Politeness Strategies in English Adjacency Pairs
A Gender Differentiated Study on Greetings, Compliments and Directives

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1. Introduction

When people talk, they not only exchange information, but also form certain interpersonal relationships, during the process of which politeness is a very important factor to be taken into account.

Politeness is commonly seen as an appropriate behavior in everyday life, yet it is more than refined manners and gentlemanly or ladylike behavior. Since the consideration of politeness will necessarily decide the different linguistic forms people choose to serve the same speech function within an interaction, politeness is also manifested at various levels of language use: lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and social-cultural (Maricic, 2005: 22).

Linguistic politeness is not equal to the superficial politeness routines. It involves appropriate language choices in respect to social relationship, relative status, and formality, which will not be the same for all interlocutors and situations. Norms for polite behavior vary from one culture to another, and therefore, linguistic politeness is also culturally bounded. In English-speaking contexts, what each participant views as appropriate may well be different from that in other cultures such as Chinese society.

Even with the same cultural background, politeness should be seen within a community of practice, a group of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor, which was developed by Wenger (1998), as quoted by Mills (2000). Each community will establish certain linguistic behaviors which function differently from other communities of practice, so a community based perspective on gender and linguistic performance is important. The study of politeness must therefore involve a sense of politeness with different functions and meanings for different groups of people.

It is commonly believed that women and men may be inclined to use different politeness strategies in the same context. In Gender Voices, Graddol and Swann mention Robin Lakoff’s claim (1975) that there are a set of features that more often appeared in women’s speech than men’s, which pointed to an impression of women being more polite than men (Graddol and Swann, 1989: 83). One explanation for this
is that women are more collaborative and co-operative in interaction while men are more aggressive and competitive. However, whether women are linguistically more polite and whether they use different politeness strategies to initiate or respond to a speech act is worth further studying.

Since many conversational actions are accomplished through established adjacency pairs – automatic sequences that consist of two parts produced by different speakers (Yule, 1996: 77), including greeting patterns, compliments turns and request-acceptance/rejection sequences, viewing a range of different interactions based on these specific speech acts is sure to provide us insight into different strategies adopted by various women and men, both in a single-gender group and in mixed-gender group, and find out the possible reasons underlying those phenomena.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of this investigation is to find out whether and how the concept of gender may influence people’s choices of politeness strategies in face-to-face conversations, especially in adjacency pairs as found in greetings, compliments and directives. The perspective of the study is one which takes in also the issue of context.

1.2 Material

In order to make an investigation on the area of gender difference in politeness behavior, five episodes from season five of the American TV series Desperate Housewives (2009) have been randomly selected for analysis, namely episode 3, episode 4, episode 16, episode 19 and episode 22, each lasting for around 40 minutes and making a total of 209 minutes with a variation of only a few seconds.

The series is mostly set in real-life situations in contemporary America with informal conversations between people of different relationships and different backgrounds, especially the fifth season where a lot of new people come in, so the scripted conversations in this season can make good corpus for the study of gender-differentiated politeness strategies used in conversations within different
contexts, and thus manifest real life to a large degree.

1.3 Method

In this research, adjacency pair examples concerning greetings, compliments and directives that appear in the five episodes are to be noted down and classified according to the gender of the participants. Examples of greetings not only include one-to-one types, but also those among a group of people altogether, and compliments also include those indirectly attribute credits to the addressee, such as the positive evaluation given to a third person who is closely related to the addressee.

A statistic as well as a quantitative study will be made to find out the different ways people greet, give and receive compliments, make and respond to directives, and the use of different politeness strategies in a specific situation when 1) the initiator is a male while the recipient is a male, 2) the initiator is a female while the recipient is a female, 3) the initiator is a male while the recipient is a female 4) the initiator is a female while the recipient is a male. Based on the analysis, a conclusion will be made as to whether there is any difference and what kind of difference there exists in those speech acts and the signification of those language phenomena from a gender perspective in relation to social relationship and formality.

2. Theoretical Background and Previous Research

To analyze politeness strategies in speech behavior, well-developed politeness theories are needed as well as a full understanding of adjacency pairs in pragmatics. Linguistic politeness has already been one focus for sociolinguists for more than thirty years, so a review of previous findings can be used as a basis for further research.

2.1. Politeness Theories

Generally, politeness involves the consideration of other people’s feelings. According to Coates (2004), Brown and Levinson (1978) use the term face to explain politeness.
Face means the public self-image of a person, and politeness in an interaction can be interpreted as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face. A person may have a positive face, i.e. a need to be accepted or liked, and also a negative face, a need to be independent and not to be imposed on (Yule, 1996: 60-61). In order to maintain a conversation, people are expected to respect instead of threatening the face wants of others. The positive politeness strategy is used when a speaker tries to save the other’s positive face by emphasizing the closeness between them while the negative politeness strategy is adopted when the speaker performs a face saving act by showing respect and distance in relation to the person he is talking to.

2.2 Politeness Analysis Approaches

So far, cooperative principles and politeness principles have been the core approaches to politeness analysis, and they nearly function as the basic operating principle of all verbal interaction

2.2.1 The Cooperative Principle

Politeness can be analyzed in light of the Cooperative Principle phrased by philosopher of language Paul Grice (1975), “Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”, which is underlain by the four maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. According to Grice, the application of the maxims is the basic mechanism by which utterances are used to convey more than they literally denote, which allows for the possibility of implicature. In a communication, usually more is communicated than is said (Yule, 1996: 36).

2.2.2 The Politeness Principle

Maricic (2005) mentions that in addition to Grice’s Cooperative Principle, another politeness researcher Lakoff (1979) points out that language use is also guided by pragmatic rules of being clear and polite, with the latter further divided into three
hearer-oriented sub-rules, namely, Do not impose, Give options, and Be friendly. Thus, Lakoff puts forward the politeness principle emphasizing interpersonal or relational goals serving largely to reduce friction in personal interaction (Maricic, 2005: 27). Different rules are applied to different situations and the purposes of the interaction: whether to develop the relationship and maintain a rapport or to exchange information efficiently.

According to Maricic, Leech (1983) further develops the Politeness Principle by suggesting a number of maxims including the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim. Based on these maxims, Leech proposes types of situations that are competitive, convivial, collaborative and conflictive, which require different kinds of politeness. What can be inferred is that “the higher the hearer’s position in the hierarchy” in the society, “and the more distant s/he is, the greater the speaker’s need to be indirect, to minimize cost and to provide more options for the hearer” (Maricic, 2005: 29). This provides explanation for the concept of politeness in English speaking societies.

Whenever politeness of speakers is analyzed, a specific speech situation should always be taken into account. Coulmas quotes Fraser (1990) saying that expressions do not have inherent properties of politeness. In fact, politeness is always a dimension of contextualized speech (Coulmas, 2005: 86-87). Linguistic means and social norms of appropriate behavior should be linked together to make an analysis of politeness.

2.3 Two Variables in Politeness Behavior

There are several variables in people’s politeness behavior, of which the most obvious ones are gender and culture.

2.3.1 Culture

Politeness is fundamental to social life because it is a way to make linguistic action inoffensive and conform to current social expectations. The meaning of politeness
derives from the speech community’s social values. Since rules for polite behavior differ from one community to another, linguistic politeness is also culturally determined. So long as the cultural differences exist, linguistic politeness will undoubtedly be realized in different ways.

Just as precise content for greeting formulas is culturally specified, there are also sociolinguistic rules for polite acceptance and refusal which vary from one culture to another. In some countries a general and vague expression is acceptable as an excuse to refuse an offer, while in some Western cultures a specific reason is regarded as proper (Holmes, 2008: 288). Differences in expressing the same speech act reflect different social values and attitudes of different societies.

American culture encompasses traditions, ideals, customs, beliefs, values, arts, folklore and innovations developed both domestically and imported via colonization and immigration from the British Isles. Americans are said to value hard work as a virtue, often at the expense of vacation time and to the point of stress (Wikipedia, 2011, Culture of the United States). As Obama puts it in a video introducing America for the world exposition in China (as viewed in person by the researcher in 2010), the American spirits involve the concept of cooperation, diversity and creativity. While they expect to compete, they also expect to be given equal opportunity to grow to their potential. Americans believe they all have equal rights under the law (American Family Traditions, 2009). The American society is generally compatible, combining both conservative European values and radical ones of its own. This generates a unique norm concerning what is regarded as appropriate social behavior.

2.3.2 Gender

When it comes to communicative competence, gender differences have long been noticed in this area. Research evidence shows that men and women have a different understanding of how a compliment or an apology is done, and hence different communicative behaviors are conducted (Coates, 2004: 86).

Cultural stereotypes have it that women are more polite than men and they use
different conversational strategies in communication. Holmes refers to Robin Lakoff (1975) saying that women use language characterized by linguistic features such as lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite forms, avoidance of strong swear words and emphatic stress (Holmes, 2008: 298). Lakoff is also quoted to be suggesting that women’s choice of language reinforced their subordinate status in American society. However, O’Barr and Atkins (1980) in their courtroom study find that these features are not peculiar to women, but correlate with the speaker’s social status, as pointed out by Coates (2004:107).

What has been proved by evidence is that women do use more hedges -- linguistic forms like well, you know, etc as mitigating forces or indications of uncertainty. In addition, women pay more compliments to other speakers, while men talk more, swear more and use aggravated directives to get things done (Coates, 2004: 110), all these pointing to the conclusion that women are linguistically more polite. According to Coates, Brown (1998) attributes this phenomenon to the fact that women are sensitive to the face needs of others while men’s speech is more matter-of-fact (Coates, 2004: 107). After studying the language of women and men in New Zealand, Holmes (1995) confirms Brown’s findings by explaining that “most women enjoy talk and regard talking as an important means of keeping in touch, especially with friends and intimates. They use language to establish, nurture and develop personal relationships. Men tend to see language more as a tool for obtaining and conveying information.” (Holmes, 1995:2)

2.4 Adjacency Pairs

Adjacency pairs are important patterns in the structure of conversation. The following concerns the definition of adjacency pairs and an overview of three typical adjacency pairs including greetings, compliments and directives respectively.

2.4.1 The Concept of Adjacency Pairs
Everyday talk is organized by turn-taking. Speakers often resort to certain norms to make sure that the talk is distributed on a turn-by-turn basis. A smooth pattern would be one that “one speaker speaks at a time, and speaker change recurs” (Coates, 2004: 111-112). What is closely related with the turn-taking system is automatic paired utterances called adjacency pairs.

Levinson offers a definition of adjacency pairs provided by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) who define adjacency pairs according to the characteristics of i) being adjacent; ii) produced by different speakers; iii) ordered as a first part and a second part; iv) typed, so that a particular first part requires a particular second (or range of second parts). Typical adjacency pairs include greeting-greeting, question-answer offer-acceptance/rejection patterns (Levinson, 1983: 303).

In pragmatics, many conversational actions are accomplished through established adjacency pairs – automatic sequences that consist of two parts produced by different speakers (Yule, 1996: 77), including greeting patterns, compliments turns and request-acceptance/rejection sequences.

A recognized rule working on adjacency pairs is that having produced a first part of some pair, the current speaker is expected to stop speaking, and the next speaker must produce at that point a second part to the same pair (Yule, 1996: 77). If an initial request or greeting does not receive a second part or if there is a delay in the second part, it would be meaningful. Silence may indicate disagreement while delay can be a symbol of hesitation, both showing a lack of connection between people in conversation.

In fact, many adjacency pairs are not that strict in that there will often be seen insertion sequences where “one question-answer pair is embedded within another” or “where a notification of temporary interactional exit and its acceptance are embedded within a question-answer pair” (Levinson, 1983: 304). Levinson has already recognized the importance of conditional relevance and pointed out that the two parts of adjacency pairs are bound together by “the setting up of specific expectations which have to be attended to” (Levinson, 1983: 306) instead of simply the rule of one question necessarily receiving an answer, which broadens the concept of the
adjacency pair model.

What is also worth noting is that there are a variety of potential seconds to a first part. Adjacency pairs represent social actions, and the social actions that appear in the second parts are not of equal position. There will be a structurally expected next act called the preferred response and a structurally unexpected act referred to as the unexpected (Yule, 1996: 79). Acceptance or agreement is a preferred second part to a request or an invitation because that is what we expect the other person to respond, while request rejections, refusals and disagreements are usually marked as dispreferreds that contain more complex components and allow more room for discussion.

2.4.2 Greetings

Greeting sequences are prototypical of adjacency pairs, in which one greeting is expected to be returned by another. Some examples are illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Part</th>
<th>Second Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: How's it going?</td>
<td>B: Good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally greeting formulas are supposed to serve an affective function and to establish non-threatening contact and rapport (Holmes, 2008: 290). The utterance of the first part immediately invites a second part. Either delay or absence of the second part will indicate something significant and meaningful. In terms of face theory, greeting other people when we see them by asking them how they are, expressing admiration and approval for what they have been doing and what they feel about things is one way to meet the positive face wants of others (Coates, 2004: 105)

2.4.3 Compliments

Compliment is defined in Oxford Dictionary as a polite expression of praise or admiration. A complimenting behavior will inevitably involve two parts, namely the
topic and the syntactic pattern. Compliments are usually made about the assessable, such as a nice object that belongs to the addressee, the admirable trait of a person including being kind, mentally strong or hard working, the ability of accomplishing difficult tasks, positive characteristics of certain things like a fantastic dinner, etc. Lexically, the reference can be accomplished by using a variety of linguistic forms for the co-participant to know what the compliment was about so as to subsequently respond to the compliment appropriately (Golato, 2005: 29).

Positiveness of a compliment is achieved by both syntactic and semantic means. It is evidenced that women both give and receive more compliments than men (Coates, 2004: 98); however, according to Holmes (1995), most compliments adopt a very narrow range of syntactic patterns, and there are no obvious differences in the use of these patterns between women and men in Holmes’s data, except the What (a) ADJ NP! (e.g. What a lovely day!) which is used more often by women. By contrast, men use minimal patterns far more than women (Holmes, 1995: 127).

As far as personal focus is concerned, Herbert (1998) found women preferred compliments with first or second person focus while men use impersonal forms with third person focus, as quoted by Coates (2004: 99).

In addition, women are found to regard compliments as common, and their compliments tend to focus on appearance, while men prefer compliments on possessions or skills instead of appearance.

In English culture, it is generally regarded as polite to accept a compliment but in practice, compliments are not always accepted. Mills emphasizes that compliments can function in different ways and may be interpreted negatively depending on the context (Mills, 2003: 219). She criticizes that while Holmes admits compliments being unwelcome in some relationships where compliments are seen as ways for the speaker to assert superiority, her analysis only focuses on compliments functioning to express admiration instead of include those interpreted as face threatening cases (Mills, 2003: 220). Since a compliment may pose a potential face losing risk for the addressee, the expected pattern is that when speakers are status equals, they tend not to accept compliments, while when they are not status equals, person with higher
status is found at the compliment-giving end. Research by Herbert shows that compliments given by females are not likely to be accepted while those given by males to females tend to be accepted, which indicates other things being equal, men and women are not seen as status-equals (Coates, 2004: 100-101).

2.4.4. Directives

Directives are linguistic utterances to get people to do something. The directive force varies in strength when the directive is made in the form of interrogative, declarative, and imperative.

Although generally speaking, the interrogatives and declaratives are more polite than the imperatives, much is dependent on the intonation, tone of voice and context. Social distance between the participants, their relative status, and the formality of the context all together influence the choice of appropriate directive forms (Holmes, 2008: 273).

According to Coates, both Goodwin (1980, 1990, 1998) and West (1998a) find from their study that girls and women often use more polite and less direct forms of directives than males (Coates, 2004: 95-96). However, besides gender there are other factors influencing the form of imperatives, such as working condition and social relationship in the speech community. In conclusion, the dimension of solidarity and social status are to be considered when analyzing politeness behavior.

3. Analysis

In American TV series Desperate Housewives, people are frequently seen greeting, complimenting and giving directives to each other. All the utterance pairs concerning greetings, compliments and directives are to be studied quantitatively and analyzed qualitatively so as to find out the specific politeness strategy used in men and women’s speech behavior.

3.1 Greetings in Desperate Housewives
Greetings that appear in the five episodes are analyzed in regard to the way they are initiated and responded to when they occur in all male contexts, all female contexts and in mixed groups as well.

3.1.1 Figures from the Recording

Table 1 Greetings That Occur in the 5 Episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greeting Groups</th>
<th>M to M</th>
<th>F to F</th>
<th>M to F</th>
<th>F to M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Greetings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Formulaic Greetings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures stand for the total number of greetings and the number of formulaic greeting patterns that are initiated from a male to another male (as abbreviated to M--M), from a female to another female (F--F), from a male to a female (M--F) or from a female to a male (F--M). Formulaic Greetings refer to the common greeting patterns such as a brief *Hi, Hello* or simply the calling of another person’s name.

3.1.2 Analysis on Male-Male Greetings

Of all the 24 greeting scenes that have been recorded, 8 of them are between males. There are two kinds of situations, that is, when people see each other and when one takes the initiative before the other notices him. Five greetings begin almost unanimously with a *Hi* or *Hey* followed by the other person’s first name. There are also cases where people start their greeting by showing their concern toward what the other person is busy doing as can be found in Dave’s greeting to Tom in episode 3:

Example 1

Dave: *Cleaning out the old garage? -- My deepest sympathy.*

Sometimes people directly offer help to the person they are greeting, which is shown in episode 16 when Orson enters Tom’s pizza restaurant seeing he is busy packing
and classifying everything before selling the restaurant:

Example 2

Orson: *You need some help there?*

These greetings are expressed differently mainly because they serve also as a way to draw another person’s attention.

A still different kind of greeting appears when Dave says to Jackson in episode 22:

Example 3

Dave: *There's the man that ruined my fishing trip!*

Dave has planned to go fishing with Susan and her son until he knows that Jackson and Susan are to hold an engagement party on the same day, which makes his plan unable to be carried out.

What is worth noting is that all those greetings are made between friends, and they are all informal and followed up by asking how the other person is doing or feeling. This is a way to establish rapport regardless of the way people initiate the greeting. In example 1 and example 2, Dave’s and Orson’s utterances are clearly affective in function. Even in example 3, when Dave uses the seemingly criticizing expression, his tone does not suggest any displeasure. On the contrary, the not-that-serious complaint expressed actually is a sign of intimacy between friends. Positive politeness strategies are used in all these greetings. Jackson is actually not very familiar with Dave, so instead of shortening the distance, he adopts negative politeness by apologizing sincerely: *Sorry about that, Dave.*

What is interesting is that Dave who always tries to show his gentle manners tends to use greetings other than a simple *Hi*, but resorts to indirect and humorous ways to show his concern to other people and thus further establishing his impression on other people as a close friend as well as a considerate gentleman.
However, it seems not all the greetings receive an expected immediate second part as the automatic response.

Referring back to example 2, Orson shows his concern by offering help to Tom, and he assumes the relationship between them is close. However, Tom does not see him in the same way, so the offer of help threatens Tom’s face because this indicates he is in a pitiable position. His pride makes him avoid responding to Orson’s greeting and shifts the topic to an expression of surprise: Orson! What are you doing here!, showing he is not so glad to see Orson, and does not appreciate the offer made by the person he despises.

Another example is in episode 16.

Example 4
Father Drance: Hello!
Dave: (no response)
Father Drance: You remember me? Father Drance. I... I didn't know you'd moved back to the area.
Dave (to Edie): oh, I just remembered. Mike wants vermouth. Can you grab that before we forget?
Father Drance: It's wonderful to see you looking so well. I...
Dave: Shut up. I'm only gonna say this once. I've moved on. I've remarried, I have a new life, and it's the way I want it to stay... new.

Father Drance happens to meet Dave and he gladly greets him but no response is produced in the first greeting pair, because Dave does not want to be recognized and does not want to have anything to do with Father Drance. Dave deliberately avoids the rapport to be established and behaves not to be cooperative. In the second round, instead of minimizing the distance by responding to Father Drance, he makes an excuse to ask his wife Edie to go away, and when Father Drance shows his friendliness and solidarity again, Dave appears rather rude.

If affective greetings do not get their reciprocal second parts, it is the expression
of annoyance and the speaker’s face needs are threatened.

3.1.3 Analysis on Female-Female Greetings

There are all together 7 greetings between females. Most of the first parts in their greetings are not greatly different from those used among males: five greetings begin with a *Hi* followed by congratulation or the asking of other people’s feeling as a way to show concern. And most of the first parts receive their second parts: a returned *Hi* or the addressing of the other person’s name as solidarity strategy. More often than not, it is followed by a compliment, an example of which is in episode 4. In response to Bree’s greeting to her female friends on the dinner party, Gaby says: *How beautiful.*

The only one greeting pattern that does not serve the affective function is in episode 19. Bree can not bring herself to the prison to visit her husband because she feels it humiliating, but when she learns that Edie visits her husband every week, suspicion forces her to go to see Edie immediately and find out the fact. But since they are not close friends with Bree usually looking down upon Edie, the greeting becomes a little abrupt.

Example 5

Edie: *Well, well. What are you doing here?*

Bree: *I wanted to see you.*

It is direct and not friendly, considering the low frequency of interaction between them. Here the way Edie greets Bree does not serve as a way to maintain relationship, but can be seen as impolite, showing Bree is not welcome.

Another example to be noticed is in episode 22 when Gaby meets her former friend Fran in the church. Gaby does not know she has become so poor as to go to the church for a free meal.

Example 6
Gaby: Fran. It's Gabrielle Solis from the tennis club.
Fran: Oh, of course.

Gaby shows camaraderie in her greeting by mentioning they belong to the same tennis club. However, this kind of meeting is embarrassing for Fran because she no longer has the same social status as Gaby. There is no usual expected response, and the violation of the cooperative principle shows Fran is not willing to continue the talk. Fran assesses the enlarged social distance and tries to keep a distance from Gaby. This explains why she does not use the same positive politeness to respond to the greeting.

3.1.4 Analysis on Greetings in the Mixed Groups

In the 9 mixed gender greetings, most of the greetings are initiated with a *Hi* followed by a person’s given name. There is not much difference between the way people greet each other. Possible differences are related to the social distance between people. If they are not familiar with each other, especially when they meet each other for the first time, a more formal greeting will appear, as in episode 3 when Bree’s son-in-law is introduced to her and her husband for the first time:

Example 7
Leo: *It's nice to finally meet both of you in person.*
Bree: *Lovely to meet you, Leo.*

Almost all the greetings in mixed groups are returned as expected except one in episode 4. When Jackson sees Susan and her ex-husband Mike, and says *Hey, guys* to both of them from a distance, he does not get any response back from the two persons, because Mike is jealous of Jackson being close to his son, and Susan is pointing this out although he himself refuses to accept the fact. Embarrassment makes the ritual greeting patterns unable to be conducted. Fortunately Susan’s little son’s immediate response: *Jackson, look at my new bike!* happens to divert Jackson’s attention to the boy’s new bike. It is this replacement of the expected second part that does not make
the lack of a returned greeting face threatening.

3.1.5 Implications of the Results

From the above discussion, it can be seen that generally there is no great difference in the way people greet each other whether in a single gender group or in a mixed group. The observance of the cooperative principle depends on the participants’ relationship between each other instead of the gender factor. All the greetings are to serve affective functions and positive politeness strategies are mostly used among friends to enhance solidarity. However, what may slightly differ is the initiating part. Men are more likely to use a humorous or brief comment to show their concern for friends in an indirect way. If a greeting is not at all returned as expected, it sometimes indicates a conflictive situation and is potentially face threatening.

3.2 Compliments in *Desperate Housewives*

Compliments are recorded in four tables with regard to the number of compliments used in different groups, the topics that are involved, the responses that are provided and the frequency of minimal words that appear in the five episodes.

3.2.1 Figures from the Recording

Table 2 The Number of Compliments That Are Made in the 5 Episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliment Groups</th>
<th>Number of compliments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male to Male</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compliment Group in table 2 concerns the gender of the addresser and the addressee. Compliments that appear in different compliment groups in the five episodes are
counted and recorded as Number of Compliments.

As shown in table 2, 26 complimenting turns are observed, among which 7 are given from male to male, 11 from female to female, 3 from male to female and 5 from female to male. The result gives evidence that most compliments do occur within female groups. In general, compliments are made comparatively more often in single gender groups than in mixed groups. In the cases studied, males pay fewer compliments to females than females to males, although the statistic difference is not very large with a ratio of 3 to 5.

### Table 3 Topics of Compliments in Different Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliment Groups</th>
<th>Compliment Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Female</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that of the 4 compliments that are made on appearance, only one is produced by a male. By contrast, of the 7 compliments on objects, a majority of 5 appear in all male groups while only 2 are found in all female groups. In addition, when a male compliments another male, the topics range from appearance to object and ability, but no man is found to be complimenting another one on traits such as being nice or kind. The most often praised are objects, things that belong to the addressee. Men seldom compliment each other on appearance. Even when they do, they only do it between friends and limit the comment to the topic of staying young. The example can be found in episode 22 when Tom meets his old college mate:

Example 8
Tom: *Yeah! God, you look fantastic. You haven't aged a day.*

Bill: *Hey, right back at ya.*

Similarly, females compliment each other on all those aspects as mentioned above, but their focus is both on trait and appearance.

In mixed gender groups, males are likely to praise female both on trait and ability, while females will give their praise mostly on men’s ability.

**Table 4 Responses to the Compliments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliment Groups</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Returned Compliment</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male to Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 4, No Response means nothing is uttered with regard to the first parts. Rejection is used in a broad sense, including providing explanation of the act to show modesty instead of accepting compliment with thanks as in an expected polite second part.

Table 4 indicates that in single gender groups, men may well reject, accept, and return compliments that they receive, or even ignore the praise by making no related response at all. On the other hand, females are often seen to accept compliments. However, in the only 3 cases where men pay compliments to women, women reject twice while accepting only once. What is interesting is that when the compliment is made from a woman to a man, only one out of four is accepted; for the rest three times, the women’s compliments receive no response from the men.

This does not seem to give very much support to Herbert’s assumption (1998)
very much that compliments given by females are not likely to be accepted while those given by males to females tend to be accepted, which is quoted by Coates (2004: 101).

Before any conclusion is made, a further study is needed on the three adjacency pairs where men give no response to compliments in episodes 3, 4, 16 respectively, to see whether they serve the same function as rejection.

Example 9

Katharine: So, Leo, where did you study law?
Leo: Cornell.
Katharine: Now I'm jealous. I always wished that I'd gone to a school like Cornell.

But...It just wasn't in the cards for me.
Leo: (smile)

Hearing Katharine’s compliment, Leo does not say anything but gives a smile because he is the newcomer and does not want to make a big fuss over his educational background. The smile can be interpreted as his being polite and modest. While he shows his appreciation of Katharine’s compliment by giving a gentle smile, he refrains from making any comments to make himself a focus of attention. The Modesty Maxim is applied when he tries to minimize the expression of praise. Since the topic is then quickly shifted to another person, there is not much time left for him to give a further response either. The silence here actually amounts to acceptance.

Another example is in episode 4 when Lynette meets one of her former subordinate at the dinner party.

Example 10

Lynette: Hey! Well, this was one great guy. He would schlep all the way across town just to get me my Chinese food.
Stu: (silence)
Lynette’s statement seems to be a compliment on that man’s good temper, but considering the fact that he is no longer working for her and he is now the head of a company, mentioning something like his being obedient and running errands for his boss surely gets him embarrassed. To Stu, Lynette is asserting superiority. A compliment that is made at the wrong time on the wrong thing raises the risks of losing face for the addressee, and is not a polite behavior in itself. The absence of the second part is a way to save face especially for a man. It can be regarded as a rejection, but it is not because the person giving compliment is a female, but because of the face-threatening effects of the so called compliment itself.

It can be seen that a lack of response does not serve the same function. Only the last example shows a male does not want to accept a female’s compliment. Taking the contexts into account, it is safe to say that of the 3 compliments made from male to female, 2 are rejected while one is accepted. On the other hand, 2 out of 4 compliments given from females are accepted by males, and 2 are rejected. At least in the given data, women are seen more likely to reject men’s compliments than men are to women, though the difference is not very big.

Even when the recipients reject compliments, a common strategy is used whether by a male or by a female.

Example 11
Gaby: Look at you, right on the cover!
Bree: These are advanced copies. I wanted you to be the first to have them.

Example 12
Orson: Oh! Wow, this is charming.
Tom: Oh. It's a salt shaker my grandfather gave me. Used to display it on the shelf.

Example 13
Bruce: Fantastic dinner, Bree. This was a great idea.
Bree: Well, I just wanted to get you together with Tom here. I thought you two
might hit it off.

In all the above contexts, the compliment receivers give their rejection by producing alternative responses to reduce the force of the compliments. A modesty maxim is observed when the recipient tries to restore the social balance between them.

Table 5  Hedges Used in Compliment Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliment Groups</th>
<th>Hedges Used In Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male to Male</td>
<td>3/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Female</td>
<td>3/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>3/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure under the title Hedges Used in Responses shows the proportion of the hedges used in all the responses to compliments. Take the all male group as an example, the table shows, of all the 6 responses initiated, 3 of them are seen to be using hedges. In this table, a total is hard to give, because all the figures used deal with the proportion of hedges used in compliment responses which can not simply be counted.

Table 5 suggests that in contrast to the common belief that men use fewer hedges, men use them as often as women do in their response to compliments in mixed groups, and slightly more than women in single gender groups with a proportion of 3/6 against 3/7.

As to the syntactic patterns, not much difference is found. But what is worth noting is another compliment made by a female to a male in episode 3 when Katharine gives favorable comments on the sprinkler system fixed by Dave:

Example 14
Katharine: Like a charm. And thanks again. I've never been able to get that to work.
Dave: *Oh, I hear ya. To program those things, you need an engineering degree.*

In addition to the high evaluation of Dave’s ability, Katharine makes a comparison between Dave and herself to emphasize how capable he is, thus potentially threatening her own face.

### 3.2.2 Implication of the Results

The study shows that females pay more compliments to each other and get the most acceptance in response especially in all female groups, because their conversations aim to establish and strengthen interpersonal relationship, and they pursue a style based on solidarity and support. They are sensitive to others’ feelings and moods, using compliments to show appreciation either for the appearance or for the good personality.

To women, appearance and good traits are of equal importance, one representing outside beauty and another signaling inner beauty, the most important values that are traditionally held. However, since modern America is a society not that conservative, women have already earned a much higher position in the society compared to other cultures, they also value ability of other females, though it is not as often praised as the other aspects.

Men’s conversational style is more competitive, and they are actually proud and jealous of peers other than close friends who have much in common, so they are more likely to pay compliments on objects that are impersonal. To men, being nice is not something that they regard as worth commenting on, which can be interpreted as a sign of femininity, so they seldom praise each other for this. That is why Stu, the person mentioned in example 10 feels so embarrassed after being complimented by Lynette. Men seldom compliment on each other’s appearance either.

As far as syntax is concerned, there does not seem to be much difference among the groups. Tags and incomplete sentences are equally used by males and females. Males are just as straightforward as females to be positively polite. The possible reason is that all the characters live in suburbia, away from the metropolis such as
New York, and their culture conforms to what Brown and Levinson (1987: 250) describes as “friendly back-slapping” positive politeness culture. However, there is a possibility for female to express their admiration for a male by degrading themselves as example 9 and example 14 show. There is no example so far to prove that a man will do the same to compliment a woman.

Both males and females use a similar number of hedges like well in response as a mitigating force to reduce the possibility of sounding too complacent. Most of them are being modest in response to compliments to consolidate the solidarity between the addressee and the addressee.

3.3 Directives in *Desperate Housewives*

Degree of politeness is obviously revealed in the form directives take. An analysis of directives will be given on the basis of directive forms used by different people in different contexts.

3.3.1 Figures from the Recording

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directive Forms</th>
<th>M--M</th>
<th>F--F</th>
<th>M--F</th>
<th>F--M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>You</em> Imperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative using <em>please</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declarative as suggestion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative with modal verb</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures stand for the number of each directive form that has been used when the directive is from a male to another male (as abbreviated to M--M), from a female to another female (F--F), from a male to a female (M--F) or from a female to a male
(F--M). The Directive Forms are arranged by the degree of politeness in a common sense, from less polite at the top to the more polite ones at the bottom. The heading of Declarative includes those using *should* or *need*, and Declarative as suggestion counts those using *maybe* as mitigating devices and those beginning with *Let's*.

It seems that most directives occur within female groups with an imperative being used most frequently while males give the fewest directives to each other. In mixed groups, more directives are given from females to males than the other way around. In all the contexts except the all male group, directives in the form of imperatives take a large proportion, especially when it is given between females or from females to males. The table shows that it is females who use the *you*-imperative that indicates a strong force in the speech.

However, females are also likely to use the most polite forms of directive by adopting interrogatives together with modal verbs, which is indicated in the all female group and in female-male group. By contrast, a male is likely to use declarative and make a suggestion either to his fellow friend or to a person of closeness like his wife if he wants the listener to do something, which is illustrated in episode 3:

Example 15
Dave: *Hey,* --the play-offs are on. *You should* come check it out. *It's like being right on the field.*
Tom: *Yeah...Um,* Lynette's really busting my hump about clearing this place out, *so...*

Example 16
Orson: *You know,* Bree, things will be a little strange at first, *so please,* be on your *best behavior.*
Bree: *I do not require* lectures on tact.
Orson: *Good. So if you feel an impulse to criticize something,* you'll keep the *thought to yourself.*
Bree: *I've already started.*
Of course the way a male talks to other people has a lot to do with the assumed position and closeness. Men are likely to see each other as status equals, so they respect other males while showing positive politeness, which urges them to use a comparatively polite form such as suggestion in the form of declarative, as revealed in example 15. When a husband sees himself at home as one of lower status, he is also likely to choose the same strategy intending not to threaten his wife’s face, as example 16 shows.

What can be seen so far is that females’ inclination to use the polite directive form of interrogatives has more to do with contexts than with gender of the addressee. When they are asking for something that is not perceived as usual or routine, or when they are trying to show respect, they are more likely to choose interrogative than imperative either to a female friend or to a male. One example is in episode 4, when Lynette knows there is a marketing plan for Bree’s new book.

Example 17

Lynette: Could I see that? I'd love to read it.

Bree: Why?

Lynette: Well, back before I consecrated my life to mozzarella, marketing was sort of what I did.

Bree: Oh, right! Of course.

Although they are friends, Lynette realizes she is being rude asking for something private of Bree, and as a friend who is supposed to be of equal status, she is also feeling herself humble compared with Bree’s success, so she chooses the polite form for her request.

On Bree’s part, she just does not want to leave an impression of being superior to other friends, so instead of a direct reply, she puts an insertion part asking why, indicating that it is not worth attention.

Another example is in episode 19 when friends take turns driving Lynette to chemo and take care of her:
Example 18

Lynette: *I can’t get comfortable. Could you fluff my pillows?*

Katharine: *of course.*

Lynette: *Before you go, would you put my socks back on? My feet are cold again.*

Although they are friends, Lynette is not asking for something that her friend should do, so she is being polite when making request. Under that circumstances—a friend gets cancer, no request seems too much, not to mention that request is put forward in such a humble way. As a result, Katharine gladly shows her cooperation and does as she is expected.

The same kind of politeness is seen in episode 19, when Susan is jogging with her new friend Edie and she feels tired:

Example 19

Susan: *Wait. Stop. Could we just rest for a second?*

Edie: *We've only gone four blocks.*

At first Susan is too tired to notice her own speech act, and then when she realizes that asking for a stop is sure to ruin the fun and reveal herself as one who does not share the same hobby of running with her friend, she uses interrogative with a modal verb *could* to show her politeness, and leaves room for negotiation.

Edie is already taking Susan as a good friend, she does not choose a polite form of rejection, and her response does not show any personal distance from Susan, but rejecting the request by giving a reason to initiate further information, she actually provides a chance for Susan to explain everything. This will not be interpreted as being rude at all.

In the same episode, Edie is seen to adopt a polite directive form of interrogative with Susan:

Example 20
Edie: Hi. I’m the whore that lives down the street. Could I borrow a couple of condoms?

Susan: A couple? Are you sure that’ll be enough?

With the same person, a more polite form is used by Edie because at that time, Susan knows Edie has slept with a husband of her friends, she is offended and does not want to be friend with Edie. On that day, Edie tries to break the ice first by coming to Susan to notify her about her husband’s affair. Though she is showing her concern as a friend, she knows she is not liked by Susan, so interrogative is used to keep the social distance, and show her hesitancy. Her devaluation of herself is supposed to give Susan face while sacrificing her own face. This is a way to apologize and it sends a message that she endeavors to reestablish relationship.

Females will use the same polite form to males if they feel they are asking for a favor from males, especially in public. There are two examples in episode 3:

Example 21

Bree: No, um, you (Danielle) take Benjy upstairs. I'll get it. Orson, could you get the mop, please?

Orson: (no response but do as required).

Example 22

Lynette: Could you just... For a sec?

Tom: Okay, you know what? Please leave our rehearsal space.

Examples 21 and 22 both include directives given from wife to husband with other people present. Both wives use the most polite form of interrogative with modals to show their respect for husband and thus saving both faces. In example 21, by contrast, Bree uses you imperative to Danielle, but it seems quite natural considering the fact that Danielle is her daughter. Even in this way, those husbands are not willing to do as directed because they feel their face is being threatened.
Orson’s silence shows his reluctance; however, he still does as he is directed to keep his wife's face. On the contrary, Tom, feeling intruded and controlled by his wife, because she clearly disapproves of his idea of setting up a garage band, wants to save his face by obvious rejection and gives an order to his wife. The *please* used here is of strong force rather than a sign of politeness.

However, when it comes to something that a female is resolute about, especially in private circumstances, they will use the imperative to people of close relationship including a male and that male will be more likely to show cooperation instead of taking a female’s directive as an offence. Two examples can be found in episode 16 between two couples:

Example 23
Bree: *My, what an interesting coat hanger. It's shaped like a sofa. Please put it in the closet.*
Orson: *Sorry, darling. (getting up from Sofa and beginning to put the cloth away)*

Example 24
Lynette: *Toss it, and keep tossing until this two-car garage can hold at least one car.*
Tom: (do as directed)

Face threatening acts are most often found in competitive circumstances such as in a bargain where individual interests are involved. Gender will not exert influence at all as to which form is adopted while the one who is in a superior position can afford to use the impolite way of speaking without mitigating devices.

In episode 3, Gaby is persuading Andrew to offer her a lower price:

Example 25
Gaby: *Okay, fine. Knock off $200, and we'll give you cash.*
Andrew: *No*
Gaby: Will you at least have it washed?
Andrew: I'll empty the ashtray. Final offer.

In response to Gaby’s seemingly impolite request, knowing she does not have any other choice, Andrew directly refuses her which left her in an embarrassing position. When Gaby changes her tone to a more polite way, Andrew somewhat saves her face by meeting her request half way, but still not as polite as to it should be with a friend.

Another example can be found in the same episode when Gaby finally is forced to sell her own loved sports car in a low price to another couple because of the cash problem.

Example 26
Gaby: Take good care of her!
Wife buying the car: Actually, it's not for us. It's for our nanny.

Gaby tries not to lose face in this deal, so she uses an imperative to keep herself from being in a pitiable position. However, the wife notices this, and by declaring the purpose of buying the car, actually humiliates Gaby. Those competitive situations produce face-threatening speech acts regardless of gender factor.

3.3.2 Implications of the Results
All the studied cases indicate females are generally more likely to use both polite and less polite forms of directives, the former being used when the request is for something usual or not a routine. They use polite forms because they are often sensitive to other people’s face needs, especially to males in public sphere. They also use imperatives very often because most of the imperatives are made in informal contexts where women’s adoption of direct request seems justified as a sign of intimacy and close relationship with other people. Males prefer to use directive in the
form of declaration, because just as they themselves cherish distance and respect from other people, they treat their fellow friends as equals who have the same face needs. The needs to show respect while keeping solidarity encourage them to choose declarative as a way to make request.

American culture is one that is combined with traditions and modern values, so most women are now holding an equally high position, which partly explains why so many imperatives are used by women at least at home to their husbands. However, still males will see women’s directive as face-threatening especially in the presence of other people, so a dispreferred response will occur and even when they do as directed, they make silence which indicates unwillingness.

4. Conclusion

Evidence at present suggests that it is personal relationship rather than gender that may influence the way people greet each other. Though degrees of formality vary, females and males use almost the same positive politeness to show concern to friends. The only slight difference is that men are sometimes likely to use a more casual and humorous way to initiate a greeting.

What is also found in this study is that females pay more compliments to each other and get the most acceptances in response, for the purpose of establishing and strengthening interpersonal relationship. Appearance and good personality are universally valued and hence become the assessable that are mostly praised for. As a country pursuing freedom and equality, women are increasingly complimented on ability. Men are most often complimented on objects in single gender groups and on ability in mixed group.

Men and women use similar syntax to express admiration, however men are not likely to compliment others by devaluing himself and risk losing his own face. What is more, the same frequency of lexical hedges is seen to be used in men’s response as well as in women’s. The modesty maxim is observed to save face of both the addressee and the addressee regardless of gender.
It is not proved that females are more polite when giving directives. Females use both a great number of interrogatives with modal verbs and imperatives. Polite forms are used when the request is not seen as something of a routine. They use negative politeness to emphasize the distance and indicate the status difference between themselves and the addressee, which reveals females’ sensitivity to other people’s face needs. Imperatives are also largely used because females value closeness and solidarity, especially in informal contexts. Women make request in a direct way to show intimacy of friends. Men by contrast use declaratives most of the time as a way to set up interpersonal relationship while not being too close to the other one. Positive politeness is revealed especially in all male groups. Males are to show preferred responses to females’ imperatives but will feel face threatened in public even when the request is made in a polite form.

Generally, as American culture is one that emphasizes equality and compatibility, solidarity is observed more influential than power or social status. Use of positive politeness strategies depends more on the personal relationship than on gender factor alone. The assumption that men and women are not status equals with women often on the compliment-accepting side while men on the giving side does not hold true in today’s society. Just as mentioned above, women are seen to be using both positive and negative politeness strategies when getting a male to do something, though the values shared by men do not change very much in that men will still feel face threatened when they are given directives in public.

However, as the research is based solely on TV series, the data are not large enough and not extensive enough to include men of different social status, especially in different working places. Some of the figures may be limited because of the plot, although the series are held to reflect real life situations to a great degree. Whether the findings can be generalized to all American society needs further investigation.
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