Face Work and Politeness Strategies in Computer Mediated Discourse across Genders

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Abstract

Without considering face-work, dynamic social and cultural relations will come to a halt. Therefore, in order to avoid any friction and hostility in everyday interactions, participants have to pay due care and attention to politeness strategies and face-work. In the technology-oriented world of today, communication is not only face-to-face, but it is also rendered through the Internet. Although Goffman's theory of facework has been developed with respect to face-to-face interpersonal communication, it can also cast some light on and provide insight into the behaviors displayed by participants in computer-mediated synchronous and asynchronous discourse. According to a study carried out by Siegel et al. (1986) uninhibited behavior is higher in computer-mediated communication (CMC) conditions than face-to-face (FtF) inasmuch as the attention of people communicating via CMC is distracted from the social context. This research aims to investigate how this uninhibited behavior, i.e. face-threatening act happens across genders and how they try to avoid face-threatening acts and how they compensate for it when it occurs in on-line interactions. Accordingly, it uses the ethnography of communication approach and the concept of face-work to analyze the transcript of asynchronous interactions. The participants are a number of EFL Linkedin, a social network, members who are English teachers and practitioners discussing EFL issues. As this paper focuses on the devices which facilitate or hamper communication, it can be illuminating and insightful for EFL and ESL teachers and learners at the same time.