

# A Cross-cultural Study of Speech Act Realisations in Arabic and English: A cultural-scripts approach

## دراسة ثقافية مقارنة لإنجاز الأفعال الكلامية في العربية والإنجليزية: مقاربة النصوص الثقافية الوصفية

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### Abstract

The present article reports and describes the findings of a cross-cultural pragmatic study vis-à-vis the realisation of two main speech acts, requests and apologies, in Arabic and English. Natural Semantic Metalanguage and Cultural Scripts have been employed for this purpose. This approach makes use of a set of cultural-neutral universal words/expressions called Semantic Primes which can be transposed across languages/cultures without posing problems of translatability. The usefulness of this approach lies in the fact that it describes norms, behaviours and nuances of cultural meaning in a particular language/culture in a way which is accessible to both the insider and the outsider. The ultimate goal behind the application of such metalanguage is to reduce cultural misunderstandings and conflicts.

**Key words:** *Speech acts, Arabic, English, Natural semantic metalanguage, Cultural scripts, Semantic primes.*

### Résumé :

Cet article rapporte et décrit les résultats d'une étude transculturelle pragmatique vis-à-vis la production de deux plus fréquents actes de parole, requête et excuse, en arabe et en anglais. On a employé la 'Métalangue Sémantique Naturelle' et les 'Scripts Culturels' tant qu'un outil descriptif. Cette approche dépend notamment de l'utilisation d'une gamme des mots/expressions universelles et culturellement neutres, soi-disant, 'Primitifs Sémantiques' qui sont transférables d'une langue/culture à une autre sans l'inquiétude de problèmes de traduction. L'avantage de cette approche est de permettre à décrire les comportements, les normes et les nuances des sens culturels dans une langue/culture particulière d'une façon claire et rigoureuse au-delà des frontières linguistiques et culturelles. Le but ultime de telle métalangue est de minimiser les malentendus et les conflits culturels.

**Mots clés:** *actes de parole, arabe, anglais, la Métalangue sémantique naturelle, Scripts culturels, Primitifs sémantiques.*

### الملخص

هذا المقال يسلط الضوء على نتائج دراسة ثقافية مقارنة في مجال التداولية لكيفيات التماس طلب وكيفيات الاعتذار في اللغة/الثقافة العربية والانجليزية، وهما اثنان من أهم أفعال الكلام. ولهذا الغرض، تم توظيف اللغة الوصفية الدلالية والنصوص/العبارات الثقافية. هذه المقاربة تركز على استعمال مجموعة من الألفاظ والعبارات الكلية والتي لا تحمل أي دلالات ثقافية (تدعى البنيات الدلالية الأساسية). هذه البنيات الدلالية الأساسية تسمح بنقل المعاني الثقافية من لغة/ثقافة إلى أخرى من دون طرح مشكل معادلة المعاني وتكافئها. تكمن أهمية هذه المقاربة في القدرة على وصف الأساليب، السلوكيات والفروق الدقيقة للمعاني الثقافية في لغة/ثقافة معينة بأسلوب مُيسر لأصحاب هذه اللغة/الثقافة وللأجانب عنها كذلك. فالهدف الأسمى من وراء هذه اللغة الوصفية هو التقليل من مسببات سوء التفاهم والتعارض الناتج عن الفروق الثقافية.

**الكلمات الدالة :** الأفعال الكلامية، العربية، الإنجليزية، اللغة الوصفية الدلالية، النصوص/العبارات الثقافية، البنيات الدلالية الأساسية.

## Introduction

Our main concern in the present paper is to report and describe the most outstanding findings of a cross-cultural comparative study conducted earlier. This study has examined the production of requests and apologies in Arabic and English. Previously, the results have been interpreted in the light of individualism and collectivism/high-context and low-context dichotomies, politeness theory, conversational maxims and contrastive (cross-cultural) pragmatics research. Critiques targeted to such theories assume that culture-specific meanings cannot be captured by the ‘ethnocentric’ terminology (e.g. individual, collectivist, direct, indirect, polite, impolite, close, distant, high, low) employed by these fields for describing culture-related norms and behaviours (See 1.1.). In this perspective, the present article examines these findings from another point of view as conceptualised in the Natural Semantic Metalanguage theory and the Cultural-scripts approach.

This article is divided into two parts. The first one is theoretical and, in turn, has two sections. In the first section, we will deal with Natural Semantic Metalanguage and Cultural Scripts; what are they and what they are good for? In the second section, we will review a sample of cultural studies which have used Natural Semantic Metalanguage and Cultural Scripts to describe and explicate cultural meanings. The second part is a practical whereby we will employ the cultural-scripts approach so as to describe and explicate areas of cultural divergence in requests and apologies realised in Arabic and English.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. Natural semantic metalanguage and cultural scripts

Wierzbicka and colleagues laid the foundation to the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (henceforth NSM) theory (e.g. Bouguslawski, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1989, 1991 [2003]; Goddard, 189). The assumption underlying this theory is that there is a need for a language so as to present and explicate differences across cultures in a way that should be intelligible and at the same time accessible to the outsiders as well as members of the culture(s) under question (Wierzbicka, 1991 [2003]; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2004; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007, among others). Stating it differently, NSM focuses on ‘minimum vocabulary’ and ‘minigrammar’ which construct a crossroad where all languages meet. That is, they constitute a sort of ‘conceptual lingua franca’ across and within languages and cultures (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 109). This goal can be achieved by means of certain words and expressions which are ‘hypothetically’ universal (Wierzbicka, 1991 [2003]), cultural-neutral and, ideally, translatable to all languages (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007). These linguistic elements are labelled Semantic Primes (henceforth SPs) that can be defined as ‘a small set of basic concepts’ carried through linguistic exponents, words and word-like elements available in all languages and have universal characteristics (e.g. grammatical properties and patterns of combination) and which serve in explicating other words and concepts (ibid, p. 107-108). Added to SPs, other patterns like sayings, proverbs, frequent collocations, conversational routines, formulaic speech, discourse particles, interjections, terms of address and references also reflect cultural norms and values (ibid, p. 112). Table 1 displays SPs of English which are the results of accumulating research during the last decades.

Substantive:	I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHING/THING, BODY
Determiners:	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER
Quantifiers:	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MANY/MUCH
Evaluators:	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors:	BIG, SMALL
Mental/experiential predicates:	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech:	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events,	DO, HAPPEN
movement, contact:	MOVE, TOUCH
Location, existence,	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS/EXIST
possession, specification:	HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)
Life and death:	LIVE, DIE

Time:	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space:	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Location concepts:	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, augments:	VERY, MORE
Similarity:	LIKE/WAY

Exponents of primes can have other polysemic means which differ from a language to language—they can have combinatorial variants (allolexes). They can have different morpho-syntactic properties (including word-class) in different languages. They have well-specified syntactic combinatorial properties.

**Table 1: Semantic Primes: English Exponents (ibid, p. 106)**

Based on the above SPs, syntactic frames can be produced. For example, the syntactic frame of the verb ‘to do’ is as follows (ibid, p. 108):

DO: X does something

X does something to someone [patient]

X does something to someone with something

[patient + instrument]

Such syntactic frames help researchers mould cultural values of speech practices in the so-called Cultural Scripts (henceforth CSs). This technique articulated cultural norms, values and practices using the NSM of SPs as a medium of description (Wierzbicka, 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2004). To have a concrete example, the Malay concept *hormat* if rendered into English as respect or even via a list of words: respect, deference and proper politeness; the meaning of this cultural value is distorted as such presentation does not convey the culture-specific connotations (Goddard, 2000, cited in Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007, pp. 110-11). In this regard, framing cultural-dependent concepts by means of the language of CSs would help capture ‘small nuances of cultural meaning’ (ibid, p. 112). Furthermore, according to Wierzbicka, an attempt to capture culture-specific assumptions, for instance, directness as a way of speaking, in two cultures (let it be the Anglo-American and the Japanese) is hampered by the use of the words direct and indirect which fail to signal differences in the perception of directness as a cultural value (Wierzbicka, 1991[2003], pp. 91-95). Whereas, by means of CSs we can achieve that. In this respect, directness in Anglo-American English and Japanese are portrayed in [A] and [B] respectively:

[A] I think: I can say: ‘I want this’, ‘I think this’

I know: other people don’t have to want the same/think the same

No one can say: ‘I want you to want this’, ‘I want you to think this’

[One can say freely what he wants/thinks, but as long as he

acknowledges the other’s right to independence and personal

autonomy] (ibid, p. 91)

[B] I say: I would want something like this

I don’t want to say: ‘I want this’ [no-specific reference] (ibid, p.95)

Wierzbicka and Goddard (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1991[2003]; Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007) reacted to what they describe as a ‘universalist approach’ to cultural behaviours and styles studies: politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987), conversational maxims (Grice, 1975) and contrastive pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993). According to them, the issue this approach raises is one of terminology. They apply a totally-ethnocentric terms *like polite, formal, indirect, power, distance* which do not seem to have equivalents in other languages. In this respect, the CSs approach (‘pragmatic sister theory’ to NSM) stands as an alternative to the ethnocentric approach reflected in the type of the works cited above (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007, pp. 111). The authors reiterate that their CPs-based approach can help in solving ‘serious and often unrecognized’ problems in cultural studies which are monopolised by the ethnocentric terminology (ibid, p. 110).

To recapitulate, this approach provides linguistic evidence through using cultural keywords to describe speech practices in a way accessible to both the insider and the outsider. The founding fathers claim

that it can be useful for cross-cultural education and intercultural communication (Goddard, 2004) while NSM can be an auxiliary cultural-free language in international communication that serves to minimise cultural misunderstandings and conflicts (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 109). Moreover, this approach should play an explicit role in language learning and syllabi. As an example, in German textbooks out of 500 words only 40 SPs are presented. Surprisingly, simple primes like *like*, *the same*, *happen*, *there* do not appear at all (ibid, pp.109-110). This argument is in line with that of McCarthy stating that the core vocabulary can be ‘a survival kit’ for language learners in various situations during communication (1990:49, ibid, pp. 105-106).

### 1.2. Reviewing a sample of cultural-scripts-based studies

The present section is devoted to reviewing a sample of cultural studies which have adapted CSs-approach in their description/analysis of cultural norms and values. The studies selected are among the ones published in a special issue in Intercultural Pragmatics, namely, Ameka and Breedveld (2004), Ye (2004), Wong (2004) and Travis (2004). For an exhaustive bibliography on NSM, readers can consult this website (<http://www.une.edu.au/LCL/index.php>).

Ameka and Breedveld (2004) dealt with selected cultural behaviours in West Africa speech area. First, the use of the left hand in order to point to a person, to show a direction, to shake hands, to pass something to someone and alike is considered a taboo. The fact that the left hand is used in cleaning and ablutions makes it ‘wholesome and dirty.’ In case someone is obliged to use it, he/she should acknowledge this through certain expressions to signal the violation of the norms and seek the other’s excuse. In Ga language, for instance, one may say I give it to you with the left hand (p. 170). The taboo of the left hand use in West Africa can be represented via CSs as follows:

[C] [People think like this:]

When I am with other people

If I want to do something with my hands, it is bad if I do it with the left hand

If I do something with my left hand, people can think something like this about me:

“this person is a bad person”

If I have to do something with the left hand, it can be good if I can do it with my other hand at the same time

If I have to do something with the left hand, I have to say something about it to these people

I have to say it with some words

People know what words they can say at times like this (p. 170-171)

In addition, in West Africa, there is the practice of asking the permission for leaving through a genuine question and waiting for the response which can be either positive or negative. The permission is not required if the meeting is a mere coincidence, but it is a prerequisite in formal meetings in the case of traditional ceremonies like name-giving, marriage, funerals. As opposed to Western cultures (e.g. the Dutch), one signals his leaving while he/she is already departing without waiting for approval (p. 173). This can be presented through SPs as follows:

[D] [People think like this]

When I am with someone in this person’s place and because I want to do something with this person

If I think like this: “I don’t want to be here in this person’s place anymore”

I have to say something like this to this person:

“I think that there is nothing more you want us to do now

I think that there is nothing more you want to say to me now

If it is like this, I want to be somewhere else short time after this

I want to do something because of this

I know that I can’t do it if you don’t say to me ‘you can do it’

I want you to say it” (p. 172)

Another practice in the West Africa speech area tackled by Ameka and Breedveld (2004) is the so-called triadic communication, i.e., communicating through an intermediary who is supposed to possess oratorical skills. The intermediary is called upon in serious social encounters when one needs to convey the message without offense (e.g. insulting a newly arrived bride and her relatives). This practice of a third-party communication can be portrayed by means of CSs:

**[E]** [People think like this]

When I want to say something to someone

If I think about it like this: "it is not a small thing",

It is good if someone else can say it to this person

(If someone else can say it to this person, I don't have to say it)

Because of this, it can be good to say to another person: "I want you to do it" (p. 177)

Another linguistic practice is the avoidance of addressing adults by their names. That is, speakers resort to titles, social/political status, religious or occupational titles (e.g. teacher, professor, pastor, driver, alhaji, chief) and kinship terms instead. The latter are transferred even to French and English (e.g. *ma sœur*/my sister, in Ewe society, p. 178). Another alternative is calling a mother or a father by the name of their first-born child (father/mother of X). Interestingly, even names that are derivatives or sound like the addressee's name are avoided (Hammadi vs. Hammada). Only in institutional setting one's name may be heard (e.g. churches, hospitals). This can be portrayed through cultural keywords:

**[F]** [People think like this]

If I think about someone like this: "this person is not a child"

When I want to say something to this person, I can't say this person's name (p. 179)

The last practice dealt with by Ameka and Breedveld (2004) is the Fulbe avoidance behaviour *yaage*. This word may have different translations shame, reserve, shyness, fear, restrain, sense of shame through decent education, good habits and good education (p. 180). Thus, *yaage* signifies "proper behaviour between people that avoids embarrassment and shame" (p. 180). This ideal makes it a social faux pas, for instance, to look at a person's face/eyes, to eat in a stranger's presence, to say what a person would not like to hear (e.g. insulting), to address a person by his name and to show bad feelings. This cultural-specific preconception is shown in [G]:

**[G]** [People think like this]

I have to think about many people like this:

I want this person to know that I think good things about this person

I want this person to know that I feel something good towards this person

I don't want this person to think anything bad about me

Because of this, when I am with this person I cannot do some things

At the same time I cannot say some things (pp. 180-181)

The study of Ye (2004) examines interpersonal relationships and cultural logic in Chinese social interactions. The author's discussion is centred on the *shengren* and *shuren* which literally mean uncooked person and cooked person respectively, i.e., a strange and an old acquaintance. Chinese awareness of this factor may be reflected in the following idiomatic expression: strange at the first meeting, but friend at the second (p. 2013). *shengren* and *shuren* relationships can be portrayed in scripts [H] and [I].

**[H]** [People think about some people like this]

"I have known for some time who this person is

This person has known for some time who I am

Some time before, I could not think like this

After this, when I saw this person, I said some things to this person

At the same time this person says some things to me

It happened like this for some time

Because of this, I can say things to this person like people say

Things to someone when they know who this someone is"

People can't think about all this people this way

They have to think about some people in another way (p. 214)

**[I]** [People think about some people like this]

"I don't know who this person is

I can't say things to this person like people say things to someone when they know who this someone is" (p. 214)

The author discusses the challenges such preconceptions may bring about for Chinese in intercultural encounters. He illustrates this point through the speech act of greetings. As a convention, instead of greeting, the Chinese are likely 'to ask the obvious' (e.g. A: are you eating noodles? Aren't you? B: yes, I am). This serves in acknowledging the other party's presence and seeking confirmation or further information. Based on his own experience, the author who is familiar with the Australian culture and, thus, the *how-are-you-type* of greeting assumes that the Chinese way of greeting is shocking from the outsider's perspective. He himself usually plans to ask the obvious when meeting Australian colleagues

(e.g. are you going to the library? Aren't you?), but he holds back at the last moment as this would be perceived inappropriate by his addressees from an Anglo-perspective.

Wong (2004) dealt with personal autonomy as a cultural value in both Anglo English and Singapore English. Despite the fact that both varieties use the same grammar and words, they reflect 'radically' different cultural values and norms which appear unusual to each other's speakers. This is obvious in the speech act of requests, as an example. Anglo-English speakers are aware that, when requesting, the other party has the right not to comply. This necessitates the use of interrogative-directives (or whimperatives) with acknowledgement (e.g. would you do this? \_\_\_\_ Thank you) while bare imperative are hardly ever employed whether or not it is the duty of the other party to comply. This is a typical way to signal respect to the requestee's autonomy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that one should not do what another asks him/her to do. Rather, people tend to do things willingly. Scripts [J1] and [J2] show that the requester is considerate to the requestee's autonomy and he/she does not want the requestee to feel obliged.

**[J1]** [Some people think like this:]

When I want someone to do something

I don't want this person to think like this:

because this person wants me to do it, I can't do it (p. 234)

**[J2]** [People think like this:]

When I want someone to do something

I want this person to know that I think like this:

this person cannot do it if this person doesn't want to do it (p. 234)

So far as the Singaporean variety is concerned, the use of interrogative-directives is, by far, less frequent than in the Anglo-English variety. Singaporeans favour the modal 'can' or the invented one 'can or not' (e.g. today after school follow me downtown, can or not?). Apparently enough, they are much interested in the other person's ability to do something or not rather than his/her willingness which is not given great importance. For the author, respecting the other wants

is not, seemingly, a Singaporean value. In other words, they place less evidence on personal autonomy than the Anglo-English speakers. The author interprets this in the light of the training orientation which regards directives as a mere yes/no questions as well as the fact that for the Chinese, who constitute the majority of population in Singapore, personal autonomy is not a cultural value. The scripts [K1] and [K2] represent the speaker and addressee's concern about the ability to comply with the request respectively.

**[K1]** [People think like this:]

When I say to someone about something "I want you to do it"

I can think about it like this:

if this person can do it, this person will do it (p. 239)

**[K2]** [Some people think like this:]

When someone says to me about something "I want you to do it"

If I can do it, it is good if I do it (p. 239)

Turning to the study of Travis (2004), the author investigated the use of diminutives in Colombian Spanish. Diminutives realised through the suffixes -ito/-ita give an emotional tone to a word and express good feelings (e.g. papito, laurita, mijita, poeta). Diminutives in Colombian Spanish are associated with children; they encode small size in directives (i.e. minimizing hedge). They may also function as a dismissive device that expresses contempt. So far as the use of diminutives when talking to children is concerned, it can be portrayed as follows:

**[L1]** [People think like this:]

When I say something to a child

It is good if this child can know that when say it I feel something good towards this child

It is good if this child can know that when I say it I think about this child like this:

"you are someone small

people can't feel something bad towards you because of this" (p. 252)

**[L2]** [People think like this:]

When I say something to a child about something

It is good if this child can know that I think about it like this:

"it is something small"

It is good if the child can know that when I think about it like this I  
 feel something good  
 Because of this, it is good if I say many words in the way people say  
 words when they want someone to know that they think like this(p. 253)

## 2. The Application of the Cultural-scripts Approach on the Findings of our Study

### 2.1. Description of the study

The findings tackled in this practical section are a part of the author's previous work (doctoral dissertation) which is a cross-cultural pragmatic study that deals with requests and apologies production in Arabic, English and interlanguage. We have collected data by means of a discourse completion task. This tool is very frequent in such type of studies. It includes descriptions of real situations and for each situation respondents have a space to write a request or apology imagining that a given situation is happening to them.

Example: You are a passenger in a bus. You misplace your bag on the rack. *Your bag suddenly falls on one of the passengers and hits him/her. What would you say to apologise?*

.....

We have collected data from two groups. The first one represents the (Algerian) Arabic culture. Participants of this group are 32 university students aged from 24-34. The second group represents the Anglo-American/Anglo-Saxon culture (these terms are going to be used interchangeably throughout the present paper). This group consists of 20 participants from different walks of life (most of them university students) aged from 21-59. The aim of the study is to spot cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences which are likely to lead to communication breakdowns or are likely to pose problems to Algerian EFL learners. Data has been analysed through identifying the strategies employed in the two languages/cultures so as to uncover the sociopragmatic trends and the linguistic structures employed for each strategy at the pragmalinguistic level. We have attempted to capture the influence of four cultural and contextual variables: power, social distance, degree of imposition in requests and degree of infraction in apologies. We have interpreted our

data in the light conversational maxims, politeness theory and contrastive pragmatics findings.

### 2.2. Requests and apologies in the literature

Requests and apologies have been extensively researched in the fields of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. In the former, researchers seek to uncover universal and distinctive features in the speech act realisations and perceptions in two or more cultures (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Cenoz & Valencia, 1996; Fukushima, 1996; Márquez Reiter, 2000). In the latter, researchers investigate how learners perform, perceive and develop speech acts when using a second/foreign language, mainly English (e.g. Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Ghawi, 1993; Jung, 2004; Tagushi, 2006; Schauer, 2007; Al-Ali & Alawneh, 2010; Woodfield & Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Hassall, 2001; Martinez-Flor, 2012). Moreover, many studies compared requests and apologies realisation in Arabic (or one of its varieties) and English (British and American mainly) or investigated the realisation of them in one language only (e.g. Hussein & Hammouri, 1998; Deutschmann, 2003; Abdulwahid, 2003; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Alfattah & Ravindranath, 2009; Al-Zumor, 2011; Alaoui, 2011).

### 2.3. Describing the findings by means of NSM and CSs

#### 2.3.1. Requests

##### a. Interrogative-directives and bare imperatives

Our findings show that the use of indirect requests/interrogative-directives is the most frequent across all the situations in the English corpus. We have already talked about the restrictions native speakers of English pose on the use of bare imperatives based on the respect of personal autonomy (scripts [A] [J1] [J2]). By contrast, in Arabic such restriction is not a cultural value. Bare imperatives have been used with someone who is 'above' the speaker in status (university professor) or someone who is 'not one of us' (stranger) and when asking a 'big' favour (asking a help for carrying bags). In this case, in Arabic, speakers use certain lexical items to soften the directive nature (e.g. *min fadhlik/if you do it as a favour; rabbi y3ayshek/May God make you live*

long; rabbi yahfdhek/May God protect you; yarHem waaldik/May God be merciful to your parents). Meanwhile, with people who are ‘part of us,’ (friend, classmate) there is no taboo associated with directives in Arabic (e.g. Alfattah & Ravindranath, 2009); it is rather the interrogative-directives that are perceived as unnatural (Abdulwahid, 2003) as they do not reveal connectedness and spontaneity toward the addressee. The preponderance of direct requests in Arabic can be represented as follows:

[a] [People think like this:]

When I say to someone to do something for me/give me something

It is good if I say to this person to do it/give it

It is not bad to say it like this

The other person does not feel bad if I say it like this

I feel good if I say it like this and the other person feels good to hear it

This makes me feel a ‘part of this person’ and the other person feels a ‘part of me’

If I say it like this to someone ‘above me’/‘not one of us’ or if I say to someone to do for me/give me something ‘big’, I say other words,

Because this person can feel bad if I do not say ‘some other words’

### b. Request perspective

Request perspective refers to the three options available at the requester’s disposal. A requester may emphasise the role of the addressee in performing an action (can you help me?), avoid the reference to the addressee as the doer of the action (May I have the book? or *is it possible* to have this book?) or emphasise the cooperation of both parties (Can we clean the room). The choice of one of these options is a conventional way to reduce the coerciveness in English requests (Blum-Kulka 1991, p. 266). In Arabic, the reference to the hearer as the performer of the request is not perceived as a threat to one’s personal autonomy. Our findings suggest that the employment of the two main perspectives (speaker- and hearer-perspective) goes to show different cultural values. This amounts to saying that Anglo-American requesters avoid the speaker-perspective in ‘above me’, ‘not a one of us’ and ‘something big’ situations (asking a professor/salesclerk or asking for money). In Arabic requests, we remarked the preponderance of the hearer-perspective and only in ‘above me’ and ‘not one of us’ situations (asking a professor and a salesclerk) statistics show a balance in the presentation of the two orientations.

Cultural values toward the selection of perspective in Arabic and English can be written by means of CSSs.

[b1] If I want you to do something for me/give me something,

I say that you are the person who does/gives this thing to me

It is not bad if I say this

You do not feel bad if I say this

[b2] If I want you to do something for me/give me something,

I do not say that you are the person who does/gives this thing to me

I say that I am the person who wants to have/wants this thing

It is bad if I say: “you do/give something for me”

You feel bad if I say this

### c. Terms of address and internal modifiers

In Arabic, terms of address are employed extensively in requests. They are a constituent part of the politeness and the communicative systems. Address terms can be in-group markers (e.g. *sadiiqi/my friend*, *saHbi/my friend*, *shriiki/my partener*), kinship terms (e.g. *khuya/khtii/my brother/my syster*, *khaali/my maternal uncle*, *3amii/my paternal uncle*), diminutives (e.g. *Zinou=Zineddin*, *Badrou=Badreddin*, *shoushou=shu’ayb/shahinez*) and others (*lhaaj/lhaaja=man/woman who has performed Al-hajj/pilgrimage*, *shiikh=teacher/Imam/intellectual*, *Madame, mademoiselle/Miss*, *jeune homme/young man*, *Mouhammed/first name*). As for the use of kinship terms, they are used frequently to address non-acquaintances and, for Maalej (2010), they are extended metaphorically, not necessarily, so as to signal politeness as is the case for English ones, but rather to minimise distance and seek rapprochement. For diminutives, they are used to create good feelings when addressing children mainly. As far as *lhaaj* and *lhaaja* are concerned, they are reserved to elderly people whether they have been in Mecca or not. In Algerian society, people may use the name of the prophet which is very widespread as a first name to address people who are not acquaintance and their names are unknown. Women are very sensitive to terms of address. If one calls a younger woman as *lhaaja*, she may feel angry as this suggests that she is advancing in age the way she looks. Consequently, one has to work out the addressee’s age for a successful selection of a term of address. Certain French terms



of address may be used by educated people in formal settings mainly (e.g. Mademoiselle/Miss). Address terms are oftentimes employed as attention-getters in requests and may be used after the core request or apology, and, in this context, they function as lexical softeners. Besides, they are enhanced by possessive markers like 'my' and 'our'. So far as terms of address in English requests are concerned, they are, by far, less frequent than in the Arabic corpus. They function as markers of politeness and distance (e.g. Professor X, excuse me Sir). In addition to address terms, requests in English are opened by means of consultative devices (do you mind...? Would you mind...?) which serve as negative politeness markers that help in mitigating the imposition and marking distance. The values manifested in the selection of internal modifiers in Arabic and English requests can be captured via CSs in [c1] and [c2] respectively:

**[c1]** [People think like this:]

When I want to say to you to do something for me/give me something  
 Before [or after] I say this, I say 'other words' to make you feel 'a part of me' [e.g. my brother]  
 And not 'above/below me'  
 It is not bad if I say these words  
 And you think like this: "this person wants to move near to me and I feel good because of that  
 It is not bad if this person says to me to do something/give something for this person

**[c2]** [People think like this:]

When I want to say to you to do something for me/give me something  
 Before I say this, I say 'other words' to make you feel good and 'far from me' [e.g. Sir]  
 It is good if I say these words  
 And you think like this: "this person wants to say that he is a good person and wants to be 'far from me'"  
 Because of this, I can do/give what this person wants me to do/give if I want  
 And I do not do/give what this person wants me to do/give if I do not want  
 I feel good because of this"

**d. Independence strategies**

Independence strategies refer in the present study to two main strategies which are used external to

the requests' minimum unit: imposition minimisers (e.g. only if you have a minute) and apologies (e.g. I apologise for that). In English, these strategies are evident in difficult situations: requesting 'someone above me' (professor), 'someone not one of us' to 'do a big thing' (stranger/carrying bags) and 'someone one of us', but for 'something big' (workmate/time to help on PC; classmate/lending money). This cultural behaviour is interpreted in the light of the ideal of respecting others' personal autonomy (script [d 1]).

**[d1]** [People think like this]

If I want you to do something/give something for me,  
 I think like this: "it is a big thing; this person is above me/not one of us"  
 When I say this, I say 'other words' and you think like this:  
 "because of this, I can say that I cannot do/give something to this person and I feel good if I do/give or not what this person wants me to do/give"

In Arabic, in such situations, speakers tend to offer explanations, reasons, acknowledgement (e.g. shukran/thank you; jazaak Allahu khayran/May God increase your bounty), lexical softeners (e.g. min fadhlik/if you do it as a favour; t3iish/you may live long) and sweeteners (e.g. you know better than me). That is to say, signalling independence from the other party or acknowledging his/her autonomy is not as much a part of the Arab Islamic society as it is in the Anglo-Saxon one. Instead, speakers strive to show the two parties' connectedness to each other investing in the fact that people in Arab Islamic societies, as a part of their beliefs, should do 'alkhay/all that is good and be life savers to one another whenever possible ([d2]).

**[d 2]** [People think like this:]

If I want you to do something for me/give me something  
 I think like this: "it is good if you do/give to me this thing  
 It is bad if you do not do/give this thing when you can do/give this thing"  
 And you think like this:  
 "It is good if I do/give this thing to this person  
 and it is bad if I do not do/give this thing when I can do/give this thing  
 because it is good if you make other people feel good and make others think that you are a good person"

### e. Religious expressions in Arabic requests

Request modification in Arabic displays the speakers' religious identity. As a small talk, a requester may greet his/her addressee in the Islamic way ('asalamu 3alaykom we rahmatul Lahi wa barakaatuh/God's peace and mercy be upon you). A requester may acknowledge the requestee's help by means of an appreciator taking the form of invocation of a divine care and well-being (jazzaak Allahu khayran/May God increase your bounty; baarak Allahu fiik/God's blessings be upon you; rabbi y3ayshek/May God make you live long; Allah yahfdhek/May God protect you). Similarly, when promising a future reward for the hearer in return of his/her potential compliance, Muslims usually refer to God's will, as a part of their beliefs, (e.g. I will bring you the book tomorrow Inshaa'Allah/if God wills). For Nazzal (2010, pp. 255-256), such linguistic formulas are not employed only as a part of a shared religious identity, but are rather to fulfil a pragmatic function; they impact, and even change, the interlocutors behaviours and attitudes. The preference of religious expressions as a communication strategy in requesting can be written by means of CSs ([e]). This has been noted in apologies as well whereby the offender may also swear in order to be believed.

[e] [People think like this:]  
 If I want you to do something for me/give me something,  
 I say 'some words'  
 'These words' make you and I feel that "you and I are from the same place"  
 I know this makes you feel good and want to do good things  
 And you think like this:  
 "it is bad if I do not do/give what this person wants me to do/give when  
 I can do/give this thing  
 because I heard from this person who is 'from the same place as  
 me' 'good words'"

### f. Seizing to request in English

In a situation when speakers have to ask a stranger to help in carrying bags of groceries to the car park, more than half of the speakers in the English group seize to perform the act stating that it is socially inappropriate (e.g. I would never do this. Ever; I would not ask the stranger for help). Conversely, the opting-out category

is encountered only once in the Arabic corpus. This tendency in English can be expressed in a form of a script as follows:

[f] When I want to say to someone to do for me/give me something

If this is a 'big thing' and this person is 'not one of us',

It is good if I do not say to this person to do it/give it

This person will think that I am a 'bad person' if I do it

### 2.3.2. Apologies

#### a. Use of apology strategies

With reference to four main strategies, namely, explanation or account of the situation, claiming responsibility, expressing concern about the victim and offering repair, statistics make it evident that, in Arabic, speakers tend to claim responsibility to set things right in 'above me' (apologising to a university professor for forgetting to give back a book), 'not one of us' (apologising for stepping on a lady's foot) and 'doing something big' (apologising as your bag falls from a rack on a passenger) situations. As for the Anglo-Americans, they favour explanations, expressing concern and offering repair at the expense of admitting responsibility when apologising in such situations. This is interpreted in the light of the fact that, in Arab Islamic societies, people feel a sense of public availability to each other (Al-Zumor, 2011). For this reason, it is not offensive if one claims responsibility for his/her own deeds. In the Anglo-Saxon culture, based on egalitarianism and personal preserves, claiming responsibility may be regarded as a self-humiliation (Wierzbicka, 1985, p. 168, *ibid*, p. 25). These two values in the employment of apology strategies can be represented in [g1] and [g2] respectively.

[g1] [People think like this:]  
 When I do something bad to someone,  
 If it is a 'big thing' and this person is 'above me' and/or 'not one of us',  
 It is good if I say: "I did something bad"  
 This person feels good if I say this  
 And if I do not say this, this person thinks like this:  
 "this is a bad person who does something bad"

**[g2]** [People think like this:]

When I do something bad to someone,  
 If it is a 'big thing' and this person is 'above me' and/or 'not one of us',  
 It is good if I "say words about the way I did this thing [explanation]",  
 "know if the other person feels bad or not because of the bad thing  
 I did [concern about the victim]" and "make this person knows I will  
 do something the next moment [repair of the situation]"  
 This person feels good if I do these things/say these words,  
 This person thinks that I am a bad person if I say: "I did something bad  
 to this person" [claiming responsibility]

## b. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) and intensifiers

So far as the relationship between the IFIDs (explicit expressions of apology like 'I am sorry', 'I apologise', 'accept my apologies') and intensifiers (markers used to aggravate sincerity in apologies), we have noted differences which may be related to cultural traits in the two groups. In Arabic, intensifiers are of lexical natures (e.g. swearing, *min fathlik/please*) which are usually centred on strategies other than IFIDs (e.g. I *swear* I will bring it tomorrow; the intensifier modifies the repair strategy). In English, intensifiers are of vocative (emotional expressions/interjections, e.g. Oh my gosh!) and adverbial nature (e.g. so, really, terribly) which are centred on IFIDs oftentimes. The reason is that the IFID 'be sorry' (the most frequent par excellence) is employed for a wide range of situations/offenses and, thus, it may not be perceived as a sincere apology for certain offenses. Native speakers inject IFID-internal intensifiers so as to convey sincerity (Bergman and Kasper, 19993) and avoid conflicts (Màrquez Reiter, 2000). These trends indicate that speakers of Arabic give much importance to the circumstances of the infraction and the Anglo-Americans to the illocutionary force and the propositional content instead. These nuances in cultural assumptions can be made clear by means of CSs: [h1] for Arabic and [h2] for English.

**[h1]** [People think like this:]

When I do something bad, I feel bad  
 I use 'some words', because the other person wants to know that:  
 "I am true when I say these words about this bad thing [explanation]"; "I am true when I say I did a bad thing [responsibility]"; "I am true when I say I will do something the next moment [repair]"; "I am true when I say I will not do that bad thing one more time after a short/long time [forbearance]"

Because I did something bad to this person

I feel bad because of doing a bad thing to this person

**[h2]** [People think like this:]

When I do something bad, I feel bad  
 I say 'some other words' because the other person wants to hear that:  
 "I did a 'big' 'bad' thing not a 'small' 'bad' thing  
 and I feel 'very bad' not only 'bad' because I did that 'big' 'bad' thing  
 to this person"

## c. Committing 'a big' offense to a 'close' friend

Participants' responses to an offense committed to a close friend (forgetting a get-together for the second time) go to show different cultural attitudes regarding what constitutes a close friend and the types of offenses a close friend may tolerate. In this scenario, English-users opt for admitting responsibility, providing explanations, offering repair and promising of forbearance. In Arabic, speakers opt for explanations rather than claiming responsibility and repair, as compared with previous situations (e.g. apologising for stepping on a ladies foot/'not one of us person'). In addition, the comments provided by participants in English serve as metapragmatic reflections on the severity of the offense committed and the status of the offended person. These are the comments made available by them: "I should be under a lot of stress to be so forgetful"; "this could not be a 'close friend' I would not forget. The first time 'maybe,' but surely not the second"; "if it's the second time I might be tempted to lie to avoid saying I'd forgotten him twice"; "can't answer this one. This something I could never do." By implication, a close friend is someone who is likely to tolerate our mistakes in the Arab culture; meanwhile he/she is someone who should not be offended by our infractions in the Anglo-Saxon culture. These cultural nuances cannot be captured by descriptions like 'high infraction', 'low infraction', 'close', and 'distant' friend. CSs can best transpose them across languages/cultures ([i1] [i2]).

**[i1]** [People think like this:]

I did a bad thing to you  
 This is a 'big thing',  
 You do not think that I am a bad person  
 Because you are 'one of us'

**[i2]** [People think like this:]  
 I did a bad thing to you  
 This is a 'big thing'  
 You think that I am a bad person  
 Because I did something 'bad' and 'big' to a person who is 'one of us'

#### d. Involving the victim in repairing the situation

Our study has yielded some evidence of cross-cultural divergence in the use of the repair-strategy. We have noted that the Anglo-Americans strive to offer the victim many options so as to make him/her at ease (e.g. I can bring it to your home or you can come by to pick it this afternoon if it works better for you). In the other side, speakers of Arabic, seemingly, involve the victim in solving the situation (e.g. tomorrow remind me through the phone so as to bring it) or even assigning a partial responsibility to him/her (e.g. you could have called me and reminded me). Such cultural behaviours reflect two ideals: "I want to be far from you" (as far as I can) and "I want to be near to you" (as close as I can) which can be represented in [j1] and [j2] respectively.

**[j1]** [People think like this]  
 I did something bad to this person  
 It is good if this person and I do something  
 Because I and this person want to feel good like before

**[j2]** [People think like this]  
 I did something bad to this person  
 It is good if I do something to this person  
 Because I want this person to feel good like before

#### Conclusion

In this modest contribution, we have attempted to invest in the usefulness of NSM, SPs and CSs in describing cultural-specific nuances of meaning and behaviour as displayed in requests and apologies production in Arabic and English. As maintained by the pioneer contributors in this area, such approach makes cultural differences clear and accessible to both the insiders and the outsiders. Moreover, cross-cultural education and intercultural communication stand to benefit from this approach. In this context, adapting NSM as an auxiliary language in intercultural encounters, no doubt, contributes in

minimising cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. We strongly recommend that this approach is adapted to re-describe and re-explicate the findings which are regarded as empirically well-founded in previous cross-cultural studies.

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