



**POLITENESS STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN CALL
CENTRE INTERACTIONS IN JORDAN**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DECLARATION OF THESIS	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
ABSTRAK	x
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION	12
1.1 Research background	12
1.2 Problem statement	17
1.3 The objectives of the study	19
1.4 Research questions	20
1.5 Significance of the study	22
CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW	24
2.1 Concepts and terms	25
2.1.1 Pragmatics	25
2.1.2 Speech act	25
2.1.3 Politeness	25
2.1.4 Classical Arabic (CA)	26
2.1.5 Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)	26
2.1.6 Colloquial Arabic	26

2.1.7	Jordanian Arabic (JA)	27
2.2	Review of theories	28
2.2.1	Speech act theory	28
2.2.2	Politeness theories	35
2.2.2.1	Goffman's idea of face	38
2.2.2.2	Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory	39
2.2.2.3	Lakoff's theory of politeness	43
2.2.2.4	Brown and Levinson's model of politeness	46
2.2.2.5	Fraser and Nolen's conversational-contract view	51
2.2.2.6	Leech's theory of interaction	52
2.2.2.7	Watts' politeness behaviour	58
2.3	Review of previous studies	60
2.3.1	Politeness and gender	62
2.3.2	Politeness and dialectal differences	68
2.3.3	Politeness and time constraint	71
2.4	The gap in the existing knowledge	72
2.5	The proposed works	73
2.6	Summary and conclusion	73
CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY		76
3.1	Research design	76
3.2	Data sources and data collection techniques	77
3.2.1	Research site	77
3.2.2	Participants	78
3.2.3	Data collection methods	79
3.2.3.1	Pilot study	79

3.2.3.2	Recordings	81
3.2.3.3	Interviews	82
3.2.3.4	Researcher's role	88
3.2.4	Ethics	90
3.3	Issues of reliability and validity	92
3.3.1	Triangulation	94
3.4	Data transcription	95
3.5	Summary and conclusions	98
CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION		99
4.1	Analysis of data obtained from recordings	99
4.1.1	Conversation 1	99
4.1.2	Conversation 2	105
4.1.3	Conversation 3	110
4.1.4	Conversation 4	113
4.1.5	Conversation 5	119
4.1.6	Conversation 6	124
4.1.7	Conversation 7	132
4.1.8	Conversation 8	141
4.1.9	Conversation 9	148
4.1.10	Conversation 10	151
4.1.11	Summary and conclusions	157
4.2	Analysis of data obtained from interviews	161
4.2.1	Situation 1	161
4.2.2	Situation 2	164
4.2.3	Situation 3	166
4.2.4	Situation 4	168

4.2.5	Situation 5	171
4.2.6	Situation 6	173
4.2.7	Situation 7	174
4.2.8	Situation 8	177
4.2.9	Situation 9	179
4.2.10	Situation 10	180
4.2.11	Situation 11	182
4.2.12	Situation 12	185
4.2.12.1	The greeting /ʔassala:mu ʔalaykum waraḥmatul la:hi wabaraka:tu/	185
4.2.12.2	Invocations	187
4.3	Conclusion	192
CHAPTER 5 : FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION		196
5.1	Summary	196
5.2	Overview of the findings	197
5.3	Discussion of research questions	202
5.4	Contribution of the study	214
5.5	Limitations of the study	220
5.6	Recommendations for future research	221
5.7	Conclusion	222
REFERENCES		225
APPENDIX A LIST OF PARTICIPANTS		235
APPENDIX B INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORM (HEAD OF THE COMPANY)		237
APPENDIX C INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORM (PARTICIPANTS)		241

APPENDIX D	THE CONVERSATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY	245
APPENDIX E	THE DESIGNED SITUATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY	
(ENGLISH)		282
APPENDIX F	THE DESIGNED SITUATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY	
(ARABIC)		286
APPENDIX G	TRANSLATOR'S LETTER	290
APPENDIX H	PANEL OF EXPERTS	291

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LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Table 2.1: The component maxims of the General Strategy of Politeness (taken from Leech (2014, p. 91))	54
Table 3.1: The designed situations of the present study	84
Table 3.2: Mapping the situations, variables and research questions	87
Table 3.3: Transcription conventions	95
Table 3.4: Arabic letters and their phonetic representation	96
Table 4.1: Taxonomy of politeness strategies in Jordanian Arabic	192
Table 4.2: The role of the study variables	194
Table 5.1: Dialectal differences in pronunciation	208
Table 5.2: Matching findings with research questions and objectives	209

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Classical Arabic
CCCS	Call-Centre-Customer Service
CJ	Connect Jordan
CP	Cooperative Principle
FNT	Face-Negotiation Theory
FTA	Face-Threatening Act
GSP	General Strategy of Politeness
H	Hearer
JA	Jordanian Arabic
MP	Model Person
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
O	Others
PP	Politeness Principle
S	Speaker
S	Self

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Strategi Kesopanan dalam Kalangan Kakitangan Pusat Komunikasi di Jordan

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini ialah usaha untuk mengenal pasti secara sistematik strategi kesopanan yang digunakan dalam interaksi antara masyarakat Jordan dengan kakitangan pusat khidmat pelanggan *Connect Jordan (CJ)*, iaitu sebuah syarikat telekomunikasi utama di Jordan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan maklumat penting mengenai sosiolinguistik dan sosiopragmatik Arab Jordan. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini mengisi jurang dalam literatur sosiolinguistik dan sosiopragmatik dengan memfokuskan pada tingkah laku masyarakat Jordan di dalam mengajukan permintaan dan memberikan reaksi bagi konteks ini. Kajian ini mengambil kira beberapa pemboleh ubah sosial seperti jantina, masa, perbezaan dialek, sebab membuat panggilan dan pengalaman kakitangan yang mungkin mempengaruhi pemilihan strategi. Kajian kualitatif ini mengumpul data secara triangulasi. Data dijana melalui rakaman interaksi spontan dan wawancara individu. Kajian ini melibatkan 28 responden perkerja CCCS dan pelanggan. Kerangka teori kajian ini berasaskan model kesopanan Brown dan Levinson (1987). Namun, teori interaksi oleh Leech (2014) turut digunakan mengikut kesesuaian. Hasil analisis terhadap data menunjukkan masyarakat Jordan lebih memilih untuk menggunakan strategi kesopanan negatif berbanding lain lain strategi ketika mereka membuat permintaan selain menunjukkan kecenderungan untuk menguasai perbualan yang berlangsung semasa membuat permintaan. Di samping itu, penggunaan panggilan hormat juga merupakan salah satu ciri ketara dalam strategi kesopanan oleh kakitangan dalam urusan menerima permintaan dan memberikan maklum balas. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden masih berpegang pada norma sosiobudaya masyarakat Jordan termasuk budaya Islam yang menunjukkan bahawa norma ini penting bagi pelajar Arab Jordan. Tambahan lagi, dapatan analisa menunjukkan bahawa faktor jantina dan alasan semasa membuat panggilan memainkan peranan penting dalam pemilihan strategi kesopanan manakala perbezaan dialek dan pengalaman pekerja hanya memainkan peranan kecil dalam pemilihan strategi. Namun, peranan tempoh panggilan tidak mempengaruhi pemilihan strategi kesopanan dalam konteks kajian ini. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyumbang kepada pengetahuan dan pemahaman masyarakat terhadap strategi kesopanan dari segi peranan sosial budaya dalam masyarakat Jordan. Hasil kajian ini bertujuan untuk membekalkan guru, pelajar dan para pengkaji dengan maklumat penting mengenai sosiolinguistik dan sosiopragmatik Arab Jordan.

Politeness Strategies Employed in Call Centre Interactions in Jordan

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to examine systematically the types of politeness strategies employed in the interactions between Jordanians and the employees of the call-centre-customer service (CCCS) of a major telecommunications company in Jordan, Connect Jordan (CJ). It aims to provide essential information about the sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics of Jordanian Arabic. Accordingly, it will fill a gap in the sociopragmatics literature through investigating Jordanians' politeness strategies. It focuses on the Jordanians' politeness strategies taking into account some social variables such as gender, time, dialectal differences, reason for calling and the employees' experience that may be significant in selecting an appropriate strategy. Thus, the objectives of the study are to explore whether these variables have any role in choosing a particular politeness strategy. For data collection for this qualitative study, the researcher used a triangulation method. The data have been obtained through recordings of naturally occurring interactions and individual interviews. The study included 28 participants, CCCS employees and customers. The theoretical framework adopted for this study was mainly that of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. However, Leech's (2014) theory of interaction was referred to where relevant. The analysis of the data has shown that there is a preference among Jordanians for the use of negative-politeness strategies to other strategies as they seemed to dominate the scene in making requests. In addition, honorificity is a striking feature of the employees' politeness strategies in both requests and responses. The results of the study have also revealed that participants adhered to sociocultural norms of the Jordanian society including Islamic culture which indicates that the acquisition of these norms is essential for learners of Jordanian Arabic. Moreover, the results of the analysis have shown that gender variation and reason for calling play significant roles in the choice of the speaker's politeness strategy whereas the roles of the dialectal differences and the experience of the employees were minor to a certain degree. The time of calling plays no role in the choice of the politeness strategy in the context of the present study. The main purpose of this study is to contribute to people's knowledge and understanding of the politeness strategies in terms of the roles of sociocultural factors in the Jordanian society. The results of the study are intended to provide teachers, learners and researchers with essential information about the sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics of Jordanian Arabic.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

The concepts of 'language' and 'culture' are interrelated. A lot of research has been done in order to understand the interdependence of language and socio-cultural context, so scholars have been engaged in investigating the degree to which the socio-cultural rules influence the use of language in particular societies (e.g., Yaqubi et al., 2016; Samarah, 2015; Maer, 2015; Aliakbari & Moalemi, 2015; Alrefai, 2012). Pragmatic research has been very much concerned in identifying the ways socio-cultural rules shape the language in attempts to determine the role of the acquisition of such rules in facilitating communication. (Al-Adaileh, 2007).

Jordan, officially the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is an Arab country located in Western Asia on the East Bank of the Jordan River. It is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and east; Iraq to the north-east; Syria to the north; and Israel and the Palestinian West Bank to the west. Amman, the capital, is the most populous city and the country's economic, political and cultural centre (Al-Asad, 2004). Jordan has a total area of 89,342 square kilometres (34,495 square miles). The population of Jordan is estimated at 10,909,567 (The World Factbook, 2020).

In Jordan, Arabic is the official language. English is the most commonly used foreign language and is widely spoken by middle and upper-class Jordanians (Szczepanski, 2017). Arabic is one of the world major languages spoken by more than 200 million people and is an official language in 25 countries (Newham, 2015). It is

usually divided into three main categories: Classical Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic (these and other related terms are discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1).

The call centre of any company is the place where employees take calls from customers and provide outstanding customer service experience. These employees are usually flexible in that they are adapted to different people and different cultures. They answer questions and provide solutions for their customers over the phone. The most important required skill in the employee of the call centre is to effectively communicate which means both understanding what the caller is trying to communicate and then responding in a way that makes sense to the caller in order to resolve their issues. So, communication in this setting is important because connection with the callers and quality relationships can be established through the good communication skills that the employees have. Therefore, the business of the company might be improved through such communications where linguistic politeness is a significant component of the communication.

In Jordan, telecommunications companies are an example of call centres that are mostly busy due to the huge amount of calls they receive from their customers. Based on the researcher's and her relatives' experience, sometimes it is difficult to get a free line to call the centre, especially in the peak times. Whether customers are satisfied with the services provided by the company is not clear so far, so investigating the interactions between the selected company represented by its call-centre-customer service (CCCS) in terms of the politeness strategies they employ mapped on some social variables may

reveal valuable information and findings that contribute to the field of sociopragmatic in general and in Jordan in particular.

As for the present study, it focuses on the differences in the politeness strategies used by Jordanian males and females found in their naturally-occurring interactions with the call-centre-customer service of a leading telecommunications company in Jordan. It investigates the role of social variables in shaping the structure of the politeness strategies used by Jordanian people when performing the above speech acts. These variables include gender, time, dialectal differences, reasons for calling and the employees' experience.

Many studies have been conducted on Jordanian Arabic in terms of speech acts, phonological systems, speech sounds variations, and syntactic patterns as well as pragmatic and sociolinguistic functions (Al-Momani, 2009; Rababa'h & Malkawi, 2012; Almutlaq & Jarrah, 2013; Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013; Al-Sobh, 2013; Al-Harashseh, 2014a; Abushihab, 2015; Bani Mofarrej & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2015; Alkheder & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2018; Badarneh, 2020, among others).

A study on Jordanian students was conducted by Al-Momani (2009) in order to investigate the realisation of requests and compare them with those of American English native speakers. Another study in Jordanian Arabic context was conducted by Rababa'h and Malkawi (2012) who study the politeness strategies for greetings employed by Jordanian native speakers in their day-to-day social interactions. Similarly, Almutlaq and Jarrah (2013) study the way in which salutations are structured in Jordanian Arabic and the role of the social factors in using different forms of salutations. Al-Khawaldeh and

Zegarac (2013) examine the communication of gratitude in everyday situations by Jordanian Arabic native speakers focusing on gender differences. Al-Sobh (2013) analyses the apology expressions performed by Jordanian university students in different situations. Abushihab (2015) studies politeness and compliments in Jordanian Arabic and compared them with those made in Turkish language in order to see the degree of similarity and difference. Al-Harahsheh (2014a) studies the practice and perception of silence in casual conversations in Jordanian society. Bani Mofarrej and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2015) study the euphemistic death expressions used in the Jordanian society focusing on the impact of some social variables including age, gender and region on the use of these expressions. Alkheder and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2018) investigate the disagreement strategies that are usually used by Jordanian Arabic speakers, and Badarneh (2020) who explores the use of politeness formulaic expressions in everyday social interactions in Jordanian Arabic.

As obvious from the above and other studies conducted in this area, telecommunications companies in Jordan have not been investigated for the use of politeness strategies, a motive for the present study to be carried out. Telecommunications companies are an important site for investigating interactions aspects because employees receive calls from different kinds of people: males and females, young and old, with different psychological states: calm, angry using various dialects. So, their interactions are rich in linguistic behaviours that deserve investigation. For more reasons and motives for conducting this study, see the discussion under Problem Statement in Section 1.2 below. Politeness strategies employed by customers and call centres in Jordan can be studied from a linguistic perspective because they contain various forms of speech acts, such as requesting and responding.

As far as Arabic, the language investigated in this study, is concerned, it has a wide range of affixes which have a wide-ranging semantic, syntactic and pragmatic functions. In the light of this, it is necessary for both native and non-native learners of Arabic to possess a bountiful sociopragmatic competence in order to use the language properly in accordance with the social and cultural norms where it is used. Thus, intralingual research on the speech act behaviour in Arabic may offer a solid ground for pedagogical purposes for the future research on Arabic as a first or a foreign language.

Many studies have investigated speech acts focusing on how foreign or second language learners develop their sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic competence in another language such as, Yuan and Zhang (2018) who study the pragmatic development of Chinese learners of English as a second language. Furthermore, Masrour et al. (2019) and Shakki et al. (2020) study the pragmatic development of Iranian learners of English as a second language. Cui (2012) studies the ability of advanced learners of English as a second or foreign language to express a speech act (thanking) with different nationalities including Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian and Japanese to see the influence of their L1 on their performance. Other studies are interlingual as they examined speech acts cross-culturally to compare speech act behaviour across cultures (e.g., Al-Adaileh, 2007; Aubed, 2012; Mohammadi & Tabari, 2013; Abushihab, 2015; Massud, 2016; Ghaben & Banikalef, 2020; Rabab'ah & Al-Hawamdeh, 2020). Intralingual Arabic speech acts studies that investigate a single language and explain how one speech community behaves are scanty (Hahn, 2006). Nevertheless, a few studies have investigated speech acts in a single language or culture (Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Hahn, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008; Algharabali et al., 2019). Because this study examines speech acts in a single

language, Jordanian Arabic, it can be classified under the category of intralingual research.

1.2 Problem statement

This study focuses on the differences in the politeness strategies used by Jordanian males and females found in their naturally-occurring interactions with the call centre of a leading telecommunications company in Jordan. More precisely, it investigates the role of social variables in shaping the structure of the politeness strategies used by Jordanian people. These variables include gender, time, dialectal differences, reasons for calling and the employees' experience. The study sheds some light on the gender differences in the politeness strategies employed by Jordanians. Many studies showed that men and women speak differently (Holmes, 1995; Parisi & Wogan, 2006; Kampf & Blum-Kulka, 2007; Abu Humeid, 2013; Al-Qudah, 2017; Al-Sallal & Ahmed, 2020; Ghaben & Banikalef, 2020). However, the results of gender differences in language interaction in different speech communities are contradictory in that the different-culture approach contends that the language spoken by men is different from that spoken by women because they belong to different cultures, whereas the dominance theory stresses that men and women behave in similar ways because they come from the same culture (Al-Adaileh, 2007).

As for the role of the dialectal differences in choosing certain politeness strategies in JA, the previous studies seem to be limited to certain speech acts such as euphemism death expressions investigated by Bani Mofarrej and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2015) and a study on salutations conducted by Almutlaq and Jarrah (2013). In addition to the absence of studies on telecommunications companies, the relation between requests, for example,

and the dialectal differences has not been investigated, to the best knowledge of the researcher.

The researcher was born and grown up in Amman where CJ is situated; she received her school education and higher education in Jordan and taught English courses in public schools and some government universities. As for the site of this study, the CCCS of the telecommunications company, she has been a subscriber for quite a long time. She had interacted with their CCCS for different issues related to their services. She noticed that the strategies they employ in response to her requests differ from one employee to another whether the person she spoke to is male or female; in addition to that, the researcher noticed that the strategies used by the employees differ from one person to another. She discussed these issues with some of her relatives and close friends who indicated similar views to her own and added that caller's characteristics such as gender and dialect in addition to the reason for calling may play a role. They also raised some issues regarding their satisfaction being customers. Moreover, the available research on the use of the communication strategies employed by Jordanian people has not satisfied her inquiries as none of the researchers focused on telecommunications companies.

Based on the pilot study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3.1 below), the researcher's own observations, the opinions of her friends and relatives about the communication strategies employed by this telecommunications company and the gap in the literature, she decided to undertake carrying out an in-depth research study to explore in more details the use of communication strategies in this site highlighting the role played by some social variables including gender, dialectal differences, time, reasons for calling

and the employees' experience. The last three variables are rarely included in politeness studies leaving a gap in the literature. The inclusion of these social variables in this study may explain the variation that might be detected in the forms and types of such strategies and bridge the gap in the literature.

1.3 The objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the politeness strategies employed by Jordanians when interacting with the CCCS of a major telecommunications company in Jordan. It focuses on the Jordanians' politeness strategies taking into account some social variables such as gender, time, dialectal differences, reasons for calling and the employees' experience that may be significant in selecting an appropriate strategy. Thus, the objectives of the study are the following:

1. To explore how politeness strategies differ across male and female speakers in their interactions.
2. To explore the role of the reason for calling the company in the politeness strategies participants employ in their interactions.
3. To explore what role the time of calling plays in the choice of the politeness strategies of Jordanians in their interactions.
4. To explore how politeness strategies differ in terms of the employees' experience when communicating with Jordanian customers.

5. To explore how politeness strategies vary across different dialects in interactions with the telecommunications company.

1.4 Research questions

The study focuses on the differences in the politeness strategies used by Jordanian males and females. The study aims to explore whether social variables have any significance in selecting an appropriate code for negotiating these acts. Therefore, the study research questions are meant to gather information about the role of the social variables in the participants' choice of politeness strategies. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the differences in politeness strategies across male and female speakers?
2. How do politeness strategies used differ in terms of the reason for calling?
3. What is the role of the time of calling in the speakers' choice of politeness strategies?
4. How do politeness strategies differ in terms of the experience of the employees?
5. What are the differences in the use of politeness strategies in various dialects used by the participants?

The first research question is used to explore whether the gender of the participants plays any role in choosing a particular politeness strategy or giving a preference to one politeness strategy over the other. In addition to the analysis of the interactions, the interviewees will be presented with some situations that elicit some information about this issue.

The second research question seeks an answer to whether the reason for calling (e.g., inquiring, requesting, complaining) influences the speakers' choice of words and expressions. In other words, it is meant to gather information about the role of the reason for calling in shaping the form of the linguistic and pragmatic components of the politeness strategies used in performing the selected speech acts.

The third research question aims at investigating the role of the time of the call, especially if it is at the end of the employee's working shift, in order to explore how such a factor would affect their choice of the politeness strategies they use.

The fourth research question is meant to investigate whether the experience of the employees play any role in their choice of politeness strategies and in which way.

Finally, the fifth research question aims at finding the role of the dialectal differences among the participants in structuring their politeness strategies in the selected speech acts mentioned above. In other words, it investigates the dialectal influence on performing these speech acts.

1.5 Significance of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the differences in the politeness strategies that appear in the daily naturally-occurring interactions of Jordanian males and females with CCCS of CJ. This study is significant for a number of reasons. It investigates an area of cultural pragmatics that, to the researcher best knowledge, has not been sufficiently explored in Arabic. Therefore, it will enrich the field of sociopragmatics and intercultural pragmatics. In addition, the findings of this study will lead to a better understanding of the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic speech act behaviour in Jordanian Arabic. Moreover, the results of the study are intended to help to provide teachers, learners and researchers with essential information about the sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics of Jordanian Arabic. Teachers and learners of Arabic as a foreign language can be benefited from the results of this study in that they need to know and understand the pragmatics of Arabic and how the intended meaning is interpreted within the sociocultural norms of the speech community. In the absence of such knowledge, the acquisition of Arabic by non-native speakers will be incomplete and may result in communicative difficulties in certain situations. For researchers, the results of this study can be beneficial to their research in that they may compare politeness strategies in JA and other languages or compare their findings with the findings of the present study.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher has undertaken the task of conducting this research study in a form of a thesis in five chapters. Following the Introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 provides a critical review of major studies relating to the key aspects of the present study. The work of the pioneering scholars in the area such as Goffman, Lakoff, Brown and Levinson, Leech, and others are included, as well as previous studies on politeness theory and speech acts in general and in the Jordanian

context in particular, and the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis of the data (2.5). Chapter 3 presents the methodology adopted in the research, including data collection methods and transcription, and detailed information about the participants. Chapter 4 constitutes the analysis section of the study, in which data obtained from the conversations and interviews are analysed within the chosen theoretical framework in order to establish the different politeness strategies used by Jordanians and the reasons for using such strategies. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results and the major findings of the study that answer the research questions and offers some concluding remarks. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and provides some recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a brief review of the traditional speech act framework. It focuses on Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts, Searle's (1969) theory and Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. The review of these traditional theories will lay the underpinning of the second part of the chapter in which the researcher will expand the scope of the study by reviewing and discussing the main outlines of some important politeness theories: Goffman's (1967, 1971) idea of face, Lakoff's (1973, 1975, 1990) theory of politeness, Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model of politeness, Ting-Toomey's (1985) face-negotiation theory, Fraser and Nolen's (1981) conversational-contract view, Leech's (1983, 2014) theory of interaction and Watts' (2003, 2005) politic behaviour. In order to show the gap in the existing knowledge, the researcher will provide a general picture of the previous studies on politeness in the Arabic context narrowing down the focus to intra-language studies on Jordanian Arabic and the social variables that the study focuses on. However, the chapter begins with the definition of some important terms used in this study. Section 2.2 provides a summary of the past research in which speech act theories and politeness theories are discussed and their assumptions are highlighted; section 2.3 provides a review of the recent studies that undertake similar objectives or target similar participants to the present study, and finally sections 2.4 and 2.5 discuss the gap in the existing knowledge as indicated by the literature and the proposed work respectively.