

Language-Gender Interface: A Study of Politeness Strategies Applied by Kashmiri Speakers.

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Abstract

Different languages differ in expressing politeness either by employing various politeness strategies in order to mitigate face threatening acts or manifesting the language in such a way that its lexicon and morphology itself expresses politeness in its structure. The present paper attempts to establish the politeness expressions employed by Kashmiri speakers in their speech.

Key Words: Gender, Politeness, Pronominal, Honorific, Speech, Verb, Impolite.

Introduction

The study of language and gender interface is an interdisciplinary endeavor shared by scholars in linguistics, anthropology, social psychology, education, literature, and other disciplines. Many researchers have been concerned primarily with documenting gender related patterns of language use, but the field has also included many issues for which the language is a lens through which to view social and political aspects of gender relations.

Politeness forms an important aspect of human communication. Politeness can be regarded as the practical application of good manners. It is a culturally defined phenomenon; therefore, what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be rude or unconventional in another culture. But the overall objective is to make the interacting parties comfortable with each other. Politeness expressions are the devices or the skills in the speech of an individual which help to protect and maintain the face of the interlocutor, and help in avoiding the face threatening acts in order to make both the parties, i.e., speaker as well as hearer, comfortable and relaxed in the process of communication. Different languages differ in expressing politeness, either employing positive and negative face needs to mitigate face threatening acts or manifesting the language in such a way that its lexicon and morphology itself expresses politeness in its structure.

The paper, therefore, is an attempt towards the establishment of various politeness strategies found in Kashmiri speaking males and females.

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Language Gender Studies: A Brief Review

The year 1975 was key in launching the field of language and gender. That year saw the publication of three books that proved pivotal: Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*, Mary Ritchie Key's *Male/Female Language*, and Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley's edited volume *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. These pioneering works emerged during the feminist movement of the 1970s, as scholars began to question both the identification of male norms as human norms, and the biological determination of women's and men's behavior. Early language and gender research tended to focus on (1) documenting empirical differences between women's and men's speech, especially in cross-sex interaction; (2) describing women's speech in particular; and, for many, (3) identifying the role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality between women and men.

Lakoff's observations provided a starting point from which to explore the complexity of the relationship between gender and discourse. In one frequently cited follow up study, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) examined features of 'women's language' in courtroom discourse and found that the features Lakoff identified were related to the status (social class, occupation, and experience as a witness) rather than the sex of the speaker. They suggested that women use this style more than men in everyday interaction because they are more likely to be in lower-status positions. Later studies, however, showed that this is not necessarily the case. Cameron et al. (1989), finding that speakers who took up the role of conversational facilitators tended to use more tag questions, posited that women were more likely to do so because they were more likely to assume this role. Similarly, Preisler (1986) examined problem-solving situations in an industrial community, and found that managers who contributed most actively to the accomplishment of a task also used more linguistic 'tentativeness features', and these managers were usually women.

Innumerable studies inspired by Lakoff either confirmed her observations or found exceptions in particular contexts. Nonetheless, as Bucholtz and Hall (1995: 6) note, Lakoff's description of gender-related language "continues to be accepted by diverse groups of speakers as a valid representation of their own discursive experiences". Although her account of 'women's language' does not represent the way each individual woman speaks, it nonetheless represents the norms by which women are expected to speak, or what Bucholtz and Hall call 'the precise hegemonic notions of gender-appropriate language use'. Thus, Lakoff remains an invaluable tool for current studies of gender and discourse.

Methodology

The data used for the present study was elicited through questionnaires, participant observation, interviews and discussions with the informants. Besides, being the native speakers of Kashmiri, the researchers' knowledge was also utilized. Interviews, observations and personal meeting of the researcher with people belonging to different socio-cultural background contributed a lot in the collection of data.

Politeness Strategies in Kashmiri

Politeness expressions form one of the important speech practices of Kashmiri speakers belonging to both the genders. Deference, respect and the recognition of the social status of the speaker and the hearer are the basic elements in Kashmiri to express politeness. The collected data for the present study reveals that use of this speech practice varies among Kashmiri speaking males and females.

Among Kashmiri speaking males and females, politeness is expressed in the following ways:

- Usage of polite pronominal form.
- Usage of honorific markers.
- Usage of special verb forms in the speech.

Usage of Polite Pronominal Form

The second person pronominal forms '*tsi*' and '*toh*' are used for addressing second persons in Kashmiri. '*toh*' is the polite pronominal form of address. It is used to show respect and is most commonly used in the formal contexts. '*toh*' is the polite form of the pronominal '*tsi*' which is mostly used in the informal contexts. Polite pronominal form '*toh*' is always used with the 'second person plural familiar' as well as 'second person plural respectful', while as the degree of politeness is reflected when dealing with 'second person singular familiar' and 'second person singular respectful'. Generally, the usage of '*toh*' and '*tsi*' to address second person/persons is found in the following way:

SECOND-PERSON SINGULAR FAMILIAR	SECOND-PERSON SINGULAR RESPECTFUL	SECOND-PERSON PLURAL FAMILIAR	SECOND-PERSON PLURAL RESPECTFUL
' <i>tsi</i> '	' <i>toh</i> '	' <i>toh</i> '	' <i>toh</i> '

Second person pronominal usage

Generally, Kashmiri speaking males and females use '*toh*' as a polite pronominal form to address people who are elder in age to them. Both Kashmiri speaking males and females usually use '*toh*' to address opposite genders of the same age group, but the practice is more frequent among elder and intermediate generations and less frequent among the young generation males and females of the same age group. The pronominal form '*tsi*' is used as an addressing pronominal between the same genders of the same age group in an informal social setting. Elders usually address young males and females by the form '*tsi*', while as, the former sometimes use the polite pronominal form '*toh*' to address the latter because of his/her profession, educational background and social status.

For example:

FORMAL & POLITE FORM (FOR SINGULAR/PLURAL 2 ND PERSON)	INFORMAL & IMPOLITE FORM (FOR SINGULAR 2 ND PERSON)	ENGLISH MEANING
<i>'tohi kot gatshun?'</i>	<i>'tse kot gatshun?'</i>	Where you have to go?
<i>'toh' k'a: kara:n?'</i>	<i>'tsi k'a: kara:n?'</i>	What are you doing?
<i>'toh' kar a:yvi?'</i>	<i>'tsi kar a:kh?'</i>	When did you come?
<i>'toh' vana:n poz'</i>	<i>'tsi vana:n poz'</i>	You are saying the truth.
<i>'tohi ma: pata:?'</i>	<i>'tse ma: pata:?'</i>	Do you know?

Second person pronominal usage-formal & informal forms

While referring to the 'third person, the pronominal 'tsi' gets replaced by 'yi' for proximate male as well as female, and to 'su' (for male) and 'so' (for female) for remote – out of sight and to 'hu' (for male) and 'ho' (for female) for remote – within sight. And the pronominal 'toh' gets replaced by 'yim' for proximate male/males as well as female/females and to 'tim' for remote – out of sight male/males as well as female/females and 'hum' for remote – within sight male/males as well as female/females.

For example:

- *'su k'a: o:s vana:n?'*
'What was he saying?'
(Third-person singular familiar male.)
- *'so k'a: ə:s vana:n?'*
'What was she saying?'
(Third-person singular familiar female.)
- *'tim k'a: ə:s vana:n?'*
'What was he/she saying?'
(Third-person singular respectful.)
- *'tim k'a: ə:s vana:n?'*
'What were they saying?'
(Third-person plural familiar/respectful.)

The overall usage of pronominal forms among Kashmiri speaking males and females is almost the same.

Usage of Honorific Markers:

In order to increase the degree of deference and respect and to make the speech more polite, the honorific markers 'həz' and 'mahra:' are added. 'həz' is used in

the speech when dealing with the speakers of Muslim community, and 'mahra:' is used when dealing with the speakers of Hindu community.

For example:

FORMAL POLITE FORM	INFORMAL / IMPOLITE FORM	ENGLISH MEANING
'təh'i kot həz gatshun?'	'tse kot gatshun?'	Where you have to go?
'toh' k'a həz kara:n?'	'tsi k'a: kara:n?'	What are you doing?
'toh' čhiv mahra: poz vana:n'	'tsi čhukh poz vana:n'	You are saying right.
'təh'i ma həz pata: kot čhu gatshun?'	'tse ma pata:, kot čhu gatshun?'	Do you know where to go?
'toh' mahra: kəriv pa:nay'	'tsi kar pa:nay'	You do it yourself.
'toh' mahra: k'a: kara:n?'	'tsi k'a: kara:n?'	What are you doing?
'təh'i həz čhav sə:riy patah'	'tse čhav sə:riy patah'	You know everything.
'təh'i mahra: čhav pay?'	'tse čhav pay?'	Do you know?

Honorific marker usage

The usage of honorific markers 'həz' and 'mahra:' are found in the speech of both Kashmiri speaking males as well as females. The usage of honorific marker 'həz' is more frequent in the speech of Kashmiri speaking females of Muslim community when addressing Kashmiri speaking males and females of elder age group, while as, the usage of 'həz' by Kashmiri speaking males of Muslim community is less frequent as compared to females. The usage of honorific marker 'mahra:' is more frequent in the speech of Kashmiri speaking males belonging to both Muslim as well as Hindu community than females when dealing with Kashmiri speaking males and females of elder age group of Hindu community.

Moreover, the honorific terms like 'jina:b' and 'sar' are also used to show respect to the person in the process of communication.

For example:

- 'he: jina:b k'a: čhiv dapa:n?'
What are you saying sir?
- 'sar, pəktiv həz me si:th.'
Sir, come with me.

Usage of Special Verb Form in the Speech:

Besides using polite pronominal and honorific markers, the speech of a Kashmiri speaker is made more polite by the usage of special form of verb. The main verbs in Kashmiri takes the special form to express politeness when the suffix '-iv' is added to them. The addition of '-iv' to the main form of the verb makes the discourse more polite.

Main verb + '-iv' = Polite verb form

For example:

- 'beh' + '-iv' = 'bihiv'
'Sit + Suffix = Sit (Hon.)'
- 'khe' + '-iv' = 'kheyiv'
'Eat + Suffix = Eat (Hon.)'
- 'ne:r' + '-iv' = 'ni:riv'
'Go + Suffix = Go (Hon.)'
- 'vath' + '-iv' = 'vathiv'
'Get up + Suffix = Get up (Hon.)'
- 'pakh' + '-iv' = 'pəktiv'
'Walk + Suffix = Walk (Hon.)'
- 'do:r' + '-iv' = 'du:riv'
'Run + Suffix = Run (Hon.)'
- 'van' + '-iv' = 'vaniv'
'Speak + Suffix = Speak (Hon.)'
- 'če' + '-iv' = 'čeyiv'
'Drink + Suffix = Drink (Hon.)' etc.

SPECIAL FORM	VERB	IMPOLITE EXPRESSIONS	INFORMAL	ENGLISH MEANING
	'behiv pathar'		'beh pathar'	Sit down
	'kheyiv bati'		'khe bati'	Eat food
	'ni:riv teli'		'ne:r teli'	Go
	'vathiv ho:kun'		'vath ho:kun'	Go to that place
	'pəktiv human si:th'		'pakh human si:th'	Walk with them
	'du:riv te:z te:z'		'do:r te:z te:z'	Run fast
	'vaniv timan'		'van timan'	Tell them
	'čeyiv ča:y'		'če ča:y'	Drink tea

Special verb form usage

The usage of special verb is found in the speech of both Kashmiri speaking males as well as females. But the usage is more frequent among females than males. These polite expressions are usually found in the speech of younger persons when conversing with their elders and other respectful people. Opposite genders with same age group also exchange these expressions in conversation to show respect. These expressions are also used by older Kashmiri speaking males and females while conversing with younger people of high social status, education background and profession.

Politeness expressions are found in the speech of both Kashmiri speaking males as well females. Politeness expressions are used to show respect and deference to the hearer and to receive the same in return as well. In Kashmiri language, the degree of politeness in the speech of its speaker is defined in terms of the usage of polite pronominal, honorific markers and special verb forms. Using any one of these in the speech shows politeness, and the degree of politeness increases as the other two are also employed in the speech. For example:

- *'toh' k'a: kara:n?'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form)

- *'toh' k'a: hāz kara:n?'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker)

- *'toh' k'a: hāz čhiv kara:n?'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker + special verb form)

[What are you doing?]

- *'kheyiv bati'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form)

- *'kheyiv hāz bati'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker)

- *'toh' kheyiv hāz bati'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker + special verb form)

[Eat food.]

- *'kəriv panin' ki:m'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form)

- *'kəriv hāz panin' ki:m'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker)

- *'toh' kəriv hāz panin' ki:m'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker + special verb form)

[Do your work.]

- *'bihiv pathar'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form)

- *'bihiv hāz pathar'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker)

- *'bihiv hāz toh' pathar'*

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker + special verb form)

[Sit down.]

- 'vaniv yiman'

(Usage of polite pronominal form)

'veniv hāz yiman'

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker)

'vaniv hāz toh' yiman'

(Usage of polite pronominal form + honorific marker + special verb form)

[Tell them]

Taking the politeness expressions of Kashmiri speaking males and females into consideration, the polite expressions are manifested in the speech of the same and opposite genders in the following ways:

TYPE	MALE TO MALE	MALE TO FEMALE	FEMALE TO FEMALE	FEMALE TO MALE	ENGLISH MEANING
2 nd person singular familiar	'tsi k'o: kara:n?'	'tsi ke: kara:n?' / 'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	'tsi ke: kara:n?'	'tsi k'o: kara:n?' / 'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	What are you doing?
2 nd person singular respectful	'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	'toh' k'a: kara:n?'	What are you doing?
2 nd person singular + non-honorific	'kotu gatsak?'	'kote gatsak?'	'kote gatsak?'	'kotu gatsak?'	Where will you go?
2 nd person singular + honorific	'mahra: kot gatshak?' / 'kot hāz gatshak?'	'mahra: kot gatshak?' / 'kot hāz gatshak?'	'mahra: kot gatshak?' / 'kot hāz gatshak?'	'mahra: kot gatshak?' / 'kot hāz gatshak?'	Where will you go?
2 nd person singular + honorific + special verb	'kəriv panin' ki:m' / 'mahra: kəriv panin' ki:m'	'kəriv hāz panin' ki:m' / 'mahra: kəriv panin' ki:m'	'kərin panin' ki:m'	toh' kəriv hāz panin' ki:m' / 'mahra: kəriv panin' ki:m'	Do your work.

Politeness expressions usage between same and opposite genders

Conclusion

Politeness is the practical application of etiquette. Politeness expressions are culture specific. In most of the cultures, politeness expressions are expressed through positive and negative face-needs. While as, in other cultures politeness expressions are expressed through the language's special lexicon and morphology, where the verbs in the speech gets converted to special forms in order to reflect the politeness in the language. The Kashmiri language also manifests the second form to reflect politeness in the speech of its speakers.

The pronominal forms used to express politeness while dealing with the second person/persons are 'toh' and its colloquial form is 'si'. Similarly, 'yim' and 'tim' are the polite pronominal forms used for third person in vicinity and out of vicinity respectively and its colloquial form is 'su' (used for males) and 'so' (used for females). Moreover, the Kashmiri speakers express politeness by adding the suffix '-iv' to the main verb, thus, making it special polite form.

Main verb + '-iv' = Polite verb form.

Besides, the polite pronominal forms and special verbs, politeness is also expressed in the speech of Kashmiri speaking males and females by the use of honorific markers, i.e. 'haz', 'mahra:', 'jina:b' and 'sar'.

Thus, Kashmiri speakers, both males and females, employ two ways to show politeness in their language, i.e., in its lexicon and in its morphology. Kashmiri speaking females are found more polite in their speech than Kashmiri speaking males, based on the more usage of polite verbal forms, polite pronominal forms and the polite honorific markers than males.

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