

# Understanding (mis)gender(ing) and pronouns from a politeness theory standpoint

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Certain linguistic forms have a “wounding potential” (Motschenbacher 2010:169). The most recognisable form of “linguistic wounding” (Motschenbacher 2010:170) are direct insults. However, gendered forms –i.e., words that openly signal someone’s gender, such as pronouns, gendered morphemes or lexemes– also carry this potential. Based on the links shown by Motschenbacher’s (2010) between gender and Brown & Levinson’s (1987) and Watts’ (2003) work on politeness theory, this study aims to explore (mis)gendering as an (im)politeness strategy in different communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet).

To carry out this exploratory study, publicly available recordings as well as online interactions between users on public forums which included gendered forms have been gathered in three different languages: English, Spanish and German. In turn, these interactions and the use of gendered forms have been analysed as “face-work” (Goffman 1967:5) considering Motschenbacher’s (2010:171) conceptualisation of “gender face”. This process prompted the following questions:

1. Which gendered linguistic forms have been used in reference to transgender, non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals?
2. What is the intention or wounding potential behind those forms?
3. How is (mis)gendering linked to the face-work done by the participants and/or the communities of practice they belong to?

This poster will address these questions and focus on how looking at gender, gendering and misgendering from a politeness theory standpoint can deepen our understanding of what lies behind the use of certain pronouns, gender-marking morphemes and lexemes to refer to transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

Keywords: gender, pronouns, misgendering, politeness, face-work

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