



Politeness and Gender: Socio-pragmatic perspective

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Abstract

This research deals with one of the main important and elegant theories in sociolinguistics and pragmatics which is politeness. It focuses on the relationship between politeness and gender. Simply, Politeness means to be modest with others, to show your interest and consideration with others. The research investigates the deference between men and women in providing politeness in their utterance. It aims at identifying who tends to be more polite in his speech (men or women).

Thirdly, analysing data of Facebook concerning this study depending on three models: Holmes (2013), Leech (2014) and Lakoff (1975).

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المخلص

إن هذا البحث يتناول واحدة من أهم النظريات في علم اللغة الاجتماعي و التداولي ألا وهي نظرية التآدب يركز البحث على العلاقة بين التآدب و الجنس، ببساطة التآدب يشير الى كيفية التواضع في معاملة الآخرين و إمكانية إبداء الاهتمام و الاعتبار للآخرين لأهمية ذلك في التواصل الاجتماعي لذا فالدراسة تهتم ببيان الفرق بين الرجل و المرأة من حيث التآدب وأيهما يميل الى أن يكون أكثر تآدباً وإن هذه الدراسة اعتمدت على ثلاثة مناهج كما مبين أدناه

1.1 The Problem of the Study

As a matter of fact, the study is labelled as a socio-pragmatic one. And that requires to mention some words describing what is meant by this term. Sociolinguistics simply mean the study of language with regard to the society. It deals with social matters as using in contact with language. It is related to the social aspects as gender and age.

Pragmatics on the other hand deals with the context of speech. It is the study of languages in a specific situation. In pragmatics one cannot interpret the meaning by depending on the words form only but he must link them to the situation of the utterance.

This study deals with a main important topic in these fields which is politeness. This research tries to focus on the forms of using politeness that used in (Facebook) with concentrating mainly on the difference between men and women in providing a polite utterance.

1.2 The Aims

This study aims at:

1. Giving the meaning of politeness and its theories.
2. Explaining the relationship between politeness and gender,
3. Pointing out the gender differences in using politeness especially in Facebook.

1.3 The Limits

This research is limited to study the use of politeness in social media especially in Facebook with basing on the gender deference in its use.

1.5 The Procedures

The procedures of the current research are:

1. Collecting and classifying the data of the Study.
2. Make tables in order to organize these data.
3. Making a survey to comments on Facebook.
4. Using some internet sources.
5. Giving the conclusions.

1.6 The Model

This study follows two models in politeness. Leech's Model of Politeness Principle that gives six maxims in politeness (Tact maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim and Sympathy Maxim) and Lakoff's model which introduces three rules of politeness "Don't impose, Give options and Be friendly" and finally Holmes' concept of gender is based on.

Section Two

Politeness and Gender

2.1 Politeness as a Concept

As a matter of fact, politeness is a vital topic in linguistics in general and in sociolinguistics in particular. It is also an important phenomenon in pragmatics. Politeness can be explained as the tendency to use the language with paying attention to some factors as the use of words as Mr, sir and these are labelled under the general term which is distance. The distance refer to the relation between different people position. For examples in school, there is a distance between the teacher and the student. As the student cannot say 'Hi' for his teacher rather he can say *good morning* for example. Thus, he cannot use the same style as when he talks with his colleagues Crystal (2008:373). Even in the tones, he cannot use high tone when he talks to his teacher like that when he talks to his friends.

It is worthy mentioned that there are two main kinds of politeness the first one is positive politeness and the second one is negative. Positive politeness is used among friends, and people with the same social level. Student to student communication and teacher to teacher communication. But it cannot be used in student to teacher communication as it implies a sense of solidarity Allan (1990:258). In fact, the main reason behinds the use of positive politeness is it tries to enrich the communication and to decrease the social distance between co_communicators.

Negative politeness on the other hand, is used in student to teacher communication and in employees to master communication as it implies a sense of deference and it increases the distance between the co_communicators(ibid).

Aitchison mentions a another important point as there are some languages tend to follow politeness by using plural forms of the pronouns. Aitchison (2004:149) explains that some languages use the plural form of you for example to a one person in order to imply the sense of deference. The plural form is considered as more polite than the singular .In these languages singular form is used only with friends and colleagues. In English language on the other hand, there is a tendency to avoid pronouns in order to give the instructions indirectly to be more polite than referring to a pronoun as in the following example :

These papers should be checked out tomorrow.

It is noticed that the speaker avoid pronoun use. The reason for that is to save the hearer face and be aside from imposition (Aitchison, 2004:150).

Another elegant form of politeness is the use of 'honorifics'. They are embodied through the speech to show politeness. Honorifics should be used according to the situation. If they are used in unsuitable context they will give an opposite meaning. Thus if they are used in a situation which doesn't require the used form of high honorifics it might be considered as irony. For example if one says to student who has just failed in the exam:

What a clever student you are!

Here the speaker doesn't really mean that he is clever, but he means to berates him for his failure. Thus, this use of honorifics is impolite (Lakoff and Ide, 2005:60).

It is worthy mentioned that Watts (2003:2) points out that the matter of judgment to certain communication as polite or not, is not an easy task as many people thinks. But there are many criteria, one can based on to check if the speech is polite or not.

There are some general situations that most people depend on in defining whether the situation is polite or not.

A little boy show a respect for adults.

A beautiful girl who is always helpful to her mother.

Someone left the seat for old people.

According to the situations above, many people deal with politeness as a term that refers only to good behavior. **Others** deal with it as a characteristics of a gentleman. Another group think that one must always obey others and be helpful to them (Watts, 2003:1).

Politeness simply implies the use of certain expressions that show deference between the participants. It is used to imply a sense of respect towards the others. It consists of some important deference words as (sir, Mrs. excuse me... etc.).

Another important element that affects using politeness is the culture. Coupland (2007:60) explains the significance of politeness and how it can affect politeness. Coupland states that his culture affects his style and gives him a tendency to use politeness. He adds that he acquires how to avoid bald terms and use more elegant terms

2.2 Theories in Politeness

Since the study is concerned with politeness, it is very essential part to refer to the theories that discuss this topic. In fact, many theories appears and here the main ones will be introduced:

2. 2.1 Lakoff

"Mother of modern politeness theory" this is the words that describe Lakoff as she (1975) presents the rules of politeness and she summarizes them into three as follows :

- **Don't impose:**

The first rule of politeness as Lakoff presents, it implies the use of hedges in order to let some distance for the addressee to express his ideas. Modal is used also in this rule.

I think if I might use these papers.

- **Give options**

It implies that the speaker give hearer options if he can do the action or not. The use of questions for example is a kind of giving options:

Would you mind having that seat?

I think it would be better to sit there.

- **Be friendly**

To be friendly with others that means you must use informal speech. The speaker also must use the kind and elegant words. An example of that is:

Such a nice girl. Thanks for your help.

2.2.2 Brown and Levinson

The most important theory in politeness is that introduced by Brown and Levinson. It is the most crucial theory and it affects the other theories later. Brown and Levinson use the term face and they define it as " the public self image". It is very clear that the theory explains: there are some utterances that threaten someone's face

In this theory, two types are mentioned and each one has its strategies Barešová (2008:30) adds that in politeness people must save each one's face.

In this theory, face is borrowed from Goffman and it also belong to the English folk expressions, as it relates this word 'face' to shyness and it is related to emotional part. Thus, the speaker must pay attention to 'face' maintenance. In other words, for the communication to be successful and polite, a participants must expect that everyone must have a turn in speaking and give the others an opportunity to to speak and express his point of view so face can be saved (Brown and Levinson, 1987:60).

2.2.3 Leech

This theory is based on the Gricean principles. It presents a politeness principle to be like a complement to Gricean cooperative principle. This theory assumes that people tend to use more polite expressions rather than the impolite ones. (Leech, 2014:102)

Leech divides this principle into six maxims as follows:

- **Tact maxim:** it means that the speech must decrease a cost to the addressee and decrease the benefit to him (addressee).
- **Generosity Maxim:** the utterance must lessen the benefit to the speaker and increase the cost to the speaker.
- **Approbation Maxim:** it means that the utterance must decrease the dispraise of the addressee and increase praise of him (addressee).
- **Modesty Maxim:** the speech must decrease praise to the speaker, and increase dispraise to him (speaker).
- **Agreement Maxim:** it means that the utterance must imply a minimization disagreement between both the participants the speaker and the *hearer*. *And the agreement should be increased between them*.
- **Sympathy Maxim:** it means that the antipathy should be minimized between both participants *and a sympathy should be increased between them*.

2.3 Characteristics of Politeness

According to Leech (2014) there are eight characteristics that politeness can have:

- **Not obligatory**
which simply means that people have to use politeness only in a situation that requires it. It is impolite to use politeness where the situation doesn't allow and this can convey a sense of politeness ignorance. For example,
In a concert party, if some of the audience still silent and it is the time when music is stopped and the audience have to applause.
This behavior is considered impolite in this situation even if the performance seems not ideal, audience should all praise it.
- **Im/politeness has gradations.**
It simply means that politeness is governed by certain grades and levels for example in violin performance, if the musician use a very low tone audience must listen and if he changes for another tone they applause lower than in the case when he is up to end the tone.
- **It is normal**
It can be noticed in the case when a violinist has ended her nice music, and the audience start clapping loudly and they stop as soon as the violinist leaves this considered impolite. On the opposite, if the aid still clapping for ten minutes even when she leaves that is considered over polite. Thus, there must be a gradation. (Leech,2014:8).

- **Politeness is controlled by the situation**

In football match, when the player scores a goal, he can dance with the audience and smiling instead of meekness.

- **Reciprocal asymmetry**

It means that the polite behavior should be mutually used by both the speaker and the hearer. If the audience tend to applause in some situations the musician should reward them with a new tone and style. Thus each one will be polite with others.

- **Politeness might be occur in frequent behavior**

It is noticed in the situation of the repetitive applause for the violinist, but he must not leave until the audience stops applause. It is considered as impolite if he leaves while applause.

- **Politeness imply a sense of compliments among participants.**

It is simply the case when the speaker and the addressee share compliments between others. The use of thanking for request. If someone offers something, this thing is of great value.

- **Politeness tries to maintain a balanced value between the speaker and the hearer.**

It occurs in thanking and apologizing. These speech acts imply an appraisal for each others (ibid).

2.4 Language and Gender

It is worthy mentioned, that there is a great differences between men and women concerning the use of language. Haas(1979) states that the speech of women differs in some aspects like (topic, use, form and content).

Men talk is concerned mainly with business and sports, women speech is more polite. They mostly talk about family and home affairs. They express their feelings and emotional support more than men.

Women's speech is described as more gentle than that of men. In fact, men swear more than women. The tone of voice can affect politeness Kremer (1974:22).

Women's speech can be characterized by some features as follows:

- Using lexical hedges as kind of, you know, well.
 - Using tag questions, like: it is too lovely, isn't it?
 - Using the rise tone in declarative sentences as She is really fine.
 - Using certain adjectives, like: cute, divine and charming.
- (Holmes,2013:302).

2.5 Politeness and Gender

As a matter of fact, men and women speak different styles. They might give the same meaning, but each one has a special style. Sociolinguists state that politeness is mostly used and really followed by women. Thus, women have a tendency to behave politely. They have a desire for teaching manners (Lakoff, 1975: 10)

Lakoff states that women are influenced by emotions more than men. They try to be more polite .They have a tendency to be described as weak, friendly and vulnerable.

Women try to be cooperative with their participants. They want to avoid conflicts. Many linguists explain that women tend to be so because of their powerless characters.

Women have to be more polite. In fact, politeness doesn't imply a description of the Speech by itself. It is rather a social necessity that has to be established in order to save the face of others (Mills, 2003:

Section Three

Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1 Methodology

The method followed in this study is taking some conversations from Facebook that are spoken by men and women in order to show the effect of gender in politeness use and analyzing them according to the models of politeness provided by (Lakoff) and (Leech).

3.2 Data Analysis

This section will present some discourses that produced by men and women in Facebook and their analysis as follows:

- 1) Many comments are presented by men and women for the post:
(an old man is dying his wife's hair) .
man: he is a silly man.
woman: he is a gentle man.

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
he is a silly man	Impolite because it breaks the fourth rule (be friendly) since the speaker is unfriendly with the receiver.	Impolite because it breaks the fifth maxim (Agreement) since the speaker doesn't agree with the receiver.
he is a gentle man	Polite because the rule of (be friendly) is used here in opposite to the previous one.	Polite since Sympathy Maxim and Agreement maxim are identified here.

- 2) it is very dangerous event: people are crowded to get some food but the supermarkets are almost empty.

The comments about this utterance are:

- man: I think the real danger is, in your living there.
woman: our market is full with various food

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
1) I think the real danger is in your living there	Impolite because it breaks the fourth rule (be friendly) since the speaker is unfriendly with the receiver.	Impolite because it breaks the maxim (Agreement) since the speaker doesn't agree with the receiver.
our market is full with various food	Impolite for the same reason above	Impolite since (Agreement) and (Tact) maxims are broken here.

- 3) There is a post says: ask chef Hala any question related to cooking and she will reply.
Man: You have to eat trotters and lemon juice.

Woman: I need an ideal meal that is suitable nowadays in COVID19

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
1) You have to eat trotters and lemon juice	Impolite, because it breaks the first rule (don't impose) since the speaker here orders the receiver to eat trotters and lemon juice.	Impolite because it breaks Tact maxim and Sympathy maxim.
2) I need an ideal meal that is suitable nowadays in COVID19	Polite, because the second rule is identified here (the woman gives the chef a freedom to provide any ideal meal)	Polite, since (Agreement) and (Tact) maxims are presented here.

- 4) There is a post says: What do miss during your staying at home by the effect of COVID 19?

man: I miss my relatives and friends too much.

woman: I don't miss anything because we used to stay at home.

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
1) I miss my relatives and friends too much	polite because it presents the third rule (be friendly) Impolite because the first rule (be friendly) is broken here	polite because the Tact maxim and Sympathy maxim are used here.
2) I don't miss anything because we used to stay at home		Impolite since (Agreement) and (Tact) maxims are broken here.

- 5) A post says: what does depression do with you? Do you discover a new talent in yourself that you don't know before?

Woman: I discover many talents one of them is writing stories.

Man: I discover that I like sleeping!

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
1) I discover many talents one of them is writing stories	polite because it presents the third rule (be friendly) Impolite because the first rule (be friendly) is broken here.	polite because the Agreement maxim and Sympathy maxim are used here. Impolite since (Agreement) and (Tact) maxims are broken here.
2) I discover that I like sleeping!		

- 6) A Chinese staff has reached to Najaf to provide some healthy services to get rid of COVID2019

Woman: God curse them. They are the reason behind it.

Man: Is this a joke? Who bring it to us?

Unit of Analysis	Lakoff's Theory	Leech's Theory
1) God curse them. They are the reason behind it	Impolite because it breaks the third rule (be friendly)	Impolite because the Tact maxim is broken here.
2) Is this a joke? Who bring it to us?	Impolite because the third rule (be friendly) is	Impolite since (Tact) maxim is broken here.

	broken here	
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3.3 Findings

This study has compiled the following findings:

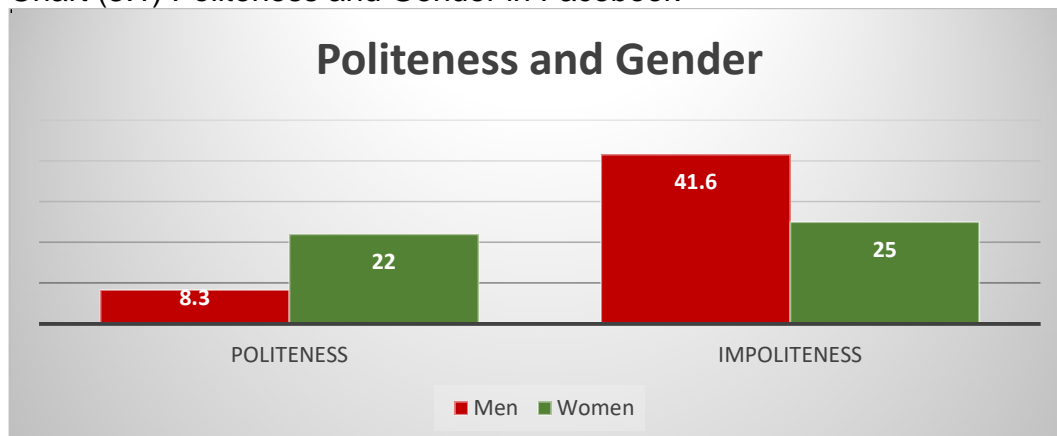
Firstly, percentage of impolite texts in the selected data are more than the polite ones since politeness is used 33.3% of the selected data whereas the impolite ones are used 66.6% of the selected data.

Secondly, 25% of the polite texts are used by women and 8.3% are used by men and that investigates the theory which says women are more polite than men.

Thirdly, in Lakoff's model, the third rule (be friendly) is used 16.6%, (don't impose) is used 8.3% in the selected data whereas the second one (give options) is not used at all.

Fourthly, in Leech's theory, Tact, Agreement and Sympathy maxims are used equally 16.6% of the selected data.

Chart (3.1) Politeness and Gender in Facebook



This chart shows the difference between men and women in providing politeness. It is very obvious that women are more polite than men

Conclusions

The current study has achieved the following conclusions:

- 1) Politeness refers to expressions that a person uses to avoid directness, or it is the language that shows more respect and consideration for people.
- 2) There is a difference between men and women in the language use. Women use polite expressions more than men do,
- 3) 25% of the polite texts are used by women and 8.3% are used by men and that investigates the theory which says women are more polite than men.

- 4) In Lakoff's model, the third rule (be friendly) is used 16.6%, (don't impose) is used 8.3% in the selected data whereas the second one (give options) is not used at all.
- 5) Fourthly, in Leech's theory, Tact, Agreement and Sympathy maxims are used equally 16.6 % of the selected data.

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