

Reversal Politeology: Interchangeable Use of (im) Politeness in Jordan

Layth Al Soudi, Radzuwan Ab Rashid

Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Alaysia, Malaysia.

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Abstract

This study investigates the interchangeable implementation of (im) polite behavior in light of face theory. Specifically, this study explores the way people in Jordan interchangeably implement polite behavior in impolite context to achieve impolite sequel as well as exploring the way people use impolite behavior in polite context. In addition, the study also highlights the role of intentionality and disagreement in language interaction in light of im/politeness considerations. A set of open-ended questionnaires was distributed to twenty-four adults in the city of Maan in Jordan. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. The findings suggest that impolite behavior within societal constraints does not always lead to negative sequel; rather, it sometimes represents a polite tendency particularly in intimate relationships. Moreover, a polite behavior often represents an implied malicious intention. The study also shows that (im) politeness and face are inseparable due to social considerations of rights and obligations. This study also reveals that disagreement in interaction among interlocutors in Jordan is not a face-threatening act. The study recommends that researchers cast some light on the influence of speech acts on politeness in social interaction.

Keywords: Face theory, (im) politeness, reciprocity, disagreement, intentionality.

النظرية الادبية التبادلية: العكسية في مفاضلة الاستخدام الادبي

ليث السعودي، رضوان راشد
جامعة السلطان زين العابدين، ماليزيا.

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة السلوكيات غير المهذب في المجتمع الأردني في ضوء نظرية (face theory)، ذلك أن السلوك المهذب يحكم عليه من خلال السياق الذي يحدث فيه أثناء التواصل الاجتماعي، وبالتحديد يستكشف هذا البحث الطريقة التي يتبادل بها الناس في الأردن السلوك المهذب في سياق غير مهذب، وكذلك استكشاف الطريقة التي يستخدم بها الناس السلوك غير المهذب في سياق مهذب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يسلط البحث الضوء أيضاً على دور القصد والاختلاف في التفاعل اللغوي في ضوء اعتبارات الأدب / قلة الأدب. ومن أجل الخروج بالنتائج المرجوة للبحث تم توزيع أربعاً وعشرين استبياناً يحوي خمسة أسئلة مفتوحة على مجموعة من البالغين القاطنين في محافظة معان في الأردن، وقد تم اعتماد منهج التحليل النوعي الوصفي للبيانات، وأشارت النتائج إلى أن التصرف الذي يوصف بأنه غير لائق عموماً قد لا يقود إلى عواقب سلبية، بل على العكس من ذلك قد يقود إلى بعض النتائج الايجابية، بالإضافة إلى أن بعض التصرفات التي تظهر بأنها أدبية عادة ما يكون لها نتائج سلبية على مستوى الاستخدام المجتمعي، كما أشارت الدراسة إلى أن الاختلاف لا يؤدي إلى نتائج سلبية بين أفراد المجتمع الواحد. وأوصى الباحثين بضرورة تسليط الضوء على تأثير طريقة الكلام على الأدب أثناء التفاعل الاجتماعي. الكلمات الدالة: نظرية الوجه، النظرية الأدبية، اختلاف الآراء، القصد



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1. Introduction

Linguists and behaviourists have been investigating and exploring real-world im/politeness as a way to explore people's interaction as well as recognition of **Politeology** (i.e. the scientific and systematic study of im/politeness and face theory within cultural domain). Politeology could be introduced as the dualistic study of im/politeness theory and face prioritising the pragmatic implementation of people's interaction within a given society. Due to the dearth and less attention paid to politeness of interaction in Jordan, the current study is deemed significant because it exhibits Jordanians' politeness criteria witnessed in societal involvement in light of face requirements. In this study, we present the interchangeability of politeology in terms of some prominent social events in Jordan. Away from the aforementioned dualistic attempt, intended pejorative act is potentially presumed to be embedded in the prevailing act of rudeness (Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003).

In its broad sense, im/politeness is comparatively relative on the basis that each culture is known with its marked behavioural standards that influence people's interaction (Fräser & Nolen, 1981). In relation to face and politeness, Goffman (1967) assumes that people within a given society are assumed to adopt a particular behavioural 'line' that demarcates the politeness of each interlocutor's personal face (p. 5). Like the above, myriad of theories (second order im/politnness) have been demarcated in order to describe people' behaviour (first order im/politeness) within im/politeness criteria. Among these theories is 'rapport management' which is presumed to be the interactional management of participant's involvement in a social ionteraction (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p. 96).

The aim of this study resides in investigating the way people interchangeably implement polite behaviour in impolite context to achieve impolite sequel as well as exploring the way people use impolite behaviour in polite context in light of facework. In addition, the study also emphasises the role of intentionality and disagreement in language interaction in light of im/politeness considerations. For the sake of clarity, the study poses the following two research questions; these are:

1. How could disagreement and intentionality influence language interaction?
2. How could im/politeness signify a reversal sequel in Jordan?

2. Literature Review

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness build up a coherent and sophisticated theoretical framework that encompasses the domain of perception and production of Face Threatening Act (FTA) in social interaction (Al-Adaileh, 2007; Tracy, 2017). Having established this point, Brown and Levinson (1987) proclaim that FTA can be performed within two main strategies: 'do the FTA' or 'don't do the FTA' (p. 69). Presumably, interactional collision that is ensued from doing FTA is dichotomised into: 'positive politeness and 'negative politeness' (p. 69). Positive politeness refers to one's desire to be accepted in group or society. Negative politeness, on the other hand, displays one's desire not to be impeded. Building on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, Wang (2021) explores politeness strategies in making requests and responses in light of discursive approach among Chinese college students (i.e. two males and two females). The study confirms that politeness framework of Brown and Levinson accounts for online interactional communication.

In light of the study's objective, the generic realisation of politeness is not always positive as much the same way impoliteness does not always represent negative values and attitudes. Fundamentally, context, face, speaker's intention, as well as hearer's perception of the utterance make the most significant contribution to language interaction (Archer, 2017; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Marsh, 2019; Spencer-Oatey, 2005; Tracy, 2017; Wang, 2021). In view of this, Against this backdrop, Rabab'ah and Alali (2020) extract 676 impolite comments from 30 articles found in Al Jazeera official website. Researchers adopt Culpeper's (2016) bottom-up model of impoliteness; they find out that the anonymity of online commenters is the major factor promotes impoliteness. They also presume that the use of ellipses brackets (...) in online comments subrogates ill-wishes or even revilement.

Similar to the current study, but not with context-sensitive environment like the current, Culpeper and Tantucci (2021) investigate reciprocity of (im) politeness of request-based forms in two experiments. They claim that interaction is driven

by social morality in determining language implicature. They aver that incongruence and (im) polite ‘mismatching are associated with specific context’ that paves the way to interlocutors cordially receive the act of deviation. According to the paradigm of Politeology, attacking or maintaining face that affects interlocutors’ interaction depends on two main levels of face considerations: the social level and individual level. Social level represents face-value that is set by the person him/herself regarding ‘social face identity’ (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, p. 106). Individual level is an individual’s involvement within familial or societal group. Social level is also dubbed ‘culture-specific collective identity’ that mainly shows the value of an individual in specific culture (Sinkeviciute, 2018, p. 5).

The current study presents the perception of politeology in Jordan. As a way to highlight the socio-cultural and socio-political context in the current study, Jordan (i.e. a Middle Eastern country) is surrounded by many recent challenges as it barely could ‘manage to survive’ (Ryan, 2013, p. 342). These challenges would definitely affect language, society, and cultural ideology as the same degree it affects economy. The challenge increases during the flow of ‘refugees into the country as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, two Gulf wars, and an ongoing civil war in neighbouring Syria’ (Badarneh & Migdadi, 2018, p. 94).

3. Methodology

A set of open-ended questionnaires was distributed using Google forms to twenty-four Jordanian participants (11 males and 13 females) aging between 25-35 years old in the city of Ma’an. The questionnaire was written in standard Arabic so that participants can freely express and share their feelings, ideas, and social information. Data collection process consumes a month of gathering with the aid of two friends. The participants’ responses were translated into English as a preparation phase to data analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the generated bulk of data. In this, participants were asked five questions to explain their reaction and how possibly would they respond to some common situations:

1. How do you explain the sudden unexpected formal treatment from a very close friend?
2. How do you explain the formal treatment of a husband to his wife or vice versa?
3. How do you explain the abundance of joke and banter you receive from someone you barely know?
4. Why do you think it is inappropriate to joke in serious events like funeral?
5. According to your social knowledge, what is the result of swearword escalation?

These questions were obtained based on observational interaction with people in the city of Ma’an in Jordan. The abovementioned questions were supposed to gauge participants’ realisation of Politeology in their daily interaction in different situations through Thematic Approach. In order to maintain participants’ anonymity, participants were given numbers according to their order of contribution.

4. Analysis

The analysis of data is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) two assumptions: 1. ‘a trigger’ in language communication stimulates some inferences (p. 218); 2. The utterance itself determines the purport of the functional linguistic form. As can be seen in the table 4.1 below, participants have identified four main themes for the first interview questions; these are: positive view, negative view about a friend, negative view about self, and a snitch intrusion.

Table 4.1: themes extracted from the first question

Q1: How do you explain the sudden unexpected formal treatment from a close friend?		
Data extracted from interviewee (I, hereafter)	Sub-themes	Themes
الاحترام الذي يظهر تجبيل الصديق الذي يود المحافظة على حدود الصداقة 'Respect definitely shows an honourable treatment of a friend who likes to maintain distance [...]' ¹ (I/12)	Respect	Positive view
يجب ان يكون هناك مشكلة ادت الى الغضبها 'there must be a particular problem that lead to his/her anger' (I/4) [...] تكون طريقة للتعبير عن الخطأ '[...] as a way to express his/her ire' (I/ 3)	Anger	Negative view about a friend
تكون علامة للجدية المفاجئة الغير مرغوب فيها 'it is a sign of un-favourable seriousness they suddenly have' (I/ 20) تظهر جدية غير مفهومة 'it presents unexplainable seriousness' (1/ 24)	un-favourable Seriousness	
ربما يود الشخص بإنهاء العلاقة بطريقة مؤدبة 's/he may want to end the relationship in a polite way' (I/ 23)	Forsake	
قد اكون أسأت بطريقة غير مقصودة وذلك فعليا غير لائق 'I may unexpectedly misbehave which might really be inappropriate' (I/16) او انني قمت مصادفتاً بعمل شيء خاطئ [...] '[...] or I may accidentally do something wrong' (I/ 17) ربما قام الشخص بملاحظه شيء لم يعجبه [...] 'he/she noticed unpleasant thing ...' (I/ 11)	Admission of misbehaving	Negative view about self
من الممكن ان تكون علامة ان اعدائي توصلوا الى صديقي و وشوا بي 'it could be a sign that my enemy has approached my friend and tattle' (I/ 15) بالطبع، شخص ما حتما اخبره شيء مغلوط عني 'of course, someone must have told him/her something wrong about me' (I/ 8)	Snitching	A snitch intrusion

It can be seen that participant 12 believes that formal treatment of a friend indicates high respect whereas the majority believe that it entails negative attitude. In this matter, participants (e.g. 4, 3, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 23, and 24) allege that the sudden formal interaction of a close friend results from anger, seriousness, or an excuse for forsake. Further, participants (e.g. 11, 16, and 17) admit that they may accidentally misbehave; these participants attempt find excuse to their friends. The last extracted theme is the intrusion of a snitch among friends. This intrusion causes some misunderstanding results from false information about friends. The word 'impoliteness' covers participants' terms that manifest disagreement (e.g. problem, anger, ire, inappropriate, and tattle). In support to the reciprocity of the current study, participants also implement some terminological injunctions that are overarched by politeness (seriousness, polite way, and a friend). Such linguistic manifestations prove that 'implicit reciprocity' of (im) politeness is inherent and is sensitive to textual and contextual construction in society (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021, p. 148).

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine

In table 4.2 below, participants have identified three main themes for the second im/polite-related questions; these are: positive view, negative view and male's responsibility.

Table 4.2: themes extracted from the second interview question

Q2: How do you explain the formal treatment of a husband to his wife or vice versa?		
Data extracted from interview (I)	Sub-themes	Themes
انها حتما علامة احترام متبادل ادت الى الحب 'it is definitely a sign of mutual respect that leads to love' (I/18)	Respect	Positive view
من الممكن ان تشير الى الحب والشغف. على اي حال اغلب العلاقات الرسمية حدثت من التصرف الغير لائق و الكره 'it may denote love and passionate. However, much of informality ensues from inappropriate behaviour and hatred' (I/11)	Love and passionate	
بالتأكيد، الناس يعاملون ازواجهم برسمية للضرورة امام الناس 'for sure, people treat their spouses formality which is necessary in front of others' (I/20)	Social prestige	
من المرجح ان قد كان بينهم جدال جدي ادى الى هذه المعاملة 'they might have a very serious argument that lead to this treatment' (I/13)	Anger	Negative view
من الممكن ان يكون هناك سوء تفاهم حديث حول موضوع معين 'they may have recent misunderstanding about particular usual thing' (I/2)	Misunderstanding	
لا يوجد انسجام بسبب تراكم الاخطاء 'no harmony because of accumulated mistakes' (I/7) تحدث بسبب المشاكل المستمرة التي يحظون بها 'it occurs because of the continuous problems they have' (I/9)	Accumulated problems	
الرجل لا يحترم مشاعر المرأة 'a man doesn't respect the feeling of a wife' (I/10) الرجل حتما مضطرب عقليا ليست المرأة بالطبع 'the husband must be a psychotic not the wife of course' (I/12)	Man's fault	Male's responsibility

The first theme above (positive view) was symbolised by respect, love and passionate and social prestige. Contrary to the theme, formality among spouses receives negative view denoting that spouses may contaminate their relationship by: anger, misunderstanding, and cumulative problem. Other female participants (e.g. 10 and 12) foresee the reason beyond formal treatment among spouses as male's fault and responsibility. Participants' arguments about the formal treatment among spouses vary from love and passionate to serious argument and then to misunderstanding and continuous problem. This evident incongruence supports Watts (2003) who stated that '(im) politeness is a term that is struggled over at present, has been struggled over in the past and will, in all probability, continue to be struggled over in the future' (p. 9).

In table 4.3 below, participants have identified three main themes for the third question, as follows: positive view, social interactional coherence, and negative view.

Table 4.3: themes extracted from the third question

Q3: How do you explain the abundance of joke and banter you receive from someone you barely know?		
Data extracted from interview (I)	Sub-themes	Themes
بعض الناس مرحين بالفطرة لذلك انا اراه طبيعيا 'some people are funny in nature, so I think it is ok' (I/2)	Funny	Positive view
تحدث عندما يتق بي الشخص 'it happens when he/she trusts me' (I/15)	Confidence	
هي ترمز للطيبة التي يمتلكها الشخص او [...] 'it is a sign of kindness that the speaker has or ...' (I/5)	Kindness	
يجب ان يكون هذا الشخص مقبول اجتماعيا، غير ذلك لا يمكن ان تحدث 'this person must be socially accepted otherwise it cannot be possible' (I/3)	Social acceptance	social interactional coherence
انها طريقة لإنشاء علاقة جيدة بين الناس 'it is a way to establish a good bond between people' (I/14) اعتقد انها طريقة لتقديم نفسك 'I assume it is a way to introduce yourself' (I/4)	Self-introductory	
هههههه، يجب ان يكون هذا الشخص وقح لان يفعل ذلك 'hahaha, he/she must be rude to act like this' (I/1)	Rudeness	Negative view
هذا بالتأكيد تصرف غير لائق من صديق غير لائق 'it is absolutely regarded as inappropriate behavior from an inappropriate friend' (I/10)	Impoliteness	

It can be noticed from the above table that positivity is prevalent as participants (e.g. 2, 5, and 15) believe that the one who jokes at the beginning of friendship is funny, kind and confident. Participants (e.g. 3, 4, and 14) also believe that joking signifies interlocutors' social awareness of the circumstances. On contrary, other participants (e.g. 1 and 10) believe that being funny at the beginning is a sign of rudeness. This occurrence of counter-argument manifestation is classified by Maíz-Arévalo (2021) as 'aggressive humour' and 'innocent humour' (p. 179). The former depicts interlocutors' hostile intentions to derogate others while the latter presents harmless humour that mostly tend to amuse others.

In table 4.3 below, participants' responses contributed to coming up with three main themes related to the fourth question. These themes are: social limitation, people' sentiment, and negative view.

Themes that were derived from the fourth question are related to the reflexive im/politeness in funeral as a social event contains no sense of positivity. Participants (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12 and 14) assure that social limitation, people sentiment, and societal negative view are the main constraints that might forbid people from joking in funerals. Participants in the above table clearly seem in agreement with the argument of Holmes et al. (2008); they accentuate that 'verbal impoliteness [is] linguistic behaviour assessed by the hearer as threatening her or his face or social identity, and infringing the norms of appropriate behaviour that prevail in particular context' (p. 196). In table 4.5 below, participants' responses for the fifth question have been categorised into two main themes: aggression and more aggression.

Table 4.4: themes extracted from the fourth question

Q4: Why do you think it is inappropriate to joke in serious events like funeral?		
Data extracted from interview (I)	Sub-themes	Themes
[..] بداية كل شيء، هذا السلوك المخزي وقح للغاية. هذا السلوك يعتبر مرفوض و [...] 'first of all, this opprobrium act is extremely rude, it is socially forbidden and [...]' (I/1)	Social forbidden	Social limitation
جديا، هذا السلوك غير مقبول اجتماعيا لأنه يشير ان الشخص لا يهتم للميت 'seriously, this is socially unaccepted because it alludes that the person does not care for the dead' (I/8)	Social unacceptance	
[...] لا يمكن بسبب العادات والتقاليد في الاردن ' [...] cannot be possible due to customs and traditions in Jordan' (I/14)	Customs	
المسألة ليست متعلقة فقط بتبجيل الميت ولكن ضرب من الاحترام لعائلة الميت ايضا 'it is not a matter of venerating the dead but it is also kind of respect to the family of the dead too' (I/3) بشكل عام علينا ان نظهر بعض الاحترام لمشاعر الناس 'generally we have to show some respect to people's feeling' (I/4) الاحترام هو العرف السائد هنا حيث اننا لا نستطيع تجاهل الشعور الكئيب الذي يشعرون به عندما [...] 'respect is the virtue here in which we cannot ignore the sombre feeling they have when [...]' (I/12)	Respect of others feeling	People' sentiment
اراه فعلا لا يليق، نحن لا نفعل ذلك عاداتنا في ثقافتنا 'I see it as an inappropriate act, we didn't usually do it in our culture' (I/2) مكان غير ملائم للمزاح، عاداتنا ما ينتاب الانسان شعور سيء عندما يرى عائلة المتوفى 'inappropriate place to joke, people get a negative feeling when they see the family of the dead crying' (I/7)	Inappropriateness	Negative view

Table 4.5: themes extracted from the fifth question

Q5: According to your social knowledge, what is the result of swearword escalation?		
Data extracted from interview	Sub-themes	Themes
اعتقد انها تقود الى الشجار بالأيدي خصوصا بين الرجال 'I believe it leads to hand fighting particularly among men' (I/1) بالتأكيد تؤدي الى الشجار او [...] 'it definitely leads to quarrel or ...' (I/4)	Fighting	Aggression
[...] احيانا الى القتل '... sometimes to murder' (I/7) تتصاعد للشجار بالأيدي او اطلاق العيارات النارية 'it escalates to hand fighting or even gun shooting' (I/3)	Sever consequence	More aggression

Interviewees assure that swearword escalation would certainly end up with aggressive act (fighting) and then more aggressive (sever consequences). These two themes can pragmatically be merged together with one theme 'aggression.' The interactional severity engendered from the above themes might be due to 'a collectivistic culture' Jordanians have; such severity implies the impoliteness of interaction in quarrel-like contexts (Rababa'h & Rabab'ah, 2021, p. 162).

5.0 Discussion

This section discusses the potential findings of the study's research questions. In this, we strive to directly summarise participants' argumentations of disagreement and intentionality as well as the interchangeable implementations of im/politeness in social events.

5.1 How could disagreement and intentionality influence language interaction?

This study has attempted to investigate the influence of im/politeness of some social events in Jordanian society. Studies in socio-pragmatics and psycholinguistic have therein proved that intentional aggressiveness of a communicative behaviour is hurtful act leading to severe consequences (Haugh, 2008; Vangelisti & Young, 2000). This claim has been supported by all participants of the current study. 51.7% of the participants assure that only intentional offence is very much profound and poignant, whereas 48.3% conclude that an offence is offence whether it is intentional or not but might not be so profound. In this matter, it has been assumed that the addressee is the one who judges whether the speaker's intention is polite or otherwise (Goffman, 1967; Locher & Watts, 2008, Marsh, 2019).

Participants agree the disagreement is not a face threatening act which might tell that aggressiveness in swearword escalation in table 4.5 is not subsumed under disagreement. However, swearword escalation might be a result of an intentional serious advanced disagreement. For more clarifications, disagreement in this current study is shown in terms of presenting variant arguments of a topic evidenced by thematic analysis of positive and negative views in the above tables (exc. Table 4.5).

5.2 How could im/politeness signify a reversal sequel in Jordan?

It can be conceptualised from extracted themes that formality, which is supposed to be polite according to participants, may provide negative social view representing some sort of ire or mutual misunderstanding. Interestingly, some participants ascribe the negative behaving to themselves when they have been asked about the sudden formal treatment from a friend. They believe that there must be an accident of improper behaviour which excuses the formality of treatment. On this vantage point, Al-hindawi and Alkhazaali (2016) resolve the transitional dispute by claiming that any behaviour is considered polite if it does not transmit any pejorative consequence.

Further, people's social intercourse is crowded with values and limitations that explain the reason why people cannot easily come across each other's personal borders without facing consequences. In support to the prior argument, Spencer-Oatey (2008) assures that a person has the right to unobtrusively demand his/her 'entitlements' in particular society (p. 14).

Twenty-three participants agree that formal behaviour produced by a close friend is an ostensive clue of ire accentuating the idea that informality is the prevailing behaviour among friends. That is to say, the majority of participants still believe that friends are not supposed to treat each other formally. More importantly, the phenomenon of informality is not only examined among friends but also among spouses. Whereby, twenty-one participants agree that formality among spouses and couples contaminate the intimate relationship by displaying passive attitudinal relationship free from passion. In light of the former discussion, it is inferred that false-impoliteness, as contrary to false-politeness, would often build a bridge of harmony and congruence among people who are intimate in their life-relationships.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study mainly exhibits the interchangeable use of Politeology in Jordan. Unfortunately, it does not receive the scholarly attention it deserves. In this study, reversal Politeology denotes that communicative and non-communicative polite behaviour would occasionally represent impolite attitude. The same thing is applicable to false-impoliteness which occasionally represents polite orientation, closeness, and subsequently meant to save others' face particularly with intimate friends and relatives. In accordance with this proposition, face is demarcated with two levels in terms of social considerations: social level and individual level. Formal treatment of a friend is supposed to indicate high respect; however, the majority of participants believe that it entails negative attitude. In the current, positive interaction was symbolised by respect, passionate, and social prestige. In case of social events, (e.g. funeral) social limitation, people feeling and societal negative views are the main constraints that forbid people from joking in funerals. The study ascertains

that various politeness theories can be applied on Jordanians' behaviour in order to maintain social solidarity. For future studies, researchers may shed some light on the influence of speech acts in making politeness in social interaction. Of a great interest, researchers may also investigate mock reciprocity in complimenting and thanking in light of speech act theory.

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