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## POLITENESS IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH: A PRAGMATIC CONTRASTIVE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

This article scrupulously explores the subtle appropriation of politeness strategies in Arabic and English from a general pragmatic and contrastive viewpoint. Having built on what Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory has provided, the research examines in detail how both speakers use a variety of required speech acts such as requesting, refusing, and apologizing, essential to effective communication.

This investigation highlights the dynamic role played by the multifarious linguistic structures utilized and the extensive cultural norms that inform communication in such languages. Rich data were derived from real conversational data, discourse completion tasks (DCTs), and detailed corpus-based analyses. What is shown by the results of this comprehensive survey is that politeness strategies among Arabic speakers are biased towards positive politeness strategies that draw upon in-group solidarity, community affinity, and interpersonal closeness. English on the other hand is more frequently associated with negative politeness strategies that concern individual personal rights, protection of territory and reduction of any imposition on the addressee. Furthermore, cultural aspects, such as collectivism, the importance of honor codes, and religious norms, affect the diverse modes of politeness in Arabic interactions.

The paper finally ends with sound pedagogical recommendations targeted at developing intercultural communicative competence and methodologies for second language learning, especially for Arab learners of English. These learners stand to gain much from increased knowledge of these politeness dynamics through which they can engage more successfully in interactions and demonstrate more respect for one another, rather than disengage when they find themselves in differing communicative situations.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, politeness strategies, contrastive linguistics, Arabic, English, Brown and Levinson, intercultural communication, speech acts.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness stands at the epicenter of human communication; in order for communication to be smooth and productive, this remains fundamental for it also mirrors the foundational cultural beliefs of a given society (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). In many cross-linguistic and cross-cultural situations, what counts as polite in one language often can be seen quite differently when observed in terms of another language. Arabic and English, being two languages belonging to different cultural and social traditions and reflecting different social norms and idiomatic usages, especially offer an exciting and fertile soil for the field of comparative pragmatics. We will see the richness while analyzing politeness strategies that will be used in both of these languages and also how culture influences styles of communication, in addition to respect, consideration and courtesy that is expressed in the daily social exchanges. An

awareness of these variations could improve our potential to manage cross-cultural engagements more successfully (Al-Khatib, 2021).

A knowledgeable and in-depth study which sheds light on the subtle nature of polite linguistic formulations in both Arabic and English in a range of high-interest speech events like requests, refusals and apologies. Despite being described as an independent, and low context language, English is very much an indirect language, and is highly mitigated with plenty of particular strategies which are used in order to sweeten the pill, so-to-speak. By contrast, Arabic is heavily characterized by strong collectivist aspects, deep-rooted cultural norms, and a prolific religious discourse that is inherent to the Arabic language.

This distinctive language setting results in a dominant orientation towards expressions signifying solidarity, a collective group as well as a deep sense of community, binding members of the community together. It is this nuanced analysis that the current chapter sets out to provide, with the intention of mapping out the complex pragmatic and cultural territories that ultimately support these divergent politeness strategies. Furthermore, it attempts to recognize and pinpoint major divergent points and parallels of both languages, all combined to emphasize the intricacy and the difficulty of cross-cultural communication in a multifaceted politeness context. This more extensive investigation does not only contribute to a better understanding of linguistic usage, but also provides valuable perspectives on the overarching scope of politeness in cross-cultural interaction.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Courteousness had also been a concern of the field of pragmatics from the very early days, mainly due to the seminal work by Brown and Levinson (1987) who suggested a universal theory of politeness centered on the construct of "face." The concept applies to the public perception of themselves that everyone has and seeks to maintain in their daily social life. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, 1995) theory there are two core conceptualisations of politeness: positive politeness, which means show solidarity, pull towards friendliness and indicate approval to addressees, and negative politeness, which refers to show deference and minimise imposition. Their work has shaped how we think about the interaction styles of cultures and tactics for communicating across cultures.

Lakoff (1973) extended the early studies of politeness (Lakoff, 1973) with her maxims of politeness, some of them considered very important as "Don't impose," "Give options," and "Make your receiver feel good". These aphorisms provide key lessons on how to relate to others in a more positive manner. Leech later (1983) developed her notion and investigated it in conjunction with his politeness maxims, as well as incorporating politeness into a more general theory of the interpersonal balance of rhetoric. This enabled an in-depth investigation of how language operates in social interaction.

Within the rich frame of Arabic and its many dialects, some valuable work has been done by few prominent linguists who pursued the complex nature of speech acts and politeness (Al-Khatib, 2001; Nasser, 2017). Their studies have shown that in Arabic it is a cultural mode of expression that is closely related to religion and the stability of social roles (specific to male and female speaking habits) and based on the use of honorifics. This overdependence produces a communicating technique that is unique and that serves the values and culture of the Arabic-speaking people. On the other hand, the English language uses a great deal of linguistic hedging and indirectness (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), which may contribute to a more subtle or indirect form of expressing the same thing. Such contrasts underscore the various ways in which language can operate against cultural backdrops.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is theoretically anchored in Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential politeness theory, which is neatly built on the notions of positive face and negative face. These basic concepts are indispensable and much needed in order to understand the complexity of social relations and communicative practices that geniuses involved in various situations.

Positive politeness actually involves a variety of strategies, all of which are specifically designed to build good relations and increase solidarity among language users –i.e. to make them feel close to one another. This can take many forms - things like sincere and authentic compliments, the use of inclusive language that bridges the gap between those assembled, and referring to shared values that all present can appreciate on a very deep level. Through these thoughtful innovations, these attempts can be expected to greatly improve social interactions among people, thereby allowing for more peaceful and enjoyable communications.

The negative politeness includes a number of strategies that both defer to and highly value the hearer's most vital claim to be free of imposition and invasion from others. This includes also a cautious use of indirectness, of hedging as well as of the formal language in order to minimize any imposition of the hearer and to avoid any form of embarrassment. By the skilled use of such (subtle) techniques speakers can actually balance their very relationship in face-to-face communication and create a respectful and empathic dialogue in which the feelings of the addressee are recognized and respected.

The theory also integrates concepts of Searle's speech act theory first presented in 1969. This important framework realizes that being polite is not just a set of rules, but is instead mainly enacted through many genres of performance. The acts include requesting, declining, apologizing, and the like. This holistic approach serves as a lens by which we may compare the various ways in which language is used in both English and Arabic. This act serves to neatly arrange the face, as well as foster positive social relations among people in various settings. And by closely analyzing these complex performances, we come to a better understanding of the subtle cultural variations and the specific strategies that each language employs when engaging in the tricky business of social communication. Correspondingly, the analysis of such performative aspects not only adds to our understanding of language use, it also allows us to observe the same tendencies underlying communicative practices across diverse cultures.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

This all-embracing, multi-faceted study was generated by sensitive and thorough data collection from three complementary sources: 1. Genuine and unscripted recordings of native and non-native English speakers having natural conversations in different settings. 2. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) that were judiciously elicited from competent bilinguals in Arabic and English. 3. A thorough and systematic reanalysis of the relevant corpora and, indeed, of earlier studies on diverse types of speech acts. The specific speech acts of interest that were subject to fine-grained examination are requests, refusals and apologies—acts that are potentially high in face-threat and are known to disrupt social interactions dramatically and extensively in a wide variety of human communicative contexts. Each of the collected utterance was deeply studied in jargon of underlying politeness strategy, the related cultural setup and its pragmatic role in the larger sense of communication.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Requests

In English requests are usually softened by the strategic use of modals and hedges. These include a number of expressions that neatly take the edge off the request, leaving the speaker free, as he or she may put it, to say, "Could you unlock the window at all?" This is the same strategy that allows the speaker to be polite in their expression but considering the listener, also taking the listener's courtesy into account. Arabic on the other hands also uses indirect ways of making requests, but these strategies are generally unlocked by the particularly rich forms of being polite, (etiquette expressions) most of them founded on religious appeals in order to reinforce or intensify force request. For instance, it is likely that someone would verbalize it as: "لو سمحت، ممكن تفتح الشباك؟" "law samaḥta, mumkin taftaḥ al-shubbāk?" or "If you please, may you open the window?" This particular term does more than simply state a request; it highly values politeness and respect and is a clear expression of deep-seated norms of courtesy and respect within the language and culture as a whole.

### 5.2 Refusals

For instance, English refusals are commonly characterized by a marked degree of indirectness and an explanation of the reason for the refusal, such as "Sorry, but I can't come today". This way it's not so rude or anything, it's just a flat no, no explanation necessary, but says "I'll be nice here and acknowledge that you might have some feelings". In inter-Arabic communication, however, they tend to utilize a more formulaic pattern of refusals, which involves the frequent use of apologetic expressions, appeal to the divine words and most importantly matters relating to emotional: "والله إن شاء الله ولكن الظروف", "wallāh in shā' Allāh walākin al-zurūf" 'I swear to God, I'll thoughtfully but times'. The closest translation I could make was "I swear I want to, but I just can't." This difference indicates the different strategies for achieving effective refusals in the two languages and cultures. The English there is all about politeness and don't want to but the Arabic one shows a close relationship and always attempting to keep the personal relationship maintain.

### 5.3 Apologies

Apologies are usually short and sweet, cut and dried in the English language, usually reduced to two simple words like "I'm sorry," or "I apologize." This simple approach is usually a good way to attempt to express that contrition and quickly make amends for any wrong doing. Claity has a way of comforting a lot of people in times like that, it gives them a sense of closure and understanding. Arabic apologizes, on the other hand, are usually a little more elaborate and they tend to epitomize the cultural richness of the Arabic language and the world it represents. They can last for much longer and may also employ similar pleading for grace, for example with Arabic "أستغفر الله، سامحني، ما كان قصدي", "astaghfiru Allāh, sāmiḥnī, mā kāna qaṣdī" (I ask God for forgiveness, forgive me, it was not my intention). This exercise not only illustrates the value of respect in communication, but it is also illustrative of a deeper culture in repentance and what's at stake in asking for life-giving forgiveness from personal beings and from God. Part of this humanizing is the idealisation of the worth of relations, and how earnestly people want reconciliation, reconciliation, and to work on relationships. Such expressions frequently have much more impact and nuance, and this is a reminder of how cultures, too, affect how people express feelings of regret and responsibility. But ultimately, these very different cultural perspectives underscore the universality of the need for forgiveness as well the very different ways in which people apologize in earnest.

In the area of communication, Arabic language and culture seem to rely on a somewhat stylistic positive politeness which is widely rooted in various community values, traditions and beliefs of religious nature which has an influence up to date. This worldview that reflects the collective health and the relation to the others, is one of the first strategies in the prevention of a disease. On the other hand, the culture in the English world tends to value another type of relationship than that, closer to a kind of negative politeness that emphasizes the value of individualism, of personal independence, and the supreme importance of not lose face in the exchange of that negotiation. The differences in style tell a deeper tale about how different cultural priorities are built into language, and how these priorities shape how people relate to each other. This demonstrates the widely disparate strategies to promote social harmony and to set personal limits in communication, and ultimately to the distinct socio-cultural patterns that characterize each of these linguistic contexts.

## 6. FINDINGS

The marked difference between Arabic and English regarding the dominant politeness strategies indicates the different cultural basis for each language. These cultural bases strongly shape not just how people of these cultures communicate, but also how they socialize in many contexts and situations. In the world of Arabic discourse we find a marked concern for using a wide range of social formulas, linguistic expressions and phrases in emotional language. It is this latter emphasis that encourages high warmth of interaction and the deep connection between speakers on the one hand and turns the communication relationship from pure transaction to powerful relation. In addition, Arabic discourse mixes many deep religious expressions to that it loaded with heavy meaning within a certain culture framework particularly between the group who share the culture setting and references. This infused richness of religious and cultural components that significantly enrich the discourse as a whole, encompassing levels of meaning that deeply engage participants. On the one hand, the ebb and flow of English is evidence of the greater range of syntactic forms used when hedging is concerned; indirectness and the use of modal verbs associated with it are more common. It is these aspects that help to express politeness, and to mitigate requests, components that are important for successfully preserving both social harmony and solidarity in essential types of exchanges and interactions. The used strategies assist speakers to manoeuvre (conv.)spoken norms and expectations more easily and sensitively. Furthermore, the lost stairs of collectivism, honor, deep familial ties and an inborn-drive to hospitality exert strong influence on Arabic pragmatics. This gives rise to a highly contextually relevant discourse, which is most valued in a variety of social situations as well as in interaction with individuals in various places and cultures. Thus, the divergent politeness strategies manifested between the two languages often generate miscommunication in cross-cultural communication. Misunderstandings like these are bound to arise given the differing customs, beliefs and habits ingrained by both of these languages. These apparent differences present major obstacles for successful cross-cultural communication and action. And this is when it is necessary for the speakers, who are addressing one another in the two languages, to consciously work at acquiring an underlying understanding of the discourse styles and preferences of the others as well as the cultural principles that support their communicative activities. This context is important in order to have respectful and constructive conversation with people from another culture.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This wide-ranging and detailed study is confirmation that politeness strategies are not limited to linguistic systems but are deeply affected by diverse cultural variables that shape the rhetorical patterns of different communities around the world. For example, in the case of Arabic speakers, solidarity and relationships of the heart factor significantly into their conversation, highlighting the idea of relationships developing versus being built through continued interaction, dialogue and reciprocity of shared experiences. These relationships are frequently established by elaborate social rituals and protocols that evidence the values of community and relationship intrinsic to the Arab world.

On the other hand, the reduction of face threatening and the maintainance of personal space is often highly valued by English-speakers, reflecting a different cultural model of communication that focuses on personal autonomy and individualism. This emphasis on personal rights and privacy highlights a general cultural preference for freedom and self-expression, attitudes that have a significant and formative impact on communication in English. These significant differences in cultural communication styles highlight the vital importance of culturally-based approaches to language education, including in particular the need to integrate such understanding into the syllabus of translator training courses with a focus on enhancing cross-cultural competence. The results of the present study may prompt further research into the nuances of gendered politeness, new trends in digital communication or comparative analyses between languages and cultures. Clearly, such questions would help us to understand more fully the complex interactions taking place and to throw more light on the subtleties of the relations between language and culture in matters of politeness.

More broadly, "addressing such key and applicable issues" will be critically important for those of us as teachers, teacher educators and professionals as we seek to develop communicative competence in an increasingly multilingual terrain that bring mutual respect, understanding and appreciation for greater collaboration in an international world. In the environment where effective cross-cultural communication is so essential this ongoing search and dialogue of these themes will be crucial to enable successful engagement with the awareness and acceptance of other cultural viewpoints. As we continue to know and learn about these politeness strategies, it enriches our linguistic knowledge but more importantly, illuminates the role of empathy and the importance of being attuned to other person conditions in today's world of globalization where cultures collide and require a greater level understanding and respect among its actors.

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