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**When Words Protect Face: A Pragmatic Study of Politeness Strategies in
Gender-Related Conversations**



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Abstract

Language is a strong tool in social and communicative functions by which individuals express beliefs, negotiate identities and build social relations. The issue of feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles, and gender discrimination are very sensitive topics that intersect with ethnic, cultural, and personal values, experiences and ideologies. Speakers are often using politeness strategies in these situations to express views and to avoid conflict and trouble in interpersonal relations. The current study examines the use of politeness strategies in the discussion of gender related issues by exploring the theory of politeness outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987).

The research is qualitative in nature as it seeks to examine the language used by the participants in their aversions toward debates on opinions on feminism, gender equality, gender roles and gender discrimination. Data collection included semi-structured informal interviews with 15 university students. The questions were open-ended and included five questions for the interview schedule that aimed to get participants to voice their experiences and opinions on current issues affecting gender. An inductive coding process called thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected responses, and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory was used for identifying and interpreting uses of positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record and bald-on-record strategies.

The results show that the participants were generally inclined to adopt politeness strategies in responding to sensitive gender related issues. The most common strategy was negative politeness, an attempt by participants to keep their own opinions from being imposed upon others and to respect others' opinions. Positive politeness was also frequently evidenced when participants wanted to find relationships and to express solidarity with one another. Bald-on-record appeared to be used mainly when the participant was working for change in society, while off-record strategies were used in situations with potentially controversial or sensitive viewpoints. The study clearly illustrates the linkages between linguistic options and social responsiveness, cultural norms, and interpersonal interactional face management.

This research is what compares these three elements of language, politeness and gender discourse among the university students and how its relationship with each other. This research was carried out to examine the relation between these elements namely language, politeness and gender discourse among the university students and how their relationship is. It also fills a void that exists in the literature in the way that young adults manage to engage in delicate gender related topics in language in the classroom and social situation.

Key words:

1. Introduction

Language is not just a means to communicate but is a complex social practice that is used to construct meaning, express ideologies, construct identities, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Communication has social meaning and reinforces social structures beyond the word itself. In using language, the human person reflects his or her own thoughts and beliefs, values, attitudes, and experience, as well as seeking to respond to the expectations and norms of his or her social context. Due to all this,

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language has a significant role in defining social interaction and affects how people see and understand reality. Therefore, the language of social context is given a lot of interest and becomes an important object of study in the field of linguistics, especially in pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

Gender-related concerns have emerged as important social, political and academic concerns in today's society. Issues related to feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles, gender discrimination are still debated by various cultures and communities. Feminism claims equal rights and equal opportunities irrespective of gender whereas talking about gender equality is about eliminating the gap between educational and employment opportunities and talking about social treatment and politics. Meanwhile, in most societies traditional gender roles are still strong and influence expectations about behaviors, duties and social status of girls and boys/men and women. Rather, these conversations continue to be complicated by gender discrimination-people continue to face unequal treatment based on gender in different social circumstances.

Gender-related issues are intrinsically related to personal beliefs, cultural traditions, religious values and social norms and are therefore thought to be touchy subjects. Discussions on feminism and gender equality can be complex, may include points of disagreement, criticism and conflicting perspectives, and may be challenging for the people involved. When you are in these kinds of environments, you'll often hear speakers making decisions about what language to use, to be thoughtful about their opinions, without provoking any conflicts and to maintain positive social interactions. People do not always communicate ideas directly; instead, they may resort to using indirect language, hedging, mitigating, or politeness strategies to minimize chances of politely offending the people they are wishing to communicate with. The language options are used to express the significance of language and communication, as noted below.

In pragmatic studies, the importance of context in the field of shaping communication has been explicitly known. Speakers may use indirectness when they wish to get across delicate thoughts, and meaning is extremely context-specific, according to Yule (2020). Likewise, in Cutting (2008), politeness is also important in keeping relations in society and resolving conflicts during interaction. These views imply that language use in communication is a dynamic process in which people adjust their communication as they adjust the social situation, audience and relationships involved. As such, politeness studies offer an important perspective on the way people engage in communication with one another regarding some contentious or emotional discussion.

Perhaps one of the most influential theories is Politeness Theory (1987) by Brown and Levinson, which remains one of the most important theories of pragmatics. The theory is founded on the idea of face, which includes the concept of the person's image in public. Brown and Levinson observe that there are two aspects of "face": positive face, wishing to be appreciated, respected and accepted by others and negative face, wishing to be autonomous and unfettered by other people. Speakers may carry out Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) during interaction, which have the potential to threaten their own/Some other person's face. To lessen these threats, speakers use different politeness

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techniques: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald-on-record strategies. These strategies allow people to communicate well, without upsetting social harmony, or sparking social tension.

The analysis of language-gender discourse is particularly valuable on a sample of students from university, as this group of children is vital for language research. Universities provide settings in which people from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds live and learn together and share ideas. Academic knowledge, domestic and international current affairs, various ideologies and views are introduced to the students which may have a conflicting impact on their traditional beliefs, thus stimulating them to critically think. Consequently, their comments on feminism, gender equality, gender roles, gender discrimination and many times marriage express traditional cultural values or are influenced by new social attitudes. Examining the language of discussions in university settings can, therefore, be helpful for understanding the ways that help to negotiate sensitive social topics.

Research on the use of politeness models in a specific communicative situation (in this case, speaking about a gender issue) are not very abundant, even though studies related to politeness strategies have tackled aspects of politeness in many communicative contexts.

Research Objectives

1. This paper aims to discuss the participants' understanding of gender equality in the new context.
2. Analyzing the effect of traditional gender roles on the choices of men and women
3. To examine participants' insight, and evaluation on feminism
4. To explore the experiences of participants with gender discrimination

Research Questions

Question 1: In your society, do you believe that men and women are treated fairly?

Question 2: Traditional gender roles affect men and women in what way?

Question 3: What is the meaning of feminism to yourself?

Question 4: Have you had or seen any experiences of gender discrimination on your own?

Significance of Study

The importance of this study lies in the exploration of people's perspective on the controversial social issues feminism, gender equality, and traditional gender roles from a Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory point of view. It shows how the participants use various forms of politeness, such as positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record and bald-on-record politeness when answering sensitive questions. It also illustrates variations in the perception and interpretation of the issue of gender based on the cultural background of study participants. It's also a means to understand societal norms and traditional gender role allocation affect a person's attitudes to feminism and gender equality. The study examines real life responses and effects to better understand connections between language and social values and beliefs. Furthermore, it demonstrates respondents' strategies for responding to disagreement and sustaining social harmony in discussing potentially face-threatening topics. The overall

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conclusion of this study is a conclusion that successfully connects the field of language use with that of social ideology, as it focused in this study on gender and culture.

Problem Statement

Although there has been much talk about feminism, gender equality and traditional gender roles around the world, gender issues still go some way to be relevant and social contentious, especially within a culturally diverse environment where the social norms affect one's choice of attitude and perspective. People often give their thoughts on matters like this, but there is not much research on language in actual interaction to answer questions about how such things are being formulated and expressed in polite ways. There is a lack of understanding regarding the speakers' ability to process gender related issues with FTE in Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory. The influence of cultural background on the reactions in individual cases is comparatively small, because the study is not widely held in areas other than university students in which cultural background might play a role shaping the reactions; the reactions of the latter, however, have already been influenced by their academic environment. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the responses formed by the subjects with their answers to the sensitive communicative situations of the paper concerning the notions of feminism, gender equality and gender roles as well as the use of different politeness strategies while they provide the answers.

Literature Review

Language is used not just for communicating and conveying meaning, but it is also a means by which people's beliefs, attitudes and social identities are expressed. The subject of feminism, gender inequality, traditional gender roles and gender-based discrimination brought up from a personal or cultural background can be tender. Consequently, speeches often are customized so as not to cause conflict, to ensure social harmony, and to support the relationship between the speaker and hearer. Previous studies using a sociolinguistic approach have indicated that politeness theories play a role in facilitating the negotiation of potentially contentious opinions in situations such as these.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory is one of the most notable theories to account for the concept of politeness in interaction. The theory is grounded in the theory about 'face', or the public image of an individual's self. Brown and Levinson identify two types of faces-positive face, which refers to the need to be appreciated or accepted by others, and negative face which refers to autonomy or freedom from being imposed upon by others. Face threatening acts (FTAs) are actions which threaten to challenge a speaker's or their interlocutor's face while communicating. Speakers' avoidance of these threats utilizes several strategies, such as positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record and bald-on-record strategies. Social dynamics are important when addressing issues like gender variance, feminism, and discrimination, as opposed to, for instance, the constitution or the rules of a sport, Social dynamics apply to issues that are related to society, such as gender variance, feminism, and discrimination, but not necessarily to, say, the constitution or a sports rule.

Also, along this line, direct relationship between language, meaning and context, which is much dependent on context and interaction, has been highlighted by Yule (2020) as speakers often use indirect language to convey sensitive and potentially controversial ideas. Using indirectness, people can convey their opinion but do not risk causing

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offence, provoking disagreements. Therefore, when speaking about gender related topics, speakers may opt to hedge their statements, or use implication, or indirect language to tone down their statements and achieve social harmony.

Likewise, Cutting (2008) emphasizes the importance of politeness in maintaining social relationship and interaction. Speakers apply politeness strategies in language to give an impression of respect, to maintain rapport and to prevent misinterpretation. This outlook helps confirm Brown and Levinson's thesis that politeness is a vital aspect of human communication, especially when opinions are likely to differ or social norms are challenged.

Many studies have shown that people often use indirect and polite language for information when they touch on controversial issues like politics, religion and gender. The results have indicated that even though there exists a clear disagreement, the speaker's avoidance of direct disagreement has been supported with the involvement of mitigating expressions for protection of both the speaker's face and the partner face. In addition, the cultural and social environment can influence a person in expressing their agreement or disagreement, criticism, and personal experiences. The results indicated that politeness strategies are not just linguistic strategies, but a culture manifested in interpersonal interaction that is expected of the speakers.

Although feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles and gender discrimination have been studied in relation to politeness and indirect communication, very little attention was given to the use of politeness by the university students when it comes to these matters. Most of the previous research addressed more comprehensive conversational contexts or social issues in general rather than investigating gender-specific aspects of student interaction at universities. Students, which are sometimes complex spaces of meetings of different ideologies and social values, make it crucial to understand how these gender sensitive topics are negotiated by means of language. It is because it can be said that this study fills an important void in literature in the field of communication as it investigates university students' politeness strategies employed in adjusting their positions regarding feminism, gender equality, gender roles and gender discrimination. The study is based on Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness Theory because it focuses on how university students deal with concerns as well as the use of various linguistic means to express opinions in socially sensitive situations. The results will inform the understanding of the link between the discursive features, such as politeness and language, in the context of the academic discourse in contemporary discourse environment and the relation between these factors and gender.

Language is a potent social means by which people build meaning, state ideology and enter interpersonal communication. Speakers may experience socio-sensitive and ideologically charged contexts when talking about feminist issues, gender equality, traditional gender roles and gender discrimination, which could be challenging from both linguistic and ideological points of view. Using the theory of the Politeness Theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this study considers the university students' point of view on gender-oriented issues in their expressions in their language. The design of the study was a qualitative approach using semi-structured interview questions of five open-ended questions focused on 15 students of the university. The answers were analyzed trying to determine the use of positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record and bald-on-record strategies in discourse. The results show that participants often use politeness strategies in expressing disagreement, relating experiences and talking about social inequalities. Negative and positive politeness

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proved to be the two most prevalent strategies, with off-record strategies being used in sensitive situations, and bald-on-record strategies being used mostly when the participants called for social reform. It addresses the languages, ideology and social sensitivity, showing how the L2 community copes with language idioms that challenge their face in terms of gender related topics.

Research Gap

Although many studies have been carried out on politeness in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, few, if any, have limited the subject matter to the case of university students use of politeness strategies when dealing with gender issues. Typically, previous research focuses on politeness in general conversation, at work, or between people from different cultures instead of in the context of gender talk between young adults in English-speaking academic environments.

Moreover, addressing issues of face concerns, disagreement, and ideological sensitivity in relation to issues affecting the gender equality and feminist discourses while discussing traditional gender roles and gender discrimination is not given sufficient attention in the learning context. This means that there is a gap in knowledge about the language politeness systems used to influence the construction of students' socially and culturally appropriate points of view. Thus, the study attempts to gain insight into the use of politeness strategies by students at the university in gender-related discourse, from a theoretical perspective known as the Politeness Theory (PT) of Brown and Levinson (1987).

Methodology

Research Design

This study shows that the methodology adopted in this research is qualitative research in order to examine the application of politeness strategies used by learners in talking about Feminism/Women Equality/TGRS/Gender Discrimination in hard topic 1: Gender in University. A qualitative methodology is believed to be suitable since it allows for a deep exploration of participants' ideas, experiences, and language. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is a way to examine data that are text-based to construct meaning in social interaction in detail.

In this study, the study of the participants' response focuses on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987). The theory provides explanation of how speakers deal with face threatening acts (FTAs) with positive politeness, negative politeness, off record and bald on record strategies. The following categories should be considered in bringing to light how a person's spoken views towards controversial social issues do not conflict with their relationships and social order.

Participants and Sampling

In this study there were fifteen University students aged from 18-25 years. Male and female students were represented to reflect different viewpoints on aspects of the gender issue. To understand and include a variety of perspectives and experiences, participants were chosen across a variety of academic disciplines.

Convenience sampling was used because of convenience and time constraints. The participants were chosen when they were available and were willing to participate in the study. While the results from convenience sampling might not be generalizable, it would be acceptable for qualitative research that seeks rich and detailed insights rather than exact statistical results.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. This approach was selected

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because it allows flexibility whilst maintaining focus on the important topics for all participants. Semi-structured interviews can also be used to allow participants to share their ideas freely and facilitate the research to ask probing questions when clarification is desired.

There were five open-ended questions each that centered on the concept of feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles, gender discrimination and social change, forming the interview schedule. The questions were framed so that the participants are invited to express their own views, experiences and/or perceptions about current gender issues. Interviews were held one-on-one, in a comfortable setting, to encourage honesty and openness in discussion. Before engaging in the study all participants were told about their aims and received their consent.

Data Analysis

Collected data were then transcribed and analyzed employing thematic analysis and pragmatic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to discover common themes, patterns and perspectives from participants' responses. The interview transcripts were read repetitively, coded and later categorized under themes based on the discourse on gender. Moreover, the Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) were adopted to examine the linguistic methods used by the participants. Linguistic elements like hedging, indirectness, modality, mitigation, evaluative language, and solidarity expressions were explicated. These features were broken down and coded into politeness styles: SP (pronunciation of positive politeness) SP (pronunciation of negative politeness), OPS (use of off-record politeness strategy) and BOP (pronunciation of bald-on-record politeness strategy). This analysis allowed the researcher to investigate the way the participants dealt with the concerns of the face and the sensitive discussion of gender related topics.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were adhered to in the conduct of the research. For participants, goals of the experiment and their voluntary participation were explained. Prior to the interview WS' information consent was provided and participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential and anonymous.

Participants' personal details have been anonymized from the analysis and final report. Participants were also informed that they are free to drop out of the study at any point of time without any consequences that could harm themselves. The data gathered has been used only for academic reasons.

The study has some limitations.

In spite of its value in determining the politeness strategies used in gender related communication, the following are certain limitations in the study. The study was conducted with only a small number of university students (15) and the results may not be representative of the opinion of all university students. In addition, the findings may be limited for generalizations to others, due to the use of convenience sampling. In addition, the responses may have been somewhat tempered by the sensitive nature of the subjects discussed with the participants. Despite this, the study merits a useful and helpful analysis of the use of politeness strategies about issues concerning feminists, gender equality, gender roles and gender discrimination discussed by university students.

Analysis and Discussion

Based on the findings of this research, university student shows diverse politeness strategies in discussing sensitive topics of gender issues in relation with feminist,

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equality of genders, traditional gender roles, traditional gender perspectives, and the issue of gender discrimination. The participants agreed that although gender equality has improved, there is still gender inequality in society. In many cases, participants hedged with expressions like 'to some extent', 'maybe', and 'perhaps' while expressing their opinion. Such linguistic markers are negative politeness markers as they make the statement less assertive and do not exclude alternatives from being considered. This seems to indicate that when participants were asked about gender-related items they were ambivalent about their comments and wanted to withhold their opinion from others. This discovery confirms the points made by Brown and Levinson (1987) about the importance of respecting the autonomy of the listener and reducing the FTA, which is consistent with the theory of negative politeness. It is also consistent with Yule's (2020) observation that indirectness in the communication of sensitive and/or potentially controversial ideas is frequently used by speakers.

The same trend was observed with reference to traditional gender roles. Instead of directly challenging cultural expectations, norms, or beliefs, the participants often expressed these ideas in subtle ways with qualifiers like "society expects," "people generally believe," or "this has always been the norm". These are off-record politeness expressions as they give room for the speaker to mean to voice criticism without being confrontational. Participants avoided expressing opinions as a personal judgment by considering it as referring to society. Overall, the results reveal that face concerns are strategically managed in speaking about culturally salient topics and are congruent with Brown and Levinson's ideas (1987) that when discussing culturally sensitive topics, speakers are able to express messages while keeping social harmony intact.

Most of the participants applied positive politeness strategies in their discussion of feminism, highlighting the notions of equality, fairness, respect, and common rights as human. The themes of 'equal opportunities' and 'equal treatment for men/women' appeared frequently over the interviews. The answers here are an attempt to achieve a sense of solidarity and commonality with listeners. Positive politeness facilitates the reduction of interpersonal distance and enhances cooperation by keeping the emphasis on common values, not on differences. This strategy seemed to be a tactic most often used to see feminism largely as an issue of equality and social justice, not conflict. This is aligned with what Cutting (2008) has said politeness is also important to cohesion of positive social relationships and good communication.

Participants commented with special care on remarks concerning the issue of gender discrimination. While many contributors cited personal instances or incidents, they didn't usually name individuals or institutions or groups. Rather, they used general language like "some people," "in some situations," and "in many places." The language options adopted are indicative of negative politeness and off-record strategies, which aim to maintain the harmony of the conversation while talking about discrimination. The results indicate that gender discrimination is an extremely sensitive subject; it needs linguistic negotiation. There were indications that participants understood the social consequences of a direct accusation, and wanted less confrontational, indirect modes of expression!

What was interesting, however, was that participants became more "direct" in their talk when it came to the possible solutions to gender-related issues. These include using words like "equal opportunities should be provided," "gender discrimination must be reduced" or "the mindset of society needs to change." Bald-on-record communication is known as a communication strategy that has a primary focus on clarity and directness,

rather than on face-saving. This technique implies that for the participants, social change was a significant topic where clarity and decisiveness in communicating was important. They seemed to be wary in articulating problems but seemed more confident and assertive in presenting solutions. The results confirm that there are no arbitrary use of politeness strategies, but rather careful selection of these strategies in accordance with the context, the topic sensitivity and communicative purpose. Negative politeness was the strategy most common overall; positive politeness was also relatively common, and there were significant occurrences of off-record styles in the responses of the participants to cultural norms and discrimination. Bald-on-record strategies mostly emerged during attempts to promote social reforms. The results align with the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) and add to Yule (2020) and Cutting (2008) who argued that politeness and indirectness are important to maintain social relations and manage sensitive conversations. The study thus emphasizes the nature of close relation between language, ideology and social interaction, revealing the manner and ways in which the university students perform when negotiating gender related issues in this modern society by utilizing politeness strategies.

Findings

The results of the current study indicate that in general, the university students agree that gender inequality is a persistent social problem even though they do not deny that education, awareness and opportunities for men and women improved. Responses reflected a diverse attitude towards the levels, and factors, of gender inequality, but the majority noted that traditional gender roles still play a role in shaping social norms, individual actions, and decision-making within society. In addition, and in general, attitudes towards the principles of feminism were constructed by most having a sentiment of equality and fairness, not one of gender superiority, and as a movement of equal opportunities.

Analysis of the responses of the participants revealed that politeness strategies were an important factor in influencing discussions on gender aspects. Negative Politeness was the most common strategy; expressions used to hedge or carefully convey opinion included “I think”, “perhaps” or “to some extent” suggesting that participants were generally careful to not impose opinions on others. Occurrence of positive politeness was also frequently noted, especially when the participants highlighted shared values like equality, respect and fairness. The use of these strategies built a sense of unity and united action in considering potentially sensitive issues.

The results also show that the strategies used to avoid the main issues on points were often used by the participants during the conversation about gender roles and traditional gender practices and experiences of gender discrimination. By using indirect expressions or general reference, it enabled people to express their sensitive opinions without the danger of conflict and offense. In contrast, bald-on-record strategies were found to be somewhat more common when participants offered proposals for the solution of gender related problems or for a transformation of society. With the subjects being raised, participants used more direct and assertive expressions to bring equality and reform to the fore.

In conclusion, the results show that university students use various politeness strategies appropriately based on the sensitivity of the subject matter, communicative purposes and social context in which the conversation takes place. This suggests that the participants' concern for maintaining interpersonal harmony was reflected in the

predominance of negative politeness, followed by positive politeness, in their expressions of opinion on the issue of feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles and gender discrimination. The results of the study corroborate Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as seen in the use of linguists' strategies to deal properly with threat to the speaker's face in gender related communication.

Conclusion

This study examined the use of politeness strategies by university students while talking about the issue of gender among different aspects of feminism, gender equality, traditional gender roles and gender discrimination. The study was based on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and looked into the strategies participants used to handle face threatening acts and to make statements regarding opinions on socially sensitive, ideologically charged topics. The study aimed at using qualitative approach based on the semi-structured interviews to investigate the discourse-gender description of the relationship between language, politeness, and gender among university students. The study was designed to investigate the relationship between language, politeness, and gender in the students of university using a qualitative analysis of the responses obtained in semi-structured interviews.

Results showed that the participants were generally aware of the presence of gender disparity as a prevailing social problem even though there were divergent views about the reasons behind the existence of gender disparity and extent of the disparity. Gender roles were still regarded as important, describing the expectations and actions of men and women, and feminism was mostly seen as a fair play, Equal rights and Equal opportunities movement. The analysis also revealed that participants were sensitive toward the topic of which they spoke by reformulating their language. Negative politeness emerged as the most frequently adopted strategy and used by participants to suggest opinions very cautiously and not imposing their opinions on other participants. Positive politeness was mostly adopted in terms of equality and shared values while off-record strategies were employed in context of critical discussion of social norms and experiences of discrimination. Bald-on-record strategies were more concentrated when solutions or social change were suggested by the participant(s).

The presence of these findings confirms the theory put forward by Brown and Levinson (1987) which stated that interactants strategically work out face problems (FPs) in communication. Findings of the study show the act of politeness is not only a linguistic manifestation, but also a social mechanism which facilitates people to engage in disagreement effectively in a way they are able to keep their interpersonal relationships and communicate their sensitive ideas. The findings are also consistent with those of Yule (2020) and Cutting (2008) who highlight the context, indirectness and politeness of successful communication. Hedging, indirect utterances and solidarity-building utterances are general features of the participants that had already been found in earlier research as products of social expectations and in order to ensure harmony within the interaction.

The study also offers a pragmatics perspective and a sociolinguistic perspective of university students' linguistic negotiation in the issue of gender related discussions. It fills a gap in current literature regarding politeness strategies in gendered discourse by specifically focusing on the role of politeness strategies in academic settings with young adults. The results indicate that the interplay between ideas of feminism, gender

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equality and gender discrimination is not only influenced by personal beliefs and social values, but also by individuals' linguistic techniques in interpersonal interaction.

Although the study has a contribution, it has some limitations. The difficulties with this study are that only a small number of fifteen university students was studied, and the study results cannot be extrapolated to the wider university student population. Further, convenience sampling also might limit the diversity of views among university students. Future studies could involve more participants, other cultural and educational backgrounds or a comparison of the strategies of politeness between genders, age groups and different social settings. Gender-related discourse in online communication, in social media or in professional contexts may also be another option for further studies to present a more comprehensive view of politeness in current interactions.

Finally, this study shows that the role played by politeness strategies is very significant in condemning the issue related to gender in the discussion in the university student field. The results show that besides functioning as a vehicle for expressing opinions, language has other functions such as the regulation of social relationships, intra-ideological negotiation and interpersonal harmony. The study highlights the strong linkage between language, culture, ideology and social communication as students demonstrate certain strategies that they use to engage in polite interaction to discuss sensitive issues. Its overall contribution is to emphasize the value of politeness as an integral part of human communication and help to deepen the discursive knowledge in modern discourse on gender.

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