(TRANSLATING) EMIRATI ARABIC POLITENESS FORMULAS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AND A MINI-MINI-DICTIONARY

by

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Politeness is a universal, interdisciplinary phenomenon. Every culture, every language, has its ways of showing respect and deference, saving face, avoiding or minimizing imposition, and exercising good manners verbally and non-verbally. The study is an investigation of some aspects of (translating) politeness Emirati (UAE, United Arab Emirates) Arabic. It starts with a brief theoretical background on politeness. Next, the study reports on the major findings of observing euphemisms, forms of address and non-verbal politeness in the UAE. Then, the study discusses some issues in translating politeness formulas and root-echo responses – e.g., congratulating, thanking, apologizing, in UAE Arabic. Finally, a number of politeness formulas in Emirati Arabic are translated into English and appended to the study.

1. Introduction

Politeness is an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Recent years have witnessed a 'mammoth-like' increase in the number of publications dealing with the phenomenon (Chen 2001:87). There is a vast literature on politeness in almost every culture now. As shown below, studies on politeness in Arabic are very few, and they hardly address Gulf varieties of the language.

The present study starts with notes on the politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1978/1987). Some of the countless applications of the model, specifically those pertaining to Arabic, are reviewed. Brown and Levinson's model is chosen here because it is perhaps the most full-fledged and the most detailed. It can accommodate the use of body language and euphemisms in indicating politeness.[1] Then, the study explores aspects of politeness in Emirati Arabic – euphemism, address forms, body language and politeness formulas. Some problems in translating Emirati Arabic politeness formulas by a number of UAE university students are discussed. Finally, a collection of common

politeness formulas in the UAE is given, with a translation into English.

2. Politeness

2.1. What is it?

There is a 'disconcerting amount of divergence and lack of clarity concerning the meaning of politeness' (Meier 1995:345). A working definition of politeness could be that provided by Verschueren:

> Irrespective of its specific aspects, '**politeness**' has become a cover term in pragmatics for whatever choices are made in language use in relation to the need to preserve people's face in general, i.e. their public self-image. (1999:45, original emphasis)

This definition retains Brown and Levinson's (1987) emphasis on face and their concept of politeness as 'face-risk minimization' (p. 91) as well as Lakoff's (1975) view of politeness as a 'verbal velvet glove to conceal the iron fist' (p. 45). Politeness is in the eye of the beholder, so to speak. What it means to be polite, when and why people need to be polite, and how they indicate politeness inevitably varies from one culture to another and from one context to another.

2.2. Brown and Levinson's Model

2.2.1. In a nutshell

Brown and Levinson (1987:59-60), following Goffman (1967), argue that every person has **face**, which is one's public self-image; when the speaker decides to perform a linguistic or nonlinguistic act which may cause the hearer (or the speaker) to lose face, the speaker will tend to use a **politeness** strategy in order to minimize the risk or the damage. According to Brown and Levinson (p. 61), there are two types of face: **negative** face, which is related to the claim to one's territory, personal

preserves, and rights to non-distraction, such as freedom of action and freedom from imposition, and **positive** face, which is related to the desire to be appreciated or approved of by other members of a society. These are **avoidance** and **presentational** rituals, according to Goffman (1967:70-71).

Brown and Levinson argue that the notion of face and one's social interaction oriented to it are universal. They suggest five possible strategies to alleviate a face-threatening act (FTA): (1) without redressive action, baldly; (2) by positive politeness; (3) by negative politeness; (4) by going off record; and (5) by not doing the FTA at all. The more risky the speaker perceives the FTA to be, the higher the number of strategies he/she will want to choose (p. 60). Each of the above strategies consists of several subordinate strategies.

The major **Positive Politeness Strategies** (Claim common ground – Convey that S and H are cooperators) are: Attend to H; Intensify/Exaggerate interest/approval; Notice H's admirable qualities or possessions; Show interest; Use in-group identity markers such as colloquialisms and contractions; Avoid disagreement; Assume/Seek agreement; Presuppose/Assert common ground; Use ellipsis (omission) to communicate tacit understandings; Claim common view: assert knowledge of H's wants or that H has knowledge of S's wants; Joke; Offer, promise; Be optimistic; Include S and H in activity; Use inclusive forms to include both speaker and hearer in the activity; Give (or ask for) reasons; Assert reflexivity by making activity seem reasonable to H; Assume/Assert reciprocity; Give gifts to H; Show sympathy, understanding.

Negative Politeness Strategies (Be direct - Don't assume – Don't coerce H – Communicate S's want not to impinge on H – Impersonalize S and H – Redress other wants of H's) are: Be conventionally indirect; Inquire into the hearer's ability or willingness to comply; Question, hedge; Be pessimistic; Use subjunctive to express pessimism about hearer's ability/willingness to comply; Give deference, e.g., by using honorifics; Apologize; Admit the infringement; Impersonalize; Avoid 'you' and 'I'; State the imposition as a general rule; Nominalize, change verbs and adverbs into adjectives or nouns to diminish S's active participation; Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H; Request forgiveness; Minimize

imposition; Pluralize the person responsible; Use the past tense to create distance in time.

2.2.2. Applications of the Model: Politeness in Arabic

Brown and Levinson's face-saving model of politeness 'has attained canonical status, exercised immense influence, and is still the model against which most research on politeness defines itself' (Harris 2003: 27-28). It is widely recognized as the 'most fully elaborated work on linguistic politeness', as it provides 'a systematic description of cross-linguistic politeness phenomena which is used to support an explanatory model capable of accounting for any instance of politeness'. The central claim of the model is that 'broadly comparable linguistic strategies are available in each language, but that there are local cultural differences in what triggers their use' (Grundy 2000:156).

The model has been extensively applied in the analysis of various discourse genres in various languages and cultures. Important studies on politeness in Arabic include El-Shafey (1990) on politeness in Egyptian Arabic and British English; Atawneh (1991) on **directives** performed by (Palestinian) Arabic-English bilinguals; Stevens (1993) on **refusals** among speakers of Egyptian Arabic and English; Nelson et al. (1996) on **compliments** in Egyptian Arabic and American English;[2] Ferguson (1981) on the structure and use of politeness formulas in Syrian Arabic and American English; Davies (1987) on **formulaic** expressions in English and Moroccan Arabic; El-Sayed (1990) on the use of many expressions from the **Allah-lexicon**; Stewart (1996, 1997) on **root-echo responses** in Egyptian Arabic; Hafez (1993) on suasion attempts in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; Methias (2003) on politeness strategies in Naguib Mahfouz' *been ʔil ʔasreen* or 'Palace Walk'; Osman (1994) on the relation between directness, politeness and language **proficiency** in a sample of native speakers of American English and Egyptian learners of English.

This is not an exhaustive list of applications of the model. However, it is more or less a representation of the most important directions of politeness research in the Brown and Levinson tradition. One of these directions, most notably represented by the studies of

Ferguson (1981), Davies (1987), El-Sayed (1990) and Stewart (1996, 1997), has paid attention to the formulas used in indicating politeness. El-Sayed's work draws attention to the importance of religious expressions in expressing politeness in Arabic. Very little has been done on the use of euphemisms and body language in indicating politeness. Farghal (1992, 1995) provides some important insights into tautologies and euphemisms in Arabic. This is one obvious gap in the major models of politeness as well as in the applications of these models to the study of politeness behavior in different languages and cultures. The gap warrants an exploration of the different aspects of politeness in a very rich culture such as that of the UAE.

Moreover, translating UAE politeness formulas into English and making them available to UAE university students can contribute to enhancing their communicative competence. Learning a foreign language involves not only knowing how to **speak** and **write**, but also how to **behave** in that language, as compared to how one behaves in one's first language. On the other hand, an Arabic-English mini-dictionary of UAE politeness formulas should be a valuable guide and resource for newcomers to this vibrant country.

3. UAE Culture

Arabic is the official language of the UAE. Various dialects of Arabic can be heard in the Emirates, as well as the languages of the immigrant communities, such as English, Urdu, and Farsi. Both Arabic and English are used in business. They are many hybrids and a number of distinct pidgins of Arabic, Asian, and Anglo-American tongues can be easily identified in the country. Culturally, as regards how people think, believe, and behave (Goddard 2005), the UAE still lives on Muslim-Arab values which drive all aspects of life, as shown in, for example, the integration between civil and religious law (Richardson 2002).

Images of young women students 'in black abeyas (cloaks) and sheylas (head scarves), with only their faces uncovered, having been driven to college by a male relative or driver in vehicles with opaque windows' and 'escorted to college where they stay until the end of the day, when they are driven home', are part of everyday life in the

country. Those images give some indication of the society's adherence to a strict Muslim code of behavior where women are protected from public display and not often involved in the public arena. The country still upholds its cultural values in spite of the dramatic changes in economy and business. Emirati women meet

> few men outside the family group and many are prohibited from going shopping, travelling to the next city and overseas without suitable chaperones. More recently, some families have forbidden the use of Internet at home to protect their daughters and wives from having access to undesirable information and uncontrolled communications. (Richardson 2002:432)

One important aspect of the UAE culture that does not seem to be changing substantially is that it is an extremely courteous culture. The flood of greetings and how-are-you's and ritual wishes one is likely to overhear in an encounter between two Emiratis is amazing. A simple 'thank you' is substituted here by a host of expressions of gratitude and many prayers: *mashkuur* ('You are thanked'), *(ʔalla) yi ʕTiik ʔil ʕaafyih* ('May god give you strength'), *(walla) maa qaSSart* (('God be my witness) You saved no effort'), *ʔalla yijzaak/yijziik kheir* and *jazaaka allaahu khayran* ('May God reward you well'). This verbal generosity, wrapped in a predominantly religious discourse, is well-documented in manuals and traveler-companions dealing with the UAE. To overlook this, or to take it as an indication of the redundancy and repetitiveness of Arabic, is to be unfair to the sociolinguistic make-up of the country (*Cf.* Mazid 2004). The UAE culture is courteous in many other ways as well, e.g., in using euphemisms, polite address forms and non-verbal indicators of politeness. The findings given below may support this argument.

4. Method

Locals are only about one fourth of the entire population of the UAE. One consequence of this is that it is very difficult to find many encounters between locals. Most encounters involve expatriates, which

means that a lot of accommodation – convergence and divergence – goes on in everyday interactions. The basic data of the present study, the politeness formulas, were collected through a short questionnaire completed by 15 female UAE university students taking a Politeness Seminar Capstone Course, Fall 2004. The questionnaire was simple: 'What do you say on the occasion of visiting a sick person?' 'How do you greet someone during the month of Ramadan?' and so on. The basic language functions covered in the questionnaire are: **welcoming**, **apologizing**, **Eid**, **Ramadan**, and **Hajj** greetings, **wedding** greetings, **newborn baby** greetings, greeting a **sick person**, **condoling**, **requesting** and **responding to requests**, **thanking**, and **leave-taking**. The euphemisms listed below were collected by two of my male students and the address forms by three of my female students, Spring 2005. My personal observations and interactions with UAE locals for an academic year and a half are another source both of formulas and euphemisms. My comments on the problems in translating UAE politeness formulas are based on translations of some such formulas (10) by a group of female students (23, intermediate to advanced, almost 80% of them graduating seniors) taking a Translation of Arabic Texts Course, Spring 2006. The findings of the observations, questionnaire and translation activity, and discussions thereof, are given below.

5. *Findings and Discussions*

5.1. Euphemisms

'Euphemism' is 'a polite word or expression that you use instead of a more direct one to avoid shocking or upsetting someone: 'pass away' is a euphemism for 'die' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 3rd ed., 2000). Euphemisms belong to the broader linguistic practice of double-speak or double-talk. **Doublespeak**, according to *Wikipedia* (2003, WWW) is language 'deliberately constructed to disguise its actual meaning, usually from governmental, military, or corporate institutions'. Euphemisms are also used to hide unpleasant ideas, even when the term for them is not offensive (*Wikipedia* 2003, WWW).

Below is a list of the euphemisms identified in contemporary Emirati Arabic. It is obviously a very partial list.

> **Death**: *ʔil marḥuum* (the deceased; the one who is a recipient of mercy) or *ḥayaat* X (X's life); *ʔitwaffa* (died; He was taken back to where he belongs'.); *ʕaṮaak ʕumruh* Lit. 'He has given you his life'; 'May you live longer'.
> **Urinating**: *yriiq il maaʔ* Lit. 'to spill/pour water'. Equi. 'to powder one's nose'.
> **Mention of a Taboo**: *ʔalla yʕizzak* (masculine, 2nd person, singular)/ *yʕizzik* (feminine, 2nd person, singular) *aʕazzak allaah* Lit. 'May God grant you dignity!' Equi. 'I beg your pardon', 'Excuse me'.
> **Root-Echo Response**: *w inta* (masculine, 2nd person, singular) *ʕaziiz* Lit. 'And you are dignified'. Equi. 'That's OK'. Synonym: *ʔakramak allaah; karrama llaah wajhak/wayhak* (*wajhak/wayhak* = 'your face').
> **Mention of Female Members of the Family**: *ʔil ʕyaal* (Lit. 'kids'); *ʔil ʔahl* (Lit. 'family'); *ʔumm il ʕyaal* (Lit. 'mother of kids'); *ʔil beet* (Lit. 'home'); *ʔil mʕazbih* ('wife'); *ʔil ḥurmah* ('woman' – the word derives from the same root where *ḥaraam, i.e.,* 'forbidden' or 'taboo', comes from); *ʔil freeḥ* (generic- any female); *ʔil ʕyuuz* (Lit. 'old woman'. Equi. mother); *ʔil riḎiiʕih/ʔil riẔiiʕih* (Lit. 'suckling'. Equi. 'sister').
> **Sickness and Disease**: *ʔumm iṢṢibyaan* (Lit. 'mother of boys'. Equi. 'short epilepsy'); *mayhuud* (Lit. 'tired'. Equi. 'sick').

The universal tendency to use euphemisms when talking about death, sickness, and toilet matters still obtains here. One significant departure from Western norms of talk, however, is the restriction on talking about female members of the family. To an Anglophone, it may seem strange that one cannot say 'my wife', 'my sister', or 'my mother', but this is a very important part of the UAE culture. The same is true for many other Arab, particularly Gulf, countries, although forms and degrees of euphemizing vary considerably across those countries, depending on, among other things, how westernized they are. Other

important parts of the UAE culture that need to be handled with care have to do with non-verbal communication.

5.2. Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication (NVC) is communication by speech or writing. Below is a categorization of NVC signal types and tokens identified in the context of the study.

> **Appearance**: Clothing in the UAE is controlled by climate and religious requirements. People in the UAE still adhere to their traditional costumes in public settings. Men usually wear ankle-length, loose and comfortable clothing, called *dishdasha*, with a high neck and long sleeves. Over the head, they put a round cap, called *gahfa* to protect their head and neck from the sun. For status and/or context of situation reasons, they wear *bisht*, which is a black or beige frock bordered with gold embroidery. This is a very formal costume. Women's clothing in the UAE usually consists of loose and ornate garments. A *kanduura* – a wide calf-length robe with wide, long sleeves – covered with a *ʔabaaya*, in addition to a *sheela*, is the common clothing for women; while for most women in UAE, the black color gives a sense of formality and beauty. Some women in the UAE choose to put on a veil; some choose not to. It is interesting to notice some career women in the country who choose not to use a veil but put it on when they are in a big meeting or a public event.
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> **Artifacts**: It is considered polite, one of my female students wrote, to take off your shoes before entering a home.
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> **Haptics (Touching):** When greeting an Emirati woman, a man should not offer his hand for a handshake unless the woman extends hers first. As for kissing, there are at least four common types – **head** kissing, indicating respect and in a wedding context where a groom kisses his bride's head giving her a gift and saying *maasiḥ ʕaleeki bil maal wil ḥalaal (*to show that this is a legal bond for which the groom has paid a dowry); **cheek** kissing – commonly between females; **nose**-touching – two or three nose-touches is an

unmarked greeting; **hand** kissing – another indication of respect and deference. The photograph of HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan kissing his late great father's forehead is one of the most cherished moments in modern UAE history.

Body Language: It is also very important for visitors of an Emirati home never to sit in such a way that their feet are pointing directly at someone else. It is also decent for an Emirati female not to smile to a stranger. Pointing at someone with a finger can be very rude and the right hand is always more acceptable in giving and receiving.

Eye Contact: This is generally avoided in most cross-gender encounters.

Olfactics (**Smell**): Incense is burned to welcome guests into an Emirati home. The smell fills the air with a sweet fragrance. According to tradition, 'rose-water' may also be sprinkled on a guest's head and hands upon leaving.

Proxemics (**Use of Space**): Men and women in the UAE do not normally socialize or eat together, although modern Emiratis may not observe this tradition within the family. Families going out at a weekend normally divide into males and females and this is being observed by most expatriates from other Arab countries. One part of the marriage preparation in the UAE is for the bride-to-be to stay forty days confined to her parents' home in respect for her husband.

Vocalics: There is very little shouting and screaming on the street. For someone coming from a Mediterranean background, the UAE is 'discomfortingly' quiet.

Ceremonials: There is a very elaborate etiquette of coffee-offering in the UAE. Some of my students told me that coffee is more important than food in almost every Emirati home. It is very embarrassing and disgraceful not to offer coffee to a guest and it could be regarded as inappropriate not to accept it. Normally, the one who is on the right will get coffee first. Once he is done, he should shake the cup if he does not want any more coffee. One interesting example of coffee etiquette in the UAE is for a suitor to wait and never drink coffee before he receives an answer to his proposal of marriage.

5.3. Forms of Address

The forms of address identified in this study do not simply function as **vocatives**; they often function as **positive politeness strategies** that include the addressee with the addresser in a commonality. That is perhaps why words from the family semantic field recur in these forms.

Here is a list of the address forms identified:

Zero address form to a stranger, especially by someone from the opposite sex; *?umm … …* أم ('Mother of …'): to an older female, e.g., *umm ʕiisa* for Mariam; *?abla* ابلا ('Miss'): to a female teacher; *?ustaaz* أستاذ ('Sir'): to a male teacher; *ʕammi al ḥajj* عمى الحاج ('Uncle Pilgrim'): respectful, to an old man; *ḥajji* حجى ('Pilgrim'): to an old man; *ʕammi* عمى ('Uncle'): to an old man; *khaalti* خالتى ('Aunt'): to an old woman; *ya waladi/wlidi* يا ولدى ('My son'): to a boy by an old person; *ya binti* يا بنتى ('My daughter'): to a girl by an old person; *ya ?akhi/ ya khuuy* يا اخى/ يا خوى ('Brother'): to a male we do not know; *ya ?ukhti* يا اختى ('Sister'): to a female we do not know; *?abd alla* عبد الله ('Worshipper of Allah'): to a worker, taxi driver, etc., whose name is unknown to us; *ya Tayyib* يا طيب ('Good guy'): to a worker, taxi driver, etc., whose name is unknown to us; *Tawiil il ʕumr/Taal ʕumrak* طويل العمر ('May you live long'): to a superior; *smwwak* سموك ('your Highness'); *maʕaaliik* معاليك ('your Excellency'): to a superior – the former is more respectful and more formal; *ya baʕd ʕumri* يا بعد عمرى ('you, dearer to me than myself'): an informal endearment; *?arbaab* أرباب ('Boss'): to a sponsor or someone in a higher position; *maama* ماما ('mum'): to the lady by a servant or a maid; *baaba* بابا ('dad'): to the sponsor by a servant or a maid; *win-niʕim (biik/biiki)* و نعم بيك/ بيكى: a response to an introduction. Equi. 'Nice to meet you'.

5.4. (Translating) Politeness Formulas

The politeness formulas identified in the questionnaire responses as well as my observations suggest that Emirati Arabic is an extremely

polite language and that most of its politeness is of the positive kind. Except for the few disclaimers and apologies, the formulas appended to the study function as positive politeness strategies – offers, expressions of approval, sympathy, congratulations, and so on. Moreover, the formulas, rich with derivatives of the Holy Name Allah, support the general observation that Arabic discourse is theologically centered. (See Mazid (2004) for a detailed discussion of this aspect).

As regards translating such formulas into English, one serious problem in the context of the present study was that students often failed to take the task seriously enough. This does not have to do with their English language proficiency; rather, it has to do with their perception of the importance of translating local formulas into English. Because Arab culture is at the receiving end in the globalization process, many students feel that it is at best, simply fun, or at worst, a waste of time, to find equivalents to their own politeness formulas in English. Once they were told what it means to translate their own politeness formulas to English, they responded quite differently.

On the other hand, common repressions such as *ʔassalaamu ʕaleekum* السلام عليكم (Lit. 'Peace be upon you') and *yarḥamukum u llaah* يرحمكم الله (Lit. 'May God have mercy on you' – responding to sneezing) are translated easily and efficiently into 'Hello' and 'Bless you', perhaps because of their recurrence in translation classes as examples of literal vs. functional translation. The rest of the sneezing exchange may not be as easy. So, *ʔal ḥamdu lillaah* الحمد لله (Lit. 'Praise be to God'), said by someone who has just sneezed, was translated as 'thank(s for) God' (19), 'thanks Allah' (1), 'Bless you' (1), 'sorry/thank God' (2) and 'sorry' (1). 'Sorry' is a good equivalent – another is 'Excuse me'. The third part of the exchange – the response of the sneezer to 'Bless you' – is *yarḥamuna wa yarḥamukum u llaah* يرحمنا و يرحمكم الله. This was translated as 'Thank you' (9), which is a good equivalent, 'Bless you (too) ' (2) and as 'God bless us (all)'/'God bless everyone', or 'God bless us and you' (12). The option of returning the politeness formula – 'Bless you too' – is a safe option in the absence of a better alternative, but the 'us and you' option is a literal translation.

In translating *maḥshuum* (Lit. 'You are well-respected/decently treated') محشوم, students wrote the following: 'forbidden' (2), 'you are away from that', 'you wouldn't do that' (2), 'you are not like that', 'I don't mean an insult', 'sorry to say that', 'I am not insulting/offending you' (4), 'It's OK', 'you are not the person whom I mean', 'you are better than this/that' (4), 'not you', 'no blame on you', 'you mean no harm', 'you are not insulted'. The closest to the correct equivalent are 'I don't mean an insult/I am not insulting you' and '[I] mean no harm'. The expression *maḥshuum*, excluding the addressee from an offense or a negative evaluation, is a **disclaimer**. A disclaimer is

> a kind of alignment talk used by speakers in an effort to (i) render potentially problematic actions … meaningful, and (ii) define such actions as an irrelevant basis for a reassessment of the speaker's established identity. (Overstreet and Yule 2001:48)

Thus, an equivalent of *maḥshuum* could be 'the present company excepted', or 'I beg your pardon'. A variant of 'no offense intended' can do as well.

Translations suggested for *twaŞŞi bshayy* توصى بشى ('You ask /command anything?') were more or less good equivalents. One possible reason for this is that I gave an explanation of the function of the expression: a pre-closing gambit where someone offers help to his/her addressee. Students gave these translations: 'Would you like me to get something for you/get you something?', '(Do) you want/need something/anything (before I go)?', 'Can I help you?', 'Anything else?', 'Can I do something for you?', 'Anything?', 'May I bring something to you?', and 'Any help?' Problems in these translations include the wrong use of 'something' in a question, the use of 'Can I help you?' which is an opening gambit and the literal transfer of 'before I go' from Arabic to English.

The expression *ʕafa ʕaleek* أفا عليك was translated as 'Don't worry' (12), 'I'm in service anytime' (1), 'It's OK (No problem/Don't mention it/No need to thank me') (8), 'You're welcome' (1) and 'It's my pleasure' (1). 'Don't worry' obviously does not communicate the same function of the expression, and 'in service' and 'No need to thank me' are regrettably too literal. A variant of 'It's my pleasure' or 'You're

welcome' is a good functional equivalent to expression which normally occurs in the context of responding to a "Thank you', "That's so kind of you', or 'I may be asking too much'.

Once explained, half translated. This seems to have been the case also with *?alla y؟izzak* الله يعزك (Lit. 'May God grant you dignity!'). Translations given for this expression are '(I beg your) Pardon' (6), 'Sorry (for what I have said)' (5), in addition to some interesting renderings such as 'Never mind', 'God loves you', 'God bless you' (3), 'You are better than that' (2) and 'God put you in a high position'. The expression occurs in the context of talking about something socially unacceptable or inappropriate, something taboo or 'low', such as animals, toilet, shoes, and occasionally kids. Thus, '(I beg your) Pardon' and 'Excuse me' are suitable equivalents. Explanation, however, did not work perfectly well when translating *?allaa(h) yiḥram waldeek* الله يرحم والديك (Lit. 'May God have mercy on your parents'). Ten students gave more or less this literal translation, nine gave the rather more appropriate 'for God's sake', four gave 'I am begging you' and one gave 'Leave me please'. The literal translation does not capture the functional load of the expression which occurs in the context of being outraged by someone and asking him/her to simply 'give me a break'.

In the case of culture-specific expressions such as *mabruuk ؟aleekum ir-raḥmah* مبروك عليكم الرحمة (Lit. 'Congratulations on the (mercy of the) rain') and *ḥajj mabruur waanb maghfuur* حج مبرور و ذنب مغفور (Lit. 'pious, accepted pilgrimage and forgiven sin/s'), students had to rely on literal translation for the absence of an equivalent or a near-equivalent in English. Most of them gave 'Congratulations on the (mercy of the) rain' (16) as a translation of the former and a variant of 'May God accept your Hajj (and erase/forgive your sins)' (15), 'Congratulations on Hajj' (4), 'Welcome back from Hajj' (2) and 'Happy Hajj' (1), in addition to 'Merry Christmas' (1) as a translation of the latter. In the absence of a good equivalent in the target language –English – 'May God accept your Hajj and forgive your sins' sounds good, while 'Welcome back from Hajj' strips the Arabic expressions from its religious/ideological content. On the other hand, since native speakers of English do not often 'congratulate' one another on the occasion of rain as they do, for example, on succeeding or getting a new job, a near equivalent such as 'Showers of joy 'n'

happiness' accompanied by a literal translation and a note on the cultural significance of rain in the UAE should be a good rendering of the rain greeting above.

6. Conclusion

Some of the findings and statements of this study might sound like common sense. For example, there is a lot of etiquette in Emirati Arabic; students often produce literal translations when encountered with idiomatic and formulaic expressions; Emirati Arabic is heavily infiltrated with religious expressions, and the UAE culture still adheres to an Islamic code of behavior. However, some threads merit further investigation, e.g., the effect of explanation on the product of translating politeness formulas from Emirati Arabic to English, students' strategies in translating culture-specific expressions, NVC signals of politeness in the UAE culture, use of euphemisms and disclaimers, and so on. The present study does not provide any conclusive statements on any of these. It is merely a pointer, an invitation to a rich research area.

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Notes

1. For a comprehensive review of the three models of politeness, see Mazid 2004.
2. For a study of complimenting behavior among Upper Egyptian learners of English and a review of the research on compliments, see Mazid 1995:17-26.

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Appendix

Some Emirati Politeness Formulas

NB. The change of a 'j' into a 'y' and of 'k' to 't<u>sh</u>' is not systematically observed in the transcriptions. Lit. is 'literal' and Equi. is 'equivalent'. The following symbols are used in transcribing the Arabic data: ? ء - ح ḥ - خ <u>kh</u> - ذ ð - ث θ - <u>sh</u> ش - S ص - D ض - Z ظ - T ط - ع ? - gh <u>gh</u> غ - q ق - y ى - /ee/ a near equivalent of the English diphthong /eI/.

Welcoming Gambits

hala هلا; *?ahla w sahla* أهلا و سهلا; *?alla ḥayyih* الله حيه; *ḥayya lla min yaalna/ jaalna* يالنا/ جالنا; *ya marḥaba* يا مرحبا **Root-Echo Response**: *?il mraḥḥib la ḥaan* المرحب لا هان Lit. 'May he who is welcoming me/us never see any humility'; Equi. 'Hi', 'Hello'.

w <u>sh</u>ḥaal il شحالك و شحال تواليك; *<u>sh</u>ḥaalak w <u>sh</u>ḥaal twaaliik* شيلحال = إيش الحال *shil ḥaal*; *asaak?* علومك; *?luumak?* شحال عربانك; *w <u>sh</u>ḥaal ?urbaanak* شحال الفريح *freeḥ* *b<u>kh</u>eer* عساك بخير. (*twaaliik* = yours; *il freeḥ* = family; *?urbaanak* = your folks; *?luumak* = your news). Equi. 'How are you?' 'Hope you are OK'.

baarak allaah fi/ ?allaah yibaarik ha s-saa?a lli <u>sh</u>uftak/ <u>sh</u>ufnaak fiiha بارك الله فى/ الله يبارك ها الساعة إللى شفتك/ شفناك فيها. Lit. 'May God bless that hour when I/we saw you'. Equi. 'Good to see you'.

faqadtak فقدتك Lit. 'I missed you'. **Root-Echo Response**: *maa faqadt/ tifqid ghaali* ما فقدت/ تفقد غالى Lit. 'May you never lose/miss anyone dear to you!' *Saar li kaam*

(min) youm maa shuftak شفتك ما يوم من كام لى صار Lit. 'I haven't seen you for many days'. Equi. 'I miss you', 'I miss you too'.

Disclaimers

maḥshuum/ah/iin محشومين /محشومه/ محشوم Lit. 'dignified; well respected; free from blemish or disgrace' – second person masculine singular; second person feminine singular; second person plural, respectively. Equi. 'I beg your pardon', 'Excuse me'.

ʕaziiz w ghaali غالى و عزيز Lit. 'dear and precious'; *ʔalla yʕizzak* يعزك الله Lit. 'May God grant you dignity!'; *ʔakramaka llaah* (الله أكرمك) Lit. 'May God grant you dignity!' Equi. 'I beg your pardon', 'Excuse me'.

batrakhkhaṢ بترخص Lit. 'I take my leave'. *min rukhṢatk* رخصتك من Lit. 'from/with your permission'. **Root-Echo Response**: *hub rakhiiṢ* رخيص هب Lit. 'You are not cheap'. Equi. 'Excuse me', 'May I excuse myself?' Response: "That's OK'.

Responding to Requests

faalak Ṭayyib طيب فالك Lit. 'Your omen is good'; *faalak ma ykhiib* يخيب ما فالك Lit. 'Your omen will never fail/be let down'. Equi. 'With pleasure', 'My pleasure'. *ḥaḌriin* حاضرين Lit. 'We're present/there'. Equi. 'With pleasure', 'My pleasure', 'I will'; *ʕala khashmi/ʕal ha l khashm* هالخشم على /خشمى على Lit. 'on my nose/on this nose'. Equi. 'With pleasure'.

Thanking

mashkuur (ma qaṢṢart) (قصرت ما مشكور Lit. 'You are thanked. You saved no effort'; *(walla) maa qaṢṢart* قصرت ما الله و Lit. 'God be my witness: You saved no effort'; *ma tqaṢṢir* تقصر ما Lit. 'You'll save no effort'. Equi. "Thank you so much', "That's very kind of you', 'I am really grateful to you'.

(ʔalla) yiʕṬiik ʔil ʕaafyih العافية يعطيك الله Lit. 'May God grant you strength'; *(ʔalla) yiʕṬiik ʔalf ʕaafyih* عافية ألف يعطيك الله Lit. 'May God grant you a thousand strengths!' Equi. "Thank you so much', "That's very kind of you', 'I am really grateful to you'.

Lit. جزاك الله خيرا *?alla yijʐaak/yijʐiik kheir* الله يجزاك/ يجزيك خير; *jaʐaaka allaahu khayran*
'May God reward you (well)!' Equi. 'Thank you so much', 'I am really obliged'. This
is a formal 'thank you'.

(la) ?afa ʕaleek لا أفا عليك Lit. an interjection that means 'no' or 'don't say'. Equi.
'Never mind', 'You are most welcome'.

Offers

twaSSi bshayy توصى بشى Lit. 'You ask/command anything?'; *tamur ʕala shay*
تامر على شى Lit. 'You order anything? ' **Root-Echo Response**: *ma yu?mur ʕaleek
ʕadw/ Ðaalim* ما يؤمر عليك عدو/ ظالم Lit. 'May no enemy or unjust person have any
command over you!'; *shayy f khaaTirk/ f il khaaTir* شى ف خاطرك/ شى ف الخاطر
Lit. 'Anything on your mind?' **Root-Echo Response**: *salaamatk/salaamit raaSak*
سلامتك/ سلامة راسك Lit. 'your safety/your head's safety'. Equi. 'Is there anything I
can do for you?'; '(No) Thank you'.

?itfaDDal/ ?itfaDDali اتفضل/ اتفضلى Lit. 'Kindly get in/join in' – second person
masculine singular and second person feminine singular. **Root-Echo Response**:
ʐaad/ yʐiid faDlak/ faDlik زاد/ يزيد فضلك Lit. 'May you increase in virtue!' Equi.
'Thanks a lot'.

Leave-taking

sallim (sallim) (ʕar-rabʕ/ ʕala rabʕak) سلم سلم ع الربع/ ربعك Lit. 'Salute your
family/folks'; *fii ?amaan illaah* فى أمان الله Lit. 'in God's safety'; *marħaba ?issaʕ*
مرحبا الساع Lit. 'Welcome this hour' – as a closing gambit. Equi. 'Good to see
you/Nice talking to you'.

Apology

?ismaħli ?ismaħlna اسمحلى/ اسمحلنا Lit. 'Forgive me!'; *?issmuuħah* السموحه Lit.
'Forgiveness!'; *?aasif/ ?aasfa* آسف/ آسفه 'I'm sorry' – first person singular masculine
and feminine, respectively.

Gimme a Break

ʔallaa(h) yirħam waldeik الله يرحم والديك. Equi. 'Gimme a break!'; *ʔalla yhadiik/ yhadak* الله يهديك/ يهاداك. Lit. 'May God guide you!' Equi. 'Gimme a break!' (You are driving me crazy).

Compliments and Positive Reactions

Ṣaħħ lisaanak/lsaanik صح لسانك Lit. 'Your tongue is right/correct'. Equi. 'Well-done', 'Well-said'; *bayyaDD allah wajhak/ wayhak* بيض الله وجهك/ ويهك Lit. 'May God keep your face bright/white!' Equi. 'Well-done', 'Well-said'. **Root-Echo Response:** *w wajhak/ wayhak baʕd* و وجهك/ ويهك بعد. Equi. "Thank you'; *ʔinẓeen* انزين. Equi. 'Good!' 'Great!' 'Well'.

Disease

ʔallaah yisallimk الله يسلمك Lit. 'May God keep you safe!'; *ʔinshalla ma tshuuf sharr* انشالله ما تشوف شر Lit. 'May you see no evil!' **Root-Echo Response**: *ʔishsharr ma yijiik/yiik* الشر ما يجيك/ يييك Lit. 'May evil never come to you!'; *Tayyib Tayyib (ʔinshaaʔallaah/ʔinshaalla)* طيب طيب انشالله/ انشاء الله; Lit. 'Good! Good! God's will be done!'; *Taaliʕ minni shsharr* طالع من الشر Lit. 'You are getting out of evil'; *ʔajr w ʕaafya (ʔinshaaʔallaah/ʔinshaalla)* أجر و عافيه انشالله/ انشاء الله Lit. 'Reward and health God's will be done!' Equi. 'Get well soon', 'I wish you speedy recovery', 'I am so sorry for you'.

Sneezing

ʔal ħamdu lil laah الحمد لله Lit. 'Praise be to God!' Equi. 'Excuse me', 'Sorry'. Response: *yarħamukumu llaah* يرحمكم الله. Lit. 'May God have mercy on you!' Equi. 'Bless you!' Response: *ʔaθaabakumu llaah* أثابكم الله Lit. 'May God reward you!'; *hadaana w hadaakumu llaah* هدانا و هداكم الله Lit. 'May God guide us and you!'; *yarħamna wa yarħamkumu llaah* يرحمنا و يرحمكم الله Lit. 'May God have mercy on us and on you!' Equi. 'Thank you'.

Death Condolences

ʕaÐÐama llaahu ?ajrak/ ?ajrakum أجركم /أجرك الله عظم Lit. 'May God make your reward great!' Equi. 'I am so sorry for you!' 'X – the deceased – was a very good person'.

shakara llaahu saʕyak/ saʕyakum سعيكم /سعيك الله شكر Lit. 'May God thank your coming to condole!'; *?aḥsan allaah ʕazaak(um)* عزاكم /عزاك الله أحسن Lit. 'May God make your condolence well-accepted!' Equi. 'Thank you very much'.

Marriage and Newborns

mabruuk مبروك ('Congratulations!'); *mabruuk ma dabartum* دبرتم ما مبروك Lit. 'Congratulations on your plans!'; *yʕalha ?umm ʕyaalak w tsʕdak ma tishqiik/ tishjiik* تشقيك ما تسعدك و عيالك ام يجعلها Lit. 'May she be the mother of your kids and may she be a source of happiness, not suffering for you!' (to the groom); *?alf mabruuk mink al maal w miha al ʕyaal* العيال منها و المال منك مبروك ألف Lit. 'A thousand congrats! May you give her money and she give you kids!' (to the groom); *?alf mabruuk ʕuqbaal ilʕyaal* العيال عقبال مبروك ألف Lit. 'A thousand congrats. May you live to see your kids getting married/May you have kids!' (to the bride); *?alf mabruuk w ʕuqbaali* عقبالى و مبروك ألف Lit. 'A thousand congrats! May I get married too!') (to the bride by a female); *?alf mabruuk allaa yhanniiki wi waffiqqik/ waffitsh fi ḥayaatak/ḥayaatitsh ?il jidiidah/ ?ilyidiidah* الجديدة حياتك فى يوفقك و يهنيكى الله مبروك ألف Lit. 'A thousand congrats! May you have a successful happy new life!' (to the bride by a female); *baraka llaahu lakuma wa jamaʕa bainakuma fil khayr* خير فى بينكما جمع و لكما الله بارك. This is a very formal variant.

mabruuk ?irrayyaal الريال مبروك *mabruuk ?iTTarish* الطارش مبروك. Equi. 'Congratulations on the baby boy!'; *mabruuk ?il ḥassir* الحاسر مبروك *mabruuk ?il ḥurmah* الحرمه مبروك. Equi. 'Congratulations on the baby boy!'; *yitrabba f ʕizzak* عزك فى يتربى Lit. 'May the child be brought up in your prosperity!' Equi. 'Congratulations on your new bundle of joy!', 'You've got your hands full with this one', 'S/He'll wind you around her/his little finger'.

baraka llaahu fiik/ ?alla(h) ybaarik fiik فيك يبارك الله /فيك الله بارك Lit. 'God bless you!' Equi. 'Thank you'.

ma shaa?a llaah ما شاء الله Lit. 'God's will be done!' Equi. 'Wow! S/he is very beautiful!' 'What an armful!' 'S/He's beyond precious!' 'Isn't he adorable?' 'What an angel-face!' 'Isn't s/he a darling?' 'Isn't s/he a dear'.

Rain Greetings

mabruuk ʕaleekum/ ʕaleek ?irraḥmah مبروك عليكم/ عليك الرحمه. Lit. 'Congratulations on the mercy of the rain!' Equi. 'Showers of joy 'n' happiness!' **Response**: *w ʕaleek/ ʕaleeki/ ʕaleekum* و عليكم /و عليكى/ و عليك. Equi. 'Same to you'.

Eid, Hajj and Ramadan

ʕasaakum min ʕunwaadih عساكم من عواده Lit. 'May you see the day again!'; *min il ʕaaydiin … min il faayziin* من العيدين ... من الفايزين Lit. 'From those who return … from the winners'. Equi. 'Many happy returns of the day!' Response: *wa ?iyyaakum inshaa?llaah* و إياكم إن شاء الله. Equi. 'You too', 'Same to you'. Synonyms: *?iid saʕiid* عيد سعيد Lit. 'Happy Eid!'; *kull ʕaam w intum bikheir* كل عام وانتم بخير Lit. 'Every year you are OK!'

taqabbala allaahu (minna wa) minkum Saaliḥa l aʕmaal تقبل الله منا و منكم صالح الأعمال; *taqabbala llaah* تقبل الله. Lit. 'May God accept your and our good deeds!'

ḥajj mabruur (wa ðanb maghfuur) حج مبرور و ذنب مغفور 'May God accept your Hajj and forgive your sins'.

mabruuk ʕaleek (ha) shshahr il kariim مبروك عليك هالشهر الكريم Lit. 'May this month be a blessing on you!'; *kul ʕaam w int/ inta bkheer/ Tayyib* كل عام و انت بخير/ طيب; *ramaDaan kariim* رمضان كريم Lit. 'Ramadan is generous'. Equi. 'Happy Ramadan!' 'Many happy returns of the month of Ramadan!'

w ʕaleek (?inshaa?allaah/?inshaalla) و عليك إن شاء الله *(bil maghfira wir raḥmah)* بالمغفرة و الرحمة Lit. 'And on you God willing with forgiveness and mercy!'; *?allaah yibaarik fiik* الله يبارك فيك Lit. 'God bless you!' Equi. 'You too', 'Same to you'.