

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDERED POLITENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Ikromova Fazilatkhon Vohidjon kizi

Kokand state university

ikromovafazilatkhon@gmail.com

Abstract: This research investigates gendered politeness strategies in relation to cultural variations across different societies. The primary concern is to reveal potential cultural variations in politeness, and more importantly, to explore to what extent gendered politeness is dependent on, in other words, a part of, cultural and societal systems. Three levels of factors interplay and crosscut gendered politeness: they are gender, cultural and language systems as well as cultural and societal contexts.

Key words: politeness, culture, gender, society, stereotype, behavior, communicative roles.

1. Introduction

Many scholars have noted that women and men frequently express emotions and attitudes differently in communicative contexts. Specific rules, which are diverse among cultures, are connected to common attitudes that males and females display in their natural forms and styles of communication. It is important to understand the typical communication styles of women and men according to the given culture in order to predict their reactions and behavior. While empathy and rapport are preferred in female communication, male communication is typically characterized as more assertive and less sensitive to others. The different patterns of socialization that boys and girls receive are the main reason for the distinction in power and relationship constructs. These socialization patterns are influenced by the linguistic environment and society. The latter directly affects the process of socialization, and as a result, impacts the language style. Men are mostly described as 'aggressive', 'competitive', and 'assertive'. They are also said to be more selfish and self-promoting than women. Some researchers argue that because men are subordinated by the same male values, the conduct of the masculine gender stereotype is a vulnerable form of existence. However, the pattern of behavior that women manifest during these different communicative roles is shaped by the prevalent standards of womanliness. Women are anticipated, based on these mandates, to be 'caring', 'responsive', and 'tolerant'. Such mandates, which talk of patience and caregiving, stress dependability, selfless offerings of support, and hedonistic satisfaction rather than particular or intrinsic power.

Materials

Specifically, the present study examines and compares gendered politeness in fictional conversations in six societies across different modes. These different modes are traditional and literary societies, traditional Chinese societies, and modern societies including American, British, and Swedish ones. The major linguistic and non-linguistic factors measured include the three key components of gendered politeness and power/status variables. Results based on linear regressions and t-tests show that gendered politeness in the studied societies and modes was affected variously, primarily by the main effects of gender/age group and literary mode. Some interaction effects were found, such as those between specific types of politeness and

selection factors including power/status. Finally, results were nearly independent of politeness theory standing in the context of congruity and autonomy.

Theoretical background

In cultural determinism, many hypotheses have been established to explain individuals' default integration of "socio-cultural values and their influence on attitudes, mentalities, perceptions, and behaviours". Undoubtedly, there are many different levels of culture, and each one has some influence. In general, cultural identity is thought to have the most effect, but there are cultural pariahs based on "ethnicity, religion, social class, age, gender, education - training, and other factors"[2]. It often says, "in general" because there are several phenomena that are currently occurring that cannot be linked to or are not necessarily linked to national culture [3], "even if they do suggest the importance of a common cultural background for members of a group that make up the community, this includes a virtual community".

In terms of culture, the personality and perception of the social environment have an influence on gender communication and gender representation in media. As a result, our cultural identities and personalities have an impact on our views [2]. People are sometimes aware of the consequences, and sometimes we are not. In either case, "people have a predisposition to favour those who share their cultural or personality characteristics"[2]. According to McCornack, this inclination is so strong that it frequently leads us to believe that people we admire are more like us than they are. Knowing more about how these forces shape our perceptions can help us become more aware of and capable of forming impressions of others[4]. In the discourse of culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all have an impact on our impressions of culture. Our cultural identities influence the schemata by which the people interpret what they see. People are seen to assimilate views, attitudes, and values shared by others in our cultural group as we are socialized into diverse cultural identities.

Politeness theory, notably developed by sociolinguists like Erving Goffman, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, suggests that politeness is a way to manage social relationships and mitigate face threats. "Face" refers to an individual's self-esteem or social identity. Women and men often navigate these politeness strategies differently, influenced by societal roles, expectations, and norms.[1]

Different cultures have distinct practices and expectations regarding how gender influences communication styles, politeness strategies, and social interactions. Here's an exploration of gendered politeness across different cultures:

Western Cultures

In many Western societies, particularly in the United States and parts of Europe, gendered politeness often manifests in the expectations placed on men and women in conversation. Women are typically socialized to be more polite, nurturing, and accommodating. This can result in women using more hedging language (e.g., "I think", "maybe") to soften their statements, making them sound less authoritative. Research indicates that women often prioritize relationship-building in their communication, using polite language to foster connection.

Conversely, men may be socialized to adopt a more assertive and direct communication style. They might use less polite language and may be perceived as more competent when doing so. This creates a dynamic where women's politeness can sometimes be undervalued in professional settings, leading to misunderstandings about their confidence or authority.

East Asia

In East Asian cultures, such as Japan and South Korea, politeness is intricately tied to social hierarchy and gender roles. In Japan, for instance, the language reflects various levels of politeness through honorifics and forms of speech that vary depending on the speaker's social status. Women may use more formal and polite language in public interactions, which can emphasize their role within societal expectations.

In contrast, men often engage in more straightforward communication, which can be seen as a display of authority. The gendered expectations in these cultures can lead to a distinction in how men and women express politeness, with women often required to navigate their roles carefully to maintain harmony and respect.

For example, in Korea, women are expected to display higher levels of politeness and humility in their speech. This is evident in the use of honorific language and the practice of "jeon", which emphasizes emotional connection and respect. Gender norms dictate that women should be nurturing and deferential, while men are often expected to take on more assertive roles.

Middle East

In many Middle Eastern cultures, gendered politeness can be deeply rooted in traditional values regarding gender roles. Men are often expected to be assertive and take the lead in conversations, while women may be encouraged to exhibit more reserved and polite behavior. In public settings, women might face greater scrutiny regarding their conduct, necessitating a heightened sense of politeness.

Politeness in this context often includes gestures of respect, such as offering hospitality or showing deference. Women are often expected to fulfill traditional roles in hosting, and their politeness is expressed through generosity and warmth. Men, on the other hand, may demonstrate politeness through protective behavior and assertiveness in social settings. While these customs apply to both genders, the expectations can differ significantly, reinforcing traditional gender roles within communication.

Latin America

In Latin American cultures, gendered politeness is often characterized by warmth and expressiveness. Women are typically expected to be more nurturing and friendly in their interactions, using affectionate terms and engaging in small talk. Greetings often include physical touch, such as kisses on the cheek, which conveys a sense of closeness and respect. This relational approach to communication emphasizes politeness and personal connection.

Men, while also expected to be polite, may demonstrate this through protective or chivalrous behaviors. The cultural norm may encourage men to take on a more dominant conversational role, but politeness is still valued, often expressed through gestures of respect and camaraderie.

South Asia

In South Asian cultures, such as India, politeness is heavily influenced by social hierarchy and gender. Women are often socialized to be deferential and polite, particularly in mixed-gender interactions. Language reflects this, with women frequently using honorifics and respectful forms of address.

Men, on the other hand, may feel societal pressure to adopt a more authoritative communication style, but politeness remains important. Social norms dictate that men should also treat women with respect, but the balance can sometimes lead to misunderstandings in communication styles, particularly in professional environments.

Indigenous cultures

Many Indigenous cultures place a significant emphasis on community and respect for elders, with gendered politeness shaped by cultural values rather than strict roles. For instance, women may be revered as caregivers and maintainers of cultural traditions, leading to a style of communication that emphasizes nurturing and inclusion.

Men may take on leadership roles but are expected to show respect and humility in their interactions. Politeness in these cultures often transcends gender, focusing more on community harmony and respect for individuals regardless of gender.

Conclusion

Gendered politeness is a multifaceted aspect of cultural communication that reflects deeper societal values and norms. While traditional roles continue to influence how men and women navigate politeness, contemporary shifts are reshaping these interactions. Each culture carries its own set of expectations and norms that influence how gender shapes interactions. Understanding the nuances of gendered politeness across cultures enhances cross-cultural communication and fosters greater empathy and respect in an increasingly interconnected world. Recognizing these dynamics allows individuals to navigate social interactions more effectively and contribute to more inclusive dialogue across cultural boundaries.

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