

GENDERLECT AFFECTING ON POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGE

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Abstrak

Since language is a system of spoken sounds or conventional symbols for communicating thought, we use language to express our thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc to make a communication. We communicate to other people by using language. Therefore, the way we speak is influenced by the culture belonged to social group where we interact. Language reflects the context in which it is used. People use language differently in formal and casual context. Besides, people adapt their talk to suit their audience and talk differently to children, friends, customers and colleagues. The linguistics' form will also be affected by the purpose of people's talk. They use variety of ways to express the 'same' message. Thus, this small project was done by interviewing two friends who had ever stayed abroad before, male and female (appendix) to see whether both of them use different politeness strategy in speaking English. They are coming from different origin, thus, the writer also wanted to see whether their L1 and their culture influence ways of their speaking. It is stated on Politeness theory that gender plays more prominently in the field of politeness but politeness theory has ignored the fact that based on gender, women and men will also perform politeness differently and it was proved in this small project. The writer interviewed two interviewees, male and female, by asking them to answer three questions prepared by the writer. The conversation was recorded and the writer analyzed the ways of their speech by listening to the recording. The writer found that both of them did not use any certain politeness strategies. The female friend talked more confident, were better in grammar and did not use more fillers or hedges. Vice versa, the male friend talked nicely, made many mistakes in grammar and use many fillers or hedges.

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Introduction

When we discuss language and society, there will be no necessary one-to-one relationship between them. It can be assumed that there probably aren't any speech communities in which aspects of society have no impact on language whatsoever. The examination of various possible connections that might be obtained between the two is part of sociolinguistic's task. Romaine, S (2000) stated that some time ago, one linguist commented that no two languages are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. This statement shows that language plays an important role as an agent for the transmission of culture. It is often said that one of the item's inventory a culture talks about is the vocabulary of a language which has categorized in order to make sense of the world.

Language is a system of spoken sounds or conventional symbols for communicating thought (Collins Dictionary,

2010). According to Finch (2003: 21), we use language for an almost infinite number of purposes, from writing letters, or notes to the milkman, to gossiping with our friends, making speeches and talking to ourselves in the mirror. Furthermore, Oxford Dictionary states that language is the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. So we use language to express our thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc to make a communication. We communicate to other people by using language. Therefore, the way we speak is influenced by the culture belonged to social group where we interact. Language reflects the context in which it is used. People use language differently in formal and casual context. Besides, people adapt their talk to suit their audience and talk differently to children, friends, customers and colleagues. The linguistics' form will also be affected by the purpose of people's talk. They use

variety of ways to express the ‘same’ message.

Why do people select one way rather than another to convey their message? Why do they choose different linguistic forms to different audience? How do they decide which linguistic form is appropriate in a certain situation? One relevant factor supports the answer of these questions is “politeness”.

Politeness

Politeness is the expression of the speaker’s intention to mitigate **face** threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another (Mills: 2003). Being polite therefore considers to **save face** for another. Face here refers to the respect that an individual has for him or herself, and maintaining that “self-esteem” in public or in private situations. People maintain two kinds of face: *positive and negative face*. Positive face happens when the hearers like, respect and approve the speakers, while negative face happens when the hearers cannot constrain request of others. This causes dilemma, as if someone asks other(s) in a pleasant way, positive face is satisfied but negative face may lead the hearer(s) to think the speaker take advantage of the hearer. The reverse is also true, as defensive talk will threaten the positive face.

In everyday conversation, people use various ways to go about getting the things they want. For example, when we are in a group of friends, we can say to them, “*Go get me that plate!*”, or “*Shut-up!*” However, our ways in saying those expressions will be different when we are surrounded by a group of adults at a formal function, in which our parents are attending, we might say, “*Could you please pass me that plate, if you don’t mind?*” and “*I’m sorry, I don’t mean to interrupt, but I am not able to hear the speaker in the front of the room*”. In different social situations, people are obliged to adjust their use of words in expressing something to fit the occasion. It would seem socially unacceptable if the phrases above were reserved, the speaker would be considered impolite and against the social norms.

Social Norms

According to http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/social_norms.htm, social norms are the rules that a group uses for appropriate and inappropriate values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. These rules may be explicit and implicit.

People in a social group who are failure to stick to the rules will get punishments, or even an exclusion from the group. A common rule is that some norms must frequently be displayed; neutrality is seldom an option.

Norms included in social norms are:

1. Injunctive Norms refer to behaviors which are perceived as being approved of by other people.
2. Descriptive Norms refer to the perceptions of how other people are actually behaving, whether or not these are approved of.
3. Explicit Norms are written or spoken openly.
4. Implicit Norms are not openly stated but people will find out when they transgress them.
5. Subjective Norms refer to expectations that valued others have about how we will behave.
6. Personal Norms refer to standards we have about our actions.

Norms are often transmitted through stories, rituals and role-model behavior, for example, in a common group norm amongst academics is that dress is casual (with the underlying implication that what goes on in the mind is more important than what goes on the body). Besides, norms may also be transmitted by non-verbal behavior, for example with ‘dirty looks’ when people act outside the norms.

In any society, wherever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages. Erving Goffman (1963) is someone who first created the term “face”

through the publication of article “On Face Work”. He discusses face in reference to how people present themselves in social situations and that our entire reality is constructed through our social interactions.

Politeness Theory

Politeness theory states that some speech acts threaten others’ face needs (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politeness_theory). The theory was first formulated by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1983.

The most important tenet of Brown and Levinson’s original text on politeness theory is that people change their language based on the hearer and thus our strategies for compliance change depending on the audience. In daily life, people form messages that protect “face” and achieve other goals as well. Brown and Levinson begin their politeness theory with the idea of ‘model persons’, rational parts who think strategically and are conscious of their language choices. Thus, politeness strategies are developed to design messages in order to save the hearer’s face when face threatening acts are inevitable or desired. This effort shows how speaker tries to avoid embarrassing the hearer or making him feel uncomfortable. There are different strategies to handle face threatening acts and these strategies are put into a hierarchy of effectiveness.

Politeness Strategies

There are four main types of politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson, i.e. bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record or indirect strategy.

First, **bald on record** strategy which is commonly found with people who know each other very well, and are very comfortable in their environment, such as close friends and family. This strategy does not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer’s face. With this strategy there is a direct possibility that the hearer will be shocked or embarrassed. For example, a bald on record strategy might be to tell our sister to “do the dishes. It’s your turn.”

The second strategy is **positive politeness**. This strategy is usually seen in

groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other very well. Quite often hedging and attempts to avoid conflict are used. For example, a positive politeness strategy might be the request “I know that you’ve been really busy lately, but could you do the dishes?”

The third strategy is **negative politeness** which focuses to assume that the speaker may be imposing on the hearer, and intruding on their space. Therefore, by using this strategy then it is assumed that there might be some social distance or awkwardness in the situation. For example, a negative politeness strategy in requesting something with minimize imposition might be “I just want to ask if I could use your computer?”

The last strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson is **the indirect strategy**. This strategy is removing the speaker from any imposition whatsoever. For example, a speaker gives hints to the hearer by saying, “It’s cold in here”, expecting indirectly that the hearer would get up and turn up the thermostat.

Small Project on Politeness Strategy which based on Gender

Much of the work on politeness assumes that the listeners and the speakers are all homogenous (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politeness_theory). Even gender plays more prominently in the field of politeness but politeness theory has ignored the fact that based on gender, women and men will also perform politeness differently.

Based on the opinion above, then the writer did a small project by interviewing two friends, male and female (appendix) to see whether both of them use different politeness strategy in speaking English. The reason why the writer chose them to become the interviewee was because both of them had ever stayed abroad before. They speak English fluently. Both of them are coming from different origin, thus, the writer also wanted to see whether their L1 and their culture influence ways of their speaking.

The writer prepared the questions first, told them that the result of the interview would be analyzed to be a written research and will be published in English

journal. In order to get a natural response from them, the writer did not tell them anything related to 'politeness' term, as Holmes (1999:1) stated that the aim or purpose of the interaction (informative, social) may be important factor in accounting for the particular variety used. There were three same questions addressed to both of them. Each interviewee spent about 1 minute to answer each question. Three questions given by the writer were:

1. Tell us about yourself!
2. Alright, we heard that you've ever been abroad before so how can you compare their culture to Indonesian culture?
3. As we told you before, we are now doing small project, so in terms of language did you find any difficulties to adapt your language when first time you arrived there?

These questions were answered by them in take-turned. First chance was given to our female friend then followed by our male friend. Their answers were as follows:

1. (Female): Ok, my name is Yanti, and I like the name because I makes people comfort and more friendly than if I use my full name. And ..., I am a teacher now but I don't like to call myself a teacher but just as a free guide of English to make people speak not teaching them how to speak because they know how to speak. I am ..., I was graduated from PGRI university uhm ... 2004 and I got many things from English. I got money, I got friends, I got experience and I got knowledge and I got anything. But, most of that I think about is just like the knowledge.

(Male): Okay, thank you very much for the time. Uhm ... well, my name is Mr. Ghazali Tamson but you can call me Charli. I'm 23 years old. And my educational background, ah ... I was graduated from PGRI university. It has been one year. And my duty is teaching English at one of private course in Palembang.

Uhm ... beside that I like join organization like scout and others. And also I've ever been abroad in United Kingdom for following scholarship program and then uhm...uhm...I like mingling and with the friends and uhm...just like that, thank you very much.

2. (Female): If you find it just like when go finding out the different culture then there's so much different, especially they are open minded and then their idea of managing time abd then the accuracy of thinking about planning, how to run your life, how to think, how to appreciate people and then mostly ios about the religion. Indonesia is very conventional country with all the religion prestige but there, they don't want to talk about it and they don't discuss about it and I think there is one thing that we should learn from other country.

(Male): Say about culture is so much different , okay...uhm...for example, may be uhm...I'm worried that I got different turn from Yanti. Just learn about my observation uhm... how to, you know ngh... about transportation, transportation accessibility. For example when people want to go through the road they got automatical traffic, so ... ngh ... uh ... we cannot go as we want like in Indonesia, okay, and then uhm ... their think is how to appreciate one another, okay, discipline. They stay in line when they have to come to public place or something else. That's it.

3. (Female): Ngh ... since Canada is a bilingual country that the people were born with the two languages, so it's quite impossible for you to find someone who cannot speak English. If you are someone who speaks English it will be much better if yu can speak French, too. But, either one of the language you are able to it will be no problem

because in Quebec people understand what you are talking about what the idea of ngh... understanding and respecting and appreciating people. No matter what language you say or what they are able to, then it is the end of the conversation. The idea is the phenomenon of respecting people, there is uhm...more than just what people can or people are able to, just like that ...

(Male): And ... well ... uhm ... talking about the language the UK and what do we feel about the English. So, and ... we know that English is a progress country, so it's sound impossible if UK speaks another language, but, ngh ... you know we still find difficulties, okay, in understanding it especially because they got different accent. That's really really a big problem (laughing). In the London, they speak loud, but when I were in Birmingham, okay, not only me myself didn't understand and sometimes Londoners didn't understand what the Birmingham say, because people think Birmingham is the hardest accent, and also another cities like Scotland, Birmingham, and then London, Irish and Welsh, okay, they've got different accent but uhm ... in my opinion, uhm ... the easiest one is London, coz it's clear.

From the answers, it can be seen that our male friend used more lexical hedges or fillers, such as okay, well, you know, etc. Even we can see also that he made many mistakes related to grammar, but his pronunciation and accent is very good, we can consider him as a near native guy in speaking English. It was hard for us to catch his words, since he spoke too fast. He used flat intonation, relaxed in expressing his ideas, but seems that his ways of speaking is too much influenced by his cultural background. On his first answered, he thanked us first and ended his answer by saying thank you again.

Different from our female friend, she was very confident in speaking. She had clearer pronunciation, talked louder and used better grammar. She did not use lexical hedges or fillers that much. She had rising intonation on declaratives. She answered all questions directly without any lips-service and talked straight to the point.

Actually since the writer know both of them better, the writer see that their ways of speaking even by using Palembangnese language are quite the same. The writer draws a conclusion that their cultural background plays an important role in their ways of speaking.

Out of these recorded conversation, the writer found that those two friends use quite often hedging and attempts to avoid conflict. This fact is applicable to the **positive politeness** strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson, in which this strategy is most commonly used in situations where the hearers know each other fairly well.

The findings do not show that each of them used certain politeness strategy even they are different in gender. They have the same educational background, and even both of them have ever been in Europe countries before but they got quite different accents in speaking English.

The writer found that cultural background is the most significant factor which influences their ways of speech. The male interviewee tended to be more polite and nicer in expressing his ideas. Even he knows he writer well but he tried hard to talk carefully. On the other hand, our female friend was more opened in expressing her ideas. She talked sharply, full of self-confident, and tried hard not to create an awkward situation. Even she used more Standard English than the male one; it did not mean that she intended to be more polite.

Liao and Brenahan (1976) cited in Guodong and Jing (2005) argued that women are more status sensitive than men. Therefore, it is predictable that women will use more politeness strategies than men do. But, this argumentation cannot be applied in writer's case since the writer found out that the intensity of politeness strategies used by male interviewee is higher than those which are used by the female one.

Conclusion

People use variety of ways to express the 'same' message. They select one way rather than another to convey their message. They choose different linguistic forms to different audience. They decide which linguistic form is appropriate in a certain situation. One relevant factor supports these statements is "politeness". People being polite in order to **save face** for another.

Brown and Levinson outlined four politeness strategies that sum up human 'politeness' behavior: Bald On Record, Negative Politeness, Positive Politeness, and Off-Record-indirect strategy. It is stated on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politeness_theory that gender plays more prominently in the field of politeness but politeness theory has ignored the fact that based on gender, women and men will also perform politeness differently.

The small project done by the writer also proved this statement. The writer interviewed two friends, male and female, by asking them to answer three questions prepared by the writer. The conversation was recorded and the writer analyzed the ways of their speech by listening to the recording.

The writer found that both of them did not use any certain politeness strategies. The female friend talked more confident, was better in grammar and did not use more fillers or hedges. Vice versa, the male friend talked nicely, made many mistakes in grammar and use many fillers or hedges. So, the writer concludes that the choice of politeness strategy by the speakers is not influenced by gender.

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