



RESEARCH PAPER

**Gendered-based Analysis of Politeness Strategies employed in
Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House"**

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ABSTRACT

Gender differences in using language have been examined for hundreds of years. The study of politeness strategies has much significance in this regard since it clearly reveals the interdependence of gender and language. This paper attempts to examine discrepancies between men and women in a male dominated society by employing Brown and Levinson's strategies of politeness. The methodology adopted in this study is discourse investigation of Ibsen's "A Doll's House". Brown & Levinson's model of politeness has been implemented as a tool for the analysis of the utterances of the characters, determining variations between males and females in the use of politeness strategies. The results expose that women are socially restricted to use positive politeness strategies to pay regards towards man's public face and to show their subordination while men freely apply bald on record, a dominating politeness strategy to impose their superiority over women. Moreover, it shows that there are changes in use of women language with the advancement of their social status in which they become more and more self-assertive and independent. Findings will contribute in better understanding of the phenomenon of politeness and its implication on men and women conversational styles.

Introduction

Literature is true reflection of life and the social conditions of a society. Victorian age was the age of patriarchy and male supremacy in which women were marginalized and restricted to domestic sphere of life. Women's rebellion against such unfair system and fight for their rights were great social issues of that

time which were reflected by the writers through their writings. Henrik Ibsen as a father of modern drama highlighted social problems of his age in his literary works *Ghosts*, *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*. His famous drama "A Doll's House" is selected for the present study which is the story of a courageous woman Nora who makes sacrifices for her husband and children. Under masculine power of her husband Torvald who treats her like a doll, she is deprived of her own identity and dignity. Torvald as a product of patriarchal social system desires and demonstrates his ideological power both at home and in society. For the preservation and propagation of his power he establishes rules for his wife to obey. In a society where males are dominated language of the society is a tool in the hands of the dominating gender, and is utilized fully to give an impression of dominator and dominated; possessor and possessed, controller and compliant (*The Use of Symbolic Language in Ibsen's A Doll's House*, 626). In whole play Torvald exploits animal terms i.e. squirrel, skylark and singing bird to address Nora which reflects gender biased and prejudiced social attitude of treating women as inferior ones.

Literature Review

Politeness is a linguistic tactic employed by speaker to pay regard towards hearer's face while interaction. Hill (1986) explains politeness as "one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish mutual rapport and affinity" (Watts, 2003; p.51). The phenomenon of Linguistic politeness became more prominent by Lakoff's studies in 1970 and Brown & Levinson's in 1980. Linguistic Politeness is "an abstract term referring to a wide variety of social approaches for constructing and reproducing mutual social communication across cultures" (Watts 2003, p. 47). The study of politeness strategies has become a crucial area of inquiry in Linguistics which reveals relationship between language and gender. For Segal "gender is taken to refer to a culturally based complex norms, values and behaviors that a particular culture assigns to one biological sex or another" (2004, p.3). Lakoff (1975) analyzed gender linguistic differences and identified women's speech more polite than men's. "Women's conversational style is exemplified with the application of "hedges, tentativeness, tags which show implicitness, mitigation and vacillation "and male speech is characterized as "direct, forceful, and confident using features such as direct, unmitigated statements and interpretation "(Mills, p.165 Brown and Levinson's model of politeness has gained much prominence in the study of polite behaviors of males and females. This model of politeness is based on Goffman's idea of 'Face'. Face is "the positive societal value a person argues for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Mills, 2003, p.213). Face is further divided into two categories i.e. positive and negative face. Positive face is "the Positive and consistent image people have of themselves and their desires for approval" whereas negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal pressure and rights to non-distraction" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.66). In

daily communication people perform such linguistic actions which put threat for others' faces. These linguistic actions are referred as face threatening acts (FTA).

Brown and Levinson (1987) anticipated four FATs which are given below:

1. Advising, ordering and warning are such linguistic actions which threaten the audience's negative's faces;
 2. Complaining and criticizing threaten the audience's positive face;
 3. Accepting, Apologizing and complementing are threatening for speaker's positive face;
 4. Accepting thanks and promising threaten speaker's negative face.
- (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.74)

To reduce these FTAs Brown and Levinson introduced following four strategies of politeness:

1) Bald on record: In this strategy the FTA is carried out "in most straight, clear and brief way. (Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 69). It is a dominant and imperative way of speech preferably used by males while interaction. It threatens hearer's face wants.

2) Positive Politeness: Brown illustrated it as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others", or alternately, "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality'...claimed by interactants" including "the want that this self-image be appreciated and accepted of" (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Considering the hearer's face wants, use of plural personal pronouns and showing desire of connectivity are sub-strategies of this main strategy.

3) Negative politeness: Negative politeness is avoidance-based approach which is characterized by: "Self-effacement, formality and restraint, with attention to very restricted aspects of H's self-image, centering on his want to be unimpeded (Brown and Levinson, 1987). It is indirect and reverent way of speech which is recognized in communication through the use of question hedges.

4) Off-record: Off- record is referred as "there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent" (Brown and Levinson, 1987; p. 5)

Graddol and Swann state that "a language has an existence outside of ourselves" (1989:5).

Moreover, some linguists believe that linguistic differences existing between men and women are not due to gender but social environment. To Brown (1980) "by linking behavior to social structure we are enabled to ask the question why women talk the way they do in the society and what social structure, pressure and constraints are modeling behavior". According to Lakoff (1973), "there is a discrepancy between English as used by men and by women; and that the social

discrepancy in the positions of men and women in our society is reflected in linguistic disparities" (p. 76). Besides, language behaviors reflect power of men and weakness of women.

Many Research studies show that Women prefer polite expressions while interaction since they are culturally "relegated to a secondary status relative to men and a higher level of politeness is expected from inferiors to superiors" (Brown, 1980; p.2). For Holmes (1995), "Women are much more likely than men to express positive politeness or friendliness in the way they use language (p.6)." It is socialization which train women to use such politeness strategies which focus on intimacy, connectivity and their subordination in society. On the other hand, men's prefer negative politeness "which promote status, independence, competition, and so forth (Scollon and Scollon, 239). The issue of gender linguistic differences has been studied for number of years. However, in 1960 feminist movements recognized language as a tool of women's oppression by males. It mirrored patriarchal system and accentuated male dominance over women in Victorian era. The Feminist works of 1960 tried to demonstrate and minimize the differences between women and men resulted by artificial behavioral gender stereotypes. Previous research studies mostly covered feminist issues of male dominance; women subjugation and women struggle for freedom in patriarchal society. How such patriarchal social system affect the linguistic behaviors of men and women. This research is a minimum effort in such regard which attempts to explore these gender differences of language with the reference of use of strategies of politeness and observes the changes with the passage of time. Moreover, it also provides explanations of these differences and changes.

Material and Methods

This research is accomplished by means of qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative research is concerned with the description of a social phenomenon so this research entitled as "A Gendered-based study of Politeness strategies of "A Doll's House" seeks to explore gender nature of politeness. Several methods can be applied while conducting a qualitative research such as case study, content analysis and conversational analysis. Researcher has utilized conversational analysis approach in this study. Discourse analysis involves analysis of language in a particular socio-cultural context (Willig, 2008). To reach out the conclusion, characters' utterances are analyzed by applying Brown and Levinson's model of politeness. After analyzing the characters' utterances researcher has categorized them into four strategies of politeness suggested by Brown and Levinson. Moreover, possible explanation for the use of these politeness strategies is also part of research. Since this research focuses on the analysis of politeness strategies employed by men and women so discourse analysis was regarded as most suitable approach for this research.

Results and Discussion

The issue of gender diversity in use of language has been studied for so many years. In start these differences between men and women' speech were limited only to morphological and grammatical qualities. In 1970 the scope of sociolinguistics was broadened with the introduction of 'gendered politeness by Lakoff. An important factor regarding gendered nature of politeness is of power. Power relations give birth to gender discrimination which subordinates women socially, economically and linguistically as well. Dolinina and Cechetto (1998) affirm that politeness strategies create hierarchical relations of impartiality and superiority- subordination between conversational participants. Men utilize independence strategies promoting status, freedom and competition while women favor positive politeness strategy reflecting intimacy, connectivity, cooperation and problem sharing. Why men and women prefer different strategies of politeness? Answer is socialization. Like other fields of life socialization encourages men to dominate women in mixed-gendered discourse while, women are socially trained to be deferential and submissive in their conversational styles. In what follows, the central objective of this research is to evaluate gendered nature of politeness with reference to use of strategies of politeness by Torvald and Nora in "A Doll House". Moreover, it also exposes that how subordination manifested in women's politeness strategies damages their possibility for equality in communication. Brown&Levinson's universally recognized theoretical framework is applied as a tool for profound analysis of text.

Table 1

Character	Sentences	Sub-strategy	Main Strategy
Helmer	Is that my little lark twittering out there?	Ask for agreement	Positive politeness
Nora	Yes, it is!	Show agreement	Positive politeness
Nora	Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.	Make offer	Positive Politeness
Torvald	Don't disturb me.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record
Nora	We can borrow till then.	Use of plural personal pronoun	Positive Politeness
Torvald	The same little featherhead!	Direct/ FTA	Bald-on-record
Torvald	No debt, no borrowing.	Warning	Bald-on-record
Torvald	There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt.	Give advice	Negative Politeness
Nora	As you please, Torvald.	Interest in Hearer's wants	Positive Politeness

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.1- Appendix A)

Analysis and Discussion

Like other social etiquettes linguistic behaviors are also socially determined according to the traditions and norms of a society. Since Victorian age was age of male supremacy so males occupied all spheres of life without any distinction. To be socially superiors and powerful ones, they considered it their privilege to dominate women. Torvald's governing linguistic behavior towards Nora is patent evidence of this view. In above illustrations, he identifies Nora with different animal terms such as lark and featherhead which are threatening for Nora's public self-image. His consistent use of animal terms for Nora exhibit social view of treating women as inferior ones. With the reference of using politeness strategies he prefers direct, Bald-on record strategy without considering Nora's face's wants. Moreover, he delivers a lecture to Nora about borrowing which is threatening for her negative face. In a patriarchal society, women are socially trained to be obedient and submissive towards men. Therefore, in response to Torvald's authoritative conversational style Nora adopts polite and reverential linguistic strategies to show her agreement. She employs positive politeness strategy in her conversation to regard his husband's needs and interests. Brown and Levinson state that this strategy indicates speaker's desire of intimacy and connectivity. Nora's use of group marker 'we' manifests her desire to be connected with her husband. A clear glimpse of deference for Torvald and his view is visible from her last remark "As you please, Torvald.

Table 2

Character	Sentences	Sub-strategy	Main Strategy
Helmer	You cannot save anything.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Nora	You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.	Plural personal pronoun	Positive Politeness
Helmer	You are an odd little soul.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Helmer	Very like your father.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Helmer	You always some new way of wheedling money out of me, it seems to melt in your hands.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Helmer	It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Nora	I should not think of going against your wishes.	Interest in hearer	Positive Politeness
Helmer	You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing.	Direct	Bald-on-Record
Nora	Yes, it is really wonderful.	Show agreement	Positive Politeness

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.4- Appendix B)

Analysis and Discussion

Torvald occupying high social position in society controls both public and domestic affairs as well. He makes use of direct expressions to suppress and subordinate Nora in communication. He scorns Nora for spending too much money in very straightforward way. He is courageous and confident enough in challenging Nora's family background without any sense of shame. His derogatory remarks about Nora's father threaten her self-esteem. Brown and Levinson contend that positive politeness strategy tries to regard hearer's interests. Nora employs this strategy to consider Torvald's face wants.

In Victorian era women roles were restricted to domestic sphere as wife and mother. Their main responsibility was to attend her husband and children. Torvald utilizes imposing conversational style to realize Nora that her main duty is to please all. She acknowledges Torvald's directions by employing positive politeness strategy in her last utterances "Yes, it is really wonderful".

Table 3

Character	Sentences	Sub-Strategy	Main Strategy
Nora	If you hadn't been so busy I should have asked you a tremendously big favour, Torvald.	Indirect	Negative politeness
Helmer	Tell me.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Nora	There is no one such good taste as you.	Exaggerate/ compliment	Positive politeness
Nora	Torvald, couldn't you take me in hand and decide what shall I go as, and what sort of dress I shall wear?	Indirect	Negative politeness
Nora	I can't get along a bit without your help.	Interest in hearer's wants	Positive politeness
Helmer	We shall manage to hit upon something.	Plural personal pronoun/Include both a speaker and a hearer in the activity	Positive politeness
Nora	That is nice of you.	Appreciation	Positive politeness

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.39- Appendix C)

Analysis and Discussion

Lakoff states that those women generally speak even formally and politely, as women are socially demoted to lower status as compared to men. Therefore, higher level of politeness is anticipated from lower to higher. Besides, she believes

that women are assumed to be more reserved and indirect in their expressions (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 158). Nora's indirect approach in seeking favor from Torvald is indication of females' polite ways of expression and their avoidance from face threatening acts. There is no sign of directness and imposition in her speech which illustrates women's preference for addressee's needs. Nora's compliment about Torvald's taste supports Wardaugh's view (2006, p. 277) that positive politeness strategy attempts to attain harmony through compliments. Holmes affirms that in cross-gender communication women pay more regard toward addressee's face and feelings than men do. Nora's preference Torvald's choice in selection of dress for herself is patent evidence of this idea. Her asking for Torvald's support demonstrates women's dependence on men in patriarchal society in which they are not free enough to take any decision by themselves. Torvald gives his approval by employing positive politeness strategy. In her last utterance she expresses her gratitude for resolving the issue of dress in very polite and reverential way.

Table 4

Character	Sentences	Sub-strategy	Main-strategy
Nora	Would you do it?	Indirect command	Negative politeness
Helmer	I should like to hear what it is, first.	Formal/wish for freedom	Negative Politeness
Nora	Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice and do what she wants.	Minimize the imposition/interest in hearer's wants	Positive Politeness
Helmer	Speak plainly.	Imperatives	Bald-on-record
Nora	I would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.	Interest in hearer's wants	Positive Politeness
Helmer	Nora- You surely don't mean that request you made me of this morning?	Direct/ warning	Bald-on-record
Nora	Yes, Torvald, I beg you so earnestly –	Show agreement	Positive Politeness
Helmer	This is simply incredible obstinacy!	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.50- Appendix D)

Analysis and Discussion

Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 131) describe negative politeness as "the spirit of reverential behavior". This strategy aims to minimize the imposition and maintain solidarity. Using questions is the instance of negative politeness. Above dialogues show that Nora employs negative politeness by saying "Would you do

it?" Instead of uttering "Do it", she uses word "would" in her expression which exhibits the sign of formality and refinement. Nora's indirect approach to seek Torvald's favor is evidence of an authority for command usage for males, as established by social norms (Conley, O'Barr, and Lind 1979). Having inferior status in patriarchal society she tends to be non-assertive and polite in her speech. To consider addressee's face wants and desire of connection both are sub-strategies of positive politeness strategy. Nora regards Torvald's interests and desires by saying "your squirrel" will dance and play tricks to make him happy. Furthermore, use of personal pronoun "your" is obvious evidence of her desire of connectivity. Torvald directly warns her not to repeat the previous request of Krogstad's favor. To show her affirmation she realizes positive politeness strategy through her agreement. On the contrary, Torvald favors more direct expression such as "speak plainly". Moreover, He threatens Nora's positive face wants through his criticism.

Table 5

Character	Sentences	Sub-strategy	Main-Strategy
Nora	I have loved you above everything else in the world.	Interest in hearer/exaggerate	Positive politeness
Helmer	oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record
Nora	Let me go.	Wish for freedom	Negative politeness
Nora	You shall not suffer for my sake.	Wish for freedom	Negative politeness
Helmer	Here you shall stay and give me explanation.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Helmer	Answer me.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Helmer	She who was my joy and pride--- a hypocrite, a liar--- worse worse – a criminal.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record
Helmer	All your father want of principle has come out in you.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record
Helmer	No religion, no morality, no sense of duty.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record
Helmer	You have ruined all my future.	Direct/FTA	Bald-on-record

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.90- Appendix E)

Analysis and Discussion

Nora secretly borrows money from Krogstad to save Torvald's life and has great expectation from Torvald regarding its payment. On the revelation of this secret; consequences are absolute opposite to her anticipations. Instead of being grateful to Nora for saving his life, Torvald censures her. She expresses her deep love for Torvald and considers his interests. Brown argues that males' conversational style lacks of consideration for public face. They are insensitive and

direct in their utterances. Torvald disgraces Nora's love by calling it a "silly excuse". He makes frequent use of directives to dictate Nora's behaviors. Directives speech acts in this case, are ways to do things by words (Searle 1976:11). Torvald's use of directive in her expression "Answer me" is an attempt of more powerful man of patriarchal society to dominate woman. His abusive face threatening terms such as hypocrite, liar even criminal for Nora embarrasses her and destroys her public face. He alleges her audaciously as destroyer of his social image and public repute. Notwithstanding his face threatening acts, she tries to maintain his face. She uses reverential, negative politeness strategy, in her expression "let me go" to exhibit her desire for freedom. However, after such a humiliation a sense of care and concern for Torvald's reputation is still present in her speech. An obvious indication of deference for Torvald's public face in her speech is a significant supportive strategy of negative politeness.

Moreover, it also reveals her want for individual identity free of all social restrictions imposed on her as a woman.

Table 6

Characters	Sentences	Sub-strategy	Main Strategy
Nora	Sit down.	Imperative	Bald-on-record
Nora	I have a lot to talk over with you.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Nora	I have been greatly wronged, Torvald- First by my papa and then by you.	Direct/ FTA	Bald-on-record
Torvald	Have you not been happy here?	Ask for agreement	Positive Politeness
Nora	No, I have never been happy here.	Direct/ FTA	Bald-on-record
Nora	I have been your doll-wife-just at home I was papa's doll- child.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Torvald	You do not love me anymore?	Question hedge	Negative Politeness
Nora	I do not love you anymore.	Direct/ FTA	Bald-on-record
Nora	I cannot remain with you any longer.	Direct/ FTA	Bald-on-record
Torvald	But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.	Interest in hearer	Positive Politeness
Nora	There must be perfect freedom on both sides.	Wish for freedom	Negative Politeness
Nora	See, here is your ring.	Direct	Bald-on-record
Nora	Give me mine.	Task oriented	Bald-on-record

Conversation between Helmer and Nora (Ibsen, 1879, p.105- Appendix F)

Analysis and Discussion

Language is connected with society and changes with change in social environment. Since Victorian age was renowned as age of development of science and social transition. Hence, severe roles socially prescribed for both men and women were also varying. Women who were formally oppressed by patriarchal social structures also strived for equal status and freedom. With the expansion of feminism movement in 1960 efforts were also made to surmount this prejudicial use of language. Due to change in their social position; women became more and more self-assertive and confident in their conversational strategies. Nora's direct way of speech against Torvald at the end is evident of this idea. Indirect, Negative politeness strategy is replaced by more direct powerful conversational, bald-on record strategy. Since, she wants to talk her husband so she directs him to "sit down". Her complaining attitude about Helmer's misbehavior is face threatening for him. When Torvald asks her if she is not happy there, she gives him such rude answer which violates his positive face's wants. Torvald's demeaning term "doll" for Nora reflects Victorians' prejudiced view of treating woman as captivating object. At end Nora audaciously rejects such women roles as wife and mother prescribed for them by patriarchal society. Her dominant decision of breaking relation herself and imposing it on Torvald puts a threat to his negative face.

Conclusion

Socialization imposes gender-based norms of politeness persuading males to be governing and females to be more cooperative polite and deferential in mixed-gender discourse. This research was intended to make cross-gender politeness analysis of "A Doll's House". The specific purpose of this paper was to enlighten how the relationship between power and gender influences in use of strategies of politeness. Brown and Levinson's model of politeness was implied as a research tool for discourse analysis. After analysis it was identified that numerous strategies of politeness such as bald on record, negative politeness and positive politeness are employed by Torvald and Nora while their interaction. Among these strategies, bald- on record is frequently employed by Torvald to exhibit power and male dominance in Victorian society. While Nora's preference for positive politeness strategy reveals her subordination and submissiveness towards man in patriarchal society. Moreover, to pay homage towards Torvald's superiority and maintain his social integrity as a man she implies more deferential, negative and more cooperative positive politeness strategies in her conversation. It is concluded at the end that gender stereotypes of patriarchal society restricting women to be more reverent and polite in their conversation are totally artificial. Besides the other social changes, changes have also occurred in man and women speaking styles through time. Nora's changed dominating and direct conversational style at the end is the evidence of improved women status. Moreover, it is expected that with social progress there will be no linguistic dissimilarities between men and women.

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