than “rape” suggests some of the heightening of moral ambiguity in which Butler engages (see Bonner (1990) and DeGraw (2004)).
17. Lilith’s experience of being the first human mother of hybrid alien-human children—in essence, her “rape”—happens in *Dawn*, but Lilith is asked to retell the story in each of the following books. The meaning of this mini-narrative of rape emphasizes main themes of the trilogy including lack of consent and how conflicted humans try to make sense of their colonization.
18. Christina Braid’s (2006) “Contemplating and Contesting Violence in Dystopia: Violence in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy” focuses on this aspect of Butler’s work.

REFERENCES

- Baccolini, Raffaella, 2000. Gender and genre in the feminist critical dystopias of Katharine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler. In: Marleen Barr. (Ed.), *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*. Rowman, Lanham, pp. 13-34.
- Baccolini, Raffaella and Tom Moylan, 2003. Introduction. *Dystopia and histories*. In: Baccolini, Raffaella and Tom Moylan. (Eds.), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopic Imagination*. Routledge, New York, pp. 1-12.
- Barnes, Myra, 1975. *Linguistics and Language in Science Fiction-Fantasy*. Arno, New York, 1975.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, 1990. You don’t touch lettuce with your fingers: parental politeness in family discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics* 14, 259-288.
- Bonner, Frances, 1990. Difference and desire, slavery and seduction: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*. *Foundation* 48, 50-62.
- Bousfield, Derek and Miriam A. Locher, 2008. Introduction: Impoliteness and power in language. In: Bousfield, Derek and Miriam A. Locher. (Eds.), *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*. Dr Gruyter Inc., Berlin, pp. 1-13.
- Braid, Christina, 2006. Contemplating and contesting violence in dystopia: Violence in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy. *Contemporary Justice Review* 9 (1), 47-65.
- Broad, Katherine R., 2011. Body Speaks: Communication and the limits of nationalism in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy. In: Raja, Masood Ashraf, Jason W. Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi. (Eds.), *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, pp. 141-155.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson, 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bucholtz, Mary and Kira Hall, 2004. Language and identity. In: Duranti, Alessandro. (Ed.), *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Blackwell, New York, pp. 369-394.
- Butler, Octavia, 1989. *Adulthood Rites*. Grand Central Publishing, New York.
- Butler, Octavia, 1997. *Dawn*. Aspect, Reprint edition, New York.
- Butler Octavia, 1997. *Imago*. Aspect, Reprint edition, New York.
- Cavalcanti, Ildney, 2000. Utopias of/f language in contemporary feminist literary dystopias. *Utopian Studies* 11 (2), 152-180.
- Chilton, Paul, 1990. Politeness, politics and diplomacy. *Discourse & Society* 1 (2), 201-224.
- Culpeper, Jonathan, 2011. *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- DeGraw, Sharon, 2004. ‘The more things change, the more they remain the same’: Gender and sexuality in Octavia Butler’s oeuvre. *Femspec* 4 (2), 219-238.
- Ermida, Isabel, 2006. Linguistic mechanisms of power in Nineteen Eighty-Four: Applying politeness theory to Orwell’s world. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38, 842-862.
- Filik, Ruth, Alexandra Turcan, Dominic Thompson, Nicole Harvey, Harriet Davies, and Amelia Turner, 2016. Sarcasm and emoticons: Comprehension and emotional impact. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 69 (11), 2130-2146.
- Giora, Rachel, 2003. *On Our Mind: Salience, Context, and Figurative Language*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Goffman, Erving, 1982. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*. Pantheon, New York.
- Jacobs, Naomi, 2003. Posthuman bodies and agency in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*. In: Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (Eds.), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Routledge, New York, pp. 91-111.
- Lakoff, Robin T., 1989. The limits of politeness: Therapeutic and courtroom discourse” *Multilingua* 8, 101-129.
- Meyers, Walter E., (1980). *Aliens and Linguists: Language Study and Science Fiction*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens.
- Miron-Spektor, Ella, Dorit Efrat-Treister, Anat Rafaeli & Orit Schwarz-Cohen, (2011). Others’ anger makes people work harder not smarter: The effects of observing anger and sarcasm on creative and analytic thinking. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96 (5), 1065-1075.
- Nelson, Jennifer, (2007). Agonist symbiosis in *Xenogenesis*: Past as prelude in Octavia Butler’s post-colonial

- science-fiction utopias. *The International Journal of the Humanities* 4 (7), 89-98.
- Sands, Peter, 2003. Octavia Butler's chiastic cannibalistics. *Utopian Studies* 14 (1), 1-14.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower, 1994. The three faces of utopianism revisited. *Utopian Studies* 5 (1), 1-37.
- Sisk, David, (1997). *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*. Greenwood, Westport, CT.
- Wallace, Molly, 2009. Reading Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* after Seattle. *Contemporary Literature* 50, 94-128.
- Watts, Richard. (1992). Linguistic politeness and politic verbal behavior: Reconsidering claims for universality. In Richard J. Watts, Sachiko Ide and Konrad Ehlich. (Eds.), *Politeness in Language: Studies in its History, Theory and Practice*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 43-69.