

Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study

Motlak Fahd Motlak Fahd Al-Odwani ^(*)

1. Introduction

Politeness is a social component necessary to human everyday interaction and socialization. It reflects linguistic and non-linguistic behavior that people usually involve to reflect upon how far they are considerate of other people's feelings and emotional reactions.

It functions by evaluative moments-the participants' assessments of interactional behavior- and it is a crucial interpersonal interactional phenomenon, according to the fact that it helps people maintain interpersonal social relationships among each other (Kádár, 2017).

However, Politeness is seen as one of the most popular fields in pragmatics (Culpeper, 2011), with a history extending from the 1970s. Moreover, the modern pragmatic research in the field of politeness began due to the impact made by the linguistic and philosopher Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP). The CP specifies that in meaning making interlocutors tend to collaborate with each other, through following the four Maxims set out by the CP: Quality, Quantity, Relevance, and Manner.

(*) This paper is part of an M.A. thesis entitled : "Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study ", Supervised by Prof. Bahaa el Deen M. Mazeed – Faculty of Al- Alsun, Sohag University & Dr. Ismail Abdel-Ghani Ahmed – Faculty of Arts, Sohag University.

Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study

Politeness sets into operation if one or more of these Maxims are violated with the intention of releasing polite inferences.

On the other hand, impoliteness is also an important element in any cultural interaction, since it can be assumed to be present in every culture or language; however, it varies greatly from one language and culture to another. Culpeper (2005, p. 38) suggests that “impoliteness comes about when:

1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or

2) the hearer perceives and constructs behavior as intentionally face-attack, or a combination of (1) and (2)”. Mullany (2008) comments on the second part of this statement and opines that the hearer also has a decisive role in determining the intentionality of a speech and must be considered. Therefore, it is safe to assume that both speaker and hearer roles are important in analyzing and understanding politeness as well as impoliteness (Mullany, 2008).

Both politeness and impoliteness are important fields within the field of linguistics and both are found in every language and every culture. They are useful tools to figure out certain linguistic similarities and differences that already exist among cultures and languages. From there, the current study sets out to conduct a comparative analysis of politeness and impoliteness in Kuwaiti and Egyptian Arabic dialects. It explores social and cultural-

specific utterances of the two dialects reflecting upon the specific use of the linguistic politeness and impoliteness in both cultures, since each society has its own polite and impolite linguistic forms that present certain social and cultural background.

2. Methodology:

The current study investigates the linguistic politeness and impoliteness of both the Kuwaiti and Egyptian Arabic dialects through an eclectic theoretical framework that is relevant to the question of the study. The researcher focuses on the following constructs: Politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987), Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence by Culpeper (2011) and principles of Pragmatics by Leech (1983). The data used in this research is from a contemporary YouTube show which provides proper samples that help in satisfying the question of the study without being cliché or redundant, as it provides contemporary modern examples for Kuwaiti and Egyptian dialects and culture.

The design of this study is comparative research. A comparative research focuses mainly on comparing two groups, methods, aspects, features, or theories in an attempt to draw a conclusion, after analyzing similarities and differences, about them. In comparative research, researchers try to clarify and analyze similarities as well as differences between the topics under discussion. Sometimes, like the case of this study, such studies are usually cross-

Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study

cultural or cross-national that seeks to compare two separate nations, languages, cultures, or social traditions.

The main purpose behind comparative studies is to find and improve understanding between two different cultures or languages in different societies and to find a base of familiarity and some sort of solidarity.

Hence, the main aim behind this research is to find how politeness and impoliteness function in Kuwaiti culture and comparing it with its Egyptian counterpart. Moreover, comparing here means finding and analyzing similarities as well as differences not only differences as it is mistakenly understood by the word 'comparative in common usage. In other words, the goal behind this research is to find the similarities and differences in politeness and impoliteness between Kuwaiti and Egyptian cultures and also to find that the universal theories of politeness and impoliteness can be applied in our Arab culture, with all its varieties as Arabic culture is not one single culture, but many in fact that vary from one Arab country to another.

3. Data Collection

The sample data is taken from the popular Kuwaiti YouTube show “Sewar Shuaib”. Sewar Shuaib is a talk show with a strong underlying message that encourages social change in Kuwait as well as the entire Arab world. The show was named after the host Shuaib Rashed who is a Kuwaiti presenter; he presents his show on YouTube and features Arab celebrity guests each week. The main idea

behind this show is to highlight issues rarely addressed by the media. This kind of shows is usually preferred by audiences as it discuss many important contemporary problems and issues that faces our Arab world, such as bullying, friendship between females and males, fame obsession, and many other important topics and ideas as well as phenomena that have lately appeared in Kuwait and the entire Arab world.

Shuaib guests are not only celebrities, but different people from malls and streets in Kuwait as well, where we can find people from all over the Arab world and meet many different cultures, traditions, thoughts, and beliefs, that is why this show was specifically chosen as a source of the data to be analyzed in this show, as in many episodes he interviews Egyptians and also, many celebrities from Egypt, which makes it easy to hold the comparison targeted by this research.

Shuaib Rashed is considered one of the pioneers in this domain in Kuwait and even in the Arab world. He was born in 1983, studied media in Kuwait university and started his career in the media field by creating online videos on Instagram and YouTube and established a production company for online content named “Omedia” in 2012, which he later left and established another company name “Belmokhba/BLM Inc.” which produces his show “Sewar Shuaib” that gained massive success on YouTube in the entire Arab world.

Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study

The data was selected in accordance with the aim of this study where the researcher viewed a number of episodes in order to spot situations and utterances where politeness and impoliteness appear and analyzed them in addition to comparing them with their equivalents in Egypt where some background knowledge about the Egyptian dialect is utilized to compare it with the Kuwaiti expressions as well as some assistants among Egyptian friends who helped in giving proper explanations of some Egyptian colloquial utterances which are compared with the Kuwaiti ones.

In brief, the data was collected from a Kuwaiti online show (Sewar Shuaib) and was analyzed by means of politeness and impoliteness, whenever either appears, and then was compared to the Egyptian dialect to clarify whether it is similar to the Kuwaiti ones. When a difference is observed, the effect of this difference on the meaning and the degree of politeness and impoliteness is analyzed. The instances and utterances of the data are downloaded from Sewar Shuaib YouTube channel.

4. Tools

The theories used analyzing the samples in this section are:

1- Leech maxims, which he referred to in his book “Principles of pragmatics” (1983); which are:

a- tact maxim

b- generosity maxim

c- abbreviation maxim

d- Modest maxim

e- Agreement maxim

f- Sympathy maxim

2- linguistic impoliteness; which Culpeper (2005, 2011) mainly referred to, as well as Bousfield (2008).

3- Negative and positive impoliteness

5. Analysis

Sample 1

In an episode under the title of +18, a scene between mother and her son where she knocks at the door to wake him up the son says;

“ya yoma egaza” -

يا يوما أجازة (Shuaib, 2017, 1:29)

This has the same Egyptian equivalent of;

-"Ya Omey al naharda agaza"

يا أمي النهارده أجازة

(Today is a holiday, mom)

In the previous example, if Leech's scale of self and other is applied, then we can see that speaker B (the son) replies to Speaker A's (the mother) request be an answer which would seem to be irrelevant to speaker A's utterance. However, this answer is polite and adheres to a politer reply, because if speaker B replies directly by saying "No, I am not going to wake up", he, then, would be considered to be attacking the face (according to Brown and Levenson's theory (1987), and Watts' modification of the same theory (2003: 143) of his mother by denying one of her requests

Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects: A Comparative Study

(or even orders because mother has higher social and family status than son, then it is acceptable to give her son orders and would not be seen as impolite). However, Speaker B preferred to give an indirect reply by saying that it is a holiday which lets his mother implicate indirectly that he will not get up early today because he has a vacation and that her request or order to him will not be accepted.

We cannot see any greater difference between the Kuwaiti and Egyptian reply; they both lead to almost the same result as they both are indirect and polite. In brief, it can be said that according to the context of this example and the reply of speaker B, after taking in consideration the social and cultural context, we can say that speaker B's reply to speaker A's command was indirectly polite, by means of giving a polite indirect answer to avoid the impoliteness of a direct rejection.

Sample 2

In the same episode, another scene between the same son (speaker B) and his father (speaker A), where speaker A says;

- Saker Al may

) (Shuaib 2017, 1:49) (سكر الماي)

This has the same Egyptian equivalent of:

Efel al maya

) (أقفل المايه)

Close the water tap!

In this scene, we see speaker A commands speaker B to close the water and to get out of the bathroom while he was washing his face. This utterance seems to be impolite according to Leech's maxim of generosity, which Leech defines as "minimizing benefit to self and maximizing cost to self" (1983: 133). In this example, speaker A is not minimizing benefit to himself or maximizing cost to himself, but, instead he is maximizing benefit for himself by ordering his son to close the water and to not wash his face in order to not pay much money for the water utility. Hence, it can be said that speaker A's utterance is impolite, because it violates Leech's generosity maxim of politeness. Instead, speaker A would better utilize an indirect utterance to give such a command without being impolite, such as using an indirect utterance as "the water bill costs me an arm and leg, son", and let speaker B implicate by himself that his father wants him to close the water because he pays much money to water utility. Even if speaker A did not want to be impolite, however, the intention of speaker A does not matter because, according to Terkourafi it does not matter what the intention of the speaker is but how the hearer perceives it (2008: 49-55).

In brief, it can be said that speaker A's utterance to speaker B is considered to be impolite as speaker A seems to be violating Leech's politeness maxim of generosity. On the other hand, if we look at the Egyptian counterpart to this utterance, we can see that it still can be seen as impolite because even in the Egyptian culture, ordering someone to

**Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects:
A Comparative Study**

close the water and to not wash his face is still considered an impolite act. However, what was earlier mentioned is not always true, because this utterance cannot always be seen as impolite. If we check that sentence again we can see that it was said by someone who has a higher social and family status or authority (i.e. the father) to someone who has lower or inferior social and family status or authority (i.e. the son).

Briefly, this utterance, in some cultures (such as our Arabic culture) cannot be seen as an impolite utterance because it is said by someone who is highly appreciated and has a higher social and family rank to someone who has lower or less social and family rank. However, even if the person addressed has lower family or social rank, one should be polite to that individual because if people felt uncomfortable while interacting with each others; then the interaction would immediately stop and fall apart. According to Culpeper strategies of impoliteness (1996: 8) this is a bald on record impoliteness where face is not relevant or minimized.

Sample 3

In the same episode, another scene between the son and his mother where that mother says;

Arak labis w kas7x

(shuaib, 2017, 2:30) أراك لابس وكاشخ

This has the same equivalent Egyptian equivalent of:

لابس ومتأنتك/ لابس علي سنجة عشرة

I see that you are well-dressed

In this example, the mother seems to be adhering to one of Leech's politeness maxims, which is the approbation maxim, that Leech defines as " minimize dispraise of other and to maximize praise of other" (1983: 135). This utterance seems, on the surface, to be polite because the mother here praises the way her son looks and stating that he is wearing beautiful clothes. This utterance does not seem to be threatening the face of the hearer; however, it seems to be benefiting the hearer.

From another perspective, this utterance can be seen as an impolite utterance because if we looked at the underlying meaning, according to the context of that scene, we can see that the mother is mocking her son and that she is angry that he always goes out and she does not know where he goes. Hence, we cannot deduct any utterance from its context and try to clarify whether it is polite or impolite and that some utterances can be polite and can also be impolite, only the context, as well as some other aspects (such as the intonation), can only define whether an utterance is polite or not.

On the other hand, if an Egyptian is told that Kuwaiti utterance, using the same expression of "Kas7x", he/she might feel uncomfortable and might even feel that they are insulted. The reason is because the Egyptian slang does not use this cluster of sounds (s7x), it is very heavy on the Egyptian hearers and very common in many Egyptian

**Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects:
A Comparative Study**

taboo or unpleasant words. Moreover, the Egyptian use a cultural specific expression (the above-mentioned one), which we cannot tell whether it is polite or not, as it depends greatly on the context and the intonation by which this utterance is being told; as in some cases the speaker would really mean that he likes the way the speaker dressed, while in some other cases the speaker produces such an utterance to mock the hearer and means the opposite. Moreover, we can also look to this example as the speaker did not want to be rude or impolite by asking the hearer directly where are you going, instead, the speaker preferred to use an indirect utterance by referring to the hearer's clothes and to let him infer that she wants to know where he is going.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier in the introduction section, the main aim of this study is to explore how politeness and impoliteness function in both the Kuwaiti and Egyptian cultures, understand how the Kuwaitis and the Egyptians make use of Leech's maxims in their daily communication, and highlight the divergences and convergences between Kuwaiti and Egyptian Arabic. Moreover, the main reason for undertaking this has been to find out if politeness differs within the same language, as both Egyptians and Kuwaiti use Arabic as their mother tongue, but the question here is whether it is the language that defines politeness or the other way around. For the sake of

answering the research question, and clarifying if culture or language define politeness, a three main prominent theories were used, which are; Leech's theory of politeness which is included in Principles of Pragmatics (1983), where Leech referred to six maxims to explain the relationship between sense and force in everyday conversation, which are; (approbation maxim, generosity maxim, tact maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim). In addition to Leech's theory, there were negative and positive politeness, where Brown and Levinson (1987) admit that "politeness involves showing concern for two different kinds of face needs: first: negative face needs or the need not to be imposed upon; and secondly, positive face needs; the need to be linked or admitted (p5), and Linguistic impoliteness by Culpeper (2011).

To fulfill the objectives of the research, a YouTube show 'Sewar Shuaib' was utilized, where it provides good samples as well as dialectic variations as the show is not only concerned with the Kuwaiti people only, but also with interviewees from different Arab countries.

In the course of this study analysis, it became clear that there are similarities as well as differences between Kuwaiti and Egyptian dialects and politeness and impoliteness both function in almost the same way in the two dialects, however there have been some cultural and dialectic differences that affected the way politeness and impoliteness function, where in some cases what is considered as polite in the Kuwaiti dialect is seen as

**Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects:
A Comparative Study**

impolite in the Egyptian dialect, such as in samples 2, and 3. Briefly, we can say that even though Kuwaiti and Egyptians both speak the same language and come from the same culture (Arabic language and culture), there are some minor cultural variation in which even in the same language and the same culture there are some differences and cultural specifics that appear in every culture that can be seen clearly in the way politeness and impoliteness function. Moreover, it is not only the language or the culture that defines how impoliteness and politeness function, but both factors are need to clarify how they function in one language, dialect or culture. Hence, it became clear even if the comparison is made between dialects of the same language, and even if both dialects have the same expressions and terminologies, this does not necessarily implicate that these expressions have the same connotation, as in some cases – as seen in the sample – there were expressions which is common between Kuwaiti and Egyptian dialects which is seen in one dialect as an Expression of politeness while it seen as impoliteness in the other.

List of References

- Bousfield, D & Locher, M. (eds.), (2008). *Impoliteness in Language – Studies on its Interplay with Power and Practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Brown, Penelope, and Levinson, Stephen. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan (2005). Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: The Weakest Link. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture 1*: 35-72.
- Culpeper, Jonathan (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan (1996). Toward an Anatomy of Impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics 25*:349-67.
- Grice, Herbert Paul (1975). 'Logic and conversation'. In P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds) *Studies in Syntax and Semantics III: Speech Acts*, New York.
- Kádár, D. (2017, March 29). Politeness in Pragmatics. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Ed. <http://linguistics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-218>.
- Leech, Geoffrey (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.

**Politeness and Impoliteness in Egyptian and Kuwaiti Dialects:
A Comparative Study**

- Mullany, L. (2008). “Stop hassling me!” Impoliteness, power and gender identity in the professional workplace”. In D. Bousfield and M. Locher (eds.), *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*. 1-16**
- Terkourafi, Marina (2008) Toward unified theory of politeness, impoliteness and rudeness. In Bousfield, D & Locher (eds.), M. *Impoliteness in Language – Studies on its Interplay with Power and Practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.**
- Watts, R.J. (2003) *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**