

Cultural Differences of Politeness in Arabic and American Motivational Speeches

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Abstract

This study discusses the explanation of cultural differences in politeness in Arabic and American motivational speeches following Samarah's study of politeness in Arabic culture. Samarah's study has also been applied to the American culture in the current study, and American motivational speeches have been examined based on the concepts extracted from Samarah's study. The purpose of this study is to distinguish between the two languages of motivational speech - Arabic and American - by utilizing the concepts extracted from each culture as outlined in Samarah's study. Secondly, the study aims to analyze the meanings and forms of politeness in Arabic and American motivational speeches. The researcher observes several phenomena in Arabic speeches, such as gratitude, benevolence, felicitations, and introduction of conversation, while in American speeches, three situations are noted - sociability, greetings for part of speech, and appreciation.

Keywords: Politeness, Cultural differences, Meaning and forms

1. Introduction

The cultural differences in politeness between Arabic and American motivational speeches are interesting to explore. Both cultures have distinct ways of communicating and expressing motivation, with varying degrees of formality and directness. Arabic motivational speeches often emphasize the importance of contextually appropriate politeness, incorporating Islamic values of respect and humility. Speakers often use honorifics and poetic language to address the audience and establish a sense of shared values. American motivational speeches, on the other hand, focus more on individualism and self-improvement. They tend to be more direct and energetic, emphasizing personal achievement and highlighting success stories. While both cultures aim to inspire and motivate their audiences, the divergent approaches to politeness reflect broader cultural values and norms. Examining these differences can provide valuable insights into the multitude of cultural variations that exist in the realm of motivational speeches.

1.1 Politeness and Culture

Politeness, typically accomplished through language, can either be one of the aims people seek to achieve with particular linguistic choices or one of the criteria people are expected to adhere to when using language to connect with others. Politeness is a characteristic present in all human societies and has recently become a

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topic of intense debate among academics. Some believe that Brown and Levinson's approach to politeness, as well as Geoff Leech's, has a "Western bias" and should not be viewed as "a universal theory applicable to all languages and cultures" (Leech, 2005:4). Many scholars believe it is more important to place emphasis on cultural aspects and investigate how politeness differs across cultures, as well as the relative importance of etiquette (Foley, 2001; Tian Jinping & Zhai Jianhong, 2005).

1.2 Cultural Differences

In other words, different cultures generate distinctive worldviews, which in turn impact standards of politeness behavior and result in disparities in various aspects (Huang, 2008). Differences in culture can help explain why people exhibit different levels of politeness. Additionally, individuals do not operate in isolation but rather within a speaking community that is rich in cultural conventions.

1.3 Politeness in Arabic Culture Background

The Islamic religion has an impact on virtually every facet of Arabic social life. Here, the writer attempts to discuss both the social and religious aspects. On one hand, religion teaches individuals to conduct themselves with humility when interacting with others. On the other hand, society forcefully encourages individuals to behave with dignity. This tension between the two opposing attitudes often puts individuals in challenging situations (Samarah, 2015). The humble way is demonstrated by beginning a request with the name of God, while the dignified way is demonstrated by using the imperative form of the verb "lend" (such as "[sallifni!] Lend!") (the undignified way would be using the verb in the present tense form and inflected for modality, such as "would you lend me..."). The structure of this statement is well received by Arabs and is frequently used.

1.4 Politeness in American Culture Background

Due to the manner in which politeness is displayed in the United States, people from other countries may have the impression that Americans are dishonest or disingenuous in their day-to-day interactions with both friends and strangers. Everyday interaction in the United States is generally characterized by a hefty dose of polite linguistic routines such as "thank you," "please," and "I'm sorry." This is in contrast to other language communities (Pinto Derrin, 2011).

According to Barnlund and Araki (1985), Americans not only give more compliments than Japanese people but they also provide praise largely for looks and personal attributes, which Japanese people may consider shallow. Therefore, although some groups of people from other countries may view the politeness of Americans as false, there hasn't been much research on how common people in the United States view their own style of courteous interaction (Pinto Derrin, 2011).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Studies

According to Coulmas (2013), politeness is based on both politeness theory and cultural conventions. The concept of politeness should be culturally neutral and suitable for differentiating politeness in a theoretical description. Coulmas (2013) further stated that "[politeness] is a non-normative theoretical construct designed to compare various standards used in different societies for the assessment of speech behavior" (p. 85). A cultural norm of politeness refers to evaluating people's spoken conduct based on the social values of the community. It appears that a cultural convention derives from a particular sociocultural system; hence, understanding this concept is necessary for competent behavior in that community. Coulmas (2013) noted that reconciling these desires while considering each speaker's positive and negative requirements is difficult.

He stated, "[politeness is] the art of not committing face-threatening acts and protecting oneself against such acts" (p. 86). On a scale of politeness, speech expressions vary, and speakers can be more or less polite. This interest is influenced by common features such as gender, age, class, power, and income of the addressees.

Politeness, according to Meier (1995), is a crucial aspect of a person's ability to maintain social interactions within a particular civilization. However, depending on the culture, politeness is manifested differently and interpreted differently. Meier (1995) stated that "every society has some sort of norms for appropriate behavior, although these norms will vary" (p. 388).

Despite the nonverbal behaviors associated with politeness, politeness is primarily achieved through language. Culture may impose standards or restrictions on people's language usage. It can be observed that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds typically display politeness in different ways. So, what is the relationship between proper politeness and culture? How are we supposed to understand the relative nature of politeness? From a survey of studies on politeness, it can be seen that several researchers approach the topic of politeness from various perspectives.

Some academics, such as Matsumoto and Gu, who dealt with East Asian cultures and emphasized cultural differences in politeness, have taken issue with the formulation of politeness and face offered by Brown and Levinson (Foley, 2001:274). Matsumoto and Gu argue that Brown and Levinson's classification of face into positive and negative face, as well as their treatment of politeness and face, are not applicable to East Asian cultures. "Derives from the importance given to individualism in the Western European concept of the person" (Foley, 2001:274).

3. Politeness Meaning and Forms in Arabic and American Motivational Speeches Expressions

The phenomenon, (as shown in the present study), involves not only one side, for example, distinguishing between religion and social factors, and determining the roles played by both sides in Arab culture. Additionally, we can compare this phenomenon with other cultures, such as European cultures. Alternatively, we could compare this phenomenon with other countries (Samarah, 2015).

This study explores the meaning and forms of politeness, according to Samarah, A. (2015), who presents this part of his study on the significance of sub-concepts considered in politeness with Arabic expressions. The recommended concepts are:

- Sociability
- Gratitude
- Benevolence and Felicitations
- Guilt
- Permission
- Appreciation
- Hospitality and Generosity
- Respect
- Introduction of Conversation
- The Recognition of Social Status (Pronouns)

Samarah (2015) has listed at least "nine" situations in Arabic where it is particularly crucial to be polite. The following categories apply to these nine situations:

- When you want to express sociability
- When you want to express gratitude
- When you want to express benevolence and felicitations
- When you want to express guilt
- When you want to ask for permission
- When you want to express your appreciation of the others' actions, positions, relatives, friends, as well as the other person's culture, language, and everything related to the interlocutor

- When you want to express hospitality and generosity
- When you want to express your respect for the other person
- When you want to start a conversation

In this context, these situations of politeness can be applied to both Arabic and American motivational speeches.

3.1 Arabic Motivational Speeches Situations

a. Gratitude

When you are thankful to someone for a favor, present, etc.

Speech: "Allah bless you, good people" is said to show gratitude and appreciation.

b. Benevolence and Felicitation

Speaker A: I told my family and my principal not to call me unless there was an emergency.

Speaker B: "Inshallah Maku Ella Alafiah"

The expression "Inshallah Maku Ella Alafiah" means "I wish you don't face harm, God willing." Speaker A used this expression in response to Speaker B's speech. In this case, the situation of benevolence is used, where you wish someone good luck for an upcoming event or action.

c. Introduction of Conversation

When you want to start a conversation with an audience member or a person you care about, Arabs often use a polite expression to initiate the conversation. In the first example, the speaker starts his speech by saying, "Allah bless you, good people." In another example, a speaker introduces his speech with "Ahla wsahla" (welcome) to the audience. This expression, "Ahla wsahla" (welcome), was identified by Samarah, A. (2015) in his study as a situation of the sociability concept.

3.2 American Motivational Speech Situations

a. Sociability

The primary role of sociability expressions is to express and maintain a social relationship. Examples of these expressions are "welcome" and "thank you," which are typically spoken by Americans at the beginning of a speech to convey their happiness at seeing the audience. For example, "Welcome, I'm very excited today to talk about effective speaking."

I would like to point out that an excess in the use of welcoming phrases can be noticed easily in greetings among Americans when they start their speeches.

Example: "We're going to make this worth it for you. I'm honored to be here with you because let's face it, you accomplished something I could never do." In this example, the speaker used the honorific politeness expression "I'm honored to be here with you," which generally relates to the sociability situation.

b. Greeting as Part of Speech

Politeness expressions are typically used to greet a part of speech. The expression "almost" is used for the same situation. Moreover, in American speeches, greetings as a part of speech frequently include expressions like "thank you" to the audience.

Example: "Thank you all for coming out in the rain, the pouring rain."

c. Appreciation

When you want to convey your appreciation for someone's activities, position, or status, as well as their culture, language, and other associated aspects, you use appreciation expressions.

Speaker A: "Achievement versus goal setting, that's interesting, right? So, he said everybody sets goals, either they write them down or they don't, they have them in their head. I'm going to teach you how to achieve goals."

Speaker B: "It's really interesting coming from the guy that was in the secret, and I love what you've talked about, the difference between the law of attraction and the law of goya."

In the example above, Speaker B expresses their love and appreciation for what Speaker A said and explains the differences between the law of attraction and the law of goya.

Through this study, we can utilize these concepts in both Arabic and American motivational speeches. Arabic speakers focus on the use of gratitude, benevolence, and felicity, as well as the introduction of conversation, while American speakers use these politeness concepts in various situations such as sociability, greetings for parts of speech, and appreciation.

4. Conclusion

Based on Samarah's study of politeness main meanings and forms, the researcher has categorized them as follows:

- The influences of religious faith and social convention are the most significant factors shaping politeness in Arabic culture. These factors play a crucial role in the construction and management of Arabic politeness.
- Politeness phenomena in American society are primarily based on direct communication and a variety of greetings.
- The forms and meanings of politeness expressions in Arabic speeches, as outlined by Samarah (2015), are similarly found in three main situations: gratitude, benevolence, felicitation, and introduction of conversation, while in American speeches, such expressions are found in sociability, greetings for parts of speech, and appreciation situations.

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