Observational Study of Im/politeness in Hizaji and South East Communities

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Abstract. This study identifies and brings light to how people express themselves and interact during mealtime. Furthermore, this study explains and understands linguistic variations and diversity in communities that differ socially and geographically. The researcher has collected selected spoken data from various scenes of welcoming guests at home during a meal and offering food in Jeddah community, and some other data from South East Asian neighbors who have lived a long time in Saudi Arabia and know a lot about the culture and traditions. The methodology used is a qualitative observational participant research method in which the researcher has intervened in the environment. The researcher has also used contextual analysis that focuses on the role of the group context on the actions and attitudes of individuals. It is found out that through 'conversational routines' people understand better and tolerates each other's words and attitudes. By this, they can have genuine acceptance of their shortcomings. Those actions may include: improving relationships with others, having time to listen, showing empathy with others, being candid, forthright no matter what it takes, being honest and sincere, and being able to develop an empowered and positive attitude.

Keywords: Hospitality, im/politeness, impoliteness superstrategies, offer, politeness superstrategies, Saudi Arabia, Jeddah community.

INTRODUCTION

Why do people act in a way that leads to being misunderstood? Humans are prone to commit mistakes. The fundamental laws or systems being laid out are rigid and they are easier to violate than to comply with. The idea comes to the proposition that im/politeness has been borne out from the best traditions and practices with its corresponding defects in the system, values, or social norms. No one has the monopoly of good deeds and righteousness, and yet we choose to hate the fact that it is happening. It is important to be aware of the defects, so we can address and face them rather than evading them. Evading these defects may just complicate the whole situation. Fraser (1990) has summarized the socio-cultural norms of viewing politeness as follows:

[E]ach society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behavior, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in context. A positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness = rudeness) when action is to the contrary (220).

According to Leech (1980), it is "strategic conflict avoidance" that "can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict" (19). Since Leech's (1983) classical pragmatic view of politeness indicates that, the main role of the politeness principle in his theory is to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place. We have to be more considerate and sensitive to the feelings of others. We should feel compassion and love towards our fellow human beings no matter their status in life. By

doing so, we would deal politely particularly to the less fortunate by being kind and sharing with them the bounties of life. Therefore, we could say with certainty that politeness and love for people are intertwined, which means that one without the other would prove futile. So, with politeness comes a love for people, which can be realized when we learn to deal with each other prudently.

In this paper, it is thus first argued that one key issue that has been relatively neglected in impoliteness research is how participants know something counts as im/polite, im/proper and in/appropriate. The underlying question here is that: what is the basis for claiming something im/polite arises in dining etiquette is needed? This also focuses on the language manifested in each collected spoken data. It is meant to shed some light on the impressions and perceptions about impoliteness. It seeks to highlight and understand the linguistic variations and diversity in communities that differ socially hence assisting everybody to develop positive attitudes towards the study of impoliteness in this imperfect world. The present study may be helpful for readers to understand the relationship between language and society in connection to im/politeness. By doing so, many students will hopefully cultivate the interest and right attitude towards the learning culture as a whole.

The Hijaz region is located in the western part of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is a typical cosmopolitan region inhabited by people who belong to different ethnic backgrounds. So when someone talks about the traditions of this part of the world, he/she has to take into consideration the multicultural nature of the Hijazi community. Islam and its teaching form the ethics of this group and shapes the behavior of the people who inhabit this region. It is quite natural, then to find hospitality as the greatest common divisor among all these people. Hospitality is practiced as one of the rituals of Islam and as an essential Saudi tradition and custom.

This study identifies the strategies of the Hijazi community regarding welcoming and offering a meal for an unexpected guest. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), one of the principles of the theory is that the linguistic resources and strategies used to carry out speech acts can vary significantly from one culture to another. Indeed, different cultures might vary in their evaluation of the social and related variables which suggest the strategies to be used, like the time of performing the speech act, the power or the distance between the speakers, and the ranking of the imposition resulted by performing the speech act. This is bound to reflect on the language used to express these concepts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tracy and Tracy (1998) defined face attacks "as communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive" (227). Culpeper (2005) adds that the phenomenon of impoliteness has "to do with how the offense is communicated and taken" (36). He (2010) defines it as follows:
Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person or group identities are mediated by others in interaction (3233).

Culpeper (1996) states that "Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that if one wishes to perform a potentially face-threatening act, but wishes to maintain the face of those involved, one will undertake politeness work appropriate to the face threat of the act" (355). Thus far, Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest five superstrategies for performing an FTA (face-threatening act). These are thoroughly related to the degree of face threat summarized in Culpeper, (1996):

1. Bald on record
2. Positive politeness
3. Negative politeness
4. Off-record
5. Withhold the FTA

According to him, the above politeness superstrategies have their opposite ones which are "means of attacking face" (356). They are:

1. Bald on record impoliteness
2. Positive impoliteness
3. Negative impoliteness
4. Sarcasm or mock politeness
5. Withhold politeness.

In her paper, Vilkki (2006), indicates that the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) has three well-known strategies for performing speech acts:

1. Positive politeness aims at enhancing the addressee's positive face.
2. Negative politeness aims at softening the infringement on the addressee's freedom from imposition.
3. Off-record politeness means flouting one of the Gricean (1975) maxims on the assumption that the addressee can infer the intended meaning (324).

As it is stated by Chang (2008) that "[d]ifferent cultural backgrounds may lead to different productions of the level of […] politeness" (60). Hence, the Universalist claim of this model is in contrast with the cross-linguistic and cultural differences.

The researcher has selected here at random some principles applied based on Aijmer (1997) focusing on

offers strategies as appropriate under the specific circumstances. From the daily interactions with people, they greet each other with formulaic expressions such as how *do you do, hello, etc.* that are "closely bound to a special function or communication situation" (Aijmer, 1997, 1), which Coulmas (1981) calls "conversational routines" (2).

Aijmer (1997) notes "there has been a greater interest in studying formulas in their own right from a linguistic and pragmatic perspective" (1). He also adds that "conversational routines are analyzed semantically in terms of the situation in which they are used. They can be grouped into several classes. One group consists of formulaic speech acts such as thanking, apologizing, requesting, offering, greeting, complimenting, which serve as more or less automatic responses to recurrent features of the communication situation" (2).

However, aside from the focus on requesting and offering conversational routines, there is another group of conversation routines that express both speaker and hearer attitudes and emotions and the researcher has dealt with in this work. It is in this area where the researcher tackles some of the unwritten code of conduct as it seems negligible, but they do exist. The original aim is to explore here only the host country – Saudi Arabia (in particular Jeddah community), but later extended to other Asian countries where people can see that socioeconomic factors play an important role and that is why they speak and think differently.

When we talk of requests and offers, we cannot help, but think of etiquettes prescribed in social and cultural conducts. The researcher is concerned with the relationship between language and society, how people speak to each other, how they create meaning and become socialized through the use of language. Each human language is a complex of knowledge and abilities enabling speakers of the language to communicate with each other, to express ideas, hypotheses, emotions, desires, and all other things that need expressing.

The views of Culpeper (1996) as covered in his notable paper, *Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness,* are very important. He points out that, "[p]oliteness theories have focused on how communicative strategies are employed to promote or maintain social harmony in interaction" (349). He acknowledges that "[o]n the other hand, little work has been done on communication strategies with the opposite orientation, that of attacking one's interlocutor and causing disharmony" (349).

Brown and Levinson (1987) say with regard to the functioning of politeness within a face-oriented model "it is intuitively the case that certain kinds of acts are intrinsically threaten face" (65). Culpeper (1996) summarizes this saying, "in other words, [Brown and Levinson] argue that certain acts (e.g. orders, threats, criticisms) run counter to one's positive face, the want to be approved of, and/or one's negative face, the want to be unimpeded" (350).

Fraser and Nolan (1981) make this point: "… no sentence is inherently polite or impolite. We often take certain expressions to be impolite, but it is not the expressions themselves but the conditions under which they are used that determines the judgment of politeness" (69).

Craig *et al.* (1986) and Tracy (1990) claim, "that an adequate account of the dynamics of interpersonal communication should consider hostile as well as cooperative communication" (Cited in Culpeper, 1996, 350). That is to include in the scope of a politeness theory antagonistic or confrontational communication.

Schnurr *et al.* (2007) emphasize how leaders who belong to different ethnic backgrounds establish themselves as effective leaders in interaction with subordinates, whilst also taking account of the politeness norms of their specific workplaces. The analysis of meeting openings and the use of humor reveal that what is taken to be appropriated behavior in one organizational setting, and what is seen as constituting polite behavior by group members, may be considered inappropriate and even impolite by members of a different organization.

Haugh (2013) studies the discursive psychology and ethnomethodology that impoliteness evaluations are intimately inter-related with the interactional achievement of social actions and pragmatic meaning with particular reference to the moral order. This leads to the conclusion that evaluations of impoliteness can be simply considered as a form of social practice.

Culpeper (1996) focuses on conventionalized impoliteness methods, insults and threats, and taboo words. He identifies some linguistic backup for the way religiously intensified hate crime as framed in the law and discussed in the legal literature. Regarding impoliteness, he explains its effectiveness as an approach to these data, but he also highlights points of neglect in that literature too, notably, non-conditional threats and incitement.

Alaqeel (2016) focuses on politeness behavior and speech act of requesting in Saudi Arabia using Brown and Levinson's model of politeness applied to the Arabic context. It gains insight into cultural aspects and the impact of social variates of the gender of the hearer, social distance and power status among young Saudi women. The study investigates whether there is a possible difference between two generations of Saudi women and may reflect social norms according to age and religious values. It also shows that Saudi spoken Arabic tends to positive politeness. In addition, the social context impact of the gender of the hearer is mainly obvious in distant relationships through the preference of negative politeness or selecting out strategies.

METHODOLOGY

In the following sections, an explanation will be given for

the data collection, the procedures the technique used for analyzing the data, and finally the participants of the study. This study uses the qualitative observational research method and context analysis. Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach. The qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions.

Data collection

Observational research is a social research technique that involves the direct observation of phenomena in their natural setting. In this method, the researcher intervenes in the environment. Most commonly, this refers to inserting herself as a member of a group, aimed at observing behavior that otherwise would not be accessible. Therefore, she has collects selected spoken data from dining etiquette of welcoming unexpected guests in the Hijaz community. The situations are distinctive in terms of reaction to the opposite gender, social relations and the time of the visit.

Data analysis

The researcher has used contextual analysis, which focuses on the role of the group context on the actions and attitudes of individuals. It is a useful technique in the study of education, neighborhoods, census tracts, and the family. The approach borders on practical and what is reality. It is used to identify and analyze spoken languages. The narratives on 'offering' or 'welcoming' strategies are based on observation of actual occurrences that highlight how a simple utterance is given. After collecting the data, they are analyzed to find the most frequently used strategies in welcoming the guest and offering dinner. Then, the Arabic utterances of Hijazi people are translated since they are collected in Arabic, while the utterances of the Southeast Asian group are collected in English.

Participants

The participants of this study are of two groups of people: Hijazi people from Jeddah city in Saudi Arabia in comparison with a certain Southeast Asian group given to welcoming unexpected guests at home. Both of them are living in a compound in Jeddah city. The Southeast Asian neighbors have lived a long time in Saudi Arabia. Those neighbors know a lot about the culture and traditions of the country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an ideal environment, the following scenarios illustrate common traits in Saudi Arabia in receiving a guest at mealtime. Part of social culture and tradition which is admirable is how visitors are treated with care when offered to join for a meal at the house directly. Archer *et al.* (2012) state that "[i]n Arabic, for instance, direct invitations and offers are thought to be more polite than their indirect counterparts" (Cited in Al-Hindawi and Alkhazaali, 2016: 1543).

Situation 1

Hijazi host to a guest: Welcome, we are glad you are here to join us in our meal. Allah blessed us with this provision that we may share with you. Hope you will be as pleased as much as we do!
Non-Saudi guest: Oh, thank you! How nice of you to offer to share your meal with me. God will surely bless you more.
Hijazi guest: Thanks, Allah shall be with you always for your kindness.

Comment: It is worthy to note here that offering starts with mentioning the name of Allah. To invoke the name of Allah in any situation and particularly at the instance of offering meals to visitors clearly shows our gratitude to Allah for all the comfort and provision we are about to enjoy which is a positive politeness strategy showing the speaker's interest to offer the meal. Showing respect to visitors is another positive politeness strategy. It is realized by letting the guests in and offering them food. At the same time, this is considered a high degree of appreciating what Allah wants us to do. A genuine acknowledgement that all blessings come from Allah should be manifested through utterances and gestures of politeness not only in words but also in deeds.

There is another way to interpret this manner of offering or welcoming guests to one's residence and joining in their meals. It is like sowing good seeds. Therefore, the guest feels difficult to deny the opportunity to invest for the host's good intention and in good faith while expecting nothing in return. Therefore, his/her approval or acceptance is considered one of the positive politeness strategies, too.

The whole context of the Hijazi offering claims in-group membership with the hearer by using in-group markers such as (we, and us). The researcher can see here that what starts as a polite invitation ends up with a polite acceptance of the offer. There is a meeting of the minds by both, and the guest responds to the offer reciprocating respectably. Otherwise, if only one party is in earnest, there is a possibility that the host will be offended that may end up with the first and last offer. So, politeness here comes in as a form of expression accompanied by action. Thus, linguistic politeness comes into play with how we structure our words in a way that reflects our sincere feelings by interacting with other people in a

civilized and polite manner.

To depart from the preceding example of politeness, the researcher will now feature how impoliteness comes into play in this imperfect world. The researcher presents here various contexts where she could imagine being in the place of either the host or the guest whichever role she chooses to act. She provides various assumptions and answers to an offer or invitation to show how the utterances will direct the further flow of communication.

The researcher still has setting observation in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Jeddah city in particular), but this time the participants, i.e. the hosts and the guests are non-Saudis. They are foreign workers from South East Asia. This is based on a true-to-life experience observed in the course of the research. The researcher has respect and admiration for the participants, though she has some reservations that this may not be a common attitude taking into account that the participants involved are outside their own country. The participation is to determine the reliability of such action and to narrate and to comment on what has had happened. The researcher then gives her opinion and analysis which is deemed necessary. How the act of im/politeness manifests itself, with an attempt to show either negative or positive politeness. The researcher concurs that im/politeness is something that is embedded with the culture and behavior as a person due to individual differences. Society plays an important role in shaping behavior or culturally conditioning the minds and actions.

Situation 2

Host (a relative of guest): There you are, please come in and join our meal.
Guest (a relative of the host): Oh no, sorry I came in at this time. I'm already full. Thanks, anyway.

Comment: There is a show of respect or politeness on the part of the guest because the host is cordial and seems sincere. The host includes the guest in the activity of his meal. This is considered as an important positive politeness strategy, which claims for common ground between them. The guest communicates in a way that does not impinge on the host's wants by giving apologies and justifications that are negative politeness strategies, then giving thanks. Others prefer to say thanks at the start before turning down the invitation, which sounds more polite.

Situation 3

In another situation, he visits a family friend also from a close distant place within the district and arriving at lunchtime.

Host (friend): Have you eaten lunch already? Please join us.
Guest (friend): Oh yes, I have already eaten at home. Thank you.

Comment: There is clear impoliteness here on the part of the host. Though the host appears vague for his invitation of lunch. It sounds quite insincere. Culpeper (2005) emphasizes that sarcasm or mock politeness occurs when "the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are insincere, and thus remain surface realizations" (42). The attitude of the host does not reflect that he wants to offer something but to hold back the guest from answering positively.

The guest has pretended and just lied. He has not eaten yet, but that he also does not intend to join in the meal. He feels ashamed since he has come at the wrong time. However, the offer coming as a question is vague, either inviting for lunch or just plain asking we are not sure about it. It is coming as vague yet impolite, which puts the guest in a defensive position. That is why it is important to know all the factors that are related to the context of invitation or offer as is emphasized by Al-Hindawi and Alkhazaali (2016). These researchers assume that "([i]m) politeness is context-bounded and cannot be fully understood or interpreted unless there is a reference to the broader and limited context in which the utterance occurs" (1543).

Moreover, Culpeper (2007) has raised a question that is "an off-the-cuff comment" by Locher (2004): "Isn't all impoliteness a matter of power" really a debatable question, especially in the data above where impoliteness occurs, although the relationship between the host and guest is an intimate one. According to his prediction "impoliteness is "more likely" to occur in situations where there is an imbalance of social structural power" (28).

Situation 4

If instead, the reply of the guest could have been more direct, meaning answering the question with an inquiry since the offer comes in the form of a question. Any reply could be taken in as humor or a joke. This all depends on the closeness or intimacy between the guest and the host. This reply is nothing serious, yet polite with no real intention to join in the meal, though he seems like wanting to invite himself:

Guest: If you're that serious, well I could join you. Who am I to refuse such blessings?
Assuming the host is an intimate friend, the response of the guest to the question could be:
Guest: If there is sufficient food for you and me, then I would be more than glad to join you.

This seems to be also a sincere and polite response

while giving chance to the host to recover. At this instance, the host may disregard as if hearing nothing, since there is no sufficient food to offer in the first place. Otherwise, it could be embarrassing for both of them if they continue responding to each other and acting like a fool.

Situation 5

It would be a different situation, however, if the host had invited rather than asking. Even in just a make-believe invitation will be more entertaining than you as a guest would rather answer politely and sincerely.

Host: Would you please join our lunch.
Guest: I would really love to, but I'm already full. Thank you very much indeed.

Comment: The fact here is that there is only a half-hearted offer or no offer at all, but the host knows how to play with words and emotion. However, the offer is also welcomed by the guest since it is coming as sincere though just a disguise, yet a good acknowledgement of the guest's presence or arrival. Usually, the guests are the ones to adjust by choosing to be polite.

Situation 6

There is yet another situation where both participants are trying to outsmart each other without realizing that each one is trying to manipulate the other. When the host makes an offer to a guest who seems to be hesitant, then the more the host insists on making an offer. The dismay of the host will appear when the guest takes it as a sincere offer when it is not. Likewise, the host will feel some form of relief when the guest explicitly refuses to accept the offer, as the host expects a 'No' for an answer.

Host: Well, here we are just like the good old days. How would you like it if we order food through delivery service?
Guest: It's alright, but anything will do. I also miss eating hot-delivered pizza.
Host (changing his mind): Okay, but I guess we could just manage with what our maid will cook this time.
Guest: Oh really, I appreciate whatever is available. Thanks.

Yet the host could still manipulate the situation to his advantage, to show that he is generous after all. At this stage, the guest is using "bald on record impoliteness" which means "the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where a face is not irrelevant or minimized" (Culpeper, 2005: 41).

He supposes to wait until the host finishes his meal. This will bound to happen when the participants are not intimate or close to each other. Therefore, the scene is too stiff or formal. The changing of mind is the prerogative of the host and this does not place him as impolite though he dictates how the show is run, while the guest should respect and be humble enough to appreciate whatever is being offered.

CONCLUSION

The researcher affirms the importance of having good communication as a remedy if not an instant solution to the problems in this imperfect world. It is not solely on the lack of communication, but it is the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and accurately to others. It must be at least a two-way communication.

Saudi Arabia is a host to multinationals, home to a multitude of foreign workers from different parts of the world. Those foreigners brought with them distinct customs and traditions. Nevertheless, in terms of showing respect and politeness, there is some degree of similarities as well as variations.

Based on the analysis, the majority of the Hijazi participants favor using positive politeness strategies and value using in-group membership, while the non-Saudi participants are observed to use indirectness in offering speech acts to save the face of others and maintain a good relationship between interlocutors and within society as a whole.

Through 'conversational routines' we better understand and tolerate each other's words and attitudes. Impoliteness is a complex concept. It is always associated with rude behavior in various forms. Societies view about rude behavior may vary by culture, setting or individual circumstances. Rudeness comes in many forms such as rude speech, rude things to say, rude ways of speaking, antisocial behaviors, rude body actions, rude eating/table behaviors, noisemaking/disturbances, rude driving and committing illegal acts as well.

So when do we think impoliteness becomes understandable to be acceptable? It comes now at this very moment when almost everyone is seeking perfection, but we are afraid it could be an endless search. It is only acceptable that as we live in this world we are tempted to try something new and different without losing our morals. There is beauty in diversity, but there is also imperfection that usually comes with it. We do not celebrate impoliteness, but to be able to learn the benefits of imperfections. That means we all have some work to do to make this world a better place to live in.

There are many ways to manage people who bother us with their rude behavior. The bottom line is always to remember that we are here in this world just finding our

way, and doing the best we can at this thing called life. At best, we have to remind ourselves that it is okay not to be perfect, and we all have moments when we behave rudely.

All these talks on having proper relations with others and about politeness are useless if we cannot offer or propose some courses of action to take. These may include:

- to improve on relationship with others
- to have time to listen
- to emphasize with others
- to be candid, forthright no matter what it takes
- to be honest and sincere
- to develop an empowered attitude

The empowered attitude is indispensable in any competitive environment: sports, debates, and in anything, but with one very important qualifier. The assertiveness and even aggressiveness associated with this mindset must be encased and tempered by being genuinely polite, diplomatic, tactful, and a nice and pleasant person.

The selected data of this study involves only the Hijazi people of Jeddah city, therefore, the researcher recommends examining a larger group from the Hijaz community including people from Madinah, Makkah, and Taif. Moreover, it is suggested to use different instruments for collecting data such as DCTs and role play. Thus, it is recommended to choose gender using offering or welcoming speech acts of Saudis in face-to-face interactions by videotaping, observing or interviewing them in real-life situations for further study.

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