

DOES A MEN'S TENDENCY TO COMPLIMENT WOMEN REVEAL WOMEN'S SUBORDINATE SOCIAL STATUS?

INTRODUCTION

Compliments in discourse are a common feature of conversation. They are usually intended to make others feel good. Compliments are generally described as positively affective speech acts serving to increase or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and addressee. However, compliments may have a darker side. Compliments can be used to express sarcasm or disapproval, to put someone down, to insult, to manipulate, and to threaten the addressee's negative face. Thus, the relationship between participants is crucial in accurately interpreting the functions of a compliment.

Nowadays, it is thought that women are regarded as a subordinate or less powerful group than men in many communities and not surprisingly this is often reflected in the different politeness devices used by and addressed to women. Since recent researches have proved that women both give and receive more compliments than men, some go so far as to suggest that the fact that women are complimented more often than men is an indication of their subordinate status.

While women seem to use compliments to establish, maintain and straighten relationships, they're much less positive politeness devices for men, where they need to be used with care since they're face threatening. The fact that men pay more compliments to women than they do to men may indicate that men are aware of the value of compliments in women's eyes. Alternatively, this pattern may reflect the fact that men perceive compliments as appropriate encouragement to subordinates. In other words, male compliments to women may reflect the different social power positions of women and men.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Compliment is one of the most obvious ways of expressing politeness., It is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good'(possession, characteristic,

skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (Holmes 1986:485).

The most important function of compliments is to reinforce the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee (Wolfson 1984), especially between females, although compliments have a number of other functions as well. Tannen (1995) claim that complimenting is largely a positive politeness strategy, for it lets the addressee know that he or she is liked and approved of. As positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function compliments serve is to polish the social relationship, pay attention to positive face wants, and thus increase or integrate solidarity between people

Many researches who tried to prove the fact that some features in women's language reflects their subordinate social status, could not help but mention Robin Lakoff's researches in their works. "Lakoff characterised what she called 'women's language' as a display of subordinate status to which women in particular societies were condemned: its hallmarks were powerlessness, insecurity, and triviality".(Cameron 2005)

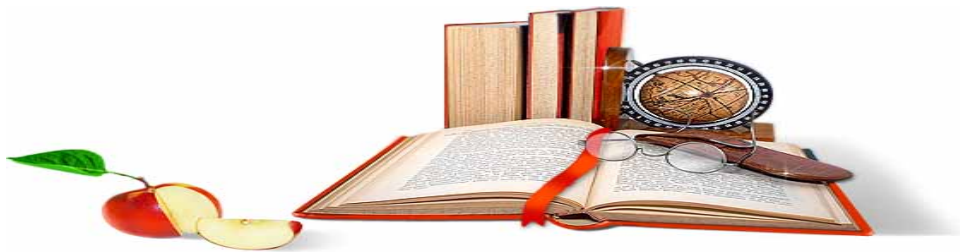
Lakoff's research was so called 'dominance' approach to language and gender, in which the emphasis was placed on the effects of gender inequality. Male dominance and female subordination were considered to be reflected in gender-differentiated linguistic behaviour. On the other hand, so called 'cultural difference' researchers, the best known of whom is Deborah Tannen, argue that linguistic gender differences were produced not by the subordination of women as such, but by the social arrangements which separate the genders in the formative period of childhood and adolescence. Boys and girls learn different ways of speaking in the same sex peer groups where their main socialization takes place. Although dominance and difference researchers offered contrasting views, it is striking how much they had in common. On some of the most fundamental points there was no dispute between them.

When it comes to the complimenting and the way in which it reflects speaker's social status Nessa Wolfson says that nowadays there is a growing field of research which is focused on compliment behaviour and its relation to both status and gender. Janet Holmes conducted a study using a New Zealand sample focusing specifically on the function of compliments across gender, whether they are positively affective speech acts or potentially face threatening acts. Using a corpus of 484

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