| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

An Analysis of Politeness Strategies used by Non-Native Saudi English Speakers in Family Gatherings

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| **ABSTRACT**

In social interaction, people need to be polite and aware of others' self-image, feelings and wants to maintain and build good relationships. For this goal, people use various politeness strategies to save the hearer's face when face-threatening acts are inevitable. This paper aims to examine the types of politeness strategies used by six Saudi family members, three girls and two boys, in their interactions based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies (1987) and to find out the most frequent politeness strategies used by them. The data were collected by recording the participants on different occasions in family gatherings and using a qualitative approach. Based on the analysis, there were 33 utterances containing all four types of politeness strategies. The most frequent politeness strategy used was the positive politeness strategy (33.33%) and followed by negative politeness (30.30%), bald-on record (21.21%), and off-record (15.15%). This study could lead to further research on politeness strategy in other conversational settings with regard to the effect of power and gender.

1. Introduction

In everyday life, people use language to communicate with each other for different reasons, and that language is affected by the degree of intimacy or social relationships, as stated by Yule (1996). Each language is consisted of what Hudson (1996:21) calls "linguistic items" (e.g., sounds, words, grammatical structure and meanings) and these items, along with other concepts (e.g., power, class, status, gender, politeness), as mentioned by (Wardhaugh, 2006:10) are used to achieve good conversations among individuals in various societies.

The way people use language, their selection of dictions, and their attitude should be carefully measured and performed in a proper way using certain strategies to make interaction runs smoothly. These strategies are called politeness strategies and are manipulated in conversation to build a good atmosphere and to show pleasant behavior in social interaction with others or as the "Underlying motivation for an individual's linguistic behavior", as stated by Thomas (1995:150). Politeness paves the way for the listeners to give a proper response to the speaker's inquiry.

According to Brown and Levinson, the theory of politeness and its strategies are developed in order to save the hearers' "face", which refers to the individual's self-esteem and respect that he/she has for himself/herself, and preserving that image in different situations in order to avoid embarrassing others, or cause them to be uncomfortable. Face threatening acts (FTA'S) are acts that violate the hearers' self-esteem, and politeness strategies are used to deal with these FTA'S.

Politeness tries to focus on the feelings of the persons being addressed and avoid embarrassing them and attempts to choose the appropriate words or expressions to be used in the conversation with different people in different situations (Holmes, 1995:296-297).

Politeness strategies, however, are needed in our daily face to face social interaction to build good relationships with other members of our community since people are judged and evaluated according to how they talk. In this paper, the researcher used the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) to analyze, interpret and discuss politeness strategies used by six Saudi family members in their conversations.

2. Theoretical Review
2.1 The definition of politeness
It is significantly difficult to have an agreement on what is polite or what is impolite in the way of using language in everyday communication. However, linguists, as well as other scholars, attempted to introduce definitions of politeness based on their studies:

Lakoff (1975:64) stated that politeness is "developed in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction", and he (1989:102) defined politeness as "a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse - both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening."

Leech (1980:19) referred to politeness as "strategic conflict avoidance" that "can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation". He (1983:105) also pointed out that politeness is required to "mitigate the intrinsic discourtesy" of some acts such as ordering, asking, begging, etc. The role of the politeness principle, as expressed by Leech (1983:82), 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."

House and Kasper (1981) defined politeness as a social value or cultural feature that might be called 'urbanity' and occur in all civilized societies, and polite behavior may vary across cultures.

Fraser and Nolen (1981:96) stated that politeness is based on a 'conversational contract', which means that participants in a conversation show an understanding of sets of rights and obligations that will indicate the boundaries of the interaction.

Hill et al. (1986:349) stated that politeness is "one of the constraints on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort and promote rapport."

Brown and Levinson (1987:1) described politeness "as a complex system for softening face threats" and also indicated that "politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol, presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties."

Ide (1989:22) said that politeness is "language associated with smooth communication".
Foley (1997:270) referred to politeness as "a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure that everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction." Moreover, Watt (2003:33) defined politeness as the ability to please others through external actions.

Politeness is also defined by Mills (2003:33) as the expression of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another.

The study of politeness has been addressed by many linguists and researchers using different approaches to develop a valid social theory of politeness, and the literature falls into three categories: (1) research on the theories of politeness (e.g., Grice, 1957; Lakoff,1973, 1977; Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson,1987; Fraser,1990; and Escandell-Vidal,1996); (2) research on the cultural-specific concepts and strategies of politeness (e.g., Hill et al.,1986; Gu,1992; Lindenfeld,1990; and Sherzer, 1983); and (3) research on the application of theories on different cultures (e.g., Chen,1993, 1996; Garcia,1989; and Holmes,1990). All these studies illustrated that certain factors influence the adoption of politeness strategies.

The theory used in the present study is the model of politeness strategy offered by Brown and Levinson (1987). Despite the fact that some aspects of this model have been criticized by other researchers (Gu,1990; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; Yu, 2001; Ogiermann,2009), it has been the most accepted model on the concept of politeness.

Based on the notions of face explained by Goffman (1967:5) as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by his or her self-presentation. Brown and Levinson (1987:61-62) introduced their politeness theory and categorized "face" into two forms: positive and negative. Positive face was defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others executors", or "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants." Negative face on the other hand, was defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others", or "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction—i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition".

2.2 Face and Face Threatening Acts (FTAs)
Brown and Levinson (1987:66), as explained above, define the face as the public self-image that everyone wants to claim for himself/herself and suggest that positive and negative faces occur in all human cultures, and there are certain expressions or utterances (promises, apologies, expressing thanks, disagreement, criticism, orders, delivery of bad news, and request) which affect the face of the addressee or the speaker. These utterances are called face threatening Acts (FTA) which go against the wants and desires of the interlocutors and naturally damage either the positive or negative face. Moreover, some acts (e.g. complaints, interruptions, threats, strong expressions of emotion, and requests for personal information) might affect both the positive and negative face at the same time.

2.2.1 Positive Face Threatening Acts
A positive face is threatened when the speaker or addressee does not pay attention to the interlocutor's feelings and wants. Positive face threatening acts can cause damage to either the speaker or the addressee.

2.2.2 Negative Face Threatening Acts
A negative face is threatened when an individual does not avoid or intend to avoid the obstruction of their interlocutor's freedom of action. It can cause damage to either the speaker or the addressee. A person should have the freedom of choice and action; otherwise, his negative face is threatened.

2.3 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategy (1987)
Brown and Levinson proposed an explicit model of politeness, which contains four main types of politeness strategies in order to reduce, save and satisfy specific wants of a face used by different people in their interactional behavior in different situations when face-threatening acts are unavoidable or desired. When there is a need to perform an FTA, the individual has to use the direct manner or try to mitigate the effect on the hearer's positive or negative face by using different mitigating or politeness strategies. These strategies are 1. Bald on-record, 2. Positive politeness, 3. Negative politeness, and 4. Off-record (indirect).

2.3.1 Bald On-Record Strategy
Bald on-record strategies are used to address the other person directly to express his/her needs and not to reduce the threat to the hearer's face. All imperative forms and commands in emergency situations are examples of bald on-record. In addition, the bald on-record strategy is used when the threat to the hearer's face is very small or in a situation when the speaker is more powerful than the hearer. This strategy is also found when the interlocutors know each other very well, such as close friends and family. Some examples of different cases in to use of the bald on-record strategy are presented below:

A. Examples where there is no threat to the hearer's face:

1. Great urgency or desperation:
> *Help! (compare the non-urgent 'Please help me, if you would be so*
> *kind')*
> *Watch out!*
> *Your pants are on fire!*
> *Give me just one more week! (to pay the rent*

2. Speaking as if great efficiency is necessary:
> *Listen, I've got an idea.*
> *Hear me out: . . .*
> *Look, the point is this: . .*

3. Task-oriented:
> *Lend me a hand here.*
> *Give me the nails.*

Pass me the hammer!

4. Little or no desire to maintain someone's face:
   Don't forget to clean the blinds!

5. Doing the FTA is in the interest of the addressee:
   Careful! He's a dangerous man. (warning H against someone who could threaten him)
   Your headlights are on!

6. Showing disagreement:
   No one makes your hair stronger

7. Giving suggestion:
   Dress like a goddess, and gods will flock to you!

Examples where the threat is very small and minimized implicitly:

1. Welcomes:
   Come in.
   sit down

2. Offers:
   (You must) have some more cake
   Don't bother, I'll clean it up.
   Leave it to me
   Eat!

3. Requesting:
   Put your jacket away!

2.3.2 Positive Politeness Strategy
Positive politeness strategies aim to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face and are used to make the hearer feel good about himself/herself, usually in situations where the audience knows each other quite well. Fifteen strategies are used to indicate positive politeness as expressed by the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). These strategies are:

1. Noticing and attending to the hearer: (his interests, wants, needs, goods)
   You look sad. Can I do anything?
   Goodness, you cut your hair..... By the way, I came to borrow some flour

2. Exaggerating by giving different intonation, tone and other prosodic features or exaggerating by using intensifying modifiers: (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
   What a fantastic garden you have!
   That's a nice haircut you got; where did you get it?
   How absolutely marvelous!

3. Intensifying interest to the hearer using vivid present tense or exaggerate:
   You know?
   See what I mean?
   I come down the stairs, and what do you think I see? — a huge mess all over the place, the phone's off the hook and clothes are scattered all over . . .

4. Using in-group identity markers:
   Hey, mate, can you lend me a dollar?
   Help me with this bag here, will you, son?
   There you go, honey.

5. Seeking agreement by the addressee's statements through using specific statements or repetition and talking about safe topics:

>A: I had a flat tire on the way home
>B: Oh God, a flat tire!

6. Avoiding disagreement by using false agreement, expressing pseudo-agreement, using hedges or making white lies:

>Yes, it's rather long, not short, certainly.
>Yes, yes she is small, not really small, but certainly not very big.
>I agree with you, but I also think...

7. Showing common ground:

>Oh, this cut hurts awfully, Mum
>Yes dear, it hurts terribly; I know
>I have been struggling with this problem for a while, you know.

8. Joking:

>Ok, if I tackle those cookies now?
>My doctor told me to avoid cakes unless they are delicious.

9. Showing the speaker's concern for the hearer's wants:

>Look, I know you want the car back by 5.0, so should(n't) I go to
>town now? (request).
>I know you can't bear parties, but this one will really be good — do come! (request/offer).
>
>I know you love roses, but the florist didn't have any more, so I
>brought you geraniums instead (offer + apology).

10. Offering and promising:

>I'll drop sometime next week
>I'll stop by soon, I promise.

11. Being optimistic:

>You will lend me your lawnmower for the weekend. I hope.
>Look, I'm sure you won't mind if I borrow your typewriter.
>You'll call us, won't you?

12. Including both the speaker and the hearer in the activity:

>Let's have a cookie, then. (i.e. me)
>Let's get on with dinner, eh? (i.e. you)
>Let's stop for a bite. (i.e. / want a bite, so let's stop)
>Give us a break, (i.e. me)

13. Telling or asking the reason:

>Why do not you lend me your cottage for the weekend?
>Why don't we go to the seashore?
>Why don't I help you with that suitcase?

14. Assuming reciprocity:

>I'll lend you my novel if you lend me your article
>If you wash the dishes, I'll vacuum the floor

15. Giving gifts to the hearer in the form of sympathy, understanding and cooperation in the conversation:

>Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you

2.3.3 Negative Politeness Strategy
Negative politeness strategies are used to avoid imposition or embarrassment on the hearer and maintain the desire to remain autonomous using distancing styles such as applying modal verbs or hesitation, apologizing, asking questions or asking for

permission to ask a question. Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) presented ten strategies to illustrate negative politeness. These strategies are:

1. Being indirect:
   Can you please pass the salt?
   Can you shut the door, please?
   Would you know where Oxford Street is?

2. Using questions and hedges:
   Perhaps, he might have taken it, maybe
   Do me a favor, will you?
   I'm pretty sure I've read that book before.
   You're quite right
   I wonder if (you know whether) John went out

3. Being pessimistic (i.e. being pessimistic whether the hearer wants to do what we ask or not):
   You couldn't find your way to lending me a thousand dollars, could you?
   Could you jump over that five-foot fence?
   Perhaps you'd care to help me
   I don't imagine there'd be a chance of you …

4. Minimizing the imposition:
   I just want to ask you if I can borrow a single sheet of paper.
   It's not too much out of your way, just a couple of blocks.
   I just dropped by for a minute to ask if you…

5. Giving deference and being deferent to the hearer:
   Excuse me sir, but would you mind if I close the window?
   Mr. President, if I thought you were trying to protect someone, I would have walked out.

6. Apologizing:
   I'm sorry; it is a lot to ask, but can you lend me a thousand dollars?
   I hope this isn't going to bother you very much, but can you give this package to Mr. Smith?

7. Impersonalizing speaker and hearer by making your addressee unmentioned:
   It is expected that you send this letter today.
   I would go and see the dean if I were you.
   I ask you to do this for me
   It would be appreciated if the seat belt is fastened at this moment.

8. Generalizing expression rather than mentioning addressee directly:
   Passengers will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train.
   International regulations require that the fuselage be sprayed with DDT.
   Drinking alcohol beyond this line is prohibited.
   The United States expresses regrets over the occurrence of the incident.

9. Nominalizing:
   Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favorably.
   Your cooperation is urgently requested.
   It is our regret that we cannot…
   I am pleased to be able to inform you . . .

10. Going on record as incurring a debt or as not indebting the hearer:
   I'll never be able to repay you if you lend me a thousand dollars today.
   I'd be eternally grateful to you if you would tell me the truth.
   It wouldn't be any trouble; I have to go right by there anyway.

2.3.4 Off-Record Indirect Strategy

Fifteen strategies indicating off-record politeness were presented in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) to relieve the speaker from being imposing on the hearer. These strategies are the following:

1. Giving hints: The speaker mentions motives or reasons for doing a certain act. by using asserting or questioning:
   It's cold in here (Shut the window!)
   This soup's a bit bland (Pass the salt)
   What a boring movie (let's leave)

2. Giving association clues: The speaker violates the maxim of relevance by mentioning something associated with the act required of the hearer, which could be either related to the speaker-hearer's experience or by mutual knowledge of their experience:
   Oh God, I've got headache again.
   Are you going to market tomorrow?.. There's a market tomorrow,
   I suppose, (means give me a ride there)

3. Presupposing: The speaker here might say something which seems relevant but violates the maxim just at the level of its presupposition:
   I cleaned the home again today. (You supposed to do it this time.)
   I washed the car again today.

4. Understating or saying less than is required:
   The red dress is quite nice for you. (quite means not too good.)
   A: *How do you like Josephine's new haircut?*
   B: It's alright

5. Overstating or giving information or exaggerating more than what is needed:
   I tried to call a hundred times, but there was never any answer.
   There were a million people in the Co-op tonight!
   You never do the washing up.

6. Using tautologies (uttering patent and necessary truth):
   War is a war.
   Boys will be boys.
   Business is business.

7. Using contradictions:
   A: Are you upset about that?
   B: Well, yes and no
   I am Ok and not Ok.

8. Being ironic:
   John is a real genius. (he'd just done many stupid things.)
   Lovely neighborhood, eh? (in a slum)

9. Using metaphor:
   Harry is a real fish. (he swims like a fish)

10. Using rhetorical questions that do not require any answer:
    How many times do I have to tell you?
    What can I say? (Nothing, it's so bad)

11. Being ambiguous:
    John's a pretty sharp or smooth cookie.
    He's a giant. (He's tall and fat.)

12. Being vague:

> *I'm going down the road for a bit.* (go to the local pub.)
> *Perhaps someone did something naughty.*

13. Over-generalizing and not naming the hearer or addressing him directly:
    > *Mature people sometimes help do the dishes.*
14. Displacing:
    > *A: Someone has to be responsible with this mess.*
    > *B: you know who was having time with his friends tonight here?*

15. Being incomplete in the utterance using ellipsis:
    > *Well, if you insist...*(I will do it if you insist)

2.4. Research Question
This paper aims to investigate the politeness strategies in the conversations of five members of one family on different occasions based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The author assumes that all four strategies will be used by the participants, and some strategies will be manipulated more than others, specifically, negative politeness and positive politeness.

3. Research Methodology
This paper aims to investigate the use of politeness strategies in the conversations of Saudi English-speaking households. The participants of the research were six Saudi family members, three girls and two boys, aged from 28 to 32. The data were collected in family gatherings by recording the conversations using a mobile phone on different occasions over a period of 10 days, and only some extracts were transcribed for the purpose of this study. A qualitative descriptive approach was used to analyze the data based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) four types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald-off record (indirect).

4. Findings and Discussion
The findings of the study showed that the participants used many utterances that reflect all four types of politeness strategies, as presented below:

4.1 Utterances of bald on-record:
1. *Hi, Come in and sit down.*
2. *Be careful, don't carry too much weight.*
3. *Listen, you need to clean the dishes*
4. *....get me napkins*
5. *....you have to give back my dress.*
6. *Give me the glass, please.*
7. *Don't forget to give me my book.*

4.2 Utterances of positive politeness:
1. *Oh, you look sad. Can I help you?*
2. *You look good and pretty*
3. *You look nervous; what is going on? Can I help you?*
4. *Hi brother, you look so good.*
5. *Do you want to go with me to the shopping mall?*
6. *How can I help you?*
7. *Can you tell me something?*
8. *Hahahaha. It's a good party, don't worry, brothers and sisters. I will get the cake right now.*
9. *I agree with you, but I think we need to decide later.*
10. *That's a nice haircut you got for your kid; where did you make it?*
11. *I have a difficult time with my studies this term, you know*

4.3 Utterances of Negative politeness:
1. *Asma, can you close the door, please?*
2. *Can I have one of your fries?*
3. *I feel sick; can you shut the AC, please?*
4. *No, I can do it by myself.*
5. *I'd better have a glass of pure water if you don't mind.*

6.   *No thanks.*
7.   *Our next gathering will be next Monday. Could you come with us, Abdullah?*
8.   *No, thanks. I think I need a rest.*
9.   *Oh, really? Is that delicious? I would like to have some of your dishes.*
10. *I'm going to the coffee shop at 9 a.m. tomorrow; do you wanna come with me?*

4.4 Utterances of off-record:
1.   *Yes, thank you.*
2.   *I wanted to go to Jareer bookstore. But I haven't got a car; I have important homework, so I need some reference books.*
3.   *Do you have a good classmate?*
4.   *Yeah. I'm so stressful.*
5.   *Oh my God, I need cash now. I forgot to cash some money today.*

The different frequencies of politeness strategies used by the participants in their conversations are presented in the following table:

Table 5.1 Types of Politeness Strategy

No	Type of Politeness strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Bald on Record	7	21.21%
2	Positive Politeness	11	33.33%
3	Negative politeness	10	30.30%
4	Off Record	5	15.15%
	Total	33	100%

The results of this study show that all four types of politeness strategies were used by the participants in their conversations, and the most dominant types were positive politeness strategies (33.33%) and negative politeness strategies (30.30%), as predicted in the research question. It was followed by a bald-on record (21.21%) and off-record (15.15%).

4.5 Bald on Record
Bald on-record strategies were used to directly address the other person to express his/her needs and not aiming to reduce the threat to the hearer's face. Using imperative forms are examples of bald on-record as they can be seen in the phrases (e.g., *give me the glass, please; get me napkins*; *Listen, you need to clean the dishes*; *Don't forget to give me my book*), which were consisted of great urgency; great efficiency; task-oriented; little or no desire to maintain someone's face; alerting; welcomes; offers; and request. Using mitigating devices such as '*please*' in some phrases soften the command. It should also be noted that in an emergency situation, a command has no politeness function, as in the phrase *be careful, don't carry too much weight*. In addition, bald on-record politeness strategies were used when the threat to the hearer's face was very small, as in the phrase *come in and sit down*.

4.6. Positive Politeness
The participants used positive politeness strategies to reduce the threat to the hearer's positivity, including exaggerating (interest, approval, sympathy with the hearer) as in phrases *you look good and pretty; Hi brother, you look so good*; avoiding disagreement as in the phrases *Can you tell me something?; Hahahaha. It's a good party, don't worry, brothers and sisters. I will get the cake right now*; offering and promising as in the phrases *Do you want to go with me to the shopping mall; How can I help you*; and finally, give gifts to the hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding) as in the *phrases Oh, you look sad, Can I help you?; You look nervous; what is going on? Can I help you*?

4.7 Negative Politeness
Negative politeness strategies were also used to avoid the imposition on the hearer, including being conventionally indirect, as in the phrase. *Our next gathering will be next Monday. Could you come with us, Abdullah;* minimizing the imposition as in the phrases *No, I can do it by myself; I'd better have a glass of pure water if you don't mind; No, thanks. I think I need a rest; Oh, really? Is that delicious? I would like to have some of your dish;* and impersonalize speaker and hearer as in the phrase *I'm going to the coffee shop at 9 a.m. tomorrow; do you wanna come with me?*

4.8 Off-Record
Off-record strategies were used in this study through the use of indirect language to remove the speaker from the potential to be imposing, including giving hints, as in the phrases *I wanted to go to Jareer bookstore. But I haven't got a car; I have important*

homework, so I need some reference books; Oh my God, I need cash now. I forgot to cash some money today; Do you have a good classmate; Yeah. I'm so stressful; Yes, thank you.

5. Conclusion

The study indicated that when the participants communicate with each other, they care about their interpersonal relationships more than exchanging information, and they tend to use positive politeness strategies more than other types of strategies. As Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that people tend to use positive politeness strategies over negative ones to protect the individual's positive self-image and stress the need for an association between the Speaker and the Hearer, and this usually occurs in groups of friends and families or those who know each other very well. The number of participants in this study was relatively small, which necessarily limited the conclusions of the study. Therefore, more participants are needed in further studies to have more generalization of the results, and it would be helpful to investigate the effect of other factors, such as different English language proficiencies, power, and gender, in choosing proper politeness strategies.

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