



## Awareness of Politeness Maxim in An Efl Context: A Case in Libya

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**Abstract:** Since the beginning of our societies, politeness has been the target of criticism. This criticism begins as early as childhood, and as a direct result, the politeness maxim has developed into an interesting topic of conversation. When we are acting or speaking, we must treat everyone politely. This obligation exists regardless of the context. We can maintain a polite manner in our vocal expressions even though our intentions are not particularly good for the people we speak with. For example, we must respect other people's perspectives, even if we vehemently disagree with them. Within the context of this piece, Leech's aphorisms act as the cornerstone upon which an investigation of civility is built. He recommended six distinct groups of etiquette maxims and provided examples for each. The primary focus of this research is on the extent to which university students in Libya studying English as a foreign language are aware of the need to maintain good manners. According to the abstract, the study's goal is to explore the level of knowledge held by Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL students about the speech act of politeness maxim. This investigation will be carried out to determine the amount of knowledge possessed by these students. In the classroom of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), which serves as a learning environment? Because utterances must sound universal and acceptable to contemporary culture, the research recommends investigating the approval and agreement maxim in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This is because these maxims make ethical sense in education.

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### Introduction

The words and expressions people use can impact how they think, say, feel, and connect with others because language is a crucial part of social identity. People utilise various strategies while communicating since it is a crucial part of the communicative skills expected of language users. As a result, this section of the Study contains information about its background, challenges, research questions, and goals. This part also explains the importance of the Study.

### Background of the Study

By analysing how Libyan Arab and Amazigh EFL undergraduate students do the speech acts of suggestion, apology, request, permission, opinion, and questioning, the current study aims to ascertain their awareness of the politeness maxim. Utilising the civility maxim is thus one of the communication tactics. Being polite has grown to be an important aspect of society; it is now used to describe the social climate of a town or region. An example of a social norm formed by local customs is politeness. To show that they are civilised people who won't be accused of being rude or having poor manners, they must occasionally act polite. Although politeness can be used to

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pinpoint social culture, it is, in many ways, a universal virtue (Hussain et al.,2022). For example, the modesty maxim calls for the speech participants to be humble by dialling back their admiration for them. As evidence, consider the following exchange between a teacher and his two pupils as they discuss their exam results:

Teacher: Your results are excellent!

Student A: Ah, I think it is ordinary.

Students B: Oh!, it is me.

The answer "**Ah, I think it is ordinary**" from student A is more polite, and it is the answer the listeners expect more. This means that student A humbly minimises praise for herself and maximises disdain for herself, showing modesty. However, the answer of student B, "**Oh! It is me,**" is considered immodest because he maximises praise on himself, showing an attitude of arrogance and immodesty. Therefore, the answer of student A shows the universality of the modesty maxim in terms of humbleness and politeness. In this case, the context can be either situational or cultural. Pragmatics is very important because it teaches people how to behave in society, so many people developed some pragmatic theory to support their communication skills during its development. Geoffrey Leech, with his Politeness Principles (PP) theory, is one of them (Leech, 1983).

Following the Libyan revolution in 2011, many changes occurred in the country's various governmental systems, including the educational system. As a result, there is a need to investigate Libyan EFL undergraduate learners' competence in using English in various discourses and their choice of strategies when expressing speech acts.

### **The aim of the study**

The current research aims to:

1. To examine the awareness of Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners regarding the speech acts of politeness maxim in various social contexts.
2. To investigate the politeness realisation of the participants while producing the speech acts of permission, request, apology, question, opinion, and suggestion.
3. To investigate the similarities and differences between Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL( non-Arab minority in Libya) users in responding to situations of speech and act patterns.

### **Research Questions**

The research seeks to find answers for the following research questions:

1- To what extent Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners are able to choose the appropriate politeness maxim in performing the speech acts of permission, request, apology, question, opinion .and suggestion.

2- What are the similarities and differences between Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners regarding politeness maxim use and patterns in the speech acts of permission, request, apology, question, opinion .and suggestion.

3 Are there any significant differences regarding the appropriate use of politeness maxim by the Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners?

### **Statement of Problems**

The current study aims to examine the strategies used by a group of Libyan undergraduates in performing the previously mentioned speech acts to investigate whether there are any differences between Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners regarding the appropriate

use of politeness maxims in speech act patterns. It also investigates how effective the politeness maxim has been in Libyan societies. According to the author, language learners can develop their communicative and transcultural competence when linguistic and cultural experiences shape communicative events (Takkula et al. 2008).

### **Significance of the Study**

As a result, the current study's investigation of Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners' interlanguage speech acts is critical in raising stakeholders' understanding of the importance of politeness competence. Furthermore, the findings of this study may provide useful information for improving EFL language learners' communicative ability, and we feel they might serve as a model for future research, especially in the EFL context.

### **Method**

The current chapter provides background information for the study. It reviews the literature of previous studies on the topic and illustrates the theoretical frameworks used. In other words, it primarily explains previous research on speech act theory regarding the politeness maxim and the proposed six maxims of Leech. According to Leech, the Politeness Principle is about minimising the expression of impolite beliefs, with a corresponding positive version of maximising the expression of polite beliefs that is slightly less important. As a result, utilising Leech's Politeness principle, it is feasible to evaluate dialogue between characters in theatre. Leech proposed using politeness to create and understand language. Politeness principles are intended to foster a sense of community and social relationships. In this sense, Leech also proposed six maxims: Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approval Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim, and Sympathy Maxim.

### **Results**

#### **Politeness Theory**

Politeness theory has garnered considerable interest in pragmatics over the last three decades, and it has evolved into a sub-branch of pragmatics with a close relationship to pragmatics (Thomas, 2014). Politeness is a type of behaviour that is generally revealed in languages and is directly related to societies. Politeness theory implies a type of behaviour or speech that gives advantages to others, and the linguist claims that:

"Face can be further classified into positive face and negative face. A "positive face" alludes to the speaker's desire for acceptance and admiration from others. It puts more emphasis on the speaker's self-esteem. If others ignored him or her, one's face would be in danger. Negative face refers to one's free choice of actions and his desire not to be imposed on by others. It put stress on the freedom of action. The issue of "face" protection always draws attention in cross-cultural communication. Politeness is culture-specific. What one culture considers polite is usually not considered very polite or even rude in another culture. Knowing another country's culture can prevent people from losing face (Jiang, 2015, p. 97). "

However, only some studies of the politeness principle have been published in the literature. It occurred as a result of the fact that the majority of literary works were generated as written text rather than conversation. Literary work is classified into three categories: poetry, prose, and drama. Drama is the only literary work that is written in a conversational style.

#### **Theory of Speech Acts**

Speech acts are the specific linguistic functions that something that is stated performs. The father of speech-act theory (SAT), British philosopher J. L. Austin, was the first to explain the idea at Oxford University in a series of lectures between 1952 and 1954. He claimed that when people make utterances, they not only say words; they also do actions with them. Execute the intended actions and ensure that listeners understand the conversation's purpose. According to Austin

(1965), there are three forms of linguistic acts in utterance: the locutionary act (what is said), the illocutionary act (what is meant), and the perlocutionary act (what is meant) (the effect on the hearer). It depends on the situation and the speaker's intention; for example, it could be a picnic tip or a sentence to break the ice, start a conversation, etc. According to Achiba (2003), the illocutionary act is a specific language function performed by an utterance. The third and final type of meaning is perlocutionary, which refers to the effect of the speech act on the listener. Perlocutionary acts, according to Austin (1975), are "what we bring about or achieve by saying something" (p. 109). For example, when producing the same sentence as in the previous example, "It is sunny," only the speaker's facial expressions or voice tone may be sufficient for the hearer to understand the intended meaning. In this sense, Henkemans argues that:

"The modification of the standard theory of speech acts is to make it possible to explain that in practise, arguing is not the same as convincing. Even though the verbal means used in arguing and convincing are the same, the emotional conditions of these acts are different. To account for this difference. There is a need to differentiate between the correctness of a speech act from the speaker's point of view and from the listener's point of view (Henkemans, 2014)."

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) promoted teaching the target language's culture in the 1970s, and, as a result, using speech acts in an EFL/ESL context aimed to increase teachers' and students' cultural awareness of the target language. Indeed, supporters of CLT argue that teaching a foreign or second language and teaching cultural and social norms cannot be separated and that "speech acts can be realised in different ways in different cultures" (Sanal & Ortactepe, 2019: 378). As a result, taking into account the cultural and social beliefs and norms of the learners' mother tongue society is critical when conducting studies that investigate speech acts, and in this case, the researcher propagates that:

"With regard to speech acts, about half of the research projects have included the original three speech acts (requests, refusals, and apologies); others only included one or two of those three but added other speech acts; and still other projects ignored the speech act issue altogether. Interestingly, one project (Brown & Ahn, 2011) found that speech acts made very little difference in the variance produced by any of their five tests of Korean pragmatics, therefore, while a variety of speech acts should probably be included in instruction as examples of where to pay attention to pragmatics, speech acts may not make much difference when measuring pragmatic competence (Brown, 2018)".

### **Politeness Principles**

According to Leech, the Politeness Principle is about minimising the expression of impolite beliefs, with a corresponding positive version of maximising the expression of polite beliefs that is slightly less important. Leech proposed using politeness to create and understand language. Politeness principles are intended to foster a sense of community and social relationships. Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approval Maxim, Maxim, Agreement, Sympathy Maxim, and Modesty Maxim were also proposed by Leech.

#### **Tact Maxim**

Tact maxim refers to minimising the cost to others while maximising the benefit to others. In this maxim, the speaker minimises the cost (and thus maximises the benefit) for the listener. Example: Could I halt or interrupt you for 3 minutes?

#### **Generosity Maxim**

The maximisation of generosity refers to minimising benefits while maximising costs to oneself. This maxim is self-centred, whereas the tact maxim is concerned with others (it focuses on the speaker and says that others should be put first instead of the self). Example: Today, you must come and have breakfast with me.

#### **Approbation Maxim**

Approbation Maxim means minimising criticism of others while maximising praise of others. This adage is used to avoid saying hurtful things about others, especially the listener. Example: We understand you are perfect in summary; could you sum up this test?

### **Agreement Maxim**

Agreement Maxim refers to minimising the expression of disagreement between oneself and others while maximising the expression of agreement between oneself and others. In this maxim, disagreement is usually expressed as regret or partial agreement. Example: She does not want me to take the big parcel; she rather wants me to take the small one.

### **Sympathy Maxim**

The sympathy maxim refers to minimising antipathy and maximising sympathy between oneself and others. In this case, the accomplishments of others, for example, must be recognised and evaluated. On the other hand, when tragedy strikes someone else, they must be shown sympathy or condolences. Example: I am so sorry for your mom's death. Have my condolences.

### **Modesty Maxim**

Modesty maxim means to minimise self-praise and maximise self-criticism. Both the approbation and modesty maxims are concerned with the speaker's degree of good or bad evaluation of others or himself. However, this maxim is usually used when apologising for something. Example: Hey! I am so careless; I have my door key missing.

The Importance of Speech Acts in Language Learning The speech acts are a group of words created by the speaker to make interactional conversation and make new acts such as apology, prevention, permission, request, etc. It is crucial, as it is for reaching the intention; unless we recognise the intended meaning produced by some speech acts, we will not be able to give an opinion about the position of a speaker regarding what s/he utters and attribute the good thoughts and aims to a participant (Schiffrin, 2005). Furthermore, recognising the purposes of utterances is often essential to successful communication. However, the relationship between the linguistic structure and its implicit function must be clarified (Searle, 1975). Searle presents many parameters that differentiate his speech acts. Nevertheless, the numerous influences are the fit Direction, of which there are a couple of important ones: Speech acts that present gossip to the globe fit only in issue; they express the globe as being so-described. Speech acts produce a world-to-word fit if they propose that interlocutors behave so that the world comes to provide the description. Searle (1975:158) notes, "Direction of fit is always a consequence of an illocutionary point. Building our taxonomy fully around this distinction in the Direction of fit would be exquisite. Still, though it will compute mostly in our taxonomy, I cannot make it the fundamental basis of the prizes," Roberts, C. (2018). In this manner, Searle (1969) classified speech acts into five essential types called the taxonomy of speech acts for the illocutionary influence used to explain communication in contexts. They are as follows: Commissives, Directives, Representatives, Declarations, and Expressives: Austin (1965) and Searle (1975) have suggested the speech acts must meet particular circumstances to be successful. The cases were indicated to be felicitous ones, and they correlated to the structure and position of the point of the meeting. For instance, at a birthday ceremony, people interact for many things, such as giving gifts, kissing, and hugging him or her.. According to the classifications of Searle (1969) and Cohen (1996), speech acts can be classified into five categories: (1) Representatives (claims, assertions, reports) (2) Directives (requests, suggestions, and commands). (3) Expressives (complaints, apologies, thanks). (4) Commissives (threats, promises, and offers). (5) Declarative (decrees, declarations) This is related to how the speech acts affect the context. So as the language philosopher Searle's classifications with an explanation of the speech act are as follows:

“Representatives were defined as kinds of speech acts that include a description of a statement of a fact and

assertions connected to the truth or falsity of what the speakers probably think and believe to be the case or not. The utterances are perhaps true or false, as they hope to describe them. The pragmatics of the sentence shows the direction of the words and what the sentences or paragraphs mean. For instance, if some person states, That teacher is outstanding, No one should believe his or her speech without confirming him or her until everybody knows if it was right or wrong."

Directives are acts by which a person tries to get someone else to do something else. The utterance sender is seeking what he or she wants to send. The destination of the phrase and words uttered by the speaker has an understandable meaning for all. For example, a circumstance that happens every day is a habit, like an asker who asks anything from another to respond to it. Related verbs to the Directives include warning, inviting, requesting, daring, directing, summoning, commanding, challenging, questioning, begging, reassuring, advising, asking, bidding, ordering, forbidding, instructing, suggesting, defying, and entreating.

"Commissives: are a type of speech act used by the speaker for doing anything and the sides of the used sentence. Commitment is the same as the destination of explaining the intention through words and expressing what is inside the speaker. Some related words to the Commissives: vowing, intending, pledging, and promising to do what is needed and what was asked to be done."(Takkula et al. 2008).

Expressive speech is used to explain a psychological situation and express its fluent mood. When any person says "forgive me," it refers to something wrong that is unusual and unacceptable socially. Some related verbs to the expressive are: Thanking, greeting, congratulating, regretting, condoling, surprising, blaming, and welcoming.

Declarations are speech acts that change according to the content of the words in a sentence. The speakers perform the actions by stating their status. The linguist Hatch (1992) mentioned that declarations are speech acts that include speech and what the speakers want to say and perform. Some related verbs to the Declarations: Appointing, declaring, dismissing, resigning, and firing from employment, naming, blessing, and sentencing.

## Conclusion

The literature review and the theoretical framework in this study involve some fundamental definitions that facilitate the comprehension of speech acts regarding the politeness maxim. The purpose of the study is to examine the awareness of Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL learners regarding the speech acts of politeness maxim. In various social contexts. 2. to investigate the politeness realisation of the participants while producing the speech acts of permission, request, apology, question, opinion, and suggestion. 3. To investigate the similarities and differences between Arab-Libyan and Amazigh-Libyan EFL( non-Arab minority in Libya) users responding to speech-act patterns. In a nutshell, the Politeness maxim has a role in the investigation because it is used by people in their social interactions and specific contexts, such as knowing what to say, how to say it, when to say it, and how to interact with others. Being polite is very important to creating good communication between oneself and others. This means that both the speaker and the hearer should exercise caution when using language in communication, and this caution refers to the politeness maxim.

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