



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Phenomenon of Politeness in Pashto Language and Culture: An Exploratory Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

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This Study explores the expression of politeness in the Pashto Language. To this end, the researchers collected data from the respondents of the Pashto Language through a questionnaire of the open role play situations of requesting and apologizing. The questionnaire was adopted from Reiter's Study (2000) and it was also translated into Pashto for the respondents of the Pashto language. The questionnaire consisted of 24 role play situations (12 requests and 12 apologies) and the performance of the role plays in each set of the questionnaire took from 45 to 50 minutes. Ten students each from Peshawar University, University of Malakand, Islamia College University, Peshawar, Swat University, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal and from a Post Graduate college, Swat, were taken as respondents for this research study. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) Analytical framework and coding scheme were applied for the analysis of the data. The results show that politeness exists in the Pashto language. Thus, the results have shown further that negative politeness and positive politeness have been considered as a crux for dissociation and association in the Pashto language.

**Introduction**

Language is considered as an effective tool for communication. It is also used for promoting social relationships among human beings. It is impossible for humans to express their feelings, willingness and opinions without language and such an expression for their daily and routine affairs takes place with the help of linguistic process. However, for meaning and interaction, there is always a need of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies that assist the interlocutors for making their speech more polite, hearer friendly and smoother. As Brown & Levinson (1978) say that there are such strategies which make the verbal interchanges like requesting, offering, criticizing and complaining etc. smoother and ready to accept without

offending others. So such speech which is made through smoother and polite strategies ensures an interactive and successful speech. In short, Politeness means that both the speaker and the hearer have to abide by certain rules and strategies to avoid face-threatening in the interaction.

The concept of being polite is difficult and it may vary from culture to culture and from language to language. It is, therefore, difficult to take the concept of politeness independently because it depends on certain specific social and cultural norms. The aim of language should, therefore be made in perfect accord with the setting of that particular community. Mostly, the important features of the social context where the speech is spoken are; the context of the person spoken to, and especially the role relationships and the relative position of the participants in a given spoken discourse (Grundy, 1995).

Further, being polite means to conform strictly to the specific social and cultural norms of that society and in accordance to these specific social and cultural norms, a speaker or hearer's politeness and impoliteness are judged. The speakers and hearers use the strategies of politeness for a smooth, better and an effective communication and these strategies also develop a harmonious interpersonal communication among the interlocutors.

Brown & Levinson's concept of Politeness (1978) is used widely to check the source of substantial involvement in language study. They say that there are certain precise parallels that are used in different languages to identify politeness. Brown & Levinson (1978) even claim universality for their politeness theory and its applicability to all the languages of the world.

Lyons (1981) state that human beings are homo loquens (talking animals) and they, therefore, want to know a way of behaving towards others and also to know how others behave in the wide range of social situations. The speaking of a language does not only convey information but the words also leave an effect on the hearer or addressee. If we speak inappropriately and the content of our message is very clear, we may still be misinterpreted. So, a crucial stage comes in the human interaction when people become concerned how to keep a good relationship, how to avoid imposing and also to turn over the other person some choice in the topic being discussed (Lakoff, 1973).

## **Literature Review**

In human speech and conversation, normally, the particular specifics are not remembered but an overall impression of the person and of the conversation are remembered. The things that are normally remembered about the conversation are whether the interlocutors were cooperative, friendly and polite or they were standoffish or rude during their conversation. Even sometimes, it is strongly assumed that the meaning of another person's view or intent is correctly interpreted but it may not be always true. There are also some other sociopragmatic factors that are needed for understanding the right intent of the other person. Human beings are

not born with politeness but it comes as a result of socialization process in a certain given speech and linguistic community. Thus, politeness evolves as a result of ethnic and historical construction. So the word, 'Polite' means smoothness and refinement in conversation, but the exact etymology of the word polite or politeness is not known.

### **Politeness as a Social or Individual Entity**

The concept of politeness is linked to the very picture of the society where the act of politeness or polite behavior is expressed by the individuals. Such individual acts of politeness in a certain society are determined as per a standard which is known to the interlocutors or even to a third person who is considered as a part of the interaction. Thus, politeness is not something which is born naturally, but it is a part of the socialization, based on some mutually agreed, shared and developed relationship among the interlocutors. The level of politeness is different from individual to individual within the same mutual groups, but it is within the mutually shared standard and criterion of that certain communicating group.

### **Politeness across Cultures**

Thomas (1995) states that there are many scholars whose interest lie in politeness. Politeness is a pragmatic concept, but in pragmatics, concepts and definitions vary and change, so is the case with the term, politeness. Apparently, the term politeness seems easy to define and easy to understand, but it is not the case. It is highly problematic and not easily definable. Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992, p. 3) state the indefinability of the term in following ways. According to Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki and Ogino (1986) politeness is a constraint on human interaction but Sifianou (1989) finds a set of social values. Watts (2003) finds it linked to impoliteness and similarly Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987), Fraser and Nolen (1981) and Leech (1981) are one on it with an iota of friction.

The concepts of the Western scholars are mostly specific to the western cultures but in the oriental cultures the concept of politeness is different. Finally, the term politeness may refer to some communication strategies which are used and intended to maintain the mutual face and to achieve smoothness in communication for taking into account the human relationship. Politeness also makes opportunity in behavior but this appropriate behavior may vary from culture to culture and from situation to situation. However, Fraser (1990) finds four different perspectives and approaches about politeness. These four different approaches of politeness are the Social-norm view, the conversational-maxim view, the face saving view and the conversational-contract view.

### **Material and Methods**

This research study aimed at finding out the expression of politeness in Pashto language by adopting a questionnaire of open role play situations from

Reiter's (2000) book, "Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay: A Contrastive Study of Requests and Apologies". Two Speech Acts, requests and apologies along with their strategies were taken to measure the existence of politeness phenomenon in the Pashto language.

Speech acts were used because they were face threatening acts in which the Hearer (H) would find an impingement upon his freedom of action and the speaker might use them with hesitation in making a request with a fear of losing his face. Therefore, due to the fear of face loss, the speaker tried to use a great variety of strategies, including the politeness for the granting of the requests. Apologies were also taken as they enabled a speaker to understand that some social norms were broken or violated for which he/she was held responsible. An apology had also an involvement of the face loss for the speaker and a support for the hearer. The reason of taking both the speech acts was to measure the cross cultural phenomenon of Politeness. Data from Pashto Language came through an adopted and translated questionnaire of 12 the request role plays situations and 12 apology role-play situations. Then, the questionnaire of these role plays were given to the students of Jehanzeb College, University of Malakand, University of Swat; Abdul Wali Khan, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, Dir Upper, Islamia College University Peshawar and University of Peshawar. The students of these universities were doing their first degree in a subject which was not related to any course of language and linguistics. The age range of these students was from 20 to 25 or more and they were mostly from the department of the Management Studies, Law, Chemistry, Pharmacy Sociology, Geology, Forestry, Botany and Zoology.

The university students as respondents were taken as the target population in order to ensure the homogeneity in terms of their educational background, age, range, and their social class. The sample was representative of the student population at the university level because universities were the places where the students were the instances of the whole Pashtun communities and where the language of their communication was Pashto, and then again, it was here in these universities that almost the speakers of all dialects of Pashto language were studying.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the Data was done through the adopted coding scheme of Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) CSSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project). Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) analytical framework was mostly based on the presumption that request strategies in almost all languages have three major levels of directness: direct, conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect. Moreover, Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) analytical coding framework was further based on a ten point scale that was to measure the level of directness, indirectness and non-conventional indirectness.

## Results and Discussion

## Distribution of the Main Request Strategy types in Twelve Situations

Target Request	Strategy Type	PL	PL %
Request 1 "Borrowing of Book"	I	3	20%
	CI	9	60%
	N-CI	3	20%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request II "Asking for time off"	I	2	13.33%
	CI	8	53.33%
	N-CI	5	33.33%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>99.99%</b>
Request III "Minding the phone"	I	1	6.67%
	CI	13	86.67%
	N-CI	1	6.67%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request IV "Asking for direction"	I	3	20%
	CI	8	53.33%
	N-CI	4	26.67%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request V "asking for lift"	I	2	13.33%
	CI	7	46.67%
	N-CI	6	40%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request VI "Asking for Car borrowing"	I	3	20%
	CI	9	60%
	N-CI	3	20%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request VII "Canceling or postponing the holiday"	I	3	20%
	CI	6	40%
	N-CI	6	40%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Request VIII "Asking for typing letters"	I	3	20%
	CI	6	40%
	N-CI	3	20%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>80%</b>
Request IX "Borrowing house"	I	2	13.33%
	CI	8	53.33%
	N-CI	5	33.33%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>99.99%</b>
Request X "Swapping seats"	I	1	6.67%
	CI	9	60%
	N-CI	5	33.33%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Request XI "Asking for loan"	I	2	13.33%
	CI	5	33.33%
	N-CI	8	53.33%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>99.99%</b>
Request XII "Borrowing computer"	I	3	20%
	CI	8	53.33%
	N-CI	4	26.67%
No of Respondents	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **The Pashto Language**

The table above shows that lower incidence of the Impositive strategy in Pashto Language was noted in R 3 and in R 10 (6.67% each) and it was just 13.33% each in R 2, R 5, and in R 9. In the role plays of R 5 and in R 10, the participants are not known to each other, but in R 2 and R 3, they are familiar to one another. It is clear that the more closer the speakers or the interlocutors are, the more direct form of their request would be. As it has been noted by Brown and Levinson (1987), that the fear of losing face takes place when on record request is asked for and then, such a request would be denied.

The data show that Pashto speakers used almost all the strategies. The use of I, CI, and NCI were used in various degrees by them. The Pashto speakers also used consistently CI but its frequency was less than the other factors of Impositive and NCI. Basically, in CI and NCI an opportunity is given to the addressee to volunteer himself / herself to understand the request through any hint or clue. Thus, in such CI and NCI strategies, there is less possibility of imposition upon the addressee and in such requests, the hearer would have the pleasure to offer for the speaker's needs. Regarding such phenomenon, Brown and Gilman (1989) state that Off-record strategies (CI and NCI) are the mixed strategies that relate to both the positive and negative politeness.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the data show that respondents from the Pashto linguistic culture made their requests as per their social distance. It means that the smaller the social distance between the addressor (Speaker) and the addressee (Hearer), the more direct and intimate strategy would be used among the interlocutors.

After the analysis of the data of the open role plays of 12 requests an evaluation of the data as per the social variables of imposition, distance and power is given. The variables had an impact on the requesting behaviour of the respondents. The gist of the analysis of the social variables in Pashto language is given in the following:

- The social power and social distance had an impact on the Pashto speakers. The pattern and mode of their requests were motivated by these variables.

- Even, though the social power and social distance variables were with consideration in the context of the Pashto language but the considerations of closeness and intensity were still more important. The variables of social distance and social status (power) were considered in Pashto language but almost all forms of requests (directness, indirectness, imposition) were observed in the context of the Pashto language but Pashto language respondents found indirectness and non- conventional indirectness less and the rest of the strategies were more dominant

The analysis of the request patterns shows that these requests forms were used in the Pashto linguistic culture. The respondents of the Pashto language had a tendency towards the imposition in their requests but they also made use of CI and NCI in their requests. It was further shown that the Pashto speakers used directness or Impositive more without losing their face. It means that the appropriacy of such directness was the demand of the situation in their close circuit and it was also the expected behaviour on the part of the Pashto speakers in such a close circuit context

As far as the NCI requests were concerned, respondents of the Pashto language did not use them frequently. The Pashto respondents tried to reduce the level of coerciveness at the time of their request but had a different degree of tolerance for intrusion and interference.

The considerations for privacy and reserve behavior were different in the Pashto language. The use of the degree of Impositive or directness was made in the Pashto linguistic culture but its level of orientation and degree were different in Pashto language. In simple words, the Pashto respondents did not bother much about the consideration of the negative politeness.

The results of this study further show that not a higher level of indirectness in the request pattern was not noticed in the Pashto but the Pashto speakers made use of CI and internal and external devices but its frequency was less and not abundantly noticeable. The Pashto respondents showed their preference for the less tentative request patterns. They were also aware of their relationship to other speakers.

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