8 Epilogue

8.1 Introduction

The previous seven chapters have discussed the linguistic and socio-psychological consequences of the relation between communication of information about the self on delicate topics, and gendered social construction. Details have been given as to how a speaker-oriented approach may be of particular interest in both politeness and self-presentation theories supported by social constructionism. This final chapter begins by returning to the main concerns of the research introduced in Chapter 1. Then a summary of the findings of the study together with a general comparison between the Groningen and the Ankara group with respect to interactional style and attitudes towards cultural norms is presented. The chapter concludes with a short discussion of the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Two things were aimed at in this dissertation: first, to sharpen our understanding on the triple matrix of politeness/facework, self-presentation and gender, and to trace its practices in linguistic choices. With this purpose, I explore the linguistic and socio-psychological consequences of the relation between communication of information about the self on delicate topics, and gendered social construction. Second, I have proposed and shown the usefulness of analyzing face management strategies within the framework of politeness and self-presentation theories in a taxonomy. A better understanding of speaker-oriented facework strategies and the motivation behind them helped us to identify (and hopefully to fill up) gaps in the field of politeness theory and to use these findings to raise new questions. The issue of speaker-oriented facework has clearly not been analyzed sufficiently and systematically in the politeness literature, even if many studies used some notion of self-politeness in their analysis in one way or another. This dissertation has provided a more systematic treatment of speaker-oriented facework strategies with special reference to socio-cultural norms and self-presentation styles. Hence, narrative/conversation situations through which Turkish women expressed themselves were analyzed in terms of strategic self-presentation in the form of conversational humor, evasive communication style, vague and indirect interactional manner, and assertive attempts for the concerns of sincerity.
8.2 Summary of Findings

The contribution of this thesis is threefold. First, it has presented a new interpretation to the existing politeness literature by extending BL’s politeness theory to a speaker-oriented self-presentation approach within the framework of a taxonomy of self-presentation styles by underlining that conflict avoidance is not the only factor behind politeness behavior.

Second, the overall frame emphasized speakers’ efforts to maintain, protect or enhance self-face and that facework is a mutually beneficial venture of speakers and hearers. This frame also gave me the chance to define and discuss the notion of “face” in Turkish culture where asymmetrical power between males and females and the definition of honor in relation to women’s body and behavior in Turkish society give only symbolic roles to women as carriers and bearers of the cultural values. “Multiple consciousnesses” of Turkish women about face management were also reflected in their facework strategies because they tried to manage the risk of shame not only for their own account, but also for the wider range of their social relationships. In other words, “discernment” has taken precedence over “volition”, and “discernment” has become culturally, but not linguistically operative in the determination of “proper interaction” in Turkish society.

Third, three of the four core chapters (Chapter 5, 6, and 7) compared different types of self-presentation and their linguistic implementations in talk on sensitive and innocuous topics and two groups of women. The qualitative and quantitative analyses presented in these analytical chapters revealed that the cultural construct of “womanhood” affects the organization and content of discourse and that the reflection of self and choices in interactional style are the results of the intersubjective influences of cultural meanings, normative practices and personal interpretations.

Chapter 4, as an opening chapter of my analyses, presented the traces of four types of self-presentation defined in the taxonomy of conversational humor designed in with reference to Schütz’s original taxonomy and provided a global view on the implementation of the taxonomy regardless of group and topic differences. Chapters 5 and 6 investigated defensive and protective self-presentations by linking them with systematic linguistic choices and facework strategies. Chapter 7 focused on assertive self-presentation illustrated through speakers’ attempts to convey sincerity. Hence, different linguistic self-presentations were discussed in a multidisciplinary framework. Next, the basic findings of each chapter will be summarized.

The first chapter underlined the intersection points of the triple matrix of politeness/facework, self-presentation and social construction of gender roles. The notion of gender was discussed from a socialization perspective where gender was viewed at the level of individual choices, but as serving for social control. The necessity of self-presentation management and its indispensable place in social life were also underlined. By extending theorization of gender and impression management to the analysis of linguistic politeness, a more complex model where impression management and speaker-oriented politeness strategies operated with gendered norms was formed.
The study was framed by Goffman’s dramaturgical approach. The understanding of the macro-societal level in the back stage drew on theories of social construction and symbolic interaction, in particular the work of Goffman and Bourdieu. Cultural construction of self, women’s sexuality and reflections of sexism on Turkish language were specifically discussed with the framework of backstage constituents, in order to link sexual discourse with social construction.

Chapter 2 provided an elaborate review and analysis of the impression management and linguistic politeness, showing how the limitations of each could be offset by the strengths of the other. This chapter also constituted a background for a communicative theory of facework, where the full range of identity concerns people have in interaction and the ways these concerns are expressed in their discourse practices can be taken into consideration. The notion of face in Turkish culture was discussed with respect to constituents of face and factors affecting face management. The main argument on face was that the notion of face in Turkish culture challenges BL’s politeness theory in that discernment is more important than the volitional use of politeness (strategic politeness based on face needs). Therefore, self-presentation strategies Turkish women performed were predetermined and represented multiple concerns in relation to group relatedness.

The third chapter presented an outline of the methodology of the study. First, the details of the research design were given. Second, participants in the two groups and the details about the sessions were introduced by giving the details of demographic information. Finally, the corpus and the general methodology of the data analyses were described.

The fourth chapter provided a global framework for analyzing speaker-oriented spontaneous humor by questioning the reasons of this use in the light of assertive, offensive, defensive and protective types of self-presentation styles. While BL (1987) treated humor as a relatively simple matter of positive politeness, my analysis underlined the complexities of joking behavior. By combining self-presentation theory, which takes into account wider personal concerns, with politeness theory, which provides a linguistic framework, multiple functions of humor were explained in terms of multiple personal goals in a speaker-oriented approach. Accordingly, conversational humor can be employed in combining positive and negative facework strategies of the speaker. Humor in the form of teasing can even have a boomerang effect and turn onto the speaker herself.

The fifth chapter provided an overview of the dynamics of evading answers in terms of overt and covert practices, and protective and defensive self-presentational consequences of these strategies in interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, they underlined women’s tendencies to behave in line with the mainstream; on the other hand, they produced, sustained, and reinforced facts and a “proper” way of linguistic interaction in terms of gender and cultural norms. A deeper insight was given into the ways in which self-referencing pronominal shifts sen, biz and nominal reference insan can be used as a form of covert evasive strategies. Functions and distributions of shifted references were studied by comparing the Groningen versus the Ankara groups and sensitive vs. innocuous topics with respect to the extent of shift. Qualitative analyses revealed that topic sensitivity prompts speakers of both groups to employ pronominal shifts for various interactional purposes in the use of biz (sg.) and biz (pl.). The overall distribution
evidenced more frequent shifts in the Ankara group than in the Groningen group. In contrast to my hypothesis, shifted references accumulated around *biz* (sg.) and *biz* (pl.), but did not diverge further in sensitive topics. Our qualitative analysis revealed that Turkish women display interactional goals both at self-oriented and other-oriented dimensions. Self-oriented facework, which is the primary concern of this study, was managed either to protect the social image against the possible dangers and risks or to minimize the damage that has been done after the desired image was threatened due to disclosure on sensitive topics. Other-oriented references projected identification with others and solidarity, thus strengthening a shared authority and reemphasizing common ground. One should bear in mind that excessive *biz* usage was deceptive as it implies solidarity and identification with others. However, *biz* provides plurality and invisibility for the speaker as well.

Chapter 6 explores the way through which euphemistic indirectness including reduplications was employed in image construction in line with protective self-presentation. Detailed qualitative and quantitative analyses of euphemistic reduplications where undesirable expressions were shown to be concealed were also provided. My qualitative analyses revealed that culture-specific normative expectations were very effective in determining self-presentation behavior, discourse composition and style of interaction. As a result of the distributional and functional analysis of euphemistic reduplications, the two functions found for reduplications were the euphemistic function and the time/effort saving function respectively. The findings provided evidence for my claim that vague reduplicative structures were mostly used for protecting the speaker’s face. They occurred more often in sensitive topics than in innocuous topics in both groups. The corpus was further analyzed to test whether use of reduplications was dominant in speakers’ own text signaling personal face concerns or in quoted text. In both the Groningen and in the Ankara groups, euphemistic uses of reduplications were found to occur more frequently in speakers’ own talk.

Chapter 7 explored ways in which *valla(hi)*, an originally Arabic religious oath meaning “I swear by God”, and *gerçekten* (really), a rather contemporary, non-religious sincerity marker in modern Turkish, are used in the Groningen and in the Ankara group. In particular, functions related to self-presentation and face management in talk on sensitive or taboo topics were investigated. The data revealed that employment of *valla* and *gerçekten* was primarily assertive and strategic and corresponded to not only positive and negative politeness strategies, but also assertive and defensive styles of self-presentation. Sensitive topics forced speakers to monitor their words and to establish a preferred impression depending on cultural customs and predetermined gender role of women in both groups. There were differences in the use of *valla* and *gerçekten* in the two groups. The Ankara group used only *valla* for hearer-related facework and mostly *valla* to establish a positive self-image, while the Groningen group used *gerçekten* about as often as *valla* for both functions.
8.3 Comparison of the Two Groups

The Groningen group and the Ankara group had compatible characteristics in terms of educational background and migration story of the families they come from. However, they represented two different Turkish cultures: one in an immigrant setting under the shadow of a dominant culture and another in the native land. Some differences between the two groups were inevitable, but to what extent these differences would be displayed in linguistic choices and self-presentation styles was the main question of this thesis. As I mentioned in the first chapter, native cultures in immigrant setting are characterized by a frozen set of values and practices. A superficial change could be observable as a result of a liberal atmosphere in the immigrant setting, but traditional values brought from homeland usually stay frozen and immigrants are encouraged to preserve these values due to identity concerns. Thus, in general, women in both groups tend to project a stereotypical picture of women being reluctantly participate in interviews on critical topics and being passive participants giving non-committal replies. The outer “expected” picture presented itself in the form of evasive and indirect interactional style supported by euphemistic structures, depersonalizations, equivocal communication techniques in both groups. Consequently, women shelter under the stereotypes that define them as subordinate, weak and vulnerable, since their reality—whether it is brought from their homeland or not—is the same and it is socially constructed through personal interpretation and the intersubjective influences of language, culture, and nurture.

Topic sensitivity was effective in both groups in terms of triggering evasive communication, indirectness, other avoidance strategies and attainment of a sincere image. The Ankara group displayed a much more careful, cautious and socially-conscious portrait of women. Respondents in the Ankara group were more controlled in language use and avoidance strategies, and they provided a greater amount and diversity of facework strategies. For instance, they provided more pronominal shifts in sensitive topics, more frequently employed avoidance-based strategies such as euphemistic reduplications and self-referencing shifted references. Their employment of the sincerity marker *vallah* functioned as a cultural index of the community. I take this as (tentative) evidence for the influence of conservatism and religiosity on the women living in Ankara.

The Groningen group represented a more liberal perspective as compared to the Ankara group. In the beginning, they were very doubtful about the aims and consequences of my interviews considering the pervasive spread of information in a small minority community. Being a younger population, they were more open to discussions on critical topics and as they acknowledged later, they were in need of being able to talk about unspeakable aspects of their lives with authority and respect. Their narratives revealed that the social construction of immigrant women’s femininity and sexuality was still guided and nurtured mainly by Turkish culture and partly by religion. However, relative liberalism in their interactional style and discourse, which is a strong evidence of the influence of Dutch culture, cannot be neglected. Experiences illustrated in the participants’ narratives followed a common thread, namely the life-long struggle with the social constructions of
gender roles, femininity and sexuality. Similar to the Ankara group, social anxiety triggered by sensitive topics forced speakers to monitor their words and to establish a “proper” impression depending on the situation. Avoidance-based strategies, evasive or equivocal communication, protective and defensive self-presentation styles emerged as the artifacts of culture-specific normative expectations. In the attainment of assertion sincerity, the Groningen group employed gerçekten about as often as valla for both speaker-oriented and hearer-oriented facework strategies. The use of gerçekten, a more contemporary, non-religious sincerity marker and intensifier used as conventional means of legitimization or self-validation, presumably reflected influences of the more liberal atmosphere in Dutch society.

8.4 Limitations of This Study

The TWIST corpus provided massive amounts of sexual, cultural and social meanings, scripts, different strategies of linguistic self-presentation and face management along with various interrelated sub-themes. I have selected certain aspects of my data and used both qualitative and quantitative methods for my analyses. While qualitative methods were better suited than quantitative ones to explore and study meanings, experiences, and processes in people’s lives, quantitative methods provided the opportunity to evidence the systematic use of linguistic tools employed for face-management and self-presentation strategies.

Discourse analyses are notoriously difficult to validate, as reliabilities are generally rather low. In this study, reliability was assessed for some, but not all of the analyses. For euphemistic reduplications and usage of valla, this assessment was pretty exhaustive, but the identification of pragmatic functions for shifted pronominal references was only validated with a relatively small portion of the data. All analyses are quite elaborately described and documented with examples, allowing readers to judge the plausibility of the interpretations and classifications.

A video-recorded study could have been more useful by providing visual data to analyze laughter and silence in discourse more elaborately. However, video-recording was not an option in this study. Even the audio-recordings were quite threatening, as they recorded evidence of the participants’ disclosing private issues of their lives. There is no doubt that the presence of a camera would have aggravated the women’s fear of stigmatization and would have been a great obstacle in my data collection process.

Finally, this study is limited to less-educated, first generation Turkish immigrants living in the Netherlands and less-educated Turkish women living in the slum areas of Ankara. The findings of this study cannot directly be generalized to educated Turkish women or those living in immigrant settings as second generation immigrants.

8.5 Future Research

Future research in the area should introduce more diversity within the group of participants. Diversity could be described in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, age and educational levels. Only with a larger and
more diverse sample will it be possible to discover how these factors affect the way women present themselves, and create and modify their gender roles. A series of studies considering age as a variable could also assist in understanding how the changing nature of social, political, and economic factors influenced generations of women and their sexualities.

It would be interesting to conduct a similar study to explore linguistic self-presentation and sexual construction of men in Turkish culture. Such a research would be significant as it would present the differences in the way men and women are conceptualized in social norms and cultural values in terms of their sexualities and styles of self-presentation.

Finally, the results of this thesis make a strong case for the interplay of politeness, socio-cultural relationships and interpersonal communication. My findings on gender and facework/self-presentation suggest the need to investigate the forms and meanings of politeness and styles of self-presentation in a considerably expanded variety of social and cultural contexts. By studying the speaker-oriented facework of less-educated women from a non-Western culture in immigrant and non-immigrant settings, my study has contributed a stepping stone on our way towards a better understanding of the relationship between the cultural backstage and the frontstage displays of facework/politeness strategies in interaction.