

**The University of Petra
The Faculty of Art & Sciences
The Department of English**

*Linguistic Politeness in English and
Arabic
And its Implications for Translation*

**By
Fatima Zohra Boubendir**

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Translation**

Supervisor: Dr. Nafez Shammass

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Dedication

*To my beloved parents
For their unconditional love and support*

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Abstract

This study investigates the area of linguistic politeness and the translatability of politeness formulas in English and Arabic. Expressions of linguistic politeness in Arabic are attempted for translation into English and the concept of politeness as a reflection of both normative and linguistic behavior is defined and discussed.

Both qualitative, i.e. analytical, and quantitative, i.e. statistical, methods are used in this research. The data consists of questionnaires that were given to Arabic native speakers and English native speakers. All the results are tabulated and the differences in both normative and linguistic polite (or impolite) behavior are tackled in a way that reflects the variance in social values and socio-cultural structures of the two groups under study.

The findings reveal that Arabic native speakers have difficulties trying to translate Arabic culture-specific i.e. 'lingua-pragmatic' polite formulas into English. English native speakers could not provide any translation for Arabic polite formulas because of their little knowledge of Arabic. However, the study shows that the social values incarnating politeness in both societies under study were getting closer despite the noticeable differences. The study also showed that Arabs use fixed expressions more than Britons and Americans do. The Britons and Americans resort more to syntactic structures to avoid imposition and conflict that can lead to possible confrontation.

Keywords: Arabic, English, linguistic politeness, translatability, lingua-pragmatics, social values, language-specific, culture-specific.

تنوع التعبير المهذب في اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية واختلافاته

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة موضوع التهذيب اللغوي ومناقشة مفهومه وتأثيره في الترجمة في اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. حيث حاولت الباحثة ترجمة بعض من التعبيرات العربية المهذبة التي تستخدم في مختلف المواقف في حياتنا اليومية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية، كما قامت بمناقشة وتعريف مفهوم التهذيب في السلوك عامة واللغة خاصة.

اعتمدت الدراسة على نوعين من منهجية البحث وهما: المنهج النوعي والمنهج الكمي. كما تمت الاستعانة باستبيانات وزعت على مجموعتين: الأولى تكونت من متحدثين لغتهم الأم هي العربية والثانية من متحدثين لغتهم الأم هي الإنجليزية. تم تحليل البيانات ودرستها لإظهار الاختلافات الاجتماعية والثقافية واللغوية لكلتا المجموعتين.

بينت الدراسة أن المتحدثين العرب واجهوا صعوبات أثناء محاولتهم ترجمة التعبيرات المهذبة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية، وأن المتحدثين بالإنجليزية واجهوا الصعوبات نفسها لقلّة معرفتهم للغة العربية. كما أظهرت الدراسة أن هنالك تغيير كبير يطرأ على القيم الاجتماعية في المجتمع العربي. كما يظهر تقارب مع المجتمع الغربي في بعض النقاط رغم الاختلافات الكبيرة بينهما. كذلك أظهرت الدراسة أنه لتفادي المواجهة وللتهديب فإن الناطقين بالعربية غالباً ما يستخدمون تعابير لغوية مهذبة ثابتة بينما يركز المتحدثون باللغة الإنجليزية على التراكم النحوية.