

DO FEMALES SPEAK MORE  
POLITELY TO FEMALES AMONG  
HONG KONG YOUNG  
GENERATIONS?

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate politeness strategies among the same and cross - gender conversation among Hong Kong young generations. To find out the effect of gender in politeness strategies of whether females speak more politely to females than to males, nine scenarios are design to elicit conversations. The scenarios include the topics of making complaints, apologizing and offering comfort. These scenarios are based on the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and are distributed to 30 females and 20 males aged between 20 to 25 who are undergraduate students at universities in Hong Kong.

The result shows that females speak more politely to females than to males. Moreover, it is found that no matter what the gender of the speaker is, they both speak more politely to females rather than to males. Therefore our study suggests that the gender of the listeners is the major factor affecting the use of politeness strategies of the speakers.

**Keywords:** politeness, Cantonese, conversation analysis

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and gender has been a widely researched and debated topic in sociolinguistic. Literature documents that in many cultures females speak more politely than males do. Moreover, extensive research has been dedicated to speakers but little to the listeners.

In order to examine the effect of hearer's gender on the speaker's politeness behaviours in a conversation, this research will provide a contrastive study of politeness behaviors between the same and cross gender in order to find out whether females speak more politely to females than to males. In this research, the gender differences in vocabulary and sentence structures in Cantonese among Hong Kong young generations will be focused.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Starting from early 1970, a number of researchers, such as Firestone (1971), Key (1972) and Conklin (1973) have been examining whether women speak differently from men. Until now, a range of studies explore that different genders have different language uses. In general, previous research (Zimmerman & West (1975); Fishman (1978) and Lakoff (1975)) documented the differences between men and women in conversation. Such differences include, comparing with men, women (1) use more intensifiers, for example, “so”, “really”; (2) use more questions to stimulate or invite participants to talk; (3) use intonations, pitches to emphasize points; (4) interrupt others less; (5) use more indirect accusations, statements and euphemism to avoid hurting others; (6) make more tentative statements and tag questions to express the uncertainty and influence other’s opinions; (7) give more positive feedback; (8) produce fewer delayed minimal response such as “uh-huh”; (9) disclose more personal information about themselves; (10) use more hedges, such as “kind of”, “maybe”, “sort of” (11) use hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation; (12) use super polite form, like “would you mind”, “... if you don’t mind”; (13) use more “wh-“imperatives, such as “why don’t you turn off the television?”; (14) apologize more, for example, “I’m sorry, but I think ...”; (15) use more modal constructions, like “can”, “could” and (16) use less swear words.

Besides, in a more recent study, Cameron, Coates and Tannen (as cited in Peter (2002:16) also pointed out:

“The underlying variation in the socialization of men and women: (1) Men tend to dominate the time and turn talking, while women tend to support and reply; (2) men explain things to women, women ask more questions, use more ‘backchannel noise’ and invite others; (3) women regard forcefulness as personal aggression, men see it as normal conversational, organization and so on.”

Within different gendered language uses, the use of (4) less interruption; (5) indirect accusations, statements and euphemism; (6) more tag questions; (12) super polite form; (14) apologizing and (17) less swear words are generally regarded as politeness expressions. This is the most frequently topics discussed by researchers.

It is also found that different cultures have different assumptions toward politeness. Hsu (as cited in Pan (2000)) by describing Chinese and American's politeness behaviour, pointed out the Chinese culture as situation-based while America as individual-based. Chinese use politeness strategies according to the social relation and the addressee's social attributes, such as age, gender and rank. However, Americans use same politeness strategies to all people, regardless of the relation and the power of the addressee is. Moreover, Wierzbicka (as cited in Pan (2000)) found that British treat everyone the same. They use same politeness strategies to addressees in both in-group and out-group relationships. Nevertheless, in China, there is a large social distance between in-group and out-group members. Thus, the politeness strategy is used according to the social relation toward the addressees. These also explain why the foreign service students in Pan's study think that the politeness behaviour of Chinese is inconsistent. Here, we can observe that different cultures have different norms in politeness. Taking Chinese as an example, the main factor to affect the use of the politeness strategies is the social relation between speakers and addressees.

Besides, Pan (2000) argued that the source of power that the addressee possesses is the main factor affecting the choice of using politeness strategies. This power includes the social factors of the addressee's age, gender, rank and social class. Speakers modify their speech according to these attributes. For example, if the addressee is in lower social status than the speaker, no facework is needed. Hence, they do not need to pretend to be more polite to the listeners.

In these social attributes, many researchers are interested in the relationship between language and gender. Large ranges of studies find that women in general speak more politely than men. Ide (1982); Reynolds (1985, 1990) argues that women are in lower social status and powerless when

compare with men, thus they speak more politely in order to protect themselves. Moreover, regarding the role of talk, Holmes (1998) suggested that there are different opinions from men and women. Women see communication as the aim of maintaining the relationship. They focus on the affective functions of an interaction. Thus, they use language to develop solidarity and maintain relationships. However, men treat language as to exchange and obtain information as they want to maintain and increase their power. Therefore, women speak more politely than men. Besides, society tends to expect women speak more politely than men. Hence, the society accepts men to speak directly and control other's thinking. Women, on the other hands, are not expected to use these kinds of speech. Furthermore, Frank and Anshen (1985) pointed out that only male are allowed to talk rude. Even if they do not use polite speeches, they are forgiven because "boys will be boys". Yet, female is not allowed to do so. This indicates that society does affect the social functions of language.

Based on the above findings, it can be seen that women speak more politely than men. Then, an interesting question is raised that whether women speak more politely to women than to men. If so, what are the reasons behind? Some researchers have been trying to answer this question. For example, the finding from Brouwer (1982) investigates the differences in the politeness in the same and cross- gender in the conversation of selling ticket. It is found that men and women speak more politely to male ticket sellers than to women when considering the salutations, modal constructions and the frequent occurrences of "please" and "thank you". Instead, Holmes (1988, 1989) argued that women speak more politely to women than to men as women often apologize and compliment to women than to men.

Previous studies have provided mixed results on English. We are interested to investigate this in Cantonese to find out the answer of whether females speak more politely to females than males in the Chinese society. Since a number of linguists found that females speak more politely than males. We hypothesize that females speak more politely to females than to males, while males speak less politely to males than to females. To answer our research question, this study will

focus on the Hong Kong young generations on their performative speech acts of complaining, apologizing and comforting others with regard to their syntactic structures and choose of words of politeness expressions in Cantonese. Their speech will be analyzed in the frame work of politeness theories.

In the past, a number of politeness theories developed by researchers. For example, Brown and Levinson's FTAs theory (1978); Gu's Chinese politeness theory (1990).

Brown and Levinson's Face- threatening acts (FTAs) (1978) is the most fully elaborated and influential work on linguistic politeness. Brown and Levinson work with the notion of "Face" is something that all human have and everyone wants to maintain in the interaction.

In Brown and Levinson's FTA, face is divided into two groups, 'positive face' and 'negative face'. Positive face is used to reduce the distance between the speaker and the listener in order to show the closeness and solidarity. It is an approach – based politeness. For example, treating someone as in – group member by using slang and address form, seeking agreement. Negative politeness, on the other hand, refers to distance and formality to the listeners. It is an avoidance-based politeness. For example, the use of indirect forms, hedging and deferential address terms.

Regarding these two groups of politeness, Brown and Levinsons found that negative politeness was comparatively more polite than positive politeness. Since it is not assumed the closeness between the speaker and hearer that the positive politeness supposed.

Moreover, to minimize the loss of face, Brown and Levinson proposed five strategies which showed as below: (Strategy 1: the least polite form; strategy 5: the most polite form.) (Brown and Levinson 1978: 60)

“Strategy 1. Do the act on - record baldly without redressive action: an action performed by the most clear and unambiguous action.

Strategy 2. Do the act on - record with positive redress: satisfy the need of the hearer's positive face.



- Strategy 3. Do the act on - record with negative redress: satisfy the need of the hearer's negative face.
- Strategy 4. Off - record: making speaker attend to the hearer's negative face but only provides some hint instead of pointing out directly.
- Strategy 5. Don't do the act at all: avoiding saying something offensive to the listeners, i.e. being silent."

Some linguists think that the Brown and Levinson's FTAs only suitable to western culture which is not suitable to Chinese culture. Since Brown and Levinson only concern the own image, which is individualism. However, Chinese society concerns the public – image, which is collectivism. Therefore, regarding the politeness behaviour in modern Chinese, Gu (1990)'s work is the first comprehensive study in this area. He proposed four maxims of politeness, namely the Self-Denigration maxim, the Address maxim, the Generosity maxim and the Tact maxim (Gu, 1990:245-252). "The first maxim, the Self- Denigration maxim is the most significant maxim reflects in Chinese politeness. That is, to denigrate ourself and to raise the other in order to show the respective and modesty to listeners. The second maxim, the Address maxim means to use the appropriate address forms to show the respect to the listeners. The Generosity and the Tact maxim aim to minimize the benefits to themselves and the cost of others."

However, the Gu's four maxims are not used in this research. Since Gu's maxims are very vague and can not reflect the whole picture of present Chinese society. This is especially for the Self-Denigration maxim of denigrating ourself and raising the other which is not common to be found in young generations nowadays. Therefore, the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson are used as it can provide the framework of the research. In this research, it is interested (1) to see whether females are more sensitive to the feelings of 'face needs' of their listeners. (2) Moreover, aim to find out whether participants use positive politeness to their friends to identify the closeness and solidarity, while using negative politeness to strangers to form a distance.

## METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this project is to investigate the politeness among same gender and cross gender conversation. The aims of this study are as following:

1. To compare the politeness expressions in same gender and cross gender conversation.
2. To investigate if the relationship between participants in a conversation would affect the politeness strategies employed by women in same-/cross-gender conversation.

### **1) Participants**

30 female and 20 male volunteers aged between 20 and 25 from university in Hong Kong are recruited. Participants are all native speakers of Cantonese from different family and social backgrounds.

### **2) The design of the questionnaire (see Appendix)**

The questionnaire contains 9 scenarios that are considered common in daily life. This enables the participants to provide responses naturally. Moreover, the questionnaires are designed in Cantonese.

For every scenario, participants should provide two types of responses, both to respond to the (a) same gender and (b) the cross gender. Since many variables such as age, social distance do affect the result of politeness, some control settings are needed. Each part is set to respond to friends or strangers who are also in similar age. Moreover, each scenario is set to be in public areas.

Therefore, in certain stance, participants may speak more politely as they consider their self images in other's eyes.

### **3) Scenarios**

The questionnaire contains 9 scenarios in 3 topics:

Topic 1: (Scenarios 1-4) Situation in which some one makes the speaker unhappy / upset.

Scenarios 1: A friend forgot to bring the concert tickets

Scenarios 2: A friend failed to keep the promise

Scenarios 3: Some stranger pushed over the participants

Scenarios 4: A salesperson sold out the mobile phone without the  
participant's permission

Scenarios 1 to 4 are designed to see whether the participants will make a complaint or not. How would they complain, if they choose to do so? For example, is there any swear words? Do they complain directly or indirectly?

Topic 2: (Scenarios 5-7) Situation in which the participants upset/ offend others.

Scenarios 5: Participant damaged his/ her friend's book

Scenarios 6: Participant's food fell over on a stranger

Scenarios 7: Participant stepped on a stranger

Speaker on these scenarios may accidentally do something that may upset or offend others. This aims to see whether the participants would apologize, and if so how they apologize?

Topic 3: (Scenarios 8-9) Situation in which the participants give comfort to others.

Scenarios 8: A friend failed in the public examination

Scenarios 9: A friend lost his/ her beloved things

Participants are in a situation where their friend is very upset and need someone to comfort. This is designed to see whether the participants would show sympathy, understanding, and how they would comfort and cheer their friends up.

#### **4) Procedure**

9 typical scenarios were provided to the participants. In each scenario, participants are asked to write down their first responses to such situation, verbally or non-verbally. There is no time limit and therefore participants can take as much time needed to complete these scenarios.

## **5) Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, participants are first divided into two main categories. One is the female group and the other is the male group. Then, under each group, I will analyze their performative speech act of both (a) same gender and (b) cross gender among friends and strangers with regard to their syntactic structure and lexical items of politeness expressions.

## FINDINGS

After collecting the data, the results will be divided into 3 parts, making complaints, apologizing and comforting others. In each part, it will be firstly (1) to see whether there are differences in politeness behaviours between the female participants to the same and cross gender of listeners. Secondly, it will be found out (2) whether there are differences in politeness behaviours between the female participants to their friends and strangers. After that, it will be analyzed the male participants in term of these two aspects. Finally, (3) it will be the comparison of the results of politeness behaviours between female and male participants.

The following part is about the politeness behaviours of female participants to same and cross-gender of listeners.

### 1) Complaints

Make complaints	Responses	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3		Scenario 4	
		To friends				To strangers			
		F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M
Make complaints  (The degree of politeness: 1 is more polite; 3 is less polite)	1. Say “唔係呀嘛”	50%	20%	10%	10%	0%	0%	13%	10%
	2. Say “有冇搞錯”	10%	50%	7%	7%	17%	20%	20%	17%
	3. blame or scold	23%	47%	33%	47%	21%	21%	53%	60%
Make complaints with body languages	1. 皺眉 (frown on someone)	--	--	--	--	3%	0%	--	--
	2. 望住佢 (gaze to someone)	--	--	--	--	7%	7%	--	--
	3. 啤佢 (glare at)	--	--	--	--	13%	20%	--	--

	someone)								
Without making complaints	Never mind/without any respond	20%	3%	7%	7%	17%	27%	0%	0%

Table 1: percentages of politeness strategies when making complaints in scenario 1 to 4

### 1.1 Politeness behaviours of female participants to female and male listeners

Scenarios 1 to 4 are about somebody who makes the participants angry and upset. It is found that female participants usually make complaints in these 4 situations and mostly they respond in a reply/ performative speech acts and body languages.

For reply, it can be divided into three types and levels, namely saying “唔係呀嘛”, “有冇搞錯” and even a scold. In these three types, saying “唔係呀嘛” is the most soften way which is regarded as more polite form to express their discontent, while scolding is regarded as impolite strategies to show their anger.

Make complaints	Responses	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3		Scenario 4	
		To friends				To strangers			
		F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M
Make complaints	1. Say “唔係呀嘛”	50%	20%	10%	10%	0%	0%	13%	10%
(The degree of politeness: 1 is more polite; 3 is less polite)	2. Say “有冇搞錯”	10%	50%	7%	7%	17%	20%	20%	17%
	3. blame or scold	23%	47%	33%	47%	21%	21%	53%	60%

Table 2: percentages of politeness strategies for making complaints in scenario 1 to 4

From the above table, it is found that females speak more politely to females than to males. The most significant evidence is that they usually use “唔係呀嘛” which is the soften way to make complaint to females and this can be clearly shown in scenario 1 with 50% and in scenario 4 with 13%. However, they use “有冇搞錯” which sounds less polite and directly to express their

dissatisfaction to males, for examples in scenario 1 which has the highest percentages of 50% . Besides, female participants scold to males more than to females. This especially reflects in scolding to male friends which is 30% in scenario 1 and 47% in scenario 2 when comparing to female with 23% in scenario 1 and 33% in scenario 2. In addition, they use more impolite words to blame their male friends as shown in the following table.

Make complaints	Scenario	F→ F	F→ M
Examples of blaming others	1	10% e.g. -點解你會咁大槽架 -仲有咩好睇, 番屋企睇日出 lor	30% e.g. -頂! -頂你個肺! -你唔係咁 Kai 呀? 真係唔該晒啲....唉~最叻係你呀.... , -你而家點死都要死番張飛俾我呀! -你唔係咁冇記性呀嘛? -你地啲男仔真係大頭蝦! -麥你咁架, 你唔帶飛睇咩 ar -做嘢咁唔小心, 你浪費我 D 時間同金錢 -玩嘢 ar
	2	33% e.g. -咁有呢搭圾架你呀?	47% e.g. -你個仆街 -咩料 ar -即刻同我死過嚟 -乞人憎 -你玩嘢 ar -唔嚟又唔早響
	3	10%	17%

		e.g. -有無帶眼出眼!? -喂!! 痴線架! -睇路 la!! 撞死人咩	e.g. -無帶眼就唔好學人出街 -睇路啦! 行路唔帶眼! -睇路 la!! 撞死人咩 -你有冇睇路行架? -推咩呀推, 行咁埋, 想搏懵呀
	4	50%	53%

Table 3: percentages of politeness strategies for blaming in scenario 1 to 4

Some other interesting findings can be found in scenario 1 to 4. Firstly, females use more question forms such as in scenario 2, “你而家先話唔嚟?” which is an indirect way to female in order to protect their face. However, they use a more direct way, like the statement “唔嚟又唔早響” to males.

Secondly, female participants usually add the final particles to soften their tone to females, for examples, “點解 ge?”, “點解 ar?”. In fact, they speak more directly without adding the final particles to males, such as “做咩唔嚟?” and “點解唔嚟?”.

Thirdly, in scenario 4, even female participants making complaints, they still use more polite forms, like “麻煩你”, “唔該” while requesting the female sales to do something for them.

However, no polite forms are used to male sales.

Make complaints	Response	Scenario 3	
		F → F	F → M
Make complaints with body languages	1. 皺眉 (frown on someone)	3%	0%
	2. 望住佢 (gaze to someone)	7%	7%
	3. 啤佢 (glare at someone)	13%	20%

Table 4: percentages of using body language to express discontent among same gender and cross gender

As O’Sullivan (2007) pointed out that many form of expressions can be regarded as polite



interaction. Thus, they can be reflected not only by the verbal form of spoken words, but also performed by body language, eye contact, facial expressions and behaviours. For instance, from the above table, only in scenario 3 can be found in using body languages, such as frowning on, gazing to and glaring at someone to express their discontent. They frequently use glaring at someone to show their wrath and it is clear that they glare at males more than females in 7%.

**1. 2Politeness behaviours of female participants to friends and strangers**

Make complaints	Response	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3		Scenario 4	
		To friends				To strangers			
		F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M
Make complaints	1. Say “唔係呀嘛”	50%	20%	10%	10%	0%	0%	13%	10%
(The degree of politeness: 1 is more polite; 3 is less polite)	2. Say “有冇搞錯”	10%	50%	7%	7%	17%	20%	20%	17%
	3. blame/scold	23%	47%	33%	47%	21%	21%	53%	60%

Table 5: percentages of making complaints among same gender and cross gender

It is obvious that the percentages of using “唔係呀嘛” to females is greater in scenario 1 and 2 than in scenario 3 and 4. This illustrates that females usually use this to their friends than to strangers. This is because in scenario 1 and 2 the listeners are friends while in scenario 3 and 4 are strangers.

Moreover, the percentages of blaming the strangers are the same in scenario 3 no matter what the gender of the strangers is. Also, there is only a small range of differences of 7% between the male and female strangers in scenario 4. However, there are large ranges of differences between the same and cross gender of friends as shown in scenario 1 and 2. This suggests that if the listeners are strangers, no difference on blaming regardless of the gender of the strangers is.

## 2) Apologizes

Responses		Scenario 5		Scenario 6		Scenario 7	
		To friends		To strangers			
		M→M	M → F	M→M	M → F	M→M	M → F
Length of the utterances	word/ utterance	Longer (26)	Shorter (22)	Longer (17)	Shorter (15)	Longer (5)	Shorter (4)
Follow up	1.Offer compensation	77%	54%	73%	57%	--	--
	2. Check up	--	--	10% e.g. -你有有 事 ar?	3%	13% e.g. -有事 ma?	3% e.g. -有事 ma?

Table6: percentages of politeness strategies of apologizing in scenario 5 to7

### 2.1 Politeness behaviours of female participants to female and male listeners

Scenarios 5 to 7 are about the participants upset or offend others. The study by Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) suggested that apologies can be performed in different ways, such as taking responsibility (such as follow –up), expression of sorrows, explaining the reasons and offering compensation.

It is found that these apologize performances can be found in this research. Almost 99% of female participants apologize to others by saying “sorry”. Besides saying “sorry”, some of them have follow- up. This can be explained in scenario 5 and 6 as they try to offer compensation to sufferers. In scenario 5, females usually compensate a new book to the sufferers. In addition, in scenario 6, females try to help the sufferers to clean the clothes. Obviously, females apologize with these kinds of actions to females far more than to males.

Moreover, in scenario 6 and 7, participants check up the sufferers by asking “有事嗎?” to minimize their faults and protect their own face. From this, it is found that female participants

check up the females (10% and 13%) far more than to males (3% and 3%). This infers that female participants show more consideration to females than to males.

In terms of the length of the utterance, the finding indicates that female participants speak more number of words to females than to males when apologizing. Hence, females put more effort to explain and offer compensation to females than to males in order to mitigate their faults.

### 2.2 Politeness behaviours of female participants to friends and strangers

In regards to the follow-up, there is no significant difference between friends and strangers.

However, in term of the length of the utterances, both to female strangers and male strangers as shown in scenario 6 and 7 are quite near with only one or two words in difference. However, when females talk to their friends, there are large differences in the length of the utterances.

### 3) Comfort others

Responses		Scenario 8		Scenario 9	
		To friends			
		F → F	F → M	F → F	F → M
Length of the utterances		Longer (25 word/ utterance)	Shorter (23 word/ utterance)	Longer (22 word/ utterance)	Shorter (24 word/ utterance)
Comfort their friends with actions	1. Help their friends to find the things	--	--	27%	19%
	2. Buy the new one to their friends	--	--	12%	12%
Without showing consideration and understanding		--	e.g. -算啦,下次再 嚟囉!	--	e.g. -男人來架, 放開啲啊  -男仔黎 ga,

				唔見左少少 野唔好咁 la, 有我唔係最 好咩? 全部 都係身外物 ar 哥哥  -男人老狗, 唔係為咗果 少少嘢 LA 埋口面呀 嘛???? 你 冇嘢呀???? 冇咗咪冇咗 囉, 唔使死 架嘛???  -買過條囉,你 又唔係無錢  -再買過囉
--	--	--	--	--

Table 7: percentages of politeness strategies when comforting others in scenario 8 and 9

### 3.1 Politeness behaviours of female participants to female and male listeners

In scenario 8 and 9, in terms of the length of the utterance, it can be seen that females speak more words to female friends. This indicates that they give more support, cheer up and show more understanding to females.

Moreover, in order to protect the face of their female friends, they try to speak indirectly. For instances, they avoid to speak directly to their female friends that it is not sensible for them to continue to study. In fact, they use an comparatively indirect way to give other suggestions to them, like “唔好咁唔開心啦~ 其實會唔會有 d 讀書方法可能需要調整一下?? 又或者, 除左讀書, 你有冇諗定第二條出路?”. In contrast, when they talk to their friends who are males, they

just directly tell them the truth that they are not suitable for retaking the examinations and suggest them to find a work, such as “算吧啦, 咁即係證明你唔係考試的料囉, 不如搵下有咩適合你做仲好啦.” This reflects that females are more attentive to the feelings of the face needs of their female friends.

Besides, females comfort their female friends with more actions than to males. This can be exemplified by scenario 9 that they do a favor to their female friends to find the things which is 8% more than that to males.

Furthermore, from scenario 8 and 9, it is found that females comfort more, show more understanding and consideration to their female friends. However, to their male friends, they sometimes do not show any understanding and support. For example, saying “e.g 算啦, 下次再嚟囉!” in scenario 8; saying “男人老狗, 唔係為咗果少少嘢 LA 埋口面呀嘛?? 你有嘢呀?? 冇咗咪冇咗囉, 唔使死架嘛??” and “買過條囉, 你又唔係無錢” in scenario 9.

To conclude, females are more attentive to the feelings of the face needs of their female friends. They show more understanding and consideration to their female friends which can be reflected in (1) the length of the utterances, (2) offering advices in an indirect and positive ways and even (3) taking more actions to support them.

This part is about the politeness behaviours of male participants to same and cross-gender of listeners.

### 1) Complaints

Make complaints	Response	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		Scenario 3		Scenario 4	
		To friends				To strangers			
		M→ M	M→ F	M→ M	M→ F	M→ M	M→ F	M→ M	M→ F
Make complaints (The degree of politeness: 1 is more polite; 3 is less polite)	1. Say “唔係呀嘛”/ “唔係呱”/ “唔係呀”/ “唔係掛”	10%	10%	10%	15%	0%	0%	0%	20%
	2. Say “有冇搞錯”	32%	0%	15%	5%	0%	0%	40%	0%
	3. blame/ scold	79%	0%	70%	15%	55%	10%	65%	55%
Make complaints with body languages	1. 皺眉 (frown on someone)	--	--	--	--	0	0%	--	--
	2. 望住佢 (gaze to someone)	--	--	--	--	10%	11%	--	--
	3. 啤佢 (glare at someone)	--	--	--	--	10%	0%	--	--
Without making complaints	Never mind/ without any respond	10%	58%	10%	15%	5%	10%	5%	10%
Ask the reason why they don't come		--	--	15%	50%	--	--	--	--

Table 8: percentages of politeness strategies when making complaints in scenario 1 to 4

### 1.1 Politeness behaviours of male participants to female and male listeners

From table 8, it is clear that male participants usually use more polite way to express their discontent by saying “唔係呀嘛”/ “唔係呱”/ “唔係呀”/ “唔係掛” to females as shown in scenario 2 with 15% and scenario 4 with 20% when comparing with 10% to males.

It appears that there is high frequency of using “有冇搞錯” to males in scenario 1 with 32%, 15% in scenario 2 and 40% in scenario 4. However, it is extremely less of saying “有冇搞錯” to females as only 5% can be found in scenario 2.

Moreover, male participants scold far more to males than to females in scenario 1 to 4. Most obviously, they even use swear words to blame males, instead of females as shown in the following table:

Make complaints	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
Examples of blaming  (Impolite strategies of making use of swear words are underlined)	- <u>屌你呀</u>  -頂  -你死都要死番出黎 ar  -頂你個肺呀  -你件粉腸……有無搞錯啊，快D 同我死翻去拿！  -屎啦你！咁都可以唔記得？你係人唔係呀？都唔知點解我會有個好似你咁咁 friend ge，成事不足敗事有餘！你	-仆你個街 a 你唔黎都講聲要我地等你咁耐 你食屎喇  -扮鬼啊你  -邊有 D 甘無交帶既同性朋友！  -你條死仔玩野呀，正仆街  -串佢兩句，同埋會提佢人唔到錢都要照夾。  -“頂你個肺”	-喂，咩事呀？玩野呀？  -死飛仔做乜 <u>lun</u> 野呀，想打呀。  -你咩料呀？得閒過頭想搵交打呀？你唔好以為我好蝦呀！你死緊啦你！  -罵佢，：你有病啊？推推推`	--

	呢d咁ge人真係 唔死都唔知有咩 用!			
--	---------------------------	--	--	--

*Table 9: percentages of politeness strategies for blaming males in scenario 1 to 4.*

In a big contrast, males do not make any complaints to females and they even forgive them as shown in 58% in scenario 1, 15% in scenario 2 and 10% in scenario 3 and 4. In addition, in scenario 2, half of the male participants would ask their female friends the reason why that they can not come for the meeting and it is 35% more than to males. This implies that males show more patient, consideration and care to females although they failed to fulfill their promise to come.

For making complaint with body language, male participants gazing to males and females are quite similar with 10% and 11 % respectively. Instead, only males use impolite strategies of glaring at males as shown in scenario 3.

In short, it can be concluded that male participants speak more politely and treat female listeners better than to males when considering the percentage of making complaints.

### ***1.2 Politeness behaviours of male participants to friends and strangers***

It is found that male participants use more swear words to blame their male friends than to male strangers.



## 2) Apologizes

Responses		Scenario 5		Scenario 6		Scenario 7	
		To friends		To strangers			
		M→M	M → F	M→M	M → F	M→M	M → F
Length of the utterances	word/ utterance	Shorter (17)	Longer (20)	Shorter (14)	Longer (16)	Shorter (4)	Longer (5)
Follow up	1.Offer compensation	37%	72%	40%	50%	--	--
	2. Check up	--	--	0%	5%	5%	30%

Table 10: percentages of politeness strategies of apologizing in scenario 5 to 7

### 2.1 Politeness behaviours of male participants to female and male listeners

In scenario 5 to 7, almost 99% of males apologize to others by saying “sorry”. For follow - up, they try to offer compensation to sufferers in scenario 5 and scenario 6. For instance, participants compensate another book to the sufferers in scenario 5. In addition, males try to help the sufferers to clean the clothes in scenario 6. Obviously, males apologize with these kinds of actions to females more than to males, this especially in scenario 5 with 72%.

Moreover, in scenario 6 and 7, there is a check up by asking the sufferers “有事 ma?” to minimize their faults and protect their face. Male participants check up the females with (5% and 30%) which are far more than to males (5%). This infers that males show more consideration to females than to males.

In terms of the length of the utterance, the finding indicates that females speak more number of words to females than to males when apologizing. Hence, males put more effort to explain and offer compensation to females than to males in order to mitigate their faults.

### 2.2 Politeness behaviours of male participants to friends and strangers

It is found that no matter what the gender of the strangers is, the percentages of male participants

offering compensation to strangers are quite similar. In fact, there are comparatively large differences with 35% between their female and male friends since male participants often offer compensation to females.

### 3) Comfort others

Responses		Scenario 8		Scenario 9	
		To strangers			
		M→M	M → F	M→M	M → F
Length of the utterances		Same (20 word/ utterance)	Same ( 20 word/ utterance)	Shorter (15 word/ utterance)	Longer (19 word/ utterance)
Comfort their friends with actions	1. Help their friends to find the things	--	--	10%	30%
	2. Buy the new one to their friends	--	--	0%	5%
Without showing consideration and understanding		-抵死啦！叫住你米鬼考架啦，系都吾聽人講！  -考唔到咪考唔到囉，	--	-都叫你平時唔好咁粗心大意 ga la, 你睇你, 又唔見野 la, 而家喊都喊唔番 la, 節哀順變 la!  -車。男人老狗有乜野咁大不了。	--

Table 11: percentages of politeness strategies when comforting others in scenario 8 and 9

#### 3.1 Politeness behaviours of male participants to female and male listeners

In terms of the length of the utterance, it can be seen that there are same length of utterance of 20 words per utterances in scenario 8. Contrastively, males speak more words to female friends in scenario 9 which indicates that they give more support, cheer up and show more understanding to females.

Besides, male participants comfort their female friends with more actions than to males. This can be exemplified by scenario 9 that they do a favor to their female friends to find the things which is 20% more than to males. Moreover, only male participants buy the new one to their female friends.

Furthermore, from scenario 8 and 9, it is found that male participants comfort more, show more understanding and consideration to their female friends. In fact, male participants sometimes do not show any understanding to their male friends, such as saying “抵死啦！叫住你米鬼考架啦，系都吾聽人講！” in scenario 8; saying “都叫你平時唔好咁粗心大意 ga la, 你睇你，又唔見野 la, 而家喊都喊唔番 la, 節哀順變 la!” and “車,男人老狗有乜野咁大不了。” in scenario 9.

This part is about the comparison of the results of politeness behaviours between male and female participants to same and cross – gender of listeners.

### ***Politeness behaviours of participants to female and male listeners***

It can be concluded that regardless of the gender of participants is, they both speak more politely to female than to male friends and strangers. These can be reflected in 4 aspects. Firstly, in making complaints, they blame less and avoid using swear words to females. In most cases, they even forgive them. Beside these, it is interesting to find that both female and male participants use the more polite way “唔係呀麻” to females in order to express their discontent. On the contrast, they use a less polite way “有冇搞錯” to males.

Secondly, in regards to body languages, it is comparatively less glazing at females to show their discontent. Thirdly, in term of the length of the utterances, they speak more to females in scenario 5 to 9 to show their considerations and supports. Lastly, they follow- up more, comfort more and support more with some actions to their female friends.

Furthermore, it is found that female participants use more question forms and indirect ways to mitigate their language to females. However, they use a more direct way to males. Besides, females use more final- particles, especially the confirmation-seeking particles. In addition, it appears that only male participants use swear words to blame their male friends and this implies that females speak more politely than males.

### ***Politeness behaviours of participants to friends and strangers***

It is obvious that the use of politeness strategies changed according to the role of the listeners since different conversations can be found between participants to friends and to strangers. For friends, the use of politeness strategies is mainly related to the gender of their friends as participants speak more politely to female friends than to males. In fact, participants treat strangers in similar way no matter what the gender of the strangers is. For instances, there are small differences in blaming to strangers. Besides, there are similar length and percentages of

offering compensations to strangers.

Moreover, it is found that they speak more politely to strangers than to their friends since they blame less and do not use the swear words to strangers. Also, female participants even use more polite form “唔該...” and “麻煩...” to female strangers. However, this can not be found in the conversation to their friends.

## DISCUSSION

In this part, the above findings will be discussed from two aspects. Firstly, the findings of females speak more politely to females than to males will be discussed. Secondly, how the relationship between participants would affect the use of politeness strategies will also be discussed.

Moreover, it will be compared the results with previous studies and will be discussed whether they are corresponding or not.

### *1. Politeness behaviours of participants to female and male listeners*

In general, it appears that females speak more politely than males do. It is corresponding to the previous studies and the finding of Brown (1998) that females speak more politely than males as females are more sensitive to the feelings of their listeners, and thus they speak more politely than males. For instances, from the above finding, it is easy to find that females use less swear words, blame less and show more considerations, understanding and supports to listeners than males. Also, they use more question forms and tag questions to mitigate their language and get affirmation. All these reflect that females are more attentive to be polite and they also have more status sensitive than males.

However, regarding to the research question which asked whether females speak more politely to females than to males, it is obvious that females use more politeness strategies to females than to males, for examples, they use more question forms and indirect ways to mitigate their language to females. Also, they blame less and do not use swear words to scold females. Moreover, they apologize more to females by offering compensation and check up which were fully reflected in scenario 5 to 7. Lastly, as shown in scenario 8 and 9, they comfort more and show more consideration to females than to males.

Besides that, it is interesting to find that male participants also use more politeness strategies to females. That means, no matter what the gender of the participants is, they both speak more politely to females. This result strongly reflects the image of females in the society is regarded as

less confident, lower social status, powerless and shy. Thus, their self-esteem will be lower and so their faces need to be protected. Besides, females are more emotional and more sensitive, they are easy to get angry than males. Therefore, speakers need to pay more attentions to their use of words and speak more politely while talking with females. Moreover, the society expecting females are more politely than males. In order to respect the politeness behaviours of females, speakers will speak more politely to them. To all these factors, regardless the gender of the participants is, they try to make use of the politeness strategies to reduce the risk of hurting females. Thus, it is clear that the gender of the speakers is not the only factor affecting the results, but also the gender of the listeners. In certain extent, the gender of the listeners is even more important than the gender of the speakers. However, past researchers just focused on the gender of the speakers and they found that females speak more politely than males in general. Here, it can be clearly seen that they ignored the prominent of the gender of listeners. Therefore, it is critical to take the gender of the listeners and speakers all together into consideration and this is the surprising finding in this research.

## ***2. Politeness behaviours of participants to friends and strangers***

As mentioned above, in general, participants speak more politely to females than males. In fact, one interesting finding can be found. There is only a small range of differences in using the politeness strategies in the conversations between participants and strangers. In other words, they treat the strangers in similar way no matter what the gender of the strangers is. However, there are great differences in using politeness strategies to friends which participants speak more politely to females than to males.

It is also interesting to find that beside the gender of the listeners, the politeness strategies also change according to the role of the listener. Scollon and scollon (1991, 1994, as cited in Pan 2000:13) finds out that there are special features and distinctions in in-group and out-group relationship in Asian discourse. “For in-group relationship, there are five classical Confucian relationships, namely ruler-ruled, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger and friend-friend.” .

For out-group relationship, participants and strangers only have a temporary relationship. They do not know and therefore no facework is needed. Hence, they do not need to pretend to be more polite to strangers.

In this research, it is no doubt that there are large distinctions between in-group (friends) and out-group (strangers) relationship and hence, it is definitely true that this appears in collectivist Asian cultures. However, unlike the finding from Scollon and Scollon that no facework is needed when talking to strangers. Since in this research, it is surprising to find that participants speak more politely to strangers than to their friends. This suggests that the increase of social distances, the increase of the use of politeness strategies. Moreover, this reflects that everyone try their best to maintain and concern each other's face. Therefore facework can be found in order to reduce the threats to another's face. They use these kinds of politeness strategies may due to the reason that they do not know the strangers well and each other's relative position in the social hierarchy.

On the other hands, there are fairly equal amounts of power and solidarity between the participants and friends. However, there is imbalance of power in scenario 1 to 3 and 5 to 7. In scenario 1 to 3, participants' friends find guilty as they make the participants angry. Thus, participants are more powerful than their friends. In this case, impolite language will be induced. In contrast, scenario 5 to 7 is about participants find guilty and in this case, participants are less powerful. Besides, they are in very close relationship when compare with that of strangers and therefore they speak more directly, less politely and even use some swear words to their friends.



## CONCLUSION

This part containing three parts: (1) summary; (2) limitations and (3) suggestions of this paper will be discussed accordingly.

### 1) Summary

It can be concluded that females speak more politely to female listeners than to male listeners among young generations in Hong Kong. Moreover, one interesting finding can be found in this research. No matter what the gender of the speakers is, they both speak more politely to females. This provides a distinct finding against those past researches which only focus on the gender of the speakers. Moreover, this also provides an insight to us that the gender of the listeners is also the critical factor affecting the politeness behaviour of the speakers.

Besides, the politeness strategies change with the relation between the participants and the listeners. Participants behave more politely to strangers than to their friends. Moreover, they treat the strangers in the similar way and therefore in this case, gender of the strangers become less important to cause the change of the politeness behaviours of the speakers.

### 2) Limitations

Firstly, although the use of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is more convenient to collect the data, it still has its limitations. This method can only get the participant's responses in written form. However, it can not be observed their eye contact, body language, voice of the participants during the face- to- face interactions. Therefore, these kinds of body languages have not been considered in this research.

Secondly, despite the detail description of each scenario, participants may not have that kind of experiences to go by in real life and therefore, they may not provide corresponding and real responses.

Thirdly, participants are set to be talking to their friends and strangers in similar ages in the public

areas. Therefore, only the gender, age of the listeners and the relation between the participants can be controlled. Others factors, like the appearance and the behaviour of the listeners which can also affect the results, have not been taken into account.

Lastly, this research only focus on the question that whether females speak more politely to females than to males and the result clearly shows that participants speak more politely to females. However, there is no explanation of why participants speak less politely to male listeners since this is not the purpose in this research.

### **3) Suggestions for further study**

In order to collect more realistic responses, it may be better to record participants' responses using video tapes. Therefore, the body languages, such as eye contact, facial expressions can be observed and considered.

Besides, more factors which may affect the results should be considered. For examples, the out-looking and the behavior of the listeners can also attribute to the speaker's verbal behavior.

Lastly, since this research only focus on whether females speak more politely to females than to males. It is more comprehensive if future studies include males to find out and explain the reason why male participants speak more/less politely to male listeners.

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## APPENDIXES

CTL4235 Final Year Project  
Department of Chinese, Translation & Linguistics  
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指示：

以下 9 個情境都係圍繞我哋日常生活環境經常出現嘅，如果這些事情發生在你身上，你嘅第一個語言反應或反應係？（請用廣東話(口語)在空白地方填寫）

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你的性別: 男 / 女

1. 你同一個熟朋友都好鐘意一個明星，嗰嗰呢個明星開演唱會，你哋好開心約埋一齊去睇。但入場嘅時候，你嘅朋友發現唔記得帶你哋嘅入場飛，你會同佢講咩？會有咩反應？
  - (a) 如果對方是同性
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - (b) 如果對方是異性
  
2. 你在一間電器公司買咗一部新款手機，俾咗訂金，但要等三日後攞貨。三日後，年輕的 sales 打電話俾你嚟攞貨。但攞貨時，sales 同你講你嘅貨已賣咗俾人，你會有咩反應？
  - (a) 如果對方是年輕嘅同性 sales
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - (b) 如果對方是年輕嘅異性 sales
  
3. 年三十晚你在維園行年宵嘅時候，有個青年推跌你，你會同佢講咩？會有咩反應？
  - (a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

4. 你同一班朋友約咗去長洲玩。但果日大家在碼頭等咗十五分鐘都未見你最要好朋友嘅踪影，於是你打電話俾佢，但佢同你講“我都係唔嚟”，果時你會同佢講咩？會有咩反應？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

5. 你嘅熟朋友多次在公開考試中落敗，非常失落，你會點安慰佢？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

6. 你嘅熟朋友唔見咗心愛嘅嘢，心情低落，你會點安慰佢？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

7. 你將一個熟朋友借俾你嘅心愛書籍整爛咗，你會怎樣跟他／她說？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

8. 午飯嘅時候你在 Canteen 唔小心將炒飯同汽水倒在你身後嘅年青人身上，使佢好狼狽，你會同佢講咩？會有咩反應？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

9. 你在地鐵繁忙時間趕返屋企，迫上車箱嘅時候，唔小心踩到隔離嘅年青人，你會跟他／她說什麼？

(a) 如果對方是同性

(b) 如果對方是異性

- 完 -