
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Use of Address Terms by Jordanian Students: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the usage of terms of address by Jordanian students from a sociolinguistic view. To identify the appropriateness of using these terms, the researchers rely on a politeness theory to analyze the data. Thus, this study adopted Brown and Levenson's politeness theory (1987) to identify the exact meaning of politeness. To achieve the aim of this study, the researchers used a quantitative method of role-play. This study revealed that using the terms of address is desired by Jordanian students. They are keen to use them in order to soften their speech with others. Moreover, they considered that using them saved the face want of the hearers. This study recommends future researchers to conduct comparative research with other cultures to find the similarities and differences in using address terms.

KEYWORDS

Terms of address, politeness, Jordanian Arabic, Sociolinguistics.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 03 August 2024

PUBLISHED: 05 September 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijels.2024.6.3.8

1. Introduction

Respect for people is a desired demand that most humans seek to prove in their lives. To do that, they perform many strategies in their speech, such as using terms of address, being indirect, save the other's face want, and using polite terms. Jordanians, like other societies, are interested in showing their politeness principles by using their own kind words, such as terms of address. Al Natour. M (2015) stated that Jordanians use the terms of address to soften their requests because Jordanians considers using them is polite. Braun (1988) defined the honorific as a word or phrase used to address others while they interact in a specific context.

Examples of these terms of address that are used by many people around the word, *Sir*, *Miss*, and *Prof*. Entering the speech by using them plays a crucial role in attracting the listener interest in responding to the speaker's speech. Therefore, this study strives identifying the exact meaning of these terms of address that were used by Jordanians to clarify their exact meaning. Proving this goal makes communication with Jordanians more successful and flexible.

The degree of relationship among the interactants can be understood by observing the terms of address that they use. So, these terms help the observers to know the level of authority that the interactants have to know how to communicate with them politely. This study was conducted to determine the importance of using the terms of address.

2. Previous Studies and Methodology

The past studies and the theoretical framework that was adopted in this study were discussed in this section. Many studies were mentioned to shed light on the problem of this research. Then, the theoretical framework was discussed to highlight the circumstances of politeness that are implemented by Jordanians in their speeches using terms of address.

2.1 Previous Studies

Politeness is one of the major linguistic aspects that has been investigated recently. It covers a speech act which is employed many times by all humans around the world. Ethelb, H. (2015) investigated the translation of terms of address from Arabic to English. He found that some patterns of face work were lost in the translation process. Benkaddour (2021) examined if polite behavior always positively marked. He revealed that insincerity in polite behavior can generate negative markedness and hence can cause relationship breakup, although it was superficially polite and appropriate. Almahasees et al. (2023) stated that His Majesty King Abdullah II used various strategies in his speech regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, His speech consisted of nomination, prediction, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification, and mitigation strategies in appeasing Jordanians and conveying his directives to the government.

Other studies sought to find out the exact meaning of politeness, such as the study that was conducted by Zainab Kadim (2022). She stated that English and Arabic were different in insulting in terms of the locutionary acts and illocutionary acts. She noted that the same insulting strategies were used by both languages' speakers. Lailatul Qomariyah & Mohammad Arif (2021) stated that the using of politeness strategies helped them to have more interactive and communicative students.

Exploring request strategies in Austrian Italian learners was examined by Nicola Brocca & Elena Nuzzo (2024). They found out that in the use of modifiers, small differences were found as well as in the preference for some types over others. Aljhem Basis (2024) revealed that request letters sent to the Dean of the Student Affairs Office at the institution employ a diverse range of politeness strategies. American president used more politeness strategies as compared to Chinese president Saira Batool et al (2024).

Tree & Manusawai (2021) and Al-Ali & Shatat (2022) research has shown how social distance, relative power, and imposition—three important sociopragmatic variables—strongly limit the language encoding of politeness during the generation of requests based on cultural norms.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Different theories examined politeness, such as Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), Grice (1975) and Lakoff (1973). Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) is one of the most used theories in the latest centuries in analyzing politeness because the scholars of this theory stated that their theory is universal. Their theory was structured based on the idea of 'face.' Face, as they said is the public image which is wanted from every member to be unimpeded by others. Because of that, they ensured that their theory can analyze politeness in every culture because people have the same face needs.

The politeness strategies are universally used by speakers according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The strategies that can be implemented based on their theoretical framework are four. First, positive politeness, which is intended for the addressee's positive face. Second, negative politeness, which is intended for the addressee's negative face. Third, a bald-one record is used to express a message directly to the listener. The fourth one is off-record, which permits speakers to execute a face-threatening act (FTA) indirectly where their utterances can consist of several ways of interpreting the utterances. The circumstances determining the choice of politeness strategies that are proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 60) are explained in the following diagram:

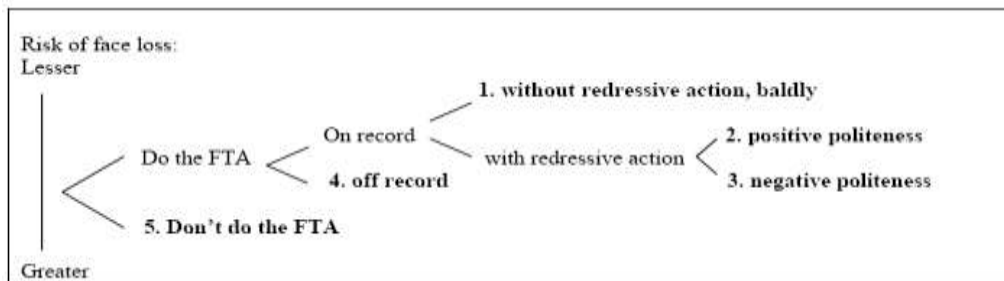


Figure 1 Circumstances Determining Choice of Strategy (from Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.60)

There are two types of terms of address. Firstly, a relational aspect which include relational between speaker and referent, speaker and addressee, speaker and bystander, and speaker and setting. Secondly, the Absolute aspect of address terms indicated that part of the summons terms is reserved for the speaker and others to the hearer. For example, your honor and Mr. President are address terms that can only be directed to persons who occupy such a post (Levinson, *ibid*: 91). In some languages like Arabic, some terms can be directed to women, but not men. Terms that are feminine or masculine-oriented are also said to be absolute. For instance, the term 'teacher' will have a suffix that differentiates a male from a female.

Relational address terms, on the other hand, are explained by Volkel (2010:196) as honorifics that “indicate the difference in status or rank between the speaker, addressee, other participants or over hearer, etc. ... [since] they encode relations that are important in a speech event”. The term of address “أستاذ” (Professor) example in a relational sense, the term “أستاذ” (Professor) can be used by any member of the society, say, shopkeeper, porter, chef to address any other member of the society, especially a stranger, so show respect in one way, or ironically in another. Thus, relational address forms are more challenging than absolute ones, for their use depends on the situation in which the speaker and addressee are involved. Besides, it is not always the lexical meaning of the term that is intended but rather the implicit meaning. Rendering the appropriate cultural form of address into another language - especially the relational ones - is a significant challenge for speakers of other language to understand. They are under difficulty in deciding how to address the other party correctly as articulated by the original speaker. This research is intended to show the terms of address and transferring politeness in an academic sitting where cultures intervene by Jordanians to explain the exact pragmatic meaning of these terms once they are uttered by them.

This study focused on the terms of address that are formed by Jordanian students, including their professors. The data was recorded to analyze the researcher's utterances. Codes were used for each participant to maintain the privacy of their responses, such as S-1, S-2, S-3.

Each role-play lasted about 5-10 minutes. Observations and memos were used while recording the data to specify the terms of address that were used by Jordanians. The politeness meaning was explained clearly to identify the implicit meaning for them in order to reach the exact understanding of using them by Jordanians. In order to know the reasons for producing them by Jordanians and their exact meaning. The terms of address were classified and then analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theoretical framework.

3. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and seeks to collect data by using a qualitative tool which was role-play. In this method, the researcher informed the participant about a situation and request them to interacts based on the theme of that situations. The linguistic and contextual impact of their speeches observed clearly. The terms of address that they used were noted and analyzed.

As stated by Glaser (1992), any type of data collection methods can be used if it helps to achieve the aim of the research. Some examples of the methods that can be used to collect data are informal conversation, focus groups, group feedback analysis, or any other individual or group activities which yields data. So, the role-play method was a suitable method that attained the goal of this study. The sample of the study was selected from the English department's students at Jerash university. This follows Creswell's (2014) description of qualitative data as that was obtained through information provided by purposefully selected informants.

The number of students was 40 students, to be able to make 20 role-play discussions. Sekaran (2003. 295) advised that, as a rule of thumb, a minimal sample size of 30 is acceptable for the analysis. Therefore, the sample of this study was appropriate for collecting empirical data. The following table explains the number of males and females who participated in this study:

Table 3.2: The number of male and female participants

Students	Number	Codes
Male	15	MS1,2,3
Female	15	FS1,2,3

4. Findings

The finding is divided into three parts, namely, terms of address used between male and male, terms of address used between female and female, and terms of address used between male and female. This classification elaborated on the differences between the utterances for terms of address that were used by the interlocutors. Each pair of address terms was mentioned in a separated table with their meaning in Arabic and English in order to make them useful for future researchers of Arabic and English languages in their coming research. Moreover, it helped clarify the exact meaning of these terms in the standard language of the participants, who are Jordanian Arabs.

4.1 Terms of address used between male and male

This part of the analysis concentrated on the communication between male and male and how they use the terms of address in their interaction for specific themes in the role-play. The situations that were provided to the participants were as follows:

- 1- You are setting with your friends in the cafeteria. You want to discuss the mid-term exam with them. How do you call your friends once you agree or disagree with them for the answers to the exam’s questions?
- 2- While you are walking in the corridor at your department’s building, your professor was walking towards you. You want to discuss with him your reason for absence. How do you call him while you are talking to him?
- 3- Imagine that you missed your mobile and you do not know where you missed it. You find your female/ male classmate and you need to request her/him to make a call using her/his mobile. How do you do that and what is your reaction to the responses that you will get?
- 4- Imagine that you need to get assistance from an employee in the faculty. You find one of them at the faculty lab. How do you call him/ her, and how do you respond to her/his speech?
- 5- The head of department call you without using terms of address. How do you reply to him, and what is the term of address that could you use while you were talking to him?

Each situation of the above role-play was analyzed based on the terms used by the participants, the meaning of them in English and types of interactants. All of these terms of address exhibited with examples to cover the flow of the speech in the context and setting of communication.

4.2 Situation 1:

Table 4-1: Signified situation and the utilized terms of address by the participants in the role-play situations-1.

Situation 1			
You are sitting with your friends in the cafeteria. You want to discuss the mid-term exam with them. How do you call your friends once you agree or disagree with them about the answers of the exam’s questions?			
NO.	Terms of address	Translation	Interactants
1	يا زلمة	Oh Man	Male-male
2	يا رجال	Oh Man	Male-male
3	يا حبيبي	My love	Male-male
4	يا اخي	My Brother	Male-male
5	يا محترم	Gentleman	Male-male

As demonstrated in the above table, the participants used five terms of address with their friends while they were discussing the mid-term exam. These terms considered polite by the participants because they were interacting with a close friend. The meaning of using them explicitly realized because they did not use such terms of address in a formal speech. The term ‘يا زلمة’ was the most colloquial one, which indicated the lowest level of distance among the interlocutors. It signified that the relationship between them was very close. Using this term showed that the power between them was equal, and there was no one who has power over the other one. ‘يا حبيبي’ was a diminutive form to address the close friends. It shed the lights on their strong relationship. ‘يا اخي’ implied to two different meanings that were related to different reasons. Firstly, the religious meaning because Muslims considered themselves brothers and sisters, so they called each other ‘brother’ with a male and ‘sister’ with a female. Secondly, the closeness meaning which represented the strong relationship between the interactants. ‘يا محترم’ was the politest term which indicted a kind of respect to close friends; it meant ‘Gentleman’. This term of address was used sometimes between the interactants once they repeated their explanation for a point that was not clearly explained by the other party. So, they used this term to attracted the attention of the listener to their understanding of the discussed point.

All the terms used by the participants in this situation indicated polite behavior between them because they represented the closeness among them. Generally, using terms of address with close or distant people showed a kind of respect to them. So, using these terms marked the performance of politeness among the interactants. As Brown and Levenson’s (1987) claimed using terms of address is a way of entering the speech before using positive or negative politeness strategies. It is an external modification that soften the speech at the beginning to show respect.

Table 4-2: Signified situation and the utilized terms of address by the participants in the role-play situations-2.

Situation 2			
While you are walking in the corridor at your department’s building, your professor was walking toward you. You want to discuss with him your reason for absence. How do you call him while you are talking to him?			
NO.	Terms of address	Translation	Interactants
1	دكتور	Doctor	Male-female
2	بروف	Prof	Male-female
3	دكتورنا	Our doctor	Male-female

The participants utilized three terms of address in this situation. The limited usage of these terms was related to the other party in the interaction, who is the professors. So, they tried to be more formal in their speech to show their respect. The terms of address 'دكتور، بروف' meant 'doctor, Prof.' They indicated that the students wanted to use the academic ranking with their professors to show their respect. It indicated that they wanted to exhibit their understanding of the distance between them and their professors. So, both meanings seemed to show politeness and superiority in their speech with their professors. So, using them, the students was for showing their intendance to save the face of the professors. The term of address 'دكتورنا', which meant 'our doctor,' show a kind of closeness between the students and their professors. Using the possessive pronouns in this way indicated that the students have a strong relationship with their professors. The three social factors were obviously implied in the interaction of this situation because the interactants were not at the same level educationally, formally, positionally. These social factors indirectly directed the style of the interactants speech, which committed them to behave based on the norms of speaking in a specific context and setting.

Table 4-3: Signified situation and the utilized terms of address by the participants in the role-play situations-3.

Situation 3			
Imagine that you missed your mobile and you do not know where you left it. You find your female/ male classmate and you need to request her/him to make a call using her/his mobile. How do you request that, and what is your reaction to the responses that you will get?			
NO.	Terms of address	Translation	Interactants
1	أنسة	Ms./Lady	To female
2	صبيبة/ أنسة	Ms./Damsel	To female
3	اختي	My sister	To female
4	اخي	My brother	To male
5	سيدي	Master/ Sir	To male
6	أستاذ	Teacher	To male
7	حبيبنا	My dear	To male

The third situation indicated the highest number of terms of address that were used in all situations. There were 7 terms used by the participants. These terms of address were divided into two types as they are employed to two different genders, male and female. The first three terms of address 'أنسة، صبيبة/ أنسة، اختي' were used with female.

The first division for these terms of address were for females. The terms of address (أنسة، صبيبة/ أنسة) were used with girls who are expected to be unmarried by the speakers. It is preferred by the girls to call them. They preferred to use these terms of address because they felt that the speaker show respect to them. These terms gave an indicator for the girls that they look very young and attractive. So, using them considered to be a polite manner. Even the married women felt happy once they were called by using these terms of address. Their feeling was correlated to their feeling that they look younger and beautiful. Therefore, the married women in the role-paly turn-taking were laughing or smiling once the speaker call them using these terms of address.

The term of address 'أختي' meant 'sister' elaborated another different meaning which was related to the religious relationship among Muslims. Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, told all Muslims that they are brothers and sisters to strengthen their relationship and power throughout the ages. Thus, Most Muslims around the world use these terms of address once they know that they are talking to Muslims, even if they recently know each other. Similarly, in this research, the interactant used the term of address 'sister' to show their respect for her. It was a kind of politeness interaction that represented the strong relationship between them.

The second division for these terms of address were for males. 'اخي، سيدي، أستاذ، حبيبنا' were the terms of address that were used by the interactants with male respondents. They used the term of address 'أخي' which meant 'brother' for a similar reason to using the word 'sister' for female. It was related to religious reasons, as explained previously. The second term of address was 'سيدي' which meant 'sir, master,' indicated a kind of politeness to the listener. Using this word among Jordanians was common to show respect. Another reason for using this term was related to the user of these terms once they did not know the name of the classmate. So, saying this term while sitting among a group of people in Jordan attracted many of them to look to the speaker because they knew the connotation of the usage of these terms in their society.

Similarly, the term of address 'أستاذ' which was commonly used by Jordanians, meant 'teacher.' It was used repeatedly by the interactants in the role play scenarios interactions because of two reasons. The first one was related to their desire to be polite with the other party of speech. The second reason was related to the inherited reason for using this term by Jordanians. In the previous decades, the Jordanian male had two main jobs which attracted most of the Jordanians in that time. They were teachers

and soldiers in the Jordanian army. So, they heard many times these terms once the people interact with them. Because of that, they are still used to practice these terms of address 'سيدى، أستاذ' till now. They felt that they were polite by using them in their interaction as they heard their fathers and grandfathers using them while they were interacting with others.

The last term of address that were used rarely among them with each other in this situation was 'حبيبنا', which meant 'my love.' This term indicated a kind of closeness between the interactants because it is considered very polite among Jordanians. They preferred to use this word to soften the speech with the listener in order to decrease the level of rejecting their request for the mobile. So, it is a diminutive term that was used as a kind of respect with the requestees.

Table 4-4: Signified situation and the utilized terms of address by the participants in the role-play situations-4.

Situation 4			
Imagine that you need to get assistance from an employee in the faculty. You find one of them at the faculty lab. How do you call him/ her, and how do you respond on her/his speech?			
NO.	Terms of address	Translation	Interactants
1	أنسة	Ms./Lady	To female
2	ست	Madam/ma'am	To female
3	أخي	My brother	To male
4	سيدى	master/ Sir	To male
5	أستاذ	Prof	To male

In situation 4 there were five terms of address used by the participants. The terms as mentioned in the above table 4 were 'أنسة، أستاذ، سيدى، أخى، ست.' Out of five, four of them were similar to the terms of address that were used. One of them is new, which was 'ست', which meant 'Madam/ma'am.' This word was a polite term of address that was used with married women because it softened the opening of the speech with them. The terms of address that were used with male employee were the same as the ones used in situation 3 with the same reasons for using them. The cause of the similarity was related to the common terms of address that the Jordanians use in informal and some formal contexts. Using the same terms of address with formal and informal context was considered an indicator of the flexibility of Jordanian society.

Table 4-5: Signified situation and the utilized terms of address by the participants in the role-play situations-5.

Situation 5			
The head of the department call you without using the terms of address. How do you reply to him/her, and what is the term of address that could you use while you were talking to him?			
NO.	Terms of address	Translation	Interactants
1	دكتور	Doctor	To male/ female
2	بروف	Prof	To male/ female
3	دكتورنا	Our doctor	To male/ female
4	عزيزي البروف	Dear Prof	To male/ female

In situation 5, there were four terms of address observed, which are 'دكتور، بروف، دكتورنا/دكتورتنا عزيزي البروف' which meant 'doctor, Prof, my doctor and dear Prof'. In this situation the students replied to their professor once students were called by professors without using terms of address. Although the professors did not use terms of address with the students, the students preferred to use terms of address with their professors. This reaction represented clearly the impact of power that the professor had on the students. This reaction was related to one of the social factors that Brown and Levenson's stated in their theory. They claimed that this factor and the other two factors, social distance and relationship, effected the speech of the interlocutors. So, using them by the students, even if they had a strong relationship, indicated that they careful about the words they utilized to save the face of their professors. This kind of respect between the students and their professor exhibited the implementation of politeness in the academic setting. One of them was various from the terms used in situation two, which was 'عزيزي البروف', which meant 'dear prof.' This term of address indicated the strong relationship between the students with their professors. Moreover, it also represented that they attempted to save the professor's face politely by representing their respect in their utterances.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the data elaborated on many vital results. Using the terms of address by Jordanians generally indicated that they were polite. Based on their interaction in the role-play situations, the acceptability of the addressees for these terms indicated the desire to hear them as the addressers. Another important result opted from the analysis was the interest of the speakers to avoid threatening the addressees face by using suitable terms with them. They utilized various terms of address based on the addressee's relationship with them. For example, they used 'Dr, Prof, Dear prof...' to show that they absolutely understand using them meets

politeness rules. They kept on saving the face of the addressee by using suitable terms for the address. Similarly, they used terms of address with the employees like 'sister, madam, ma'am, Ms..' to open their speeches with them politely in order to save their faces wants and to avoid face attacking. Correspondingly, they used acceptable terms of address with their close friends, like 'brother, my dear, Mr., master ..', to indicate that they respected the close relationship with them.

The sociological variables that were stated by Brown and Levenson's (1987) were employed by the interactants. The students used suitable terms of address based on the power, ranking, and imposition of the hearer. To illustrate that, they used the terms 'Dr, Prof' with their professors and 'Ms., Madam' with the employees, but they did not use them with their counter classmates and close friends. The result indicated the impact of the sociological variables on the speakers while they interacted with the hearers. In other words, the implicit impact of social variables was implemented by the students indirectly without showing that explicitly because the context obligated them to use these address terms.

The adaptation of Brown and Levenson's theory (1987), as represented in the analysis, effectively indicated the preservation of the speakers to save the face want of the hearers. Moreover, the performance of politeness was clearly exhibited by using suitable terms of address with the hearers based on the rank of imposition, gender and context. These results revealed the desire of the addressers to use them to save the addressees' faces from the threat and to avoid attacking the addressees face want. This practice manifested the employment of politeness explicitly and implicitly by both interactant with full awareness of the implicit meaning of their speeches.

The role of the Islamic religion on the addressers and addressees was clear by using some terms of address that represented the implicit meaning of following the Islamic principles. Once the addresses used terms like 'أخي، أختي' which meant 'brother, sister,' they tried to remind the addresses about their role in helping the affiliated people of their religion. They also used these terms to avoid embarrassment because they did not know the name of the addresses. So, in both cases, they sought to keep the addressees' faces.

To conclude, using terms of address by Jordanians were important to be polite with others. They used them for specific purposes to indicate their respect. Saving the face of the addresses by the addressers represented their seeking to be polite with others. There preservation to use different terms of address figured out their skills to implement politeness based on the situation and the type of interactants. These results helped future researchers to conduct more research on the originality of the terms of address used by Jordanians. It could also help them to look for other terms of address they used with other addresses in other sittings and contexts.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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