

A Gendered Study Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth

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Abstract:

Language is subject to variation across individuals due to its dynamic nature. Among the key dimensions influencing linguistic variation is gender, with males and females often exhibiting distinct patterns of language use. Thus, one noticeable area where this variation emerges is in the expression of politeness. This study aims to explore gendered differences in the use of politeness strategies on social media, focusing specifically on Algerian youth. To investigate this phenomenon, a mixed-method approach was employed within a case study framework using a questionnaire and an interview to collect necessary data. The findings serve as evidence that gender plays a significant role in shaping online politeness strategies. While both genders strive to be polite, women tend to employ more overt expressions of politeness, whereas men often adopt more indirect or subtle forms. These findings reinforce the notion that gender-based linguistic variation is a persistent sociolinguistic reality, manifesting not only in offline communication but also within digital spaces.

Keywords: Algeria, Gender differences, Language variation, Male and Female, Politeness strategies, Social media, Sociolinguistics, Youth

1 Introduction:

Politeness strategies accompany human beings in their daily life interactions. Those are essential tools for people to navigate their ways out of a social situation. Although natural, politeness is in reality an intricate series of choices that are constantly made. Whether saying

something or keeping quiet, being overly direct or a bit more implicit, acting in a polite and socially acceptable way could be a true brain teaser. One thing that cannot be denied is the existing difference between males and females. When it comes to expressing politeness, the two genders show different approaches to the matter and tend to make their choices differently. Politeness is, thus, more than a matter of acting good mannered, it is about linguistic choice, a choice that differs according to gender.

Men and women use their linguistic abilities differently in real-life interactions, and the same applies to the virtual world they navigate. Gendered politeness extends to social media contexts where each party uses language in a thoughtful way. This raised interest around the issue of gendered politeness on social media. In order to investigate the issue, two research questions were formulated:

- 1- To what extent do male and female differ in their use of politeness on social media?
- 2- What types of politeness strategies are adopted by each gender in online communication?

The questions were addressed in hypothetical terms as follows:

1- There is a significant difference between males and females in both the frequency and manner of using politeness strategies on social media, with female users generally employing politeness more frequently and in more indirect ways than males.

2- Male and female adopt different types of politeness strategies in online communication, with females more inclined toward positive politeness (e.g., compliments, expressions of solidarity), while males tend to favour negative politeness or more direct, clear, and unambiguous communicative strategies.

1.1 Politeness Defined

Broadly speaking, politeness can be seen as a kind of behaviour that maintains good social harmony. In the reality, politeness is much more complex than that. It is not a matter of superficial courtesy but rather a reflection of social norms and expectations, culture, and intricate linguistic choices. Brown (2015) claims that “politeness is essentially a matter of taking into account the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated” and highlighted that in order to ensure such thing, linguistic choice was a crucial element to be considered. As for a fact, caring about others’ feelings implies a delicate use of language where one would carefully formulate their ideas into something that would potentially not be misinterpreted, rude, or hurtful.

From a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective, many scholars attempted to define the concept of politeness in relation to language. Leech (1983: 81), states in relation to politeness that one has to “maximize the expression of polite beliefs, minimize the expression of impolite beliefs”. Yule (1996) finds that politeness could be seen as a fixed concept and that it was synonymous with etiquette, tact and overall sympathy which are all socially and culturally governed. On the other hand, Watts (2003) suggests that politeness was much more than the common sense knowledge of the concept which includes the context related, everyday expressions of politeness like saying “please” and “thank you” whenever required. Instead, he highlighted the importance of linguistic choices and says that politeness is strategically used to maintain face, an idea that was also approved of by Yule who claimed that politeness could also be about being aware and considerate of the other person’s face in an interaction, which often reflects a sense of respect.

1.2 Politeness Theory

When it came to the definition of politeness, different scholars gave different points of view on the matter. However, a majority acknowledged the existence of the concept of ‘face’ which is closely related to politeness. The idea of ‘face’ was initially introduced by Goffman (1967) which was later adopted by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their politeness theory. In fact, face is about the desired self-image of a person and the way they want to be seen. It is the public image that one presents and strives to maintain in a social interaction to avoid conflict or embarrassment. The two scholars, developed the idea of face into positive face, the desire to be appreciated and negative face which represents the desire to be independent and not imposed upon. Therefore, in a social interaction, people make use of politeness strategies to protect those faces and minimize what Brown and Levinson called face threatening acts (FTA) i.e. any utterance or comportment that would violate either types of face that the person is trying to protect. Those strategies include on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, not doing the FTA, a kind of spectrum that allows people to pick the desired level to avoid a FTA situation. So, the scholars provided a theoretical framework and a clear explanation over the way people act in daily interactions while trying to save their face as well as that of the person in front of them.

1.3 Politeness and Gender

Despite being closely related to culture and society; politeness may also be shaped by gender. In fact, social norms impose certain stereotypes and expectations that differ for men and women even when it comes to expressions of politeness. Politeness is not only a matter of social norms but also gender roles. This issue was of paramount importance in sociolinguistics and led scholars such as Robin Lakoff (1975), the pioneer of the field of language and gender, to take a closer look at it. When it comes to politeness, Lakoff suggests that conventionally speaking, women usually have an unclear, indirect, repetitious and meandering speech while men show the

complete opposite. This shows that women tend to be politer than men and this is distinguishable from a very early age.

Lakoff (1975) finds that women tend to use a more formal, hypercorrect, and ‘super polite’ language which is not the case of men who tend to be more casual with the use of more slang forms. She noted that within female exclusive groups, some women may use some forms of camaraderie similarly to men but that in mixed groups this feature completely vanishes away. Moreover, women are more prone to use tag questions and hedges which reflects their social inferiority to men who tend to be seen as more powerful and thus more eligible to use a direct and assertive language. This view reflects the social expectations that treat women as inferior to men with a restricted social role.

Sekhri (2022) conducted a gendered linguistic study within the Algerian speech community. Her research unveiled that men and women do not talk the same and this is particularly the case when it comes to expressing forms of politeness. The researcher states that generally speaking, men tend to treat language as a simple communicative tool to get things done. On the other hand, women value social relationships and acknowledge the fact that language is a means to preserve good relations thus they are more formal and extremely polite especially when it comes to requesting or complimenting. Therefore, it is safe to say that women are more polite than men and are more caring over their interlocutor’s feelings as they carefully choose their words to achieve their ends.

Overall, previous works on language and gender clearly show the differences between men and women particularly when it comes to linguistic choices. In their day to day interactions, women seem to be politer and considerate of their as well as their addressees’ face while men tend to be more casual and direct as they focus more on getting things done or directly conveying their ideas. This difference of politeness level is most certainly a reflection of social expectations

and norms which usually are hyper-fixated on women's comportment rather than men's. However, it is interesting to see whether those differences are also reflected on the virtual worlds of social media.

2 Methodology and Data Analysis

This section will deal with the practical aspect of the research work by shedding the light on the employed methodology as well as the data analysis and interpretation.

2.1 Methodology

This paper investigates the issue of the use of politeness strategies on social media platforms and the influence of gender on such linguistic choices. As an attempt to answer such concerns, a mixed method approach was employed in order to explore the issue by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. A case study was put in place a research method. This one was exploratory single instrumental and embedded as the case was divided into two groups corresponding to the two genders. Concerning the sample, a number of 30 young Algerian people took part in the research by answering an online questionnaire and an interview. They were equally divided into male and female groups in order to analyse data.

In order to collect enough data to talk about the issue at hand, the researcher employed two research tools. First, an online questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire included a mixture of questions that allowed the collection of different kinds of data. The answers were later analysed quantitatively and qualitatively and some graphic representations were provided to summarize the findings. Next, a semi-structured interview was used which allowed the participants to talk freely about the topic. The collected results were also analysed and summarized.

2.2 Data Analysis

This section is concerned with the quantitative and qualitative data analysis as well as a comprehensive data interpretation.

2.2.1 Questionnaire Analysis

In order to collect sufficient data around the studied issue, a questionnaire was administered to a number of young Algerian guys and girls with ages ranging from 20 to 35 years old. The collected data was carefully analyzed and summarized as follows.

Q1: Which social media platforms do you use daily?

In order to identify the most used social media platforms according to the participants, this question was formulated. The answers revealed that the most used platform among Algerians of all ages was Facebook/ Messenger with a rate of 38.46%, followed by Instagram with 34.61%. 19.23% of the informants prefer TikTok, a platform that was mostly selected by the youngest participants of the group. Only a minority of 7.68% chose other options like Reddit and Telegram.

Table1. The Most Used Social Media Platforms by Algerian Youth

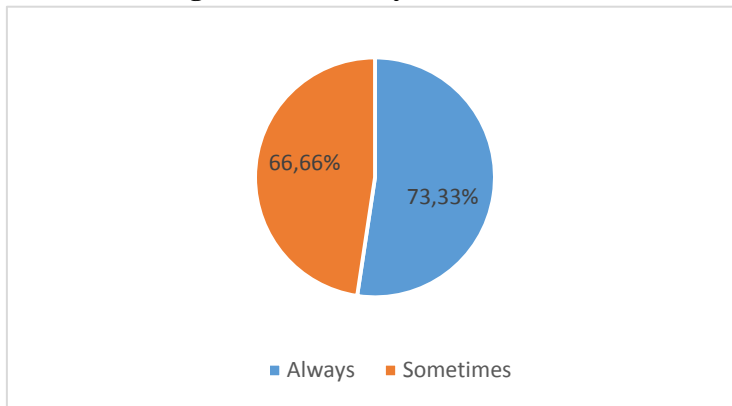
Application	Number	Percentage
Facebook/Messenger	20	38.46%
Instagram	18	34.61%
TikTok	10	19.23%
Others	4	7.68%
Total	52	100%

Source: SELKA Meryem & KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 5

Q2: How often do you use social media?

In order to have an idea about the frequency of use of social media, the participants were asked to select one of the offered options. Both genders mostly selected 'always' (73.33%) as they considered they used social media pretty frequently. 66.66% of the male participants claimed to always use social media while the remaining 33.33% claimed to use it sometimes. For the females, 80% always use social media while 20% use it sometimes

Fig1. Level of Daily Use of Social Media



Source: SELKA Meryem & KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 6

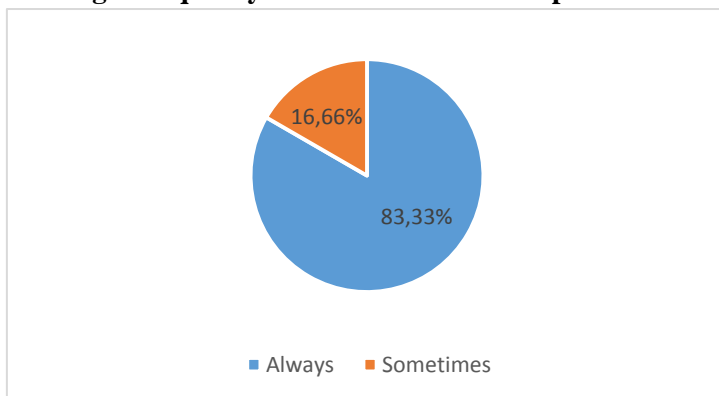
Table2. Level of Daily Use of Social Media According to Gender.

Gender	Male	Female
Always	66.66% (n= 10)	80% (n=12)
Sometimes	33.33% (n=5)	20% (n=3)
Total	100% (n=15)	100% (n=15)

Source: Ms. SELKA Meryem & Dr. KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 6

Q3: How often do you use politeness expressions on social media?

The participants were asked this question to know if they are prone to using expressions like ‘please’, ‘thank you’, ‘sorry’, even on social media. The results showed that the majority of the participants (83.33%) always use these kinds of expressions while 16.66% said they used them sometimes. According to gender, there were equal proportions i.e. no gender influence as both males and females selected ‘always’ with a rate of 80% while 20% selected ‘sometimes’ as their answer.

Fig2.Frequency of Use of Politeness Expressions

Source: Ms. SELKA Meryem&Dr. KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 6

Table3. Frequency of Use of Politeness Expressions According to Gender.

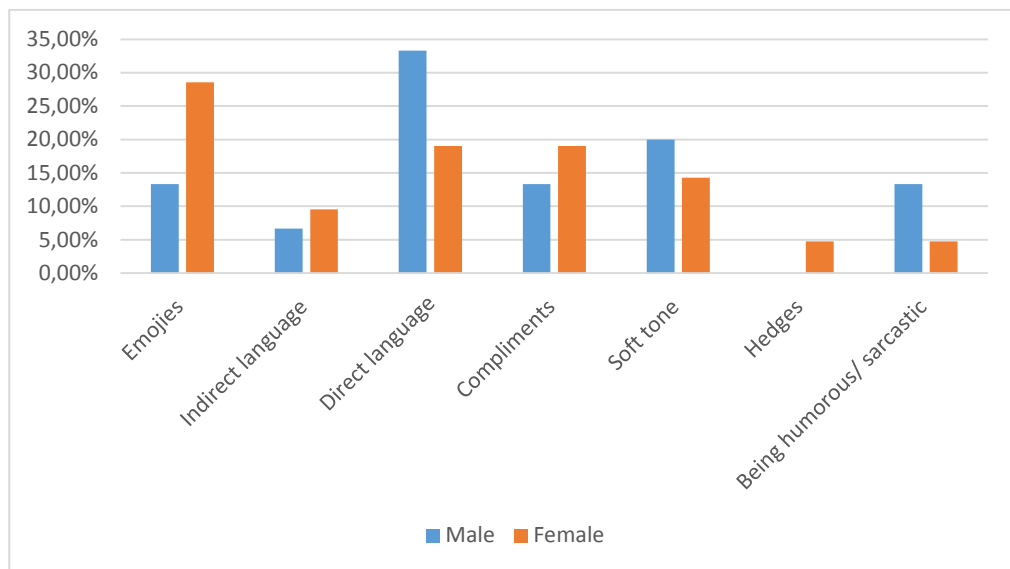
Gender	Male	Female
Always	80% (n=12)	80% (n=12)
Sometimes	20% (n=3)	20% (n=3)
Total	100% (n=15)	100% (n=15)

Source: Ms. SELKA Meryem&Dr. KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 7

Q4: What strategies do you use to be polite on social media?

In order to see if males and females use more or less the same of different politeness strategies, the participants were asked to answer this question. When it comes to males, most of the participants claimed that they used direct language as their main politeness strategy with a rate of 33.33%. Other informants 20% claim to use a soft tone, while some use emojis, compliments, and humor with equal rates of 13.33% respectively. Only a minority 6.66% use an indirect language. On the other hand, females claim to mostly use emojis as a way to express politeness with a rate of 28.57%. A large number of female informants use compliments and direct language on social media with equal rates of 19.04% for each. 14.28% claimed to use a soft tone while a score of 9.52% was obtained for the use of indirect language. Finally, equal rates of 4.76% were obtained for both the use of hedges and humor as a politeness strategy.

Fig3. Gender and Most Used Politeness Strategies on Social Media



Source: Ms. SELKA Meryem & Dr. KAID SLIMANE Hynd (2025), A Gendered Analysis Exploring Politeness Strategies on Social Media: case of Algerian Youth, page 7

Q5: Do you adapt your level of politeness according to the person you are speaking to?

This question was asked to gain insights into whether the addressee plays a vital role into shaping the level of politeness of the speaker. Regardless of gender, both males and females mostly agreed that the level of politeness does have a lot to do the person they are speaking to even on social media. The participants revealed that social media is a reflection of the real world thus, if one tends to adapt their politeness level on a daily basis they would certainly do so on social media as well in a kind of unplanned and natural way. Also, the informants claimed that it was important to do so mostly because they do not know the person that much and would fear misunderstandings and wrong interpretations which often happens on social media. Some male participants, however, suggested that they were less likely to adapt their language and politeness level and that they treated everyone the same, while another participant claimed that he would “match the other’s energy” meaning that their politeness level would depend on the other person’s politeness.

Q6: Do you think that men and women use different politeness strategies on social media?

As for to know whether the participants are aware of differences between men and women particularly when it comes to politeness strategies, this question was formulated. The informants’ answers showed that for the most part, both genders consider that men and women are different and this transcends even to the application of politeness strategies on social media. For the female participants, men and women do not talk the same and it even applies to politeness strategies. In fact, women tend to be described as softer, significantly intimate and more considerate of other’s feelings. They are seen as emotional creatures. Also, women tend to be polite to everyone and anyone. On the other hand, men are seen as less afraid of being called ‘rude’ as they are less careful of their public self-image. Moreover,

men usually seem polite with people they do not know on a personal level and are less careful, more casual and sarcastic especially around close friends. From the males' gaze, men tend to associate politeness to the addressee, if they consider that the other person deserves to act polite around them they will. But globally speaking, men consider that politeness strategies are not a matter of gender but rather a matter of education and principals. This means that men consider that they will naturally act politely in whatever shape or form they consider suitable to the situation. Nevertheless, they are very considerate of the way the person in front will act. If they feel a bit of rudeness, they would not fear to act the same way.

Q7: Is politeness on social media really important? Why?

This question reveals whether, nowadays, politeness is still something to be considered even on social media. The informants unanimously agreed that politeness was a very important parameter in life in general. Since social media is only a reflection of what could happen in real life, politeness remains a highly significant. In fact, both genders consider politeness as a major element to keep harmony, peace and foster a good socialization on social media. Being polite on social media is only a reflection of the person's true character, thus omitting politeness from one's speech would create a kind of misunderstanding and even uncontrollable wildness. Moreover, it helps preserve self-image. Social media is a parallel diffusion of real life. The people one can talk to on social media are real, their experiences are real, and their existence is real. Hence, their experiences on social media are real too, seeing someone act impolitely on social media would create the same kind of disturbance that one could feel if they saw the same scene in real life. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to coexist politely and humanely and enhance digital morals as much as it is important to be in real life.

Q8: Do you think that people are less polite on social media than in real life? Explain.

In order to see to which degree is ‘face’ preserved, the informants were asked whether the level of politeness is lower on social media when compared to real life. The results showed that all of the informants regardless of gender consider that there is some part of truth to the statement. In fact, many informants claimed that people tend to be less polite on social media because they are protected by their screens and sometimes even unknown usernames. This gives them a sense of power. Moreover, on social media, people are less likely to bump into each other again, whether it be in real life or in another comment section, therefore, they feel less restricted. In a way, their ‘face’ is protected by the screens that separate every user from the other, a separation that can sometimes be misused.

2.2.2 Interview Analysis

In an attempt to ensure the reliability of the previously collected data thanks to the questionnaire as well as to get more qualitative data and a further insight into the topic, the use of an additional tool was required. A semi structured interview was conducted with 6 youthful Algerian guys and girls. The participants had to answer a few questions that revealed the way youngsters express politeness on social media and how gender influences their actions.

Q1: Do you use politeness strategies online?

As a first question, the participants were asked whether they made use of politeness strategies on social media to see if they gave importance to politeness even in the virtual world. Regardless of their gender, all of the participants agreed that politeness mattered whether in real life or in social media. politeness reflects one’s true character. If a person is rude on social media, they most certainly are in real interactions as well. The participants said that they often would use politeness expressions like /sahjiit/ ‘thank you’ or /Allah iXəliik/

'please' whenever needed, or give compliments. Female participants seemed to give frank and straight forward compliments like /ziitthəbbəl/ or /Xerjetpɔpia/ 'you look amazing' while men were more reserved /artist sa7bi/ 'you look good' or /sa7iit/ 'nice job'.

Q2: Are there particular situations where you try to be more polite?

In order to see if the addressee plays a role on the person's level of politeness, the participants were asked this question. The answers revealed that, regardless of gender, both guys and girls tend to adapt their level of politeness according to the person they are conversing with, even on social media. The participants admitted that it was a natural, unplanned reaction and a kind of reflection of what they would have done in a real life interaction. Some guys mentioned that they would adapt their speech if speaking to a girl versus speaking to a guy by fear that girls would not accept the highly explicit and crude language that guys may use with each other. Girls, on the other hand, consider that they usually are polite no matter the situation but they do emphasize their politeness when speaking with a stranger or an older person.

Q3: Do you think that your gender influences how you express politeness?

This question was formulated to see if the participants were aware of the influence of gender on language use, particularly regarding politeness. The results showed that the informants mostly acted the way they did in an unconscious way and linked their polite speech to their education saying that they were always raised that way. However, female participants seemed more attached to those values compared to males who would not hesitate to use a harsher tone if needed.

Q4: Have you ever adapted your online communication style to align with gender norms or expectations? In which ways?

The final question focused on social norms and expectations towards each gender when it comes to language use and expressing politeness. Here, female participants claimed that they sometimes did. Although they usually act politely anyway regardless of the situation, sometimes, they feel restricted by social expectations and the famous ‘what would people say’. An interviewee claimed that she felt the urge to insult someone back in the comments if they were rude to her but would stop herself by fear of judgement. She stated “what is posted on social media will always remain there or at least some trace of it. This could ruin your whole image if the wrong people see it”. Girls also claimed that they usually have to show a feminine image to the world and are expected to be soft and gentle even in situations they don’t feel like it by fear of being categorized as impolite. Male participants however did not give much importance to social norms and did not feel as pressured. They claimed that they acted in whatever way they felt like depending on the situation. They are mostly polite but can easily turn tables if the situation required it.

2.2.3 Discussion

From the collected data, a few ideas could be deduced regarding the issue of politeness on social media according to gender. The administered questionnaire revealed that the idea of ‘face’ although not commonly shared by everyone is still something that people pay close attention to even if it seems unconscious. Women tend to be more careful with this because of social beliefs that shape the way they act whether in real life or on social media. Different politeness strategies can be employed by either genders. People do acknowledge that the two genders have their preferences but the use of different options remains an unconscious matter. As for a fact, men and women tend to lean towards different strategies with women opting for a softer tone, emojis and compliments while men prefer to use a direct language.

From the interview, the idea of politeness on social media is grasped by both genders, although they may have different ways to express it as well as different perceptions of it. While men seem to be direct and honest, women may find softer ways to express their true feelings. However, when it comes to being vulnerable and showing appreciation and giving compliments, women are more open while men tend to hide their feelings. Both genders expressed the importance of politeness even on virtual interactions as those only reflect what a person is capable of doing in real life. Therefore, people tend to be polite and try to save face even if their 'face' is hidden behind a screen. However, females are more concerned about their 'face' and are more careful when it comes to social expectations while men are not afraid of saying what they think out loud.

Finally, social media is not much different from a real life interaction. Whether people are separated by simple screens, kilometers or continents, both men and women care about self-image and politeness even if they express it according to their own preferences. Politeness remains a crucial part of everyday speech and interactions even within virtual connections on social media.

3 Conclusion

This article explores the use of politeness strategies on social media in relation to gender as a social variable among youthful Algerians. The study included a number of young Algerian males and females who took part of the investigation to determine whether gendered differences in language use truly exist, particularly when it comes to being polite on social media. The results showed that men and women do show different ways of expressing politeness. In fact, both consider that politeness is a highly important thing that must be preserved even in virtual interactions. When it comes to politeness strategies, males tend to be direct and clear employing a straight-to-the-point kind of language. Alternatively, women seem to be more soft and thus use positive politeness strategies including giving compliments as well as an indirect language that strongly focuses on the other person's feelings. Therefore, women are very often polite

with almost everyone and in every situation while men tend to adapt their politeness to the situation itself. All in all, men and women are entirely different, even in language use. Both genders can be polite but each expresses politeness in their own unique way.

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