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GENDER, POLITENESS AND STEREOTYPES

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***Abstract.** This article aims to interrogate the relationship between impoliteness and gender identity. I question the way that previous research on politeness has assumed a stereotypical correlation between masculinity and impoliteness and femininity and politeness. Furthermore, I aim to move politeness research away from the Brown and Levinson (1978) model, whereby individual speech strategies are considered to be inherently polite or impolite, towards a more complex model of the way that politeness and impoliteness operate.*

***Keywords.** Politeness; impoliteness; gender; pragmatics; relevance*

Introduction: In this chapter, I aim to bring together new theoretical work on gender from feminist linguistics with new theorising of linguistic politeness. I aim to clear some theoretical space for thinking about both the terms gender and politeness, and thus much of the paper is given over to a critique of theorising on this subject. My argument is that we need a more flexible and complex model of the relation between gender and politeness. Theorists in gender and language

research cannot continue to discuss gender simply in terms of the differential linguistic behaviour of males and females as groups; we need to be able to analyse the various strategies which gendered, raced and classed women and men adopt in particular circumstances and with particular goals and interests. Thus, I am not arguing that no generalisations can be made about gender; context-sensitive empirical studies would be able to yield useful data, but we would have to be wary about using this data to comment on women or men as a whole. As I show later, there are generalisations which can be made about the employment of stereotypical behaviour at certain moments in interactions, but even here, stereotypical behaviour cannot be said to have one function or one interpretation. We need to question whether there is one stereotype for feminine and masculine behaviour. (See Liladhar, 2001 forthcoming; Eckert and McConnell, 1999; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999)

In terms of the analysis of politeness, I would argue that we need several analytical changes: firstly, we need to see politeness as occurring over longer-stretches of talk; secondly, it should be seen within the context of a community of practice, rather than as simply as the product of individual speakers, and finally, we need to be aware that there may be conflicts over the meanings of politeness. By focusing on the analysis of an incident in which I was involved, in the final part of this essay, I try to formulate the ways in which I think the theorising of gender and politeness might proceed, and in particular I focus on the way that impoliteness is dealt with in interactional terms. A more pragmatic focus on impoliteness enables us to view politeness less as an addition to a conversation, something which is grafted on to individual speech acts in order to facilitate interaction between speaker and hearer, (which is at least implicit in Brown and Levinson's 1978 model) but rather as something which emerges at a discourse level, over stretches of talk and across communities of speakers and hearer

This, therefore, constitutes a discourse analysis of politeness, rather than a linguistic analysis of politeness. Thus, rather than identifying the Face Threatening Acts performed by individuals and the politeness repair work deemed necessary to

contain their force, as Brown and Levinson (1978) have done, I will be focusing instead on the effect of impoliteness on groups and the way that gender plays a role in assumptions about who can be impolite to whom, and who needs to repair the damage. I will suggest that, using Relevance theory to examine the way that male and female interactants make sense of an event in speech, we may be able to see gendered protocols at work. (Sperber and Wilson, 1986) In viewing a range of different interactions we can analyse the different strategies adopted by various women rather than attempting to make generalisations about the way that all women respond to rudeness or are themselves impolite. In this way, we can map out parameters for strategic intervention to repair interaction and suggest ways in which they may be contextually gendered, without making assumptions about the necessary pairing of language items with a specific gender.

In certain recording of conversation sessions which some of my undergraduate students undertook at the University of Loughborough, in 1993, this was clearly the case. The male students in question saw intimate speech situations as stereotypically feminine and therefore spent a great deal of the time drawing attention to the fact of being recorded and addressing sexist comments to the person who was recording the interaction.

Conclusion: Thus, what the analysis of this incident shows is that gender in an interaction is not simply about the gender of the speaker or hearer; this particular community of practice is coded by many of the participants as masculine because banter is considered to be the normal mode of interaction; however, what was interpreted as impoliteness on a male's part is condoned more, since this fits in with the stereotypes of masculine interaction. A seemingly feminine response to the situation, that is, one which attempts to resolve the situation, cannot be simply coded as powerless, since in fact this is what brings the incident to a close. However, even though this is a strategic use of femininity, it may still be classified by others as a weak form of behaviour. Stereotypically masculine speech styles may be condoned more when they are employed by men than women, because these accord with notions of the habitual styles of men and their use of politeness.

However, we should not assume that interactional power is necessarily achieved by the use of masculinist speech such as banter and impoliteness. Thus, when analysing politeness and impoliteness in relation to gender, it is not enough to simply analyse males and females use of seemingly self-evidently polite strategies within particular interactions; what must be focused on is the gendered domains of speech acts like politeness and the perceived norms of the community of practice.

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REGIONAL VARIATION

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***Abstract.** Language, as a dynamic and multifaceted system of communication, exhibits a rich tapestry of variation across diverse geographical regions. This comprehensive study embarks on a journey to explore the intricate dynamics of regional variation in language, encompassing a wide array of linguistic features influenced by a complex interplay of social, cultural, geographical, and historical factors. Drawing upon an extensive body of sociolinguistic theories and empirical data, the research undertakes a holistic examination of how variations in phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical dimensions manifest within specific regional contexts. Furthermore, it delves into the multifaceted role of language contact, migration, and globalization in shaping linguistic diversity, thereby highlighting the ongoing evolution of languages in multicultural and multilingual settings.*

***Keywords.** Regional variation, sociolinguistics, language contact, globalization, dialectology, linguistic diversity, geographical isolation.*