The present paper deals with the phenomenon of politeness, but from a different perspective, that of the speaker’s face. Running through the dominant theories of politeness, the major aim of the paper is to reveal that they are other-oriented (to the hearer) and underestimate the needs of the speaker in communication. The speaker’s face is recognized by two researchers (Chen, 2001; Ruhi, 2004) who acknowledge this deficiency in literature and propose a broader model.

In order to examine the overlooked position of the speaker’s face in interaction, I focus on the linguistic act of complimenting, which, within the framework of B&L’s theory, has an ambiguous interpretation: it is considered a positive politeness strategy and at the same time a face threatening act against the hearer’s face. More specifically, I examine compliment responses, which despite their variability have something in common: they have to balance two different and non-mutually satisfied constraints, the agreement with the complimenter and the avoidance of self-praise (Pomerantz, 1978). Although the compliance with one of the two constraints is partly culturally defined, I argue that the motivation for the acceptance of the compliment (self-praise) or the rejection of it (face-threatening for hearer’s face) seems to be the speaker’s needs and not the protection of the hearer.

The exploration of the Greek data (26 informal conversations) confirms the above hypothesis, revealing that the dominant constraint in the particular sample is that of the agreement with the complimenter (thus there is no effort to avoid self-praise).

On a second level in this paper, by taking into account that gender is a dynamic category which is constructed and reconstructed through language, I explore how gender is (or is not) involved in the protection of the speaker’s face.

**References**

