

Gender Differences in the Application of Linguistic Politeness Marker (Please) in Request: A Sociolinguistic Study Egyptians' Request to Microbus Drivers

Tarek Hider Mohammad Alahmad

Department of English, Jadara University

Bergesh, Irbid, Jordan

Tel: 962-795-941-849 E-mail: t3riq_3bzead@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Linguistic politeness is considered a vexed question amid scholars and researchers alike which still, up to the date, a disputed phenomenon in the discipline of linguistics. This paper reports on a study that examined the gender differences in the stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men in the use of request by the application of the Linguistic politeness marker (please) by Egyptians (Egypt, Mansours city). In the literature of linguistic politeness, there are many pioneers in the area as Culpeper et al. (2019) says that Maria Sifianou has enriched politeness research and pragmatics, viz. the inspection of the relationship amid universality and politeness. Furthermore, Leech (2014, p. 162), in *The Pragmatics of Politeness*, points out three different degrees of politeness from semantic sight in the account of the linguistic politeness marker "please" (a) Politeness marker (b) Illocutionary marker and (c) Information question marker. However, the linguistic politeness marker "please" is used to be uttered in requests as a general term to mitigate or soften the directive force of the speech event to addressee. Researchers and scholars who address the speech event request have spent considerable effort in classifying the variety of strategies for requesting in Anglophone. Moreover, Brown and Levinson's model (1987, p. 68–9) proposed five "superstrategies" for doing FTAs, of which requests were a paradigm case. In this study, the data were collected from the Egyptians riders who were going to their destinations in Mansoura city, Egypt. There are two groups (a) women (100) and (b) men (100). The

participants are speaking in the local vernacular Arabic (Egyptian dialect). They came from random social background. Further, there are a table and a chart to illustrate the gender differences amid the two groups of women and men.

Keywords: Linguistic politeness, Politeness marker (please), Gender differences, Requests, Sociolinguistics, Egyptian politeness marker

1. Introduction

In almost all communities worldwide, there is questionable perspective in the account of stereotypical assumption about linguistic politeness for both genders i.e. ‘women are more polite than men’. There are many explanations for this view from a sociolinguistic outlook. As far as the literature is concerned, most studies on linguistic politeness underline the aforementioned stereotype as well as laypeople have orthodoxly their view point in everyday conversation.

From sociolinguistic perspective, linguistic politeness is going to be studied in the following decades although it is studied in about a half century as Sinkeviciute (2019) points out that the importance of the phenomenon can be easily witnessed in the theory’s wide use. Even nowadays, it is still potential to notice its ongoing impact on the laypeople’s conversations as well.

The importance of linguistic politeness is addressed in the early childhood as Leech (2014, p. ix) points out this notion as there are “Many children learning their native language soon discover the importance of saying things like *please* and *thank you*,” Deliberately, in the course of linguistic politeness, scholars and researchers still upheld the realm of linguistic politeness which has many phases notably need extra elucidating. Lakoff (1973) puts forward three basic principles about politeness (a) Don’t impose on others (b) Give others the right of choice (c) Be friendly with each other, make each other feel good. Also, Brown and Levinson (1987) held that in order to establish some kind of social relations, people must recognize communicator’s face, namely their public self-image. In communicative activities, both sides must respect each other’s expectation for their own images and consider the feelings of others, to avoid “face threatening acts” (FTAs). Geoffrey Leech developed his theory (1983) Politeness Principle (PP), which consists of (6) maxims, to a new model (2014) General Strategy of Politeness (GSP), which consists of (10) maxims.

The stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men is still a questionable phenomenon. This study gives more information by addressing the linguistic politeness marker (please) in request from Arabic language use by laypeople vernacular.

2. Literature Review

This segment gives a skim overview of the linguistic politeness theories that “provide the fundamental starting point for understanding the field” (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 13). In targeting the politeness phenomenon, there are unlimited studies which underlined the importance of linguistic politeness makers in the day-today life from language use worldwide. In fresh study, Supriatnaningsih et al. (2020) show the use of politeness makers from

Japanese language perspective, the study shows that around (80%) of the Japanese university students, they were (105 students), apply the Japanese politeness markers. However, politeness is studied more in English language use as Culpeper et al. (2019) say that Looking at what has been done in the area of politeness, we are inevitably faced with the fact that even though much theory oriented work has been based on the English language.

Haugh (2018) shows that it is essential to high light on the laypeople's utterances to study the linguistic politeness phenomenon which it is also a potential source of first-order definitions based on laymen's usage, appreciative and elucidation of particular terms of politeness.

Paternoster & Fitzmaurice (2019) state that the idea that we express politeness through languages is one that has lied during eras of human life, and also much theoretical work has sought to pinpoint what politeness entails of and whether or not the assumption of politeness as a universal linguistic phenomenon in recent decades. Moreover, Leech says that (2014, p.295) "A last main topic to consider in the history of politeness in English is the growth of indirect directives. Given that present-Day English seems to be strongly if not exceptionally associated with indirect requests (manifestations of the Tact Maxim". The usage of linguistic politeness marker "please" softens and mitigates the speech event request when the speaker addresses the other. Portner et al. (2019) assume that the politeness is expressed by two levels of markers the utterance-oriented and content-oriented markers which stem from a single converting of this type of meaning in the grammar.

Terkourafi (2015, p. 957) says that "In the past fifteen years, the field of politeness studies has experienced momentous growth both in the range of phenomena studied and in the number of venues dedicated to the relevant research." Leech (2014, p. 134) points out that requests are type of sensitive politeness in the social community "speech events with a competitive function: directives, and within that category, requests. Of all the utterance types sensitive to politeness" He also, adds that requests are the most studies speech event "requests are arguably of the most abiding interest and have been most studied, particularly with reference to the English language."(ibid.) Although its body is growing, research on pragmatic development is still in its beginnings (Rose, 2000, 2009; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

In linguistic politeness phenomenon, there are many theories that try to illustrate politeness phenomenon (Erving Goffman 1967, 1972; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1978/78). It could be said that it has a dramatic improvement in the last two decades (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003; Spencer-Oatey 2000b, 2008; Leech 2014). There are several pioneer linguists who overtly yield numerous publications as Terkourafi (2015, p. 957) says that "In the past fifteen years, the field of politeness studies has experienced momentous growth both in the range of phenomena studied and in the number of venues dedicated to the relevant research."

However, the ability to perform speech acts, e.g., requests, invitations, compliments or apologies, is one of the components of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Pragmatics is the domain of applied linguistics concerned with the development of the ability to successfully participate in linguistic interactions, including production and the effect on the recipient (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

3. Politeness Markers

Politeness as a global phenomenon could be noted in all languages in which interactants cannot avoid to lessen the violation in day-to-day conversations. Culpeper et al. (2019) says in the framework of globalisation, it can be said that politeness study has been a field with relatively more interest in the globalised aspect of politeness.

Shafran (2019) points out that the patterns of use of *please* seemed to be more associated with the role of status in the native language. The findings of the study show that the most preferred mode of directness in both groups (Arabic and Hebrew) is conventional indirectness.

The politeness marker *please* is considered a cross-cultural mitigating indication (Ogiermann, 2009) that is entirely well-known with the speech act of request (Sifianou, 1999; Stubbs, 1983). It specifically occurs in cases where the purpose of a request is vibrant; namely in imperatives and conventional indirect forms (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2005; House, 1989; Wichmann, 2004). According to House (1989), *please* is the most apt in “standard situations” where the right of the speaker to make the request and the obligation of the addressee to fulfill it are self-evident, and when the level of imposition is low.

Leech (2014, p. 162) points out that there are three different degrees of politeness in the account of the linguistic politeness marker "please". Moreover, The CCSARP group classify the request strategies. Finally, House and Kasper (1981) map out their framework which consists of 11 politeness marker.

4. Three Different Degrees of Linguistic Politeness Marker "Please"

In the pragmatic usage, there are many formulas that the addressee could functions the politeness marker "please". Leech (2014, p. 162) points out three different degrees of politeness in the account of the linguistic politeness marker "please":

a) *Politeness marker* : The routine usage of politeness marker is strongly needed amid the interactions in order to soften the requests as in the below examples:

- *Tickets please,*
- *Would you like some more? Yes, please.*

At the other extreme, especially when *please* is pronounced with an emphatic falling intonation or is used as isolate, it can be an insistent reinforcement of the directive:

- *Richard! Stop driving please! Please Richard! Please Richard!*
- *Please stop jumping on the chair arms will you?*

b) *Illocutionary marker*: The routineness commonly associated with *please* has led to the suggestion that *please*, instead of being a politeness marker, is simply an illocutionary marker. That is, it signals the status of the utterance as that of a request, rather than signifying any particular degree of politeness. This applies most evidently to elliptical, or to hints, like the chair's procedural statement at a board meeting:

- *Right, I think we <pause> move on then please,*
- c) *Information question marker:* A third type of utterance where *please* determines the interpretation of a routine request is a straightforward:
 - *What's the time please?*

The addition of *please* marks this as probably taking place in an official setting, in an examination hall. However, even here *please* is a politeness marker as well as an illocutionary marker in the account of politeness if *please* is deleted, the level of politeness drops to zero.

5. Strategies for Requesting in English

The linguistic politeness marker "please" is used to be uttered in requests as a general term to mitigate or soften the directive force of the speech event to addressee. Leech (2014, p. 261) points out that "It marks an utterance as a request spoken with a certain (often routine) degree of politeness. But its effect depends greatly on context". In her corpus study, Wichmann (2005, p.1534–5) notes that the initial placing of please is associated with commands and with public discourse, whereas its final placing is associated with more indirect types of directive, the rarer medial use (as in *Would you please...*) being associated with public discourse only. Moreover, in Aijmer's study (1996, p. 157) of requests in the London-Lund Corpus (spoken BrE of the period 1958–1977), the four most common interrogative request formulae *will you*, *would you*, *can you*, and *could you* show a frequency preference that favors the most indirect choice.

6. Brown and Levinson's Model

Researchers and scholars of requests have spent considerable effort in classifying the variety of strategies for requesting in English. Brown and Levinson's model (1987, 68–69) propose five "superstrategies" for doing Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), of which requests were a paradigm case:

- (a) do it *bold on-record*, without redress:
 - Get me something to eat.
- (b) do it *on-record* with *positive politeness*:
 - Be a love, and get me a sandwich.
- (c) do it *on-record* with *negative politeness*:
 - Could you get me a sandwich?
- (d) do it *off-record*:
 - I'm so hungry. Are you going anywhere near the sandwich bar?
- (e) or *not do the FTA* (the directive) at all: i.e., [Silence]

7. The CCSARP Group

The CCSARP group classifies the request strategies. For them, as in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989, p. 46–8), there are three super strategies:

- 1) direct requests (or rather, commands)
- 2) conventional (or on-record) indirect requests
- 3) non-conventional (or off-record) indirect requests, i.e., hints

8. House and Kasper's Framework

Broadly, House and Kasper (1981) use the implementation of politeness markers to classify their framework which consists of 11 markers (cited from Tajeddin & Pezeshki, 2016)

9. Level of Directness in Requests in the Arabic Language

Orthodoxly, interactants manifest indirect requests to reveal their requests to the addressee in the social milieu. In the Arabic language also there are many studies that shed light on the phenomenon which show indirect requests as preferred option amid the interactants when they are in similar level (Abuarrah et al., 2013; Atawneh and Sridhar, 1993; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Stavans and Webman Shafran, 2017; Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily, 2012; Trosborg, 1995). Contrastingly, direct requests is a preferred option in a case that speaker is higher in position than the addressee or once there is little social distance as in family members or friends groups (Abuarrah et al., 2013 in Palestinian Arabic; Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily, 2012 in Saudi Arabic).

Likewise, Arabic requests appear to be compatible with House's (1989) observation that *please* mitigates forms of transparent requests and is used when the level of imposition is low. For example, Abuarrah et al. (2013) note that, in Palestinian Arabic, imperatives are typically accompanied by mitigating expressions including *please* (e.g., if you please [law samaht]). Correspondingly, Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) find that Yemeni Arabic female speakers use polite markers such as *please* to soften both direct and conventionally indirect requests.

In the same vein, a number of EFL studies with Arab participants show that these apprentices used *please* more often than American English speakers, which the authors suggested could result from transfer from their native language (Atawneh and Sridhar, 1993; Scarcella and Brunak, 1981). Linguistic politeness is studied and documented across languages and cultures worldwide (e.g., Abuarrah et al., 2013; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). In addition, the Arabic speakers who speak EFL, their preferable option in requests is to practice indirect requests when the addressees' relation increased with the speaker. On the other hand, they prefer to practice direct requests when the addressees' relation decreased with the speakers. These results show the flexibility in the level of requests directness amid the interlocutors in ESL in the Arabic language speakers on English requests (Al-Ammar, 2000 cited in Umar, 2004; Al-Zumor, 2003 cited in Al-Marrani and Sazalie, 2010; Atawneh and Sridhar, 1993; Umar, 2004).

10. Research Questions

Aiming to contribute to the growing body of research on the development of linguistic politeness markers, this study focuses on the usage of politeness marker (please) by two groups of native Arabic Egyptians speakers: men (100) and women (100). The researcher applies the lexical approach to address the stereotypical assumption about gender differences. Moreover, the researcher collects the corpora from the application of linguistic politeness marker (please) in request in Arabic language in Egyptian vernacular by laypeople in Mansoura city, Egypt.

لو سمحت

law samaht

if you please

Leech (2014, p. 260) points out that internal modifiers can be either lexically or syntactically expressed, as a means of softening the request as it impacts on others. From the onset of this research, a number of questions were raised and needed to be answered. Below is a list of the key research questions:

- a) The stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men from Arabic language laypeople in Egyptian vernacular.
- b) The application of the linguistic politeness marker strategy (please) in request for both genders.

11. Methodology and Corpora Collection

To collect data, the researcher uses *field notes* method to collect the corpora from the informants. The corpora was collected spontaneously which means that the researcher has a notebook in the hand and writes the utterances directly after hearing the informants' requests to microbus drivers. It had taken (20) days in (2) months to collect the corpus (men 100 utterances and women 100 utterances). The researcher collected the data in random days, distinctions and times. The speakers used Egyptian dialect (in the local Egyptians vernacular Arabic). Laypeople used to say requests to the drivers when they reach their location. Leech (2014, p. 255) points out that "one way to obtain sufficient authentic examples of a given pragmatic phenomenon is to keep a notebook in which one records with as much accuracy as possible as many and as varied examples encountered as possible".

However, Manes and Wolfson (1981); Wolfson (1989) apply such method to collect more than twelve hundred examples of compliments. The data were collected from the Egyptians riders who were going to their destinations in Mansoura city, Egypt. There are two groups: women (100) and men (100). The participants are speaking in the local vernacular Arabic (Egyptian dialect). They came from random social background. The participants use falling tone to soften their requests.

12. Data Analysis

The researcher uses a table and a chart to illustrate the usage of linguistic politeness marker "please" amid the two genders. As there are no relationships among the drivers and the riders, laypeople prefer linguistic politeness to soften the requests which addressed to the drivers. As explained by Meyerhoff (2011), the social distance between the speakers determines the type of strategy used.

It is noticed that from the table below, the number of men who use linguistic politeness marker "please" is only (9%) ,but the usage of zero politeness marker in requests is (91%) which shows that men are not lean towards to use of linguistic politeness markers "please" in request. On the other hand, it is observed that women' use to linguistic politeness marker "please" is over (50%) while the use of zero politeness marker in requests is just under (50%). Over all, The total use of linguistic politeness marker "please" for both genders is just under (70%) which shows a positive use amid the Egyptian laypeople in the requests to microbus drivers. On the other hand, the use of zero politeness marker in requests is just over (30%) for both genders. The table below simplifies the politeness use of "please".

With hindsight, the researcher juxtaposes the two columns of both genders to find out that women (51%) are more polite than men (9%) in use of the linguistic politeness marker "please" in their requests. In other words, these results approve the assumption that women are more polite than men in the speech event "request". For more illustrations, the results are presented in a clustered column Fig.1. Clustered column charts make it easier for the readers to compare and contrast between gender differences in the use of the linguistic politeness marker "please" in requests.

Table 1. Proportional use of the linguistic politeness marker (please) in requests for both genders

Categories of politeness marker	MEN		WOMEN		TOTAL	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
1.Zero politeness marker	91	91%	48	48%	139	69.5%
2.Politeness marker "please"	9	9%	52	52%	61	30.5%

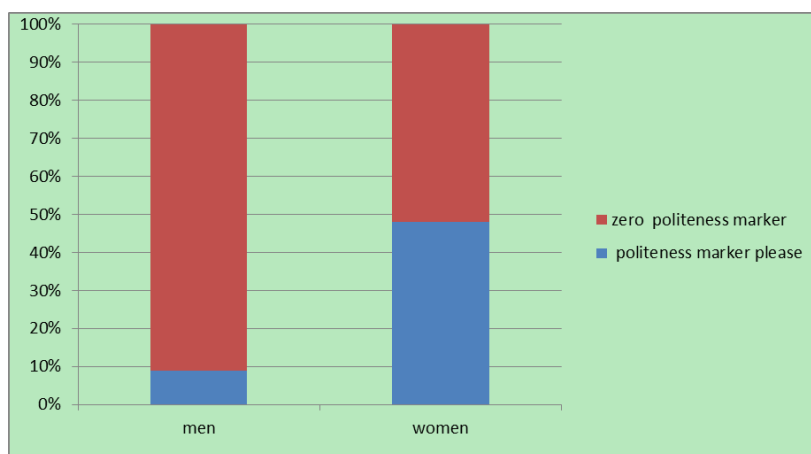


Figure 1

13. Results

According to Brown (2015), it is vital to practice linguistic politeness and behave well while speaking with others therefore linguistic politeness is a preferable option in the social milieu. Moreover, Wichmann (2004, p. 1523), following House (1989, p.107), points out that "please" is considered a standard where the rights and obligations are clear, and no "social or communicative difficulty" is questionable.

The study reveals that women are apparently more polite than men by using the linguistic politeness marker "please" in their requests. It is observed though from the data that women are just over (50%) and the men are just under (10%). The result of the study approves the aforementioned stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men. On the other hand, men are less polite than women, men use the zero politeness marker with over (90%) of their utterances and the women with (50%). Over all, it is can concluded that laypeople tend to use the linguistic politeness marker "please" in their requests.

14. Conclusions

Whatever the topic of research and the type of analysis are, each study enriches our knowledge of language use in one way or another. I also hope that this research contributes to the area of pragmatics in general and, in particular, to the fields of conversational humour and (im)politeness as well as intracultural, intercultural and cross-cultural research into interactional behaviour in the English language in a number of ways.

Stereotypically, while acquiring the first language, children are used to be taught how to utter felicitous expressions trying on bridging the gap amid the interactants in social milieu. Leech (2014, p. ix) points out this notion "Many children learning their native language soon discover the importance of saying things like *please* and *thank you*, which are insisted on by their parents in the process of socialization—becoming "paid-up" members of human society".

Abidingly, the researcher espouses the view that the usage of the linguistic politeness marker "please" promotes concord and cordiality amid the speakers, and also reduces the violation that is likely to be done to the addressee. In addressing the stereotypical assumption that women are more polite than men, the researcher addresses the speech event request to identify linguistic politeness phenomenon. However, the researcher accounts (200) utterances for both genders (100) for men and (100) for women. It is noticed that from the study that the number of men who use linguistic politeness marker "please" is only (9%) while the women' usage is over (50%). Conversely, the usage of zero politeness marker in requests is (91%) for men which shows that men are not lean towards to use of linguistic politeness markers "please" while women is just under (50%). Over all, The total use of linguistic politeness marker "please" for both genders is just under (70%) which shows a positive usage amid the Egyptian laypeople in the requests to microbus drivers. On the other hand, the use of zero politeness marker in requests is just over (30%) for both genders. The study reveals that women are apparently more polite than men by using the linguistic politeness marker "please" in their requests. These results agree with most of the literature on the subject.

Finally, more future research should be done in order to explore the reasons behind one's taking offence to jocularity in different contexts. The results presented in this chapter are based on the housemates' interactions and perceptions thereof in a particular community of practice, i.e. reality television discourse.

Interestingly, they will also be seen to significantly correlate with the interviewees' negative evaluations of jocularity in Chapter 8. Undoubtedly, it is a question in itself whether any of these questions will ever be answered. The only certain thing is that if one does not venture this path, cultural contexts will remain a topic of popular travel books and a gap in the academic literature.

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