Fathi, '24 Formulaic Politeness in Moroccan Arabic

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Abstract

This paper aims to show that Moroccan males and females do make use of polite speech behavior that cannot be accounted for in Brown & Levinson's framework of politeness. In other words, such highly expressive speech behavior is different from Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies in many respects. While such politeness behavior attends to the face wants of the hearer, it cannot be considered as politeness strategies in Brown & Levinson's sense, but rather as Politeness Formulas. Politeness formulas differ also from strategies with respect to their politeness conversational structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Moroccan males and females do make use of polite speech behavior that cannot be accounted for in Brown & Levinson's framework of politeness. In other words, such highly expressive speech behavior is different from Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies in many respects. Before giving an idea about the characteristics of such differences, we shall have to provide a variety of examples of the use of such polite speech behavior in the following listing. It should, however, be stressed that this taxonomy does not claim, by any means, to be comprehensive. Rather, it purports to supply a highly representative sample of polite usage in Moroccan Arabic, outside the realm of Brown & Levinson's framework of politeness strategies, which also attend to the interlocutors' face wants. Given that they depart from Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies, we shall proceed by dubbing these polite speech interactions in terms of PFs (Politeness Formulas), as they constitute frozen chunks of speech behavior that must be considered as a unified whole not liable for disintegration or partial usage.

II. BROWN & LEVINSON'S THEORY OF POLITENESS

Brown & Levinson set out to describe and account for the remarkable phenomenon of politeness in speech. On the basis of the observation of cross-cultural similarities in the abstract principles underlying polite usage, they systematized a description of this phenomenon in the speech of three different cultures, namely, United States, Tzeltal and Tamil. They came to the conclusion that there are, in fact, common mechanisms that regulate polite usage across the established boundaries of cultures and languages in time and space. Starting from the basic distinction between positive and negative politeness, they devised fifteen positive politeness strategies and ten negative politeness strategies.

2.1 Positive politeness and positive face

The theoretical notion of positive face is the want of every speaker that, in speech encounters, his

wants be desirable and attended to by at least some others. Positive politeness, then, which is approach-based, anoints the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects the speaker approves of the hearer's wants. According to Brown & Levinson, positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable. This is because face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must, therefore, be constantly attended to in speech interactions. In general, it is believed that the more effort the speaker expends in face-maintaining linguistic behavior, the more communicates his sincere desire that the hearer's face wants be satisfied and approved of. The strategies of positive politeness as described by Brown & Levinson involve three broad mechanisms: claiming common ground, conveying that the speaker and hearer are cooperators, and fulfilling the hearer's wants for some underlying goals like requests, questions, etc.

2.2 Negative politeness and negative face

The theoretical ideation of negative face can be defined as the want of every competent adult speaker that his actions be unimpeded by others. Negative politeness, then, which is essentially avoidance-based, consists in assuming that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with the hearer's freedom of action. Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded. According to Brown & Levinson, when we think of politeness in Western culture, it is negative politeness behavior that springs to mind basically. Actually, negative politeness is the heart of respect behavior, just as positive politeness is the kernel of "familiar" and "joking" behavior. In their framework, Brown & Levinson outline negative politeness strategies into five major sub-groups or broad mechanisms, each subsuming one or more Neg Pol strategies, each. These mechanisms are: be indirect, don't presume or assume, don't coerce H, communicate S's want not to impinge on H, and redress other wants of H. These are realized through ten, apparently different, negative politeness strategies.

III. SAMPLE POLITENESS FORMULAS

PF 1   A- šukran

Thank you!

B- la šukran çala važib

Or, also used:

B- al-çafw

You're welcome!

PF 2 A- llah jerHem l-walidin (May God bless your parents!)

Thank you very much!

B- walidina u-walidik (My parents and yours)

Or, also used:

B- bla žmil

Don't mention it.

PF 3 A- llah jexlef

May God reward you!

B- b-SaHtek

To your health!

PF 4 A- smeH lija

Excuse me!

B- ma-kajn muškil

No problem!

PF 5 A- metšarfin a-sidi

Pleased to meet you!

B- llah jšarref meqDarek

Me, too.

PF 6 A- ssalamu çalajkum

Good morning (afternoon, evening)!

B- wa-calajkum ssalam

Good morning (afternoon, evening)!

PF 7 A- tbark llah çlik

How do you do?

B- llah jbarek fik

Fine, thank you!

PF 8 A- sellem çla drari

Send my regards to the guys!

B- mubellaR

Sure!

PF 9 A- iwa selmi çla l-walida u-derrijat

My regards to your mother and sisters!

B- llah jsellem çlik l-xir u-rrbaH

Thanks for caring!

PF 10 A- kif dajrin haduk nas

How are they doing?

B- labas sewwel fik l-xir u-rrbah

They're fine. Thanks!

PF 11 A- kif dajra l-walida

How's your mother?

B- labas rebbi jxellik

Fine, thanks for caring!

PF 12 A- çaš men šafek

We haven't seen you for a long time!

B- tšuf le-hna

Thanks for caring!

PF 13 A- mreHba bikum

(You're) welcome!

B- barak llahu fik

Thank you!

PF 14 A- ahlan wa-sahlan

(You're) welcome!

B- ahlan bik

Thank you!

PF 15 A- llah jeSleH

May God keep (him/her) righteous!

B- llah jeSleH jjamek

May God keep you righteous!

PF 16 A- llah ježçal kulši mbarek mesçud

May you be successful/happy!

B- llah jbarek fik

Thank you.

PF 17 A- mebruk ma-derti

Congratulations!

B- leçguba lik nša çellah

Hope the same for you!

A- f-Hjatek nša çellah

In your lifetime.

PF 18 A- mbarek le-çwašer

Or, also used:

A- mbarek l-çid

Happy feast!

B- çwašrek mebruka

You, too.

PF 19 A- llah jçawn

Busy! Good working!

B- llah jbarek fik

Thank you!

PF 20 A- çla slamtek

Or, also used:

A'- çel slama

You're back safe!

B- llah jselmek u-nežžik

Yes, thanks!

PF 21 A- bSaHet l-Hemmam

Fresh now!

B- llah jeçTik SSeHHa

Or, also used:

    B- nbus biddik

    Yes, thanks!

PF 22 A- llah jfuk wHajlek çla xir

    Hope you recover soon!

    B- amin rebbi jxellik

Or, also used:

    B- amin llah jTewwel çemrek

    Amen! Thank you!

PF 23 A- majkun çandek bas

    Hope you'll feel better.

    B- ma-tšuf bas

 Or, also used:

    B- lehla jwerrik bas

    Thank you!

PF 24 A- l-baraka f-rasek

Or, also used:

    A- çaDDam llahu ažrak

    My condolences!

    B- Ma-mša mçak bas

    Thank you!

    A- llah jçewweD mHebtu Sber

    May God reward you!

    B- amin

    Amen!

PF 25 A- llah jçaššer xeTwatek

    Thanks for coming!

    B- bla žmil

    Don't mention it.

PF 26 A- llah jkemmel çlik

    May God reward you!

    B- llah jsetrek

    May He protect you!

PF 27 A- kan rakeb çla waHed leHmar Hašak

He was mounting a donkey "spare you".

    B- çezzek llah

    Thank you!

PF 28 A- (sneeze) al-Hamdu lillah

    (sneeze) Thank God!

    B-reHmek llah

    Bless you!

Otherwise, B risks the blaming response:

    A- ReHmek llah ja rasi ja l-mir ja lli barek west le-Hmir

    May God bless me, the prince, sitting amongst donkeys!

IV.   DISCUSSION OF POLITENESS FORMULAS

We have stated earlier that the above listing is by no means exhaustive and that it is simply a representative sample of a particular type of polite speech behavior that Moroccan males and females make use of in different speech contexts. We have labeled these polite speech interactions into politeness formulas (PF) because we claim they differ from Brown & Levinson's politeness strategies in many respects. Before analyzing in detail the characteristics that singularize these politeness formulas (PF) from politeness strategies (PS), we shall discuss these PFs in terms of their functions and the speakers' intentions in using them.

At first sight, we notice that the first four extracts stand out from the rest thematically and functionally. In fact, they are different ways for thanking someone's good turns and acknowledgements and gratefulness expressing toward the interlocutor. Example PF 4, besides expressing thanks, is also used for asking for excuse after making faux pas, or stepping on somebody's feet. All these examples, then, are used in roughly the same situations for expressing thanks, or asking for excuse with PF 4. These situations presuppose preceding propositions or acts that are believed as face-threatening and that, therefore, require to be redressed. In this regard, these first four PFs share the same redressive function of FTAs with PSs. However, unlike PSs, these PFs serve to

redress preceding FTAs, and not coming ones. In fact, the above four examples are the only PFs that have a redressive function of FTAs.

The other examples of PFs do not have any redressive function and yet can be grouped into different subgroups according to their themes and functions. The next seven PFs are considered as polite speech behavior to be used in specific appropriate situations. Thematically, these PFs revolve around salutations and greetings. They are basically used by the speaker to express greetings or make salutations to interlocutors. They also serve to send greetings to persons not present in the speech encounter. While PF 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 are used with friends or persons previously met, PF 5 is solely used with newly presented persons or strangers, just like PF 5, which can be used both with strangers and friends. PF 12, however, is used with friends who have been missed or not seen for quite a long time.

In the same spirit of PFs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, PF 13 is used in situations requiring specific salutations. More precisely, PF 13 is used for welcoming or wishing good stay to guests. Similarly, PF14 is also used for welcoming, although it is viewed as refined polite speech behavior.

On the other hand, PFs 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 can be subsumed under the same heading of expressing congratulations and/or wishing well. Usually, they are used to congratulate somebody for celebrating or having celebrated weddings, engagements, circumcisions, etc. It is true that although these five PFs are used to express congratulations, they are mutually exclusive as they cannot be utilized in the same context. Rather, each PF is used in specific appropriate contexts, where other PFs would not be congruous. However, PF 19 is an ambivalent politeness formula since it can be used in many situations which require S to wish well to H and, thus, attend to some of his positive face wants of being liked and admired.

The last subgroup of PFs comprises five politeness formulas that thematically revolve around expressing sorrow, grief or empathy. PF 22 is used only to pregnant women or to women who have just given birth to a baby. Similarly, PF 23 is addressed to an ill person about to recover.

The other three PFs are used in slightly similar contexts to express distress at the death of a relative to the interlocutor. While PF 24 is used to condole a person and PF 25 is used by the condoled person when seeing off the relatives who came to stand by him and lament for him, PF 26 is used only to a widow apparently wearing white gears.

The last two instances of politeness formulas constitute largely divergent PFs which are employed in utterly diverse contexts. PF 27 centers on the expression "Hašak" (save you) which is politely used after every taboo word, heard or said. It is related that older generations in the countryside used to say "Hašak" whenever they talked about or referred to their wives. The other example is somewhat peculiar and rather funny, commonly used between intimate friends. In this case, B is not required to respond at A's sneezing unless A has made his turn at speaking first. However, if A sneezes and says "al-Hamdu lillah" and B does not respond appropriately by saying "reHmek llah", A is highly likely to retort to B's disregard as exemplified by PF 28.

V. CONCLUSION

By way of summary, we remind that the politeness formulas outlined above can be subsumed under different headings depending on their themes and functions they serve according to S's intention(s). Thus, we notice that PFs 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be labeled as the Thanking Formulas, while PFs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are used to express greetings and will be termed the Greeting Formulas. Under the Welcoming Formulas we have PFs 13 and 14. For S to make congratulations, he can choose, depending on contexts, one of the Congratulations Formulas numbered 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21. Lastly, we subsume PFs 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 under the heading of Empathy Formulas because they are used by S to empathize with H and share his sorrows and griefs.

Earlier in this section, we have claimed that the above politeness formulas are different from Brown & Levinson's strategies and cannot be accounted for in their framework of politeness. We will attempt, in the following, to justify this claim by pinpointing the characteristic differences of PFs that distinguish them from

PSs. First of all, we notice that, unlike Pos Pol and Neg Pol strategies, politeness formulas, as exemplified above, do not necessarily serve to redress or defuse the imminent threat in FTAs, nor are they binding. Rather, the speaker makes use of PFs merely for the sake of showing politeness without having the prior intention of asking, offering, or calling for help. In other words, PFs are transparent since they do not disguise any underlying purpose, besides being polite, on the part of the user.

Another striking feature of PFs is that they basically serve to satisfy and attend to the positive face wants of the hearer. That is, when the speaker puts to use a particular PF, he primarily intends to communicate to H that his wants are desirable and that he is approved of in certain respects. In this regard, PFs may be considered as a particular type of positive politeness, yet not in Brown & Levinson's sense. Politeness strategies have fundamentally two different and simultaneous functions: a high order function for satisfying H's face wants, and a low order one, contingent on the particular strategy and context, for redressing FTAs. Politeness formulas are assuredly parallel to positive politeness strategies in that they attend to other positive face wants of the hearer: being respected and esteemed. Just like PSs, politeness formulas are essentially approach-based since they anoint other positive face wants of the hearer.

Unlike politeness strategies, politeness formulas are frozen chunks of speech behavior because, for many generations, they have been established, recognized and transmitted as frozen formulas. They should not be considered as discrete elements juxtaposed to generate meaningful sentences, but rather as independent chunks to be used as unified blocks of meaning. They cannot be altered or reformulated since they have been internalized by native speakers as unified blocks of meaning and not as discrete elements making up meaningful sentences. For this reason, they are finite in number and easily recognizable in speech interactions. No speaker can know exactly how many politeness formulas there are in Moroccan Arabic, but would certainly recognize them as making, or not, part of the linguistic repertoire of PFs they have internalized, just as they have internalized that figures of

speech are finite in number. Given that PFs are finite in number, and have only one basic function, that of satisfying H's positive face wants without necessarily redressing imminent FTAs, they are most suitably and justifiably labeled as formulas, rather than strategies of politeness.

Lastly, politeness formulas differ also from strategies with respect to their politeness conversational structure. Politeness formulas are made up of two parts, one is delivered by S and the other by H, which can be labeled as initiation and response, respectively. The response part is contingent on the initiation part so that if H does not respond to S's initiation, he is either impolite or means to behave impolitely. It does not make any difference whether S and H are males or females to make use of politeness formulas, since they can be used by and addressed to either males or females. However, PF 22 and PF 26 are addressed to females only although they can be delivered by both males and females. PF 21 is also particular as the proposed second version of the response is used solely by and with females.

By way of summary, we underscore that in this section we have shown that although Moroccan males and females make use of most politeness strategies as outlined in Brown & Levinson's framework, they have their particular politeness formulas, which are used in varying specific situations that might not necessarily elicit any polite speech behavior from non-Moroccan Arabic speakers. We have also shown that these PFs differ from PSs in many respects, namely, that they do not necessarily have a redressive function to defuse FTAs, attend to other positive face wants of the hearer, and are frozen in structure and finite in number.

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KEY TO PHONETIC SYMBOLS

/p/: voiceless bilabial stop	/ž/: voiced palato-alveolar fricative
/b/: voiced bilabial stop	/H/: voiceless pharyngeal fricative
/t/: voiceless alveolar stop	/r/: voiced alveolar nonlateral
/d/: voiced alveolar stop	/w/: voiced labiovelar
/k/: voiceless velar stop	/j/: voiced palatal glide
/g/: voiced velar stop	/ç/: voiced pharyngeal fricative
/f/: voiceless labiodental fricative	/S/: voiceless palatal fricative
/v/: voiced labiodental fricative	/T/: voiceless palatal stop
/q/: voiceless uvular stop	/D/: Voiced palatal stop
/s/: voiceless alveolar fricative	/x/: voiceless velar fricative
/z/: voiced alveolar fricative	/R/: voiced uvular fricative
/h/: voiceless glottal fricative	/i/: high front vowel
/m/: voiced bilabial nasal	/a/: low back vowel
/n/: voiced alveolar nasal	/u/: high back vowel
/l/: voiced alveolar lateral	/e/: schwa
/š/: voiceless palato-alveolar fricative	