
THE MEANING OF “MANNERS” IN AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom says that *Good manners will open doors that the best education cannot*. While manners have been studied by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians, who have uncovered an array of social processes performed in seemingly trivial daily encounters, this study, with its ethnopragmatic approach to semantics through the natural semantic metalanguage, brings a new perspective. The uniting theme of these “rules” in the Australian context centres on personal autonomy and its concomitant norm of not telling people what to do. The importance of manners in Australian English is evident in its frequency of use and its prominence in Australian child-rearing and etiquette literature.

Keywords: manners, Australian English, politeness, ethnopragmatics, natural semantic metalanguage (NSM)

1. Introduction

When I tell people that I am researching the meaning of *manners* in Australian English, they often seem confused, asking “Do we *really* have any?”, justifying their doubt with the stereotype of the rough-mannered Australian, or the “uncouth Ocker” (Russell 2010:1). Others effortlessly reel off a list of behaviours that they regard to be the embodiment of this word saying, “Oh, so you mean like saying ‘please’ and ‘thankyou’, not pushing in line, that sort of thing?”. Detailed research has revealed that this listing “quirk” is a vital clue to the semantic structure of this plural-only abstract noun. What is discussed in this study is not so much what qualifies as Australian *manners*, but what Australians understand the word *manners* to mean.

Until now, scholarly attention to this concept has come from sociologists (Elias 2000 [1939]; Goffman 1955, 1959, 1963, 1967, 1970), anthropologists (Hall 1955; Fox 2004) and historians (Curtin 1985; Klein 1989; Visser 1991; Bryson 1998). They have uncovered a

gamut of social processes performed in seemingly trivial day-to-day encounters. The research presented here is one of the first studies of *manners* undertaken from a semantic perspective.

Manners have fascinated people for centuries, whether it be lamenting their seeming demise or describing what they are and how to acquire them. These days, people continue to talk about *manners*, with popular literature and newspaper pieces bemoaning their apparent declining importance in society and arguing for their resurgence (Caldwell 1999; Truss 2006; Holdforth 2007; Alkon 2010; Kelly 2010; Winton Burn 2010; Gardiner 2012; Cosic 2019; Griffin 2019; Chrysanthos 2022). Online parenting forums are replete with opinions about the importance of *manners* for children and advice on instruction.

Using an ethnopragmatic approach to linguistic analysis, this study is grounded in linguistic evidence and uses the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) to achieve its goal of explicating the meaning of *manners* in terms that make sense to the speakers concerned (Goddard 2006a). To understand the contemporary Australian lexical item *manners*, we begin with looking briefly at the history of the concept of “manners” in Australia.¹

Over the centuries the semantic content of *manners* has changed, adapting to its linguistic environment and speakers’ needs. The Australian English lexeme *manners* began its life in 1788 when the British settled Australia through penal exile to the colony of New South Wales. This rough new society did not have a rule book codifying social behaviour, and initially most rules of conduct were transplanted from their British source. It was not until almost a century after colonisation that the first Australian etiquette manual was produced, devoting a particular focus to sports and amusing pastimes, including a section on the uniquely Australian hunting sport “Kangarooing” (McConnell 1980 [1885]). With the industrialisation of the nineteenth century, social mobility increased, and in response, etiquette manuals flooded the market. These expressed the hope that

¹ For practical purposes, when referring to the lexical item, italics are used—*manners*; this contrasts with references to manners as a concept which use double quotation marks (“manners”) for first use, and without thereafter. Manners as a concept is treated as an uncountable noun taking a singular verb.

Australians might come to achieve the natural and unaffected behaviour that emanated from considering others.

Manners were important to the colony for three main reasons (Russell 2010:2). First, the colonists held the moral premise that they were civilizing a savage world. Second, the social composition of white society was such that *manners* defined social positions and functioned as social gatekeepers. Third, *manners* were considered to be a critical part of a person's identity. The majority of nineteenth-century colonists identified themselves as "English", not simply in the sense of having emigrated from England, but as members of the Anglo-Saxon world.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Australia experienced a boom in gold and wool. Cities flourished. People's fortunes rose rapidly, and the working classes began to ascend the social ladder. The manners manuals of the time promised to guide people of new fortune to an improved sense of grace and courtesy. However, the mere reliance on these books betrayed readers' ignorance and humble beginnings. Commentators in "society" magazines agreed that teaching good manners in the home was the key to maintaining decorum and respectability in the colonial society. It was anticipated that careful fostering of manners in the home would flow into the regulation of public places.

During this time of rapid expansion, people faced the challenge of how to behave towards newcomers and strangers. Introductions were a maze of elaborate courtesies; acknowledgements in the street followed special rules. For example, the "cut direct", a blank stare in response to someone's bow of recognition, was reserved for persons who were notorious for extraordinarily bad conduct (McConnell 1980 [1885]:42). Society considered "cutting someone" to be the severest social blow that could be dealt (Mrs Erskine 1902:59). The prescriptions and regulations about manners in public focused on managing conduct between strangers who had no investment in each other's lives and whose association was only temporary.

At this time, Australian society was developing many peculiarities that set it apart from its British origins. In this new socially mobile society, it was possible to move upwards from low beginnings. An early twentieth-century Australian etiquette manual explained that while people naturally form their habits and behaviour according to the class into which they were born, in Australia, it was

possible to start life in a lower class “whose customs are, to say the least of it, rather primitive” then rise through the social levels, learning the correct behaviour for newly reached tiers of social standing (Pyke 2005 [1916]:5). While the central theme of manners was correct behaviour, this must not be at the expense of someone else’s feelings. The most important rule to observe in the social world was to behave in accordance with the Golden Rule “Do as you would be done by” (Pyke 2005 [1916]:6–7).

Over time, manners has become more about dealing with other people and less about reflecting social class. Manners formerly carried a moral dimension: as an outward display of someone’s morals—“a man’s manners are the outward expression and manifestation of his interior life”—having manners was near to being a virtue (De Valcourt 1855:2). These days, having manners is about displaying knowledge of how to ensure that interpersonal interactions run smoothly, and demonstrating knowledge of the basic “rules” to follow in interactions to show respect and consideration for others.

Manners has adapted to its environment and the needs of its speakers, distancing itself from morals. With good manners no longer equating to good morals, social attitudes to particular behaviours, especially those to do with the body, have changed over time (Elias 2000 [1939]). The social attitude that a correct and “good” way of behaving towards other people in social situations exists and that this is coupled with a desire not to offend other people still holds, but manners has become attainable by all. No longer is it contingent on birth and social class or wealth.

Following this historical overview, Section 2 moves onto the cultural context and use of the contemporary Australian lexical item *manners*, and the methodological approach taken in this study. Section 3 details the collocational profile and fine semantic elements, exploring *manners*’ status as an abstract plural-only noun and the innovative notion of the “*manners* scripts”. These discussions culminate in the semantic explication for *manners*, followed by concluding remarks.

2. *Manners* as an Australian sociality concept: Cultural context and use

Knowledge of sociocultural rules and expectations informs people’s behaviour. Manners is a set of “rules” that dictate how people should interact with one another. These rules encompass doing things and

saying things. These particular ways of behaving share a theme of showing consideration for others and displaying one's knowledge of the "right" way of doing things in particular situations. The exclamatory phrase *Have some manners!*² laments someone's lack of manners and is an appeal for the addressee to behave in a "good way" that is appropriate to the situation. To "use" one's *manners* means to do something in a particular way that shows knowledge of what to do in this context, and because of this knowledge, an awareness of how to treat people in a way that shows concern and consideration of their feelings. This "good way of behaving" reflects socially acceptable codes that embody important cultural values.

In Australian English culture, and possibly Anglo cultures more widely, these behavioural prescriptions are about ordinary, everyday behaviours centring on particular speech acts such as "greeting", "requesting", "thanking", and "apologizing" and their associated words such as *hello, hi, please, thank you, excuse me, and sorry*. The dataset used in the analysis of *manners* is particularly illuminating on this point.

2.1 Data and methodology

The dataset used in this research comprises Google search results from Australian webpages and my own Australian English native speaker observations. The Google search items were manually gathered over an eighteen-month period, beginning in 2011. Albeit time-intensive, one benefit of using a search engine-mediated approach to data collection is the level of familiarization acquired for each example. I read the entire source pages to gain an in-depth understanding of the context in which the word was used, imparting an ethnographic flavour to the research.

This ethnographic approach to data collection is partnered with the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) methodology to lexical semantic analysis. The NSM constitutes a set of culture-neutral semantic primes and accompanying simple grammar that has been established over decades of cross-linguistic research (Wierzbicka 1996; Peeters 2006; Goddard 2008). Together these primes and their

² Some variations on this phrase are *Where are your manners?*, *Use your manners!*, *Watch your manners*, and *Mind your manners*. These are frequently, but not exclusively, used with children. Notably, of the verbs that collocate with *manners* in these common phrases, cognitive verbs are remarkably compatible with *manners* (for example, *don't forget, remember, watch*).

grammar are used to form reductive paraphrases of more complex lexical items or cultural values, norms, and expectations to reveal their meanings in nuanced detail (Levisen & Waters 2017). Cultural scripts and their relationship to the *manners* scripts are further discussed in Section 3.2.

Discussion forums and comments sections were rich data sources, with people posting reflective passages about the importance of *manners*, their absence or presence in people or at events. Entire websites and threads on parenting forums are devoted to the importance of teaching *manners* to children and the best modes of instruction. Particular speech acts and their associated words were often cited. Examples (1) and (2) were typical of the parenting forum posts:

- (1) I personally like *manners* - *please thankyou exuse³ me* etc...but I also think the parent has to lead by example rather than forcing a child to say one or the other.

- (2) I'm a big one for *manners*. Three-year-old Ella has always said *please* and *thank you* (bar the odd lapse in memory!!). She's even started saying “*scuse me*” when others are talking and she'd like a turn. Children learn by what they see and hear.

With fluency as the pedagogical goal for these interaction rules, people are judged on their level of acquisition and quality of performance. Example (3) is from a parenting forum on which the author questioned the perceived decline in the teaching of *manners* in the home setting. This example is significant for two reasons. First, when taught and learnt well, *manners* should be effortless, becoming a “natural” way of interacting with someone else. Second, this example states some of the negative social consequences that may follow from not instilling *manners* in children—people will think and say bad things about them. To be described as *rude* is highly undesirable in Australian English, and Anglo cultures generally (Waters 2012).

³ Spelling errors and other infelicities from the original text are preserved in the example sentences.

- (3) *Good manners* shouldn't be something that a child has to think about, if it is taught correctly at home from day one, *manners* become an integral part of the way they view things. They won't need prompting to use words like "Please and Thank You" it will be a natural speech pattern for them. Believe me it really does matter. You would not want your child to be one of those discussed at school as being rude and obnoxious!!!!!!

Teaching *manners* is associated with the social instruction of children. Childhood is the usual time for foundational training on interpersonal interactions and learning how to become a competent member of a culture. By the time people reach adulthood, fluency in the social code of manners is expected. The examples below attest to *manners* being taught in the home environment, with parents and other adults as the behavioural role models. Example (4) is a complaint on a forum about contestants on a reality television cooking program; (5) is a post on a parenting advice forum, and (6) is taken from a primary school newsletter sent to parents.

- (4) *Manners* start at home first.
- (5) *Manners* For Children is Role Modelling by You: How do our children learn their *manners*? They learn from watching the adults around them.
- (6) *Manners* are one of the most important set of social skills parents and teachers can develop in children.

Manners is a popular topic of educational discourse, with hundreds of books devoted to the topic. The intended readership follows a distinct age-related pattern. The Australian bookselling website booktopia.com lists 983 book titles containing the word *manners*. Of these, children were the target audience for 249 titles, with the remaining 734, including reference works, such as guides for adults

teaching manners to children, aimed at adults.⁴ When contrasted with the availability of book titles featuring the adjective *polite*, the number decreased dramatically to 104, with only 34 intended for children. Below is a selection of book titles centred on the word *manners*:

For children	For adults
<i>Manners matter</i>	<i>A parent's guide to manners for kids</i>
<i>Mind your manners</i>	<i>Ready to go! Manners: A guide to raising good kids</i>
<i>I can't find my manners</i>	<i>Why manners matter: The case for civilised behaviour in a barbarous world</i>
<i>How elephant learnt some manners</i>	<i>Peas and queues: The minefield of modern manners</i>
<i>Dude, that's rude! (Get some manners)</i>	<i>The A to Z of modern manners: A guide to behaving well</i>
<i>Do unto otters: A book about manners</i>	<i>Teach yourself good manners: Classic guide to etiquette</i>

Table 1: Book titles containing the word *manners*

The works on manners for children provide instruction on fundamental rules for social interaction, such as greeting people, requesting strategies, thanking, apologizing, and leave taking (cf. Cole 1995; Riehecky 2022). In the manners literature for adults, however, the rules are more sophisticated and often conflated with the concept of “etiquette”. The word *etiquette* refers to specialized ways of behaving in specific contexts that have a “right” way and a “wrong” way of behaving, such as formal dining situations, weddings, funerals, and following someone’s divorce or separation (Morgan 2001; Von Adlerstein 2002; Norman 2017). While *etiquette* is about a group of behaviours with concrete rules for specific occasions, the word *manners* also refers to a group of behaviours, but with a wider range of use, namely everyday social interactions.

⁴ Accessed 30 January 2022.

A striking semantic feature of *manners* is evidenced in “manners series” books, in which the associated words and behaviours can be listed. For example, the *Don’t Forget Your Manners* series has four titles: *Thank You, Sorry, Please, and Excuse Me* (Carter 2008). The *Good Manners* series has *Hello!, Please!, Thankyou!, I’m Sorry!, After You!, and No, Thank You!* (Amos 2005). These series titles show that certain behaviours (often representative of speech acts) and words can be “picked out” and listed as *manners* exemplars.

That a set of prescribed rules for *manners* in Australia has existed over time is demonstrated in the *Good Manners Chart* (Children’s National Guild of Courtesy 1898), and the *Good Manners* webpage, a “kids only” section of the Child and Youth Health Website (2013). This site also had a downloadable pamphlet of identical content (2011).⁵ These published instructions are a testament to the importance *manners* holds for Australian culture, setting them apart from the other sociality terms from Australian English (cf. Waters 2012, 2017). No such publications with such wide readership proffer instructions on *rudeness* or *politeness*.

The *Good Manners Chart* was first issued to Queensland schools in 1898 by the Department of Public Instruction as a part of the systematic teaching of *conduct* and *manners* to children. Based on the rules formulated by the Children’s National Guild of Courtesy founded in English primary schools in 1889, this chart featured in Queensland classrooms until the 1960s. It states that *courtesy*, *politeness*, and *good manners* all mean “kindly and thoughtful consideration for others”. Although these three words are not strictly synonyms, they are close in meaning, and from a folk point of view, very similar.

The rules begin with general points of conduct such as “Be Honest, Truthful, and Pure” and “Do not use Bad Language”. They continue with a set of dos and don’ts grouped according to particular settings: at home, at school, at play, in the street, and at the table. The chart includes a group of rules to be applied “Everywhere”, such as “Never be Rude to *anybody*, whether older or younger, richer or poorer, than yourself”, “Remember to say ‘Please’ or ‘Thank You’”. The chart concludes with the Golden Rule: “Always do to others as

⁵ Although no longer accessible in this format, sections of this webpage have been reproduced in Australian primary school newsletters available online.

you would wish them to do to you if you were in their place.” This maxim (see Matthew 7:12) underpins all the behavioural canons on the chart. My own dataset revealed some connection between the ordinary Australian speaker’s understanding of *manners* and the Golden Rule, but this fell short of being undebatable. The more pervasive connection was linking *manners* with *being considerate* and to notions of *respect* and *politeness*.

Given that the behaviour set comprising *manners* needs to be learnt and socially displayed, people are judged on their knowledge and performance. The social consequences of having *manners* are positive, just as the consequences for not having them are negative, even harsh, leading potentially to other people’s low opinions and social exclusion. To illustrate, example (7) mentions some of the social rewards (“success”, “better liked”) that can arise from having *manners*. It is from a parenting forum post on teaching *table manners* to children of 1 to 2 years old (on *table manners* see Waters Forthcoming).

- (7) Teaching a child what behaviour is expected of them is a daily process as most parents know and *good manners* are the key to your child’s social success. It’s not hard to understand that children who have *manners* are better liked by both adults and children alike. *Manners* has certainly been linked to later success in life and this teaching needs to be done by parents not school or child care.

The following example is a comment from a contestant on the reality television program, *Big Brother*, who uses a fellow housemate’s lack of *manners* as a reason to nominate him for eviction. This comment was discussed on a *Big Brother* forum.

- (8) He’s rude, demanding and has *a lack of manners* through the house. He doesn’t show *manners* to anyone including myself. When you live with a group of people you prefer to live with someone who has *manners*.

This example shows that people do not like being around people who do not adhere to the codes of *manners* because it can make them feel bad. In (8), the nominator may not feel valued or respected as a person because of the other housemate’s lack of *manners*. This negative

feeling can be accompanied by the opinion that this person with the lack of *manners* does not consider other people's feelings and does not know how to behave properly in social situations, thereby breaking the rules for expected and appropriate behaviour. In example (9), a poster on a wedding, babies, and life forum recalled that failure to use *please*, *thank you*, or *excuse me* with family members meant that your request went unfulfilled:

- (9) I can not handle *bad manners*. Its not hard to be poliete and kind. And its not hard to teach your kids either. It was simple on our house, if you didn't say, please, thank you, excuse me etc you just didn't get what you were asking for. Simple.

The use of *please*, *thank you*, and *excuse me*, which come under the banner of *manners*, reflects deep Anglo cultural understandings of the value of “personal autonomy” and the cultural norm of “not telling people what to do” (Wierzbicka 2006; Goddard 2012; Levisen & Waters 2015). Anglos see themselves as autonomous individuals with the right to make their own decisions. Except in special circumstances, no one is entitled to impose their will on anyone else or to expect compliance (Wierzbicka 2006). An exchange between family members using *please* and *thank you* shows that compliance with even minor favours is neither expected, nor taken for granted, but is instead treated as an act of free will and therefore something one should be grateful for.

The value placed on personal autonomy, and its concomitant constraints on telling people what to do, is realized in an elaborate system for getting people to do things. Use of the imperative is heavily restricted; requests are often phrased as whimperatives, *Would you ...? Could you ...? Would you mind ...?*, and the politeness markers *please* and *thank you* are ubiquitous (see also Wierzbicka 2003). Saying *thank you* to someone on fulfilment of a request is verbal recognition that you understand that this person did not have to do something simply because you asked. Avoidance of the bare imperative is shared by Australian and Danish linguistic communities. Levisen and Waters (2015:255) capture this as follows:

Australian and Danish cultural script against “ordering someone to do something”

many people think like this:
when I want someone to do something, I can't say to this someone:
“you have to do it because I want you to do it”

In addition to the shared Anglo cultural value of personal autonomy and the communicative norm of not telling people what to do, Australians place a high value on “egalitarianism” (Béal 1992, 1994; Wierzbicka 2001, 2002; Peeters 2004a; Goddard 2006b, 2009; Mullan 2010). This cultural understanding means that Australians see themselves as equals—no one is superior or inferior to anyone else—which has implications for Australian communicative style and interactional behaviour. Historian John Hirst explains that Australian egalitarianism is about “blotting out” social differences when people meet face-to-face (2002:23):

They talk to each other as if they are equals and they will put down anyone claiming social superiority. It is the feel of Australian society that is so markedly egalitarian, not its social structure.

Overt displays of respect are discouraged, and anyone actively seeking treatment that would distinguish them from the crowd is a liable target for negative judgement (Hirst 2002; Goddard 2006b; see also Peeters 2004a, 2004b, 2004c on *tall poppy syndrome*). This equal treatment of all people is embodied in the use of *manners* because they are to be used in both the home and public environments, meaning that people use them with everyone—with people they know well and with strangers.

In the dataset, the most frequently cited words in people's *manners* metadiscourse were *please*, *thank you* (consistently mentioned as a pair), and *excuse me*. Culpeper (2010) dubs *please* and *thank you* as the “icons of English politeness” (p. 3238). This lends much support to their inclusion as *manners* scripts.

In folk knowledge, particularly around child rearing, *please* is known as the “magic word” and should be attached to a directive message (Levisen & Waters 2015). In the politeness literature, *please* is often labelled as a “politeness marker” or “politeness formula”

(House 1989; Wichmann 2004; Aijmer 2009). Strong pragmatic constraints restrict the speech acts that can co-occur with *please* (see Wichmann 2004 on British English). The use of *please* can be formulaic, in that it is expected to accompany requests made in standardised social situations such as service encounters where participants understand that the right to ask for something and the obligation to provide it is inherent in the event, or where the imposition of what is requested is minimal on the hearer (House 1989; Wichmann 2004).⁶ Aijmer (2009:67–68) notes that *please* is also expected in a response to an offer; for example, *Would you like a cup of tea? Yes, please*. This use of *please* is not inconsistent with the *manners* script for *please*, because the affirmative response indicates that the responder would like the asker to perform some action for them.

Manners as an Australian sociality concept consist of a set of rules for social behaviour. They are an expression of the broader cultural values of personal autonomy and egalitarianism, and the cultural norm of not telling other people what to do.

3. The semantics of *manners*

The *Macquarie Dictionary* (2009) entry for *manners* states that it developed from the Latin *manuāria*, meaning “of or for the hand”. This later became *maniere* in Old French meaning “way of handling”, and then *manere* in Middle English. The *Macquarie Dictionary* presents three definitions:

1. *The prevailing customs, modes of living etc. of a people, class, period, etc.*
2. *Ways of behaving, especially with reference to polite standards: bad manners*
3. *Good or polite ways of behaving: have you no manners?*

Further analysis, undertaken in this study, shows that *manners* have two related meanings rather than three as presented in the *Macquarie Dictionary*. The *Macquarie Dictionary*'s first listed definition of *manners*, the anthropological sense of the word, pertaining to the “ways people live”/“ways of living”, is quite sophisticated and not the most common usage, perhaps even unknown to some people. While I support this meaning distinction, further exploration is not pertinent to

⁶ Although both House (1989) and Wichmann (2004) base their findings on British English, they are relevant to the present discussion on Australian English. Aijmer (2009) does not specify which “English” is used in her study.

the present study. My analysis considers options 2 and 3 to be the same meaning; that is, this sense of *manners* means “ways of behaving towards other people”. The two-way polysemy can be stated as *manners*₁ meaning “ways of doing things, that is, living” and *manners*₂ meaning “ways of doing things, that is, behaving towards other people”. The second *manners* is the focus of this article.

The semantic complexity of *manners* encourages further analysis and discussion before introducing the explication. We begin with two grammatical features of *manners* that influence and reflect its semantics: its status as an abstract noun and its plural-only morphology.

3.1. *Manners* as an abstract plural-only noun

The approach adopted here in relation to the abstract noun *manners* follows the lead of Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014). Logically and linguistically, abstract nouns differ from concrete nouns. Concrete nouns, such as *apples*, carry the assumption that they exist independently of discourse and that speakers can choose to say something about things of this kind (or about something of this kind). On the other hand, an abstract noun such as *manners* is not invested with this same assumption. This means that the speaker wants to say something “with” the word *manners*, not about “manners”. Goddard and Wierzbicka’s approach, tracing back to John Locke and Jeremy Bentham, sees abstract nouns essentially as reified discourse topics.

Linguistic evidence, such as the grammatical feature of countability, shows that *manners* differ from other abstract nouns. Unlike the abstract nouns *disease* and *emotions*, *manners* is a non-count abstract noun (see Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014:228–229). For example, while *Her manners are lovely* and *He has manners* are acceptable, **Her two manners are lovely* and **He has two manners* are not acceptable. There is, of course, some relationship between *manners* and the word *manner* in the singular, referring to a way in which something is done or happens. They share the idea of doing something in one way, but in the case of *manner* (for example, *He dealt with the request in an efficient manner*), it is only one something that is done in one way. Conversely, *manners* are a set of many things that can be carried out in different social circumstances. Also, *manner* must occur with a modifier, *a friendly manner*, *a polite manner*, *a painting in the manner of Cézanne*; *manners* can occur alone.

The word *manners* is plural-only: both morphologically, having plural -s ending, and morphosyntactically, requiring plural verb forms and plural pronouns. Other expressions in the sociality realm share these properties, but they are phrases, not single nouns; for example, *airs and graces*, referring to affectations of superiority, and *Ps and Qs*, as in *Mind your Ps and Qs*, indicating careful thought about behaviour and avoidance of causing offence. *Manners, airs and graces* and *Ps and Qs* label groups of multiple heterogeneous behaviours linked by a special characteristic. Further examples of plural-only abstract nouns referring to beliefs that dictate behaviours are *morals* and *ethics*. For example, *Our ethics are meant to guide our laws* and *You can start a business without compromising your morals*.

The verbs that collocate with *manners* give clues to its semantics and lend support to including the semantic primes KNOW and DO in the explication. *Manners* collocates readily with cognitive verbs, such as *learn, teach, acquire*, and *practise*, which involve thinking and dedicating one's attention to a task. Other verbs that collocate frequently with *manners* relate to performance, such as *show, demonstrate, display, use, correct, improve*, and *perfect*. Some of these verbs have a strong tendency to occur in the imperative with *manners*; for example, the fixed expressions with cognitive verbs *Get/Learn some manners!*, *Remember/Mind/Don't forget your manners!* and with performance verbs *Show/Use some manners!*⁷

The verbs that can occur with *manners* are restricted. For example, *manners* cannot be studied or recited, as one might study and recite multiplication tables. A sentence such as *You need to read/recite/study some manners* sounds strange, whereas the sentence *You need to learn some manners* sounds perfectly natural. The learning involved in *manners* is somewhat less “deliberate” and formalised, and more about exposure, imitation, and practice.

Some aspects of the collocational profile of *manners* (such as its compatibility with the verbs *use, show, have*) suggest that they should be considered as an accessory to interpersonal interactions. This and *manners*' occurrence with the verb *have*, indicates that a successful

⁷ In comparison with the abstract noun *politeness*, outside of its specialised use in academic literature, the phrase *Use politeness!* or *Use some politeness!* sounds odd and is not improved by the addition of pronouns: *?Use your politeness!* or *?Use some of your politeness!*

paraphrase needs to encompass the knowledge of the context-dependent nature of using certain behaviours instead of others.

The adjectives that modify *manners* are evaluative, spanning the positive and negative extremes and commenting on the quality of someone's behavioural performance. Positive evaluators range from *perfect manners*, *impeccable manners*, *beautiful manners*, *charming manners*, *lovely manners*, *excellent manners* through to the more neutral *good manners*, *decent manners*, *reasonable manners*, *basic manners* to the negative such as *bad manners*, *poor manners* and the very bad, such as *terrible manners*, *appalling manners*, *disgraceful manners*, *atrocious manners*. Knowledge and use of *manners* is gradable, meaning that the better one's knowledge and execution of *manners*, the "better" the adjective. Two of the most frequently observed collocations are *good manners* and *bad manners*, and are deserving of their own study.

The interpersonal nature of *manners* evokes a frame in which a hypothetical person is with at least one other, and they use their knowledge of cultural rules, such as saying *please* and *thank you*, to inform their behaviour. Analysis shows that *manners* are to be used in both the home and public environments, removing the need to specify whether the "someone" in the explication is known "well" or "not well". To illustrate with some example sentences: the mother in (10) states that her children are to use their *manners* both at home and in public. Her comment was in response to a parenting forum topic "Do you think manners are important?"

- (10) We are very big in the *manners* department at our house. All three of my girls are expected to use their *manners* at home and in public. I must say all three of them do rather well in using their *manners*.

The next example, a comment from a parenting article on manners, explains that in the home, the use of manners is not restricted to child-to-parent interactions, but is also necessary in parent-to-child interactions:

- (11) Absolutely agree with you. No one in our house gets anything without using their *manners*, even mum and dad. Our saying is "you're nothing without your *manners*" (pretty old school saying ... but it works).

The inherent plurality of *manners* indicates the variety of behaviours to which this abstract noun can apply. The striking tendency for speakers to list salient behaviours when discussing *manners* was remarked on in the introduction. The explication will accommodate this semantic peculiarity by stating explicitly that people can verbally identify behaviours considered as *manners*. This feature is so significant to our overall understanding of *manners* that before presenting the first explication, it is worthwhile considering how people mentally represent *manners*. This leads us to the notion of “*manners* scripts”.

3.2. The concept of “*manners* scripts”

The “*manners* scripts” exist independently of the explication as Anglo-Australian cultural rules pertaining to the concept of manners. *Manners* carries with it a knowledge of social attitudes and a knowledge of generally agreed on salient exemplars. The behavioural exemplars that form the set of *manners* scripts are not intended to be exhaustive; rather, they capture the most saliently observed in the dataset. Aside from being impractical, it is not necessary to list every behaviour that people might classify as *manners*.

The label “*manners* scripts” deliberately echoes “cultural scripts” in the NSM theory (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2004; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007). Representing shared ways of thinking that inform cultural insiders about how to interpret and behave in the world, briefly, cultural scripts differ from explications (reductive paraphrases written in the NSM metalanguage for words and expressions) in that they represent cultural norms, values, and assumptions. Similarly, the *manners* scripts differ from explications in that they represent a way of thinking about a particular “behaviour”, rather than representing the meaning of a particular word. The *manners* scripts can be considered Anglo norms pertaining to *manners* with the caveat that because the semantic analysis is based on Australian data, the *manners* scripts are for the Australian cultural setting.

Similar to cultural scripts, the *manners* scripts represent a social consensus about what is considered good or bad. Consequently, there is a greater likelihood that people will think badly of someone who does not behave as outlined in the *manners* scripts. This entails that

people are also more likely to act in accordance with the script because they know that other people hold these attitudes.

Three factors dictated the selection of the particular behaviours outlined by the *manners* scripts: their contextual use in the dataset—when people discussed *manners*, they singled out the most important and basic behaviours; the existing literature, mostly from the area of politeness research and speech acts; and my native speaker intuitions and experiences. In my own everyday interactions, these behaviours, such as talking to colleagues at work, interactions with family, service encounters in supermarkets and cafes, are commonplace. The salient exemplars of the *manners* scripts cover greetings, the use of expressions such as *please*, *thank you*, and *excuse me*, and apologizing. These are articulated below:

“saying *hello*”

when someone has not seen someone else before on the same day [m],⁸
if this someone wants to say something to this other someone,
it is good if before saying anything else
this someone says some words of one kind to this other
someone
one word of this kind is *hello*

The category of greetings is captured by “words of one kind” with *hello* as an example. The use of the semantic prime KIND shows that there are other suitable words that may be used, and that *hello* is a single member of a category of greeting words and expressions. Other suitable candidates could be *Hi*, *Hey*, *Good evening*, or linguistic routines such as *How are you?*, *How’re you going?*, or the Australian English sociocultural greeting norm *G’day* (Grieve & Seebus 2008; Barraja-Rohan 2011). The use of KIND to represent lexical options is used throughout the scripts.

“saying *please*”

when someone wants to say to someone else something like this “I want you to do something”,

⁸ The notation [m] indicates the status of “day” as a semantic molecule (Wierzbicka 2014).

it is good if this someone says some words of one kind to this other
someone at the same time
one word of this kind is *please*

“saying *thank you*”

when someone else does something good for this someone,
it is good if after this, this someone says some words of one kind to this
other someone
one word of this kind is *thank you*

The fourth *manners* script depicts a social situation where saying *excuse me* is expected. Based on British English data, Aijmer (1996:101, 121) observed that *excuse me* was linked to prefacing an intrusion on somebody’s personal space or privacy, inconveniencing someone, or interrupting someone’s speech turn. I concur, and go beyond the English specific labels “personal space”, “privacy”, and “inconvenience” to represent the behaviour surrounding the use of *excuse me* in culture-neutral terms.

“saying *excuse me*”

when someone wants someone else to do something for them, if this other
someone is doing
something else at that time, it is good if before saying anything else
this someone says some words of one kind to this other someone
one word of this kind is *excuse me*

“saying *sorry*”

when someone does something, if this someone knows that someone else can
feel something bad because of it, it is good if after this, this someone says
some word of one kind to this other someone
one word of this kind is *sorry*

This script is not intended to cover more serious injuries, emotional, or physical, because a sentence such as *?I apologized for breaking his arm because it is good manners*, without irony, is implausible. The script also shows that the precursor to apologizing is awareness that one’s actions may have caused a negative reaction in someone else.

Now that we have surveyed the *manners* scripts—the behaviours embedded within the word *manners*—we can progress to the explication.

3.3. Explicating *manners*

While the *manners* scripts are not compulsory rules, adhering to them has advantages (people might like being around you), just as flouting them has consequences (people may not want to be around you). Having or using one's *manners* can be seen positively or as the unmarked case, that is, the “normal” or expected way of behaving. In the dataset, children were more likely to be the focus of praise for having *manners*, whereas a situation in which an adult did not use their *manners* was more likely to draw negative attention. If someone does not have *manners*, it can make other people feel uncomfortable or awkward to be around them because this person's behaviour does not match society's expectations of how people should behave socially and causes frustration or annoyance.

People's *manners* metadiscourse reveals the attitudes they have towards those people who show evidence of knowing *manners* and those who do not. The dataset showed evidence of people expressing positive feelings about *manners* and the people using them; for example, “I love manners”, “manners make me smile and feel good”, “manners make me happy”. The dataset also showed instances of people expressing their negative feelings about people who do not use *manners*, with comments such as “I hate people with no manners”, “... annoys me”, “sooooo rude”, and “Grrr”, a noise of frustration or anger. This spectrum of judgements, reactions, and feelings is echoed throughout the explication with the unqualified adjectives “good” and “bad”: “it is good/bad if ...” and “can feel/think something good/bad”. This “toned down” approach is in-line with the Australian preference for a low-key style of self-presentation (Treborlang 1996; Goddard 2006b) and attitude towards displays of emotion (Béal 1992).

Undoubtedly parents would want to teach their children what to do and encourage them to carry out the behaviour, rather than simply know of its existence. There is a positive feeling and thought experienced by someone on the receiving end of some of the behaviours outlined in the scripts. It is important to note here that an effective explication needs to allow for the possibility that the speaker may feel something good. The good feeling is not necessarily directed towards the person with *manners* either. For example, when someone

shows good *manners* it can make other people feel at ease and respected, instilling a sense of faith in society.

If both parties adhere to the protocols of *manners*, the likelihood of social awkwardness creeping into the interaction is lessened. If people know how to do the behaviours outlined in the *manners* scripts in social situations, and put them into practice, people can feel at ease.

The explication for the Australian English lexeme *manners* comes together as follows:

[A] *manners* (e.g. *Manners are important*)

- a. something
- b. people can say what this something is with the word *manners*
- c. someone can say something about something with this word when they think like this:
- d. “at many times it is like this:
- e. when someone is with someone else, if this someone wants this someone else not to feel something bad, it is good if this someone does some things
- f. it is good if this someone says some words to this other someone at some times
- g. it is good if this someone does some other things at some times
- h. people can say what these things are
- i. people can know what these things are
it is good if someone knows about these things
- j. if this someone does these things, this other someone can feel something good because of it,
at the same time this other someone can think something good about this someone because of it
- k. if this someone does not do these things, this other someone can feel something bad because of it,
at the same time this other someone can think something bad about this someone because of it”

The first three components (a)–(c) of explication [A] establish *manners* as a member of the abstract noun category. Abstract nouns contain a semantic component that can be represented as “something” plus explicit reference to a particular word, in this case, *manners*. This shows that abstract nouns can be firmly established as “something” in the ontology of discourse rather than tangible items in the world.

The explication then proceeds to the hypothetical social situation introduced by component (d) “at many times it is like this” which is elaborated in (e)–(k). Component (e) captures the social interaction context of there being at least two people together for *manners* to be used (“when someone is with someone else for some time”). The time frame is deliberately unspecified to accommodate the broad range of possible durations. If one of these people is motivated by a desire not to provoke bad feelings in their interlocutor, it is helpful to take a particular course of action (“if this someone wants this someone else not to feel something bad, it is good if this someone does some things”). Someone who has *manners* will try to make the other person feel at ease during the interaction. This could be by making conversation with someone, such as by asking questions of a fellow dinner party guest. Additionally, the positive evaluation of doing certain things at this time is the fronted “it is good if”. This section of the component also reflects the accessory-like nature of *manners*—they are not essential to social interactions, but their use can be desirable.

The next two components expand on component (e) to outline what these desirable measures are. Component (f) focuses on using particular words at particular times; for example, greeting someone with *Hello* or *Hi* or framing a request with *please*. Component (g) covers actions and behaviours other than saying particular words at certain times, such as holding a door open for someone or giving up one’s seat on public transport.

Component (h) “people can say what these things are” is the link to the *manners* scripts. People can, and often do, list the behaviours and readily identify what they are. Component (i) states that people can learn these particular behaviours (“people can know what these things are”) and that this is generally well regarded.

Component (j) and (k) are symmetrical, spelling out the potential good interpersonal consequences of behaving with manners and the potential bad interpersonal consequences of not doing so.

4. Concluding remarks

This study has considered the meaning of *manners*, which involved looking briefly at their history and development in Australia, taking a panoramic view of “manners” and gradually focusing in on the contemporary Australian understanding of the lexeme *manners*. With this approach we have covered this concept’s developmental journey

from its transplantation from Britain to the colony of New South Wales and subsequent adaptation to this new Australian environment. *Manners* developed in a way that set Australia apart from its British origins. The acquisition of *manners* is no longer directly proportional to one's opportunities in life, but may be acquired by all, traversing distinctions of social class, economic status, and education. Australian conceptions of manners have been further informed by notions of egalitarianism and the equal treatment of others, accentuating the egalitarian mantra "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" or "treat others how you would like to be treated". *Manners* are visible evidence of someone's learning and practice of appropriate social codes. Having *manners* is important for interpersonal interactions because they convey respect and regard for others.

This study of the Australian example using the NSM is significant to deepening our understanding of Australian culture. This is achieved through demonstrating that some of the behaviours associated with *manners*, as outlined in the *manners* scripts, reflect the cultural value of personal autonomy and its concomitant norm of not telling people what to do. The explication of *manners* maintains cultural undertones of egalitarianism and low-key style of self-presentation, and does not make recourse to the equally complex concept *polite* (as is often the case with dictionary definitions, demonstrating obscurity and circularity), but rather reveals the semantic nuances in high resolution.

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