BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND FACE MANAGEMENT IN GENDERLECT

Fayzullaeva Muhayyo Raxmatillaevna
Phd, senior teacher at Uzbekistan State World Languages University
Atanazarova Dilnaz Baxtiyar qizi
2nd year MA student at Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Keywords: politeness, face, genderlect, negative politeness, positive politeness

Annotation

This article examines politeness strategies and face management in genderlect communication from a sociopragmatic perspective. Drawing on the theories of Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, as well as the genderlect approach proposed by Deborah Tannen, the study investigates how male and female speakers employ linguistic strategies to maintain interpersonal harmony, negotiate social relationships, and protect positive and negative face during interaction. The research analyzes conversational data taken from contemporary English podcasts and interviews, focusing on interruptions, hedging, indirectness, emotional support, mitigation, and face-threatening acts in cross-gender communication. The findings demonstrate that differences in communicative style often lead to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic misunderstandings, as male and female interlocutors may interpret politeness, emotional involvement, and conversational intentions differently. The article argues that genderlect influences not only linguistic choice but also the management of interpersonal relations and communicative cooperation. The study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and gender studies by providing a deeper understanding of politeness and face management in modern spoken discourse.

Theoretical background: Politeness and face in pragmatics

The theoretical foundation of politeness and face in pragmalinguistics is rooted in Erving Goffman's concept of "face, " described as the person's "public self-image", which can be constructed, negotiated, and maintained continuously through communication (Goffman, 1967). Within this perspective, face is not regarded as an innate trait but a socially constructed phenomenon, sustained through what Goffman terms facework, namely the cooperative strategies individuals employ to preserve their own self-image and that of their interlocutors during social encounters. This view of face as an interactional property built the foundation for further linguistic elaboration, particularly in the politeness theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987), remaining one of the most significant and extensively used models in pragmalinguistics. Goffman's term of "face" was further elaborated by Brown and Levinson, claiming that face is composed of two universal dimensions, positive face and negative face. Positive face is defined as an individual's intention to be admired, accepted, and approved by others, while negative face refers to the desire for independence, autonomy, and freedom from imposition. Based on this model, almost all interactive acts are considered as face-threatening acts (FTAs), as even routine directives, requests, criticism, or disagreement may threaten either the speaker's or hearer's face depending on contextual interpretation. To minimize these possible threats, speakers apply logically organized politeness strategies, which were categorized by Brown and Levinson into four types:

1. Bald-on-record strategies that are direct, unmodified, and mainly applied in cases of urgency where informational efficiency is more important.

2. Positive politeness strategies expressed through compliments, inclusive pronouns and markers of rapport highlighting solidarity, consideration and shared identity.

3. Negative politeness strategies are verbalized through hedging, indirectness, and modal verbs intended to mitigate imposition.

4. Off-record strategies that depend on inferential meaning and conversational implicature, enabling speakers to interpret meaning indirectly, preventing possible face-threatening acts. (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Thomas, 1995).

In this respect, Politeness goes beyond mere superficial language etiquette and represents a strategic framework for managing communication risks, where speakers continuously weigh clarity, efficiency, and social harmony according to the context.

Later theoretical developments have reframed, even challenged, Brown and Levinson's universal claims. It has been criticized that only positive and negative politeness is not enough for successful communication and may not be appropriate for all interactional conditions. The emergence of the **Politeness Principle by Geoffrey Leech** provided a supplementary perspective by suggesting a set of pragmatic maxims:

1. The tact maxim, which refers to minimising the cost to the other and maximizing the benefit to the other, aligns with Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategy of minimising the imposition. This maxim is mainly used in requests, directives, and suggestions.

2. Generosity maxim is minimizing the benefit to self, maximizing the cost to self. This maxim functions as a willingness to make a sacrifice or help

3. Approbation maxim is understood as maximizing praise of others and minimizing dispraise of others. This maxim is expressed through compliments, positive evaluation, and constructive feedback.

4. Modesty maxim-minimizing praise of self, maximizing dispraise of self. It emphasizes self-deprecation and humility, thus mitigating the social threat of self-presentation.

5. Agreement maxim- minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement. This maxim is primarily used in regulating conflict and preserving harmony.

6. Sympathy maxim refers to minimizing antipathy and maximizing sympathy, which serves as an emotional support, solidarity, and empathy. (Leech, 2014).

In the meantime, modern research in discourse and sociolinguistics highlights that politeness cannot be fully explained without Meanwhile, research in interactional sociolinguistics and discourse pragmatics emphasizes that politeness cannot be fully understood without taking into account contextual parameters, including power relations, social distance, and organizational standards, influencing the production and interpretation of face-threatening acts (Holtgraves, 2002). Recent studies also emphasize the limitations of the universal appeal of politeness models, claiming that politeness strategies are not fixed linguistic norms but rather continuous mediated practices affected by culture, identity, and communicative intentions. However, the concept of face is essential to pragmalinguistic theory since it explains the linguistic production and social mediation of meaning in different interactional settings. Based on this theoretical groundwork, politeness and face management function as practical mechanisms for scrutinizing how differences in interactional styles, especially in terms of masculine and feminine discourse, can result in divergent pragmatic interpretation and possibly contribute to communicative misalignment or pragmatic failure.

Gendered Patterns of Politeness Strategy Use

Research in pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics has indicated that the **realization of politeness strategies** is divergent in gendered discourse, despite being regarded as context-dependent, scalar, and socially constructed rather than categorical. Based on the foundational framework by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987), politeness strategies are considered as mechanisms for reducing face-threatening acts by employing different strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off-record strategies. Within this model, Holmes' (1995) experimental studies in language and gender demonstrate that female speakers are more likely to apply strategies that prioritize intersubjective alignment, while the speakers of the opposite gender tend to use more direct and less mitigated expressions. Nevertheless, these tendencies should not be viewed as fixed qualities of gender, but as patterns influenced by communicative intentions, social expectations, and situational context.

A salient characteristic of women's language examined by Holmes in her corpus-based research is the regular use of **positive politeness strategies** serving as a way for shaping and preserving solidarity. The use of compliments, agreement markers, and positive responses functions as a pragmatic mechanism for collaboration and mitigating social tension (Holmes, 1995). As an illustration, the inclusion of evaluative and affiliative expressions before a possibly directive or connective move enables the speaker to refine the illocutionary force in a mitigated tone. These devices are significant in cooperative settings where keeping group cohesion is valued. However, men are prone to utilize politeness strategies on a selective basis, viewing positive politeness as an instrumental purpose to support group membership in competitive and hierarchical situations. Consequently, while both genderlects apply the same pragmatic devices, the differences in their usage of frequency, distributional spread, and functional deployment represent wider communicative conventions.

In terms of negative politeness strategies, which are directed to respect the hearer's freedom, gender-related differences are similarly observable. Female language users tend to employ linguistic forms, including hedging, modal expressions, and indirect forms, which aid in mitigating the imposition level of utterances. This pattern is associated with Lakoff's research, which highlighted the frequent use of tentative language and mitigation strategies as features of women's discourse in her deficit model. However, this tendency has been critically reframed in modern research where these characteristics are not viewed as linguistic weaknesses but rather as strategic adaptations to communicative requirements, especially in relation-oriented contexts. In contrast, masculine language users are prone to apply direct forms and imperative expressions, representing a higher tolerance for imposition and an interactional direction that guarantees clarity and information efficacy (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995). Notably, these distinctions do not mean the absence of politeness in men's language, instead it demonstrates different prioritization of face needs, in which the minimization of ambiguity may take precedence over the mitigation of imposition. Another component of variation is the employment of **off-record strategies**, which depend on implicature and indirectness to transmit meaning without explicit expressions. Female speakers manifest greater dependence on such strategies, notably in settings engaging requests, suggestions, or criticisms. By producing partially implicit illocutionary force, speakers facilitate negotiation and enable the hearer to decode meaning in a more face-saving manner. Nevertheless, this dependence on indirectness increases the inferential load on the hearer, making effective communication contingent on shared knowledge and interpretive norms (Thomas, 1995). Men's language is characterized by greater explicitness of pragmatic intention, which minimizes vagueness but possibly increases the face-threatening potential. This difference in strategy usage is

particularly important in mixed-gender communication, where variable expectations considering the interpretation of indirectness may result in misalignment.

This contrast is further elaborated by the employment of **bald-on-record strategies**. Although these mechanisms are accessible to all language users, they are primarily linked to a masculine conversational style, with an emphasis on contexts where efficiency, urgency, or authority is prioritized. Direct commands and unmitigated requests may serve effectively and successfully in task-oriented settings, yet can be interpreted as face-threatening acts in relational or collaborative situations. Female speakers, however, show a tendency to limit the usage of bald-on-record expressions where social distance is minor. The selective choice reflects a direction toward contextual appropriateness, in which possible social outcomes or directness are carefully assessed. Significantly, modern research criticizes **essentialist interpretations of gendered politeness tendencies**. According to Sara Mills (2003), politeness should be regarded as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by context, ideology, and communicative goals as opposed to categorical gender traits. Moreover, Deborah Cameron (2007) highlights that gendered linguistic behavior is best understood through a performative and socially conditioned perspective rather than fixed binary categories. Therefore, divergence in politeness strategy use is viewed as a function of communicative placement rather than fixed biological or inherent gender patterns.

Finally, the relevance of these tendencies is central to **pragmatic failure**. As Thomas stated, misunderstandings in communication result not only from linguistic competence, but also from a clash of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic anticipations, with an emphasis on indirectness, mitigation, and face management. As a result, gendered divergence of politeness strategies may lead to differing interpretations of illocutionary force, which increases the potential of communication breakdown in gender-related communication.

References

1. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). Politeness: Some universals in language usage. Cambridge University Press.
2. Cameron, D. (2007). The myth of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages? Oxford University Press.
3. Coates, J. (1996). Women talk: Conversation between women friends. Blackwell.
4. Holmes, J. (1995). Women, men and politeness. Longman.
5. Lakoff, R. (1975). Language and woman's place. Harper & Row.
6. Mills, S. (2003). Gender and politeness. Cambridge University Press.
7. Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). Relevance: Communication and cognition (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
8. Tannen, D. (1990). You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation. William Morrow.
9. Tannen, D. (1994). Gender and discourse. Oxford University Press.
10. West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. Gender & Society, 1(2), 125–151.