I Mean, You Look Sexy.

Differences in perception of a male and a female character amongst students in Seychelles

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Abstract

This study examines the difference in perception of a character in a male and a female guise amongst university students in Seychelles, and elaborates on how such difference reflects gender hierarchies in general. The students were given a questionnaire consisting of five scenarios, in which two or more characters communicated, and then answered questions about their perception of the characters. The character’s gender mattered to how he/she was perceived for at least one of the characters in the dialogue, in four of the scenarios, and in one scenario there was no difference in perception of the male guise and the female guise. The biggest difference in perception of a male guise and female guise was in a scenario in which one character commented on his/her colleague’s appearance. The male guise was perceived more negatively both when commenting and when rejecting such comment. However, the space in which the interaction took place, and the relationship between the characters influenced how they were perceived. So, when a group of people commented on an unknown person’s appearance, on the beach, the respondents perceived both the male guise and the female guise of the character similarly both as commenters and as receivers of the comment.

Keywords: gendered language use, space, agency, gender hierarchies.
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Introduction

Humans use language to communicate with each other. Words, sentences and phrases are expressed to share information with the people surrounding us. Language use is not only a tool for communication but also an identity-shaping act (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). One social category expressed through language is gender. Judith Butler’s (1990) theory on performativity is very well acknowledged, and recited, as having opened the discussion of gender-identities as constituted through social action. Basically, she questions the idea of there being a stable, prediscursive gender. Rather, she claims, gender is produced, and emerges, in discourse. This means that gender is a “doing”, an act that is repetitive and constitutive, but nevertheless, unfixed. Gender is “done” through social acts, one of which is language use. So, to be perceived as feminine one must speak and communicate in ways that are discursively understood as feminine. What is looked upon as feminine/masculine language use is contextually specific, but nevertheless reveals ideas about how a woman versus a man should speak to come across as natural, desirable and morally correct (Cameron, 2014, p.282). Hence, what relationship between language use and gender constructed as “natural” in a specific context, reflects its gender hierarchies.

Much of the research on language and gender has been conducted in a European and American context (Livia & Hall, 1997a; Ehrlich & Meyerhoff & Holmes, 2014; Coates & Pichler, 2011). However, the sociolinguistic field of gender and language has evolved from making universal claims about “typical” female and male speech styles to emphasize the constructivist perspective and acknowledge each context’s specific interrelation between gender and language use (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2011). So, given that research findings are contextually specific makes any research conducted in places not previously observed valuable. Because, on the one hand, it sheds light on the specific interrelation between language use and gender in that place, and on the other, it broadens the general understanding of linguistic practices and gender identities and what differences/similarities there are between places.

My research is conducted in Seychelles. Research on language use and gender is lacking in Seychelles and therefore conducting such research there gives a unique insight to how these phenomena interrelate in that specific context. The approach, used in this research, is to investigate if (and how) university students perceive a male and a female character differently. By looking at the students’ perception of a character it is assumed that discursive norms about gendered language use will be revealed. This means that a feminist perspective is applied in this essay and therefore of importance since, as Lia Litosseliti (2006) argues “feminist linguistics is grounded in identifying,
demystifying, and resisting the various ways in which language reflects, creates and helps sustain gender inequalities” (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 152).
Aims and Research Questions
My aim is to investigate perceptions of gendered language use amongst students at the University of Seychelles. More specifically, I want to investigate if and how the character’s gender affects how the students perceive the character. Furthermore, I want to elaborate on how the students’ perception of gendered language use reflects gender norms in general. And importantly, if and how a difference in perception due to the character’s gender reproduce gender hierarchies. Thus, my research questions are:

How does the character’s gender affect how he/she is perceived by the students at the University of Seychelles?

In what way does the perception of the character relate to ideologies of language and gender?

How are perceptions of gendered language use related to gender hierarchies in general?
**Brief Contextual Introduction**

The context, which my research is conducted in, is the Republic of Seychelles, a small island state, located in South-Western Indian Ocean. Seychelles was first colonized by the French, and then by the British until 1976 when they attained independency. After a coup in 1977 Seychelles was governed by a one-party political system until 1992 when a multi-party democracy was established. Because of its colonial history Seychelles has three national languages: Creole, English and French. However, Creole is the Seychellois’ mother tongue. Seychelles has approximately 95,000 inhabitants and has the highest GPD per capita in Africa, and its economy is primarily dependent on tourism and fisheries (worldbank.org). Seychelles ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1992 and Seychellois women are relatively well-represented in decision-making processes and are highly visible in public life compared to the situation in other countries of the region (Pardiwalla, 2009, p.39).

The data, used in the study, was collected at the University of Seychelles. The University of Seychelles, is a relatively new university, dating from September 2009. It is the only university in Seychelles and operates on three campuses, all of which are situated on the main island Mahé. There were 2913 students enrolled at the university in 2016, and there are three times as many women than men enrolled (unisey.ac.sc). Most students at the university are funded by the government, whereas some are funded by a private institution. The age of students ranges from 17 to 50 years, most students being between 20 and 35 years old.
Previous Research

Introduction
The two previous studies on gender and linguistic behavior, presented below, are conducted in New Zealand and the United States. There is a great body of previous research on gender and language and the reason why these studies are presented is because the speech acts discussed in those are somehow present in some of the scenarios used in the questionnaire. The first study concerns the act of complimenting and the second discusses conversational practices between spouses. Even though they are contextually specific, and not representative for the Seychellois context, they give an insight to possible ways gender and language use can intertwine.

Research on Gender and Language Use
Janet Holmes (2011) discusses in “Complimenting- A Positive Politeness Strategy” the linguistic function of complimenting in relation to her own study on compliment behavior amongst New Zealand women and men. According to Holmes, giving compliments is a speech act expressing positive politeness (p.71). But, given that the complimenter chooses what in the addressee’s appearance or behavior he/she thinks is worthy of evaluation, compliments can serve other functions too. That is, depending on the context, a compliment can reveal other intentions or referential meanings than politeness or affection (Holmes, p.73). For example, compliments directed from subordinate to superordinate risks being received as flattery and compliments expressed in a sarcastic way can be experienced as condescending. Hence, power relations can be expressed through the speech act of commenting. When a compliment is experienced negatively, it can be perceived as face-threatening, argues Holmes (p.73). Even compliments uttered with the intention of politeness and affection can be perceived as unwarranted intimacy and therefore as face-threatening. So, to accurately interpret the function of a compliment, the context, as well as the relationship between the complimenter and the addressee, is of importance.

In her study, Holmes analyzed 484 naturally occurring compliments and compliment responses between men and women. She found that giving and receiving compliments was a speech act far more common in interactions involving women than men. Generally, amongst the New Zealand women and men, women were complimented on their appearance by both women and men, whilst men complimented other men, but not women, on possessions (Holmes, p.81). Holmes claims that the fact that women compliment others more often than men, and receive more compliments than men, conforms both to the idea that woman are socially affiliative and to their subordinate social position. That is, since compliments express social approval, they are, when directed “downwards”, intended to be socially encouraging, helping to build the addressee’s confidence. This
makes compliments socially vulnerable speech acts and if directed “upwards” they risk being received as presumptuous. Holmes (p.85) concluded that, amongst the New Zealand women and men, men were more likely to receive a compliment as face-threatening, especially if the compliments regarded his appearance.

In “The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations” Victoria Leto DeFrancisco (2011) presents her research on conversational practices within seven heterosexual couples in the United States. DeFrancisco investigated how gender and power were reproduced in conversations by recording these couples when at home and by conducting additional interviews with the spouses. Some of the conversational components she analyzed were talk-time, question-asking and turn-taking violations (DeFrancisco, p.154). Turn-taking violation are ways in which one speaker disturbs the conversation. These could be interrupting, giving delayed response or no response at all, giving minimal response or talking too much (DeFrancisco, p.155). To violate turn-taking could be considered uncooperative, inattentive and disrespectful (DeFrancisco, p.155).

Amongst the couples DeFrancisco (p.156) found that the women had a greater need to converse, worked harder to uphold interaction but were less successful in doing so. The men, on the other hand, used much more turn-taking violations than the women, amongst which giving no response at all was the one most commonly used. Through their conversational behavior the men silenced the women and defined the couples’ communicative practices. This, argues DeFrancisco (p.158), illustrates how the men, in these couples, through linguistic behaviors gained social and relational control.
Theoretical Framework

Introduction
The theoretical perspectives presented below all approach gender and language use as social constructions. Admittedly, having this viewpoint on gender and language use was a prerequisite when conducting my research. In this section I first present sociolinguistic theories that specifically concern linguistic practices and their relation to identity-shaping processes and linguistic norms. Then two theories are presented, which bring up other types of features affecting the construction of identities, more specifically spatial environments and the heterosexual norm.

Language Use, Identity and Linguistic Norms
Language use is as an identity-shaping act and how we perform linguistically is influenced by linguistic norms. The relation between identity construction and linguistic practices is thoroughly discussed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), and according to them, identity “is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall, p.588). Having this perspective on identity highlights the importance of language use, as not only a communicative tool, but also as an imperative act in the construction of who we are. Furthermore, Bucholtz & Hall argue that the language we use “relies heavily on ideological structures, for associations between language and identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values- that is, ideologies- about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language” (Bucholtz & Hall, p.594). So, if a specific type of linguistic behavior is constructed as naturally associated to a certain type of body, then people who violate that norm risk coming across as unintelligible or having their identity questioned. In a context in which speaking very silently is believed to be a naturally female linguistic behavior, then women who speak very loudly might have their gender questioned, or be looked upon as awkward.

Linguistic norms are contextually and culturally specific and they reflect each context’s ideas about “natural” male versus female behavior. What is looked upon as a natural way to speak for women in Sweden may not be the like for women in the Seychelles. However, as Cameron (2014), argues “most representations of male and female linguistic behavior are interpretable as symbolic statements about the nature of male and female persons, and about the relationships which should properly obtain between them” (Cameron, p.282). This means that the linguistic norms of women and men reflect what is looked upon as natural, desirable and morally correct male versus female characteristics. That is, if the linguistic norm for women, in a specific context, is for them to speak quietly and seldom, then one may assume that prejudice about women, in that context, is that
they have nothing important to say and further, are less intelligent.

Even though linguistic norms may work regulatory, individuals have agency to conform or break with them. The relationship between individual agency and the regulatory functions of norms, in the identity-shaping process, have been widely discussed within sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.606). In this paper agency is used as a term representing people’s power and opportunities to accomplish linguistic acts in general, and their identity in particular. Whether the characteristics of their identity are deliberately or unconsciously (as in imposed by norms) chosen is not of importance. Rather, agency refers to an individual’s space and power to have his/her linguistic behavior being perceived as legitimate, regardless of them conforming to linguistic norms or breaking with them. In this context, a speaker would be interpreted to have a lot of agency if he/she could say rude things without being perceived in negative ways.

**Space and the Heterosexual Norm**

In the same way as identities are social constructions, so is the meaning of spatial environments a social construct. In *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey (1994) problematizes the wide-spread conception of space as something “natural” and static. According to her, space is dynamic, that is, it is constructed and given meaning through the people inhabiting it. A space normally inhabited by men could thus be understood as a masculine space. Space, on the one hand, and gender on the other are mutually constructed, argues Massey. That is, the gendering of space “both reflects and has effects back on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live” (Massey, p.186, original emphasis). So, when entering a space constructed as masculine, a man may perform the type of masculinity expected of him. Furthermore, the relationship between space and people is not neutral but reproduced through the dynamics of power. So, what type of body having access to, and the agency to be perceived as legitimate, in a specific space, results from power struggles (Massey, p.5).

One social norm, assumed to be crucial in the construction of gender and therefore heavily influential on linguistic behavior is heterosexuality. According to queer theorists, the male gender is constructed in relation to, and as different to, the female gender (Livia & Hall, 1997b, p.8). This difference is upheld by heterosexual desire, and gender, as such, could therefore be understood as emerging in heterosexuality (Livia & Hall, p.8). In a heteronormative society, heterosexual performances, identities and relationships are looked upon as the norm against which all other sexualities are judged. This framework was very influential in the construction of the scenarios in the questionnaire and in most of the scenarios an interaction between women and men took place.
Furthermore, in all of them, an explicit or implicit heterosexual desire was communicated by at least one of the speakers.
Method and Material

Introduction

This chapter presents how the research was conducted. Firstly, a detailed description of the questionnaire, and how it was constructed, is presented. Secondly, how the questionnaires were distributed and to whom is explained. Thirdly, a brief introduction to how the data was collected and processed is given. Finally, the limitations of the method are elaborated on.

The Construction of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of five scenarios. Each scenario represented a situation in which two or more characters communicated with each other. In three of the scenarios a man and a woman conversed. In the remaining two, a one-way communication took place; in the first from one person to another, and in the second from a group of same-sex people to a person of the opposite sex. The questionnaire had two versions. The only difference between the two versions was that the characters’ gender was reversed in all scenarios. So, if character A represented a woman and character B represented a man, in the first version, this relation was the opposite in the second version. Hence, each character had a male and a female guise. In each version of the questionnaire, there were approximately as many active male characters as female characters. That is, if a woman was the active character in scenario 1, then the man was the active character in scenario 2. This design was applied in order to reduce the risk of the respondents being attentive to the importance of gender in the questionnaires.

Under each scenario there were questions about how the respondent perceived the characters, respectively. The overall question, related to every character, was “How do you perceive character X?”. Following this question, there were different adjectives or sub-questions, and under each of them was a rating scale. So, for example, an adjective related to character A in scenario 1, was “Flirtatious”, with a rating scale from 1 (“Not at all flirtatious”) to 5 (“Very flirtatious”). An example of a sub-question was “Is character X addressing her/him in a bossy way?”, with 1 representing “Not at all” and 5 representing “Very”. The respondent was to choose to what extent he/she agreed with how the adjective/sub-question represented the character concerned. For every adjective and sub-question, the respondents had the option to answer “Don’t know”.

Naturally, this construction of the questionnaire steered the respondents’ thinking of the characters and might have excluded other interpretations of them. The fact that adjectives were picked beforehand, instead of having the respondents associate freely, was due to the difficulties there might be for the respondents to express nuanced adjectives in another language than their mother tongue. So, to remove the risk of receiving descriptions that were not very nuanced (such as
“good” or “bad”), or no descriptions at all, the respondents expressed their opinion by picking a number on a rating scale. Also, since picking a number is easier than coming up with own adjectives, sampling data in this way increased the chance of the respondents answering even if they felt uncertain or indifferent. However, under each character’s question-section, the respondents were asked if there was anything they wanted to add to how they perceived “character X”, and space was left for them to express additional ideas or thoughts. So, even though the structure of the questionnaire risked steering the respondents’ perception of the characters, an option was given for them to add their own thoughts.

The scenarios were created with inspiration from literature on gender and language use. Basically, the results from previous research on the subject were considered when constructing the scenarios. So, for example, studies have shown that men give orders in a more direct way than women (West, 1998) and this fact came to influence how one of the scenarios was written. All scenarios were constructed by me, exclusively, except one. The structure and content of scenario 4 were heavily influenced by an extract of a dialogue between two spouses, presented in DeFrancisco’s “The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations” (DeFrancisco, 2011, 156-157). The adjectives and sub-questions, in the question-section, were all created by me. However, after the questionnaire was constructed a Seychellois had a look at it and gave feedback on its relevance for the Seychellois context. Then changes were made accordingly; all scenarios were kept in the questionnaire, the relationship between some characters were more accurately spelled out and names of the characters were changed. Additionally, due to possible language difficulties the Seychellois agreed on the rating scale being beneficial when measuring the respondents’ perception of the characters. Furthermore, he gave the suggestion to collect the data at the university, where the level of English is high.

How and Where
The questionnaire was handed out to 25 students and 22 of them were handed back and used in the study. There were 11 respondents of each version of the questionnaire. Before starting answering the questions the respondents were asked about their gender. The first version had seven female and four male respondents, and the second version had eight female and three male respondents. Originally, the ambition was that the respondents’ gender would be part of how the analysis would be structured. That is, apart from assuming that the gender of the characters would affect how he/she was perceived it was also believed that male and female respondents would perceive the characters differently. However, this issue was not further investigated, mainly because of the unbalanced nature of the data which made comparisons unreliable and it was not possible to get statistical significance. The
questionnaires were handed out to students on the largest campus, at Anse Royale. Students were approached and asked if they wanted to participate in a survey about language use. Most students were approached in the study room, while studying, and some were asked in the corridors of the university building. They were told how long it would take for them to fill it out (approximately), that it was voluntarily to participate and that their answers were anonymous. Most students being asked wanted to participate, two said no.

**Data Processing**

Collecting data by handing out a questionnaire is a quantitative method. Similarly, the results from the rating scale were processed using a quantitative approach in order to generalize the research findings. However, the additional comments may be seen as qualitative data, as they provide more in-depth answers without generalizability. Thus, quantitative and qualitative elements were combined in the research, having the advantage of contributing to a broader understanding of the phenomenon investigated (cf. Angouri, 2010, p.33). After the data was collected, the results from each version of the questionnaire were compared. When comparing the results from the rating scale a t-test was used to determine whether a difference in perception was statistically significant (Rasinger, 2010, p.87). P-values at p ≤ 0.05 were considered statistically significant, values at p ≤ 0.01 very statistically significant and values slightly above p < 0.05, the exact range being 0.0561-0.0634, approaching significance. The differences showing statistically significance, as well as those approaching significance, were analyzed further. Similarly, the additional comments in each version were analyzed and compared. Given that these comments were qualitative, no generalizations were made but instead each comment was analyzed separately. The comments that represented a reasoning common amongst more respondents than just one, were discussed and presented in the analysis.

**Limitations**

One limitation, related to the construction of the questionnaire, is that the scenarios and the question-section were constructed in a context not fully representative of the context in which the research was conducted in. Ideally, the scenarios were to represent a limited body of words and sentences, loaded with meaning, that made up intelligible and realistic dialogues. Furthermore, the adjectives and sub-questions were to accurately relate to the dialogues and the possible interpretation made thereof. My preconception about gendered language use, and much research about the subject in question, come from a European and American context. The fact that I had limited knowledge of the Seychellois context made it somehow difficult to create situations where gender may matter, and to construct relevant questions about how it matters. If the situations and the relating questions were not accurate, then the questionnaire would not measure what it was supposed to measure. Accordingly,
this part of the method was what risked the validity of the research the most (on validity for questionnaires, see Rasinger, 2010).

Another limitation, when constructing the scenarios, was that I decided when and how gender may matter to how the character is perceived, and that is methodologically questionable. The scenarios represented situations in which it was assumed that the respondents’ perception would differ depending of the character’s gender. However, the constructed speech styles, assumed to be gendered, may instead represent characteristics seen as representing other social categories, such as class or ethnicity. Basically, it was I, not the participants, who decided when gender would be expected to become relevant through language use, and this is “problematic, allowing for analysts to slide toward reproducing, rather than actually studying, gendered ‘facts,’ stereotypes, and presumed asymmetries” (Stokoe & Attenborough, 2014, p.162). Nevertheless, the most important part of the method was that there were two versions of the questionnaire since that made it possible to ask for the respondents’ perception of the character without having them focusing on gender. The impact of gender on their perception of the characters was made visible only when the two versions were compared. Thus, in eliciting the students’ perceptions of the characters, their perceptions of gendered language use were elicited indirectly (for further reading on indirect methods for eliciting language attitudes see, Schilling, 2013, p.105). So, the risk of the respondents experiencing an imposed importance of gender to certain verbal behaviors was therefore diminished.

A final concern is that, eliciting attitudes about something in a questionnaire can be problematic. Obviously, there are no guarantees that people share their genuine views and attitudes towards the regarded topic. First and foremost, answering a questionnaire as such may feel unnatural for a participant, which might prevent him/her from engaging in the topic. A participant may find the topic boring, or the questionnaire to be too long and complicated, which increases the risk for the participant giving the same answer to all questions regardless of what he or she thinks (Rasinger, 2010, p.63). Additionally, when a topic is politically and socially delicate, one needs to account for the possibility that people give answers they think are the correct once, so that “political correctness or constructing a particular version of self may override true thoughts or genuine beliefs” (Rasinger, p.63). Gender was not mentioned as a criterion of interest when the questionnaire was introduced to the students, because of the abovementioned reason. That is, it was assumed that asking about their perceptions of gendered language use could be considered to be a socially delicate subject.
Result and Analysis

Introduction
In this chapter the results from the questionnaires are presented and analyzed. The results from the rating scales are presented in figures. The results from the additional comments are presented continuously in the body of text next to the figures. Basically, the chapter is organized in the following way: I present the results from each scenario separately. There are five scenarios in total and each scenario has produced two different types of figures, one for each character in the scenario. Every scenario is introduced, followed by a presentation of its figures and a body of text, including a presentation of the additional comments and an analysis of the results. The order in which the scenarios are presented in this chapter does not follow the same order as in the questionnaire.

In the presentation of the results from the rating scale, the value “3” represents the middle and is therefore used as a divider. So, if a character has scored a mean value of 2.3 on being “Flirtatious”, he/she would be depicted as non-flirtatious, whereas with a mean value of 3.9, he/she would be described as flirtatious. The additional comments presented in this chapter do not represent all comments given from the respondents.

Scenario 1: Complimenting at Work
One of the scenarios represents a situation in which two colleagues, a woman and a man, meet at the entrance of their office building. They do not know each other very well. One of them comments on the other character’s body, first asking if he/she works out a lot and eventually states that he/she has a sexy body. The character receiving the comment rejects it, stating that he/she does not appreciate the colleague commenting on his/her body in that way, when at work.
When commenting on a colleague’s body, the male and the female guise of the character are perceived in similar ways in two of the options, “Flirtatious” and “Ok”. Both the male (mean value 3.9) and the female guise (3.8) are perceived as being flirtatious when giving such a comment. When asked if it is “OK” to comment on a colleague’s body, both groups of respondents gave quite low numbers on the rating scale, suggesting that they thought it isn’t OK to do so, irrespective of gender. Worth mentioning is that that question was gender neutral. That is, it went; “Is it OK to comment on a colleague’s body?”. So, even though the situation was illustrated differently, having two different types of gender commenting on the body, the respondents may have answered the question as it was; in a gender-neutral way. The two groups answered differently on four adjectives; polite, appropriate, probable and offensive. The question regarding probability is a way to measure how likely the respondents believe this is to happen. The questions regarding the other three adjectives, on the other hand, are imbued with moral. Basically, the diagram shows that it is believed that men are more probable to comment on a colleague’s body than women, and when they do so, they are perceived as more offensive, less appropriate and less polite than when women do it.

The results from the additional comments indicate that even though the male guise of the character is perceived as flirtatious in this context, his flirtatiousness is questioned. To begin with, some respondents perceive him as having other intentions than actually flirting. This is most explicitly expressed in (1) below.

1. “Philip has a hidden agenda”.

A similar observation is given in (2).
2. “He is trying to expand his work relationship with Julia but he went about it in a bad way (...)”.

The reason to why his intentions are problematized is illustrated in (3).

3. “Julia’s reaction is totally expected because she had the situation in mind, i.e. location of such a comment. Maybe if they were in another place instead of work, she would have taken the comment differently”.

So, even though perceived as flirtatious, the male guise of the character is understood as wanting something else, something undefined, through “flirting”. And the reason to why that is, seems to be the context in which he approaches her.

In comparison, in the reversed scenario the respondents, giving additional comments on the character in a female guise when she is flirting, do not question her intentions. One respondent is appreciative of her behavior, as shown in (4).

4. “Julia seems to be interested in her colleague. We are all humans, and there is nothing wrong in expressing ourselves. Her comments are rather compliments…”.

In this statement, flirting is understood as a way to show another person appreciation and interest. In contrast, in (5), one respondent expresses criticism towards her behavior.

5. “Julia does not know Philip very well. What they have can hardly be called friendship, hence her comments inappropriate”.

The reason why her comment is wrong is expressed as due to them not knowing each other very well. So, in both responses her behavior is commented upon but neither questions her intentions or the location in which she flirts.

The location, in which the comment took place, seems to be of importance in understanding the difference in perception of the male versus the female guise of the character. To comment on someone’s appearance is not automatically an expression of politeness, but depending on context, it could function to establish a power relation between the complimenter and the addressee, as discussed by Holmes (2011). The fact that the intentions of the male guise of the character are questioned, when he is commenting on her appearance, could be interpreted as him being understood as manifesting power over his colleague. Nevertheless, if the male guise of the character was believed to have the right to manifest his power over her, his approach would be perceived as legitimate. In contrast, it could be argued that the reason why he is perceived as impolite, inappropriate and offensive is because he exploits the situation. The comment is experienced negatively by the respondents, hence perceived as a face-threatening speech act (Holmes, 2011, p.73). As argued by Massey (1994), the relationship between people and space is not power neutral. It is possible to see the location, in which it happened, as a space, in which a power struggle takes
place to define what bodies and actions are to be understood as legitimate. On the one hand, the male guise of the character is perceived as having agency to exploit the situation, and on the other hand, his speech act is perceived as face-threatening. That is, the respondents both reproduce the idea that men have more power/agency in this context, and question that relation in thinking negatively about him when he is manifesting it. Arguably, when trying to make sense of the behavior of the male guise of the character, the respondents are part of a power struggle in which the men’s legitimacy to comment on a colleague is disputed.

The results from the questions regarding the character receiving and rejecting a comment on his or her body show a difference in perception of all adjectives, but two.

![To Reject a Comment](image)

(*= Approaching significance, *= p ≤ 0.05, **= p ≤ 0.01)

**Figure 2:** The difference in perception of a male and a female character receiving a comment about his/her appearance.

The most similar perception concerns to what extent the character receiving the comment could be understood as embarrassed, in which both the male and the female guise of the character are perceived as quite embarrassed. Both the male and the female guise of the character are perceived as rather polite and decent, although the female guise score higher on both. The difference in perception regarding ungratefulness, courage and expected behavior is rather big. The character in a female guise is perceived as braver and less ungrateful than the character in a male guise, when rejecting the comment. Moreover, to reject the comment is very much expected of the female guise, while being an unexpected reaction coming from the male guise of the character. Interestingly, the female guise of the character is looked upon as brave when reacting in a way that is expected of her. In contrast, the male guise of the character is not looked upon as brave when reacting unexpectedly. Instead, he
is perceived as ungrateful. In the additional comments on the character in a female guise receiving the comment, the respondents tend to try to explain her behavior. As mentioned earlier, her reaction is, by one respondent, explained as understandable because of their location, see (3). Similarly, another respondent considers the circumstances as an explanatory factor to her reaction, expressed in (6) below.

6. “She was caught off guard and she did not appreciate Philip’s comments”. The quote illustrates a belief that the female guise of the character did not expect such comment of him and therefore she reacted the way she did. Along with location, some comments emphasize the complimenter’s way of commenting when trying to understand her reaction, as illustrated in (7).

7. “Also, it all depends on Philip’s way of intonating such a comment. If Julia didn’t like what he said, maybe he did not say it politely”. A similar idea is expressed in (8).

8. “Julia took what Philip said in the wrong way and it might be how he said it because he just jumped to it instead of saying how are you doing first”. As these quotes show, the respondents are trying to make sense of the female guise’s behavior, and consider specific circumstances that would explain why she reacts the way she does. One respondent is very critical towards the female guise’s behavior, illustrated in (9).

9. “She could have asked him to rephrase his sentence as a second opinion to give him a second chance in order to react properly with enough facts”. The respondent believes that she is responsible to find out about his true intentions before reacting the way she does, hence that her reaction is illegitimate. The content of the additional comments reflects a belief that her rejection is not valid, in itself. That is, the character in a female guise does not reject the comment because she does not appreciate being commented upon as such, but because of the circumstances. Expressed in the quotes is an idea that if all circumstances are ok, a woman would naturally appreciate receiving a comment from a man. Arguably, the respondents reproduce a power imbalance between women and men, one suggesting that men have the right to comment on women’s bodies. So, one could interpret the female guise of the character, in this context, as not having agency to reject a man’s comment. Even though she is perceived as neither impolite nor indecent when rejecting his comment, the fact that the respondents are trying to find circumstantial explanations for her behavior, illustrates that her rejection is thought of as illegitimate.

In contrast, when discussing the behavior of the character in a male guise, the respondents see his rejection as legitimate. In most comments about the male guise, he is given credit for his rejection, as in (10) and (11).
10. “Philip was honest about his boundaries, leaving no room for misunderstanding”.

11. “He doesn’t take compliments lightly but that he sees himself more than a sex object and is offended by the directness of his colleague”.

Thus, the male guise’s rejection as such is not problematized. He is understood as being in touch with his feelings, and knows how to communicate them properly. Therefore, no explanations as to why he rejected is needed. Apparently, the male guise is perceived as having more agency than the female guise in this particular situation. By that I mean that he is perceived as having authority to express his feelings and wants, regardless of what that does to the receiver of his message.

The fact that the male guise is perceived as ungrateful, while the female guise is not, does not conform to the assumed power imbalance between the two sexes, discussed above. A person believed to be subordinate is expected to behave according to the (believed to be) superior person’s demands (Holmes, 2011). For a subordinate not to acknowledge a compliment would be to disrupt such power imbalance. Perceiving the male guise, in this context, as ungrateful, reflects a belief that he ought to accept the comment he is receiving. However, the respondents also believe that it is more probable that the character in a male guise would comment on his colleague’s body than it would be for the female guise to do it. Assumingly, since it is likely for women to have their bodies commented upon, such a speech act is reproducing a power imbalance in which women’s bodies are objectified. As previously discussed, comments can serve different functions, one of which is as verbal harassments (Holmes, 2011, p.74). Arguably, in this context, the respondents perceive the male guise’s comment about a sexy body as a sexist comment, hence not a compliment. One possible interpretation is that the respondents understand the female guise’s rejection as her not conforming to having her body objectified, and this would explain why she is perceived as brave. The fact that the male guise of the character, as opposed to the female guise, is perceived as impolite and offensive when commenting could be interpreted as the respondents thinking that sexism is wrong. Given that the respondents believe that it is less likely for a man to receive such comment from a woman diminishes the risk of her comment being perceived as objectification. Instead, it is possible that the respondents interpret the female guise’s comment as an expression of what Holmes (2011) calls positive politeness. Therefore, when the character in a male guise rejects her, when she is showing polite affection, he is perceived as impolite and inappropriate not to accept it.

Scenario 2: Catcalling on the Beach
Another scenario that includes the act of commenting, is one in which a group of same-sex people catcall on a person from the opposite sex. The group of people are hanging out by the beach and when a person passes by, they comment on his/her legs, face and appearance. The person being
commented upon ignores the comment, keeps walking and pretends not to hear. The results from how the group of same-sex people is perceived, and how the person receiving the comment is perceived, show many similarities, regardless the characters’ gender:

![Figure 3: The difference in perception of a group of male characters and a group of female characters catcalling on an individual of the opposite sex. The differences show no statistical significance.](image)

![Figure 4: The difference in perception of a male and a female character’s reaction when being the target of catcalling.](image)

**= \( p \leq 0.01 \)

When catcalling, both groups are perceived as offensive (3,1). It is thought of as very probable and common for both the male and the female group to do it. It is not considered “Ok” for either of the group to do it. Thus, it is believed that men and women, respectively, use the public space to catcall, and when doing so, both groups are perceived in negative ways. Hence, catcalling is perceived as a face-threatening verbal act regardless the character’s gender.

Noteworthy, the additional comments about the group of cat-calling female characters show that their behavior is compared to men’s, as expressed in both (12) and (13).

12. “They behaved in a rude way. If the roles were reversed they would feel embarrassed and objectified but they seem to feel that it does not apply to them while they are being rude”.

13. “A bit disrespectful. It’s the same if men were whisking at women”.

Having their behavior measured against men’s behavior implies that the female characters are perceived as doing something that men usually do. In the additional comments on the cat-calling male characters there are no notes on whether women do it as well. Rather, as in (14) and (15), ideas are expressed that this is normal male behavior.

14. “Men see women as sex objects, which is not OK (…) How we women dress ourselves does not matter whether or not men would give their attention or not [sic]. They do so regardless of how much clothing a woman wears”.

15. “Guys being guys”.

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22
Thus, catcalling could be interpreted as a masculine behavior, or, as if when doing so, one performs masculinity. Apparently, both men and women are perceived as performing masculinity to the same extent, in this context. But when men do it, they are perceived as being “guys”, and when women do it they are being compared to men, hence, perceived as acting like men.

When asked about the character ignoring catcalling, the respondents gave similar answers to three of the adjectives, regardless of the character’s gender, and answered differently to one of the adjectives. Neither the character in a male guise nor the character in a female guise is perceived as shy or deliberately ignorant when ignoring catcalling. It would also be quite expected of both to talk back angrily. The difference is shown when asked if it would be an expected behavior of the character to react with ignorance. It is thought of as very expected of the female guise of the character to ignore catcalling, but not expected of the male guise to do so.

In the additional comments, the male and female character ignoring catcalling are described in a similar way, by the respondents. Both the male and the female guise are described in appreciative ways, as exemplified in (16) and (17), by two respondents commenting on the male guise.

16. “He did not want a confrontation therefore he did not reply; which is good”.
17. “I believe he took the easiest and best way out of the situation”.

Similarly, the same thoughts are expressed in (18), concerning the female guise.

18. “She was right to just ignore and walk away. She knowledges herself [sic], may take it as a compliment or not. Ignorance avoids problems sometimes”.

Interestingly, in the additional comments it is suggested that both the female and the male guise avoid something other than just the group’s attention. What the male guise does not want is a confrontation, and when ignoring he takes the easiest way out. The female guise is thought of as avoiding problems when ignoring the group of men. What the confrontation would be about or what problem being avoided is not spelled out. Nevertheless, the character receiving the catcalls is, regardless of gender, thought of as smart, and tactical when actively avoiding a potential confrontation/problem. Therefore, it could be argued that the situation, for both the male and the female guise, is perceived as somewhat threatening. As mentioned above, both groups of female and male characters are perceived as rather offensive when catcalling, so logically, one can assume that the act of doing so is understood as provocative. Thus, the evasive reaction of the receiving character is understood as him or her not answering to the provocation. So, the beach seems to be a space in which both women and men are exposed to catcalling from people of the opposite sex. Furthermore, being exposed, whether you are a man or a woman, is perceived as a potential source of conflict.

Massey (1994) claims that space is dynamic, and is constructed and given meaning by the people
inhabiting it. The same space could therefore be considered scary to one person but friendly to another. The respondents’ comments reveal that the beach is constructed as a space that can be intimidating for both women and men. Additionally, the beach is constructed as a space in which both women and men are active and take liberties to comment on other people’s bodies. Thus, this space seems to be perceived as equally belonging to men and women. Even though it is arguably the case that the respondents reproduce catcalling as being a masculine speech act, men and women are perceived as equally likely to do so.

Scenario 3: Flirting in a Club
The third scenario illustrates an interaction in the public space, in which a male and a female character meet in a club. The two characters exchange glances and starts dancing with each other. One of them wants to continue dancing and even though the other says no, he/she is very insensitive and persuasive. Regardless, the other character sticks to his/her no and goes back to friends. In this interaction as well, the male guise of the character and the female guise of the character are mostly perceived in similar ways, both when nagging and when being rejective.

Figure 5: The difference in perception of a male and a female character approaching and flirting with a person of the opposite sex, in a club.

Figure 6: The difference in perception of a male and a female character rejecting a person of the opposite sex, who is flirting insensitively, in a club. The differences show no statistical significance.

The only difference in perception, looking at the results from the rating scale, is that the male guise is perceived as slightly more offensive in his approach than the female guise, when acting persuasively. Both guises of the character are perceived as more offensive than non-offensive though. Both are understood as insensitive, not especially fun and it is not too probable that either would behave accordingly. So, when behaving insensitively in a club, it is perceived as more offensive and face-threatening when men do it than when women do it. One could interpret it as if women have more
agency to behave insensitively when in a club and wanting to dance with someone.

Both guises of the character receiving the attention are perceived as neither ungrateful, nor uptight and quite fun, when rejecting the other person. It is also looked upon as rather probable that both would stick to their no and not be persuaded into doing something they would not want to. Both guises of the character are perceived as brave when acting accordingly. Thus, this behavior is looked upon as legitimate for both women and men. Their “no” is not questioned insofar as they are not looked upon as either boring or uptight. Instead, they are perceived as brave. It could be interpreted as when people in general, stick to what they want, and refuse to be persuaded into something else, they are acting bravely. So, having the right to say “no”, in this context, is understood as a right equally belonging to men and women. Both men and women have agency to reject people on the dance floor, the speech act could therefore be understood as a gender-neutral performance.

When looking at the additional comments, regarding the persuasive character, there is one difference in how they discuss the female and the male guise, respectively. In most of the comments about the female guise it is mentioned that she may be drunk, as illustrated in (19).

19. “As they are in a club, Sarah must have probably had a few drinks and if she reacted that way, it’s possible if she has been drinking”.

Similarly, in (20), the female guise’s state of mind is also considered as an explanatory factor to how she is behaving.

20. “She lacks self-control”.

This possibility is not mentioned at all when the male guise’s behavior is discussed. Accordingly, you could interpret it as if being insensitive and persuasive is not expected from a woman if she is sober. In common with the scenario presented first, there is a tendency, amongst the respondents, to make sense of the female guise’s behavior using circumstantial facts, see (3), (6), (7), and (8). In this context she is the initiator and the active part of the interaction. Even though she is perceived as insensitive and inappropriate, she is active, as in knowing what she wants and willing to behave badly to achieve it. So, it is arguable that the respondents perceive it to be unlikely for a woman to be active in this context if not being intoxicated. Even though she is thought of as having more agency to behave insensitively, the respondents question whether her actions really represent what she would have wanted if she could think clearly.

**Scenario 4: Conversing at Home**

If the three scenarios discussed so far illustrate interactions in public spaces, the forth scenario takes place in a married couple’s house. One of the spouses comes home and wants to brief feelings about an incident earlier that day. In the dialogue, the character who is to give response leaves the room
twice and exhibits turn-taking violation by giving delayed response or no response at all. Hence, the spouse behaving in this way is constructed as inattentive.

**= p ≤ 0.05

Figure 7: The difference in perception of a husband and a wife wanting to communicate with his/her spouse.

Figure 8: The difference in perception of a husband and a wife when giving inattentive response to his/her spouse.

In the role of wanting to brief a feeling both the male and the female guise of the character are perceived as rather sympathetic and quite sensitive. The difference lies in the role of being annoying, in which the male guise of the character is perceived as quite annoying whereas the female guise is perceived as not annoying at all. Furthermore, when giving insufficient response, both the male and the female guise are perceived as insensitive, not so sympathetic, and not very annoying. The male guise is perceived as impolite whilst the female guise is perceived as marginally polite. The results from the rating scale illustrate that the respondents believe that the wife, but not the husband, have agency to be sensitive and sympathetic when wanting to talk, and have agency to be insensitive when giving bad response.

So, the character in a male guise is perceived as more annoying than the character in a female guise when wanting to brief a feeling at home. This could be interpreted as if the male guise is perceived as somehow violating his right to talk, in this situation, when expressing his emotions. In contrast, the results from how the male guise is perceived when giving insufficient response show that he is expected to be verbally attentive and emotionally engaged when listening to his wife.

Firstly, Figure 8 shows that the male guise is perceived as impolite when giving inattentive response. Secondly, the character being commented upon the most, in this scenario, is the character in a male guise giving bad response. All respondents stated, in different ways, that he is being dismissive and does not seem to care about his wife when giving inattentive response, as exemplified in (21) below.

21. “When talking or listening to someone you focus on them. Justin is dismissive to an
extent”.
So, there seems to be an expectation on men to give active response when their wives want to brief a feeling and when failing to do so, their lack of response is interpreted as if they do not care about their wives. The expectations of a husband as listener versus speaker differ; when expressing feelings himself he is perceived as annoying, but when giving inattentive response he is perceived as impolite. That is, the respondents reproduce an ideal saying that husbands are to express affection by listening attentively to their wives, and not by expressing emotions themselves.

There were two comments on the character in a female guise, giving inattentive response, both of which, did not problematize her behavior. One respondent expresses in (22) an idea that both spouses are behaving in a similar way.

22. “They both wanted each other’s attention in their own way”.
Another respondent gives the female guise credit for her behavior, illustrated in (23).

23. “Maria is doing her best to listen to her husband and to be attentive to him”.
Apparently, when the character in a female guise gives inattentive response she is not perceived as neglecting her husband. It could be interpreted as if women are not expected to be attentive listeners to their husbands in a situation like this. Giving bad response, and neglecting someone’s need to communicate, is a power tool (DeFrancisco, 2011). Interestingly, the respondents do not perceive the wife as impolite when giving insufficient response, suggesting that she is perceived as having legitimate reasons to manifest power in this situation. So, gender seems to affect how an inattentive speaker is perceived; the female guise of the character has agency to give bad response without being perceived as impolite, while the male guise has not. Over all, the difference in perception reproduces an idea that women’s words matter and deserve response, in this particular context.

Scenario 5: Giving Orders to a Colleague
This scenario, in which there was basically no difference at all, neither from the rating scale, nor the additional comments, was one in which one person gave his/her colleague a directive. In this scenario, there was a one-way communication, and two varieties of it. In the first variant, the person went “Take the counter. I need to do go to the storage room.”, and in the second, the person went “X, is it ok if you take the counter? I’m so sorry, but I need to go to the storage room and fix some things”.
The difference in perception of the male and the female character in minimal, in this scenario. All respondents agreed on the first variant being bossy, diminishing and too direct. Furthermore, they all thought that the second variant was neither submissive nor unnecessarily polite. In the additional comments, no difference relating to the gender of the characters could be found. Basically, regardless the character’s gender, the respondents thought that the first variant was rude and disrespectful and the second the correct, polite and respectful way of treating your colleague. Interestingly, in the additional comments, regarding the first variant, several respondents used words such as “authoritarian”, “command” and “dictatorship”. The first way of speaking is perceived as used by people who want to establish a power imbalance between themselves and people they want to rule over. So, it is perceived as inappropriate for both genders to speak in an authoritarian way. That is, acting in an authoritarian way, in this context, is gender-neutral.
Discussion
In this chapter I answer the three research questions, separately. At the end, I give some methodological remarks concerning this study.

The Importance of Space, Relations and Context

How does the speaker’s gender affect how he/she is perceived by the students at the University of Seychelles?

The results from the rating scale show a statistically significant difference in the perception of a male and a female guise of a character, for some of the adjectives, in four of the scenarios (1, 2, 3 & 4), whilst the characters in the remaining one (5) are perceived similarly in both versions of the questionnaire. In short, gender as a social category seems to influence the perception of a character when:

- The character comments on his/her colleague’s appearance; the male guise is perceived as less polite, less appropriate, more probable to comment on a colleague’s body and more offensive than the female guise,
- The character rejects a comment from a colleague; the male guise is perceived as more ungrateful, less polite, less brave and less expected to reject such comment than the female guise,
- The character ignores a group of people catcalling; the female guise is perceived as more expected to react accordingly than the male guise,
- The character flirts insensitively with a person in a club; the male guise is perceived as more offensive than the female guise,
- The character wants to brief a feeling to his/her spouse; the male guise is perceived as more annoying than the female guise,
- The character gives inattentive response to his/her spouse briefing a feeling; the male guise is perceived as less polite than the female guise.

Interestingly, when comparing the results from the rating scale with those of the additional comments an ambiguity can be found in the respondents’ answers regarding some of the scenarios and characters. As in scenario 1, the respondents perceive the character in a female guise rejecting a comment as polite (read legitimate), on the rating scale, whilst in the additional comments, they explain her behavior with circumstantial facts, hence delegitimized her rejection. And as for the character in a male guise in the same scenario, who is perceived as flirtatious on the rating scale,
when giving his colleague a comment, but is described as wanting something else than flirting in the additional comments.

**In what way does the perception of the speaker relate to ideologies of language and gender?**

In some of the scenarios the differences in perception of a male and a female guise of a character reflect ideologies of language and gender, in Seychelles.

Firstly, in scenario 1, the male guise of the character giving a comment, is perceived as more probable to comment on a colleague’s body than the female guise. Furthermore, the male guise’s comment is perceived as him giving his colleague a sexist comment, in contrast to the respondents perceiving the female guise’s comment as a compliment. Hence, a possible interpretation is that the speech act of commenting, or preferably, giving sexist comments, is understood as a masculine speech act. However, the context, in which the verbal interaction takes place, matters to how the character’s gender influences how the speech act of commenting is perceived. In contrast to how commenting is perceived in scenario 1, when catcalling on the beach the female group and the male group are perceived in the same way (scenario 2). Both the female and the male group are perceived as equally probable to catcall, and the speech act is perceived as offensive, regardless the characters’ gender. Gender does not seem to influence how the speech act of commenting is perceived, in this context. Noteworthy, in the additional comments the respondents reproduce a belief that catcalling is a masculine speech act. However, as discussed in the analysis, both women and men are understood as performing masculinity, in this context, to the same extent. A possible interpretation is that catcalling was previously understood as more common amongst men than women, and therefore the respondents perceive it as a masculine speech act. In line with this reasoning, their perception of catcalling as a masculine speech act may change, given that they believe it to be as common for men and as for women to do it, when this research was conducted. Importantly, in line with Massey’s theory on the mutually constructive relationship between gender and space, it is arguable that the respondents’ perception of a character is affected both by the character’s gender, on the one hand, and by the space in which the interaction takes place, on the other. The office building and the beach represent two different spaces, and gender matters in the first but not in the latter. Hence, whether the speech act of commenting is perceived as a masculine speech act depends on the space in which the speech act is performed.

Two other gendered language norms, made visible through the respondents’ perceptions, are one saying that wives are the ones talking emotions and one saying that husbands are the ones giving attentive response, when at home. In scenario 4, the male guise of the character briefing a feeling is perceived as annoying while the female guise is not. Arguably, the respondents reproduce a
belief that expressing emotions to a spouse is a female speech act. In contrast, the male guise of the character giving inattentive response is perceived as impolite, while the female guise is not. Hence, giving active verbal response is believed to be a male speech act. Interestingly, this does not conform to the findings in DeFrancisco’s study on conversational practices within heterosexual couples in the United States. In her study the men gave minimal or no response at all when their partners spoke and according to DeFrancisco, the men’s linguistic behavior silenced the women. However, my study looked in to perceptions of language use, hence the findings from it may not correlate to reality.

Anyhow, the perception of the characters reveals the respondents’ expectations of male and female linguistic behavior and expectations as such, may reflect how common they believe a certain phenomenon is. Most importantly, when comparing the findings from Seychelles to those in the United States it becomes clear that gendered language use is contextually specific.

Finally, a thread of thought amongst the respondents, when discussing the character rejecting a comment (scenario 1) and the character flirting insensitively (scenario 3), is that when in a female guise they explain her behavior with circumstantial facts. In short, when the female guise rejects a comment the respondents consider the location of the interaction and the colleague’s way of expressing himself when trying to make sense of her rejection. Similarly, when the female guise is flirting insensitively, the respondents consider the fact that she may be drunk to behave accordingly. Arguably, the tendency to explain a woman’s behavior using circumstantial facts reproduce a norm saying that women are easily influenced by their surrounding and therefore, what they do or say do not necessarily reflect what they really want or feel.

How are perceptions of gendered language use related to gender hierarchies in general?

The relationship between gender and language use, constructed as the norm, in a specific context, reflects its gender hierarchies (Cameron, 2014, p. 282). In this study, both differences and similarities in perception of the female and the male guise of the characters, made visible how power relations between women and men are understood, by the respondents. For instance, the respondents’ perceptions of the characters in scenario 1, 2 and 4 illustrate different contexts in which power relations are reproduced.

The character in a male guise commenting on his colleague’s body, in scenario 1, is perceived as flirtatious on the rating scale, but described as wanting something else than flirting in the additional comments. This relates to Holmes’ (2011) claim that the function of a compliment is affected by the relationship between the complimenter and the addressee, and therefore, power relations can be expressed through the speech act of commenting. The fact that the intentions of the male guise of the character are questioned, when he is commenting on her appearance, could be
interpreted as him being understood as manifesting power over his colleague. Also, as discussed above, the respondents consider the circumstances when discussing the character in a female guise rejecting his comment, which reproduce an idea that women appreciate being commented upon if the circumstances are “ok”. This line of reasoning reflects a power imbalance between women and men, one suggesting that men have the right to comment on women’s bodies.

In contrast, in scenario 2, both the characters in a male guise and those in a female guise are perceived as offensive when catcalling, meaning that both groups’ comments are understood as face-threatening. The character in a female guise and the character in a male guise, ignoring catcalling, are perceived similarly. Hence, no power imbalance between the complimenter and the addressee is made visible through the respondents’ perception. Arguably, the respondents perceive men and women as equals when on the beach.

Regarding scenario 4, it is possible to interpret the difference in perception of the character in a male versus a female guise, both when briefing a feeling and when giving inattentive response, as reflecting a power imbalance between women and men. The fact that the male guise is perceived as annoying when wanting to brief a feeling and impolite when giving inattentive response shows that the respondents believe that women’s words matter more than men’s, in this context. Hence, women are perceived as having more agency in the household.

Methodological Remarks
From a methodological perspective, the scenarios differed in how accurately they portrayed a situation which the respondents experienced as gender-biased. For instance, scenario 1 showed a big difference in perception of a male and a female character whilst there was no difference at all in scenario 5. Arguably, the study functions as a first survey investigating the possible situations in which gender matters to how a character is perceived in the Seychellois context.

Additionally, the fact that a quantitative and a qualitative approach were mixed gave a more nuanced understanding of the respondents’ perceptions of gendered language use. As mentioned above, the results from the additional comments gave a more detailed explanation to how the respondents perceived the characters and they were at times contradictory to the results from the rating scale.

Furthermore, the additional comments from scenario 5 revealed that other social categories could have mattered to their perception of the characters. For example, when discussing the colleague giving order in a direct way many respondents mentioned that the character came across as authoritarian. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate whether the respondents would have perceived the characters differently if one of the colleagues was the manager, and the other its
employee.
Conclusion
In this paper I have presented research on gendered language use conducted in Seychelles. The aim of the research was to investigate if, and how, students at the University of Seychelles perceived a male and a female character in different ways and if these differences reflect gender hierarchies in general. My study shows that there are differences in perception of a character in a male guise and a female guise, in some situations. However, the respondents’ perception was not only influenced by the character’s gender but also by the space in which the interaction took place and the relationship between the characters communicating. So, for instance, commenting was perceived as a male speech act when the interaction took place outside an office building between two colleagues, but as a gender-neutral speech act when occurring on the beach between people unknown to each other. For some of the scenarios, a difference in perception of a male and female guise, made visible the respondents’ ideas of power relations between women and men. For instance, men were understood as superior when being by an office building, men and women were seen as equals when on the beach, and women were believed to have more power when at home. Given that research on gender and language use is lacking in Seychelles, this study has functioned as a survey, mapping possible situations in which gender influences the perception of language use.
References

Printed Sources


**Online Sources**


Appendix

The Questionnaire

Dear participant,

Please read the dialogues thoroughly and try to imagine that the characters are real people. Under each scenario I want you to answer questions about how you perceived the characters. What I am looking for is to know what you think of
1. how they speak
2. what they say
3. and how they act.

There are no correct answers; I am interested in your thoughts. So, be honest.

I am:

Woman
Man
Other

Scenario 1

Philip and Julia work in the same office. They do not know each other very well but appreciate working together. Normally, they talk during coffee breaks and lunches, and most of the times they talk about work. One day, when they bump into each other at the entrance of the office building, Philip looks at her in an intense way, and goes:

Philip: Do you work out a lot?
Julia: No, why?
Philip: You look fit; your body is very attractive.
Julia: Oh, excuse me?
Philip: I mean, you look sexy.
Julia: We’re at work Philip, I don’t appreciate you commenting on my body in that way.

Your reflections

How do you perceive Philip?

1. Flirtatious

   Not at all flirtatious
   Very Flirtatious
   Don’t know

   1  2  3  4  5

2. Polite
### 3. Appropriate behavior

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<th>Don’t know</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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### 4. Probable behavior

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### 5. Offensive

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</tbody>
</table>

### 6. Is it OK to comment on your female colleague’s body?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not OK at all</th>
<th>Very much OK</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Philip?

How do you perceive Julia?

1. **Ungrateful**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all ungrateful</th>
<th>Very ungrateful</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. **Polite**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rude</th>
<th>Respectful</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. **Brave**

Not so brave 2 3 4 Very brave 5 Don’t know

4. **Decent reaction**

Not decent at all 1 2 3 4 Very decent 5 Don’t know

5. **Expected reaction**

Unexpected 1 2 3 4 Very much expected 5 Don’t know

6. **Embarrassed**

Proud 1 2 3 4 Embarrassed 5 Don’t know

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Julia?

**Scenario 2**

Laura works in a supermarket as a cashier. She is behind the counter and there is a line of costumers waiting to pay for their groceries. One of her colleagues, who is also a cashier, passes her and she goes:

**Alternative A)**

- Take the counter. I need to do go to the storage room.

**Alternative B)**

- Paul, is it ok if you take the counter? I’m so sorry, but I need to go to the storage room and fix some things.

**Your reflections**

On Alternative A)
Is she addressing him in a bossy way?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very 5  Don’t know

Do you think her way of addressing him is diminishing?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very 5  Don’t know

Do you think she is too direct?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very 5  Don’t know

Any other thoughts on Alternative A?

On Alternative B)

Do you think she is being submissive?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very 5  Don’t know

Do you perceive her as unnecessarily polite?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 Very 5  Don’t know

Any other thoughts on Alternative B?

Scenario 3

Sarah and John are at the same club. They do not know each other from before. During the evening, they exchange glances. Eventually, Sarah asks John if he wants to dance with her. They dance for two songs, both moving as if they are attractive to each other. Sarah interrupts their dancing and goes to the ladies’ room. When returning, Sarah goes:

Sarah: I’m back, you want to continue dancing or shall we go for a drink?
John: Oh, it was nice dancing with you but I think I will go back to my friends and hang out with them. Take care.

Sarah: But we’ll dance later, right? Want to see me later?

John: Oh, I think I want to spend the rest of the night with my friends.


John: It was fun, but I want to see my friends now.

Sarah: I want to dance with you, just one more dance.

Sarah grabs his hands and turns him around.

John: Stop it.

Sarah: Come on, relax. Have fun!

John: No, let me go. I said I want to go back to my friends.

Your reflections

How do you perceive Sarah?

1. Insensitive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensitive</th>
<th>Very insensitive</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

2. Fun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annoying</th>
<th>Fun</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

3. Appropriate behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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</table>

4. Probable behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all probable</th>
<th>Very probable</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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</table>
5. **Offensive**
Not at all offensive  Very offensive  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Sarah?

How do you perceive John?

1. **Ungrateful**
Not at all ungrateful  Very ungrateful  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

2. **Uptight**
Not at all uptight  Very uptight  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

3. **Brave**
Not so brave  Very brave  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

4. **Fun**
Annoying  Fun  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

5. **Probable behavior**
Not at all probable  Very probable  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive John?
**Scenario 4**

Maria and Justin are married and have lived together for two years. The following dialogue comes from when they see each other at home, late afternoon.

Maria: I was at the supermarket today, for lunch, had salad you know?
Justin: Ahha
Maria: I ran into your sister, Helen.
Justin: Ran into who?
Maria: Your sister Helen. Strangely, she didn’t even seem to know who I was.
Justin: Ahhh
Maria: I was at the counter and I was looking at, you know, and I know she saw me and then she took off.
Justin: Be right back (he goes outside). Ouch, my elbow! (he returns).
Maria: So, I followed her up the stairs, I just felt I wanted her to…
Justin: Well, you have to remember how she is, she has tunnel vision, too, I mean she doesn’t see anything but straight ahead.
Maria: I know, but I just find it strange, I felt…
Justin: Excuse me; open the back door! I’m going to give this to… (the dog) (he goes outside). (He returns). Did you see where I put my glasses?

**Your reflections**

How do you perceive Maria?

1. **Insensitive**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensitive</th>
<th>Very insensitive</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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2. **Annoying**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very annoying</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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</table>
3. **Sympathetic**

Unsympathetic  Very sympathetic  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Maria?

How do you perceive Justin?

1. **Insensitive**

Sensitive  Very insensitive  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

2. **Annoying**

Not at all  Very annoying  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

3. **Sympathetic**

Unsympathetic  Very sympathetic  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

4. **Polite**

Rude  Respectful  Don’t know
1  2  3  4  5

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Justin?
Scenario 5
It is a hot, sunny day. Michael, 22, is walking down the beach, wearing little clothing due to the heat. When passing a group of women, all of whom are friends and standing on the beach talking, he receives their attention. They whistle and give him comments about his bodily features, such as “nice legs”, “I like your shirt” and “you have a beautiful face”. Michael pretends he does not hear what they are saying and continues walking.

Your reflections
How do you perceive the women?

1. **Is their behavior probable?**
   - Not at all probable
   - Very probable
   - Don’t know
   
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2. **Is their behavior common?**
   - Not at all common
   - Very common
   - Don’t know
   
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3. **Are they offensive?**
   - Not at all offensive
   - Very offensive
   - Don’t know
   
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4. **Is it OK to comment on a stranger’s body?**
   - Not OK at all
   - Very much OK
   - Don’t know
   
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Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive the women?
How do you perceive Michael?

1. **Is his reaction expected?**
   - Unexpected
   - Very expected
   - Don’t know
   
   1  2  3  4  5

2. **Do you perceive Michael as shy?**
   - Not shy at all
   - Very shy
   - Don’t know
   
   1  2  3  4  5

3. **Do you perceive Michael as deliberately ignorant?**
   - Not at all
   - Very much so
   - Don’t know
   
   1  2  3  4  5

4. **If he was to talk back angrily, would that have been expected of him?**
   - Not at all
   - Very much so
   - Don’t know
   
   1  2  3  4  5

Is there anything you want to add in how you perceive Michael?