GENDER-LINKED VARIATION ACROSS LANGUAGES

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Chapter 5: Gender Variation in Compliment Responses: A Case of the Malaysian Tamil Community

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Abstract: This study examines Malaysian Tamil males' and females' compliment responses. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which gender affects choice of strategy which these respondents use to respond to compliments. The study also aims to discover similarities and differences in the politeness strategies used between the groups. The data was gathered from 20 Malaysian Tamil professionals: ten men and ten women. Each respondent was required to orally respond to six compliment situations in the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which was then accompanied by a semi-structured interview. The data revealed thirteen types of compliment response strategies which were employed to resolve the conflict between agreement and avoidance of self-praise. The findings revealed that there were no marked differences between the genders in the choices of their overall strategies. Men accepted and deflected compliments more, whilst women rejected more than men. Yet, a more thorough investigation relating gender to age provided evidence that the older female subjects deflected and rejected more compliments than they accepted. Thus, it was proposed from the findings that the compliment responses are assigned along a continuum in tandem with Pomerantz’ Conversational Principles and Leech’s Politeness Principle. The men and younger women in this study at large were motivated by Leech’s Agreement Maxim whilst the older women's responses were motivated primarily by the Modesty Maxim. These differences are then related to the values of the Malaysian Tamil culture.

Introduction

Sociolinguistic variation associated with speaker's gender is a widely researched topic with a considerable amount of research carried out over the last decade. One of the main aspects investigated is gender variation in the expression of linguistic