

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MALE AND FEMALE SPEECH: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN

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Abstract

During the past five decades, scholars in sociolinguistics have argued that women are more polite than men. This study contributes to the literature by investigating gender and politeness in Nigerian Pidgin. The study, which is qualitative in design, adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. The data for this study is taken from six service encounter settings, collected by means of a tape recorder. The results reveal the following: Firstly, positive politeness strategies are preferred over negative politeness strategies and that females use more politeness strategies than males. Secondly, that in performing gender, the male and female participants display certain gender norms which are in accordance with the traditionally dichotomous gendered expectations and thirdly, that the participants often break the stereotypical norms of appropriate masculine/feminine behaviour by using the speech styles of the opposite gender.

Keywords: Gender, politeness, performativity, positive politeness, negative politeness.

Introduction

In sociolinguistic studies, the term gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. It emphasizes that masculinity and femininity are products of social, cultural and psychological factors

and are acquired by an individual in the process of becoming a man or a woman. It is different from the term “sex” which refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Segal (2004, p3) states that “gender is taken to refer to a culturally based complex of norms, values and behaviors that a particular culture assigns to one biological sex or another” and Wardhaugh (2002 quoted in Yaqubi *et al*, 2012, p.67) define it as “a social construct which involves the whole gamut of genetic, psychological, social, and cultural differences between males and females”. For Nelson and Devardhi (2012, p.60), gender is embedded meticulously in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural while Cameron (1998, p.271), on her own part, states that "gender is socially constructed rather than 'natural'. West and Zimmerman (1987) observe that gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have but something we do. Politeness, on the other hand, is a social phenomenon whose role is to promote harmonious interpersonal relations. Yule (2006 quoted in Seli and Syafitri 2019, p. 131) defines it as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face while Holmes (1992, p.296) notes that politeness involves taking account of the feelings of others and Rudick and Mcgeough (2019, p. 2844) view politeness as “an interpretive act within individuals’ interactions”.

There is a general agreement that men and women use language differently (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995) and these differences have been explained within different theories. The deficit model, propounded by Lakoff, explains women’s language in terms of inadequacies resulting from the political and cultural subordination of women by men.

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In her view, the linguistic features of women's language portray them as tentative, uncertain, and lacking in authority and submissive (Lakoff, 1973, p.3). The dominance approach, credited to Thorne and Henley's (1975), explains that men dominate and control both interactions with women and the language system itself. Cameron (1992) states that the dominance approach states that the differences in the ways men and women communicate are attributable to their socioeconomic status and emphasizes inequality as the root of any cross-sex interaction. Another explanation as to why men and women use language differently is associated with the difference approach. This philosophy is mainly based on gender socialization. According to this theory, men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures and learn to do different things with words in a conversation. Proponents of this view believe that men and women may use language for different social purposes, having been socialized in different ways from their early childhood. The difference approach was popularized by Tannen's books *That's not what I meant* (1986) and *You just don't understand* (1990).

By the late 1980's, attention was shifted from the deficit, dominance and difference concepts of gender to how diversity structures gender. This brought about a new theory of gender namely the Social Constructionist theory. Rather than conceptualizing gender as an identity which one has/is, these scholars began viewing gender as involving what people do (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet, 1992). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Linguistic Theory* was influential in this movement. Men and women have been said to differ in their use of politeness and a multitude of studies on language and gender have been devoted to identifying and trying to explain these differences (Lakoff,

1975;Brown and Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1995,1987; Tannen, 1994; Montgomery, 1998; Beeching, 2000; Bayyurt and Bayraktaroglu, 2001;Matsumoto and Britain, 2003 and Mills, 2003). Despite the wealth of empirical studies conducted on politeness in male and female speech, little research has been done on gender and politeness in Nigerian Pidgin. It is this gap that this study intends to fill by examining gender and politeness in Nigerian Pidgin.

People of both genders cannot live without communication, and a deficient communication and lack of consideration create problems in the interpretations and meanings usually given to discourse. This inevitably means that often time, one out of the two parties in discussion usually give wrong notions, meanings and interpretations to certain statements and gestures. When this happens, it leads to breakdown in communication. It is from this perspective that this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. How do men and women express politeness in Nigerian Pidgin?
- ii. What are the differences between men's and women's politeness patterns?
- iii. How does gender affect the speaker's choice of politeness strategies?

The theoretical frameworks adopted for this study are Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory revolves around the following aspects: face, face work and acts that threaten face, sociological variables

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influencing face threat, and five general ways or super-strategies of counterbalancing face threat with specific linguistic strategies. The authors state that people have two main needs or 'face wants' when communicating with others: *positive face*, the need of an individual to have their wants and desires validated by at least some other participant in the interaction; and *negative face*, an individual's need to not have their rights impeded by others. They also note that when people communicate, they generally do so with the intention of preserving the positive and negative face of all participants in the interaction. It is inevitable that in certain communicative situations, the positive and/or negative face (usually of the listener) will be threatened. These types of communicative events are referred to as face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson also add that when speakers choose to commit face-threatening acts, they may draw upon a large repertoire of mitigation strategies that can soften the effect of the threat towards the listener. They go on to develop a list of strategies that play to the positive and negative face of the listener. They are:

- a. Bald on-record strategy: It does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer's face.
- b. Positive politeness strategy: It shows that the speaker recognizes that the hearer has a desire to be respected, that is, his / her positive face. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.
- c. Negative politeness strategy: It recognizes the hearer's face but also that the speaker is in some way imposing on them.
- d. Off-record indirect strategy: It takes some of the pressure off of the speaker because he /she tries to

avoid the direct FTA by either inviting conversational implicatures or by being deliberately ambiguous or vague.

Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity comes out of the school of thought known as Social Constructionism. The theory understands the concept of gender as a product of different interactions and social processes and argues that gender is a socially constructed understanding of what makes men and women. According to Eckert and McConell-Ginet (2003), the main principle of this theory lies on the scholars' perception of gender as a social construct, moving research away from studying the differences between men and women in terms of position and focusing on similarities and differences of their speech. The concept of performativity was first introduced by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990. The theory of gender performativity is of the view that individuals 'do gender' through performed speech acts that are construed as socially appropriate forms of speech for men and women. Just as J.L Austin (1962) maintained that that illocutions like "I promise" do not describe a pre-existing state of affairs but actually bring one into being, so Butler claims that "feminine" and "masculine" are not what we are, nor traits we have, but effects we produce by way of particular things we do. To her, "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame while congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a 'natural kind of being'". (Butler 1999, p.33)

The performative model posits that speech is a "repeated stylization of the body" and that masculine and

feminine styles of talking identified by researchers might be thought of as the “congealed” result of repeated acts by social actors who are striving to constitute themselves as “proper” men and “women” (Cameron, 1997, p.329). According to this model, gender is regarded as an inherently communicative process in which individuals express and convey their gender- either masculinity or femininity- to their interactants. To them, individuals perform gender by certain activities and ways of behaviour, for instance, by their hairstyling and their language. Unlike the deficit, dominance and difference approaches, the focus is placed on the interaction between human beings, but not on the individual himself/herself. Although it is the person who “performs” gender, the context of the social interaction plays an important role as well because people only becomes gendered persons when they interact with their fellow human beings.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design. The population for this study is made up of adult Nigerian speakers of Nigerian Pidgin consisting of seventy four service providers (sixty females and fourteen males) and one hundred and twenty four customers (thirty nine males and eighty five females).The instrument used for collecting qualitative data for this study is the tape recorder, which was used to collect conversations from six service encounter settings: hair dressing saloons, restaurants, pharmacies, market stalls, supermarkets and fuel stations. The data will also be grouped and examined considering the sex of the interlocutors, that is, in same-sex and mixed-sex interactions. The notations F→F and M→M indicate same sex speakers while F→M and M→F indicate mixed sex

speakers.

Analysis and Discussion

The data shows that male and female service providers used positive and negative politeness strategies in their conversations. It reveals twelve strategies for positive politeness and three strategies for negative politeness. This is seen in Table 1 below. The frequency distribution of these strategies can also be found in the table. It shows that the greeting strategy is the most frequently used (184 times: 32.86%), followed by in-group identity markers. This was used (160 times: 28.57%). The least frequent positive politeness strategies used are, Assert knowledge of hearer's wants, Agreement and Promise (4.29%, 2.86%, and 2.86% respectively)

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Table 1: Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies

POSITIVE POLITENESS			NEGATIVE POLITENESS		
Strategy Type	Number	Frequency/ Percentage	Strategy Type	Number	Frequency/Per centage
Greetings	184	32.86	Deference/ Honorifics	120	54.0
Seeking agreement	16	2.86	Minimizing the imposition	70	31.53
Assert knowledge of hearer's wants	24	4.29	Apologies	32	14.41
Give Reasons	32	5.71			
Give gifts to Hearer/ Thanks	56	10.00			
Notice/ Attend to H's interest	32	5.71			

Promise	16	2.86			
Small Talk	32	5.71			
In-group identity markers.	160	28.57			
Joke	8	1.43			
Total	560	100.00	Total	222	100.00

Findings from the data show that the participants, both male and female, use positive and negative politeness strategies. Table 2 presents the distribution of positive politeness strategies according to gender while Table 3 shows the distribution of negative politeness strategies according to gender.

Table 2: Distribution of Positive Politeness Strategies according to Gender

	Males	Percentage	Females	Percentage	Total
Greeting	68	26.56	116	38.16	184
Seek Agreement	12	4.69	4	1.32	16
Assert knowledge of Hearer's wants	16	6.25	8	2.63	111 ²⁴
Give Reasons	12	4.69	20	6.58	32
Give gifts to Hearer/Thanking	24	9.38	32	10.53	56

Express interest in Hearer	12	4.69	20	6.58	32
Promise	12	4.69	4	1.32	16
Small Talk	16	6.25	16	5.26	32
In-group Identity Markers	84	32.81	76	25.00	160
Jokes	0	0.00	8	2.63	8
TOTAL	256	100.00	304	100.00	560

The results of this study found out that female participants use more politeness strategies than their male counterparts. As seen in the Table 2, females used politeness strategies three hundred and four times (304) while males used them two hundred and fifty six (256) times. Greeting is most frequent category found in the data and there is a significance difference in the use of this strategy by males and females who use it sixty eight (68) times and one hundred and sixteen (116) times respectively. This shows that greetings are apparently a female rather than male preoccupation hence the difference. The second

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largest category in the data is the in-group identity marker with one hundred and sixty (160) occurrences. The table shows that it is employed by men eighty four (84) times more than women who use it seventy six (76) times. Thanking expressions are used as markers of positive politeness in that they express gratitude. That is, they indicate approval of the other person. Thanking expressions, represented by fifty six (56) examples, present little difference in terms of their use by the difference genders, as the male participants thanked their addressees twenty four(24) times and the females, thirty two(32) times. The table also reveals that that the females in this study use more thanking expressions than their male counterparts. The reason for this may be that the female service providers viewed the interactions not only as a business encounter but a social one.

The next frequently used strategies are ‘Give Reasons’, ‘Express Interest in Hearer’ and ‘Small Talk’ which occur thirty two (32) times each. ‘Give Reasons’ is more prevalent among females and occurs twenty (20) times in female speech than among males where it occurred twelve (12) times. Expressing interest is most typically shown through questions about the other’s wellbeing. The data reveals that it is used twenty (20) times by females and twelve (12) times by males. The next strategy ‘Small Talk’ does not have anything to do with goal of any interaction. It is used sixteen (16) times each by both male and female participants. The analysis in Table 2 also reflects the use of the category “Seeking Agreement” This was employed sixteen (16) times. While males used this in their speech twelve (12) times it occurred only four (4) times in female speech. The least used strategies are ‘Promise’ and ‘Jokes’. Making promises is to reassure the addressee that something

they care about will happen. A promise acts as an additional bond strengthening friendship, as the senders want to show that they care about the other person’s feelings, hence their classification as a positive politeness strategy. There were very few promises found in the data. Promises were used twelve (12) times by male participants and four (4) times by females. For the strategy, “Joke”, the data records only eight occurrences used by females and none by males.

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of Negative Politeness Strategies according to Gender

	Male s	Percen tage	Femal es	Percent age	Tot al
Deferenc e markers	26	36.11	94	62.67	120
Minimiz ing the Impositi on	38	52.78	32	21.33	70
Apologi ze	8	11.11	24	16.00	32
Total	72	100.00	150	100.00	222

The table above shows that the deference strategy was utilized by female participants ninety four (94) times while male participants used it twenty six (26) times. Another negative politeness strategy used by both males and females is the imposition minimization with male participants using this strategy thirty eight (38) times while women who used

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it thirty two (32) times. The last strategy of negative politeness shown in Table 3 is the apologize strategy. This strategy is common to both males and female participants. It is used by females twenty four (24) times and by males eight (8) times.

In “performing gender”, the male and female participants in this study display certain gender norms which are in accordance with the traditionally dichotomous gendered expectations. While some male participants employ stereotypically masculine politeness strategies, characterized by directness and authoritativeness, the females use feminine strategies. The data also reveals that various contextual factors plays a significant role in the choice of politeness strategies chosen and that actual practice is not always consistent with gender stereotypes. One feature characteristically associated with female speech is the use of the deference form “Mummy” to refer to customers who were older than them. This occurred sixty one (61) times in the data.

Exchange 1 (In a hair dressing saloon) F→F

CUS: How much for this weave on?

SP: The two?

CUS: Ehn.

SP: One thousand naira for the two.

CUS: How much last?

SP: Oya pay nine fifty.

CUS: Ah ah. Na nine hundred for market. You kon add your own join.

SP: How I go add five hundred naira? Everybody with hin own market. Na as I buy I go take sell.

CUS: Give me like that. Abi you want make I carry my money go another place. I go vex for you.

SP: Mummy sorry. Na the price be that. I no fit cheat you.

CUS: Today you harsh o. Bring am. Open am make I see wetin I dey buy. You get hair cream?

SP: Mummy na only this small one. Two hundred naira.

According to Butler (1990), gender identity is created through acts. All acts are performed within a certain cultural, societal and historical script. People are influenced by their surroundings and the norms of their culture mark the boundaries of an accepted gender performance. This phenomenon is reflected in the data. The participants are aware of how a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ should behave and what choices they are supposed to make. The females in this exchange draw upon stereotypically feminine speech strategies, using supportive talk and collaboratively engaging with one another.

“Abi you want make I carry my money go another place. I go vex for you.

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“Mummy sorry. Na the price be that. I no fit cheat you.”

“Today you harsh o”

The service provider refers to her customer as “Mummy”, her way of showing respect and establishing a closer relationship, indicating that the two parties have a long time relationship. Another example of the use of deference markers by female service providers is seen in the exchange below:

Exchange 2(In a super market) F→F

CUS: How much for Hypo? Small size.

SP: Mummy, na two fifty.

CUS: What of Jik?

SP: Three hundred naira ma.

CUS: Hypo. Take, give me change

SP: One thousand naira? No change o. Just give me the fifty naira weydey your hand now.

CUS: Me sef I wan use am. Me sef i need change. Na for bank i beg the small one weydey my hand.

SP: Na im be sey you wan pack all my change. Change dey suffer me o. Oya take. Na im be say the change wey you dey find done reach your hand.

In this interaction, the service provider uses deference strategies indicated by the address form “Mummy”, showing respect while the customer does not employ any face-redressing strategies, instead making direct requests. Another evidence of feminine speech style is also

reflected in the female's participants' use of language and choice of lexical items. Fashion and the desire to look good is a concern primarily associated with women. This is seen the participants' use of terminology within this field to showcase their femininity. This is seen in their use of words like "straw curls", "packing gel", "value your hair", and "hair dryer". This is seen in the Exchange 3:

Exchange 3: (In the Hairdressing saloon) F→F

CUS: Good evening.

SP: How far?

CUS: You no know me again? Na you we dey find since so tay we reach express.

SP: Sorry o. Wetin you wan do? Retouch?

CUS: Straw curls.

SP: You dey do am before? You wan finish the hair?

CUS: E dey cut hair?

SP: Ask people weydey do am. People wey no dey value their hair naimdey do am. If you still wan do am, na your hair o.

CUS: Na de same thing with packing gel?

SP: Packing gel pass am. You wey no deygree go inside hair dryer, you wan do straw curl?

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CUS: Me wey kuku no get hair for front. I go kom back.
Make I think am.

Here, the service provider and her customer employ various positive and negative politeness strategies. The “Notice, attend to Hearer’s strategy” is seen in:

“Wetin you wan do? Retouch?”, “Packing gel pass am. You wey no deygree go inside hair dryer, you wan do straw curl?”

Give reasons, another positive politeness strategy is evident in

“People wey no dey value their hair n aim dey do am”.

Let us consider the following exchange:

Exchange 4: (In the Hairdressing saloon) F→F

CUS: How now?

SP: Mummy good afternoon.

CUS: Na only you dey here?

SP: Na only me o. You wan do your hair?

CUS: Yes. Where your other girl?

SP: She travel.

CUS: What of your daughter?

SP: She go village.

(To an attendant): Help mummy loose her hair.

CUS: (To attendant) Put towel.

SP: Any time wey work deynaim e dey travel. When work no dey, e go siddon for store from morning till night.

CUS: E tink say na you e dey do?

SP: When egokom back, I go collect my salon key from am. No be school e go, no be hair e learn.

The obvious ways this exchange resembles conventional notions of “women’s talk concern its purpose and subject matter. This is talk about people, not things and “rapport talk” not “report talk” (Tannen, 1992) - the main point is clearly not to exchange information. It is ‘gossip’ and serves one of the most common purposes of gossip namely, affirming the solidarity of an in-group by constructing the absent person as an out-group whose behavior is discussed and found wanting. The conversation between the service provider and her customer lends support to the claims by Tannen (1992) that women see the purpose of conversation to create and foster an intimate bond by talking about problems and issues they are facing.

The data also reveals evidence of females breaking the stereotypical norms of “appropriate feminist behaviour” by using stereotypical masculine speech styles. In Exchange 5, the service provider demonstrates her performance of a stereotypically masculine speech style.

Exchange 5(In a hair dressing saloon) F→F

SP: Auntie, you don buy the weave on?

CUS:Yes

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SP: You go siddon o. If I do this madam hair finish before I go do your own.

CUS: Ok. Shey you dey sell water?

SP: Yes, open the freezer.

The service provider exhibits a conventionally masculine style in ‘performing gender’, characterized by the transactional and task-oriented nature of the conversation. Her way of addressing her customer exhibits a firm, authoritative, direct and decisive style and indexes masculinity. Note that she does not use any softening devices, which might otherwise be deemed feminine as she issues the directive “Open the freezer” without any consideration for face loss. The exchanges above, as well as showing female speakers talking about personal issues, also show women performing gender. They present themselves as different kinds of women concerned with their external appearances and social performance. Sometimes they are sensitive, emotional and at other times, hardnosed. This point to the fact that the talk we do in our daily lives gives us access to these different modes of being, these different versions of the female gender. This is because language plays a crucial part in restricting our experiences.

Scholars like Coates (1989) have remarked on the cooperative nature of informal talk among females, drawing attention to the number of linguistic features which are predominant in all-female groups. Some of these, like hedges and the use of epistemic modals, are signs of attention to others’ face, aimed at minimizing conflict and securing agreement (Holmes, 2006). It is observed in the data in this present study that this criterion is also found in

male speech. For example, Exchange 6 below contains cooperative, mitigation and face protecting strategies that Coates (1989) and Holmes (2006) claim are associated with female speech.

Exchange 6 (In a restaurant) M→F

CUS: Welldone o.

SP: Welcome customer. Wetin you want?

CUS: I wan rice and stew.

SP: Like how much own you want?

CUS: You go fit give me like three hundred naira own?

SP: Wetin you want take chop am.

CUS: With hundred naira cow leg but you go put plenty stew o.

SP: Cow leg na three hundred naira. Three hundred naira cow leg, rice three hundred, making six hundred naira.

CUS: The cow leg cost o. Na five hundred I go pay.

SP: The rice no go big o. You know say things don cost.

CUS: But you no go look that one. I be your customer. Na every day I dey come chop here.

SP: You to, consider me. Na inside this rice and cow leg I go get money for rent, before I go see gain. You want

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make hungry beat me? I go muni for you because of next time.

CUS: Thank you

SP: You go chop here abi you dey carry go?

CUS: I go carry am go.

SP: Oya wait first make I serve people for your back. Make I give them first. Na them first you.

In this conversation, we see the customer, a male, haggling over the cost of his food. He initiates the conversation with a greeting before proceeding to place his order. His tone is polite and persuasive aimed at getting the service provider to serve him more food. A similar situation is also found in Exchange 7 below:

Exchange 7 (In a restaurant) M→F

CUS: Madam, salt too plenti for de egusi soup. Na manage ai manage take eat am.

SP: Eh-h, sorry o. Mesefai no dey add plenty salt for my soup apart from when ai steam de meat. E be like seyna my children add over salt for de meat. Abeg no vex.

CUS: No wahala. Just take note in case of next time.

The conversation takes place in a restaurant where a male customer registers his displeasure about the excess salt in his soup. He does this in a non-confrontational manner. The female service provider placates her customer by apologizing profusely, stating her own dislike for salty food and blaming her children for the mistake. The customer

responds to her apology positively. This is supported with the relaxed atmosphere between them. Because of the relaxed atmosphere between them he does not consider a serious problem as he says “No wahala” (No problem). The situation is informal. Contrary to the common assumption that only women engage in speech demonstrating sensitivity to the addressee’s face, the data shows that men are equally polite and non-assertive. In the data, supposedly typical female characteristics are displayed in male interaction. This is illustrated in Exchange 6 below:

Exchange8 (In a drugstore) M→F

CUS: Auntie, abeg check this paper for me.

After a while...

CUS: Wetin dis one bi? 100mg?

SP: All of demna 100mg.

CUS: Help me write as I go take am.

SP: All na one morning, one evening. Your money na thirteen thousand, eight hundred.

CUS. De money weydey my hand no reach like dat.

Remove one card for inside all first. I go

come buy de remaining after.

SP: De money kom bi nine thousand, eight hundred.

CUS: Ok. E good like dat.

Performing gender means more flexibility and that if men’s language could show both masculinity and

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femininity, and so could women's. In this sense, a person's speech may not match his/her own biological sex, and he/she may maintain the traits of more than one gender. In Exchange 6 above, the customer, a male and an elder to the service provider, chooses to humble himself by using the deference marker "Auntie" and the word 'Abeg'(Please). His goal is to attract and hold the service provider's attention before making his request. However, he does not behave in accordance with his gender as he demonstrates strategies indicative of a typically female speechstyle(hyper politeness, non-assertiveness). The same feminine feature is employed by another male participant in the conversation below:

Exchange 9 (At a pharmacy) M→M

CUS: Give me blood medicine.

SP: Syrup or tablet.

CUS: Syrup. Hope na original?

SP: No na fake.

CUS: No vex abeg but person go help himself for this country

Exchange 9 is a conversation between a service provider and a customer in a medicine store. The customer initiates the conversation with a directive "Give me blood medicine". There is no attempt to reduce the force of his request. The service provider's reply is equally brusque. After making his request for a cough syrup, the customer proceeds to ask if the medicine in question is original or fake, thus offending the addressee who replies sarcastically "No na fake". The customer, upon realizing his mistake, apologizes immediately. Instead of using the words "Mummy" and "Daddy" to address older customers like females do, male service providers prefer to use the words

‘ma’, ‘sir’, ‘oga’, ‘madam’ and ‘mama’, ‘auntie’ as reflected in the exchange below.

Exchange 10(In a Pharmacy) M→M

SP: Oga, welcome sir

CUS: Ehen. Check for this medicine. You get am?

SP: Yes. We get am.

CUS: How much?

SP: 400mg, one thousand, fifty naira for one card.

CUS: Take

In this exchange, the service provider shows respect to the customer’s higher status by using the word “sir”. The customer responds to the service provider’s greeting with “Ehen” and goes straight to the purpose of the interaction. He demonstrates a number of strategies indicative of a typically masculine conversational style, such as direct directives and questions. Using the statements “Check for this medicine. You get am?”, “How much?” he dominates the interaction. The customer also uses the pronoun “You” to establish the status differential between him and his addressee. Note that the service provider responds by using the plural pronoun “we” in “We get am” suggesting a collective responsibility implying that the business does not belong to him alone. It could also mean he is an employee in the establishment. The use of the verbs “check” and “take” makes the directive force even stronger, since getting others to react/ behave in a particular way represents a much deeper level of exerting influence and exercising control.

Conclusion

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The present study investigates the effects of gender on politeness and how service providers and their customers perform gender in their interactions with one another in Nigerian Pidgin. The analysis shows that females use more positive and negative politeness strategies than their male counterparts. Out of the thirteen positive and negative politeness strategies examined, as many as seven demonstrated a higher frequency of use by women i.e. greetings, give reasons, thanks, expressions of interest about the other, jokes, deference and apology. As regards the remaining strategies, one of them, i.e. small talk, did not show any significant different in terms of distribution between the two groups. Five strategies, i.e. seek agreement, promise, and assert knowledge of Hearer's wants, in-group identity markers turned out to have been more often used by men. One explanation for this difference is that the females appeared to pay the greatest attention to their addressees' face needs than the males and used these strategies to build rapport and establish relationship bonds.

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