

Politeness, Conversational Gender and regional differences: the case of Algerian Students in Yarmouk University (Jordan).

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Abstract:

The present study aims to explore politeness among the Algerian students at Yarmouk University, by focusing on regional and gender differences. 20 Algerian males and 20 females, who won a scholarship to commence their study on Jordan, participated in this study. The data collected through a written questionnaire. The questions are designed to discover how Algerian males and females from different region differ in their use of polite expressions. The findings indicate that there is a significant difference in the use of negative and positive politeness across gender and region. The results show that the social distance and imposition determine the strategy of applying politeness within an interaction with people. Thus, the greater the distance and the imposition, the lesser intimation are the participants.

Key words: *Politeness- Social distance- Negative Politeness- Positive Politeness -Gender*

الملخص :

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى استطلاع الاختلاف في التعبير التهذيبي بين الطلاب الجزائريين في جامعة اليرموك من خلال التركيز على الاختلافات الإقليمية والجنسية. وشارك في هذه الدراسة 20 طالبا جزائريا و 20 طالبة تحصلوا على منحة دراسية لاستكمال دراستهم في الأردن. تم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان مكتوب. صممت هذه الاسئلة لمعرفة مدى الاختلاف بين الذكور و الاناث من مناطق مختلفة في استخدام التعبيرات المهذبة. تشير النتائج إلى وجود فرق كبير في استخدام التعبير المهذب السلبي والإيجابي من حيث الجنس والمنطقة. وتبين النتائج أن البعد الاجتماعي والفرض يحددان استراتيجية تطبيق السلوك في التفاعل مع الناس. وهكذا، كلما زادت المسافة والفرض، كلما قل التخوف من قبل المشاركين في هذا البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التعبير المهذب - البعد الاجتماعي - التعبير المهذب السلبي - التعبير الإيجابي - الجنس

1.Introduction and Theoretical Background

Language is very important in human beings' lives because through language people can communicate. Being polite is very important in the Arab world. Being polite in social settings or displaying appropriate etiquette in different ways depending on our cultural backgrounds or the culture

we happen to be in at the time may function as a concept of politeness. People who are modest, respectful, tactful etc... are often referred to as those who display politeness (Chen, 1996, 54).

Many languages have specific means to show politeness; deference, respect, or recognition of the social status of the speaker and the hearer. The Algerian people expressed politeness through respectful attitudes depending on who the hearer is, and how close the relationship between them and the hearer is. In other words, a polite conversation is one that takes into account such factors as age, gender and social contexts. Culturally, polite behaviors include handshaking, hugging, eye contact and voice tones.

a- Definition of politeness:

Robin Lakoff defines politeness “*as a system to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange*” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 287). The role of politeness is to maintain a harmonious relation between the participants during the interaction. To achieve this goal, she introduces three politeness rules; don't impose, give option, and make a good feeling.

Leech defines politeness as “*a form of behavior that establishes and maintains comity*”, that is, the ability of participants in a social interaction to engage in interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. (Watts, 2003:123). Watt (2003) defined politeness as the ability to please others external actions. Moreover, Foley referred to politeness as “*a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction*”. (1997: 145)

Thomas (1995: 158) states that politeness is used to create social balance in the social interaction. Based on this idea, she (1995: 150) defines politeness as “*a genuine desire to be pleasant to others, or as the underlying motivation for an individual's linguistic behavior,*” She relates politeness to sociolinguistics arguing that it has social implications on the interaction, such as promoting and maintaining social relationships.

b- Politeness and Gender:

The relation between *Gender* and *Politeness* has the interest of many sociolinguistics. Speaking of gender, Eckert and Mc Connell- Ginet argue that “*gender is not a part of one's essence, what one is, but an achievement, what one does. Gender is a set of practices through which people construct and claim identities; not simply a system of categorizing people or establishing identities, but also managing a social relation* (Eckert, 2003:305).

According to Segal (2004:03) “gender is taken to refer to a culturally based complex of norms, values and behaviors that a particular culture assigns to one biological sex or another”. Gender role according to Holmes defines as “the outward manifestation of personality that reflects the gender identity (1995: 318).

Thus, we can notice that gender refers to roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitude and likely behaviors of both men and women (femininity and masculinity).

2.Review of Related Literature

In the area of politeness research, the study on politeness and its relation to gender of the speakers has attracted a large amount of attention .There are a lot of studies concerning politeness and gender have shown that women are more likely to use politeness formulas than men.

Penelope Brown in her work on the analysis of politeness amongst a Mayan community argues that women in general are more polite than. She states that in most cultures women among women may have a tendency to use more elaborated positive politeness strategies than men do among men’ (Brown, 1989: 190). Brown asserts that in this Mayan community which is very clearly sex-differentiated, women use more strengthening particles when speaking to women (and to men) and they also use more weakening particles when speaking to men. Women speaking to women use more particles in general than men use to men.

In discussing the positive politeness strategies which New Zealand women use, Holmes argues that women both give and receive more compliments than do men. Holmes states; for the women, being negatively polite involves avoiding disagreement. Being positively polite is being friendly, and this involves confirming, agreeing and encouraging the contribution of others. She suggests that women are more likely to use positive politeness than men; thus for her women’s utterances show evidence of concern for the feelings of the people they are talking to more often and more explicitly than men’s do (Holmes, 1995:6).

According to Lakoff, the speech of women seems more polite than men’s. She discussed various aspects of women’s speech and also the way that woman are socially constructed to speak the way that they do (2004, 25). She found that women are more polite than men in their speech. Lakoff (1977: 101) proposed that women’s language can be differentiated from men’s by looking into a few aspects such as

the use of hedges and tag questions, the avoidance of coarse language through super-polite form such as “Would you mind...”, “...if it is not too much to ask”, “Is it ok if...?” and etc. They also apologize more and prefer using indirect request(s) when asking for help. She also states that the men’s speech is characterized by the use of direct, unmitigated statement, and interpretation. Furthermore, women tend to use the standard language more than men do.

Hefner also explored the relation between the status of Javanese Women and the politeness and formality of their speeches. The author claimed that speech patterns are related to some socio-structural variables: patterns of socialization, models of appropriate male and female linguistic behavior and men’s and women’s social rules. Hefner, by considering these variables in the behaviors of Javanese women came to this conclusion that women speak more politely than men as an expression of their secondary status (Hang, 2009, 21).

3.Methodology:

In this study the quantitative method was required because the researcher used the questionnaire to collect numerical data to answer the questions of the study. In fact, the general advantages of using a questionnaire is that it can be distributed and collected easily, and assure the researcher that the information can be easily interpreted and translated.

3.1. Purpose of the study:

The notion of politeness is a broad and complicated one with numerous theories and approaches, and it is socially determined. It is linked with social differentiations, with making appropriate choices which are not the same for all interlocutors and situations .In other words, the evaluation of what is perceived as polite or impolite may vary in different conditions and contexts. The aim of this study is to raise questions about our way to communicate and how different social variables affect the occurrence of politeness expressions in Algerian speech. The social variables chosen for this study are gender and region.

3.2. Questions of the study: the aim of the study is to answer the following questions:

- 1- Is there any difference between females and males students’ speech?
- 2- Is there any relationship between the gender of the listeners and the politeness behaviors of the speakers?

3- Do regional differences affect Algerians students' way of using politeness?

3.3. Research Objectives:

- a- To identify the linguistic feature differences used in men and women speech.
- b- To find out the most preferred topics of conversation by men and women.
- c. To find out which gender used more polite linguistic forms.

3.4. Participants:

The participants in this research project are 40 young men and women from Algerian society (20 males and 20 females), who won a scholarship and recently came to Jordan to commence their graduate studies. They were aged between 23 and 26. They are almost having the same educational level. Ten participants (10 males and 10 females) are from the South and the rest are from the North. The participants' major fields of study were varied. Slightly less than half of them were majoring in humanities and social sciences. The remainders were majoring in Engineering and Medical Science.

3.5. Data Collection:

The questionnaire has two forms, one for males and the other for females. It consists of four major parts; the first part consists of three questions asked for males and females students to examine their use of polite expressions within family. Moreover the second and third parts register the responses of the students with strangers and friends. Finally the fourth part is asked to males and how they deal with females and vice versa. The situations vary according to a number of social variables: The variables of social distance, power and the degree of seriousness of the imposition.

3.6. Data Analysis:

To guarantee the reliability and validity of the research paper's analysis, a statistical method is used to analyze the results. First, questionnaire papers are collected. Second, answers to each question are classified into those produced by females and those produced by males. Third, a statistical formula is used to calculate the significance differences. Finally, analysis and discussions are made based on the results of statistical analysis to show the difference between males and females' politeness. To take reliability of the research paper into account, the following factors are carefully considered when the questionnaire is

designed; sex female (F) or male (M), language used in the experiment (Algerian dialect) and region of the participants South (S) or North (N). For the purpose of discussion, the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

4.Results and discussions:

a- Results

This research project aims to identify the ways in which Algerian males and females express politeness in their speech. The collected data are carefully examined and analyzed by using percentages.

To tackle the results of the first questionnaire's part, males and females while dealing with family, table 1 presents the results:

Sex	region	P politeness	N politeness
Males	north	8.09%	4.28%
Males	south	3.82%	1%
females	north	6.77%	9.03%
females	south	3.08%	1.23%

Table1: politeness' percentages of the participants when dealing with family

From table1 we can notice that the participants use different politeness expressions with different percentages. The researcher finds out that males from the North express 8.90% P politeness and 4.28% N polite expressions, while females from the North express 6.77% P politeness and 9.03% N polite expressions. On the other hand, males from the South express 3.82% P politeness and 1% of N politeness, while females express 3.08% P politeness and 1.23% N politeness.

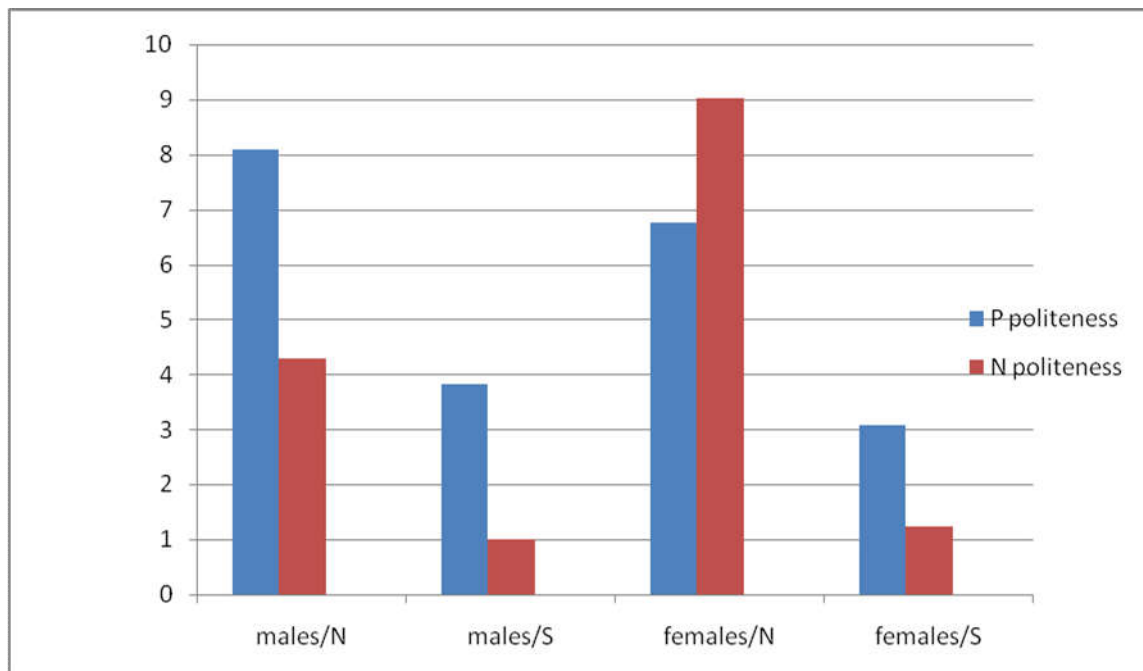


Figure 1: Males and Females from both regions while dealing with family.

The analysis of the second part of the questionnaire where males and females deal with strangers and close friends are shown in Table 2 below:

Sex	Region	strangers	N	P	Close friend	N	P
Males	North	M	13.33%	5.23%	M	8.09%	12.85%
males	South	M	3.18	2.11%	M	1.63%	5.09%
females	North	F	24.29%	4.51%	F	11.29%	10.16%
females	South	F	5.55%	1.23%	F	2.46%	3.70%

Table2: politeness' percentages of the participants when dealing with strangers and friends.

In this table, it is found that the overall P politeness by males from the north is 5.23% while N politeness is 13.33%. Furthermore, females from the north used P politeness with 4.51% and N politeness

with 24.29%. The overall P politeness by South males is 2.11% and N politeness is 3.18%. Concerning South females the P politeness is 1.23% while N politeness is 5.55%. We can notice from those percentages that, females from both regions used negative politeness expressions with strangers, Friends, and within family more than males from both regions.

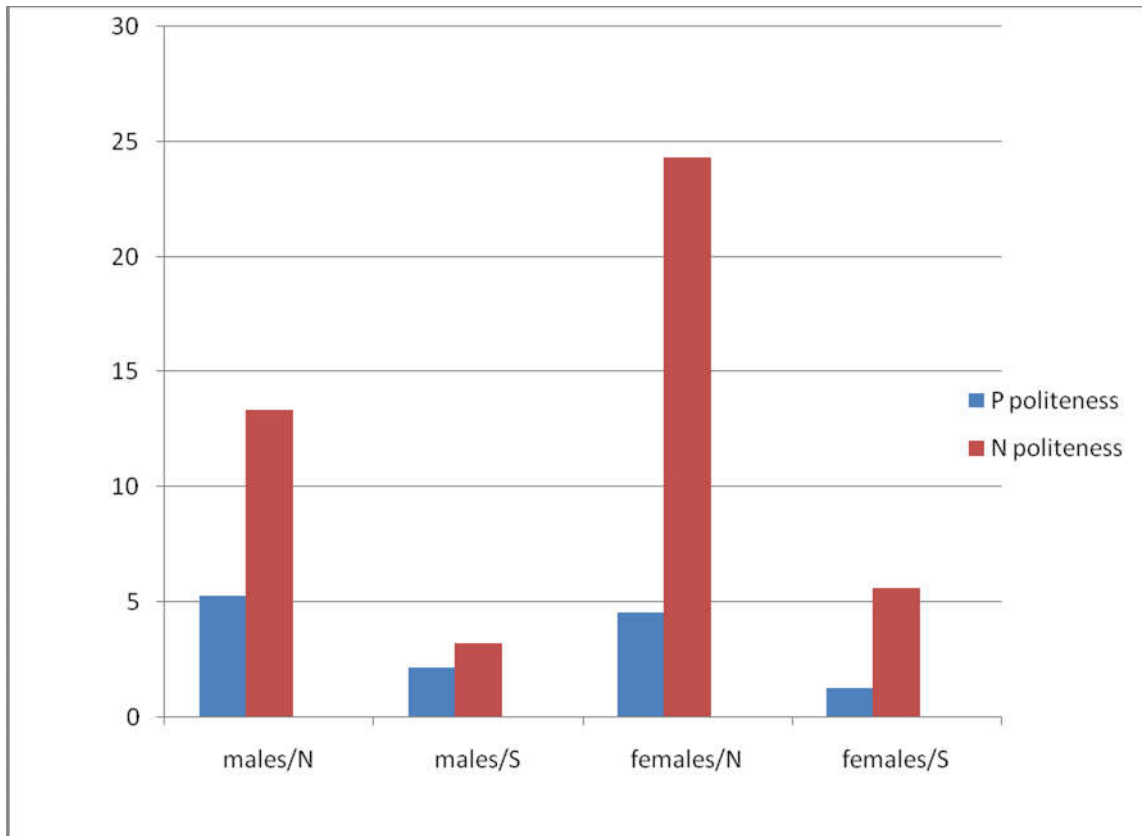


Figure 2: Males and Females from both regions while dealing with strangers.

The results of the last part of the questionnaire; how do males deal with females and vice versa, are presented in Table 3 below:

Sex	region	N politeness	P politeness
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Males	north	11.90%	3.80%
Males	south	2.54%	1.27%
Females	north	19.77%	0%
Females	south	14.93%	0%

Table3: politeness' percentages of the participants when dealing with the other sex

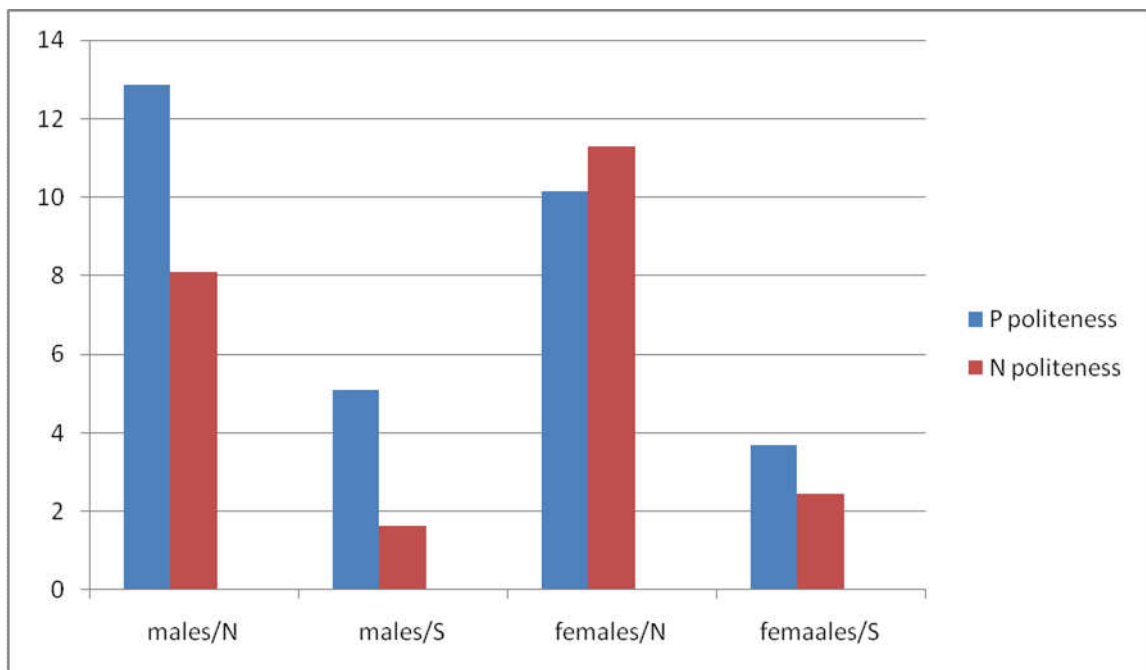


Figure 3: Males and Females from both regions while dealing with close friends.

This table shows that males from the north used 3.80% P polite expression and 11.90% N politeness when talking to females. On the other hand, males from the south used 1.27% P polite expressions and 2.54% N politeness. Concerning females, Northerners used 19.77% N politeness and 0% positive one, while Southerners used 14.93% N politeness and 0% P polite expressions when talking to males. Finally, talking totally about different genders, 14.44% of men use polite expressions when talking to females, while 34.70% of women use polite forms when talking to males. Therefore, men use polite expressions less than women when they deal with different gender.

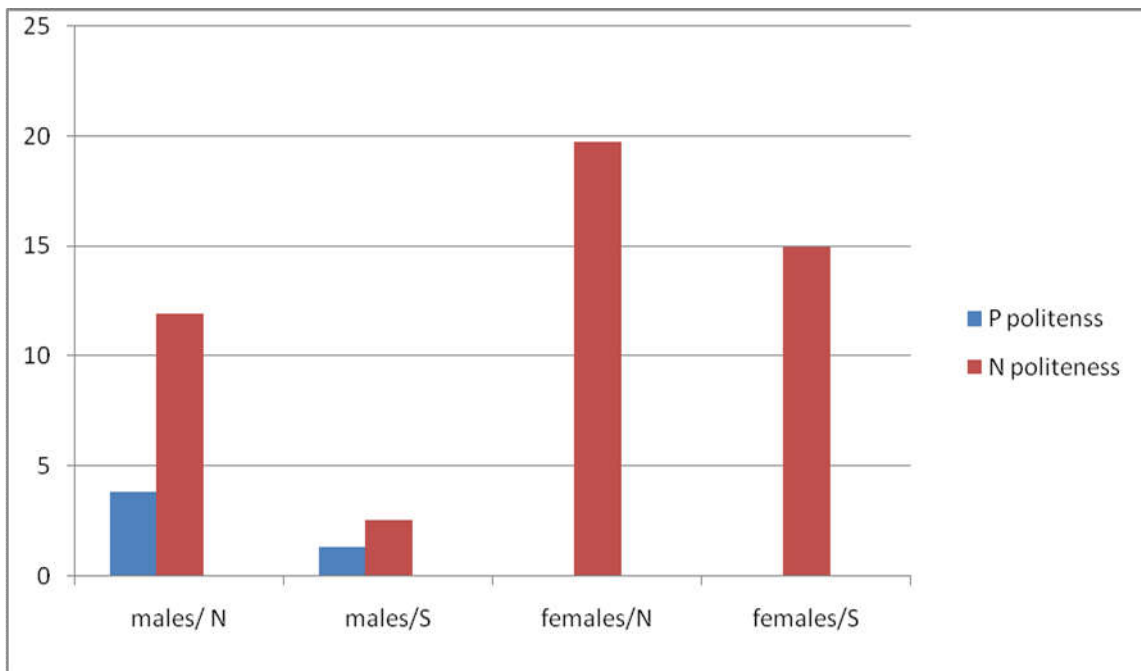


Figure 4: Males and Females from both regions while dealing with the other sex.

b- Discussion:

The discussion of the data will be presented in two parts. In the first part, comparisons are made across gender, i.e. between males and females from the north as well as males and females from the south. The second part deals with the comparison across region, i.e. here comparisons are made between both genders from the north and both genders from the south.

1- Gender differences:

In the findings of situation one, the relationship between the interlocutors is unequal social position. The speaker is in a higher position and the hearer is in a lower position. In this situation, both groups prefer to use positive politeness, but male speakers from both regions used it more. The preference for direct speech in this situation seems to be an instance of solidarity politeness strategies and shows that being direct in this situation expresses camaraderie and is consistent with cultural norms when the speaker has a high position.

Thus, we can notice that male speakers of Algerian society employed high levels of directness without the fear of losing 'face' because the fact that it is the expected behavior in such situations. They used direct expressions and imperative utterances such as terms of address '*ya mohamad*' (Mohammed)

and '*rou7 darwak*' (go now) to expressed involvement or camaraderie between interlocutors and to weaken the illocutionary force of the upcoming direct requests. The females speakers used indirect expressions utterances such as '*min fadlek*' (please), '*ila tab3'i 5tek*' (if you love your sister) to soften their speech and make it more polite.

In the findings of situation two, the speakers do not have a power but there is a high distance between the speaker and hearer in this situation. The preference for negative and positive politeness with softeners in this situation seems to be the marker of respectable of the hearer and to help negotiation of request and to smooth the conversational interaction.

Both males and females who participated in this study used various kinds of polite expressions to soften their speech and make it very polite when addressing their teacher such as terms of address '*ya ostad*' (teacher) to express their respectable for their teacher and to make their request more polite. Also the speakers used expressions such as: apologizing '*Law samaht*' (excuse me), '*min fadlak*' (please), '*3fwan ya ostad*' (sorry my teacher), and '*ida takarramt*' (If you be generous enough). Also the speakers used some Islamic expressions in this situation such as '*Allah yerda 3lik*' (Allah is pleased with you). Therefore, the speakers preferred to employ negative politeness to protect their face and hearer's face.

Although both groups used negative politeness, females used negative expressions more than males do such as '*mumkin*' (can), '*hal taastti*' (can able), '*bi immkanak*' (can you) as a marker of indirectness politeness strategies.

Concerning the findings of situation three, the speaker and the hearer see themselves as being in equal social position. There is no feeling of either a power difference or distance between them. Both males and females speakers prefer to use positive politeness more than negative one, because in Algerian culture positive politeness are common and favored among close friends. Positive politeness is classified in Algerian society as solidarity politeness strategies because it implies that the speaker assumes only a small social distance between him/herself and the interlocutor. The respondents of this study employed high levels of directness without the fear of losing 'face' because it is the expected behavior in such situations.

However the females who participated in this study used not only positive politeness but also negative one to soften their speech and make it very polite when addressing their friends such as terms of address '*ya a5t-i*' (my sister) to express their respectable for their friend. They also use some Islamic

expressions in this situation such as ‘*allah ya7fdak*’ (Allah preserves you) and ‘*Allah ywaf9ek* (Allah helps you).

The findings of situation four reveal that gender appeared to be an important variable that affect the choice of politeness expressions. In female-male interactions, the results reveal that females used a wide range of negative politeness strategies. Modifications such as *min fadlak* (please), *Law samaht* (excuse me), *Allah ybarak fik* (Allah blesses you), *3fwan* (sorry), are employed much frequently in the data examined to play the role of negative politeness markers. In Algerian society and culture, women have special circumstances because of cultural and religious values and they have to take care for their words when they speak with males.

In male-female interactions, the speakers used some negative politeness expressed by using different expressions such as ‘*mumkin*’ (can), ‘*T9adri*’ (to be able to), ‘*Ida Habiti*’ (if you want). The males’ speakers used those expressions as a marker of negative politeness strategies to express deferential politeness when addressing a person of distant relationship.

The speakers and hearers in this situation see themselves at the same social level with no interlocutor exerting power over the other, but with a distant relationship. As a result, both interlocutors may use independence strategies, including expressions that minimize threat to avoid the risk of losing face. Also the choice of politeness expressions strategies in male-female and female-male interactions depend on the culture of society and they are different from culture to another.

These findings agree with Mohamed Taha Ali Hassan who suggests that females tend to use more politeness strategies than males at the university level in the Malaysian context. He states that women avoid straightforward statements due to their inferior positions in the society. Additionally, the use of tag questions and indirect requests as politeness strategies is more frequent among females, and they mainly use them as negative strategies. He found that, when talking to their family and relatives, women used 81.30% negative politeness while men used only 43.91 %.(2002: 53-60)

2- Regional differences:

To differentiate between both genders from north and south, the figure below indicates frequencies and percentages of politeness strategies used by each group:

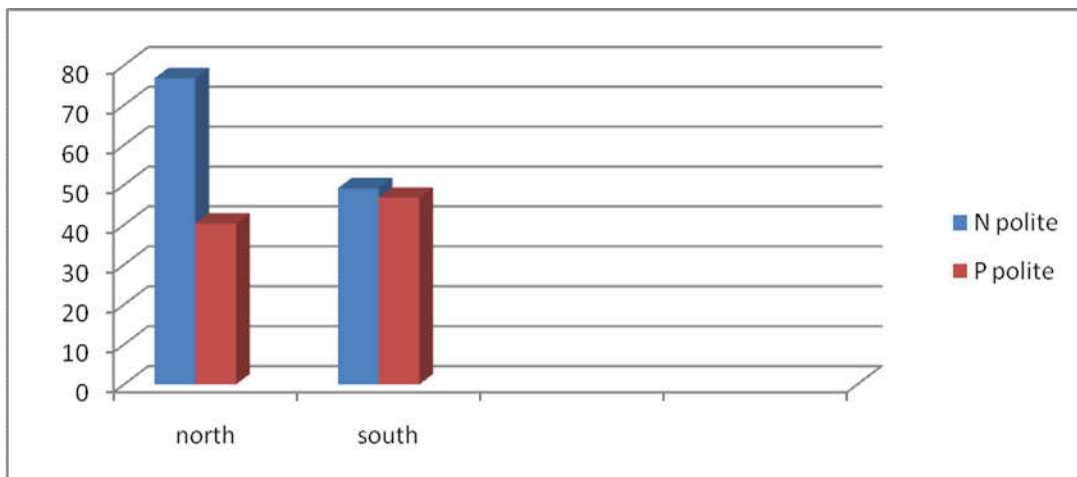


Figure1: Politeness strategies produced in North and South by males and females

When comparing the North and the South use of politeness, some variation is seen between them. We can notice that the use of negative and positive politeness strategies differ from region to another. Both North male and female Algerian speakers used negative politeness in a high frequency to mitigate their speech, they are also more likely to apologize and express thanks. On the other hand, the South findings show that male and female speakers employed high levels of positive politeness without taking into account the differences between the different situations, they used it in the majority of contexts without the fear of losing 'face'. The results show that Southerners are more direct than Northerners.

These results agree with Sophana Srichanpa's study on the pattern of Vietnamese polite expressions. He represented three region; Ha Noi (North), Hue (Central) and Hochi Minh city (South), in an attempt to capture the whole picture of Vietnamese politeness and to compare similarities and differences. As a result, the researcher indicated that in the North, the way of using negative politeness strategies are more constant than in the Central and South. He stated that the North used polite expressions such as: *ã* (dear), they also used the word *Đa* (yes) at the beginning of the sentence to express respect and politeness. (2008: 121-127).

5. Conclusion:

By analyzing the results of the questionnaire we come to the conclusions that, the researcher finds out that females use negative politeness more than males do, more specifically, females are more polite than males, and their speech is characterized by more elaborate and indirect requests, whereas males are more direct and straightforward.

Females used negative politeness more than males for several reasons; Firstly, it appears that men usually use the imperative to reflect impoliteness that expresses power over women and this is attributed to men inability to show affection or tenderness in their dealings with women. For example, wanting his sister to hand him the salt shaker, a male sitting on a dining table would say "Give me that salt shaker," but this male's sister, in the same situation, would say "Hand me that salt shaker, please" or "Could you pass that salt shaker?" In fact, imperative structures signify power; and because males possess more authority than females do, it is normal to find males use imperative more frequently than female.

Secondly, males use positive politeness strategies much more than females not simply because they are created to do so, but because our society and culture expect them to hold positions of power and to use it this way. Therefore, males utilize less negative polite expressions in both formal and informal context. Finally, females concern with making connection between people by using negative polite expressions; however, males concern with autonomy and detachment.

From the findings above we can notice that, considerable differences in politeness strategies exist even within one single society. Within the Algerian context, politeness differences are divided between the North and the South, what is considered as negative politeness within one group, can be viewed as positive by others. This means that even within one language community, politeness is highly subjective and is subjected to a person's socialization.

Appendix

Questionnaire Form

I- Part one:

- 1- If you wanted to ask your sister to prepare dinner for you, what expression would you use?
- 2- You ask your mother to wake you early for your job. What would you say?
- 3- You want your younger brother to bring the car keys. What would you say?

II- Part two

- 1- You want to ask your teacher to give you the permission to go out. How would you ask him/her to do so?
- 2- You want to make an interview with your teacher. You want to ask him some questions in few hours. What would you say?

- 3- You have got scholarship and you want to ask your teacher who taught you in the university to write you a recommendation letter. What would you say?

III- Part three:

- 1- You have missed an important class and you want to borrow your classmate's / close friend's note. What would you say?
- 2- You want borrow the computer of your classmate/ close friend. What would you say?
- 3- You want to ask your neighbor /close friend to help you repairing your car. What would you say?
- 4- You went with your classmate /close friend to stationary to buy some books, but you forgot your wallet at your home, so you want to borrow some money from your friend. What would you say?
- 5- You want your neighbor / close friend to drive you to the market because your car has broken and you want to buy some fruit for your family. What would you say?

IV- Part four

- 1- If you wanted to ask your female / male classmate to give you the lecture lesson, what expression would you use?
- 2- You want to ask the female/ male secretary department to give your exam report card. What would you say to ask her/ him to do so?
- 3- You are in the bus and it's too hot. You want a male/ female close to the window to open it. What would you say?

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