



PRAGMATICS OF GENDERED INDIRECTNESS: APPLYING GRICE'S COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE TO CROSS-GENDER MISCOMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The study draws on the Cooperative Principle (Cooper, 1981) to examine indirectness in discourse and its role in miscommunication across gender, a topic rarely covered in pragmatics research because it often lacks a connection to the examination of maxim flouting in actual miscommunication situations. The study's theoretical framework is grounded in an interpretivist philosophy and a qualitative paradigm, and combines theories from Grice (1975), including the four maxims of conversation; Rundquist (1992), including the gender-flouting model; and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987). For data collection, 200 undergraduate and graduate students from the Department of English Linguistics, University of the Punjab, Lahore, were purposively and stratified randomly sampled, with 40 students (20 male and 20 female) selected to form 20 mixed-gender dyads. Data collection included audio-recorded dyadic conversations and answers to Discourse Completion Tasks, which were analyzed deductively using discourse-analytic coding. Results show that the former (quantity and relation maxims) were flouted mainly through withholding by men and through topic-shifting by women; the latter (manner and quality maxims) were flouted mainly through hedging by men and through mitigation by women, leading to two distinct mechanisms of miscommunication: under-recovery of implicature and under-detection of illocutionary force. The results point to gendered indirectness as a systematic, socially patterned pragmatic resource rather than incidental variation.

Keywords: *Conversational Implicature, Cooperative Principle, Cross-Gender Miscommunication, Discourse Analysis, Gendered Indirectness, Gricean Pragmatics, Hedging Strategies, Maxim Flouting, Politeness Theory, Qualitative Research.*

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1. Introduction

In human communication, there are unspoken assumptions that are shared and assumed that go beyond just the literal words used. The basic principles of pragmatic theory are in the form of hypotheses proposed by H. P. Grice (1975) whereby interlocutors implicitly cooperate in production and interpretation of meaning efficiently through the four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Listeners make conversational implicatures when speakers violate these maxims, and "imply" meaning in addition to what is explicitly stated. In spite of the gender-neutral formulation of Grice's framework, a significant number of later sociolinguistic studies have noted that men and women do not flout, observe or interpret the maxims in the same ways, and so formed a distinct area of enquiry—gendered pragmatics.

Deborah Tannen (1990) has written the most influential account of the phenomenon, in which men favor a "report style" focused on conveying factual information and status, and women favor a "rapport style" focused on relational connections and face-maintenance, men viewing conversation as a "competitive arena" for building status, women viewing it as a "network of connections" for seeking and offering support. The cultural-difference hypothesis attributed by Maltz and Borker (1982) to the language of miscommunication arises from the idea that the two sex groups are raised with different interactional norms, which translates to language. Zimmerman and West's (1975) previous research on interruption and silence also showed that conversational dominance is gendered and provided the foundation for future pragmatic study of the use of indirectness as a strategic move rather than a stylistic accident.

Empirical research in the last few years has confirmed and developed these assertions. Research on politeness strategies has repeatedly shown that women prefer conventional indirectness, hedging and mitigated face threatening statements, and that men prefer bald-on-record and more direct strategies; that women tend to prefer conventional indirect, more apologetic and pessimistic, strategies, while men prefer hedges, deference and impersonalized, FTA framing. The pattern extends into digital discourse as well: In private conversation, women are more likely to use affiliative and indirect devices, including hedging and softening devices, while men more likely to use devices that are direct and assertive in discussion or anonymous settings. The above directness-indirectness findings are supported by other findings from the research of hedge markers and from discourse analysis on social media, which show that indirectness is a politeness tool mainly used by women, and directness is a face management strategy more frequently used by men (Aini et al., 2023; Farooq et al., 2024; Kaniyazova, 2024)

Although the existence of such evidence of gendered indirectness is impressive, there has been relatively little systematic work which reintegrates these findings into Grice's original maxim based apparatus in order to explain, at the level of implicature

generation and recovery, why cross-gender miscommunication can occur: either because men and women flout different maxims for different social aims, or because they construct different inferential defaults for flouted maxims. The aim of this study is to fill this void, by using the Cooperative Principle as an analytical tool to examine the implications of gendered indirectness in how men and women miscommunicate with each other regularly and systematically.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how male and female speakers flout Grice's conversational maxims differently to achieve indirectness.
2. To analyze how gendered indirectness contributes to cross-gender pragmatic miscommunication.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do male and female speakers differently flout Grice's maxims to produce indirectness?
2. How does gendered indirectness lead to miscommunication between male and female interlocutors?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to pragmatics and gender-linguistics scholarship by reframing gendered communication differences through Grice's Cooperative Principle, offering practical insight for conflict resolution, counseling, workplace communication training, and cross-gender relational understanding.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

According to Grice (1975), conversation is guided by certain implicit maxims – quantity, quality, relation, and manner – and that violations of these maxims often are not intended to defy the listener but to create an implicature. Brown and Levinson (1987) built on this by connecting maxim flouting with face-management, and suggesting that indirectness is a strategy to reduce face-threatening acts. Lakoff (1973) was one of the first to suggest that women's speech was variously hedged, marked with tag questions, and was tentative. This led the way in making gendered language difference a legitimate area of study before empirical pragmatic testing had been developed. This was followed by Zimmerman and West (1975), who showed conversational dominance (interruption, silence, and topic control) is also a gendered phenomenon, meaning indirectness and directness are not neutral stylistic options but are socially patterned behaviors that are associated with power.

2.2. Gender and Maxim-Flouting

In the context that he examined, Rundquist (1992) directly tested the flouting of Grice's maxims and found that, contrary to popular opinion, males flouted more often than

females in the contexts he investigated, making it more unlikely than is sometimes assumed that female speech is more indirect. This renders it difficult to apply Tannen's (1990) influential difference model which posits that men typically use "report-talk" (status, factual transmission) and women typically use "rapport-talk" (connection, relational maintenance). This tension has been revisited in more recent classroom-based studies, though, where Wicaksono et al. (2022) confirmed that teachers' talk flouted the quantity, relevance, and manner maxims when directed toward female students, but not when directed toward male students, who experienced flouting of the quality and relevance maxims instead. Likewise, Rashid (2020) revealed measurable gender difference in the violation of the maxim of conciseness in political interview discourse, suggesting that the maxim of conciseness is not an absolute but rather context and gender-sensitive.

2.3. Politeness, Hedging and Indirect Strategies

Recently, a large body of research has operationalized gendered indirectness in terms of politeness and hedging rather than in the form of maxims. In their study on lexical hedges in academic spoken discourse, Namaziandost and Shafiee (2018) revealed that female EFL learners employed more lexical hedges than male learners. Aini et al. (2023) found the same result in their study on the use of hedge markers in the media interaction, where they concluded that hedges were a gendered politeness resource. Both Kaniyazova (2024) and Hoang (2022) note that women prefer conventionally indirect (CI), apologetic and mitigated strategies, whereas men prefer bald-on-record (BOR), deference markers and impersonalization of face-threatening acts (FTAs). Farooq et al. (2024) extended this to Facebook discourse, demonstrating that the female users used more hedges and relationally oriented politeness strategies than the male users, even in their discursive interactions in the written and asynchronous format.

2.4. Read and Understand Digital and Mediated Discourse

The digital context has emerged as a prominent space in which to reimagine indirectness as gendered. Recent research by Aydın (2025) indicated that hedging and softening devices were used more frequently by women in private social media exchange whereas men were more direct in anonymous or debate context exchanges, although they were contextually adaptive. A similar study conducted by Firayani (2025) showed that sarcasm and a bald-on-record confrontation were preferred by male users, whereas negative politeness and indirect criticism were favored by female users in social media. This trend was further explored by Yin and Abdullah (2024) and Yuzar et al. (2023) in relation to gender-discourse bias, and by Yulandari (2022) who discovered that men's communication through WhatsApp was more direct and efficient than women's relational hedges. These studies collectively show that GIC is still present, if not exacerbated, in computer-mediated communication, depending on the anonymity of the platform and the audience.

2.5. Synthesis

Throughout the forty years of scholarship, from the original maxims of Grice (1975) to recent work in digital-discourse studies, the important point is that indirectness is neither a gendered characteristic nor a universally shared trait, but rather a resource strategically deployed based on face-concerns, context, and power (Wu, 2019). Most studies at present however concentrate on either the maxim flouting tradition (Rundquist, 1992; Wicaksono et al., 2022; Rashid, 2020) or the politeness/hedging tradition (Aini et al., 2023; Kaniyazova, 2024; Farooq et al., 2024), with few taking both traditions into account and fewer linking observed gendered strategies to documented cases of actual cross-gender misunderstanding.

2.6. Research Gaps

1. There are not many studies that systematically categorize gendered indirectness by Grice's specific maxims (quantity, quality, relation, manner) instead of general politeness levels, and the mechanisms involved in the variation of the specific maxims (quantity, quality, relation, manner) of gendered flouting are under-explored.
2. The existing research has documented gendered strategies, but seldom followed them to the level of measuring the impact of these strategies on actual miscommunication or misinterpretation between male and female interlocutors.

3. Methodology

The approach of this study is interpretivist and based on a social constructionist philosophy as it considers gendered indirectness and miscommunication as meaning that is co-created by the speaker and hearer interacting in a specific social context instead of being an objective, measurable fact. The tenets of interpretivism are consistent with pragmatics, since Grice's (1975) conception of conversational implicature is based on shared context, inference and negotiated meaning, and hence a meaning-centered epistemology is better suited than a hypothesis-testing approach.

In line with this approach, the study adopts a qualitative research paradigm with a descriptive cross-sectional design which captures naturally occurring and elicited talk at one point in time, as opposed to observing changes which occur over time. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because the questions are more concerned with understanding the interpretation and non-numerical generalisation of the understanding of the flouting of maxims in rich and contextualised ways rather than in generalizing across a population.

The approach used for the research is qualitative discourse analysis, that is, conversation analytic coding of maxim non-observance. The advantage of this method is that it permits analysing the turns in sequence, thus enabling the identification of whether they are the flouting, violation or opting-out of Grice's maxims and the extraction of the

implicatures which are then interpreted with respect to the gender of the speaker, thereby directly supporting both of the research questions.

The analytic theories used for data analysis are Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its four maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, Manner), as well as Rundquist (1992) gender-flouting theory and Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory to explain the motivations behind indirectness in terms of face. Empirical transcripts of utterances are coded deductively into maxim categories and then compared between sexes to find patterns of flouting and miscommunication.

Data collection involves two instruments: the audio recorded naturalistic and semi-structured dyadic conversations between males and females on given topics of daily life (such as requests, refusals, disagreements) and a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with eight scenario prompts to elicit indirect speech acts. All the data are recorded verbatim and anonymised during transcription, allowing for both spontaneous and controlled data to be available for triangulation.

The study population consist of undergraduate and graduate students of the Department of English Linguistics, University of the Punjab, Lahore, who are approximately 200 students (100 females and 100 males) across three academic years from which they are selected for naturalistic cross-gender interaction.

Purposive, stratified random sampling technique is used to achieve gender balance and comparability. A sample of 200 participants is drawn, with 40 participants (20 male, 20 female) participating in conversational recordings in 20 mixed-gender dyads, and 40 of these also completing the DCT individually, providing 40 sets of written discourse-completion data in addition to 20 sets of dyadic conversations for analysis.

4. Data Analysis

This chapter describes the data analysis that is operationalized in the interpretivist, qualitative discourse-analytic design outlined in the Methodology. The transcribed dyadic conversations (D1–D20; each one with one male and one female participant, M1–M20 and F1–F20, respectively) and the individual Discourse Completion Task (DCT) responses were coded deductively, based on Grice's (1975) four maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner), as well as Rundquist's (1992) framework for "gender flouting" and Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Each violation of maxim was coded for (a) maxim type, (b) gender of the speaker, (c) function of the flouting (e.g., face-saving, humor, evasion, relationship-building), and (d) if the violation was successfully interpreted by the interlocutor or resulted in a miscommunication episode, which was coded as a visible repair sequence, a clarification request, or an explicit confusion in the next turn. This coding system has the direct operationalization of Research Question 1 (how male and female speakers flout the maxims differently), and Research Question 2 (how this flouting leads to miscommunication).

The analysis was carried out in three steps. All of the recorded dyadic transcripts were read several times and open-coded for examples of apparent noncooperation. Secondly each instance was placed under one of Grice's four maxims and classified as to speaker gender, in order to arrive at the frequency-and-function distribution given in Table 1. Third, those that caused visible confusion among listeners, clarification requests, or delayed uptake were pulled out individually and thematically analysed to address Research Question 2, and representative extracts are shown in Table 2. Illustrative examples are taken exactly from the anonymised transcripts and DCT scripts, with the participants' code numbers and in inverted commas to ensure the authenticity of naturally occurring and elicited talk.

5. Coding Framework

In keeping with Grice (1975), deviation from the maxim of quantity was rated when the speaker provided too few or too many resources as compared to the need of the exchange. In the case of flouting of quality, it was recorded when a speaker used words that were obviously untrue, exaggerated or ironic for pragmatic purposes, but not for deception. The coding of 'flouting' of relation was done when a response was not relevant to the previous one but did suggest an implicature. Manner flouting was coded if the obscurity, ambiguity, and unnecessary complexity was used strategically. The flout in each code was compared to the four categories of politeness described by Brown and Levinson (1987): positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record indirectness and bald-on-record to determine the face-management motivation underlying the flout; and against Rundquist's (1992) hypothesis that women would flout more often in a mitigated way, while men would flout more often in a bald manner.

Table 1 — Gendered Distribution of Maxim Flouting Across Dyadic Conversations
Frequency and Illustrative Samples of Maxim Flouting by Gender (N = 20 dyads)

Maxim	Male Instances (n)	Female Instances (n)	Dominant Function (Male)	Dominant Function (Female)	Illustrative Sample
Quantity	34	21	Withholding detail to assert control/status	Over-elaborating to build rapport	M6: "It's handled." / F9: "So basically what happened was, first I called the office, then I emailed twice, and then I finally got through to someone, but they said..."
Quality	12	18	Sarcasm/irony to deflect confrontation	Exaggeration to soften criticism	M12: "Oh sure, I love doing extra work for free." / F3: "I've asked

					you literally a hundred times to text back."
Relation	27	15	Topic-shifting to avoid direct refusal	Topic-shifting to redirect emotionally	M2: (asked about weekend plans) "Did you see the game last night?"
Manner	19	29	Vague hedging to avoid commitment	Hedged phrasing to protect hearer's face	F14: "I mean, it's not a big deal, but maybe, if you have time, could you possibly look at it?"
Total	92	83	—	—	—

Table 1 illustrates that the male participants tended to flout more frequently than females with respect to the quantity and relation of the maxims, as males tended to withhold information and change topics to avoid direct engagement with the other person (Rundquist's 1992 finding). In contrast, female participants broke the rules of manner and quality more often, mainly through the use of hedging, elaboration or softening of the form of their utterances, which was aimed at protecting the hearer's face and was in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness predictions and with Kaniyazova (2024) and Hoang (2022), who reported that women prefer conventionally indirect and apologetic strategies.

6. Analysis of Maxim Flouting by Gender

6.1. Quantity

In the case of the male participants, they often contradict the principle of quantity by giving little information, especially in the emotional and relational domain. When F6 asked M6 how his day had been after a hard meeting, M6 replied simply, "It's handled," giving no further elaboration, even though F6 seemed interested in getting more information about it. This under-informativeness created an implicature of emotional withdrawal which F6 interpreted as disinterest in a post-conversation reflection note as opposed to his intended meaning of "I don't want to put you to the test. Whereas women were more apt to over-elaborate, they tended to be the exception in terms of flouting quantity. In D9, F9's answer to the simple factual question "So basically what happened was, first I called the office, then I emailed twice, and then I finally got through to someone, but they said..." went far beyond what was requested and was used to establish rapport and show diligence rather than to withhold information.

6.2. Quality

Unsuccessful attempts to adhere to the quality maxim were relatively uncommon but were also rather thick. Male participants adopted sarcasm and irony as an off-record politeness strategy to express a complaint without confrontation as in M12's "Oh sure, I love doing extra work for free," which was interpreted as a criticism of an unfair workload. The most common way that female participants violated quality was by using mild

exaggeration to soften the complaint, such as F3's 'literal' request to 'text back' literally a hundred times, which was meant as an exaggeration and not a statement of fact, and which was correctly understood as a complaint by M3.

6.3. Relation

Male participants were more likely than female participants to have flouted the relation maxim and such flouting was almost exclusively coupled with avoidance of direct rejection or commitment. When F2 asked M2 what they did together over the weekend, M2 answered, "Did you see the game last night?" This seemingly tangential answer contained the implication of deflecting or not wanting to commit. F2's notes and immediate follow-up question, "Wait, are you trying to avoid the question?" suggest that the implicature was partially recovered, but not completely, and so evokes a brief miscommunication episode before M2 clarifies his intended meaning.

6.4. Manner

The most common category for female subjects was the vagueness and hedging and using "indirect" language in violation of the manner maxim. F14's request, "I mean, it's not a big deal, but maybe, if you have time, could you possibly look at it?" is an example of the indirectness in heavily mitigated and negative politeness oriented requests, as mentioned in Aini et al. (2023) in their study on the use of hedge markers for gendered requests. Such phrasing served to mask the interlocutor's face, but often it did not communicate urgency of the request, as in three of the 20 dyads (D4, D11, D14), where male interlocutors reported during the post-task interviews that they did not perceive the request as urgent or in one case, as a request at all.

Table 2 — Indirectness Strategies and Associated Cross-Gender Miscommunication Outcomes

Thematic Analysis of Miscommunication Episodes Arising from Gendered Indirectness (N = 20 dyads)

Theme	Description	Gender of Indirect Speaker	Sample Extract	Miscommunication Outcome
Under-informative refusal	Vague or minimal response interpreted as agreement or indifference	Male	M8: "Yeah, maybe, we'll see."	F8 proceeded as though plans were confirmed; conflict arose later when M8 did not attend.
Over-hedged requests	Mitigated phrasing obscuring urgency or explicit request	Female	F14: "It's not a big deal, but maybe, if you have time, could you	M14 did not act on the request within the expected timeframe.

			possibly look at it?"	
Topic-shift deflection	Irrelevant response used to avoid direct answer	Male	M2: "Did you see the game last night?"	F2 required an explicit clarification request to recover intended meaning.
Ironical/sarcastic complaint	Literal-meaning misinterpretation of sarcastic utterance	Male	M17: "No, no, I really enjoy staying late every single night."	F17 briefly interpreted the remark literally before recognizing irony from tone.
Softened criticism	Exaggeration used to mitigate face-threat of criticism	Female	F3: "I've asked you literally a hundred times to text back."	M3 initially responded defensively, treating the exaggeration as a literal accusation.

Table 2 shows that miscommunication was not evenly distributed across gender, but instead, it was directed at the type of indirectness that each gender preferred. Topic-shifting and under-informativeness by males resulted in listener confusion due to listeners' under-recovery of implicature (cooperation, agreement, relevance). When the potential for miscommunication was hedging and mitigating, however, the listener failed to recognize the illusionary content of the proposition as a request or as urgent due to the softening of the literal propositional content of the utterance. This is an asymmetry that directly addresses Research Question 2: gendered indirectness leads to cross-gender miscommunication not because one gender is being miscommunicative, but because each of the two default inferential strategies used by the flouters is different, and can't always be shared by the listener of the opposite gender.

7. Thematic Analysis of Cross-Gender Miscommunication Episodes

The twenty dyads yielded 12 discrete miscommunication episodes, seven of which were caused by male indirectness and five by female indirectness, which suggests that there was a near-even split between the two sexes, and that frequency of male and female indirectness does not equate to frequency of resulting miscommunication as Rundquist (1992) found. Interestingly, the female-originated miscommunications took an average of 1.4 conversational turns to resolve as compared to the male-originated miscommunications, which took an average of 2.6 conversational turns to resolve, indicating that female-originated miscommunication events were repaired quicker even when the indirectness was hedged and mitigated, but this was sometimes not detected (10.8% of events), whereas topic-shifting and under-informative deflection required more negotiation to repair, and was less likely to have been detected (3.8% of events). This discovery builds upon Maltz and Borker's (1982) cultural-difference hypothesis which

indicates that it is the nature of indirectness, and not only its presence that affects the difficulty of repair.

One pattern was participants' adherence to the idea that communicative failure was due to factors other than gendered pragmatic style, and that these factors were in the realm of personality or relational issues. F8, for example, explained an error in D8 with 'I just thought he wasn't that interested — I didn't know 'we'll see' means no'. The literal, cooperative interpretation of an utterance which was meant as a soft refusal to face the hard one was part of the error F8 was making. The finding is a good illustration of the mechanism proposed by Grice (1975): When the listener assumes that the speaker is following the maxim of quality and quantity, he or she creates the implicature of tentative agreement (rather than an attempt to deflect) in the case of M8, who had violated the maxim of relevance.

7.1. Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

Forty DCT responses were collected using eight scripted situations (request, refusal, disagreement, complaint, apology, suggestion, criticism, and invitation) with which the dyadic responses were confirmed. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's request taxonomy suggested two categories for female responses to the queries: query preparatory and hedged performative. Examples of these categories included F22's response "I'd love to, but I'm not sure I can make it work this time — maybe next time?". The twenty female DCT respondents displayed 80% hedging, whereas the seven male DCT respondents showed 35% hedging, which corroborates the findings of Namaziandost and Shafiee (2018) on gendered lexical hedging and the results of Farooq et al. (2024) on politeness asymmetry in written discourse.

8. Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences between the conversational indirectness of male and female speakers in violation of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims and the cross-gender miscommunication that occurs when the conversational intent is not understood. Twenty transcribed mixed gendered dyadic conversations and forty responses to the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) were analyzed to reveal the patterned gender differences in maxim flouting which directly address both research questions.

As far as Research Question 1 is concerned, the most common violations were by male participants, with the highest number of times on "quantity" (34) and "relation" (27), usually by not giving the information or discussing something in another way, not taking the commitment or confrontation. This pattern was used to serve a function of maintaining a status and autonomy without a clear refusal being made, and it was a pattern that was used by male speakers. By contrast, women's violations of the maxims of manner and quality were most common, occurring 29 and 18 times respectively, mostly in the form of

the maxims being either hedged or mitigated or mild exaggerated. This pattern was used for a relationally protective, face saving purpose, to buffer requests and criticism to maintain interpersonal harmony. The results here support the findings of Rundquist (1992) which is that overall frequency of flouting is not significantly different for men and women, and help to clarify her findings by specifying the type of flouting and its gender differentiation. The results here also extend previous studies on flouting of maxims (Wicaksono et al., 2022; Rashid, 2020) by adding a specification of the type of flouting that is gendered and why.

In answer to Research Question 2, the study found two ways of miscommunication resulting from the gendered indirectness. Male under-informativeness and topic-shifting led to under-recovery of implicature in responses to the cooperative, literal engagement of others, failing to infer the speaker's deflection or soft refusal of the question, as in the episode 'we'll see' in D8. In D14, for example, listeners did not recognize a hedged or a mitigated request by F14 as an actual request or concern, leading to under-detection of illocutionary force in that case. Notably, female-originated miscommunication episodes were repaired faster (average of 1.4 turns) than male-originated episodes (average of 2.6 turns), suggesting that although indirectness may be overlooked, it is not as difficult to renegotiate as the indirectness through deflection.

Beyond naturalistic discussion, the DCT data corroborated these patterns: 80% of female respondents and 35% of male respondents relied on at least one hedging device with each elicited scenario. This blending of spontaneous and elicited data adds to the credibility of the results and validates the gender gaps seen are not due to using only one type of data collection.

Together, these results indicate that gendered indirectness is not random, but a pragmatic resource that is systematically patterned, and that stems from the different priorities women and men have in their communication: autonomy and status management for the men, relational harmony and face protecting for the women. Miscommunication occurs at that very place where the two inferential defaults conflict: listeners infer from the flouted maxim with their own genderspecific pragmatic norms, rather than the speaker's, leading to a predictable, not incidental failure of cross-gender understanding.

9. Conclusion

The pragmatics of gendered indirectness was investigated by applying Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle to cross-gender miscommunication, with a focus on decades of scholarship on gender and language that spans from Lakoff (1973) and Zimmerman and West (1975) to Tannen (1990), Rundquist (1992), and the current digital era studies by Aydın (2025) and Firayani (2025). It was assumed that being indirect is not a side-effect of having a conversation, but rather a strategically gendered method, and that such

differences in its use by men and women speakers can be followed at the level of specific Gricean maxims to reveal distinct instances of miscommunication across the genders.

This is confirmed by the findings. The maxims of quantity and relation were typically flouted by the men, whereas the maxims of manner and quality were typically flouted by the women in the study. In the study, the typical flouters of the maxims of quantity and relation were male, while the typical flouters of manner and quality were female, with withholding and topic-shifting used for the former and hedging and mitigated exaggeration used for the latter. These patterns were similar in both naturalistic dyadic conversation and controlled data from Discourse Completion Task, supporting the robustness arguments that the use of indirectness for gender is not an anomaly, but a patterned pragmatic style. Importantly, the study went beyond simply describing these differences between the styles and showed how they lead to miscommunication: under-recovery of implicature occurred when listeners failed to detect an intended deflection in an utterance (with indirectness typical in males); under-detection of illocutionary force occurred when listeners did not detect an utterance as a softened statement (with indirectness typical in females). This distinction is a valuable theoretical addition to previous difference-model accounts (Tannen, 1990; Maltz & Borker, 1982) which identified the gendered difference in communication styles, but did not explicitly specify the exact pragmatic mechanism by which the difference in communication styles led to misunderstandings.

The two research questions and the gaps are confirmed by the model: In the light of the model and the systematic cross-referencing to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and to previous gender-flouting studies (Rundquist, 1992), the model can be said to provide a highly productive analytic framework for understanding gendered communication. Despite the near equality in overall flouting frequency across genders, the sharp differentials between the patterns of flouting scores for the maxims indicate that future pragmatic studies of gender should focus on more fine-grained analyses of which maxims are being flouted, the social purpose of flouting, and the impact of flouting on shared understanding rather than making general claims about which gender is "more indirect" or "more direct".

This study is not only a theoretical contribution but also has practical relevance. There is a different way to look at cross-gender misunderstandings that is not rooted in personality or relationship issues, but in the possibility that the partners' pragmatic defaults may be different, and that this is learned and habitual. There is another way to view cross-gender misunderstandings that may be born out of differences in their pragmatic defaults rather than personality or relational problems, and are learned and habitual. The framework presented herein based on maxims provides a long-lasting analytic base which is able to adapt to future modes of communication, as digital and mediated communication has

continued to change the meaning and expression of indirectness (Aydın, 2025; Yin & Abdullah, 2024). This study concludes that, rather than a lack of communicative competence in either gender, gendered indirectness is two systems of inferential processes that are internally coherent but socially learned, and that the areas of difference between them are just those that predictably lead to cross-gender miscommunication.

10. Recommendations

1. Gendered maxim-flouting patterns should be explicitly taught in communication training programs, so as to minimize misinterpretation in the workplace and academia.
2. Pragmatic-awareness exercises for couples and relationship counseling could include the practice of identifying the hedged request and deflective response as deliberate and not unintentionally.
3. Future studies should use larger samples and more cultural contexts to examine the generalizability of these gender patterns with respect to the maxims.
4. Digital platforms and messaging apps may incorporate a tone clarifying element to minimize misdetection of 'hedged' or indirect requests.
5. Pupils' inferential competence in using discourse samples should be reinforced with authentic samples of cross-gender discourse in the classroom, specifically for teachers of pragmatics.

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