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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Misunderstanding of Jordanian Requests by the Non-Arab Students at the Northern Private Universities of Jordan: A Conceptual Paper

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the misunderstanding of Jordanian requests by non-Arab students at the northern universities of Jordan. The misunderstanding among the students at these universities restricts building strong relationships among the students which could expand the problem of making successful communications among them. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is adopted to analyze the data together with Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1975) speech act theories. A mixed method is used to collect the data. For the quantitative data, the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) will be used, and for the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview will be conducted. The results are expected to achieve the objectives of this study.

**KEYWORDS**

Jordanian Requests; Non-Arab Students; politeness theory

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**1. Introduction**

There are many researchers who have conducted research previously about politeness in request, such as (Amer et al., 2020; Al-Ali & Shatat 2022, Al-Abbas 2023). Part of this research concentrates either on the core request strategies or the cultural and lexical words used in requests. This study is essential because it focuses on the reasons for misunderstanding requests by non-Arab students at the northern private universities of Jordan. It is expected that the findings of this research will help both Jordanians and non-Arab students to communicate successfully in the future. Being socially intelligent helps them to be more effective with others. Many books have been published about communication skills across cultures, which manifest the importance of this kind of research nowadays.

**1.1 Statement of the problem**

In general, people from different cultures utilize different behaviors. Request is one of the linguistic aspects that are practised by all societies, whether they are in their countries or overseas. Therefore, the misunderstanding of Jordanian requests presented by non-Arab students at the northern private universities of Jordan is a problem that has to be resolved. Helping international students at private universities understand the exact meaning of the Jordanian requests can help them communicate successfully with others. Thus, this research seeks to narrow the gap of misunderstanding between Jordanian students and other students from different nationalities by representing the exact meaning of Jordanian requests.

**1.2 Research Questions**

1. Why are the Jordanians' requests misunderstood by the non-Arab students at the northern private universities of Jordan?
2. How could the misunderstanding of Jordanian requests be decreased by the non-Arab students at the northern private universities of Jordan?
3. What is the preferred request strategy for Jordanian students in northern private universities?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To find out the reasons for misunderstanding the Jordanian requests by non-Arab students.
2. To minimize the misunderstanding of Jordanian students' requests to help non-Arab students communicate with them successfully.
3. To explore the preferred request strategy that is used by Jordanian students in the northern private universities.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study is significant because it examines a central problem that prevents non-Arab students from communicating with Jordanian students successfully. Moreover, this study tries to help non-Arab students to be more familiar with Jordanian society and to accept their cultural practices to avoid any clashes in their lives in Jordan. Investigating a very wide region in the north of Jordan makes this study significant because it helps non-Arabs and Jordanians understand the preferred request strategies in the northern variety. The data will be collected from three private universities in the north of Jordan, which will assist researchers in getting knowledge that will help them conduct comparative research in the future.

## **2. Literature review**

Communication between people from different cultures could lead to misconceptions. This misconception in giving requests piqued the interest of many scholars. The scholarly frameworks used to evaluate requests made in a number of languages and cultural contexts have been dominated by theories of speech acts and politeness (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Prayitno et al., 2021). Recently, many empirical researchers have adapted sociopragmatic theories to analyze requests (Amer et al., 2020; Al-Ali & Shatat, 2022; Al-Abbas, 2023). This review of the literature offers an analysis of significant research conducted over the last five years that has used foundational ideas from speech act theory and politeness theory to reveal the socio-cultural norms and regulations that underlie the creation and interpretation of requests.

According to Trosborg (2011), requests are sophisticated directive speech actions intended to persuade the hearer to do something that will benefit the speaker. Requests must be strategically mitigated to comply with context-specific politeness standards, as they are potentially embarrassing and may affect the addressee's autonomy or trustworthiness (Sifianou, 1999; Hübscher et al., 2023).

As observed by recent years, research on requests in Arabic varieties, generally and Jordanian culture particularly, has increased (Amer et al., 2020; Al-Ali & Shatat, 2022; Al-Abbas, 2023), and there has been a movement away from Western languages toward understudied situations across the majority world (Adli and Guy, 2022). This new research has provided priceless insights into the rights, duties, and context-dependent social norms that limit the language options available to producers of requests based on characteristics such as age, gender, status, and environment (Al-Ali & Shatat, 2022). Highly formulaic sequences that express sociocultural preferences have also been found through the documentation of conventionalized request patterns (Amer et al., 2020). These inductive results support the current theory by demonstrating speech community rules in action and providing ecological support to politeness theories.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is adopted in this study. According to their theory, humans have public self-images known as "face" that they strive to preserve throughout social encounters. The face is made up of two parts: positive face (want for approbation) and negative face (desire for autonomy). Certain forms of communication, such as requests, inherently threaten others by intruding on them. To reduce dangers, speakers use specialized language tactics to indicate politeness. Brown and Levinson describe four sorts of politeness strategies: on-record (direct), positive politeness (solidarity building), negative politeness (deference), and off-record indirectness. The choice of strategy is determined by assessments of social distance, relative power, and imposition. Despite being critiqued as Anglo-centric, this paradigm provides a methodical platform for investigating putative language universals in politeness across cultures.

Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1975) speech act theories also have a substantial impact on the theoretical foundation for this investigation. Requests are directive speech actions intended to persuade the hearer to do something that benefits the speaker. However, petitions contradict societal norms of autonomy and hence need careful contextual knowledge and judgment in their phrasing. The idea of felicity conditions, which comes from speech act theory, defines the proper circumstances that allow a request speech act to be regarded as legitimate, comprehensible, practicable, and genuine. Important contextual elements include whether the speaker has sufficient social power, gives required reasons for obedience, respects the addressee's relative social standing, and communicates genuine intentions without pressure. Certain request forms can become standard in a speech community via frequent reinforcing encounters.

The process of integrating theories involves using complimentary ideas from speech act theory and politeness theory to analyze Jordanian Arabic requests. Politeness theory introduces the concept of "face" and describes language methods that speakers might use to reduce possible face risks based on context. Speech act theory views requests as inherently social acts based on shared cultural norms, and it offers a study of acceptable situational felicity conditions as well as conventionalized community practices. Together, these theories provide useful methods for identifying significant sociopragmatic factors and language patterns in the data.

## **2.2 Past studies on politeness**

This section seeks to elaborate on previous research that investigated various linguistic and pragmatic issues in different settings. With an emphasis on Jordanian Arabic and its relationships with other languages, these works examined sociopragmatic aspects, politeness theories, and speech acts in various languages and cultures. These studies were structured with an emphasis on comprehending the intricacies of requests, gender and power relations, tactful behavior, and conflict resolution strategies within the context of societal influences. Each research made a significant addition to the fields of pragmatics and intercultural communication while providing fresh insights into the complex dynamics of language usage.

Terkourafi (2015) studied how native Cypriot Greek speakers in three age groups conventionalized their request productions. The study examined high-frequency request patterns based on responses to the Discourse Completion Test. It found that all age groups preferred the traditionally courteous question preparation structures that sought previous ability/willingness combined with detailed reasons. This inductive documentation of formulaic request sequences illustrates speech community rules in action and supports the deductive model proposed by politeness theory.

Almahameed and Al-Ajalein (2019) focused on two variables in their study: gender and power dynamics. They attempted to investigate pragmatic errors displayed by English language learners in Jordan when performing language functions. Thirty undergraduate English language students at Amman Arab University participated in this study. Four questions on the completion test, accepting compliments, requesting permission, expressing congrats, and extending condolences, represented different language functions, and these were used to gather data. The four scenarios covered by each item were addressing a male, addressing a female, and addressing a person in a position of authority. The results showed that the students had a respectable degree of communication ability. Their use of neutral terms, those unaffected by gender or status and common expressions which allude to the expressions' familiarity and ubiquity, was credited with their effectiveness. The main causes of pragmatic failures among students were socio-cultural differences, pragmatic transfer, and language competence inadequacies.

Alakrash and Bustan (2020) examined the politeness tactics used by Malaysian and Lebanese students when they make requests in order to identify the similarities and differences between their methods. Three Lebanese post-graduate students and three Malaysian post-graduate students were interviewed to get qualitative data for the study. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) provided the theoretical framework that was used for the analysis. The findings showed that respondents who were Malay had a greater inclination towards using indirect techniques, such as inquiry preparation, hedged performatives, and hints. On the other hand, Arab participants indicated a predilection for clear and straightforward request techniques, such as wish lists and suggestions. It is suggested that the differences in the strategies used by participants are due to the different cultures they come from. Their research adds to our understanding of the complex dynamics of politeness in cross-cultural communication by illuminating the different approaches to requests taken by students from Malaysia and Lebanon.

Amer et al. (2020) conducted a study at Jordanian contact centers that provide English support services to foreign businesses and looked at both caller and employee demands. They analyzed the data based on Brown and Levinson's framework. The results indicated that the majority of employees employed negative politeness, such as hedges, consultative devices, and acknowledgement-based apologies. The preponderance of these customarily courteous tactics reflects preferences observed in Arabic standards against imposition. Female employees showed more indirectness incorporated through embedded modal structures. Men tended to use more directive moods when making caller requests, whereas women used traditional polite modal interrogatives with consultative implications.

Al Kayed et al. (2020) investigated the use of politeness techniques and pragmatic modifiers in refusals in Jordanian Arabic. The researchers analysed 24 hours of recorded talks to identify rejection techniques based on Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The data revealed that complicated refusal methods were the most common, coupled with the frequent use of external modifiers to soften refusals. Culture influenced methods and modifiers, particularly through Islamic terminology. The tendency for sophisticated techniques reflects Jordanian Arabic cultural etiquette rules that prioritize protecting the face.

Alazzam et al. (2021) stated that English is becoming one of the languages used most frequently in the globe because of globalization. Increasing the number of people who speak English express a strong desire to study English, and many nations, like Jordan, include it in their curriculum. His study intends to identify the dispute resolution techniques employed by Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and to investigate the ways in which their academic year and gender influence

the application of these techniques. The results show that there are nine dispute methods used by Jordanian EFL students, which include both aggravating and alleviating techniques. Moreover, social variables, namely gender and academic year, have been found to have a direct impact on the choice and implementation of these techniques.

Alghazo et al. (2021) examined congratulation methods in Kabyle and Jordanian Arabic. 30 university students from each language group completed a conversation completion test. The researchers used Elwood's (2004) approach to examine variations in congratulation methods depending on gender, status, and cultural background. The quantitative examination of strategy frequencies and qualitative analysis of semantic formulations indicated little variations across the groups. The variations are examined in terms of the sociopragmatic and sociocultural characteristics of the two languages. The study offers valuable comparative insights into the pragmatics of congratulations across cultures and languages. It explains how sociocultural influences the performance of these key speech acts.

Hamdan and Mahadin (2021) investigated the influence of social rank and gender on dispute resolution procedures in Jordanian-spoken Arabic. Using scenarios meant to induce disagreement, the researchers collected data from 28 university students using an oral discourse completion assignment. The findings revealed that the topic of conversation had a greater influence on conflict resolution strategies than the interlocutor's status or gender. Nonetheless, women disagreed more strongly than males on a few issues. The study provides useful insights into the sociopragmatic factors influencing Arabic conflict resolution. Although certain subjects disproportionately upset women, this suggests that the issue has a greater influence than gender or status.

Al-Ali and Shatat (2022) conducted a 20-item written Discourse Completion Task to compare the requested output of six deaf Jordanians to that of a hearing Jordanian control group. Requests were examined using semantic formula coding and mitigation strategies. Since they had less experience with sociopragmatic settings than their peers, deaf people had a smaller repertoire of politeness signals. Their absence of courteous address forms, as well as their reduced lexical and phrasal modifiers, demonstrated a lack of social awareness. Significant semantic-pragmatic components were observed, implying the establishment of a sociopragmatic competence system.

Al-khawaldeh and Abu Rahmeh (2022) investigated pragmatic methods for communicating ideas in Jordanian Arabic. Using discourse completion tasks and roleplays with 50 male and 50 female native speakers, the researchers uncovered several direct and indirect opinion communication strategies. Gender differences emerged, with men choosing direct approaches and imperatives, while women preferred indirect strategies, advise, hedges, recommendations, prayers, and address words. The study elaborated new insight into the sociopragmatic factors that impact opinion expression in Arabic, highlighting the many communicative strategies employed. It underlines the role of gender in the pragmatic strategy selection for this important speaking act.

Benyakoub et al. (2022) investigated conflict resolution strategies in Jordanian and Algerian Arabic, as well as the impact of social standing. Data from 40 participants were collected using a Discourse Completion Test, with 20 from each dialect. The scenarios provoked debates among interlocutors of various ranks. Quantitative and qualitative assessments revealed similarities in the preferred approaches of the two groups at different status levels. When arguing with persons of different socioeconomic classes, the most common strategies followed politeness standards. The findings provide significant comparative insights into the sociopragmatics of conflict in two Arabic dialects. The study identifies trends in conflict methods, as well as the influence of social position and politeness issues.

Mujiyanto and Yuliasri's (2022) examined the way graduate students used constructive civility approaches in online classroom discussions. During semester online classes, the researchers used Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to analyse students' utterances. There were fifteen effective methods to be polite. The study also examined the interlocutor's responses to politeness tactics, categorizing them as desired or unhappy answers. The findings indicated that civility and pragmatics in online academic contexts were exhibited. According to the authors, the study can help students become more conscious of appropriate behaviour and pleasant manners, hence improving their communication skills. It also highlights the factors impacting how politeness methods and emotions interact in this setting.

Al-Abbas (2023) studied the utilization of politeness strategies by Jordanian youth of all ages and genders to make requests. The researchers collected data from eighty children aged six to ten using roleplaying. Blum-Kulka's (1987) method was used to identify general politeness strategies as well as gender and age-specific variations. The findings revealed that, while still growing, children as young as six have a basic understanding of how to be courteous while making requests. There were no noticeable gender inequalities. By the age of 10, children had a better understanding of proper etiquette procedures. Boys tended to use more direct approaches, whereas ladies preferred indirect ones. The study discovered how young people use linguistic etiquette and develop pragmatic competence while making requests. The findings may assist parents and instructors in enhancing their children's sociolinguistic skills.

Ja'afreh (2023) stated that different cultures organize discourse in different ways. This is seen even in discourse genres that are thought to be highly standardized in terms of their rituals and formulae. This is seen in discourse genres that are supposed to be highly standardized in terms of rituals and routines. His study provided a pragmatic comparison of apologetic techniques in Jordanian Arabic and English, offering a counterpoint to earlier studies. A twelve-situation questionnaire was utilized to investigate the apology methods employed by Jordanian EFL postgraduate students at Al-Yarmouk University. The findings indicated that Jordanian Arabic and English apology strategies differ greatly. Some people apologized in a formal manner, but others did not. The study also highlighted how religion influences interactions among Jordanians.

Jarrah et al. (2023) explored the use of discourse markers (DMs) in Jordanian Arabic radio broadcasts. The researchers evaluated recordings from three radio programs to identify DMs that fulfill only polite functions, such as 'excuse me', and unpleasant DMs for complaints or wrath, such as 'hey stop!'. The results showed that DMs may be classified based on politeness, with differences in distribution and appearance. According to the findings, politeness had a substantial influence on interactive direct communications in Jordanian Arabic. The paper contributed new insights by combining DMs, pragmatics, and im/politeness theory. It demonstrated how important politeness is for understanding the functional categorization of DMs in Arabic discourse.

Haddad (2023) investigated Jordanian Arabic, which offers an understudied yet widespread speech act that is essential to Jordanian culture. Three approaches were used in the study: theoretical, empirical, and comparative. From a Jordanian Arabic standpoint, the theoretical perspective explains offerings based on previous findings and specifies possible qualities. Three corpora were analyzed in the empirical part: 100 Facebook advertisements for travel and tourism, 100 real estate advertisements from the 'Open Market' website, and a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire was given to 100 Arabic-speaking Jordanians. Linguistic patterns, offer tactics, and politeness adjustments were investigated through the application of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The most common tactic was to make direct proposals. Facebook and Open Market corpora employed different politeness tactics, and spoken corpus politeness changed by taking socio-cultural factors into account. These results could be used to modify Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving model by adding indications of politeness such as gender and age. The third viewpoint highlighted the parallels and discrepancies between verbal and written offers. Four main results were found: forthright offerings win out, politeness is related to persuasion, and Jordanian Arabic proposals have the potential to either strengthen or undermine face. This study covered the gaps by illuminating linguistic subtleties and cultural influences in Jordanian Arabic.

Hastuti and Wijayanto (2023) investigated numerous methods in which basic EFL students demonstrated civility when communicating with their instructor in English. Being courteous is vital for human interactions and conversational skills. For applied linguists and language educators, maintaining appropriate civility has become a top issue in L2 learning. The researchers evaluated politeness approaches using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, observing and recording learner-instructor interactions. The findings revealed that while students seldom employed bald on-record methods, they frequently used positive and negative politeness. The authors gave ideas on how to include pragmatic education in language training and how to help students develop their character.

Oktavia et al. (2023) investigated the effects of culture on direct and indirect request techniques employed by multicultural learners. The participants were 30 students from five different countries studying in Hungary. A Discourse Completion Test was utilized to collect data, which was then analysed by categorizing the head act as well as the requests' internal and external modifiers. The findings revealed that participants used more indirect request strategies, with Indonesians being the most indirect. Pakistanis were the most direct, but they compensated with external modifiers. The study shed light on how culture affects interlanguage pragmatics when making requests in a multicultural context.

In conclusion, a number of research examining pragmatic and linguistic concerns in various cultural contexts have been reviewed in this section, with a special emphasis on Jordanian Arabic. These studies showed how social norms and power dynamics affect speech actions, such as requests, apologies, refusals, and congrats. Age, gender, and social standing are a few examples of factors that significantly influence speakers' pragmatic decisions. Research contrasting Arabic dialects revealed parallels and discrepancies in the sociopragmatics of politeness and disputed settlement techniques. Further research clarified the process by which young Arabic speakers acquire pragmatic competence. All in all, these works added much to the fields of Arabic sociolinguistics, politeness theory, and cross-cultural pragmatics. In a wide range of contexts, they offered detailed insights into the complex interactions between language, culture, and social factors.

### 3. Methodology

A mixed method was used in this study to collect the data. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher used two tools: one of them is quantitative, and the other is qualitative. Quantitative data was collected by using the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), and qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. To reveal the exact understanding of Jordanian requests by other students from different nationalities, the non-Arab students answered a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire by writing their responses in specific scenarios. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to students in Jerash, Irbid and Jadara private universities. The students had a semi-structured interview, which was constructed

based on the non-Arab responses to reveal the reasons for misunderstanding their requests. The data was constantly collected till the researcher observed that there would not be new information collected, which means that the data was saturated. After getting the responses, the questionnaires were analyzed according to the theoretical framework that is adopted in this study. Before starting to collect the data, permit letters from all universities were collected, and consent letters were signed by the participants.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper delves into the reasons for the misunderstanding of Jordanian students' requests by non-Arab students in the northern universities of Jordan. It is expected that the results will assist both of them to understand their cultural practices of request to avoid clashes while they are communicating with each other. With this goal, the researchers of this study tested the following hypotheses:

1. The reasons for misunderstanding the Jordanians students' requests by non-Arab students are related to the different values of individuals belonging to diverse cultures.
2. Misunderstanding of Jordanian students' requests could be related to the performance of requests by Jordanian students with non-Arab students.
3. The reasons for misunderstanding are correlated to the language competence of both interlocutors.

This study will examine these hypotheses to find out the exact reasons for misunderstandings between Jordanian students and non-Arabic students. Discovering the reason will strengthen the relationships between the students and help them to understand each other adequately. If successful communication is employed by both of them, they will exchange various cultural practices that could help them to be competent to communicate successfully with other people from other cultures in the future.

The limitations of this study are summarized in three points. The data will be collected from non-Arab students who study at the private northern universities of Jordan. Secondly, the investigation will not cover the public universities in Jordan, which means that it will only cover the private ones. Finally, this research concentrates on the reaction of non-Arab students to the Jordanian requests for strategies that could be used by the Jordanian students at the universities.

Future research is recommended to investigate the reactions of Jordanian students at private universities to non-Arab students' requests. Moreover, they can investigate the same problem at other universities, such as the Jordanian public universities. Based on the results of this research, future researchers can investigate other linguistic aspects such as agreement, refusal behavior, and invitation speech.

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