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Project for Master Thesis: “A Comparison of Discourse Marker Use in American and New Zealand Women”

Having the opportunity to receive a grant from LMU has helped tremendously in my research for my master’s thesis, entitled: *A Comparison of Discourse Marker Use in American and New Zealand Women*. During the summer semester 2015 at LMU I began research for this project. In order to have the most accurate comparison available, I compared the reality television series *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelor New Zealand*. Both reality shows capture English dialogue in similar situations (male on female conversations, female on female conversations, and monologues directed at the camera crew and viewers) with a similar age range of female participants on each show. I analyzed four episodes of both *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelor New Zealand*. My results from this study suggested the New Zealand women care more about positive politeness than American women and that New Zealand women use *just* as a discourse marker in similar ways that American women use *like* as a discourse marker. I felt strongly that personal exposure to New Zealand English was necessary to progress further in my research for my master’s thesis.

I flew to Christchurch, New Zealand on July 13th, 2015 and spent the next month assimilating myself to New Zealand culture and understanding how females participate in same and opposite sex conversation, along with their perceptions of *The Bachelor New Zealand*. With the help of the linguistics department at The University of Canterbury, I was also able to get 42 females, ages 18-25 years old, who have been living in New Zealand since they were five years old to complete my questionnaire. This questionnaire asked questions regarding their values of politeness in discourse, their views on how women in their culture are viewed, and if they believe the reality television show *The Bachelor New Zealand* is an accurate portrayal of New Zealand English.

The results of this questionnaire indicated several important findings that I will need to take note of when furthering my progress with my thesis. First, I found that 93% of the females who took the survey also value speaker positive face more than negative face, and positive face in conversation is valued nearly equal in same sex and opposite sex conversation, with a difference of only 2% between the two. Another important result that supports my hypothesis after analyzing the results of my study on *The Bachelor New Zealand* is that 84% of the females who took the survey agree that they use the word *just* to soften their statements made in conversation. However, my findings on *just* as a discourse marker being interchangeable with the discourse marker *like* were unexpected. Prior to coming to New Zealand, I had hypothesized that New Zealand females used *just* in similar ways that American women used *like*, as the evidence from *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelor New Zealand* suggested this. The results from the surveys conducted in New Zealand suggest that this is a rare phenomenon and may have just been a result of the particular type of female who participated on *The Bachelor New Zealand*.

I also queried participants on two further topics that relate to my Master Thesis project. First, I questioned participants if they believed they were viewed as equals or inferiors to the males in their culture. The results of the survey indicate that 70% of the participants believe that New Zealand women are viewed and treated as second-tier to the men in their society. In comparison, 64% of the American participants of the survey indicated that they believe women are viewed as second-tier to men. Second, I questioned participants on whether they believe that the reality television series *The Bachelor* is scripted or unscripted and if it portrayed women accurately in their society. The results showed that 76% of these females who participated in my study believed that *The Bachelor New Zealand* was for the most part, unscripted dialogue and 90% viewed these women to accurately portray female speech for this specific demographic in New Zealand. In comparison, the results from surveys conducted by American participants show that 64% believe that *The Bachelor* is unscripted and 92% believe that the show accurately portrays female speech for that specific demographic in America.

Overall, being in New Zealand has helped significantly with the progress of my master thesis. The only exposure of New Zealand English I had had prior to this trip was through television shows. Being engulfed in the culture of New Zealand for the past month has allowed me to validate that the New Zealand English I have analyzed on *The Bachelor New Zealand* is accurate to that of

the English that is actually spoken in New Zealand, and will allow me to draw broader conclusions when continuing with my thesis and will further support my findings and claims I have made so far in my research.

I wanted to also take this opportunity to thank the faculty for the support of this project and in allowing me this grant to further my research. It has allowed me to expand my argument that there are significant differences in discourse marker use between New Zealand and American Women and has allowed me to collect valuable data to further support this argument.