

## **The Use of Etiquette Vocabulary among Boys and Girls in the English Discourse in Kenyan Secondary Schools in Kakamega District**

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**Abstract:** This study examined the use of polite forms as used by boys and girls in English discourse in secondary schools of Kakamega district in Western Province, Kenya. The objectives of the study were two-fold: First, to establish the different forms of polite language used in the secondary schools. Second, the study sought to find out the difference between boys' and girls' usage of polite language. The population of the study comprised 110 secondary schools. The sample comprised 42 teachers of English, 20 Heads of Language Departments and 520 students. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, in-depth interviews and observation schedules. Research experts in the department of Curriculum Instructional and Educational Media at Moi University evaluated the instruments. Data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages. Data from in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The findings of the study showed that various polite forms such as greetings, requests and excusing oneself have been taught and are effectively used. On the contrary, other aspects such as turn taking and negating in conversation were rarely used. It further established that there are significant differences between boys' and girls' usage of polite forms. Results indicate that girls were more polite than boys. Therefore, since polite language is a prerequisite of sound interrelationship in the secondary school the study recommends that all the aspects of polite forms should be taught regularly and that all the teachers in the secondary schools should enforce its usage.

**Key words:** Communication competence, discourse, discourse competence, etiquette, grammatical rules and Jargon

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Etiquette as a subject is a matter of concern in the world today. It is a topic that has occupied writers and thinkers in all sophisticated societies for millennia beginning with a behavior code by Ptahhotep, a vizier in ancient Egypt's old kingdom during the reign of the fifth Dynasty king. Djedkare Isis (Ca 2414.2375 B.C). In Rome for instance etiquette varied by class. In the upper strata of the Roman society it should have instructed a man to greet friends and acquaintances with decorum according to their rank. Etiquette is an intricate aspect of English. Miller (1991) propounds that people learn particular language and use them to interact with others in society. Peil and Olatunji (1998) add that at least one can try to beware of what sort of behavior various people expect to avoid misunderstanding. This implies that without etiquette no sensible interaction can take place.

All men no matter their native background are expected to be polite in mannerism. This then brings the idea of style. Most people connect the word style with fashion, particularly with clothes. In a sense, language too is either dressed up or dressed down depending on whom one is talking to. There are cases all over on how people have narrowly missed job opportunities or even lucrative business deals due to dressing down language. The focus of teaching English is now shifting to the communicative

aspect, that is, teaching English for use after school hence the need to enhance etiquette. There is need to prioritize etiquette in the Kenyan context. The conditions in our schools and institutions of learning are pathetic. Despite the fact that the teachers and students have good mastery of both the spoken and written English language, a close examination reveals that they are devoid of politeness, which is characteristic of the English culture. This explains the frequent occurrence of unwholesome arguments between students and teachers that ensue and also the classroom fights that are characteristic of these schools.

In an English classroom situation, the KNEC syllabus highlights the following aspects of etiquette that should be taught at the secondary school level. These include the use of courteous language such as thank you, excuse me and I am sorry; telephone etiquette; interrupting and disagreeing politely; negotiating skills; turn taking and paying attention (listening). Etiquette is however not just part of the explicit curriculum it equally falls under the hidden curriculum. Sadker and Sadker (2000) point out that in addition to planned lessons schools teach a hidden curriculum suitable messages that students receive from teachers and fellow students' behavior. This implies that students will learn from their school environment aspects of etiquette by this means, hence the need for teachers and

all other members of the school community to be conscious of this. English Subject teachers are obliged to teach this effectively. They need to give meaningful learning experience to the students on etiquette.

According to Gordon (1991) society tells what roles, activities and responsibilities are right for males and females of different ages and how they should behave towards each other. It lays down the status of men and women that has more power. These ways of behaving are as 'natural' fixed parts of culture by women who are disadvantaged. This study intends to show that matters of etiquette pertain to both genders hence the need for male not to view etiquette as a means to demoralize them but rather as an important aspect to maintain relations. Furthermore, Randell *et al.* (1994) agree with this when they indicate that men are more problem solvers and women more relational. Men do this to preserve their independence and to maintain their status but women do it for rapport talk. In general boys are more assertive than girls as observed by Sadker and Sadker (2000).

**The problem statement:** The level of etiquette vocabulary usage in the English discourse in the Kenyan secondary schools is wanting. It is common of students to use swear words, non- courteous words or other types of inappropriate words in discourse. This is an open show of lack of etiquette. Most of the indiscipline cases dealt with in Kenyan secondary schools have a bearing on poor etiquette. All should note that etiquette is an aspect of the English culture. Kanwar (2001) quoting UNESCO (Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Cooperation 1966) indicates that each culture has a dignity and value, which all people need to respect and preserve. Yet there are cases in our secondary schools where the rules that govern polite language are greatly faulted. The study at hand upholds that in the English language etiquette should be observed. Its various forms should be used appropriately among both boys and girls. This is evident in the 8-4-4 secondary school English curriculum that the learner should demonstrate acceptable habits both in the spoken and written communication. Fisher (1987) citing Chomsky indicates that language users may be very competent in knowing what constitutes proper use of language, the competent communicator is aware of language in use within any given context and conforms to those rules. Briggs (1986) expounds on this by indicating that the formal features should include the communicative norms that underlie their use more emphatically. Deena and Adelman (1982) point out that acquiring a new language demands more than just the words and grammar but development of the sensitivity in the aspects of language not taught for example forms of politeness used in daily conversation. It is arguable that the secondary school has students and teachers who correctly articulate the language's grammatical rules. Yet these, fall short of using aspects of politeness. Hence the study at hand sought to find out the cause of poor etiquette in secondary schools, with a view of making recommendations to alleviate the situation.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to the lack of appropriate etiquette vocabulary in secondary schools, to achieve this purpose the study had the following objectives to establish the different forms of polite language used in secondary schools and find out the difference between boys' and girls' use of the polite forms in English in secondary schools.

**Research questions:**

- What are the different forms of polite language used in the secondary schools?
- Is there a difference in the use of polite language between boys and girls in the secondary school?

**Scope and Limitation:** The study was carried out in Kakamega District of Western Province, Kenya. This District consists of one hundred and ten schools. Forty two schools formed the representative sample for the study. The respondents of the study include Head of Language Departments, English subject teachers and form 1-4 students. Their responses formed the basis of the identified forms of polite language. In addition the study was limited to the use of polite forms within the classroom and the school compound. The polite forms considered included only those outlined in the secondary school syllabus.

**Significance of the Study:** This study is of great significance since very limited studies have been done on etiquette vocabulary in the Kenyan context. Good manners have rather been an aspect designated to common sense. No wonder, there are lots of bad mannerisms, impolite statements and crude behavior all around. Hence this study was aimed at providing information with regard to the underlying causes of poor etiquette in the English language within the secondary schools. It is hoped that the information so obtained will serve as basis upon which solutions will be sought to change the current poor etiquette status in schools.

These findings will serve as a source of information for teachers, school administration, those involved in education research and other stakeholders in education.

**Theoretical Framework:** This study was guided by two related theories. First is the Conversation Principle of Politeness by Lakoff (1973). He formulates this principle into the following maxims:

- Do not impose
- Give option
- Make your receiver feel good.

These maxims help to ensure that speakers and hearers do not lose face, or self-esteem and avoid embarrassment.

Secondly, it was based on Giles' accommodation theory as cited in Clark and Schunk (1980). He developed

the notion of accommodation in linguistic behavior. Normally accommodation takes the form of convergence in which a speaker will choose a language or a language variety that seems to meet the needs of the person being spoken to.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Research Design and Methodology:** The study design used was descriptive analysis. Frankel and Wallen (1993) describe descriptive analysis as the method that involves asking a large group of people questions about a particular issue. Information is obtained from a sample rather than the entire population (Kerlinger, 1993) at one point in time, which may range from one day to a few weeks. The study employed descriptive analysis to gather data on the forms of etiquette, vocabulary used in the secondary school classroom and within the school compound. This design is used because as stated by Kothari (2003), many a time it is not possible to examine every item in the population and sometimes if it is possible to obtain sufficient, accurate results by studying only apart of the total population. Also as Cohen and Manion (1994) indicate that it helps to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of the existing conditions.

**Area of Study:** Kakamega District formed the study area. It is the headquarters of the eight districts in the Western Province. It borders Bungoma District on the North, Nandi to the East, Kisumu District to the South and Mumias District to the West. The district is divided into eight administrative divisions namely Ikolomani, Shinyalu, Lurambi, Nabakholo, Malava Shisiru and the Municipality.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** The secondary schools were stratified into rural and urban schools. The identification of the urban schools was based on first, those that are found in the municipality and secondly, those that are full boarding. The rural schools were both mixed day schools and day and boarding schools. The study involved three types of sampling. These are, simple random sampling, purposive sampling and stratified random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select the H.O.Ds. According to Moser and Calton (1992) this type of sampling selects participants with specific characteristics, experience or behaviour. They also represent one or more perspectives deemed relevant to the research goals. For the English teachers, simple random sampling was used. Small pieces of paper equivalent to the total number of teachers in each school were used. One of these had a *yes* response while the rest of them had a *no* response. The papers were chummed in a basket, each teacher picked a paper from the basket randomly without replacement. The one who picked a paper with a *yes* response formed the sample study. This was done to give

Table 1: classifications and details of the sample

Nature of School	No. Of School	No. Of students	No. Of Teachers	No. Of H.O.D s
<b>Full day</b>				
Rural	15	240	15	8
Urban	4	64	4	2
<b>Mixed day and Boarding</b>				
Rural	4	64	4	2
Urban	-	-	-	-
<b>Full boarding</b>				
Rural	-	-	-	-
Urban	19	152	19	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>20</b>

each teacher an equal chance of being selected as recommended by Moser and Calton (1992). In the case of the students, stratified random sampling was used as stated by Kothari (2003). They were first categorised into different strata basing on their classes. This as Nsubanga (2000) indicates is based on some characteristics, and from each the researcher drew at random predetermined number of units. Hence, simple random sampling was used to get the number of students needed. A sample of forty -two schools was selected. The sample size: the four classes (fm. 1-4) giving a total of 520 students, 44 teachers and 20 H.O.D.s languages (Table 1).

**Method of Data Collection:** The data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and direct field observation. The questionnaire was preferred for its suitability to the study. It allowed the researcher to reach a larger sample within limited time. A set of questionnaire was prepared for both the teachers of English and a different one for the students.

The observation schedules methods focused on the information on the factors that have led to inefficient use of etiquette vocabulary in the secondary schools of Kakamega district.

Face to face interviews were also used because it helped to enlist the co-operation of the respondents and establish a rapport with them; this was with a view to follow up questionnaires as stated by Borg and Meredith (1993)

**Validity of Instruments:** Content validity of the questionnaire was established by consulting experienced researchers in the faculty of Education. Supervisors from the Department of Curriculum Instructional and Educational media were asked to rate the ability of each item in the questionnaire to measure what it should in order to get an anticipated data. They also assessed the modes of data collection in relation to the stated object and research question, suggestions and advice offered were used as basis to modify the research items and make them more adaptable to the study.

**Reliability:** Reliability was enhanced by the use of the relevant instruments that had items which were derived from the secondary school syllabus. In addition the language used in these instruments was the kind that is

used in the classroom and within the secondary school compound. In the case of the interview, complex jargons were explained to the respondents; also the respondents in this case were qualified experts in the teaching of language who had frequent interaction with the entire school community. This made their responses reliable. The observation instruments had items which could be easily observed in any interaction.

**Data Analysis Presentation:** The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics/ frequencies and percentages. The descriptive analysis was appropriate for the study because it involved description; analysis and interpretation of circumstances prevailing at the time of the study. Basic statistical techniques were used to analyze various items of the questionnaire. These included averages, percentages frequencies and totals. This study used frequencies and percentages, because they easily communicate the research findings to majority of readers (Gay, 1992). Frequencies easily show the number of subjects in a given category. A number of tables and charts were used to present data findings. The data collected was analyzed according to the nature of the responses.

This was as follows: Quantitative data was first coded. Once the coding was completed the responses were transferred into summary sheet by tabulating. This was then tallied to establish frequencies which were converted to percentage of the total number. On the other hand, quantitative responses from open ended questions were recorded word for word to determine the frequencies of each responses, the number of respondents giving similar answers was converted to percentages to illustrate related levels of opinion.

The information from the interview schedules and observation schedule was recorded. Before analysis was done the data was converted into numerical form. This analysis was then done with the help of the classifying system. Judgment was made from the responses given.

**Responses Used in Greetings:** Results indicated that the students are fairly versed with the appropriate forms of greeting that this is good morning/good afternoon. This indicates that this is one of the common forms of polite language used within the secondary school. This is particularly true among the form 1 & 2 for both boys and girls. However form 3&4 had higher percentage of the slang forms of greetings that is an average of 46%. This is an aspect of concern since Smallbridge and Linden (1967) point out that one of the interesting changes taking place in our language today is the acceptance of an enormous amount of slang into Standard English. They emphatically add that one of the functions slang I of is to irritate. Hence, it is not an aspect of polite society.

**Giving Thanks:** From the responses, it's clear that thanks is a common response to an offer done by someone. This

is a misconception as the best response is this is good of you. As exemplified by Ongudipe and Tregidgo (1972). This should be the case as was noted in the literature review, where it was noted that when native speakers of English wish to thank someone they say more than just thank you. On the contrary the students result had low percentages assigned to this.

Thanking is also taken casually. It was noted that some respondents simply said *ok* worse still, certain students indicated that they did not respond at all. In addition more girls than boys responded with *thanks* indicating that girls are more polite than boys. In conclusion it is noted that the students have a sense of thanking inculcated in them, however some do not know the appropriate form to be used to do this.

Next were the results on response given after having been thanked. The options here included not at all, it's my pleasure, no response and do not worry. Each option had a percentage below average. This means that the students were mixed up in their views about this form. This reveals their limited understanding about this aspect of etiquette. Girls outdid the boys by having higher percentages in the correct forms it is my pleasure'

**Responses to Seeking Permission:** The results indicate the correct response to seeking permission was picked on by a higher percentage of students in the sample hence excuse me is one of the polite forms used in the classroom and in the school compound. In this form also girls scored more highly than the boys. The rudest forms I want to see was picked on by a number of boys. In certain categories no girls picked on it. The right form is polite since could is used as a softening mechanism that gives the addressee a face- saving way out.

**Responses to Interrupting Politely:** The wrong responses to this item were picked on by the respondents. Both boys and girls opted for the form I want to speak rather none of the above. This indicates their limited knowledge of this form. This was closely followed by simply say what you want which is also open rudeness. This contravenes one of the maxims of the conversational principle of politeness that is do not impose which is intended to ensure that hearers do not lose face or self esteem and avoid embarrassment. Hence, this is one of the rare forms of etiquette in the secondary school.

**Responses to Turn Taking:** This results indicate that students have an understanding of the correct way of turn taking by selecting the option wait until the other person finishes having the highest percentage score. The option *not talk at all* is not an alternative of this form. It is important to note that it was not selected by the students; this is more evidence that the correct form of turn taking is one of the forms of polite language in the secondary school. The literature reviewed indicates that men were poor in turn- talking. However, the results indicate that

boys outdid the form 1 and 2 girls (76.75% against 72.5%) equally form 3 and 4 rural boys scored 68.4% and form 3 and 4 girls scored 64%. This could be due to the assertiveness of boys Sadker and Sadker (2000).

**Paying Attention:** The result indicated that most students frequently use nodding the head. A few chose the most appropriate form looking at them (Carlin and Payne, 2001)

In this form of polite language boys scored highly. This could be due to the fact that men tend to be verbally aggressive in conversing (Labov, 1972). Students should be encouraged to use this form correctly since Carlin and Payne (2001) argue that listening skills is important for the success in interpersonal relationship, which is an important aspect of etiquette.

**Response from Teachers:** Teachers play an important role in enhancing the usage of etiquette vocabulary in the secondary school. Results indicated that all aspect outlined by the syllabus are taught. Requests were at the lead with 40 out of the 42 teacher having taught it. Greetings thanking and the use of courteous language were taught by 36 of the teachers. Turn taking was the least taught aspect.

**Rating Forms of Etiquette According to Gender:** It was observable that the teachers indicated and assigned most of the polite forms to girls than boys. For instance 29 of the teacher indicated that excuse me, a polite form, is used by girls and only one of them indicate it is used by boys, also girl seem ready to say am sorry on the contrary both gender are indicated to use greetings in addition, boys seem to be bossier since twelve teacher indicted that they use the phrases I want yet no girl was pointed out to use it.

**H.O.D s Interview Schedule Results:** The H.O.D language agreed that teachers do exhibit various forms of etiquette.. Further that the most frequently used forms of etiquette used are greetings, excuses, thanks and turn taking. Those rarely used include apologies. Most of them rated the level of etiquette in their schools as barely satisfactory/ average. Few indicated that it was below average and

**Result of the Observation Schedules:** The researcher observed various forms of etiquette in the classroom and within the secondary school compound. These ranged from greeting s thanking, turn- taking, making requests and negating of all these forms greetings were outstanding in use. The polite forms of negating and turn taking were underused.

On the difference between boys and girls usage of etiquette forms. It was observed that girls had an ease in using most of the forms particularly thank you and apologizing. On the other hand boys were observed to use rude language forms like I want and they showed a reluctance to apologize on the positive they were effective in turn- taking.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Major Research Findings:** The study revealed that students are quite versed with greetings. Most of them used the correct form. This tallied with the observation that most teachers admitted they had taught this form. The study also revealed that most students understood the need to thank others for an offer extended to them. However, a majority of them did not use the correct form of thanking. This group opted for the easy way to go about this form, which the native speakers of English term as casual, that is , thanks. The best response in this is that is god of you.

It also revealed that, students often excuse themselves before getting into the staffroom. However, as noted in the study; students are not conversant with the polite forms used to interrupt conversationalists. A majority of them picked on the form. In addition they were aware of the proper form to use before taking a turn to speak. However they did no know the best way to indicate that one was paying attention to a listener., hence poor listening skills is one of the aspects that needs to be looked into

There was a difference in the use of polite language between boys and girls. First and foremost the study revealed that girls were more inclined to the use of polite language than boys. This was in forms such as thanks, response to thanks, request for permission and interacting politely. However boys were in the lead in the aspect of turn- taking. It also revealed that teachers assigned most of the polite forms to the girls and the majority of the impolite ones to the boys.

## CONCLUSION

Deriving from the summary above this study observed that etiquette is a significant aspect of the English culture. It is in fact an integral aspect of without which both the spoken and the written forms of English are hampered. It in essence promotes rapport between and among speakers.

The various forms of etiquette vocabulary that are used within the classroom and in the school compound include greetings, thanks, response to thanks, polite interruption, request for permission and turn taking. These however varied in terms of the degree of usage. On average girls tend to outdo the boys in most of these aspects, except in turn-taking.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Etiquette should be embraced as a value and it should be learned as a skill. Its use should be trained and cultivated among students and the entire school community so that it can be adapted as the school culture rather than teaching it for the sake of only passing the exams.

- Students should be guided and counseled on its importance. For instance the boys should be made to realize that there is nothing unmanly about the polite forms of language.
- All gender should be cautioned against peer influence towards misuse of polite forms, beware of media forms that contravene the set standards of politeness, guard against the intrusion of sheng and get sensitized on the importance of etiquette as a means of self fulfillment.

**Recommendation for Further Study:** More comprehensive studies should be undertaken to include a larger population in order to ascertain whether or not the problem transcends other localities

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