

it unfamiliar, and so, capable of providing new kinds of understanding. This concept, so fundamental to modern and postmodern theories of art, reception, and social appropriations, is useful both as an approach to film and fiction and as a lens through which one may consider *Gender, Ideology* fruitfully. Though to date film scholarship on the operations of desire tended to be anchored in sight-based Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of reception (as initially elaborated by Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey), while word-based theories of reading have largely turned to linguistics, semiotics, and deconstruction (which are less concerned with desire, and certainly less with sight-based desire), an integrating reading of the essays gathered in this volume nudges us towards making both of these traditions "strange" and re-visiting each with a mind open to re-assessing its capabilities.

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Janet Holmes,
Women, Men and Politeness.
New York: Longman, 1995, 254 p.

Gender is a crucial factor to take into account when dealing with politeness phenomena. Holmes' book explains through nice examples and interesting experiments how gender differences may influence and affect linguistic politeness. She reviews studies and research on this topic by a great number of authors and she adds her own experiments and results obtained from speakers of New Zealand English (although one would expect the New Zealand evidence be dealt with in more detail, she fails to elaborate it thoroughly). The topic of research and the data used seem to be very well-connected since New Zealand culture has been described as a "gendered culture, . . . gender is the motif and preoccupation of New Zealand society, as class is in Britain" (WMP 27). This may be an advantage for her study or it might be a

drawback since it may lead to simplistic conclusions as I will comment on later.

Holmes bases her analyses and investigations on grounds defined in their essence by Brown and Levinson (1987). Concepts such as face (in its two modalities: positive and negative face), FTA (face-threatening act), positive and negative politeness, and the social variables influencing politeness have been treated in this book basically following Brown and Levinson's first drafts but adding some new touches. The main new stroke here is the addition of one social factor not included in Brown and Levinson's fine analysis of politeness: gender. This variable will give rise to two different politeness styles: a positively-orientated politeness identified in women's discourse and a rather negative politeness style in men's interaction.

The main idea from which the book starts is that women and men have different ways of talking and hence, of realizing and interpreting speech acts. In the first chapter ("Sex, politeness and language"), Holmes points out the feasible reason why this is so. Women and men use language in a different way because they have different perceptions of what language is for. Whereas men use language as a tool to give and obtain information (the referential function of language), women see language as a means of keeping in touch (the affective or social function). Holmes includes politeness, which is defined as "an expression of concern for the feelings of others" (WMP 4), within the affective or social function of language, and hence, the women being the ones who use language more in this way, women are more polite than men.

These two different perceptions and usages of language cause different norms of interaction, which is—as Holmes points several times—the most plausible reason why women and men interact differently. In other words, she explains in the second chapter that what is perceived as rude to the women may be perfectly polite to men and vice versa (WMP 53). Nevertheless, according to this, there is something that does not quite fit into the picture. On the one hand, there are different patterns of politeness due to gender differences, and the most plausible reason why this is so is that women and men have different perceptions of language. If perception of language implies what is polite or rude to both women and men, politeness is being regarded as a factor and as a consequence at the same time. In other words, politeness is being considered as a factor that contributes to the assessment of what is appropriate in each context by each gender—"politeness, or sensitivity to the needs of others, may be another contributing factor" (WMP 37)—and as the result of that assessment—"New Zealand women tend to be more polite than men" (WMP 70)—since she draws this conclusion after assessing the results

of others' and her own experiments and data. So, it seems to be somewhat contradictory that the result of the assessment—the politeness of women and men—might be due to precisely different ways of evaluating interaction—evaluating what is polite and what is not. It might be that politeness is extralinguistically motivated and then, as Mey (1993) says there would be a metapragmatic level.

The idea presented in the first chapter pervades the whole book: women and men have different ways of interacting because women are more positively polite than men in talking cooperatively and supportively. This is developed throughout the book and supported by a wide range of linguistic evidence. In the second chapter, it is shown how male interviewers talked more than female interviewers whereas male interviewees talked less than female interviewees, who were more sensitive to their interviewer's needs. Moreover, men ask more response-restricting questions that focus on the content, while women ask more facilitative questions which function as supportive elicitations rather than as information seekers. Another piece of linguistic evidence is the fact that men interrupt more than women, who use a lot of back-channeling "to encourage others to continue talking and reflects concern for their positive face needs. . . . Back-channeling is typical of a good listener" (*WMP* 56-57).

In chapter 3, Holmes analyses the use that women and men make of some linguistic devices which serve to increase or reduce the force of an utterance. These are hedges, boosters, tag questions, and pragmatic particles such as "you know," "I think," "sort of," "of course." Their interpretation in verbal interaction will depend on their function in a specific context. All these linguistic means can be orientated either towards a referential, content-focused function or an interpersonal and affective function. Men tend to emphasise the former function while women prefer the latter.

The next two chapters—chapters 4 and 5—show how two different speech acts, compliments and apologies, can render useful insights about gender differences in politeness behaviour. On the one hand, compliments are paid, realized and received differently by women and men. Women in general pay and receive more compliments than men. Interpretation of compliments also varies depending on the person who receives it. Females tend to regard compliments as positive and affective politeness devices and hence they pay and receive more than men who tend to consider them not as positive as women. Males often see compliments as face-threatening or at least not as unambiguous in intentions as women do. The content of compliments is also another point of divergence. While men usually compliment on ability or performance, women compliment more on appearance. The reason seems

to be the subordinate status of women in society, which plays a relevant role in both the linguistically realization of speech acts and in the interpretation of them. On the other hand, apologies constitute another field to study how women and men differ in dealing with speech acts. Females apologise more than men do and for different reasons, and they also respond differently.

Finally, in the last chapter—chapter 6—Holmes explains why politeness matters by pointing to the implications of these differences in women's and men's politeness behaviour in two contexts: the educational and the professional world. All the linguistic devices seen in the previous chapters are now analysed in the classroom and at the office. Getting to know the different strategies women and men use and getting familiar with the different ways in which they interpret speech acts can help a lot in our private and public lives. Personal relationships between women and men could be improved if the different politeness patterns males and females use were known. A lot of misunderstanding could be avoided—Tannen (1990) explains this problem very well. In public spheres as well, public discussions and decision-making could benefit from knowing male and female types of discourse. Holmes adds that, apart from knowing all this, women's style of discourse should be applied to all these spheres since it is more supportive, cooperative, just more polite. This however should be analysed more carefully.

Thus, Holmes' conclusion is that in the same way as there seems to exist positive and negative politeness cultures (Brown and Levinson 1987; Sifianou 1989; Hickey and Vázquez Orta 1994) there are positive and negative politeness genders. Females express more appreciation towards the other in their discourse (positive politeness), whereas males show consideration and respect (negative politeness). According to Holmes, women are more polite using this type of politeness, that is, she equates politeness with positive politeness. Also, women are more affective and social, so politeness is enhanced in the affective or social function of language. These two assertions, however, should be pondered cautiously.

Firstly, saying that women use a more positively-orientated style of discourse and patterns of politeness, and therefore are more polite than men in general—of course Holmes says there are always exceptions—seems to be a very simplistic conclusion. Or it may just seem to be simplistic because data and results come from a very gendered-biased society, as was said above. Perhaps in other cultures and societies, the outcome would not be so clear-cut. In any case, positive politeness is just one side of politeness. Negative politeness is as important and as necessary. Some authors think one type of politeness is more important than the other. Leech considers positive politeness as "somewhat less important" than negative politeness (Leech 1983:

81). Yet, showing concern about the addressee's own territory and freedom of action (negative face) is as polite as showing interest, admiration or common grounds with her/him (positive face). So, the fact that women use positive politeness devices more than men do does not just mean that they are more polite. Secondly, it seems to be true that women are more affective and social than men. It is also true that politeness seems to be linked to the social function of language. But the latter statement does not have to derive from the former. In other words, the fact that women show more affection and consideration toward the other in verbal interaction does not mean that this is politeness; it might be something else.

Reading Holmes' book, one can have the feeling that women ("other-oriented") are the good "guys" and men ("self-orientated," almost, selfish) are the bad guys of the movie. There are some examples in which Holmes seems to be bringing facts to her own territory even when the evidence is not so much in her favour. One example of this can be found in chapter 5, when she is dealing with the different strategies women and men use to apologise. She presents the different strategies used to apologise by women and men. One of the paramount differences emphasised by her takes place within the broad mechanism of acknowledgement of responsibility (one of the three main devices to apologise). Within this, there are five strategies. Two of these: *accepting the blame* (e.g. "It is my fault") and *expressing self-deficiency* (e.g. "I was confused") are more used by men than women. Yet other two strategies, *recognising the other is entitled to an apology* (e.g. "You are right") and *expressing lack of intent* (e.g. "I didn't mean to") are just used by women—although in her data the figures are not very significant: just 2 women for the former strategy and 7 for the latter out of 214 females. Holmes says that this shows that "women tend to use strategies which focus on the harmony of their relationship with the other person. . . . Men, on the other hand, tend to use more strategies which focus on the relative status relationship with the other, accepting blame and expressing self-deficiency" (WMP 163). However, it can also be said that the strategies of recognising the other is entitled to an apology and expressing lack of intent focus on the relative status relationship with the other since there is really no difference between saying "You are right" or saying "It is my fault." It is just the perspective—the functional sentence perspective: theme/rheme—that changes, not the meaning. Similarly, the strategies of accepting blame and expressing self-deficiency can establish harmony in the relationship since one is acknowledging responsibility and hence trying to repair a damage.

In short, Holmes' analyses of female and male discourses are appropriate from a formal and functional perspective. Her assessments of female and

male patterns of politeness are adequate as well. Yet her final conclusion about women using more positive politeness than men and hence being more polite than males, and her final advice about adopting women's style of discourse in all spheres in life should be taken very cautiously. Holmes sustains that women's style of discourse have all these features (WMP 222): being active listeners, giving support their addressees, disagreeing in a non-confrontational manner, asking facilitative questions, using pragmatic particles in their affective function, complementing and apologising frequently, etc. Yet if all these features were used by women and men, wouldn't verbal interaction be—apart from dull and boring—artificial? I do not really know why but I refuse to think all politeness is about can be reduced to that. I am not sure this is the authentic and real linguistic politeness. We might be mixing up deference—or even mere flattery—and politeness. And I like to think that politeness is something else, something deeper than mere sycophancy. Perhaps real politeness actually loses its spirit when it is linguistically realized. Perhaps authentic politeness is non-verbal. If this is so, we might as well do research on another topic and forget about linguistic politeness altogether. Or perhaps we should rather investigate why what we call "polite" acts, sentences or phrases often seem to be more insincere praise than real politeness.

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