ادراك التهذب وعدم التهذب اللغوي كتطبيق اجتماعي: التركيز على الثقافة العراقية

The Perception of Politeness and Impoliteness as a Social Practice:

A Focus on Iraqi Culture

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الملخص

يدرس هذا البحث ادراك وفهم الظاهرة الاجتماعية اللغوية اللياقة اللغوية في الثقافة العراقية. لقد مرت هذه الظاهرة بمرحلتين : المرحلة التقليدية والمرحلة الحديثة. تركز المرحلتان على جوانب مختلفة، فالمرحلة التقليدية تركز على اساليب اللغوية المهذبة وغير المهذبة بينما تركز المرحلة الحديثة على ضرورة تقييمهم وادراكهم. يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة الطريقة التي يفهم ويدرك بها العراقيون اللغة المهذبة وغير المهذبة في ثقافتهم، مثلا ماهي الافعال التي تصنف على انها مهذبة وأيهما غير مهذبة، وماهي الأسباب التي تغير المجتمع كي يصنف على انه اكثر او اقل تهذباً مما كان عليه سابقاً. تم استخدام الاستبيان الألكتروني لجمع بيانات من طلبة جامعة الفلوجة وجامعة الأنبار والخريجين من مختلف الجامعات الذين بلغ عددهم اكثر من ١٥٠ مشاركاً. توصل البحث الى أن المجتمع العراقي يميل ان يكون مؤدباً لغوياً ويحاول دائما الحفاظ على الذوق (الإحترام) في التفاعلات الاجتماعية في ضوء القيم الإسلامية والعادات الموروثة، لكن هناك بعض الحالات التي تصنف بغير المهذبة لأسباب معينة مقصودة او غير مقصودة.

Abstract

This research examines the perception and conceptualization of the sociolinguistic phenomenon of politeness and impoliteness in Iraqi culture. Politeness has come through two approaches traditional and post-modern. Both focus on different perspectives: the traditional approach focuses on the production of politeness and impoliteness whereas the discursive approach emphasizes the necessity of evaluating and perceiving them. We aim in this paper to examine how Iraqi people perceive im-politeness in their culture, what actions relevant to be polite and impolite? what sources of both politeness and impoliteness? what reasons that change the Iraqi society to be more or less polite than before? The data of this paper were collected by online questionnaire sent to more than 150 students at the Uniersity of Fallujah and Anbar. It was found that Iraqis mostly tend to be sociolinguistically polite and always attempt to keep tact in social interaction in light of the Islamic values and the inherited traditions though there are certain cases that involve impoliteness for specific intended or unintended purposes.

1-Introduction

The traditional approach of examining politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) has been criticized as a speaker's oriented investigation neglecting the hearers and other observers. Therefore, post-modern approach to im/politeness involves two orders of politeness: *first order* represented by a theoretical understanding of politeness and a *second order* represented by lay understanding of politeness. Within the discursive approach, there has been a great focus on the participants' own evaluation of politeness rather than the analysts' subjective and objective understanding (Eelen, 2001, Mills, 2003, Watts, 2003). First-order of politeness focuses and involves lay "*classificatory politeness* and *metapragmatic politeness. The former is obtained from participants' understanding of others' linguistic reactions as they are polite or impolite; whereas the latter can be reached at through "an actual interaction" or through "talk about politeness as a concept about what people perceive politeness to be all about*" (Eelen, 2001: 35). However, modern discursive turn emphasized the inevitability of examining im/politeness as it occurs in ongoing interaction and the perception of im/politeness in the post hoc talks. Discursive approaches of politeness should therefore receive more attention nowadays in im/politeness research. Therefore, it is worth exploring the unexplored societal rather than the individual level of politeness.

As far as im/politeness is concerned, most studies on Arabic culture have focused on the production of politeness by Arabic native speakers specifically through different speech act behaviour. The analyses in those studies have focused on identifying and describing how Arabic native speakers produce polite speech act in Arabic and in English as a foreign or second language with no evidence as to whether the participants recruited in those studies or lay participants would

perceive themselves as im/polite. Thus, there was no satisfactory consideration on the perception of im/politeness as a social practice and perception. It is therefore, specifically to this unexplored area in the im/politeness research that our paper aims to contribute.

This paper focuses on the perception of im/politeness in Iraqi culture. We generally aim to explore how im/politeness is conceptualized by the Iraqis. It precisely aims to answer the research question: how do Iraqi people conceptualize im/politeness in terms of the following:-

a) What does politeness mean?

b) What is the source of politeness?

c) Has im/politeness been changed? Why?

d) Is politeness necessary? Why?

A review of the relevant literature on im/politeness studies in the discursive approach and a review on Iraqi culture are presented in this paper. We go on by examining the participants' conceptualization of im/politeness through the four aforementioned questions. When the results are generalized, we will offer the findings of this paper as an introduction for forthcoming research.

2. Understanding Politeness and impoliteness

Research on politeness has totally increased in the last three decades. Such research has largely considered the way in which people produce polite speech acts (apologies, refusal, thanking, and compliment) and politeness has been examined as a sociolinguistic phenomenon in association with the people's behaviour through linguistic utternaces (Brown and Levinson, 1987 [1978]; Leech, 1983; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003 among others). Further, the earlier research on politeness has been viewed as being a speaker-oriented approach, i.e. the hearer and other participants were neglected. In spite of the huge and frequent interest in the traditional approach, impolite and aggressive, and conflicted behaviour were ignored.

In this point, Eelen (2001: 104) shows that, *"... the focus on polite behaviour causes impoliteness to disappear from theoretical view, so the focus on the speaker's behaviour causes the hearer's behaviour to disappear."* Thus, this research trend has been criticized as it neither focused on impoliteness nor took into account the participants' evaluation of im/politeness. Some changes and developments of Brown and Levinson's (1987) account of politeness addressed the shortcomings mentioned above. The new modifications and developments offered fertile ground integrating both impoliteness and politeness in examining social communication. Consequently, this development pushed the research on impoliteness in general and the perception of both politeness and impoliteness rapidly (see, e.g., Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003).

The new trend of examining im/politeness is called Discursive Approach or post-modern approach. It started in 2008 when a few research has been conducted on politeness represented by the publication of journal of politeness Research. One of the most interesting and worthwhile issues that appeared in the discursive

approach is the research interest movements from specific concepts such as face, face threatening act to larger concepts such as "relational work, face constituting act, rapport management and face-work".

Discursive approach of im/politeness focuses on the participants and lay participants' perception and conceptualization. This issue has been promoted and emphasized by Watts and Locher (2005). They noted: *"We consider it important to take native speakers' assessments of politeness seriously and to make them the basis of a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. The discursive dispute over such terms in instances of social practice should represent the locus of attention for politeness research (p.16).*

The discursive approach deals with im/politeness in terms of two orders: the first order is concerned with im/politeness as a common sense from a theoretical perspective whereas the second order is concerned with how politeness is conceptualized and perceived.

In addition, the "first order" includes two elements in the data analysis "participants and metaparticipants" (Kadar and Haugh, 2013). People who are associated with the assessment through which politeness and impoliteness emerge are labeled as participants or main participants. As for people who are not involved essentially in the social action are called metaparticipants; however they assess significant politeness at a distance. This implies that they do not contribute in the assessment process, however they can just view politeness or impoliteness in the web, TV, radio and social media. Furthermore, the two orders of im/politeness include a bunch of expectation. The first order includes the insiders and the outsiders. Insiders incorporate the members based of emic understanding which is diverged from the outsiders that is identified with an order as an etic viewpoint. Such expectances for all intents and purposes inform the exceptionally evaluative process that

lead to politeness. The second level of understanding politeness incorporates two aspects: *"an observer account (analyst or/and lay observer) and a theoretical account (theoretical understanding) (Kadar and Haugh, 2013:88)"*.

Perceiving im/politeness is the consequence of the negotiation between different parties: speaker, addressee, observers and other lay participants and their views about what happens in the social interaction. (Kadar, 2013). Watts (2003:252) criticizes evaluating im/politeness by participants rather than the utterance producer claiming that *"it is highly subjective and a matter of discursive dispute"*. Considering politeness in this manner is by all means a problematic in terms of characterizing politeness, for example the specialists are unable for defining politeness precisely on the grounds that the analyst is directed by members' comprehension of politeness.

On the other hand, Eelen (2001) shows that im/politeness can be observed when the addressees or hearers evaluate the behaviour produced by the speakers.

Thus, the dynamic function of im/politeness is emphasized by Eelen: *"notions of politeness is not simply the result of a passive learning process in which each individual internalizes 'the' societal/cultural politeness system, but are rather an active expression of that person's social positioning in relation to others and the social world in general"* (2001: 224). Then, he emphasizes the significance of im/politeness evaluation: *"...the very essence of (im)politeness lies in this evaluative moment"*.

Further, Spencer-Oatey (2002) account of rapport management involves a process in which a face as a concept is modified to involve other concepts rather than quality face and social identity face. Such new concepts include "social rights" which involves specifically "equity and association rights". They seem to be conceptually

interrelated to each other in spite of being distinct (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 652). In brief, the concept quality face means the desire of positive evaluation of personal qualities, for instance (the quality face of one's ability or competence) whereas social identity involves the wish to be acknowledged, i.e. the acknowledgment of one's social identities, for instance acknowledging one's role as a group leader, or acknowledging his/her value as a customer). *Social rights* include person's claim for themselves in their interaction with others. It is subclassified into *"equity rights* and *association rights"*. *Equity rights* refers to be considered and respected whereas *association rights* refers to the social involvement with or detached from others. As claimed by Spencer-Oatey, equity is related with the cultural dimensions namely individualism and collectivism. Individualism refers to cultures and communities whose members are independent and prioritize personal aims and individual interest whereas collectivism involves those members who are mutually dependent and share common goals. Similarly, Locher and Watts (2008) pointed out that the concept of politeness depends on judgment. They further explained that, in general, these judgments are constructed based on the history of interaction of individuals in their society. This shows that the longer a person lives in a community, the better his interaction history in order to make correct judgments.

Holmes (2013: 290-296) investigates politeness in relation to the social contexts such as etiquette and consideration among discourse participants. Politeness, according to Holmes, generally refers to social agreement and avoiding social conflicts. Specifically, language politeness involves speech strategies that can be viewed by others as a language tool for maintaining pleasurable interactions. It was mentioned that the sociolinguistic norms regarding appropriate

speaking styles are different, and that communication strategies play different roles in different societies. Therefore, understanding politeness usually involves the ability to sympathetically cope up to evolving social relations in different social dimensions related to the situational context.

Previous research on im/politeness seeks to framework conceptualizing im/politeness by following a discursive approach of evaluative methods. Previous researches conducted on understanding and conceptualizing politeness revealed that the researcher as an analyst works to validate the observations taken from the data of those researches. In addition, those data, which have been collected by recognizable methods, were analyzed according to some evidences related with a theoretical framework. Finally, the data have been conducted by the analyst. Although, the metaparticipants "lay observer perspective" in terms of Kadar's classification of participants is less worthy, it is still a valuable discursive approach in conceptualization and understanding im/politeness in terms of assisting the analyst "researcher" to understand the lay observer (Ahmed, 2017). Moreover, Sifianou and Tzanne (2010) reveal that conceptualizing politeness and impoliteness in Greek is determined by the participants' awareness of cultural values and moralities as well as the resultant relevance in the social and cultural context. In addition, it was found in this study that impoliteness, unlike politeness can be expressed verbally in most cases. Further and expectedly, they found that the Greek society is becoming less polite than it used to be and they attributed such change principally to the rapid technological development in life.

This study therefore, depends largely on the participants' perception of impoliteness as a social practice and phenomena in the Iraqi culture.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this paper depends largely on the post-modern turn of im/politeness that was classified as evaluative model of analysis. Therefore, the perception of im/politeness in Iraqi culture has been examined by employing an online questionnaire which was designed and administrated to 200 Iraqi individuals aiming to conceptualizing im/politeness as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. The respondents were asked some questions about im/politeness (see Appendix). In spite of the large number of limitations of the questionnaire such as time-consuming tool, the absence of context, non-complete generalization of results, we adopted it for its few advantages especially its merits in collecting the data during the Covid-19 period.

The respondents come from different educational levels, ages and social status as well as different regions in Iraq. But these variables were not taken into account in the perception since we aim to reflect a general picture of im/politeness in the Iraqi culture. A future research is therefore, recommended to take all or some of these variables into account. The respondents expressed their love and willingness to provide their views, attitudes about im/politeness relating their replies with their experience and general situation in their country.

Further, by adopting a discursive approach procedure, this paper has been accomplished in the light that the researchers as Iraqi native speakers facilitated the interpretation of the responses provided and evaluating the retrospective evaluations.

4. Findings and Discussions

This paper presents findings obtained from data collected from 160 Iraqi participants from different cities. The results cannot be applied to all Iraqis, but can offer a cultural perspective and image of politeness and impoliteness in Iraq as a social practice.

The following two par charts (1 and 2) show the perception of impoliteness and politeness in particular in what ways the Iraqi individual can act as impolite and polite.

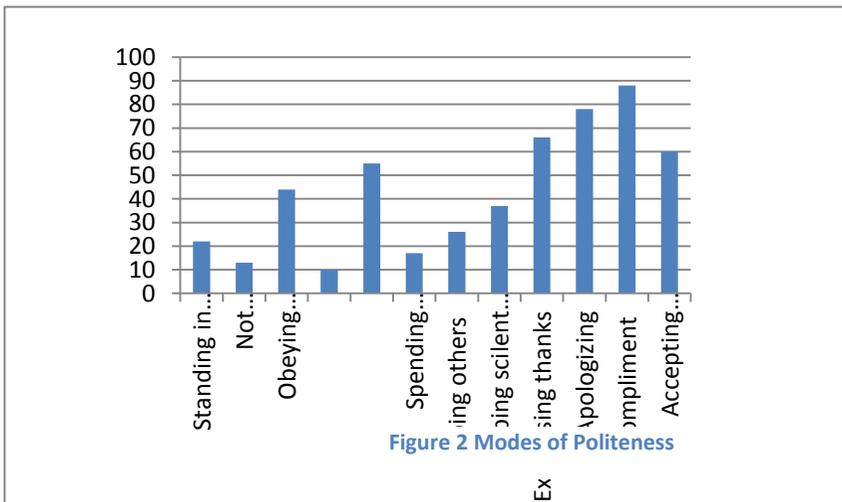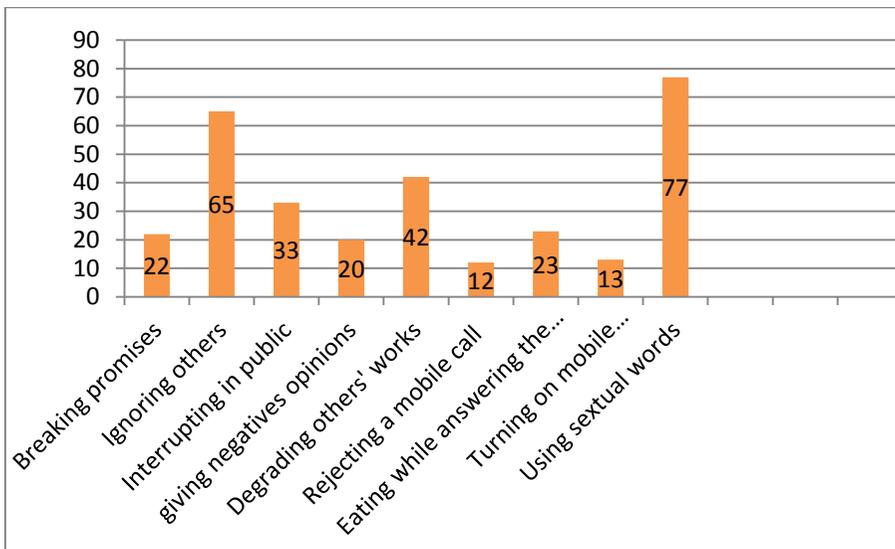### Figure 1 Modes of Impoliteness

Figure 2 Modes of Politeness

4.1Modes of politeness and impoliteness

The data collection reveals that politeness and impoliteness take different modes. There are some behaviours that reflect politeness and impoliteness. Most data indicate that politeness and impoliteness are included in those patterns of behaviours. For example respecting others' privacy and spending money on the expense of family are considered by Iraqis as a high level of politeness as a mode of politeness, whereas breaking promise and using sexual words involve impoliteness in the Iraqi culture.

Iraqi people in general reported that treating others in a friendly manner is a mode of politeness: "You can make people friendly by saying hello (or giving Islamic greetings) to others when you meet them at a party or work."

Compliment is also a kind of politeness particularly recognizing the achievements of others. Our participants have mentioned that others must be given respect and recognition of their achievements. For example, the manager can tell about the achievements of a colleague and acknowledge that the credit for the success of the plan belongs to him if he developed an ideal plan to achieve the goals.

And being impolite included a variety of modes such as disturbing others with the details of their life (violating privacy) : It is important for a person to refrain from talking about all matters of his life, and to make others know a lot about him shortly after getting to know them, as most people do not prefer hearing the details of the life of a person they have just met, knowing his emotional state, or talking to them. For example, how much was paid for the clothes he bought and so on.

In addition gossiping is another mode of impoliteness. Iraqi people are attracted to a person who talks a lot, but they do not respect him/her if

he talks about gossip. The things that the person says are rumours, and this will expose them to embarrassment with others.

Politeness is something that can be gained through practicing certain habits that include showing respect and appreciation for others. The Iraqi participants perceived that when they become accustomed to these habits for a certain period of time, their practice becomes a natural matter, and good manners become a habitual and visible matter to others, and among these habits are both polite and impolite. Non-verbal behavior has been mentioned in this study as a kind of both polite and impolite act, for example many participants have viewed eating while answering a phone call as impolite whereas standing up while speaking with old people is a kind of polite social bahaviour.

The Iraqi participants resorted to evaluating and determining when and where politeness and impoliteness can be found in the Iraqi cultural contexts. Eelen stated that (2001) "in everyday practice, (im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour". It is found that politeness acts appropriately in a way that comes in line to the expectation of the addressee or the hearer. Such perception depends on the situationality of the interlocutors, which in turn represent insights of wider social values. In other words, impoliteness in the Iraqi culture involves an action of social violations based on the hearer expectations and views.

4.2 The source and significance of politeness

Generally speaking, the Iraqi politeness norms come from different channels mainly: family norms and acquaintance with other people. It has been found that religion is the main source of politeness. The importance of politeness lies in bringing social equilibrium to individuals and societies. There is no doubt that social equilibrium in Iraqi culture is well related to religious and social norms. Thus, doing righteous deeds, to the extent that a Muslim complies with the

teachings of Islam in his behavior and morals leads to social equilibrium. It is clear that the foundations of politeness in Iraqi culture did not neglect the pursuit of morals for the individual who practices the politeness and avoids their vices, nor did they neglect the pursuit of the politeness of their society that deals with one another with the virtues of morals and keeps away from its vices.

The participants have claimed and perceived that the necessity of politeness to which Islam has guided, is revealed in the amazing reconciliation it contains between the various demands of the individual on the one hand, and the group on the other hand.

The Iraqi individuals who are recruited in this study have made generalizations or assumptions that social orders make about the attributes of all individual members from a specific group, in light of their impression of that group.Thus, such stereotypes can be described as the schemas formed in our imagibation and beliefs about individuals and values for the different social sets that are used in our everyday life. The Iraqi stereotypes and insight about politeness and impoliteness are regularly component of normal knowledge, shared to a serious level in a specific culture. They characterize their discernment as the verbal expression of a specific expression directed toward a group of people or a person as an individual from that group of people. There are various factors, for example, the knowledge that an individual has about others or offer with them, the media, and what we read about others that impact individuals' production of interpretation of expressions or bahaviours. How regularly individuals are impacted by these elements is not predictable, and thus their impact on each individual is unique.

5. Conclusion

This research has mainly focused on how Iraqi individuals perceive the sociocultural phenomena im-politeness in general. In particular we examined what culturally meant to be polite and impolite as well as identifying the ways in which politeness and impoliteness are observed. The research has also considered whether the Iraqis participated in this study believe that their society has changed negatively or positively in terms of being polite or impolite more than it used to be and to delve into the motivations to which they might credit this change.

It has been found in this paper that the perception of impoliteness can be a naturally diverged, yet not the total inverse of the social phenomenon of politeness. However, the conceptualization of the two phenomena reveals the participants' beliefs with cultural concerns regarding normal practices and privileges and appropriateness in context of situation. One more intriguing result that occurred out of this research is that for most of our participants, impoliteness is communicated verbally, though the opposite is valid for consideration, which is fundamentally found as far as non-verbal activity. In conclusion, our participants view the Iraqi society as turning out as impolite or less polite than in the previous generations due to the quick technological development happened. Iraqis, thus, mostly tend to be sociolinguistically polite and always try to keep tact in social interaction in light of the Islamic values and the inherited traditions.

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