

## Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

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### Abstract

Politeness indicates avoiding threatening the hearer's as well as speaker's faces. This avoidance could be done through several strategies. One of them is off-record strategy, i.e., indirectness. Being indirect could be achieved through adopting fifteen strategies proposed and claimed to be universal by Brown and Levinson (1978). The present study aims at investigating the applicability of indirectness strategies to religious text type in Standard Arabic. It is found that only some strategies are applied to the text type under study. A new application e original model of Brown and Levinson (1978) is recognized in Standard Arabic. Finally, a positive role of indirectness is highlighted as opposed to the negative evaluation of indirectness made by contrastive rhetoric.

### Introduction

The present study is a pragmatic work in the field of politeness. Several theories of politeness have been proposed like Lakoff's (1973), Brown and Levinson's (1978) and Leech (1983). The adopted politeness theory of the present study is that of Brown and Levinson (1978). This theory, as Brown and Levinson (1978) claim, offers a detailed, comprehensive and universal set of strategies to analyze the phenomenon of politeness in any culture. It has been categorized into four categories, namely, bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record (indirectness) in addition to a fifth strategy, viz, don't do the FTA. The major concern of the present study is the off-record category of strategies. Investigating the use of indirect strategies as ways of politeness in Standard Arabic (SA, henceforth) is still in need for empirical evidence. This need, making the problem of this study, is tried to be met by the present study.

The present study is limited to investigate the use of the fifteen strategies of indirectness proposed by Brown and Levinson (ibid.) as ways of politeness in SA. The sample of SA used in the analysis will be basically from the religious text type, especially the Wholly Quran and the Peak of Eloquence (Nahj al-Balaghah) for Ali bin-abi Talib, the Muslim Caliph, fourteen centuries ago. The adopted translation of the Wholly Quran is the one done by M.H. Shakir (1973) whereas the translator of the Peak of Eloquence (Nahj al-Balaghah) is Sayyid Ali Reza.

The present study is hoped to be of some theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, the claimed universality of the politeness strategies will be verified. Some additional investigation of the applied theory of politeness of Brown and Levinson (1978) is provided which means an additional verification to the theory. Finally, some pedagogical points of significance could be identified here. The present study offers a good opportunity for learners and teacher of English as a foreign language to widen their awareness of the different kinds of politeness while communicating with others.

Objectives: the present study aims at answering the following questions :

- 1- Are all the indirect strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) applicable to religious text type in SA ?
- 2- What strategies that could (n't) be covered by the genre chosen for the present study?
- 3- Are there any strategies in Arabic that are not stated in the adopted model? What are they?

### Theoretical Background:

Politeness is defined by Brown and Levinson (1978), as quoted in Al-Sulaiman (2010:313), as "redressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening (FTA)." It plays an essential role in leading an acceptable and successful communication between two sides, or more. This could be facilitated through considering the addressee's face.

'Face' is a notion on which Brown and Levinson (1978) have established their theory of politeness. Yule (1996:60) defines 'face' as "the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize." What is targeted to protect politeness is not only the addresser's face, but also the addressee's. Verschueren (1999:51) refers to this fact through his definition to politeness as "the strategies employed by language users to protect their own and their addressee's face." Sometimes one's face is threatened by a given act whether linguistic or social. Such an act is called a 'face threatening act' (FTA). A face threatening act is defined as "any act that puts face wants at risk" (ibid.:45). Dealing with these FTAs is the major concern of politeness. Al-Sulaiman (2010:314) states that "politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these FTAs." Face saving act (FSA), on the other hand, is defined by Yule (1996:129) as "an utterance or action which avoids a potential threat to a person's public self-image."

# Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

Brown and Levinson (1978:67) claim that 'face' is of two kinds: positive and negative defined as follows: the negative face is "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" whereas the positive face is "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actors be unimpeded by others." Politeness is seen as having two forms, positive and negative. Cruse (2006:131) classifies this point through defining 'politeness' as "a matter of minimizing the negative effects of what one says on the feelings of others and maximizing the positive effects."

Brown and Levinson (1978) theory proposes a model categorizing human politeness behavior into five strategies. They are 1-bald on-record, 2-positive politeness, 3-negative politeness and 4-off-record (indirectness) in addition to a fifth strategy, namely, 'Don't do the FTA'. Everyone of the four categories consists of a number of strategies. These strategies will be explained and clarified by illustrative examples later on. Brown and Levinson's (ibid.) model could be illustrated by the following figure:

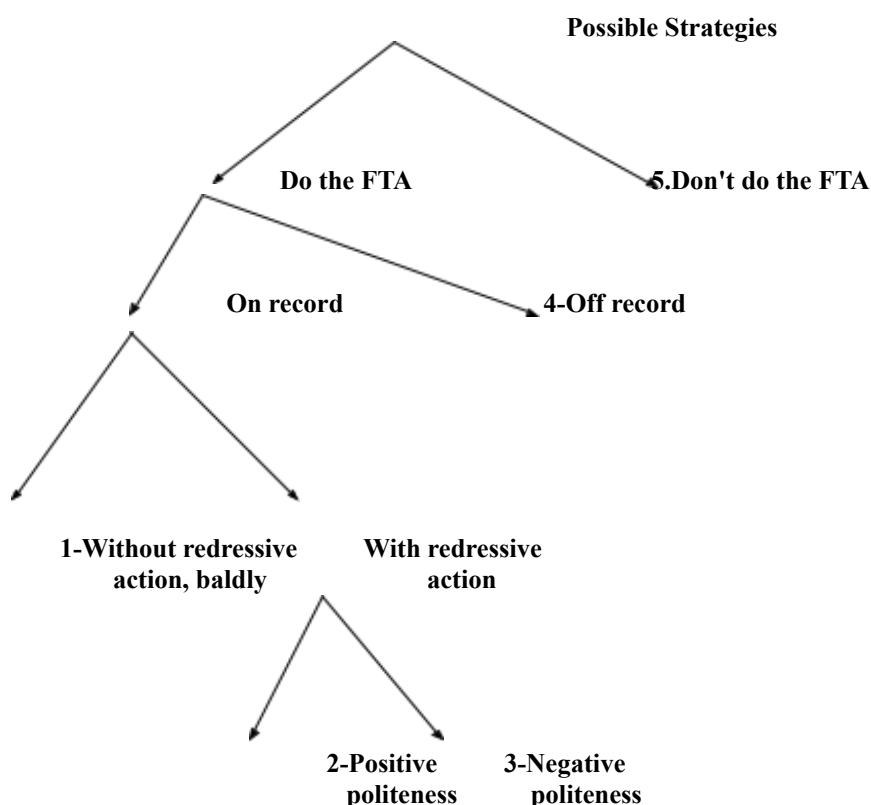


Figure (1): Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs (Brown and Levinson(1978))

As far as 'face' is concerned, the speaker's possible strategies are of two kinds. They are, as explained in Al-Sulaimaan (2010:317), as follows: S may try to avoid threatening the addressee's face (Don't do the FTA) or he may try to do the FTA. If he decides to do the FTA, he may go either 'on record' or 'off record'. Going 'on record' makes the speaker express his intention clearly whereas going 'off record' makes the speaker unable to commit himself to one particular intent since there is more than one possible intention.

Going 'on record' enables the speaker to express his intention without redressive action, i.e., "baldly on record" or with 'redressive action' if he intends to soften or minimize the FTA. In this case, the speaker could adopt either positive or negative politeness. In using positive politeness strategies, the speaker can show recognition and appropriate validation of the addressee's self image(ibid.). In using negative politeness strategies, the speaker "can acknowledge the addressee's personal territory and personal freedom of action." (ibid.).

Brown and Levinson's (1978) model suggests several categories of strategies. The speaker's choice of a given strategy is governed by three social factors. These factors ,as recognized by Brown and Levinson (ibid.79) are:

- a: Social distance which refers to a symmetric relation.
- b: Relative power which refers to an asymmetric relation.
- c: The absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture.

Below, some light is going to be shed on the four categories of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978):

### **1)The bald on-record strategy:**

It is related to the conversational maxims of Grice (Brown and Levinson:1978:99). In order to achieve efficient communication, utterances need to meet the conversational maxims. However, a great deal of successful natural conversations do not follow this rule. Different politeness strategies are based on violating different conversational maxims. The reason behind this kind of violation is to avoid or minimize threatening H's face. The Bald on-record strategies do not participate in minimizing the H's face. These strategies are used for certain reasons and in some cases as shown below:

The motives for applying the bald on-record strategy is that "whenever S wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy H's face, even to any degree, he will choose the bald on-record strategy"(Brown and Levinson: 1978:100). Several motives motivate the S to do the FTA with maximum efficiency. These lead us to two kinds of strategies: 'without redressive action, baldly, and 'with redressive action", as shown in figure (1) above. Those that are 'without redressive actions, baldly' are called 'cases of non-minimization of the face threat' where maximum efficiency is extremely important and it is mutually known to S and H as well and no face redress is necessary. There are several cases of this kind, like : great urgency or description.(ibid.). The following example illustrates great urgency:

Ex. **Help!** (whereas the following case is non-urgent: Please, could you help me, if you don't mind?)

Another case illustrating non-minimization of the face threat is the metaphorical urgency expressing orders, namely, imperatives. The following example, used usually in praying, is illustrative:

**'Oh God, forgive me'**

### **2-The positive politeness category of strategies:**

These strategies show that "you recognize that your hearer has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity" (Al-Sulaimaan:2010:315). Leech(1983:84) claims that positive politeness "consists in maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions (which includes taking opportunities for performing polite illocutions in situations where no speech may be otherwise called for." Positive politeness adopts several strategies to minimize face threatening of the H's positive face. These strategies are categorized into three categories which vary according to their mechanism. They are as follows,(Brown and Levinson:1978:107-134):

#### **1) Claim common ground**

##### **a) Notice, attend to Hs interests, wants, needs,...etc.**

Ex: Goodness, you cut your hair! (...) By the way, I came to borrow some floor.

##### **b) Exaggerate interest and sympathy with H.**

Ex: What a fantastic garden you have!

##### **c) Intensify interest to H.**

Ex: There were a *million* people in the Co-op tonight!

##### **d) Use in-group identity markers.**

Ex: Help me with this bag here, will you (son / pal)?

# Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

## e) **Seek agreement.**

Ex: A: I had a flat tyre on the way home.

B: Oh God, a flat tyre!

## f) **Avoid disagreement**

Ex: A: Have you got friends?

B: I have friends. So-called friends. I had friends. Let me put it that way.

## g) **Presuppose/ raise/ assert common ground.**

Ex: Ok now, let's stop the chatter and get on with our little essays.

## h) **Joke.**

Ex: How about lending me this old heap of junk? (H's new Cadillac)

## **2: Convey that S and H are cooperators**

### i) **Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants**

Ex: Look, I know you want the car back by 5.0, so should(n't) I go to town now? (request)

### j) **Offer/ Promise.**

Ex: I'll drop by sometime next week.

### k) **Be optimistic.**

Ex: You'll lend me your lawnmower for the weekend, (I hope/ won't you/ I imagine.)

### l) **Include both S and H in the activity**

Ex: Give us a break. (i.e. me)

### m) **Give(or ask for) reasons.**

Ex: Why don't I help you with that suitcase?

### n) **Assume or assert reciprocity.**

## **3: Fulfil H's want**

### **o) Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)**

## **3-The negative politeness category of strategies:**

This category of strategies "performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects" (Brown and Levinson :1978:134). It also "recognizes the hearer's face. But it also recognizes that you are in some way imposing on them." (Al-Sulaimaan:2010:315). These strategies are stated below with illustrative examples with no unnecessary explanation since they do not make the major concern of the present study. They are as follows, (Brown and Levinson:134-215):

### **1)Be conventionally indirect.**

Ex. Can you please pass the salt?

### **2)Question, hedge**

Ex. John is a *true* friend.

### **3)Be pessimistic**

Ex: You don't have any manila envelopes, do you by any chance?

### **4) Minimize the imposition.**

Ex: I *just* want to ask you *if* I can borrow *a tiny bit* of paper.

### **5) Give deference**

Ex: We look forward very much to dining with you.

### **6) Apologize**

Ex: I hesitate to trouble you, but...

### **7) Impersonalize S and H**

Ex: (Do this for me) instead of (I ask you to do this for me)

### **8) State the FTA as a general rule**

Ex: a) Passengers will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train. In stead of:

b)You will please refrain from flushing toilets on the train.

### **9) Nominalize:**

Ex: a) You performed well on the examinations and we were favourably impressed.

b) Your performing well on the examinations impressed us favourably.

c) Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favourably.

### **10) Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H**

Ex: a) I'd be eternally grateful if you would...  
and b) I'll never be able to repay you if you ...

**4- Off-record indirect category of strategies:**

These strategies are going to be discussed with the analysis of Arabic sample later on, since the use of these strategies in SA make the subject matter of the present study. Figure(2) below illustrates these strategies:



Figure (2): Chart of Strategies: Off record (Brown and Levinson:1978:219)

**Strategy (1): Give hints:**

Giving hints means adopting an indirect way of formulating the communicative message of S. That indirect way is characterized by uttering unrelated utterance(s). Brown and

# Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

Levinson (1978:218) state that "the basic mechanism here is violation of the Maxim of Relevance." When S utters a non-explicitly relevant utterance, H should search for a possible interpretation. (ibid.)

Giving hints strategy could be adopted in two cases , as recognized by Brown and Levinson(ibid.):

a- stating motives or reasons for doing A

ex: It is cold in here.(i.e. Shut the window)

In the example above, cold provides a motive for shutting the window.

b-Hints may also be done by asserting questioning the conditions for A (as an indirect request)

ex: You didn't open the window when you came in.

In SA, this strategy is available and applicable to religious genre, as shown below:

"إن بطش ربك لشديد"

(البروج:جزء 30/آية: 12)

**"Surely the might of your Lord is great"**

(The Mansions of the Stars:30/12)

This verse is a statement telling a fact; however, it could be interpreted differently. It could be taken as a warning not to try to violate the Lord's will in order to avoid His might punishment.

## **Strategy(2) :Give association clues:**

This strategy is based on violating the Maxim of Relevance. It is used as a means of applying polite requests indirectly. Brown and Levinson (1978:220)say that this strategy is used "when S mentions something with the act required of H." This strategy indicates a special use of giving hints. Brown and Levinson (1978:221) point out that " association clues of indirect requests are nothing but more remote hints." The following example is illustrative,(ibid.):

**Ex: Are you going to market tomorrow?... There's a market tomorrow, I suppose. (Give me a ride there.)**

This strategy functions politely since it gives H the capacity to offer, taking the responsibility for the FTA away from S(ibid.)

This strategy is adopted in SA as in the following example:

"فوسوس إليه الشيطان قال يا ادم هل أدلك على شجرة الخلد وملك لا يبلى"

(طه: جزء 20/ آية:120)

**"But the Shaitan made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam! Shall I guide you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not?"**

(Ta Ha:20/ 120)

In this verse, the Shaitan who wants Adam to make an evil act doesn't express his intention as an explicit order to Adam threatening Adam's face. Instead,the Shaitan gives Adam an associative clue by making a remote hint through letting H (Adam) make the choice concerning the Shaitan's suggestion, taking the responsibility for the FTA away from S (the Shaitan).

A point could be considered here. Could it be claimed that politeness is the real motive for the Shaitan to adopt this strategy? To put it even clearer, is the Shaitan polite? To answer this question we could investigate S's reasons or motives behind being polite. A major reason for being polite is to avoid FTAs. But there is still a need to go even deeper, why is that? That is made for the sake of persuasion since H will refuse S's offer or suggestion if it indicates an FTA. Adopting the strategy of giving association clues leads to avoiding FTA by S when addressing H which results in a successful persuasion leading to achieving the S's intention.

There is another application for the strategy of giving association clues, namely, euphemisms. Brown and Levinson(1978: 221) claim that implicatures make the source from which euphemisms for taboo topics are also derived (for example WC, toilet, lavatory, restroom, bathroom, etc.). In SA, this application is used ,as shown in the example below:

يا أيها الذين امنوا لا تقربوا الصلاة وانتم سكارى حتى تعلموا ما تقولون ولا جنباً إلا عابري سبيل حتى تغتسلوا وان كنتم مرضى أو على سفر أو جاء احد منكم من الغائط أو لمستم النساء فلم تجدوا ماء فتيمموا صعيدا طيبا فامسحوا بوجوهكم وأيديكم إن الله كان عفوا غفورا

(النساء:4/43)

O you who believe! do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know (well) what you say, nor when you are under an obligation to perform a total ablution-unless (you are) traveling on the road-until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick , or on a journey, or one of you come the privy or you have touched the women, and you cannot find water, betake yourselves to pure earth, then wipe your faces and your hands; surely Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving.

(Women:4/43)

In the example above, sex is referred to indirectly to avoid making an FTA. This application is available in English as well as SA. Brown and Levinson(1978:221) claim that "all our evidence indicates that euphemisms are (a)universal feature(s) of language usage."

### **Strategy (3): Presuppose:**

This strategy violates the Relevance Maxim but in a specific way. Brown and Levinson (ibid.222) state that "an utterance can be almost wholly relevant in context, and yet violate the Relevance Maxim just at the level of its presupposition." The examples below illustrate the strategy :

**Ex: I washed the car again today. (I did it in the past)**

**Ex: It wasn't me that did it. (someone else did)**

In SA, this strategy is also adopted as shown below, (Al-Radhi, A.2005:726-727)

أشد الذنوب ما استهان به صاحبه

**The most serious sin is that which the doer considers light**

The reference is clear here that a 'sin' is something serious but what is more serious thing is that one which the doer considers light.

### **Strategy (4): Understate:**

Quantity Maxim says "Say as much and no more than is required." Violating this maxim is the cornerstone of this strategy. Brown and Levinson (1978:222) believe that by saying less/more than is required, S invites H to consider why and the social pressure against FTAs yield one set of interpretations. There is a special mechanism of applying this strategy. Brown and Levinson (ibid.) point out that the typical ways of constructing understatements are to choose a point on a scalar predicate (ex.: tall, good..) that is well below the point that actually describes the state of affairs or to hedge a higher point which will implicate the (lower) actual state of affairs.

The following example illustrate this idea (Brown and Levinson: ibid.)

**Ex: What do you do of Harry?**

**Nothing wrong with him. (I don't think he's very good).**

# Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

In religious text type in SA, the researchers finds no application to this strategy.

## Strategy (5):Overstate:

Although this strategy is like the previous one ,namely, the strategy of understate, in violating the Quantity Maxim, it is different at another level. Instead of speaking about a point that is below the real level S does the opposite. Brown and Levinson (1978:224) explain that S may do that by the inverse of the understatement principle, i.e., by exaggerating in order to minimize FTAs. See the following example:

**Ex: There were a million people in the Co-op tonight.**

Once again, an application of this strategy could not be recognized by the researchers.

## Strategy (6): Use tautologies:

This strategy is also based on violating the Quantity Maxim. Its mechanism is applied by telling truths that are patent and necessary(Brown and Levinson:1978:225).The point in applying this strategy is that the mentioned truth is in obvious need for an interpretation. That is what makes this strategy indirect. Brown and Levinson(ibid.) say that "by uttering a tautology, S encourages H to look for an informative interpretation of the non-informative utterance." This strategy is applicable to excuses, criticisms and complaints as shown below (ibid.)

a-an excuse:

**War is war.**

b-a criticism:

**Your clothes belong where your clothes belong, my clothes belong where my clothes belong. Look upstairs.**

c-a complaint:

**If it is a road, it's a road! (Boy, what a terrible road)**

This strategy has not been applied in the genre under study as far as the researchers know.

## Strategy(7):Use contradictions:

The principle of this strategy is violating the Quality Maxim : "Speak the truth, be sincere". Stating two contradictory things reveals the fact that the process of interpreting the truth is problematic since the truth is not clear-cut. That's why , as Brown and Levinson(1978:226) say, "S tries to make H find an interpretation that compromise the two contradictory ideas." This strategy could be used to express a 'complaint' , or a 'criticism' that could be conveyed by contradictions just like when someone says the following of a drunken friend to a telephone caller(ibid.226)

**"Well, John is here and is not here"**

Another example could illustrate the use of contradictions is also given by Brown and Levinson(1978:226) as follows:

**A: Are you upset about that?**

**B: Well, (yes and no / I'm and I'm not)**

In SA, this strategy is also used as in the following example from the Wholly Quran:

ثم لا يموت فيها ولا يحيى  
الأعلى(30:12)

***Then therein he shall neither live nor die***



The Most High(30:12)

**Strategy (8):Be ironic:**

Violating the Quality Maxim makes the basis of the strategy of 'being ironic'. This violation could be made ,as Brown and Levinson (1978:226) say, by saying the opposite of what the S means he can indirectly convey his intended meaning if there are clues 1- prosodic (e.g. nasality), 2-kinesic (e.g. a smirk) or 3-contextual.

The following examples clarify some applications of the above strategy:(ibid.)

Ex.1- **John's a real genius.** (after John has just done twenty stupid things in a row.)

Ex.2- **Lovely neighbourhood, eh?** (in a slum)

Ex.3- **Beautiful weather, isn't it!** (to postman drenched in rainstorm)

This strategy has not been applied in the genre under study as far as the researchers knows. That is not to say that irony is not used in religious text type in SA. It is rather to say that irony is used in this text type but not as a politeness strategy. It is used to convey humiliation, as in the following example:

"ذق انك أنت العزيز الكريم"

الدخان (25:49)

**Taste; you forsooth are the mighty, the honorable**

(The Evident Smoke:25:49)

**Strategy(9):Use metaphors:**

Using metaphors makes another strategy of those based on violating the Quality Maxim. A metaphor is ,as Brown and Levinson (1978:227) point out, a literary false. The following example sheds some light on applying this strategy:

**Ex; Harry's a real fish.** {He(drinks/ swims/ is slimy/ is cold-blooded) like a fish.

The application of this strategy could not be located by the researchers in the genre under study.

**Strategy(10):Use rhetorical questions:**

The use of rhetorical questions is an indirect strategy of politeness which is based on violating the Quality Maxim ,i.e., 'Be sincere'. The S's intention is not to obtain an answer which makes a violation to the sincerity condition of questions which seeks information.(Brown and Levinson :1978:228). See the following examples:

As an excuse:

**Ex: How was I to know...?** (e.i. I wasn't)

For criticism:

**Ex: How many times do I have to tell you...?** (e.i. Too many)

In SA, the strategy of rhetorical is used in several ways. For criticism, the following example is illustrative :

**"The best of them said: Did I not say to you, Why do you not glorify (Allah)?"**

The Pen (28: 29)

"قال أوسطهم ألم أقل لكم لولا تسبحون"

(القلم:28:29)

# Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic

A new application to the strategy of rhetorical questions that is not referred to in Brown and Levinson(1978). It is the use of this strategy to attract the attention of H. Instead of saying (Pay attention) to H, S attracts H's attention indirectly by issuing a rhetorical question as in the following example:

**"And has the story of Musa come to you?"**

Ta Ha (16:9)

"وهل أتاك حديث موسى"

طه (16 : 9)

## **Strategy(11):Be ambiguous:**

This strategy is based on violating the Manner Maxim. S may choose being ambiguous through making his intended communicative message vague ,i.e., ill-defined intentionally. The application of this strategy aims at minimizing the threat of the FTA.

Metaphor is used sometimes to achieve ambiguity on purpose. Using metaphor to be ambiguous is based on the fact that there are more than one connotation of the metaphor and the targeted one is not explicitly identified. The following example which could be either a complaint or an insult, is illustrative, (Brown and Levinson:1978:230):

**Ex: John's a pretty[short / smooth] cookie.**

The application of this strategy could not be located by the researchers in the genre under study.

## **Strategy(12):Be vague:**

Brown and Levinson (1978:231) point that being vague is a strategy of indirectness used by S to go off record with an FTA. S may do that about who the object of the FTA is, or what the offence is. This strategy is used in several cases ,as put in Brown and Levinson (ibid.), like **criticism** as illustrated in the following example:

**Ex: Perhaps someone did something naughty.**

or **euphemism**

**Ex: I'm going you know where.**

However, the application of this strategy in SA could not be recognized.

## **Strategy(13):Over-generalize:**

This strategy violates the Manner Maxim. It is used in several cases. These cases, as stated in Brown and Levinson(1978:231) are as in the following case: **rule instantiation** may leave the object of the FTA vaguely off record:

**Ex: " Mature people sometimes help do the dishes."**

The second case is the use of proverbs, as follows (ibid.)

**Ex: He who laughs last laughs longest.**

The proverb here serves as **criticism** with a minimized FTA.

In SA, this strategy is applied as in the following example:

"..ووصينا الإنسان بوالديه حسنا"

العنكبوت(20 : 8)

**And we have enjoined on man goodness to his parents...**

The Spider (20:8)

The word 'man' in the example above have been over-generalized to include all human beings without addressing H directly.

### **Strategy(14):Displace H:**

S sometimes addresses the FTA to someone whom it is not meant to threaten, and hope that the intended target will see that the FTA is directed to him. Or, he may go off record as to who the target for his FTA is. (Brown and Levinson:1978:231).For example, in Tamil villages indirect requests follow this strategy. S moans about his needs to somebody standing nearby in the hearing of the intended goal of the request. (ibid.232)

"فما يكذبك بعد بالدين"

التين (30: 7)

"Then who can give you the lie after (this) about the judgment?"

The Fig(Teen):(30: 7)

It is clear that the Prophet Mohammad ,though he is apparently the addressee, is not the targeted addressee, since the one who gives the lie about the judgment should be the targeted H.

### **Strategy(15):Be incomplete:**

This strategy indicates a violation to Quantity as well as Manner Maxims. It is applied by using ellipsis where some parts of the utterances ellipted deliberately. Ellipted parts leaves an FTA half-done. Thus, S can leave the implicature 'hanging in the air' , just as in the rhetorical question :

**Ex: Well, if one leaves one's tea on the wobby table...**(Brown and Levinson:1978:233)

This strategy is mostly preferred for requests and other FTAs in Tamil, especially to one's superiors:

**Ex: Oh sir, a headache...**(Brown and Levinson: ibid.)

This kind of utterance gives the superior addressee the option of telling the S to go and lie down, rather than having a precious pill. (ibid.) In SA, the application of this strategy could not be found by the researchers.

### **Contrastive rhetoric and politeness:**

Language is a means of communicating information, data, thought, feelings, etc. Communicating these subjects between call sides through exchanging communicative messages take different forms. These forms vary according to various thought patterns of Ss. They represent the organization of ideas as chosen by different speakers of different languages. These thought patterns are structured differently since they are decided by the logic adopted by a given speech community. Logic, being the corner stone in this regard is an influential factor in deciding the form of the communicative message. It is widely accepted that logic is culture-specific rather than universal (Connor:1996:30). That leads to the fact that when logic of a given speech community decides a given form for a given communicative message, it may decide another form for the same communicative message of a different speech community. To put all what has been said above clearly, let us deal with a relatively new branch of discourse analysis, i.e., contrastive rhetoric (CR, henceforth). CR is "an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language(ibid.:1996:8).According to Kaplan (1966),which is reprinted in (1980), Ostler (1987) and Connor (1996), English is linear whereas Arabic is parallel. Kaplan (2001) points out that "particular languages have particular organizational preferences, and I continue to believe that English is more linear that some other languages." Linear text development is shorter and more economical than the parallel one.

# **Indirectness as a Politeness Strategy in Standard Arabic**

Economy is an established linguistic principle, (Language is economic). Thus, to be linguistically economical the speaker should use the linear text development. This could be done by being direct rather than indirect.

This argument could be sound when communicating information, data, or any kind of communicative messages that are not strongly emotional. When the doctor is trying to tell somebody that the latter's relative died during the surgery it would be far from being suitable to tell the bare truth directly. The reason behind that is that the matter is not only of conveying information, it is rather of conveying feelings and emotions. In such cases, the direct way of communicating does not make the best option. Adopting the indirect way would be much more successful communicatively. Thus, economy is not the only factor to be considered in successful communication. Another factor considering the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic sides, is also to be considered here ,i.e., politeness which takes part in "regulating communicative action and interaction throughout communities" (Kasper and Kenneth:2001:4-5). This regulation between individuals and groups of various speech communities refers to the different sides mentioned above." This means that sometimes in order to have a successful communication, the principle of politeness rather than that of economy should be considered. This consideration is done, in some cases, through indirectness. Thus, there is still an urgent and strong need for those who claim that the western linear thought pattern is superior to the Arabic parallel thought pattern to reconsider their claim.

Actually, even the claim that English is linear whereas Arabic is parallel ,i.e., uses parallel constructions heavily, could not be accepted peacefully. The reason behind that is that the basic study in this field, i.e., Kaplan's (1966) was based on a methodological flow. Kaplan (ibid.) made a comparison between the essays written by Arabs requesting residence in the USA, regardless to their ages, sexes, educational backgrounds, etc. on the one hand and a number of edited chapters written by various western professional book writers on the other hand.

The major concern of the present study is not to evaluate and criticize Kaplan's (1966) theory of CR. It is rather to show the importance of indirectness in communication. It tries to show that economy is not only influential factor in successful communication. What accounts is not only what to tell the addressee or H but How to tell him/her successfully and effectively.

## **Universality of politeness**

The concept of politeness receives a great deal of attention. Several theories of politeness have been proposed. Any theory of politeness has two sides, theoretical and practical. These two sides have been considered differently by the different theories of politeness. Is politeness universal or culture-specific? Different viewpoints are given in this regard. Brown and Levinson(1978:60) claim universality for politeness. Their work is based on examples taken from three different languages, namely, English, Tamil and Tzeltal. They (ibid.) point out that "the fine grained parallelisms in the expression of politeness in three unrelated languages" have been highlighted in their work. They believe that their work(1978) "provides evidence of the parallelisms, and demonstrates their rational sources." To be more specific, it is the notion of 'face' what makes politeness universal. Brown and Levinson (1978), as referred to by Johnstone (2008:146), suggest that "while there are cross-cultural differences in what constitutes being unimpeded or being approved of and in how these face-wants are dealt with in conversation, the fact that discourse is shaped by considerations of face is universal."

Some other linguists believe that politeness is culture-specific rather than universal. Several studies like House and Kasper (1981), Hill, Ide, Ikuta,Kawasaki and Ogino (1986), House (1986) and Blum-Kulka (1987), as mentioned in Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper(1987), support this claim. These studies" reveal culture-specific features of discourse and hence can be construed as further evidence for the claim that speech communities tend to develop culturally distinct interactional style" (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper:1987:7).

Releasing a claim should be based on strong evidence, theoretically and practically. This kind of support has not been given by Brown and Levinson (1978). Their face-saving approach is "the only one which satisfies the criteria for empirical theories, such as explicitness, parsimony, and predictiveness. However, their strong claim to universality has met increasing theoretical doubt and empirical counterevidence." (Kasper:2001:189).

Finally, although the present study is limited to one specific genre ,namely, religious one, it has become clear that not all indirect strategies of politeness are applicable. The reason behind that is that the concept of politeness is culture-specific rather than universal.

### **Findings:**

The following findings could be recognized at the end of doing the present study:

1-Not all the indirect strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) are applicable to religious genre in SA.

2-The strategies that are covered by the religious genre in SA are seven. They are as follows:1-give hints, 2-give association clues, 3-presuppose, 4-use contradictions, 5-use rhetorical questions, 6-over-generalize, and 7-displace H.

3-The strategies that are not covered by the religious genre in SA are eight. They are as follows:1-understate, 2-overstate, 3-use tautologies, 4-be ironic, 5-use metaphors, 6-be ambiguous, 7-be vague and 8-be incomplete.

4- One additional application to an indirect strategy of politeness, namely, using rhetorical questions is recognized. That application is that one of 'attracting the attention of H.

5-A strong relationship is recognized between two sub-linguistic fields, namely, pragmatics and contrastive rhetoric. The structures of thought patterns of different language users vary according to more than one factor. One of them is politeness, being part of pragmatics, which is culture-specific rather than universal. Indirectness, being part of politeness, which is considered as a form of redundancy since it requires avoiding linearity in discourse/text development is re-evaluated. Indirectness makes an essential strategy in achieving politeness for the sake of a successful communication.

6-An additional evidence is offered against the claimed universality of Brown and Levinson (1978) theory of politeness.

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