Social Context, Values and Cultural Identity: A Method for Assessment of Arab and American Attitude to Politeness

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Abstract

This paper investigated the degree of variance in American and Arab attitude to politeness, as based on social values and beliefs. In spite of a general framework of universality, it was revealed that politeness, whether linguistic or normative, rested on the relevant social values of a given speech community. It was only comprehended in its social context and cultural relevance. Arab respondents differed from their American counterparts mainly in matters related to conservativeness, family ties and obligations as a result of social consensus and hierarchy. American respondents reflected more a culture of individualism. However, there was a reasonably unexpected degree of overlap in the values and beliefs of the two parties. The linguistic representation of politeness in Arabic relied mainly on fixed forms as opposed to indirect questions in English. However, because of constant change in our social identity, more research should be conducted on a wider population every decade.

Key Words: Arab, American, Social Values, Context, Cultural Identity, Politeness, Pragmatics, Relevance.

I. Background of Research

Edwards and Shepherd (2004: 206) state that "individuals with more positive views of human nature are less likely to suffer from coronary disease. They receive higher interpersonal evaluations, are more likely to volunteer to participate in studies, and are more likely to choose to trust others and cooperate with others in experimental tasks". Nonetheless, only 96 respondents out of 300, Arab and American, citizens requested to complete a survey relevant to their cultural identity, filled in the questionnaire and sent it back to me in time.

I.1 The Respondents

The respondents were 52 Arabic-speaking citizens and 44 English-speaking Americans. Their ages ranged between 20 and 64; the average age was 31.45 years. They included 62 females (64.58%) and 34 males (35.42 %).

The Arabic-speaking respondents, mainly from the Fertile Crescent (i.e., Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Kuwait and Iraq) in addition to three Moroccans, were from diverse social, economic, and educational backgrounds. They included 31 females (59.62%) and 21 males (40.38%). 27 respondents (51.9%) were between 20 and 30 years old; 25 (48.1) were over 30. 50 respondents ((96%) were somewhat familiar with American culture. This familiarity was mainly a result of *studying* in an English-speaking country or of following *courses* in Anglo-American literature and linguistics in their own homeland, the *Media* or *history lessons*. Only 7 respondents (13.46%) were limited to a High-School level of education; the others had BA, MA or PhD. All of them knew English. The majority of these respondents were students or just concluding their university studies, while 11 of them were professors, 2 were housewives and only 21 of them (40.38%) had occupations. Finally, 33 of the Arab respondents (63.46%) had visited the United States for one purpose or another. The others (36.54%) were confined to their local, cultural and linguistic, codes.

The English-speaking American respondents, coming from different American states, particularly those of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, D. C., and Florida, were also from diverse social, economic, and educational backgrounds. They included 31 females (70.45%) and 13 males (29.55%). 27 respondents (61.36%) were between 20 and 30 years old; 17 (38.64) were over 30. 27 respondents (61.36%) were poorly familiar with a local Arab culture.

This familiarity was mainly a result of *the media*, *employment* and *religion*. However, 18 of them (40.90%), including 2 housewives, had only a High-School level of education; 5 (11.36%) were professors; the others had BA, MA or MS. Only 7 respondents (15.90%) had limited knowledge of Arabic, and only 20 of them (45.45%) had occupations. Finally, 8 of the American respondents (18.18%) had visited one or more of the Arab countries for one purpose or another. The others (81.82%) were confined to their local, cultural and linguistic, codes.

I.2 The Data

The data collected included 524 transcribed pages in the form of answers to varied questions in two questionnaires (see Appendices). Questionnaire I was filled in by 52 Arab respondents, who formed Group One (G1). Questionnaire II was answered by 44 American participants, who formed Group Two (G2). Excluding Question I that requested personal information about the respondents, Questionnaire I had four major questions. Question II (A & B) had twenty English expressions that tested the Arab respondents' ability to understand the implications and use of language-specific expressions of politeness in English. Questions III – V raised questions about social values and beliefs that are thought to form the *socio-cognitive environment* of the respondents (see Sperber and Wilson, 1986a/1995). These were 40 items in number and were arranged on scales of preference and priority. However, Question IV in particular asked the respondents in the two questionnaires to choose between two social values in case of conflict.

Similarly, excluding Question I that sought personal information about the respondents, Questionnaire II, filled in by the American respondents, included five major questions. Question Two (A - E), in particular, focused on the degree of the exposure of American nationals to semantically translated *Arabic politeness expressions*. Questions III – V were the same questions (III – V) answered by G1 respondents and included information-seeking questions about the respondents' beliefs and social values believed to have direct implications on politeness in relevant contexts. Question VI included 9 utterances, with address forms embedded, with the intention of examining American respondents' understanding of some pragmatic parameters, such as *solidarity*, *social distance*, and *formality* relations between participants as expressed in Arabic (see Brown and Levinson, 1987). Finally, because of reservations on the adequacy of questionnaires in data collection (see Hinkel, 1997; Sasaki, 1998), 31 of the respondents were interviewed for data verification of the responses provided.

I.3. Method

Both quantitative, i.e. statistical, and qualitative, i.e. analytical, methods were used in this research. On the one hand, this should reflect the facts of social values and beliefs of the two groups of respondents in the two communities under study. These facts are represented in tables that show the figures and percentages of the respondents' responses and evaluations. On the other, it serves to connect the results of these evaluations to a theory of politeness as based on *societal values* and *cultural beliefs*.

II. The Context of Politeness: Culture

Initially, I intended to provide a different title for this study. An alternative, but appropriate, title could have been *Accept Me as I Am*. The reason for this was the fact that cultural differences between communities in assessing the dichotomies of *polite/impolite*, *cooperative/uncooperative*, and even *moral/immoral* could undermine any desired outcome of understanding between various language communities and even demolish a dream of globalization. Unfortunately, the pretext of cultural differences embracing abundant misjudgments and criticisms of the 'other' are available in different books, studies and even PhD dissertations (see Williams, 1990; Johnstone, 1991, to mention only a few). In fact, a mere look at the literature of politeness can easily reveal that ethnocentrism is a key issue in relevant studies on politeness (see Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Gu, 1990, among others). Therefore, "there is urgency to detect ethnocentric bias and eliminate it by the adoption of non-ethnocentric methodologies" (Sbisà, 1992: 267).

In this study, the major assumption is that *politeness*, linguistic or normative, rests on social values practiced within the boundaries of a given culture. Therefore, one definition of *culture* should first be agreed upon for the sake of consistency. Otherwise, both the concept of politeness and what constitutes differences in the understanding and practice of politeness across cultures remain blurred and ambiguous. This ambiguity should reflect itself on politeness in actual verbal communication and utterance interpretation.

The term *culture* is an intricate concept – which made scholars view it differently in various schools of thought. Above all, the term *culture* does not seem to have been well defined in cross-cultural studies (see Fukushima, 2000). Even the very concept of culture is not equally understood by different scholars writing on culture; it does not guarantee any consistency in the understanding of culture (Scollon and Scollon 1995; Sarangi 1995).

In this study, and for the clarification of the *context of politeness* as based on the *social values* and *beliefs* of a particular cultural community, the term *culture* has to be defined in a way that shows that *whatever is assumed about politeness is provided within the boundaries of a well-defined context of both linguistic and normative behavior, only as understood within the framework of a given culture*. A general, and perhaps comprehensive, definition of culture is provided by Hofstede (1991: 5), who describes it as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". However, Hofstede (ibid.) seems to focus mainly on the dichotomy of collectivism/individualism in stating the possible variances between different cultures.

Above all, culture includes **systems of values** that are characteristic of a group of people normally influenced by these values in terms of behavior and attitude (see Mead, 1994; Rokeach, 1973; Shammas, 1995; Aust, 2004). Culture is normally shared by the members of a well-defined group of people, shapes our behavior and is passed down to younger generations (Adler, 1997). Discussing politeness at work, Scholars (Holliday, 1999) also speak of *cultures* rather than one culture of one speech community. Thus, in a common work-place culture, people "often share extensive background knowledge and experiences and may have similar values and attitudes towards work and the objectives of their orientation" (Holmes, 2003: 2). In this context, we can refer to what is termed *small* and *large* cultures: "a *small culture* paradigm attaches 'culture' to small cohesive social groupings or activities wherever there is behaviour, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping" (Holliday, 1999: 237). Each of these 'cultures' has its own values and identity (Holliday, ibid.).

Values are indicators of organizational *identity* (Aust, 2004). In addition, "Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion" (Gioia, 1998: 17, cited in Aust, 2004: 515 – 6).

> "According to Rokeach (1973), values are the most central concept existing across all social sciences. Rokeach developed Value Theory based on an exploration of the relationship between beliefs (i.e., what one believes), values (i.e., central beliefs that make up one's beliefs system), and attitudes (i.e., value clusters that guide one's behavior)" (Aust, 2004: 521).

This value theory "is based on five assumptions: (a) people have relatively few values (i.e., especially fewer than beliefs), (b) humans possess the same number of values, but to different degrees, (c) values form value systems, (d) values are rooted in culture, society, and institutions (or organizations), and (e) values are manifest in messages and therefore are able to be examined" (Aust, 2004: 251 – 252).

Consequently, in this research, *culture* is defined as *a socio-cognitive composite of values and beliefs*, the breach of which is considered impolite in the eyes of the speech community members belonging to the same culture. This definition is more related to the anthropological view of *culture* (see Barnouw, 1982; Hofstede, 1991; Bøgger, 1992; Fukushima, 2000). Thus, my definition of *culture* is not essentially different from that of Fukushima (2000: 105): "Culture is seen as being a totality, tied together by various webs or patterns of beliefs and values which are specific to each culture". However, the *order* of such *values* (see Thomas, 1983) is also of crucial significance in determining how and to what extent the linguistic signals of politeness are maintained intact. It is these values and beliefs composing the *social context* to politeness that will be examined in the two language communities under study in this research.

Brown and Levinson's (1987: 245) assumption of negative-politeness cultures and positive-politeness cultures no longer holds tenable except in relevance to such socio-cognitive values and their order. These values are the cultural facet of a given society. Therefore, culture is a decisive factor in determining what is polite and how politeness is pursued by the members of one speech community in actual verbal communication. However, "it is probably impossible to generalize about one culture in a strict sense" (Fukushima, 2000: 126). In addition, cultural values are in constant change (see Fukushima, 2000). This is because "individuals have personal theories about the world in general" (Edwards and Shepherd, 2004: 200). Above all, "contexts must often apparently dictate different meanings to different interactants" (Edwards and Shepherd, 2004: 205); (see Sperber and Wilson's (1986a 15 – 16) definition of context in addition to Gutt, 1991).

This variance in one and the same culture is quite obvious in the findings of the data analyzed in this research. In other words, in each culture, there are value and belief discrepancies that may reflect some features similar to those in another culture. In this context, *culture* is confined to a well-defined *speech community*[i]. A speech community is supposed to have a reasonable degree of homogeneity; it also indicates a cohesive level of interaction between the *social system* and the *linguistic structure* of that community. Thus, a conflict in linguistic expression between two communities is a reflection of social mismatch, and vice versa (however, see Holliday, 1999; Meyer, 2002).

III. Politeness

III. 1 Definition and Limitations

To Brown and Levinson (1987), face threatening acts (FTAs) are the major issue that measures the degree of politeness on a scale of two poles: positive and negative: "the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13). This entails that certain cultures are described as having positive politeness, and others negative politeness. However, Brown and Levinson do not define the term *politeness* (Fraser, 1990: 228). Although many researchers (see Mao, 1994; Gu, 1990; Pavlidou, 1994; Preisler et al., 1994, amongst others) describe politeness in English culture as largely negative (mitigation of imposition, expressions of formality; see Preisler et al., 1994) and that of many others, such as Chinese, Italian, and Greek, as positive (expressions of friendliness and solidarity), none of them sees a universal concept of politeness in Brown and Levinson's (1987). I argue in this study that politeness is in general subject to the cultural beliefs prevailing in each society and composing its set of social values; consequently, Brown and Levinson's (1987) 'negative face' is Leech's (1983) '*tact*'.

Nonetheless, the most comprehensive and viable theory of politeness is still that of Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987); however, this theory of politeness has been modified by Wilson et al. (1998) in relation to *requests*, in particular. The modification itself has been applied by Johnson et al. (2004).

One major assumption of Brown and Levinson about politeness is that of universality. However, and despite much debate about universals (see Leech, 1980; 1983; Grice, 1975; Brown and Levinson, 1978; 1987), both levels of politeness, linguistic and normative, are culture-specific in orientation and language-specific in representation (see Gu, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Mao, 1994; Shammas, 2005a)[ii].

The problem of the 'universality' of politeness as an interactive procedure of talk or of making oneself more accessible to human society is that it lacks consensus in both its linguistic representation and the criteria of social assessment. In fact, "there is little agreement among researchers in the field about what, exactly, constitutes politeness and the domain of related research. . . . . The distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness is not drawn (Fraser, 1990: 234).

Jucker (1994) also believes that "Grice's cooperative principle and Leech's politeness principle, for instance, operate variably in different language communities (Jucker, 1994: 534; see also Jucker, 1988).

Another central assumption in Brown and Levinson's (ibid.) theory of politeness is that of *face*. In the light of much research on the universality of politeness and face, we build evidence for the fact that "[F]ace is actually found to wear different cultural faces" (Nwoye, 1987: 62); consequently, "claims for the universality of politeness principles might be shaky indeed" (Nwoye, 1992: 328).

This is why, in this study, the concept of politeness is based on the relevant social values motivating linguistic and non-linguistic behavior in terms of what the members of a speech community consider polite. This will enable the researcher to measure the distance between two language communities, American and Arab, in terms of assessing and/or realizing politeness in actual verbal communication. Therefore, my major assumption is that, very much like the forms studied under *lingua-pragmatics* (Shammas, 1995; 2005a) in language use, politeness is culture-specific in its orientation, purposes, and linguistic devices. Linguistic politeness is further divided into two domains: that of *lingua-pragmatics*, where the fixed linguistic forms represent a polite attitude in the relevant situation, and that of *pragma-linguistics*, where the grammar, represented by morphology and syntax, and the communicator's style play a significant role in constructing what is considered polite in each culture.

This is not to suggest that universals do not exist: very much as in language, universals in the concept of politeness and its procedures can be taken as a basis for comparison and raising consciousness of cross cultural differences. As Gu (1990) says,

"at the most abstract level, politeness indeed may be a universal phenomenon, i.e. it is found in every culture. However, what counts as polite behaviour (including values and norms attached to such behaviour) is . . . language-specific and culture-specific. . . . in interaction; politeness fulfils normative as well as instrumental functions. Interactants can use politeness to further their goals (e.g. redress FTAs), but at the same time are restrained by it" (Gu, 1990: 256).

In other words, it is the social values in question that dictate the polite, linguistic and/or normative, behavior of the interlocutor in a given speech event. Such values impose control over what we say and how we say it; therefore, Mey (1991) calls for the "slogan-like formula: no text without context, and no context without social control" (Mey, 1991: 410). This social control shows itself in the way we present ourselves, in the image that reveals features of the individual as representative of the societal whole.

Thus, despite the fact that the concept of *face* is a universal notion, the polite acts expressing face needs, face saving or face threats are definitely culture-specific in concept and language-specific in representation. Arabic is a language, in which the term *face* is frequently used when matters of politeness are concerned. Expressions denoting *face* translated semantically form Arabic, (i.e. literally), are very common. Such expressions are commonly used by parents and elderly people; thus, "*They preserved the water of our face*" indicates face-saving; "*She whitened our face*" indicates face needs or connection (see Meyer, 2002); and "*He blackened our face*" implies face threats. However, in actual assessment and practice of face needs, different cultures wear different faces (see Gu, 1990).

In short, despite much criticism of Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of politeness and face as being universal (Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Ide, 1989; Gu, 1990; Nwoye, 1992; Janney and Arndt, 1993; Mao, 1994; Shammas, 1995, Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003, among others), this criticism does not get promoted to the level of refutation (see Holtgraves and Yang, 1990; Fukushima, 2000). In other words, the main concept of politeness and face needs are definitely universal and provide a useful framework for comparison and contrast in relevant studies. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987) admit that cultural differences in this respect have to be considered:

"This is the bare bones of a notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much cultural elaboration" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13).

Therefore, unless we consider every individual or a small group of individuals as having a uniquely different *culture*, my major objection to Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness is their division of cultures into negative-politeness cultures and positive-politeness cultures. My assumption is that in every culture, there are other factors that play a major role in designating a *negative* or *positive* polite attitude or response to a given incident or person. One example is *religion*; another is *tradition*; a third lies in *personal interests* (see Leech, 1983, for his cost/benefit scale). Above all, this assumption of B & L's stipulates in advance that all researchers and even laymen agree as to what culture is. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Brown and Levinson (ibid.) did not even attempt to define the term *culture*. According to some interviews with different categories of people about the 'meaning' of *culture*, I was stunned to find that people from different, religious, academic and traditional affiliations in one and the same country hardly agreed on one definition of *culture*. To a committed religious professor, for instance, culture is a *product of religious creed*; to a religiously non-committed academic professor, *religion was only one factor of a culture*; a non-educated laymen understood culture just in terms of *social obligations* and being 'one of the gang' (see Goffman, 1967). Thus, to understand culture as one component of religion would undermine any study of cultural differences between nations. This is because, to understand cultural differences, it would be enough to study *religious* discrepancies; above all, it means that culture is a static, unchangeable set of do's and don'ts. In this research, *culture is presented as a temporary state of social values and beliefs that are in constant change and overlap with other cultures and sub-cultures*. In this way, religion is just one factor that may affect culture in varying degrees and different ways at different times; however, it can also be *affected* by culture.

Therefore, politeness is defined in this research as *a felicitous attitude or behavior,* expressed verbally or non-verbally, which *guarantees* an acceptable level of *freedom* for the others and/or **cooperation** with them. It stems from and is *based on social values* and *beliefs* of a given community. Its timely *representation* relies on the status quo of *interpersonal relationships* in the relevant *social context* of actual communication**.** Such a definition will of necessity leave the door open to possible conflicts and even clashes that may stem from cultural differences. This testifies to the fact that politeness is both culture-specific in attitude and language-specific in realization. In this sense, politeness can be both negative and/or positive in one and the same culture, regardless of the level of education, class, gender, dominance, etc. It all depends on what and whom the communicator is dealing with at any moment of interaction.

Consequently, no one whole (ethnic) culture is either that of negative or positive politeness. It all depends on the social values in question and interpersonal relations. Thus, in some areas of social interaction, one may find that Arabs are more indirect than their American counterparts, i.e. relying on *negative politeness*; in others, much less (see tables 1 - 5 below).

III.2 Linguistic Politeness

 "[I]ndividuals are normally experts at interaction only within the context of their own culture, because the conventions which guide and constrain their behaviour are not 'natural' and absolute, but ... culturally relative" (Laver and Hutcheson, 1972: Intro. 14; see also Malinowski, 1930).

Politeness is also related to communicating intent. Therefore, I strongly believe that, in our present state of mind as humans, we are not, unfortunately, prepared to accept truthfully that the others are as tactful or polite as *we* are, only because we discover in the process of communication that they are *different*[iii]. It should, in fact, be clear to both the communicator and the receiver that politeness, tact or any other message is only intended as such. In other words, it is not necessary for the hearer to receive the same signals, linguistic or otherwise, from the communicator. Wilson (1994) says that

"if the speaker intended to be tactful, then, that is what the speaker intended to communicate, and the communication is successful as long as the hearer recognized the intention; otherwise it has failed. The hearer is free to believe or not to believe: that is not part of the success of communication; successful communication is only to communicate the intention"[iv].

Linguistically, most speakers of English resort to *question forms* (see Goody, 1978; Groefsema, 1992) in requesting or even suggesting. This indirect way of requesting or suggesting gives the hearer the freedom to consent or reject. In return, Arabic has got *fixed forms* of politeness that give the hearer the option to respond the way s/he likes. These forms are generally conditional in requesting, such as "*if* you permitted; *if* you wanted, with your *permission*" and many more. In other words, to leave options open to the hearer, English speakers resort more to grammatical structures, Arabs to semantic choices. These fixed forms expressing notions of greetings, condolences, apologies, congratulations, thanks and gratitude, disappointment, loss, invitations, God-wishes, etc. in Syrian Arabic were studied by Ferguson (1983):

"one could select a corpus on the basis of occasions of use or social 'meaning' so that, for example, one could study greetings, expressions of thanks, apologies, introductions, congratulations, or any similar set of situationally identified formulas. . . . The Syrian Arabic speech community makes use of hundreds of politeness formulas and a full description of their structure and use would be a major undertaking requiring years of investigation" (Ferguson, 1983: 66).

These forms were also studied by Shammas (1995; 2005a). They were embraced under what he (Shammas, 1995) termed **Lingua-pragmatics**; they were defined as *the fixed linguistic formulae that have fixed pragmatic values in the relevant context in the social reality of actual verbal communication* (see Shammas, 2005a: 2).[v]

Consequently, the division of General Pragmatics into a) pragma-linguistics and b) socio-pragmatics had to be modified (see Mey, 1985; Thomas, 1983; Leech, 1983). The new division of Language in Use, or what is termed *General Pragmatics*, is now made into three, rather than two, main components, i.e. *Pragma-linguistics*, *Lingua-pragmatics*, and *Socio-pragmatics* (Shammas, 195: 110).

This division (Leech, 1983: 11; modified by Shammas, 1995: 110) differentiates between the structures that are subject to grammatical analysis, i.e. those studied under pargma-linguistics and the fixed forms that establish a link between pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics, i.e. between the grammatical and semantic structures available in a language and the socio-pragmatic principles that govern the selectivity of those structures; this is called *Lingua-pragmatics* (see Shammas, 1995; 2005a). *Lingua-pragmatics* refers to the inherent correspondence between the linguistic signals used in communication and the social norms in their relevant context. This correspondence between the socio-cultural context and the communicator's verbal behavior is the interpretation of the social value itself. There is no possibility for the addressee to misinterpret one of the linguistic forms studied under *lingua-pragmatics*.

The communicator has limited choices, which depend on the principle of *selectivity* that is also restricted to two levels only: the first level is that the communicator can choose between *saying* something or keeping *silent*, the latter 'act' being interpreted as *negative*, the interpretation of which can range between her ignorance of the social code or lack of social tact, to impoliteness or even hostility, depending on other social criteria governing the interpersonal relationship between the communicator and the addressee. Silence, however, can also be interpreted as polite in restricted contexts and impolite in others (see Jaworski, 1993; Shammas, 1995). Many examples of such forms were discussed by Ferguson (1883) and Shammas (1995; 2005a). In greetings, for instance, Arabic *sa'idi* (literally, *happy*! is used for 'good night'), *salamu alaikom* (literally *peace be upon you*, a formal greeting, for 'good morning', etc.), *ya'tik al-afieh*! (literally, *may God give you activity*, for 'working hard, eh'?)[vi]
The second level of selection is that of an appropriate linguistic form relevant to the situation in question. Thus, the communicator can be cool, warm, or enthusiastic and, therefore, satisfy the social requirement partly or fully, sincerely or out of social etiquette.

All of the social situations that one can think of can be expressed by one or more of the forms studied under lingua-pragmatics. *Weddings, engagements, giving birth, birthdays, funerals, sickness, recovering from illness; having a haircut, a bath, a shave, a drink, a meal; going abroad, returning from travel, buying something new, changing the hair style, getting a new job, getting an academic degree,* and even *sneezing,* and *coughing* are all social occasions in the Fertile Crescent society that demand some level of response from relatives, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances (see Alshamma, 1986; Ferguson, 1983; Shammas, 1995; 2005a). This response can be expressed both verbally and/or non-verbally, depending on the interpersonal relationship, the geographical distance as well as the relative significance of the incident itself. Lack of response, however, is interpreted as lack of social etiquette, and may lead to miscommunication. This is why such forms are unique in their structure, understandability, and significance: *they represent the spirit of social life, its obligations and connections*; therefore, they cannot be appropriately interpreted except under this area of the study of language in use, i.e. *lingua-pragmatics* (however, see also Bazzanella, 1990; Haverkate, 1992; Ameka, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1992; Wilkins, 1992; Greasley, 1994; and Shammas, 1995).

Above all, expressions of *social deixis* are of direct relevance to politeness; according to Levinson (1983: 63), "social deixis concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participants' roles, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressee(s) or speaker and some referent". These social distinctions are normally studied on the levels of *power*, *social distance*, and *social obligations* as encoded in Arabic in contrast with those in English. Many Arabic utterances and pronouns indicating such power and social distance relations are not matched in English, simply because English does not have in its system such dichotomies as the T/V forms or the plural of the verb, adjective, etc. that honor the addressee(s) as Arabic does. This reflects the fact that honorifics and dishonorifics are encoded in various ways in Arabic but not in English. This concept of honorifics/dishonorifics is expressed in English in syntax and lexical semantics as opposed to morphology, i.e. word forms, in Arabic.

Such expressions in Arabic consist mainly of one or two words; very few of them include three words. This explains the importance of syntax in these and other similar expressions and reveals a direct link between syntactic forms and pragmatic interpretation:

"grammarians should not simply ignore social deixis . . . [for] while the study of English may suffer no obvious penalties for such neglect, there is scarcely a single sentence of Japanese . . . that can be properly described . . . without an analysis of social deixis" (Levinson, 1983: 94).

Arabic is similar to Japanese in this respect. These honorific references are realized in Arabic, as stated above, mainly in morphology (the plural of nouns, pronouns and verbs, in particular when addressing one single person) despite the fact that this may create a number of complexities of disagreement in the system of Arabic.

IV. Results & Discussion

"Cultures differ greatly as to what is considered 'freely available'. The British bourgeoisie considers it intrusive to inquire directly about a stranger's income, politics, religion, marital status, etc." (Lakoff, 1974: 27; cited in Thomas, 1983: 105) In Arab culture, the first *friendly* question after greeting is an inquiry about the marital status and the number of children, to mention only a few taboos in other cultures.

An examining outlook on the data represented in the tables below can reveal a lot of information about both the discrepancies and similarities between the social values and beliefs of the two communities under study. Tables 1 - 3, for example, provide an assessment of how the respondents in the two communities, Arab and American, view privacy and imposition in relation to certain areas that are believed to be a source of possible conflict between the two groups. Table 4 reflects the respondents' preferences of a given value over another in case of a possible conflict between the two. Table 5, however, reveals the attitudes of respondents to interpersonal relations and their societal structure.

Thus, Table 1 shows the respondents' attitudes to being asked by an *acquaintance* about their marital status, age, etc. (a – g). Such questions are considered points of conflict between Arab and American cultures. The results reveal, for instance, that the greatest majority of Arab respondents were not at all offended (69.23%) or a little offended (23.07%) by being asked about their *marital status*. Unexpectedly, though, 65.90% of the American counterparts were not at all offended by the same question, and 20.45% were only a little unhappy about such a question. In other words, such questions raised by acquaintances were, to both the American and the Arab respondents, only a little *impolite* and did not form a considerable degree of *imposition* on the hearer (see Table 1 below).

Q. 3 A1	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Asked by an *acquaintance* about	Marital status	Age	Income	Political affiliation	Relation with parents	Spouse's beauty or handsomeness	Whether one has a Boy- OR girlfriend
Group 1: Arabs	1: 0; 2: 4; 3: 12; 4: 36	1: 0; 2: 3; 3: 21; 4: 28	1: 5; 2: 13; 3: 22; 4: 12	1: 5; 2: 5; 3: 13; 4: 29	1: 0; 2: 6; 3: 22; 4: 24	1: 17; 2: 15; 3: 12; 4: 8	1: 12; 2: 19; 3: 8; 4: 13
Group 2: Americans	1: 3; 2: 3; 3: 9; 4: 29	1: 6; 2: 6; 3: 3; 4:29	1: 15; 2: 5; 3: 11 4: 13	1: 0; 2: 1; 3: 15 4: 29	1: 0; 2: 12; 3: 9; 4: 23	1: 2; 2: 1; 3: 19; 4: 22	1: 1; 2: 0; 3: 11; 4: 32

Table 1: Responses to Questions Raised by Acquaintances

Because grades 1 and 2 represent, more or less, the same attitude of the respondent, and so do the last two expressing a different attitude, the first two grades of offence (1. *extremely* and 2. *very much*) and the last two (3. *a little* offended and 4. *not at all*) entailed by such questions from an acquaintance, are combined together in two separate categories of response. In this way, we get these results for Question III A1: a) asking about the *marital status* by an acquaintance was only 7.69% offensive to Arab respondents and 13.63% to Americans. One reason was that many of these respondents were students and unmarried; they did not have marriage-related problems that might entail offence by such a question. b) Asking about *age* was 5.76% offensive to Arabs and 27.27% to Americans.

However, we have to take into consideration the fact that about 61.36 of the American respondents and 51.92 % of the Arab respondents were between 20 and 30 years old; many of them were also students. Such an age group does not normally care about being asked about their ages. A piece of evidence was that 11 out of 16 professors (68.75%) in the two groups had reservations on being asked about their age. c) asking about *income* was 34.61% offensive to Arabs and 45.45% to Americans. This result shows that the more sophisticated a society is, the less polite to ask about income. d) Asking about one's *political affiliation* was 19.23% offensive to Arabs but only 2.27% to Americans. This is an interesting result in the sense that it reflects the socio-political situation in each country; the more freedom and democracy prevails in a given society, the less people mind being asked about their political affiliations. On a cost-benefit scale of politeness (see Leech, 1983), people in a free society do not lose anything by declaring their political affiliation. e) Asking about one's *relation with parents* was 11.53% offensive to Arabs but 27.27% to Americans. This is also a reflection of the degree of independence produced by the industrial revolution and labor division in the West as opposed to the agricultural Arab society that mostly relies on *mutual help* among kinsmen of the same family or even tribe. f) Asking about one's *spouse's beauty/handsomeness* was 61.53% offensive to Arabs but only 6.81% to Americans. Such a question is ten times more offensive, hence impolite, to Arabs than to Americans; this is understandable in the light of religious attachment and historical development of the relationship between men and women in the Arab East; one's spouse is *one's own*, and this relationship is considered extremely private and even sacred.

Therefore, an off-record investigation into such privacy can be extremely impolite in Arab societies. However, we have to note that the ratio of 38.47% of G1 responses accepting such a question as polite (or, at least, *not impolite*) indicates great social change that should not go unnoticed, especially among the new generation of students, employees and professors. g) Asking about whether one had a boy-/girlfriend was 59.61% offensive to Arabs but only 2.27% to Americans. Once more, this last result is related to both the necessary social consensus and the religious implications dominating the Arab East culture. Although some Arab young men do have girlfriends, and vice versa, these days, declaring the relationship in public remains a taboo to many people. It is mostly a reminiscent of both tradition and religious teaching. In other words, it is not an appropriate topic for a *chat* as it could be in American society.

The same questions were repeated in Q. III A2, but they were raised by *friends* (see Table 2 below). The results are as follows: a) asking about the *marital status* by a friend was only 1.92% offensive to the Arabs and 4.54% to the Americans; b) asking about *age* was 5.76% offensive to Arabs and 22.72% to the Americans; c) asking about *income* was 15.38% offensive to Arabs but 38.63% to Americans; d) asking about one's *political affiliation* was 7.69% offensive to Arabs but only 2.27% to Americans; e) asking about one's *relation with parents* was 9.61% offensive to Arabs but 6.81% to Americans; f) asking about one's *spouse's beauty/handsomeness* was 48.07% offensive to Arabs but only 6.81% to Americans; g) asking about whether one had a boy-/girlfriend was 44.32% offensive to Arabs but only 2.27% to Americans.

Q. 3 A2 Asked by friends about	A Marital status	B Age	C Income	D Political affiliation	E Relation with parents	F Spouse's beauty	G Boy friend OR Girlfriend
Group 1: Arabs	1: 1; 2: 0; 3: 5; 4: 46	1: 1; 2: 2; 3: 9; 4: 40	1: 4; 2: 4; 3: 23; 4: 21	1: 2; 2: 2; 3: 11; 4: 37	1: 3; 2: 2; 3: 12; 4: 35	1: 11; 2: 14; 3: 11; 4: 15	1: 10; 2: 13; 3: 10; 4: 19
Group 2: Americans	1: 0; 2: 0; 3: 6; 4: 38	1: 0; 2: 10; 3: 1; 4: 33	1: 13; 2: 4; 3: 7; 4: 20	1: 1; 2: 0; 3: 2; 4: 41	1: 1; 2: 2; 3: 10; 4: 31	1: 1; 2: 2; 3: 6; 4: 35	1: 1; 2: 0; 3: 3; 4: 40

Table 2: Responses to Questions Raised by Friends

The responses in Table 2 above clearly indicate the social structure of the two communities under study. The main objections of Arabs are related to being asked about wives and their attractions, whereas the major objection of Americans focuses on the economic aspect of their private life.

Nonetheless, the overlap between the two groups in many other issues, such as in the areas of asking about *age*, *income*, *relation with parents*, etc., refers to *social change* in both societies, particularly the Arab society, being affected by new Western values. A typically Arab citizen, who has never been abroad, takes subjects such as age, marriage, children, parents and even income to be the focus of chatting with friends, neighbors and acquaintances without any reservation.

Q. IIIB included questions (a – h) raised by different categories of people in various situations. The questions were believed to seek second goals (see Meyer, 2002); therefore, they were charged with a layer of implicit imposition. Grades 1 and 2, combined together in the results below, entailed possible confrontation and face threat to the hearer. However, Grades 3 and 4 did not implicate impoliteness. The responses to such questions were as follows: a) *insisting* on the respondent to express a political attitude to a nationally sensitive issue by a *foreign politician* was 76.92% threatening to Arabs but only 38.63% to the Americans; b) *insisting* on the respondent to express an attitude to a nationally sensitive issue by a *foreign journalist* was 65.38% threatening to Arabs but only 36.36% to the Americans; c) *insisting* on borrowing a car, etc. by a friend was 17.30% threatening to Arabs but 38.63% to Americans; d) *Insisting* on respondents to accept an invitation was 3.84% threatening to Arabs and 2.27% to Americans; e) *offering advice* by an acquaintance was 1.92% threatening to Arabs but 11.36% to Americans; f) *correcting behavior* by an acquaintance was 13.46% threatening to Arabs but 29.54% to Americans; g) *correcting behavior* by a friend was 1.92% offensive to Arabs but 18.18% to Americans; h) *expressing socio-cultural superiority* by a foreigner was 76.92% threatening to Arabs but only 31.81% to Americans (see Table 3 below).

Q. 3B	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Asked about attitude to	**foreign politician insisting**	**foreign journalist insisting**	**a friend insisting**	**acquaintance insisting**	**acquaintance offering advice**	**acquaintance correcting behavior**	**Friend correcting behavior**	**acquaintance expressing national superiority**
Group 1: Arabs	1: 12; 2: 28; 3: 10; 4: 2	1: 7; 2: 27: 3: 14; 4: 4	1: 1; 2: 7: 3:27; 4: 17	1: 1; 2: 1: 3: 18; 4: 32	1: 0; 2: 1: 3: 16; 4: 35	1: 1; 2: 6: 3: 22; 4: 23	1: 1; 2: 0 3: 16; 4: 35	1: 10; 2: 30 3: 10; 4: 2
Group 2: Americans	1: 1; 2: 15; 3: 19; 4: 9	1: 1; 2: 14; 3: 24; 4: 5	1: 2; 2: 33: 3: 3; 4: 6	1: 1; 2: 13: 3: 12; 4: 28	1: 1; 2: 4: 3: 14; 4: 25	1: 2; 2: 11: 3: 18; 4: 13	1: 3; 2: 5 3: 19; 4: 17	1: 1; 2: 13 3: 25; 4: 5

Table 3: Responses to Possible Imposition

It is obvious that issues that demanded social consensus were of greater importance to Arab respondents, whereas those of a personal nature were more alarming to Americans. For instance, insisting on the respondent to talk on sensitive national issues (a & b above) was highly offensive to Arabs; on the one hand, this explicates the relationship between the West and the Arab East in the last century; on the other, it reflects the uneasy political situation of the relationship between the State and the citizen in the Arab World. *Offering advice*, *correcting behavior*, whether by a friend or an acquaintance (e – g above), was much more alarming to Americans than to Arabs. This is a reflection of the degree of tolerance Arabs have been *tamed* to accept during several centuries of colonization and totalitarian regimes; on the other hand, it shows that the *individual's territories* are his/her own in American culture. The last question must also have aroused great sorrows – as one of the Arab respondents put it to me in an interpretive interview – because of the great discrepancy between the situation now and that of Avicenna, Averroës, and Ibn Khaldoun in the Arab World; in other words, a strong person does mind being accused of weakness, whether implicitly or explicitly; this is, in short, a kind of inferiority complex that is highly sensitive these days in the Arab World; it sums up a history of failures and repeated attempts for recovery from the political malignant situation. Contrary to Arab respondents' attitude, an American respondent, in a personal interview, described his negative attitude to this question as a confirmation of national pride, nothing more.

Question IV (1 – 4) asked the respondents to choose one of two values (A or B) in case of conflict. The results obtained were as follows: 1) 44 (84.61%) of the Arab respondents chose *truthfulness*, giving it precedence over *tact*, whereas only 21 Americans (47.72%) opted for *truthfulness* in case of conflict; 2) a serious conflict showed itself in 28 Arabs (53.84%) preferring *blood relations* to *law*, but only 12 Americans (27.27%) gave more weight to *blood relations* than to *law*; 3) *public welfare* had the share of the lion in both groups: 38 Arabs (73.07%) and 36 Americans (81.81%) gave it more weight than *personal interests*; 4) finally, the major discrepancy reflected itself in 41 Arab respondents (78.84%) giving more weight to *positive politeness* than negative politeness, whereas only 23 of their American counterparts (52.27%) resorted to the same choice (see Table 4 below).

Q. 4	1a	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b	4a	4b
A choice between values	Truthfulness OR	Tact	Law OR	Blood Relation	Personal Interests OR	Public Welfare	Negative Politeness OR	Positive Politeness
Group 1	44	8	24	28	14	38	11	41
Group 2	21	23	32	12	8	36	21	23

Table 4: Order of Values

The figures in table 4 above are self-explanatory. However, shedding light on certain points can be illuminating. Thus, according to several Arab respondents interviewed, the Arab situation now stipulates truthfulness as a condition for survival. Too much tact is lying and even hypocritical, particularly when it is practiced at the expense of truthfulness. *Blood relation* is also more important than *law* because actual law is not maintained and applied in many, if not all, Arab states. One respondent put it to me like this: "Blood relations can protect you; what is termed *law* can only justify exploiting you". However, even in G2, over 27% of the Americans believe that *law* is not the right resort for the citizen to restore one's rights. Finally, one should pause at the result of choosing between negative politeness and positive politeness: unexpectedly, more than 52% of the American respondents opted for *positive politeness*. This explains their readiness for seeking *connection* rather than merely avoiding imposition (see Jameson, 2004). It also refers to the varied socio-cultural and ethnic structure of the USA; it reflects an amazingly different result from that in a similar research in more conservative European countries, such as England (see Shammas, 1995).

It is, however, understandable why about 79% of the Arab respondents resorted to positive politeness: the mere avoidance of imposition is not enough for Arabs; because of the very socio-economic structure in the Arab World, people there need a higher level of cooperation (see Brown and Levinson, 1987). Above all, the prevalence of religious thought in the Arab World imposes a hierarchical structure that demands respect, extravagant use of honorifics (see Levinson, 1983; Tokunaga, 1992) and a higher level of *connection* and *face supporting* (see Jameson, 2004) in the broader organization of society as a whole (see Gumperz et al., 1982). Nonetheless, it is an eye-catcher to see that 21.14% of the Arab respondents opted for negative politeness. This can be explicated in the light of Western influence on Arab respondents, especially as most of them have studied English or even taught English as a foreign language. Such a result would not be seen in an agricultural society, where people have always been confined to their socio-geographical surrounding.

Question V deals purely with interpersonal relations and social conventions that have direct implications on what is considered polite within the general framework of a given society. Following the same procedure of combining the first two categories and the last two separately for getting the respondents' attitudes to such conventions, we get these results: A) 52 Arabs (100%) would definitely *stand up* when shaking hands with somebody, but just 8 Americans (18.18%) are likely to do so. B) At the same time, 52 Arabs (100%) would *offer their condolences* to a friend, whose relative has just passed away, whereas 40 Americans (90.90%) saw it as an obligation. C) Inviting somebody for a dinner in return to a previous invitation had the agreement of 46 Arabs (88.46%), but only 6 Americans (13.63%) saw it as an obligation. D) 49 Arab respondents (94.23%) agreed that it would be impolite to ignore a colleague passing by, whereas only 14 Americans (31.81%) did so.

E) Congratulating a newly married friend is an obligation for 49 Arabs (94.23%), but only 25 Americans (56.81%) approved of it as such. F) Only 7 Arab respondents (13.46) approved of sex before marriage, whereas 39 American respondents (88.63%) did not see anything wrong with it. G) 32 Arabs (61.53%) saw that the individual is expected to seek social consensus in any act or conduct, but only 3 Americans (6.81%) had the same expectation. H) Helping parents when in need had the agreement of all Arab respondents (100%), but only 19 Americans (43.18%) approved of it. I) Helping a brother in need was approved by 49 Arabs (94.23%), but by only 10 Americans (22.72%). J) Only 9 Arab respondents (17.30%) would answer back their parents if reproached by them, but 39 Americans (88.63%) would do so. K) Just 12 Arab respondents (23.07%) would answer back their tutors if rebuked by them, but 39 Americans (88.63%) would do so. L) 44 Arab respondents (84.61%) would divorce a spouse that betrayed them; the others opted for the choice of "not necessarily"; on the other hand, only 14 Americans (31.81%) resorted to the same solution. M) 12 Arab respondents (23.07%) would take revenge on the betraying spouse while only 3 Americans (6.81%) would do so. N) Finally, only 5 Arab respondents (9.61%) agreed to support unjust national interests whereas 25 Americans (56.81%) did so (see Table 5 below).

Question V	Group 1: Arabs	Group 2: Americans
A: standing up when shaking hands?	1: 42; 2: 10; 3: 0; 4: 0	1: 3; 2: 5; 3: 29; 4: 7
B: Offer condolences to friend?	1: 50; 2: 2; 3: 0; 4: 0	1: 11; 2: 31; 3: 2; 4: 0
C: invite s.o. who had invited you?	1: 25; 2: 21; 3: 6; 4: 0	1: 2; 2: 4; 3: 37; 4: 1
D: impolite to ignore colleague?	1: 41; 2: 8; 3: 2; 4: 1	1: 5; 2: 9; 3: 29; 4: 1
E: congratulate married friend?	1: 45; 2: 4; 3: 3; 4: 0	1: 8; 2: 17; 3: 19; 4: 0
F: approve of pre-marriage sex?	1: 7; 2: 6; 3: 0; 4: 39	1: 32; 2: 7; 3: 1; 4: 4
G: satisfy social consensus?	1: 6; 2: 26; 3: 19; 4: 1	1: 0; 2: 3; 3: 21; 4: 20
H: help parents in need?	1: 46; 2: 6; 3: 0; 4: 0	1: 6; 2: 13; 3: 17; 4: 8
I: help brother in need?	1: 32; 2: 17; 3: 3; 4: 0	1: 4; 2: 6; 3: 7; 4: 27
J: answer back parents?	1: 3; 2: 6; 3: 3; 4: 40	1: 1; 2: 37; 3: 5; 4: 1
K: answer back tutors?	1: 2; 2: 10; 3: 13; 4: 27	1: 8; 2: 31; 3: 5; 4: 0
L: divorce betraying spouse?	1: 35; 2: 9; 3: 8; 4: 0	1: 1; 2: 13; 3: 29; 4: 1
M: revenge on betraying spouse?	1: 1; 2: 11; 3: 24; 4: 16	1: 0; 2: 3; 3: 16; 4: 25
N: support unjust national interests?	1: 1; 2: 4; 3: 17; 4: 30	1: 5; 2: 20; 3: 13; 4: 6

Table 5: Attitudes to Social Obligations

The answers provided in Table 5 above in particular crystallize the socio-*cognitive environments* of the respondents in the two groups (see Sperber and Wilson, 1995). They reveal the respondents' attitudes to a selection of social obligations and beliefs that form a socio-cognitive basis for everyday behavior. In other words, a conflict in such areas of belief is very likely to end up with serious accusations of impoliteness and even immoral attitudes. In short, except for offering condolences to a friend, the differences between the two groups were considerable in this area of social conventions.

On the whole, as Table 5 reveals, most Arab respondents would *stand up* when greeting somebody by shaking hands with them, would *offer condolences* to a friend, *invite somebody* who had already invited them, *congratulate* a newly married friend, and would *not ignore* a colleague passing by. American respondents do not seem to focus on such matters as important in interpersonal relations. This obvious discrepancy can create a serious gap between the two groups and lead to a possible misunderstanding about the very concept of politeness and its practice. In fact, it seems to reflect a clash between negative and positive polite attitudes to politeness (see Brown and Levinson, 1978), or *connection* and *autonomy* (see Meyer, 2002); for Arabs, it expresses *respect* (see Matsumoto, 88; Ide, 1989; Nwoye, 1992, among others), *cooperation* (see Grice, 1975), *modesty* and *sympathy* (see Leech, 1983) or dominantly *hierarchical social values* (see Shammas, 1995).

Approving of pre-marriage sex was a point of serious conflict between the two groups, too. However, what was unexpected was the reasonable percentage (13.46%) of Arabs agreeing on it. If anything, this expresses the *social change* resulting from socio-cultural friction between the two cultures; it is also a result of the socio-economic situation getting more difficult and delaying marriages in the Arab World. One can still argue that this is a small proportion of the Arab population practically approving of it, given the fact that *social consensus* was an obligation for 61.53% of the Arab respondents. In other words, Arabs, according to interviewed respondents, expressed a coy attitude by providing *very indirect answers* in such areas of social contact. One female, 22-year-old, Arab respondent, however, was an exception in this: when I asked her about why she opted for the freedom of sex before marriage, she replied: "Don't you want me to be honest about it?" Another important observation in this concern is that 4 American respondents (9.09%) opted for the fourth choice (i.e. *not at all*) in terms of approving of pre-marriage sex. These secondary results are *meeting points* between the two groups; in other words, each one of the two groups can find the like of him/her in the other. This can, in fact, be a sound basis for a weak claim of universality.

Social ties, particularly between family members have also been proven to be much stronger in the Arab World than in the USA (Table 5 above). This is reflected in *helping parents* and other next-of-kin relatives when in need. It also appears in paying *more respect* to parents and a high degree of appreciation to teachers. In American society, such an approach is governed by *individualism* rather than social obligations and consensus. Divorcing a betraying spouse and even taking revenge on him/her has a much higher percentage in G1; this is also understandable in the light of conservative attitude to sex and the religious implications on the social structure in the Arab World as a whole. The last area of mismatch between the two groups was that of supporting a national cause, even if it were at the expense of other nations. The small percentage of Arabs approving of it (9.61), compared with that of Americans (56.81%), is another indication of the historical lessons they have had in the last century of both tyranny and occupation.

As mentioned earlier, Question II in Questionnaire I (A – B) presented a collection of language-specific expressions that may have implications on polite linguistic behavior. The respondents were asked to a) provide an English translation equivalent to each of these expressions and b) assess the situation, in which each of them is uttered (see Appendix I). In short, the results in the Arabs' questionnaire showed that 1) no one of the respondents managed to answer all the questions appropriately; 2) only 481 out of 1040 answers (46.25%) provided appropriate translation equivalence and/or relevant assessment. Expressions such as "keep it up", "what are you up to?" and "give me five" were rarely replied appropriately, even by Arab professors of English.

Question II in Questionnaire II (A – E) asked the American respondents to a) assess the communicative function of 20 language-specific expressions semantically (i.e. literally) translated from Arabic; b) estimate the percentage of meaningfulness of each expression to him/her as a native speaker of English; c) provide an English translation equivalent for each expression; d) state the clue on which s/he relied in interpreting each expression; and e) express his/her attitude in case s/he were addressed by a foreigner with such expressions in actual speech situations (see Appendix II). The results showed that a) their assessment of the communicative function of these expressions on a scale of 6 points (a – f) was inappropriate in 91.29% of the cases; b) the rate of meaningfulness to the American respondents ranged on a scale of 5 points between 0% and 20%; c) the English translation equivalents were no more than 7.71% appropriately provided; d) all respondents (100%) said that they relied on *guessing*; and finally, e) on a scale of four points, 10 respondents (22.72%) chose to react to such expressions used in actual speech situations by *inquiring about the meaning*; 7 (15.90%) of them would *ignore the utterance*; 6 (13.63%) of them would *ignore the speaker* and the others (47.72%) did not provide any answer.

It is obvious from the data provided in Question II above that most politeness expressions are both language-specific and culture-specific. Literal translation of such expressions from another language can hardly help communicators get along politely in cross-cultural conversation (see Shamams, 2005a). The only successful translation equivalence is a pragmatic alternative.

Finally, Question VI in Questionnaire II asked the American respondents to assess the interpersonal relationship between Arab addressees and speakers on a scale of three points of pragmatic parameters: a) solidarity; b) social distance; and c) the formality/informality dichotomy. The results revealed that only one expression out of nine was assessed appropriately by 3 respondents. In an interpretive interview with two of these respondents, they said "this successful assessment must have been achieved by accident".

The other assessments had nothing to do with how such communicative utterances were used in Arab culture on all levels of *social distance*, *solidarity* and *formality*. This is because of the extravagant use of *honorifics* in Arabic as opposed to English. These expressions of honorifics are meant to show *respect* and *hierarchical stratification* of social roles and positions rather than formality, social distance or the lack of solidarity (see also Tokunaga, 1992; Harasawa, 1994; Shammas, 1995).

Considering all the results of the questions posed and the answers provided above, we can observe that a totality of all the values and pragmatic parameters relevant to each society represents what is termed *cultural identity*. This cultural identity imposes the concept of what is polite and what is not within the general framework of each society and its stage of cultural change or development.

V. Limitations & Recommendations

In the interpretive interviews, which included only 31 respondents, i.e., 32.29% of the total number, it was obvious that some of the responses were not accurate because of the 'polite attitude' of some respondents. For instance, when an Arab girl chose number three as a reply to the question "Do you approve of *pre-marriage* sex?", she said in the interview that she meant number one, but could not be too 'rude' to pick this option. This also applied to the question of "Do you support your national interests even if unjustly achieved at the expense of other nations?" Two American respondents laughed in the interview when such a question was raised. The reason was that they did not want to be too 'blunt', and therefore, untactful, by stating a first-degree positive answer. In short, such deviations did not include a high percentage of the total responses, and the difference was only a matter of degree. This was why I merged numbers 1 and 2 in one set of responses and 3 and 4 in another, whenever the choice had to be made on a scale of four points.

Because of the limited number of respondents in this research, one has to be cautious in attempting to generalize the findings to all other populations. Therefore, the data can be developed to cover other areas relevant to the social values and beliefs that motivate polite language and/or behavior. Above all, most of the Arab respondents providing their questionnaire answers were somewhat exposed to American culture or another English-speaking culture. I chose them as such because of their ability to fill in questionnaires in English. In fact, the majority also studied English literature and/or linguistics – which is supposed to abridge the cultural gap between such respondents and their American counterparts. It would, therefore, be constructive to have a larger number of respondents from both sides, provided that they *have never been exposed to the culture and/or the language of the other*. Although this will induce translation problems (see Fukushima, 2000), it will enable us to empirically measure *the actual distance between the two parties in terms of polite attitudes, normative behavior* and other relevant facts of communication. It will also reveal the *influence of cultural exposure on social change* in terms of values and beliefs in comparison with the findings of the present study.

Moreover, this study does not link social values and beliefs motivating polite attitude with *actual behavior*. A similar project can in fact investigate such social behavior and the degree of its acceptability or rejection by the other party, and on what grounds. In this case, the data would have to include a) observation and b) interviews in addition to questionnaires. Currently, I am undertaking a project addressing such questions.

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Endnotes

[i] Labov (1972: 513) believes that a "speech community is defined not by the presence or absence of a particular dialect or language but by the presence of a common set of normative values in regard to linguistic features. (One might speak of a criterion of social rather than mere 'referential' intelligibility)".

[ii] However, for more on other aspects of politeness, see Jary (1998), Lee (2001), Taguchi (2002), Pizziconi (2003), Upadhyay (2003), Bharuthram (2003), Yu (2003), Erbert and Floyd (2004), among others.

[iii] Note that in almost every culture, the term *different* is intended to mean 'superior' when used to refer to 'us' and 'inferior' in its reference to 'them' in socio-cultural comparison.

[iv] In a taped personal communication with Wilson, D. on *Relevance*, University College London (UCL): 14 June, 1994.

[v] The term *Lingua-pragmatics* was first coined, defined and used by Shammas (1995).

[vi] It is notable that in British English, the expression 'Power to your elbow!' was common in Victorian England; such an expression is similar to Arabic 'May God give you energy/activity!' usually said to somebody at work.

Appendix I: Questionnaire I (For *Arabs*)

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on '*Social Values & Politeness*' in cross-cultural interaction. Your cooperation in answering the questions below would be highly appreciated. Please interpret the questions as freely as *you* wish or ignore any question(s) you feel unable to answer. All information provided will remain <u>*confidential*</u>. Please be as *frank* and *truthful* as you can in expressing yourself.

Question I
a. Name: (omit if you wish) --
b. occupation: --
c. Sex: --
d. Age: --
e. Highest qualification attained: ---
f. Have you ever been to an English-speaking country?
   If yes, which one(s)? --
g. Do you know English? ------ How well? ---
h. Are you familiar with the American culture? ---
    How? --
i. From what sources have you got knowledge of the American culture?
 Press? ---
 Mass media? ---
 History lessons? ---
 Friends? --
 Tourism? --
 Employment? ---
 Other? Please specify: --

Question II

The following are expressions taken from English. Please read them carefully first; then answer the questions below, but please *do not discuss* these questions with any native speaker(s) of English:
A. Suggest an Arabic *equivalent* or *more* to each of these expressions in harmony with the situation/context in your mind at the time of using these expressions:
1) God bless you: ---
2) Oops: ---
3) Ouch: ---
4) Take care: --

5) Pass the salt: ---
6) Sorry to hear about your father: --
7) Try again: ---
8) No more; thanks: ---
9) Keep it up: --10) Put your shoulder into it: --
11) Can I offer my condolences: ---
12) Not the end of the world: --
13) I am full; thank you: --
14) Keep your head up: --
15) What are you up to: --
16) I owe you one: ---
17) Have some more: ---
18) You're welcome: --
19) Come again: --
20) Give me five: --

B. Describe the situation, in which each of these expressions is uttered: a) *Who* says what; b) to *whom*; c) On what *occasion*; for example, 1) a *child* to his/her *dad* when *requesting* pocket money:
1) God bless you: ---
2) Oops: ---
3) Ouch: ---
4) Take care: ---
5) Pass the salt: ---
6) Sorry to hear about your father: --
7) Try again: ---
8) No more; thanks: ---
9) Keep it up: ---
10) Put your shoulder into it: --
11) Can I offer my condolences: ---
12) Not the end of the world: --
13) I am full; thank you: --
14) Keep your head up: --
15) What are you up to: --
16) I owe you one: ---
17) Have some more: ---
18) You're welcome: --
19) Come again: --
20) Give me five: --

Question III

A. Please answer these questions on a scale of four grades: 1) extremely; 2) very much; 3) a little; 4) not at all; just use numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.):
    1) Do you get offended if one of your *acquaintances* asks you about your
    a) marital status: ---;
    b) age: ---;
    c) income: ---;
    d) political affiliation: ---;
    e) relationship with your parents: --;
    f) spouse's beauty/handsomeness ---;
    g) whether you have a boy-/girl-friend: --?

2) Do you get offended if one of your *friends* asks you about your
   a) marital status: --;
   b) age: --;
   c) income: ---;
   d) political affiliation: --;
   e) relationship with your parents: ---;
   f) spouse's beauty/handsomeness --;
   g) whether you have a boy-/girl-friend: --------------------------------------?

B. Please describe your attitude to these situations on a scale of four points: 1) I confront the person violently; 2) I rebuke him/her verbally; 3) I ignore him/her;   4) I concede and reply positively; just use numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.):
   a) *a foreign politician repeatedly insists* that you express your attitude toward an extremely sensitive issue in your country: ---;
   b) *a foreign journalist repeatedly insists* that you express your attitude toward an extremely sensitive issue in your country: ---;
   c) *a friend insists that you lend* him/her money/car when you do not want to: --------;
   d) an acquaintance *insists that you* accept his/her invitation to dinner: ----------------;
   e) an acquaintance offers you a piece of *advice*: ---;
   f) an acquaintance corrects your linguistic and/or normative behavior: ----------------;
   g) a friend corrects your linguistic and/or normative behavior: ------------------------;
   h) an acquaintance expresses socio-cultural superiority of his/her nation over that of yours: ---?

Question IV

Which *social value* of the following, A or B, would you give more weight in case of a possible conflict?
1) A. *Truthfulness* or B. *Tact*: ---
2) A. *Law* or B. *Blood relations*: --
3) A. *Personal interest*s or B. *Public welfare*: ---
4) A. *Negative politeness*, i.e. avoiding interference, even if interference is *useful* and required, or B. *Positive politeness*, i.e. being cooperative, even if cooperation is *face-threatening*: --? Just circle the *right letter* of each number 1 – 4 above.

Question V
On a scale of four points, please express your attitude freely: 1) yes/always; 2); perhaps/sometimes; 3) not necessarily; 4) not at all. Please use numbers only.
   a) Do you have to stand up *to shake hands with somebody standing*? ------------------.
   b) Do you have to *offer condolences to a friend*, whose father has just died? ---------.
   c) Is it an obligation for you to invite somebody for a drink/dinner if s/he has already invited you? --.
   d) Do you consider it impolite to ignore a *colleague* passing by? ----------------------.
   e) Is it an obligation for you to congratulate a *newly married friend*? ------------------.
   f) Do you approve of *pre-marriage* sex? --.
   g) Do you have to satisfy *social consensus* when you do something? ------------------.
   h) Is it an obligation for you *to help your parents financially if in need*? -------------.
   i) Is it an obligation for you *to help your brother financially if in need*? ---------------.
   j) If your parents rebuke you for some reason, *is it socially acceptable for you* to answer back? --.
   k) If your teachers rebuke you for some reason, *is it socially acceptable for you* to answer back? --.
   l) Do you divorce your spouse if s/he betrays you? --------------------------------------.
   m) Do you try to take revenge on your spouse if s/he betrays you? -------------------.
   n) Do you support your national interests *even if unjustly achieved* at the expense of other nations? --.

Appendix II: Questionnaire II (for *Americans*)

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on '*Social Values & Politeness*' in cross-cultural interaction. Your cooperation in answering the questions below would be highly appreciated. Please interpret the questions as freely as *you* wish or ignore any question(s) you feel unable to answer. All information provided will remain <u>*confidential*</u>. Please be as *frank* and *truthful* as you can in expressing yourself.

Question I
a. Name: (Omit if you wish): --
b. Occupation: --
c. Sex: --
d. Age: --
e. Highest academic qualification attained: ---
f. Have you ever been to an Arab country? --
   If yes, which one(s)? --
g. Do you know Arabic at all? --
   If yes, roughly what level of ability? --
h. Are you familiar with Arab culture? --
   How far? --
i. From what sources have you gained knowledge of Arab culture:
   Press? --
   Mass media? --
   History lessons? --
   Friends ---
   Employment? --
   Tourism?--- Other? Please specify: ------

Question II

The following are expressions semantically (i.e. literally) translated from Arabic. Please read them carefully first, but please *do not discuss* these expressions with anyone else, especially a native speaker of Arabic. Then answer the questions below:

A. What is the communicative function of each expression (1 – 20) below? Just insert the letter (a, b, c, d, e, f, or g) representing one of these functions against the relevant expression below:
a) complimenting? b) greeting? c) condoling? d) initiating talk? e) saying 'good bye'! f) other? Please specify. g) I don't know.
1. Yes, my brother, father of Nizar: ---%
2. Peace be upon you: ---%
3. Peace be with you: --%
4. May God give you activity: --%
5. A happy opportunity: --%
6. Thank God for safety: ---%
7. Out of your graciousness: --%
8. If you permitted: --%
9. If you want: --%
10. If God wanted: ---%
11. Have the graciousness: ---%
12. May God increase your graciousness: --%
13. We were honored: --%
14. We have won honor: ---%
15. When did you honor us: --%
16. By God, we were honored yesterday: ---%

17. A million hello's, my eyes: ---%
18. How are you, my soul: ---%
19) Talk on us: --%
20) Your glass! ---%

B. How *meaningful* is the function suggested for each of the *expressions above* on a scale of five points to an American native speaker of English, do you think?
  1) 0%?   2) 20%?   3) 40%?   4) 60%?   5) 80 or more?
Please add one percentage of meaningfulness against each expression above.

C. What English equivalent would you suggest to each of the expressions above in actual communication? Enter 'nil' if you can find no equivalent. Please use punctuation marks (e.g. commas) where you think this may make your expression more explicit or natural.
1. ---
2. ---
3. ---
4. ---
5. ---
6. ---
7. ---
8. ---
9. ---
10.   --
11. ---
12. ---
13. ---
14. ---
15. ---
16. ---
17. ---
18. ---
19) ---
20) ---

D. What clues, other than linguistic, have you depended on in interpreting and replacing the expressions above:
  1.   Previous knowledge? --
  2.   Guessing? --
  3.   Other? Please specify: ---

E. How would you react if *you* were addressed by a foreigner with one or more of the expressions above in an actual speech situation?
1. Enquire about the intended meaning? --
2. Ignore the utterance altogether? --
3. Ignore the speaker? --
4. Other response? Please specify: ---

Question III

A. Please answer these questions on a scale of four grades: 1) extremely; 2) very much; 3) a little; 4) not at all; just use numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.):

1) Do you get offended if one of your *acquaintances* asks you about your
a) marital status: ---;
b) age: --;

c) income: ---;
d) political affiliation: ---;
e) relationship with your parents: --;
f) spouse's beauty/handsomeness --;
g) whether you have a boy-/girl-friend: ---?

2) Do you get offended if one of your *friends* asks you about your
a) marital status: --;
b) age: ---;
c) income: --;
d) political affiliation: ---;
e) relationship with your parents: --;
f) spouse's beauty/handsomeness --;
g) whether you have a boy-/girl-friend: ---?

B. Please describe your attitude to these situations on a scale of four points: 1) I confront the person violently; 2) I rebuke him/her verbally; 3) I ignore him/her; 4) I concede and reply positively; just use numbers (1, 2, 3, 4):
a) *a foreign politician repeatedly insists* that you express your attitude toward an extremely sensitive issue in your country: ---;
b) *a foreign journalist repeatedly insists* that you express your attitude toward an extremely sensitive issue in your country: ---;
c) *a friend insists that you lend* him/her money/car when you do not want to: ----------;
d) an acquaintance *insists that you accept* his/her invitation to dinner: -----------------;
e) an acquaintance offers you a piece of *advice*: --;
f) an acquaintance *corrects* your linguistic and/or normative behavior: -----------------;
g) a friend *corrects* your linguistic and/or normative behavior: --------------------------;
h) an acquaintance *expresses socio-cultural superiority* of his/her nation over that of yours: --------------------------
---?

Question IV

Which *social value* of the following, A or B, would you give more weight in case of a possible conflict:
1) A. *Truthfulness* or B. *Tact*: ---;
2) A. *Law* or B. *Blood relations*: --;
3) A. *Personal interests* or B. *Public welfare*: ---;
4) A. *Negative politeness*, i.e. avoiding interference, even if interference could be *useful* and required, or B. *Positive politeness*, i.e. being cooperative, even if cooperation could be *face-threatening*: -----------------------------
---------------------------?
Just circle the right letter of each number 1- 4 above.

Question V

On a scale of four points, please express your attitude freely: 1) yes/always; 2); perhaps/sometimes; 3) not necessarily; 4) not at all. Please use numbers only.
a) Do you have to stand up *to shake hands with somebody standing*? -------------------.
b) Do you have to *offer condolences to a friend*, whose father has just died? -----------.
c) Is it an obligation for you to invite somebody for a drink/dinner if s/he has already invited you? -------------------
--.
d) Do you consider it impolite to ignore a *colleague* passing by? ------------------------.
e) Is it an obligation for you to congratulate a *newly married friend*? --------------------.
f) Do you approve of *pre-marriage* sex? --.
g) Do you have to satisfy *social consensus* when you do something? --------------------.
h) Is it an obligation for you *to help your parents financially if in need*? ---------------.
i) Is it an obligation for you *to help your brother financially if in need*? -----------------.

j) If your parents rebuke you for some reason, *is it socially acceptable for you* to answer back? ----------------------
---.
k) If your teachers rebuke you for some reason, *is it socially acceptable for you* to answer back? --------------------
--.
l) Do you divorce your spouse if s/he betrays you? --.
m) Do you try to take revenge on your spouse if s/he betrays you? ----------------------.
n) Do you support your national interests *even if unjustly achieved* at the expense of other nations? ------------------
--.

Question VI

Who are the addressees in these expressions translated literally from Arabic? Relate each expression to a point on each of the scales below by using numbers, e.g. 1: (ii) + (i) + (ii) for statement (1), i.e. a *colleague + superior + informal*, etc.
Scale I: (i) a friend   (ii) a colleague   (iii) an acquaintance   (iv) a stranger
Scale 2: (i) superior   (ii) equal   (iii) inferior   (iv) not applicable
Scale 3: (i) formal situation   (ii) informal
1. Hi, Doctor --
2. You're welcome, Professor Nabeel! ---
3. Come in for dinner, Dr. Ibrahim? --
4. This is Dr. Nizar. --
5. Professor Nabeel, may I borrow this book? --
6. (On the telephone) Mary, this is Mr. Brown. --
7. (On the telephone) Dr. Nizar, this is George. —---
8. Your Excellency may choose any book you like. --
9. Here is Brigadier Maher; here is Professor Adnan. --------------------------------------