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*Cross-cultural linguistic politeness: Misunderstanding between Arabs and British speakers of English.*

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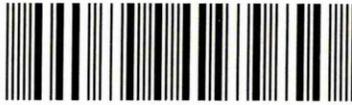
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**In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most  
merciful**

**“So announce the Good news to my Servants.  
(18 ) Those who listen to the word, and follow  
the best (meaning) of it. Those are the ones  
whom Allah has guided, and those are the ones  
endued with understanding”**

**The Holy Qu’ran, Surah 39 Al Zumar**

**Cross-cultural Linguistic Politeness: Misunderstanding between  
Arabs and British Speakers of English**

**Abdurrahman Ahmad Hamza**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**October 2007**

**Department of English  
School of Development and Society  
Sheffield Hallam University**



'This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of a degree qualification or any other type of research or academic work'

## **Dedication**

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father Ahmad Hamza, who sadly died before he could see the completion of this work which he did so much to support; to my mother Manoubia, my sister Isha, my wife Fatma and three children Ahmad, Aboubaker and Marwah.*

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This PhD research could not have been completed without the help and support of a number of people, to whom I am extremely grateful. I would like to acknowledge my thankfulness and gratitude to all of them.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor and director of study Professor Sara Mills for her continuing guidance, assistance, encouragement, and valuable advice. I am extremely grateful to her for her unlimited support and her generosity with her time and expertise, without which this work never have come to completion.

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I would like to thank the members of the Cross-Cultural Linguistic Politeness Research group who were all very helpful either in talking to me about my research or by reading drafts of the chapters of the thesis. Attending their meetings was always useful. I am very grateful to Dr Francesca Bargiela who provided me with valuable comments on my thesis.

This thesis owes a great deal to the participation of the many people who kindly agreed to be audio-taped and interviewed. I would like to take this opportunity to record my sincere thanks to all of those who have participated enthusiastically in providing me with the invaluable data, which constitutes an important part of this thesis.

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My real sincere gratitude and love goes to the soul of my Father, who kept on supporting me until his death three years ago; to my mother who sacrificed her own pleasure and did all she could to ensure I completed my studies, to my sister Isha, my brothers Mohammed and Ibrahim and also my brother-in-law Mohammed Mahjoub who all the time encouraged me and provided me with the help I needed to complete my study.

I would like to extend my thanks to all my friends, my brothers and sisters and all my relatives in Sebha who kept on supporting me with their phone calls and letters during my study.

Finally, I would like to admit my indebtedness to my wife Fatma for her infinite patience, kindness, and encouragement throughout my study and the writing of this thesis. Her kindness, faithfulness and sincerity during my study I cannot easily repay.

**Cross-cultural Linguistic Politeness: Misunderstanding between Arabs and British Speakers of English**

This research investigates misunderstanding between Arabs and native speakers of English in verbal interaction. It examines the factors that might influence understanding and interpretations of politeness in interactants' linguistic utterances at the cultural and contextual levels. Its main argument is that the 'core theories' of politeness do not provide an adequate methodology for analysing cross-cultural interactions as they do not engage sufficiently with the dynamics of context selection in interactions. Through critical evaluation of politeness theories such as Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987), this research establishes that they do not adopt a sufficiently pragmatic approach to analyse politeness in cross-cultural interaction, and that they cannot explain how misunderstandings between interlocutors from different cultures are generated. Thus, through reviewing how other scholars such as Spencer-Oatey (2000), Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), and Watts (2003) analyse politeness, and using theories of cognition, such as Sperber and Wilson (1995)'s relevance theory, this research tries to introduce a more contextual pragmatic approach that better analyses politeness in cross-cultural interaction.

This study examines data from interactions between native and non-native English speakers. It uses two types of recordings involving native and non-native speakers of English. The first type of recording is of face-to-face casual conversations. The candidates for this type had to fill in a questionnaire and some of them attended follow-up interviews. The second type of recording is taken from television and radio broadcasts. Data was selectively transcribed and the situations where misunderstandings seem to have arisen were analysed in relation to what influenced both interactants' production and interpretation of utterances in relation to what is considered polite or impolite by the interactants' cultures.

This research proves that Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987)'s theory of linguistic politeness strategies fails to reflect patterns of politeness differing from one culture to another linguistically, culturally, and contextually. It proves that the notion of politeness is interpreted differently across cultures, and involves many more issues than can be investigated through the analysis of individual utterances as Brown and Levinson do. The originality of this research, besides its criticism of the core theories of politeness in analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction, lies in the fact that it introduces a contextual pragmatic approach that not only considers additional cultural and contextual variables that influence the production and interpretation of politeness between interactants, but also provides different interpretations of these variables that influence interaction. It analyses variables in relation to both speakers and hearers and the context of interaction, which makes it more suitable for cross-cultural analysis. Applying this approach helps us to consider whether misunderstanding between interactants is due to interactants failing to understand the politeness norms of other cultures or whether it is due to interactants failing to recognise differences in the way that politeness is realised linguistically in different cultures. The thesis proves that notions such as face and indirectness are not universal, and that politeness is a cultural contextual issue. Thus, my approach identifies pragmatic failure, and isolates the cultural differences that lead to misunderstandings, through investigating the different implicatures that an utterance might give rise to in certain cross-cultural contexts.

## Transcription Convention

The transcription conventions used in this research for transcribing the selected conversations reflect the standard that has emerged in conversation analysis. This evolving system has been developed chiefly by Jefferson (1989:193-196). For the sake of this research, I have added some symbols. These symbols represent words and expressions which exist only in Arabic, which is the mother tongue of the non-native speakers of English.

N O	Symbol		Designation
1	CAP	Louder speech	Capitalised letter indicates that a section of speech is louder than the surrounding speech.
2	<u>Underscoring</u>	Stress or emphasis	Underlined fragments indicate stress or emphasis.
3	[	Overlapping utterance	To indicate that that someone has started speaking, but that someone else speaks during their turn, a single left hand square bracket is used, linking the overlapping utterance at the point where the overlap begins.
4	=	Contiguous utterance	When there is no gap between utterances, where they latch on to one another without overlapping, an equals sign is used. This equals sign can also be used to indicate the continuity of an utterances when someone overlaps or interrupts.
5	(.)	A micropause	A micropause (roughly 0.2 seconds or less).
6	(0.0)	Measured pause	Indicates a measured micropause.
7	(( not clear))	Difficult to transcribe	Indicates that some actions such as (snorts), (sniff), cough or conversational scene such as (telephone rings). The double round brackets are also used when it is not possible to hear the interaction well.
8	:	Extension of the sound or syllable	Indicates a sound stretch, e.g Ah: If the sound is more prolonged use more colons>
9	hh	Aspirations	An inbreath or outbreath. The length is indicated by a number of hs
11	?	asking	Indicates a question.
12	?,		Indicates a rising intonation weaker than that indicated by a question mark.
13	.....		Indicates speech not included
14	(hhh)	Laughing	The letters (hhh) in brackets means laugh in talking.
15	(AR)		Used when an Arabic word is used

**Convention for transliteration Arabic  
sounds into English**

Arabic Letter	Name in Arabic	English letters used to transliterate Arabic sounds
ء	hamza	' (disappears after 'al-' and where there is alif waṣ).
ا	alif	Aa
ب	bā	B
ت	tā	T
ث	ṭā	ç "th"
ج	ǧīm, jīm, gīm	J
ح	ḥā	ḥ
خ	ḫā	x "kh"
د	dāl	D
ذ	ḏāl	ḏ "th"

ر	rā	R
ز	zāy	Z
س	sīn	S
ش	šīn	Š
ص	ṣād	ṣ
ض	ḍād	ḍ
ط	ṭā	ṭ
ظ	ẓā	ẓ
ع	ayn	Ā
غ	ḡayn	ḡ "gh"
ف	fā	F
ق	qāf	Q
ك	kāf	K
ل	lām	L

م	mīm	M
ن	nūn	N
ه	hā	H
و	wāw	w (consonantal) o (lengthening)
ي	yā	y (consonantal) e (lengthening)
آ	alif mamdūda	'aa
ة	tā marbūṭa	T
ى	alif maqṣūra	À
لا	lām alif	Laa
ال	alif lām	ál-

## Table of contents

### Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. Rationale for the research .....	5
1.3. Scope of the research .....	10
1.4. Research Hypotheses and Research question .....	11
1.5. The Arabs .....	15
1.5.1 - The Arab World .....	15
1.5.2 - Varieties of Arabic .....	16
1.5.3 - Arabic Dialects .....	17
1.6. Definition of Terms .....	19
1.7. Outline of the thesis .....	24
1.8. Conclusion .....	26

### Chapter 2: Theorising Politeness

2.1 Theoretical Background to Brown and Levinson .....	28
2.1.1 Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle .....	28
2.1.1.1 Criticising Grice's Cooperative Principles .....	31
2.1.2 Lakoff's Rules of Politeness .....	32
2.1.3 Leech's (1983) politeness Principles .....	34
2.2 Brown and Levinson's theory of linguistic politeness .....	35
2.2.1 Brown and Levinson's claims and aims .....	36
2.2.2 Rationality .....	37
2.2.3 Brown and Levinson and Goffman (1967)'s notion of face.....	37
2.2.3.1 Other views of face .....	40
2.2.3.2 Criticism of Brown and Levinson's notion of face .....	41
2.2.4 Brown and Levinson's Strategies .....	43
2.2.5 Universality in Brown and Levinson's Model .....	45
2.2.6 Brown and Levinson's Variables for Politeness Strategies.....	47
2.2.7 Brown and Levinson's model in cross-cultural interaction .....	49
2.3 Post-Brown and Levinson Theorizing of Politeness .....	51
2.3.1 Blum-Kulka (cultural norms) .....	51
2.3.2 Fraser (conversational contract view) .....	52
2.3.3 Arabic view of Politeness (religion and politeness) .....	53
2.3.4 Eelen's critique of the core theory of politeness (politeness and social reality) .....	55
2.3.4.1 Eelen's critique of Brown and Levinson .....	56
2.3.5 Spencer-Oatey (cross-cultural communication) .....	58
2.3.5.1 Contextual variables and culture .....	61
2.3.6 Mills (individual speaker and wider community) .....	62
2.3.6.1 A community of practice approach .....	63
2.3.7 Watts (assessing social behaviour) .....	65
2.3.7.1 Watts and Relevance theory .....	66
2.4 Conclusion .....	69

### Chapter 3: Pragmatics and Linguistics

3.1 Pragmatics and linguistics .....	72
3.2 Pragmatic and Sociolinguistics.....	73
3.3 Defining Pragmatics .....	74
3.3.1 Pragmatic Competence .....	77
3.3.1.1 Pragmatic analysis .....	77



5.3.1 Social deixis and discourse system .....	150
5.3.2. Honorifics and discourse system .....	152
5.3.2 Compliments and discourse system .....	153
5.4 Variables leading to different linguistic strategies across cultures .....	154
5.4.1 Power .....	155
5.4.1.1 Power and cross-cultural interaction .....	156
5.4.2 Distance .....	159
5.4.2.1 Distance and cross-cultural interaction .....	160
5.4.3 Gender .....	161
5.4.3.1 Gender and cross-cultural interaction .....	163
5.4.4 Religion .....	168
5.4.5 Stereotypes .....	171
5.4.5.1 Stereotypes and cross-cultural interaction .....	172
5.5 Conclusion .....	174

## **Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Discussion**

6.1 Introduction .....	176
6.1.1 Summary of the aims of the thesis .....	176
6.2 Method of Research .....	177
6.2.1 Data Collection .....	177
6.2.2 Procedure .....	179
6.3 My analytical Approach .....	180
6.3.1 Procedure of analysis .....	185
6.4 Data .....	187
6.4.1 Tape-Recorded casual conversation and TV / Radio conversations .....	187
6.5 Analysis .....	189
6.5.1 Universality of Brown and Levinson's model in cross-cultural interaction .....	190
6.5.1.1 FTAs (Face threatening acts) in cross-cultural interaction.....	190
6.5.1.1.1 FTAs and Asking questions.....	191
6.5.1.1.2 FTAs and redress strategy .....	193
6.5.1.1.3 FTAs and Interactant's goals .....	195
6.5.1.1.4 FTAs and Irony .....	197
6.5.1.1.5 Conclusion of section 6.5.1.1 FTAs in Cross-cultural Interaction .....	200
6.5.1.2 Indirectness / Directness in cross-cultural interaction .....	201
6.5.1.2.1 Indirectness and provocative utterance .....	201
6.5.1.2.2 Indirectness / Apology and Request .....	203
6.5.1.2.3 Indirectness and sensitive questions .....	208
6.5.1.2.4 Indirectness and Disagreement .....	210
6.5.1.2.5 Indirectness and threat .....	213
6.5.1.2.6 Directness and Naming Strategy.....	214
6.5.1.2.7 Conclusion to the section 6.5.1.2 Indirectness / Directness in cross-cultural interaction .....	216
6.5.2 Understanding context in cross-cultural interaction .....	218
6.5.2.1 Context and Culture .....	218
6.5.2.1.1 Topic choice .....	218
6.5.2.1.2 Cultural Conventions and disagreement .....	220
6.5.2.1.3 Solidarity .....	223
6.5.2.1.4 Stereotypes .....	225
6.5.2.1.5 Religion .....	227
6.5.2.1.6 Conclusion to section 6.5.2.1 Context and Culture.....	228

6.5.2.2 Context and Understanding .....	229
6.5.2.2.1 Background knowledge .....	229
6.5.2.2.2 Background experience .....	232
6.5.2.2.3 Encyclopaedic entries .....	233
6.5.2.2.4 Intentionality .....	235
6.5.2.2.5 Conclusion of section 6.5.2.2 Context and understanding .....	236
6.6 Conclusion .....	237
 <b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>	
7.1 Conclusion .....	243
7.1.1 Aims .....	243
7.1.2 Theoretical Framework .....	243
7.1.3 Contribution .....	244
7.1.4 Findings .....	246
7.1.5 Implications .....	248
 <b>Bibliography</b> .....	 250
 <b>Appendix 1 (Data analysed in the thesis)</b> .....	 i
<b>Appendix 2 (Follow-up interview questions)</b> .....	xxv
<b>Appendix 3 (Questionnaires)</b> .....	xliv
<b>Appendix 4 (Ethics Guidelines for Tape Recording Conversation)</b> .....	xlvi
<b>Appendix 5 (Other data collected but not used in the thesis)</b> .....	xlvii

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, culture and context are analysed in terms of the way that they influence interaction and affect linguistic utterances. It focuses on the analysis of misunderstanding in verbal communication that takes place between strangers belonging to different cultures. It investigates the relationship between misunderstanding and the notion of politeness, in particular, perceptions of politeness in the context of cross-cultural communication<sup>1</sup>, and the role that culture and context play in producing and interpreting utterances.<sup>2</sup> There is particular focus on politeness in relation to Arabs and the English. The languages and cultures of both groups are so diverse historically, linguistically and culturally, that misunderstandings are almost inevitable.<sup>3</sup>

Interactants' cultural backgrounds and their understanding of the context of interaction influence their politeness strategies in cross-cultural situations. Culture and context are central to the analytical framework of this study, and I argue that they are not adequately considered in the core theories of politeness.<sup>4</sup> Suszczynska (1999), analysing the contextual and cultural differences in cross-cultural interaction in relation to politeness, states that

It seems that politeness theory, in its present form, is not enough to explain such differences since they stem less from universal norms of politeness and more from culture-specific values and attitude. Understanding these values and attitudes is essential to understanding language use (1999:1064).

---

<sup>1</sup> Some researchers use the term 'cross-cultural interaction' when referring to differing conceptual interactions within separate cultures. Others use this to refer to interactions where interactants from different cultures are interacting with each other. I am using this term both to refer to interactions where comparisons are made between ideas and concepts in separate conversations, but also where these comparisons occur in face to face or other interactive conversations between two parties from differing cultures. However, in explaining the difference between cross-cultural and intercultural communication, Kecskes (2004) states that 'while cross-cultural communication is usually considered a study of a particular idea(s) or concept(s) within several cultures that compares one culture to another on the aspect of interest, intercultural communication focuses on interactions among people from different cultures' (2004:2).

<sup>2</sup> House states that 'cross-cultural differences in communicative preference are responsible for causing misunderstandings and mismanaged rapport' (2000:145). Misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions are not always caused by linguistic errors such as misuse of the grammar or phonology of the language of the interaction by one of the interactants; they can also be a result of different interpretation of the context of the interaction which may lead to the misunderstanding of the pragmatic meaning of an utterance.

<sup>3</sup> Wierzbicka (2003) discusses the importance of cross-cultural pragmatics, providing a wide range of examples to illustrate the differences in the ways of speaking associated with these two different cultures, and argues that their ways of speaking reflect independently established differences in cultural traditions, values, and priorities.

<sup>4</sup> 'Core theories of politeness', in this research, refers to Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987).

Thus, I will be investigating the relationship between the production and interpretation of utterances, and exploring the role of culture and context, however problematic such concepts may appear in cross-cultural interaction. I will examine the effect of culture on linguistic utterances and the influence this has on judgements of politeness and impoliteness.<sup>5</sup> I will also examine the role of context in determining the meaning of linguistic utterances in relation to culture, and how it may affect interaction between people from different cultures. Van Dijk argues that 'contexts are, so to speak, the interface between discourse as action on the one hand and social situations and social structures on the other hand' (1997:7). This means that context is inseparable from other factors that influence interaction such as culture, and what we perform verbally or non-verbally is influenced by contextual factors.

This research argues that, unlike misunderstanding caused by problems of linguistic competence (which may be relatively easily overcome), socio- and pragmatic misunderstanding sometimes creates miscommunication, communication breakdown, or even conflict. Lyons states that 'most linguists view language as systems of symbols designed for the purpose of communication' (1981:8). Such a view is adequate when we talk about language as a tool of interaction, but language works alongside other factors to convey meaning, whether implicit or explicit. Furthermore, a pragmatic misunderstanding may not be recognised as a cultural problem, but may be assumed to be an individual fault.

When fluent speakers construct their utterances, their cultures usually influence their evaluation of the context and linguistic choices. Interactants may experience misunderstanding, embarrassment or conflict if they belong to different cultures and hold certain stereotypical views of their interlocutors. This research investigates the current state of play in linguistic politeness research and communication, surveying the field from the core theories of politeness, in particular Brown and Levinson's work (1978/87) to the more theoretical critical work which emphasises the role of culture and context in interaction, (Eelen, 2001 Spencer-Oatey, 2000, Mills 2003a, and Watts 2003). I also examine the role of cognition in communication (Sperber and Wilson 1995 and Toolan 1996), because in this research I argue that politeness is first of all a process of

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<sup>5</sup> Foley argues that anthropological linguistics 'seeks to uncover the meaning behind the use, misuse, or non-use of language, its different forms, registers and styles.'(1997:3). He emphasises the understanding of language through cultural understanding.

understanding what is intended. I will investigate politeness in relation to the core theories of politeness and understanding, which include: Grice's (1975) conversational maxims; Lakoff's (1973) rules of pragmatics; Leech's (1983) politeness principles and Brown and Levinson's (1987) linguistic politeness strategies. I will study the theoretical analysis of politeness and suggest that in order to be able to analyse politeness in cross-cultural interaction we need a more contextual, pragmatic approach.

The main theory of politeness I am critical of in this research is that proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987/1978). Working with data gathered from Tamil speakers in South India, Tzeltal speakers in Mexico, and speakers of American and British English, they provide a systematic description of politeness phenomena which is used to support an explanatory model capable of accounting for any instance of politeness. Their claim is that broadly comparable linguistic strategies are available in each language but that there are local cultural differences in what triggers their use.<sup>6</sup> My work is mainly concerned with critiquing Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim of universality of linguistic politeness strategies. They assume a straightforward relationship between specific linguistic uses and specific strategies, and certain meanings they convey in relation to politeness. They support their claim of universality by cross-cultural data. I suggest that native/non-native interaction demonstrates that such globally shared knowledge of what politeness consists of - which utterances are polite, which are impolite, how polite sentiments may be expressed and so on - cannot be sustained. My argument is not that Brown and Levinson's claims are wrong and that we therefore need to discard them completely, nor is it that their claims are valid only in cross-cultural comparison. It is, rather, they are too Western-oriented in focus and assume a universalistic basis for some of their theoretical discussions of politeness in general, and the context of interaction is not adequately considered.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, I will evaluate Brown and Levinson's work from the perspective of the views of politeness and the values attached to their work within a broadly defined Arab culture in order to demonstrate the culture-specific nature of politeness theories in general and politeness itself, and will argue for the adoption of a much more context and culture-based

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of their work.

<sup>7</sup> Bargiela and Harris (2006) argue that 'the growing interest in inter-cultural and cross-cultural analysis adds a further set of challenges pertaining to the uncritical transfer of Western concepts and categories to distant, cultures and language' (2006:6). They continue: 'it is perhaps from within cultural and cross-cultural research that the most fruitful challenge to (Western) analytical categories arise' (2006:8).

approach to the way politeness and impoliteness function within cultural groups.<sup>8</sup> By so doing, I hope to show that conventional linguistic politeness theories are inadequate for describing and explaining conflicts and misunderstandings occurring in cross-cultural interactions, where participants are likely, for example, to have different perceptions of what constitutes positive or negative politeness and impoliteness.

My theoretical approach is different from that of Brown and Levinson (1987). Their work, to some extent, ignores the role of context in the analysis of linguistic strategies. Therefore, by reviewing some other models of analysing politeness which are critical of Brown and Levinson's model, I propose a different approach to analysing cross cultural interaction. For example, in my approach, I will refer to Eelen (2001), who argues that culture should occupy the highest position in theoretical frameworks, and that politeness norms establish the links between culture, social structure and individual behaviour.<sup>9</sup> I also refer to Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, in which they define relevance as 'a relation between a given assumption and a given context' (1995:142). Their view is that people can distinguish relevant from irrelevant information.<sup>10</sup> I do not use Relevance Theory as the core theory of this research to analyse politeness in cross-cultural interaction, rather it is one which I use to make the analysis of politeness more contextually based. In this thesis, throughout its different sections, I will discuss the main arguments of Relevance Theory to show how it can be exploited in analysing politeness, and what can be done to shift the dependence on the current theories of politeness such as those of Brown and Levinson. The goal, generally, is to move towards the use of a cognitive approach to understanding politeness along with a more social approach. Consequently, the different chapters of this thesis will use other existing models of linguistic politeness so that they may be more able to account for the conflicts and confusions of understanding what is appropriate, which arise in native/non-native interaction because of cultural and contextual differences between interactants.

In this introduction, I will provide the rationale, the scope for the research, the hypotheses and research questions. Following this, I will discuss the Arab world, and varieties of

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>9</sup> See chapter 2 where there is a discussion of the other models which try to discuss understanding politeness differently from Brown and Levinson (1987) such as Spencer-Oatey, (2000), Mills, (2003a), Watts (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that 'the assumption explicitly expressed by an utterance is seen as combining with a context present in the hearer's mind at the start of the act of utterance' (1995:133). (See chapter 4 for more discussion on understanding and misunderstanding.

Arabs and Arabic dialects as background to the arguments of the thesis. Finally, I define the main terms used in this research and provide brief outlines of the chapters of this thesis.

## 1.2 Rationale for research

Several incidents from my own and others' experiences have led me to think about the reasons behind what makes certain linguistic utterances or strategies seem appropriate to one of the interactants and not to the other. For example, why is 'directness' in certain contexts acceptable in one culture and may be considered impolite in another; and why are certain linguistic utterances considered polite by one group, and considered impolite and, sometimes, insulting by another? The rationale for undertaking a cross-cultural linguistic study of politeness between Arabs and English people is the existence of misunderstandings between interactants from these two groups due to cultural differences. Misunderstanding or assessment of appropriateness might be due to misinterpretation by the addressee of the strategies that a speaker uses, and not necessarily only to misunderstanding what the speaker means.

I argue directness and indirectness, in relation to certain linguistic contexts, is differently interpreted in Arabic-English cross-cultural interaction. From my understanding of the two languages, the understanding of the indirect utterance, '**Could you do this for me?**' by a native English speaker would be different to that of an Arab speaking English. The Arabic speaker may understand such an utterance as a question or as being given a choice to agree or disagree. Thus, an Arab employee, when asked by his/her Arab boss 'Could you do this for me?' might think that s/he is being asked whether s/he has the ability to do it. In such a context an Arab boss speaking Arabic would use "**do this for me**". " **اعمل هذا لي** " , "ehmal hatha lee". In a different context where there is no power imbalance, the expression '**Could you do this for me?**' might be understood by the hearer as being given the choice. Although in such a context, the hearer would often do what is requested, such an expression would not be understood as a polite way of ordering or requesting, as it would be understood by a native English speaker. Hence, the issue is not only whether interactants from different cultures agree or disagree about the necessity of indirectness in certain contextual situations, but rather whether people use directness or indirectness for the same communicative goals, for example, such as to express politeness. Such aspects may need more consideration when an interaction is taking place between interactants belonging to different cultures.

It is worth considering some incidents which demonstrate the influence of cultural differences and different understanding of context in the assessment of politeness. These took place in the English language classes I gave in the Department of English, University of Sebha, Libya, in 1998, where most of the Arab students did not use what are considered, in English, to be linguistically polite request terms when they asked me to explain, illustrate or repeat something. They rarely used expressions such as 'Excuse me', 'please', 'pardon', 'Could you repeat that?' or 'sorry'. They usually used words or expressions such as 'What....?', 'Why...?', 'Repeat that', 'Explain to me.' Although they were communicating in English, they talked to their teachers using the imperative, which in English is considered inappropriate in such contexts.<sup>11</sup> Such a way of talking indicated that students were communicating using strategies transferred from their mother tongue, considered appropriate in their own culture, while talking in English. Ball and Farr (2003) states

teachers, like most other members of society, are generally unaware of the extent to which they believe that their own cultural and linguistic patterns are natural or logical, nor do they generally realize how they tend to interpret other behaviour according to their own cultural norms. For example, indirectness in language or nonverbal behaviour can signify respect in one culture and dishonesty in another (2003:437).

Such a way of speaking may upset speakers from different cultures. For example, a foreign English language lecturer at the University of Sebha warned his Arab students that he would not answer any of them if they did not say "please" when asking him about something. Ball and Farr (2003) discuss such misunderstandings due to cultural differences. According to them

it is crucial that teachers understand that their own views of the world, or ways of using language in that world, are not necessarily shared by others. A deep understanding of cultural and linguistic differences, either through living in another culture or through pre-service or in-service coursework, can help reduce the ethnocentrism that is widespread in Western societies (2003:438)

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<sup>11</sup> This is discussed by Nelson, Batal, and Bakary (2002) in their article "Directness vs. Indirectness Egyptian Arabic and US English communication style" In their investigation of the similarities and differences between English and Arabic, they argue that Egyptians use less indirectness than Americans in their interaction.

In contrast, in Arabic, using the imperative is not classified as impolite or inappropriate in talking to teachers. If asked by their teachers to do so, students would use 'please' or 'excuse me' as these expressions exist in Arabic as well, but in Arabic not using them does not mean that students are being impolite. Even in contexts such as casual conversations between strangers or interaction in a business place, Arab interactants may sound brusque to a British person. Sometimes Arabic-speaking interactants do use words such as <sup>12</sup>

بالله

**Bellahi**

by Allah

If you don't mind ...

or a title of respect such as

استاذ

**Ostaḍ**

Teacher

[No equivalent in English, as teacher is not used as a vocativ]

سيد

**Sayed**

Sir

Excuse me

However, not using them in Arabic would not make the speaker sound inappropriate.

Another illustrative incident happened early in 2000, in Libya, where I was trying to make a phone call to the British High Commission in Malta. The following exchange took place between the operator and myself in Libyan Arabic:

AH : لو سمحت ممكن مكالمة الى مالط ؟  
? Malṭa Ella Moukalamh momken Samaḥet Laaw  
? Malta to phone call possible you allow if  
If you do not mind, Could I make a phone call to Malta?

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<sup>12</sup> In my representation of Arabic, I use the following conventions to explain the difference between Arabic and English structure and the literal meaning and the pragmatic meaning :-

line 1 - Arabic script;

line 2 - Transliteration of the Arabic script;

line 3 - Literal values of words; and

line 4 - pragmatic meaning.

Operator : ؟ ليبيي انت  
? Leebee Anta ?  
? Libyan you  
Are you a Libyan?

AH : ؟ السؤال هذا ليش ، ليبيي انا ايه  
? Asoual Hada Laiš , Leebee Ana Iyah  
? the question this why , libyan I yes  
Yes, I am, but why do you ask me this question?

Operator : ، شي ، لا ، طريقتك في السؤال غريبة ،  
ġariba Asoual Fee ʔariqatk , šei , Laa  
strange the question in way nothing no

بيبدو انك اتكلم بالغة مش عربية  
řrabia Moš beloagh etekalam enak ybdou  
Arabic not the language you speak you it seems

No, nothing, but the way you speak to me is strange; it seems as if you are not talking in Arabic

When speaking in Arabic it is usual to make a very direct request.

For example,

اريد الاتصال بمالطا  
Malṭa Aletṣal Ouried  
Malta the calling I want  
I want to call Malta

This might be preceded by the expression

بالله  
Bellahi  
by Allah  
If you do not mind .....

Another example illustrates similar misunderstanding between interactants using different interpretations of what is appropriate linguistic behaviour. The source of the following incident is the Aljazeera Channel (2001). The following incident took place in France late in 2000, between the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and the Arab chairman of an Islamic organization in the United States of America. Interacting in Arabic, the chairman of the Islamic organization addressed Mr Arafat by his first name alone, by saying 'Yasser', and

then mentioned the president of Egypt by his first name as well by saying 'Husnee'. Here Mr Arafat interrupted him and asked him to respect him and President Mubarak if he wanted him to carry on talking to him. When he asked Arafat what he should do to show the required respect, Arafat told him to use the expression "his Excellency" before mentioning Husnee Mubarak and "Chairman" before addressing him. The chairman of the Islamic organization told Mr Arafat that when he had met the-then President of the United States, Bill Clinton, on several occasions, he always addressed him by using only his first name, "Bill". What this implies is that the use of titles to show respect is understood differently across the cultures of the interactants. Because the Arab chairman of the Islamic organization belonged to a different culture, i.e. American culture, than that to which Mr Arafat belonged, he was misunderstood. While the Chairman of the Islamic organization thought that he was being positively polite by using first names, Mr Arafat considered him to be impolite and disrespectful to President Mubarak and himself, and warned him to use titles.<sup>13</sup> In Arabic, if you speak to people who are in power such as teachers, tribal leaders, your elders, bosses, presidents, medical doctors, etc., a speaker needs to use "titles" or "words that show respect" in order to be classified polite.

In these three incidents, we find that there are misunderstandings of what is appropriate between the speakers and their addressees because of different evaluations of what counts as polite or impolite behaviour. The use of directness/indirectness in these situations or the use of titles is interpreted differently. Because of disagreement about what an utterance may mean, or the appropriate way of requesting or asking, the utterances in the above incidents were differently interpreted and sometimes considered impolite. Interlocutors' linguistic competence, their cultures and their understanding of the context play a major role in the interpretation of utterances. The acceptance of certain utterances as appropriate, then, depends on a number of factors and variables that interlocutors may interpret differently in an interaction, which may cause misunderstanding or breakdown in communication.

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<sup>13</sup> Another incident happened in a London hospital when a Libyan friend of mine, who was visiting a patient, stopped a nurse and asked her in English, "I want to visit the patient 'Lyla', tell me where is she". The nurse angrily answered him that she did not know, and that he had to go back to the receptionist as it was their job to tell people how to find someone they were wishing to visit; and that he was completely in the wrong place and asking the wrong person. In Arabic, اخبرني اين اجد, akhbernee ayna ajeed ....., Tell me where to find ..... is a normal way of communicating and does not mean that a person is rude. The Libyan did not mean to be rude or sound brusque, and did not understand why he was treated in this way.

### 1.3 Scope of the research

It is not just linguistic representations that contribute to understanding between interlocutors in a cross-cultural context. In the early 1970s, the notion of social appropriateness in communication started to attract the same attention that formal grammatical accuracy had attracted earlier. Hymes argues that

competence is not only knowledge of grammar, but also knowing what is socially appropriate or inappropriate. Interlocutors need to consider the topic, situation, and human relations, when communicating (1972:278).

What is socially and culturally appropriate is as important as what is linguistically acceptable. Thus, we can conclude that both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence have roles in any kind of communication, and together construct what is termed communicative competence. In communicating politeness, Watts, et. al. (1992a) state that politeness phenomena should occupy a firm place on more social science and humanities research agendas than it does at present (1992a:2). Thus, 'linguistic politeness' is considered as a social as well as a linguistic phenomenon, and analysing it in these terms is an important key to comprehending a number of misunderstandings that take place between interactants, especially in cross cultural interaction.

Wierzbicka states that 'different cultures find expression in different systems of speech acts, and that different speech acts become entrenched, and, to some extent, codified in different languages' (1991:26). She argues that social experiences are needed in communication and social conventions, and social discourse strategies govern our linguistic performance and behaviour. Aijmer (1996) holds that sociolinguistic and cross-cultural analysis involves attention to the functioning of language in societies. He agrees with Lyons who argues that 'language behaviour of particular persons on particular occasions is determined by many other factors over and above their linguistic competence' (1981:5). For example, Zaharna examines how two cultures, Arab and American, have distinct preferences for structuring persuasive and appealing messages and what these differences mean for American practitioners working with Arab clients in the U.S. He maintains that 'without a conscious awareness of how another culture is different from one's own, there is a tendency to see the differences of another through the prism of one's culture' (1995:2). All this is in line with the research's argument that misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication are attributable to cultural differences and different

contextual understandings, and that culture is an important aspect that determines linguistic strategies between the interactants and influences the interpretation of context.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1.4 Research Hypotheses and Research Questions

Like linguistic differences, cultural and pragmatic differences may be transferred from one language to another in cross-cultural interaction, sometimes leading to disagreement, conflict or communication breakdown between the interactants. The main hypothesis of my research is that Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of politeness does not adequately distinguish different cultures' linguistic utterances in different situations in their analysis of politeness, and their claim of universality for linguistic politeness strategies is inaccurate.<sup>15</sup> Linguistic strategies in English and Arabic are different in some situations, which may lead to misunderstanding between interlocutors. In the choice of requesting strategies, for instance, Arabs are more likely to be very straightforward in their everyday interaction. They usually, in inviting each other, do not give their interactants the choice to refuse or agree; otherwise their linguistic strategy might be interpreted as a compliment rather than a real invitation. For example, an Arab may invite someone to have lunch with him/her by saying,

معى	العشاء	تناول	و	تعال
Ma'ie	Alřasha	Tanawel	wa	tařala
with me	the dinner	have	and	come
Come and have lunch with me today				

Or asking his/her friend for help:

ساعدى	و	تعال	،	عمل	عندى
Sařednie	wa	Tařala	řamal	řendee	
help me	and	come	work	I have	
I have got work to do; come and help me <sup>16</sup>					

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<sup>14</sup> Hall considers culture and communication as two faces of one coin. He argues 'culture is communication and communication is culture' (1959:169, cited in Gudykunst, 1998:41). Searle also makes links between structure and what it does in context. He argues that 'it is possible to study the structure independently of the function but pointless and perverse to do so, since structure and function so obviously interact' (1972:19). (See chapters 3, 4 and 5).

<sup>15</sup> Meier (1997) argues that Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness is not appropriate for determining universal rules of politeness.

<sup>16</sup> This seems to be a contextual issue. I know an English friend who is as blunt as this to his friends when inviting them without being thought rude.

This way of requesting may sound strange or even, in some contexts, inappropriate to an English person as an English native speaker might use "would you like to come and have dinner with me?" or "I have got some work to do, could you help me?". What is common in English is that the interactants' strategies usually give choice to the addressee to agree. In Arabic, interpreting what is polite, is left to understanding what is considered appropriate in such contexts of interaction. Thus, different understanding of what is appropriate or inappropriate in certain cultures is due to the different understanding of what is appropriate in the context of the interaction. Levinson argues that

we would need to make an important distinction here between universal pragmatics, the general theory of what aspects of context get encoded and how, and the language-specific pragmatics of individual languages (1983:10).

I will argue that an utterance may provide different implicatures built on different assumptions made by the addressee depending on the explicitness of the utterance. An addressee may come with different assumptions that lead to interpretations that are different from those intended by the speaker because of different cultural backgrounds and understanding of the context. However, because the aim of this research is to investigate misunderstanding involving politeness in cross-cultural communication, and not just to compare what is said in Arabic with what is said in English, I hypothesise that depending purely on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness for the analysis of misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication may not lead to understanding whether interactants from different cultures are being polite or impolite towards each other. The gap between what is said and what is understood is more complicated in cross-cultural communication, and such investigation may necessitate combining more than one model of analysis in order to consider more factors that influence the production and interpretation of an utterance that Brown and Levinson's model does not consider.

On the basis of the above mentioned considerations and the arguments and evaluations in the literature survey chapters, my main research question is: Do linguistic politeness theories, including Brown and Levinson's, provide an adequate theory of analysis of politeness/impoliteness in cross-cultural communication, or is there need for another analytical approach that considers contextual and cultural differences between interactants? The question "why an utterance is considered a polite utterance by one interactant and impolite by the other?" is not answered by the core theories of politeness. The questions

which we need to ask, therefore, are: how is politeness interpreted in cross-cultural interaction and how do native and non-native speakers of a particular language interpret each other's utterances? What are the situations where native and non-native speakers experience pragmatic difficulties in cross-cultural interactions and why? The following questions are subsidiary questions designed to supplement the main research questions:

**Is linguistic politeness different in cross-cultural interactions and, if so, do such differences cause misunderstandings?<sup>17</sup>**

**Are there different understandings by interactants of what influences communication across cultures? If there are, how do these influences affect cross-cultural communication?<sup>18</sup>**

**Is politeness a significant aspect in analysing cross-cultural interaction, and how do other pragmatic and cognitive theories analyse politeness, especially across cultures?<sup>19</sup>**

**Does misunderstanding lead to interpretation of impoliteness in cross-cultural settings, and does misunderstanding(s) involve impoliteness?<sup>20</sup>**

**Have cultural and contextual factors and other influences been considered appropriately in the theories of politeness? Is there a need to modify or suggest an approach of analysis that is more appropriate to analyse cross-cultural interaction?<sup>21</sup>**

The goal of the literature review chapters, which answer the main research questions of the thesis, is to argue a) that being familiar with the target language does not necessarily lead to appropriate communication; understanding the language of the interactants' culture is as important as understanding the language itself; b) that both interactants' understanding of the context of interaction is important; we cannot simply concentrate on analysing certain

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<sup>17</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 5

<sup>19</sup> See chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 4

<sup>21</sup> See chapters 3 and 6.

linguistic uses or speech acts, or just one interactant's utterances, in order to come to a conclusive analysis of the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication; and d) that politeness is not a static issue, restricted to certain linguistic choices and strategies; it is rather dynamic and influenced by cultural and contextual factors relevant to the context of interaction.

My critical position on Brown and Levinson's linguistic strategies, as well as other core theories of politeness, is that if interactants are communicating in the mother tongue of the addressees, then they will be influenced by their own native culture and they may have different understanding of the context. If we agree that cross-cultural interaction, or interaction in general, is influenced by culture and context, then this leads me to put forward the following as the main aims of the thesis:

- a- to argue that the 'core theories' of politeness do not provide an adequate methodology for analysing cross-cultural interactions.
- b- to show that this is because the theories do not engage sufficiently with the dynamics of context in interactions.

Thus, the goal of the literature review chapters is to argue, through a critical evaluation of existing scholarship, that it is because the existing theories do not adopt a sufficiently contextual, pragmatic approach to politeness that they cannot explain how misunderstandings between interlocutors from different cultures are generated. And the goal of the data analysis chapter is to show that misunderstandings between interlocutors from different cultures arise from (a) the failure of interlocutors to understand the politeness norms of other cultures, and (b) their failure to recognise differences in the way that politeness is realised linguistically in contexts of interaction because of cultural differences. The data analysis chapter is also designed to show that an approach to politeness that focuses on the pragmatics of interpretation is needed to explain where pragmatic failure occurs, and to isolate the cultural differences that lead to misunderstandings.

Hence, I will investigate the role of variables such as gender, religion, attitude, stereotypes, power, etc., and their effect not only on the interactants' performance, but also on their understanding, especially when their linguistic uses are differently interpreted across

cultures. Thus, through analysing specific features considered polite or impolite within particular cultures in particular contexts of interaction, I will examine how situations of misunderstandings arise between interactants of different cultures, and what implicatures they might give rise to. Rather than holding to the idea that culture and language are homogeneous phenomena, I will investigate the way that context and culture are enmeshed in how interactants try to negotiate a position for themselves from what they hypothesise to be a cultural stand on a particular issue, such as directness and politeness in Arabic and English.

## **1.5 Arabs**

This section is meant to provide some background information about the Arabic language and Arabs. It provides an idea of Arabic language and how it developed, and the stages that it went through and how that influences Arabs' linguistic production and interpretations. It also provides information about varieties of Arabic, the different spoken Arabic dialects, what influences the language, and who is considered to be an Arab.

### **1.5.1 The Arab world**

The term Arab refers to a particular group of people who live in a land extending from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic coast of North Africa.<sup>22</sup> Arabs share one language, which is Arabic, and regardless of the different religions in the area, they share similar historical and cultural values. They consider themselves as a unified state because of the land, language and cultural backgrounds which is influenced by religious teachings, Islamic or non-Islamic. For examples, whether an Arab is a Muslim, Christian, Yezidee, Jewish, etc., they still agree on what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, and understand that their language is highly influenced by their religions. Of course there are differences in understanding what Arabic culture is or what constitutes Arabic culture among Arabs from different regions, but generally, it is understood that Arabic language is influenced by religion. (See Neydell (2002) and chapter 5)

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<sup>22</sup> Atiyah (1968) and Badawi (1996) point out that Westerners often do not understand the difference between Arabs and Muslims. Westerners frequently do not appreciate that Arabs come from a number of different countries. It is true that the majority of Arabs are Muslims, (about 92% of the Arabs are Muslims), but not all Muslims are Arabs. Some are Turkish, Pakistani, Indian, Malaysians, Indonesians, Asians and Europeans. Muslims are the majority in at least 55 countries; only 22 of these countries are Arab.

Because Arabs themselves may be of mixed-race, what defines an Arab is the language s/he speaks and the culture that influences his/her behaviour. This means that if a person speaks Arabic, and his culture is an Arab culture, then s/he can be considered an Arab, regardless of his race. Thus, although there are non-Arab minorities, who are not Arabs but live among Arabs, such as Berbers (in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), Kurds and Turkomans (in Iraq, Syria) and some others, but they cannot be distinguished if they speak Arabic and adopt what is culturally acceptable to Arabs. Sadiqi (2003) points out that

Berber [the language] is more used in rural than in urban areas. In towns and cities, Berber is mainly used in informal and intimate situations such as the family and among close friends. It is also allocated limited space in the audio-visual media, namely radio and television (2003:46).

What Sadiqi says about Berbers in Morocco is also the case in different parts of the Arab world where there are other ethnic groups.<sup>23</sup> For example, Berbers in Libya, Algeria, or Kurds in Iraq, use Arabic when they communicate with Arabs, but between themselves they use their mother tongues.<sup>24</sup> This is why it is difficult to distinguish them when they are among Arabs. Sometimes these minorities are classified as Arabs not because of their origin, but because they speak Arabic and because Arabic culture influences their linguistic behaviour.

### 1.5.2 Varieties of Arabic

Arabic is a Semitic language, closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic. In old Arabic or pre-Islamic Arabic, there were dialects such as Qahtan, Adnan, and Himyar (Al-Saied, 1995). During the Islamic era (635-1160)<sup>25</sup> and after, Arabic dialects started to be closer to each other because of the Quran which created what is called "Classical Arabic". Classical Arabic is the dialect of the Arabic language used to write the Quran.<sup>26</sup> It is very similar to

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<sup>23</sup> In Morocco, Berbers are the majority. They construct about 60% of the population of the country, but Arab culture and Arabic language are prevailed due to the religion of both groups which is Islam.

<sup>24</sup> Only recently have the constitutions of some countries in the Arab world allowed people of different ethnicities to use their mother tongues in education.

<sup>25</sup> The Islamic era began in the year 622 AD with the *Hijra* (or emigration) of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Within little more than a few decades of the Prophet's death in 632, Islam had already spread to territories stretching from the Atlantic to the China Sea and from North Africa to the frontiers of Siberia and, within a few centuries, sizeable Muslim communities had been established across an even wider area.

<sup>26</sup> Halimah (2001) states that 'classic Arabic represents a style used in the pre-Islamic literature, the Holy Quran, and the Prophet Muhammed's Saying: Standard Arabic represents a style used in education, business and commerce' (114)

what is now called "Modern Standard Arabic",<sup>27</sup> which is the parent language of all varieties of Arabic. Different Arabic dialects are called "colloquial dialects" which is a collective term for the spoken languages or dialects of people throughout the Arab world. Classical Arabic spread from the Arabian Peninsula through the Islamic expansion. Maxos (2004) holds that there are two major reasons leading to differences between Arabs and the issue of dialects is one of them. He cites Chomsky as stating:

In the old Ottoman Empire, regions such as the Levant incorporated numerous local communities, related to each other in various ways, and with a good deal of linguistic variation as well. Nobody spoke the classical Arabic taught in schools, but the so-called dialects were considered inferior. The intervention of the Western imperial powers led to a system of states, leaving bitter and unresolved conflicts and antagonisms, a system in which each individual must define himself as belonging to a nation or a nation-state. It is a system imposed from the outside on a region ill-adapted to it (Chomsky, cited in Maxos, 2004:1).

This means that Westerners influenced Standard Arabic language and Arabs' ways of communication by dividing them into small states. As Sawaie (1987) states, although the goal of invading the Arabs' world was to wipe out the Arabs' loyalty to their identity as Arabs and instead make them belong to certain pieces of land by creating small states, this contributed more to the creation of varieties of Arabic.<sup>28</sup> But such differences are usually more noticed in accents and dialects, and less in what is thought to be appropriate or inappropriate language (Neydell (2002). What is appropriate and inappropriate is usually influenced by religion and conventions of Arabs, and rarely by their dialects and accents.

### 1.5.3 Arabic dialects

Dialects in the Arab world vary according to vocabulary, accents and sometimes the meaning of what is said;<sup>29</sup> they influence understanding between interactants belonging to different regions. This means that the influence of dialects can be felt in almost every part of the Arab world, and more in the regions where their citizens belong to different ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> Also known as Modern Arabic; Halimah (2001) states that 'Modern Standard Arabic represents a style normally used in newspapers; Educated Arabic is a style used when Arabs meet and verbally communicate with each other in other Arab country' (114)

<sup>28</sup> Lawson and Sachdev. (2000) 'Though Arabic is the official language of Tunisia, French, a strong legacy of Tunisia's recent colonial past, is another superimposed variety that continues to be widely used. Over the last decade, English has also been appearing increasingly on the Tunisian linguistic landscape' (2000:1346). Also Maxos (2004) shows that countries such as Egypt and Lebanon have given more attention to their dialectal Arabic than to the standard Arabic, and that there were calls to use Egyptian Arabic in stead of standard Arabic.

<sup>29</sup> Arabic accents are usually not barriers between interactants from different regions, because accents are related to how a word or an utterance is pronounced.

groups. They can create differences, for example, between urban and rural societies, or between Yemeni Arabs and Libyan Arabs, but these differences are not considered as major differences that might lead to pragmatic misunderstandings. According to Neydell (2002) such differences are usually understood as minor and rarely produce misunderstanding or conflict between Arab interactants. She points out that

in most Arab countries the elite differ considerably from rural or tradition-oriented social groups; indeed, some types of behaviour required by the norms of one group are considered obsolete by another. At the same time, many basic traditions and customs still determine the way of life of all Arabs and affect their goals, values, and code of accepted behaviour (2002:xxi).

She maintains that because similarities among social groups are greater than the differences, then generalizations are possible, and differences can be overcome.

Social dialects in Arabic derive from occupations, places of residence, levels of education, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, social class (tribe), religious group, gender and age.<sup>30</sup> In relation to the religious group, for example, Al-Saied (1995) describes how

in a city such as Baghdad, Muslims and Christians and Jews speak different Arabic social dialects, so Christians and Jews use their own social dialects, but the language that Muslims speak is the shared one between the three groups when they meet' (1995:145).

In the different locations of the Arab world, there are different dialects. They include the Maghreb<sup>31</sup>, Egyptian Arabic<sup>32</sup>, Al-Hassaniya<sup>33</sup>, Tunisian Arabic<sup>34</sup>, Sudanese Arabic<sup>35</sup>,

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<sup>30</sup> Davies (1987:82-83) argues that 'formulas may seem restricted to the kind of speaker who uses them, the kind of addressee to whom they may be used, the medium through which they may be expressed and various aspects of the setting in which they are used. (see chapter 5)

<sup>31</sup> The Arabic dialect of the Maghreb shares many common characteristics. These characteristics set them apart from the dialects of the Middle East and most of Egypt. Maghreb Arabic is a dialect of Arabic in the Maghreb, plus French and Berber additions, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. It is only used as a spoken language; the news and the other media are in modern standard Arabic.

<sup>32</sup> Egyptian dialect is an Arabic spoken in Egypt. It is the variety of Arabic with the largest amount of speakers.

<sup>33</sup> An Arabic dialect derived from the Arabic spoken by the Ben Hassan tribe, which extended their authority over most of the Mauritanian Sahara between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

<sup>34</sup> Basically a Maghrebi dialect spoken all over Tunisia, as well as the eastern part of Algeria and the Western part of Libya. It is a dialect spoken by all Tunisians.

<sup>35</sup> Sudanese dialect is derived from the language of the Quran, but the mixing of Egyptian dialect and Arabic from the Arabian peninsula with the local languages led to the creation of a variety of Arabic not necessarily specific to Sudan.

Syrian or Levantine Arabic<sup>36</sup> and the Gulf dialects.<sup>37</sup> Maxos (2004) sets out how 'localism flourished after the World War I when the British and French divided the Arab world into small separate states and each state proceeded to establish its own government, media and educational system' (2004:1). Because of this division and the sense of anger at deeper separatism, a decision was taken to adopt a written Arabic in all the districts, but the spoken language can cause difficulties.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, there are different reasons for such variations in Arabic, which sometimes might cause misunderstanding, the main reason being the impact that other languages have had on Arabic, either due to an Arab nation invading others or being invaded by a Western nation. Islam, for example, spread the Arabic language to all of the places it invaded, but the people who spoke Arabic in those areas spoke a different Arabic from classical Arabic because of the languages spoken in those areas before invasion. When Westerners invaded the Arab world, they imposed their languages as a means of communication. This also created different accents and dialects among Arab people who sometimes have difficulty in understanding each other, but as we have explained, most of these differences remain on the linguistic level, and not the cultural. All the accents and dialects are Arabic, and are influenced by Arab culture which is based on a set of religious beliefs.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

In this section, I will define the terms used in the thesis as they are crucial to my overall argument and are often contentious. My definitions of these terms are a brief introduction to how these terms are used in the thesis and in the chapters where they will be addressed in more detail.

### Politeness

As discussed in chapter 2, politeness, besides its usual association with notions such as courtesy, rapport, deference and distance, involves other issues influencing interaction.<sup>39</sup>

In sociolinguistics and pragmatics, 'politeness phenomena' is a term which characterizes

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<sup>36</sup> Levantine Arabic is a group of Arabic dialects spoken in the 100 km-wide eastern-Mediterranean coastal strip, i.e. in Syria, Palestine/Israel, western Jordan and Lebanon and parts of Iraq. This corresponds to the western wing of the Fertile Crescent.

<sup>37</sup> Gulf dialect is spoken in what are now called the Gulf States and parts of Iraq, or what we may call the Arabian Peninsula.

<sup>38</sup> Comprehension between Arabs from different regions differs when they interact using their own dialects. Although this usually does not create misunderstanding, sometimes interactants do not understand each other.

<sup>39</sup> For more details see chapters 2 and 5.

linguistic features mediating a variety of norms of social behaviour. Such writers as Grice (1975), Spencer-Oatey (2000a), Lakoff (1989:102) and Leech (1983:82) expound on politeness issues across a range of aspects: harmony in social relationships, for example as a means of managing potential or actual confrontation, as a means of maintaining social equilibrium, or as a way of establishing a co-operative relationship.<sup>40</sup> Others, notably Brown and Levinson (1987), Werkhofer (1992), Watts (1992) and Mills (2003a), address such issues as the possibility for appropriate politeness to make communication possible between potentially aggressive parties.

I will therefore, throughout the thesis, treat "politeness" as any implicit or explicit linguistic behaviour intended to be polite by the speaker and which is understood as polite behaviour by the hearer according to the context of interaction. Through understanding the different implicatures to which an utterance may give rise, and whether these cause Face Threatening Acts or even discomfort to the listener in a particular interaction context, we may decide whether what is said is intended to be and understood as polite or not. This means that utterances are not analysed in relation to their linguistic meaning, but rather in relation to the cultures of the interactants and the context of the interaction. (See chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6)

### **Impoliteness**

I will discuss in detail the differing definition of impoliteness offered by different writers. Those of Mills (2003a.), Culpeper (1996) (who makes it clear that the subject is not a marginal issue), Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987) include such examples as attacks on interlocutors, especially attacks on face. (See chapter 2, 4 and 5) They show that issues such as lack of co-operation; a threat on face whether real, imaginary, or potential; surprise contradictory opinions; warnings; intimidation; social conflict; disruption or disharmony, might all be considered impolite, but these judgements are influenced by culture and context.

In this research, I shall be using the term 'impoliteness' to refer to any linguistic behaviour that might lead the listener to classify his/her interactant as impolite regardless of the linguistic strategies used. It is an assessment of a linguistic behaviour through analysing

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<sup>40</sup> For more details see chapters 2 and 3

the whole conversation and what might influence interaction, and not just by analysing an individual utterance.<sup>41</sup> It is a contextual judgment and up to the interactant to decide whether his/her interactant is impolite.<sup>42</sup>

### **Appropriateness / inappropriateness**

Appropriateness / inappropriateness is discussed by Grice (1975) in his work on the Cooperative Principle.<sup>43</sup> I shall use two interpretations of this term. The first is on the level of an individual utterance, as used by Mills (2003a), who sees appropriateness as 'differently understood in relation to individual speakers and within the community'. The second level is that of the context and the whole conversation as expounded by Eelen (2001) and Fraser and Nolen (1981) in their definitions of politeness as doing what is socially appropriate measured against behavioural standards relative to the speech community and context (as discussed by Attardo 2000), which cannot be determined by specific linguistic forms. This means that a speaker can be appropriate linguistically, but not necessarily be considered as polite because of the influence of the context.<sup>44</sup> (See chapter 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6)

### **Face**

The term 'face', to different scholars, has different meanings. Goffman's (1967, 1971) notion of face is the image that a person adopts for themselves, and acquires from society. Goffman (1967:7) deems face as a person's 'most personal possession and the centre of his security and pleasure', which, however, 'is only on loan to him from the society' and 'will be withdrawn unless s/he conducts her/himself in a way that is worthy of it'. Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for her/himself. They believe the notion of face should be seen at a more social level, existing in all languages and cultures. As discussed in chapters 1, 2 and 3, I will consider the notion of face differently to Brown and Levinson (1987) in terms of whether face is an individual issue or a cultural issue, and whether it relates to the speaker or to both interactants. Thus, face is defined and interpreted differently across cultures. Consequently the linguistic choices or strategies used to threaten face or mitigate any face threatening act

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<sup>41</sup> See Mills, (2003a) and Culpeper (2005).

<sup>42</sup> See chapter 2 for a discussion of impoliteness.

<sup>43</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>44</sup> See Watts, 2005 who argues that even when an interactant intends to insult his/ her interactant s/he still can be appropriate.

are differently interpreted, and most likely judged contextually. Hence, in this research, I use the term 'FTA' to refer to any linguistic behaviour that might lead the listener to consider what is said to him/her as threatening his/her face. I will not link that to certain speech acts or strategies from the speaker to his/her addressee. I will treat FTA judgement as contextual and hold that it is, therefore, only the interactants who can determine whether what is said is an FTA or not. (See chapter 2 and 6)

### **Indirectness / Directness**

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that indirectness or off-record utterances are more likely to be considered as polite than direct or on-record utterances. Disagreeing with Brown and Levinson (1987), Tsuda (1993) states that 'indirectness is realized in various ways' (1993:11); Fetzer (2006) indicates that 'the speaker's communicative intention is not realized explicitly' (2006:181); and Blum-Kulka (1987) believes indirectness and politeness are not necessarily linked. Wierzbicka (1985) sees 'terms such as 'directness' and 'indirectness' as much too general, too vague to be really safe in cross-cultural studies' (1985:175). Cultures vary in their understanding and the effects of indirectness/directness, and why and when it is used. In Arabic, indirectness, in some contexts, is linked to impoliteness, and directness refers to closeness, even with strangers in some contexts.

However, as discussed in chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5, I will consider indirectness / directness and politeness in relation to the context and the intended meaning. Therefore, I do not simply consider any indirect utterance to be polite. Rather, I examine what makes the speaker prefer indirectness, and whether his/her interactants consider that the indirectness strategy used indicates politeness or not.

### **Understanding / Misunderstanding**

In discussing understanding and misunderstanding in chapter 4 and 5, I shall be using the term 'misunderstanding' to refer to situations in which one of the interactants fails to understand the pragmatic meaning of an utterance or the reason behind its use, and may understand an utterance differently to how it is intended. Thus, a generated explicature of an utterance may give rise to more than one implicature to the interactants. This means that an implicature of an utterance may be inferred, but if it is not the intended implicature of the speaker, I consider it a misunderstanding.

## **Culture**

As addressed in chapters 3 and 5, I treat culture in this research as a factor in the context of interaction that influences the formulation or interpretation of an utterance to do with power, gender, class, religion, beliefs, tribe, age, or background, collective attitudes or conventions, or any values that are shared by a group of people or which an individual has experienced because of history, geography, religion, or situational background. Spencer-Oatey (2000b) states that

culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, which influence each other's behaviour and each member's interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour (2000b:4).

I will explore the range of definitions (See chapters 2, 3 and 5) of culture and its influences, by such writers as Watts (2003), Foley (1997), Goodenough (1964), Sadiqi (2003), Mills (2003a) and Scollon and Scollon (1995), to examine how culture influences linguistic production and interpretation, and whether it is possible to analyse such by a strategic model such as Brown and Levinson (1987)'a model.

## **Context**

I treat context as a crucial factor in generating and interpreting any verbal interaction that may be defined in relation to both the speaker and the addressee. I shall refer to writers such as Dilley (2002) and Goodwin and Duranti (1992), who view context as having a broad currency traversing the boundaries of various disciplines and as the most important factor in providing interactants with intended meaning. I will consider Schiffrin (1994) and Toolan (1996) who see context as indispensable in making sense of language; and also Christie (2000) who holds it as dynamic and inferred rather than static or predetermined. At the same time, I will argue that while context influences production and interpretation of language, it will not always be interpreted with the same significance for the interactants. (See chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6)

## **Stereotypes**

I will refer to stereotypes as meaning the assumptions that we have about others, or may share with them, that influence our performance or interpretation of the language, and which Aikhenvals (2003) and Gudykunst (1998) see as our mind pictures of the people

with whom we interact. They are identifiable characteristics which are not always accurate, shared to a high degree in a particular culture. I will argue that the way speech is influenced by these aspects is not constant, especially in cultures as Arabic and English, and consequently their effect on each individual is different. Agreement on stereotypes' roles in interaction is difficult (Mills 2003a, chapter 5).

## **1.7 Outline of the thesis**

### **Chapter 2: Politeness Theories**

This chapter reviews research on politeness first by critically investigating the core theories of politeness in relation to cross cultural interaction according to the notion of politeness in Brown and Levinson's theory. I review the criticisms of the main components of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and concentrate on the notion of face, rationality, the model person, and universality in linguistic politeness strategies. I discuss how other scholars, post-Brown and Levinson, view politeness, and the models that they suggest for analysis. I aim to critically review Brown and Levinson's work and the work of those theorists who have tried to move beyond their model in order to modify the current theory of analysing politeness (See chapter 2).

### **Chapter 3: Pragmatics and the Analysis of Linguistic Politeness**

This chapter builds on the work of Chapter Two, introducing pragmatics as a model of analysis of linguistic politeness and focusing on why it should be analysed from a more contextually, pragmatically based perspective. Firstly, I explore the relationship between the fields of linguistics and pragmatics, and how politeness can be analysed by drawing on pragmatics. Secondly, I examine linguistic politeness in relation to pragmatics and question why theories of politeness, regardless of their claims, fail to provide an adequate analysis of politeness, especially in cross-cultural interaction. The main claim of this chapter is not that politeness theories are not pragmatic theories; rather that there are issues in interaction that are not sufficiently considered in these theories, and that a more contextual, analytical approach is required to consider such issues.

### **Chapter 4: Understanding, Misunderstanding Politeness**

Here I review the relevant literature that deals with understanding and misunderstanding in interaction, including theories that investigate pragmatic failure, such as Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1993, 1995), and Integrational Linguistics (Toolan, 1996). In this

chapter, I argue that using a theory of cognition enables us to understand the relationship between misunderstanding and politeness and examine the process of understanding in cross-cultural interaction, especially between strangers. In particular, I will investigate language misunderstanding between Arab speakers of English communicating with native speakers, and what influences their production and interpretation. My aim is to establish what is needed to assist understanding in politeness analysis, showing that politeness is not just what the linguistic choices or strategies used may mean to the speaker, but rather what the listener understands in a particular context of interaction.

### **Chapter 5: Analysing Cross-cultural Interaction**

I investigate the relationship between language and culture, and the role of culture in the interpretation and performance of linguistic utterances. I also discuss the variables that determine linguistic strategies in cross-cultural interaction, issues of gender and religion in relation to cross-cultural interaction, and whether a native culture's construction of gender and religious difference affects communication. I investigate stereotypes and how they may influence interactants' performance and interpretation of linguistic utterances in cross-cultural settings. This chapter argues that utterances are influenced by the interactants' cultures. Consequently, in cross-cultural interactions, an utterance may be interpreted differently by the listener to what the speaker intended. I aim to highlight the need for a broader approach to analysing politeness in cross-cultural analysis that considers cultural factors in relation to all interactants.

### **Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Discussion**

Here I investigate the questions and hypotheses of the thesis by examining data collected from interaction between native and non-native English speakers. The focus is on examining misunderstandings between the interactants in relation to politeness. I first describe the pragmatic approach that I use in analysing my data, and explain how it analyses politeness more adequately than the core theories of politeness. Thus, by analysing three different types of data and then exploring the issues that should be considered in analysing politeness, my approach shows a clear link between analysing understanding between interactants in general and understanding politeness in particular. In this chapter, drawing on Relevance Theory and the work of those theorists who have tried to move beyond Brown and Levinson's model, my approach emphasises the role of the listener, cultures of both interactants, and what constructs the context of the

interactions to be analysed. Thus, the aim of this chapter is, though analysing the data, to show that misunderstandings between interlocutors from different cultures arise from the failure of interactants to understand the politeness norms of other cultures; and the failure to recognise differences in the way that politeness is realised linguistically in different contexts of interaction in cross-cultural interaction. Thus, this chapter aims to show that a contextual, analytical approach to politeness that focuses on the pragmatics of interpretation is needed to explain where pragmatic failure occurs, and to isolate the cultural and contextual differences that lead to misunderstandings.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis. It reviews the research as a whole and highlights the main arguments of the whole thesis. It also sets out the implications of the thesis and makes recommendations for further research.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

This research investigates how the context of interaction may generate different interpretations because of cultural and contextual differences in cross-cultural interaction. Factors such as social systems (whether class or tribe), gender, age, stereotype and religion, affect cross-cultural interaction, and can cause interactants to have more than one interpretation for the same utterance. Gudykunst argues that

Our cultures have tremendous influence on the way we communicate, whether we are aware of it or not. We generally are not aware of how our cultures affect our behaviours. In communicating effectively with strangers, we must understand how our cultures influence our communication (1998:40).

Thus, the aims of this research are a) to examine linguistic politeness theories in relation to native/non-native interaction between Arabic speakers of English and native speakers of English; b) to evaluate these theories according to whether they may be used to adequately analyse cross-cultural interaction; c) to investigate the factors that influence linguistic utterances and their role in creating misunderstanding between interactants in cross-cultural interaction; and d) to develop a more appropriate, analytical approach for the analysis of politeness and impoliteness in cross-cultural interaction.

## Chapter 2: Theorising Politeness

This chapter will critically review research on politeness, focusing particularly on Brown and Levinson's theory. There are three main sections. *Section One* is concerned with the core theories that discuss politeness and which influenced Brown and Levinson's (1978/87) work. The aim of this section is to critically investigate their claims in relation to politeness in cross-cultural interaction. This will include examination of Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973), and Leech (1983), whose analyses and critiques provided many of the theoretical assumptions upon which Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is based.

Section Two provides details of Brown and Levinson's theory of a universal principle for linguistic politeness strategies. It is the most comprehensive theory developed to date, but needs scrutiny as it fails to adequately explain types of communication that include cross-cultural variations. Besides discussing the main claims of the theory, such as the notion of face, universality of linguistic politeness, and variables for politeness strategies, I will investigate these claims in relation to cross-cultural communication in order to see whether they are universal, and whether their implications are the same in a cross-cultural context.

Section Three will discuss how other scholars, post-Brown and Levinson, view politeness. These will include Blum-Kulka (1992) and Fraser and Nolan (1981) and also Arab views of politeness such as those of Al-Fayyad (1984), Albassier (2004) and Al-Saied (1995). I will also discuss Eelen (2001), who has mounted the most sustained attack on Brown and Levinson's work and related politeness theories.<sup>45</sup> I will examine Spencer-Oatey's (2000) work, in which she advocates less concentration on loss of face and more on the listener, social norms and cultural meaning, and Mills's argument (2003a) that politeness and impoliteness are in essence judgements about another's interventions, and not simple speech classifications. Finally, the section will focus on Watts (2003), who holds similar views to Spencer-Oatey arguing that theories such as Brown and Levinson's put limitations on the analysis of politeness, and that the most effective analysis must be of commonsense notions of politeness. Thus, this chapter aims to review Brown and Levinson critically and to review the work of theorists who have tried to move beyond their model to use them in

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<sup>45</sup> Eelen does not offer a model of analysis of politeness as such. Thus the aim of my research is to formulate a way of incorporating Eelen's criticism of Brown and Levinson whilst constructing a working model of analysis. (see chapter 6)

order to provide an analytical approach of politeness which considers cross-cultural interaction more adequately than Brown and Levinson's model do.

## **2.1 The Theoretical Background to Brown and Levinson**

### **2.1.1 Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle**

Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims are considered by most researchers of politeness to be central to their theories. Brown and Levinson (1987), their first edition, consider Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims to be the basis of their work, as they are mainly concerned with the effective exchange of information, drawing on a set of assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation. Grice assumes that each participant in a conversation aims to be cooperative with his / her interactant and thus he /she will avoid threatening their face. Brown and Levinson apply Grice's Cooperative Principle to the investigation of linguistic politeness across different cultures.

Grice, in his article 'Logic and Conversation', (1975) draws a distinction between what is the antecedent<sup>46</sup> and what is the conventionally implicated implicature. An implicature is defined as the implied meaning that might be inferred by the addressee drawing on the expressed meaning.<sup>47</sup> Escandell-Vidal (1996) states that

there is a crucial difference between implicature and explicature. Implicatures are the assumptions that the speaker tries to make manifest to the hearer without expressing them; implicatures are recovered by inference. Explicatures are the assumptions that the speaker explicitly communicates, i.e., the assumptions that can be directly developed from the logical form of the utterance (1996:637).

Grice discusses issues such as how speakers may have a different intention from those stated by the literal meanings of the utterances they have used. He asks 'How is it that in almost every utterance we can distinguish between what is said and what is meant? And what are the factors that are important in determining what someone means by what they say?' (1975) These questions make the Cooperative Principle relevant to the notion of politeness, because cognition of what is meant, plus what is literally said and how it might be interpreted, are an

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<sup>46</sup> Antecedent is a 'term taken over from traditional grammar by some grammarians, and used for a linguistic unit from which another unit in the sentence derives its interpretation, typically a later unit. In particular, personal and relative pronouns are said to refer back to their antecedents' (Crystal, 1997:20).

<sup>47</sup> Levinson (1983) believes 'the conversation principle is presented as not simply a set of arbitrary conventions but, much more strongly, as capturing rational means for conducting co-operative exchange' (1983:103). Harris (1995) also 'concludes that Grice at present provides a conceptual framework which can adequately and easily be applied to handle natural language data' (131).

important part of any interaction involving conversational and social norms which are inferred from the notion of linguistic cooperativeness. (See Watts 2003).

Grice (1975) maintains that speakers intend to be cooperative when they interact, and do not deliberately confuse or withhold relevant information from each other. He understands meaning to refer to two different kinds of meanings; natural and non-natural meaning. To Grice, the natural meaning or entailment is one that is always associated with an expression. It is supposed to capture something similar to the relation between cause and effect. Christie (2000) states that 'According to Gricean characterisation of meaning, natural meaning would include instances where a link between two phenomena is inferred on the basis of a causal relationship or where one is a symptom of the other' (2000:125). For example, I can never say 'Ali has passed the course' without entailing that he has achieved the required mark. Natural meaning is different from what Grice call non-natural meaning. The non-natural meaning is when there is no relationship between what is said and what is intended.<sup>48</sup> According to Christie

non-natural meaning is where two phenomena are linked but where there is not necessary connection: where the relationship is based on convention. And this is of course, the relationship which holds between things in the world and the linguistic signs we use to refer to them (2000:125).

For example, inferring what is meant by the utterance 'Ali has passed a course', depends on the context in which it is spoken. For instance, in a job application, it might mean 'He has satisfied one of the conditions'; in a social context, 'He has passed one course, but he has still another exam is left to take'. In general, non-natural meaning, to Grice, is analysed in terms of speaker's intentions, what s/he intends to communicate, and the implied meaning is conveyed indirectly or through hints, without them ever being directly stated (See Grundy 2000, section, 4).

Grice (1975) also distinguishes two types of implicatures of conveying implied meanings: conventional and conversation implicatures. Conventional implicature is always conveyed regardless of considering the context where it is said. For example, the word "therefore" generally has the same implicature. On the other hand, conversational implicatures depend on a particular context of the utterance to be understood. They arise from certain principles

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<sup>48</sup> An implied meaning is what might be inferred by the addressee drawing on the expressed meaning.

of conversational behaviours as they apply to conversation. Conversational implicatures are part of the conventional meaning, give rise to entailments and are independent of it. (See Kaplan, 1999) Grice holds that conversational implicatures can always be worked out or inferred from the Cooperative Principles. He argues that in order to interpret conversational implicatures, participants employ the 'Cooperative Principle'. Grice's (1975) 'Cooperative Principle' describes speakers as making relevant, expected contributions to conversation.<sup>49</sup> This Cooperative Principle is detailed by reference to a set of four maxims, and each of these maxims consists of different sub-maxims which can apply to speakers in any conversation:

Quality : Contributions ought to be true.

Quantity : Speakers should be as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

Relevance : Contributions to a conversation should clearly relate to the purpose of the exchange.

Manner : Speakers should be perspicuous – in particular, orderly and brief, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity (Grice, 1975:45).

Grice argues that sometimes the listener understands that the speaker means something more than what it is said literally. He argues that implicature cannot be part of what is being said, and forces more understanding from the hearer. The reason Grice raises the issue of implicature is to understand whether the addressee understands what the speaker is suggesting by using particular utterances. He associates what he calls non-conventional, or conversational implicatures with certain general features of discourse. Firstly, our exchanges would not be rational if they consisted of a succession of disconnected remarks. Secondly, our talk is, to some extent, cooperative effort. Finally, each participant recognises a common purpose or mutually accepted direction.<sup>50</sup> However, although the issue of what is said and what is intended is very important to this research, and is one of the reasons for discussing Grice here in this section, his approach has been criticized in relation to understanding and politeness by different scholars.

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<sup>49</sup> Grice suggests: 'as a rough general principle (ceteris paribus) 'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (1975: 45).

<sup>50</sup> Grice argues that 'the word "means" derives from what speakers mean by uttering it' He further holds that 'what a particular speaker or writer means by a sign on a particular occasion may well diverge from the standard meaning of the sign.' (Grice 1975: 45).

### 2.1.1.1 Criticising Grice's Cooperative Principles

As discussed above, some theoreticians considered Grice's CP as the starting point for their models of analysis. In spite of this, Grice's theory has been variously attacked, defended, and revised by scholars such as Thomas (1995), Sifianou (1992), Grundy (2000), Sperber and Wilson (1995), Lakoff (1973) and Brown and Levinson (1987), in their later edition. Lakoff (1973) views all of Grice's maxims as falling within her rule 'be clear'. Sperber and Wilson, in their cognitive view of communication, hold that Grice's maxims can be reduced to one maxim of relevance. They maintain that 'communication does not necessarily involve a distinct and homogeneous set of empirical phenomena...the main defect of Grice's analysis is not that it defines communication too vaguely, but it explains communication too poorly' (1993: 32).<sup>51</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1995) view Grice's principle as not being in accord with the cognitive view that human communication is built upon, which they consider as the aim of Relevance Theory.

Brown and Levinson (1987) see Grice's Cooperative Principle as different from the politeness principles that offer principled reasons for deviation, in that it assumes each participant will attempt to contribute appropriately to a discussion. Levinson points out that 'the cooperative principle is intended to embody rational considerations as a guideline for effective and efficient use of language in conversation to further cooperative ends' (1983:101). It seems that Levinson considers Grice's theory as the link between the meanings of an utterance and the purpose it serves in a particular context.

Despite Grice's maxims, we cannot consider non-native speakers of English, for example when using an incorrect grammatical rule, to be breaking the maxim of manner, if they make themselves clear. From this point of view, Grice's Cooperative principle does not clearly recognize differences across cultures, or linguistic strategies that each culture adopts in order to secure harmony in communication. To some extent, this is supported by Sifianou's (1999) argument concerning the universality of Grice's Maxims. She observes that

Grice repeatedly states that observance of the co-operative principle and its subsequent maxims constitutes 'reasonable' and 'rational' behaviour. He does

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<sup>51</sup> Verschueren (1999) holds that 'Grice's theory....is predicated on a model of communication which attaches the highest normative value to demands for rationality and efficiency. However, social behaviour also incorporates norms which would seem to require breaches of maxims' (1999:35).

not, however, explain how he interprets these notions. Furthermore, when he says "it is just a well-recognized empirical fact that people DO behave in these ways" (p. 48), he does not make explicit whether he is referring to conversational behaviour only in his own society' (Sifianou 1999:17).

Moreover, Eades (1982) sees informativeness as culturally dependent. This militates against Grice's claim of universality for these maxims. Grice's Cooperative Principle concentrates more on the speakers than the hearers, who, in Grice's maxims, are cooperative whether there is conversational implicature or not. He assumes that inferring the meaning depends on how speakers follow his maxims, and whether hearers are able to interpret them when flouted. Such a claim should be accompanied by a strong consideration of culture and context, which is particularly important when interactants are from different cultures. Grice does not explain what happens if the hearer fails to understand the intended meaning. However, whether we agree with Grice or not, it is clear that he refers to the underlying meanings or the implicatures an utterance might give rise to. This brief discussion of Grice's view provides us with the base of the core theories of politeness and how they developed.

### **2.1.2 Lakoff's Rules of Politeness<sup>52</sup>**

Lakoff (1973) introduces what she calls the 'politeness rule'. Her view is that our use of language embodies attitudes as well as meanings. She holds politeness as a form of behaviour that has been 'developed in societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction' (1973:64).<sup>53</sup> Many consider Lakoff's rules of politeness as a development of Grice's view. Lakoff argues that Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims do not pay full attention to what she calls pragmatic factors. She points to situations in which the speaker tries intentionally to be unclear in order to achieve certain goals, and states that '... violation of the rules of conversation secures the rules of politeness' (1973:303); the aim of the message may diverge from the aim of clarity because of pragmatic goals such as achieving a relationship or finding common ground. Lakoff (1977) reiterates this view, showing that asking for things from others requires different levels of politeness, depending upon the situation and the relationship between the interactants. She introduces the notion of pragmatic rules and argues that we need pragmatic rules in order to determine

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<sup>52</sup> Eelen (2001:2) states 'Lakoff could well be called the mother of modern politeness theory, for she was the first to examine it from a decidedly pragmatic perspective' (2001:2).

<sup>53</sup> This is similar to Brown and Levinson (1987), who see politeness as conflict avoidance. Morand and Ocker (2002) also define politeness as "phrasing things in such a way as to take into consideration the feeling of others' (2).

whether an utterance is pragmatically well-formed or not. Lakoff proposes what she calls "rules of politeness" such as 'do not impose', 'give options', 'make the other person feel good', which she later describes as 'formality' or clarity, (keep aloof), 'deference' (give options) and 'camaraderie' (show sympathy). Lakoff believes her rules allow the speaker to emphasise politeness or clarity, when it is not possible to achieve both, and that sometimes the speaker's first aim is to achieve the former, when clarity is less important. She states

If the speaker's principal aim is to navigate somehow or other among the respective statuses of the participants in the discourse indicating where each stands in the speaker's estimate, his aim will be less the achievement of clarity than an expression of politeness, as its opposite (1973:296).<sup>54</sup>

She argues that her rules of politeness are applicable to different situations, and that 'being polite is thus defined - but only implicitly so - as operating according to those rules which are in effect each time, and doing so in "speech and action alike"' (1993:304).<sup>55</sup>

As with Grice, we still cannot judge if Lakoff's rules ascertain whether or not politeness is understood by the hearer. In spite of her claims of universality of her rules of politeness, it is still not clear how different societies interpret or perceive these rules. Bargiela et. al. (2001) hold that 'we may intend to show solidarity and friendship with our interlocutors but may be understood as showing insufficient deference or being overly familiar' (2001:17). Rules exist in all cultures but are restricted to social conditions and contexts, and given different priority accordingly. Lakoff does not explain how situations of misunderstanding might occur between people of different cultures when they have different concepts of propriety, and different evaluations of the context of interaction. She only explains the relationship between language and politeness and the level of language needed, without adequately considering the context of the interaction.

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<sup>54</sup> The issue of clarity and the social aspect in both Lakoff's and Grice's work is discussed by Eelen (2001), who explains that 'whereas the Cooperative Principle is geared to the 'information content' of communication, the politeness rule attends to social issues. If hearers notice that speakers do not seem to be following the Gricean maxims to the fullest, they search for a plausible explanation in the politeness rule: if speakers are not entirely clear, then maybe they are trying to avoid giving offence' (2001:3). (See Eelen 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Verschueren (1999), by contrast, holds that 'norms of politeness, in particular, often do not allow for fully informative utterances, unmitigated truth or complete clarity' (1999:36).

### 2.1.3 Leech's (1983) Politeness Principles

Leech's politeness principles are not applicable in analysing cross-cultural interaction. His view of politeness comes from his understanding of communication. He sees linguistic communication as communicating social behaviour.<sup>56</sup> He does not reject Chomsky's (1986) point of view that language is structured and that we have to master these structures in order to be able to communicate effectively, rather, he adds that communication must be studied in relation to a fully developed theory of language use. He builds his pragmatic view on the Speech Act Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) and enlarges it to include politeness, irony, and other social principles of linguistic behaviour. His work on politeness can be considered as an extension of Grice and Lakoff's views of conversation.

Lakoff and Leech adopt Grice's Cooperative Principle and add what they consider to be missing, that is politeness. Leech introduces politeness principles, which are, to some extent, different from Lakoff's politeness rules. Leech argues that interactants endeavour to reduce friction or minimize the risk of being impolite in interaction. He introduces six politeness maxims, which, while showing that interactants observe Grice's Cooperative Principle, also see speakers sometimes flouting it and sacrificing quality or quantity. These maxims are:

- (1) *Tact* : The speaker minimizes costs and maximizes benefit to others.
- (2) *Generosity* : The speaker minimizes benefit and maximizes cost to him/herself.
- (3) *Approbation*: The speaker minimizes dispraise and maximizes praise of others.
- (4) *Modesty* : The speaker minimizes praise and maximizes dispraise of him/herself.
- (5) *Agreement* : The speaker minimizes disagreement and maximizes agreement with others.
- (6) *Sympathy* : The speaker minimizes hostility, and maximizes sympathy with others.<sup>57</sup>

Judgements as to whether these maxims are at work are not precise. For example, Leech does not explain how we guarantee that our utterances maximize the benefits and minimize the cost to others, and vice versa. The tact maxim may be differently perceived, with the addressee thinking the opposite of what is intended by the speaker, and perceiving the way

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<sup>56</sup> 'The role of the politeness principle is to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place' (Leech 1983:82).

<sup>57</sup> Fraser (1990:227) criticises these maxims and argues that 'Leech has not provided specific examples of how each maxim would work in real life and how the maxims would be linked to the pragmatic scale in practise'.

they are addressed as inappropriate. For example, saying to an Arab person “do you want tea?”, might be considered inappropriate. This is because, traditionally, bringing tea without asking is better. In Arabic, “do you want tea?” may give rise to the implicature that the speaker does not really want to offer tea. In Arabic, the appropriate strategy might be to say “coffee or tea?” “شاي ام قهوة”, "qahwa am šahe". The choice is whether the interactant wants tea or coffee, leaving out the option of declining the offer.

Leech's (1983) Politeness Principles investigate human interaction as either polite or impolite communicative acts. He stresses social equilibrium and friendly relations and tries to establish links between the utterance and its social goals. A question this research might raise about Leech's principles of politeness is whether politeness is always aimed at conflict avoidance and geared to establishing comity. Also, we might question these claims in relation to cross-cultural interaction, where methods of avoiding conflict are sometimes differently perceived between interactants.

## **2.2 Brown and Levinson's Theory of Linguistic Politeness**

Brown and Levinson's work on linguistic politeness (1978, 1987) can be considered as the first, and most comprehensive, comparative study of linguistic politeness. In their model, Brown and Levinson note the importance of politeness phenomena in social relationships and describe some of the strategies used to convey politeness. Their main argument is that “politeness phenomena are universal” (1987:2). They claim that their model is built on the assumption that interlocutors are rational agents, (which seems very close to the assumptions that underline Gricean principles of communication), and the assumption that the hearer intends to cooperate, and rationally chooses a means that would achieve these ends. They conclude that implicatures of politeness would presumably arise in the same way as all other implicatures.

Brown and Levinson (1987:132) discuss whether actions that can be achieved by means of utterances are limited, and whether sentences carry in their structures indications of their paradigmatic use or illocutionary force. They refer to Searle's (1969) theory of Speech Acts and the issue of indirect speech acts, and see a straightforward relationship between indirectness and politeness. Their research is based on a detailed study of three different languages and cultures: Tamil speakers in southern India, Tzeltal speakers in Mexico, and

American and British speakers of English. Brown and Levinson notice many similarities in the linguistic strategies employed by speakers of these three unrelated languages.

### 2.2.1 Brown and Levinson's Claims and Aims

Brown and Levinson (1978) claim that (a) Politeness and face are universal (b) that we are rational, therefore, we will choose the means that will achieve our aims (c) there are certain kinds of acts that can be considered as Face Threatening Acts, and (d) any rational agent will employ strategies to avoid Face-Threatening Acts. The use of any such strategy will be dependent on social distance, relative power, and degree of imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 55-56).

Brown and Levinson's aims can be summed up as follows:

- a- To describe and account for what is, in the light of current theory, a most remarkable phenomenon, and to identify some principles of a universal yet 'social' sort, thereby providing a possible social candidate for deep functional pressure on the shape of grammars in general (Brown and Levinson,1987:56).
- b- To provide an antidote to the undervaluation in the sociological sciences of the complexity of human planning (Brown and Levinson, 1987:56).
- c- To explain the systematic use of social aspects of language and identify message construction as proper datum for the analysis of strategic language use (Brown and Levinson,1987:56)

Brown and Levinson's theory is that '...across cultures, the nature of the transaction being conducted in a verbal interchange is often evident as much in the manner in which it is done as in any overt performative acts' (1987:57). Their overall problem is: 'what sort of assumptions and what sort of reasoning are utilized by participants to produce such universal strategies of verbal interaction?' They want to account for the observed cross-cultural similarities in the abstract principles which underlie polite usage.<sup>58</sup> In order to find an answer to this problem and provide evidence for their assumptions, Brown and

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<sup>58</sup> Brown and Levinson hope further that 'a formal model that accounts for these cross-cultural similarities will also provide a reference model for culturally specific usage; that is, it promises to use an ethnographic tool of great precision for investigating the quality of social interactions in any society' (Brown and Levinson 1987:57).

Levinson attempt to answer the questions; 'what would our rational face-endowed being do?' and 'how would such a being use language'? (Brown and Levinson,1987:58).

### **2.2.2 Rationality**

Brown and Levinson draw on the notion of the Model Person (MP) - the fluent speaker of a natural language who is endowed with the properties of rationality, i.e. the ability to reason from ends to the means that will satisfy those ends and face (both positive and negative).<sup>59</sup> They state that

discovering the principle of language usage may be largely coincidental with discovering the principles out of which social relationships, in their interactional aspects, are constructed: dimensions by which individuals manage to relate to others in particular ways' (1987:55).

They consider rationality as the main factor for understanding the intended or implicit meanings of utterances.

### **2.2.3 Brown and Levinson and Goffman's (1967) notion of face**

Brown and Levinson refer to Goffman's (1967, 1971) notion of face<sup>60</sup> as the image that a person adopts for themselves, and acquires from society. They argue that face can be damaged, maintained, or enhanced through interaction with others. They note that certain illocutionary acts may threaten a person's face, which they call "FTAs (Face Threatening Acts)". They are acts in which the speaker risks impeding the hearer's freedom of action, for example requests, orders, suggestions, advice, reminding, threats and warnings. Other FTAs include putting pressure on the hearer to accept or reject an act, for example, by offers or promises, or by complimenting a person or performing an act interpreted as indicating that the speaker would like something from the addressee.

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<sup>59</sup> Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory holds that some speech acts threaten interactants' face needs. They divide face concerns into a) a person's sense of self-esteem and his/her wish to be well thought of, which is classified as positive politeness. This includes the desire to be understood by others and be treated as a friend; and b) a person's desire to determine their own course of action and wish not to be imposed upon by others, which is classified as negative face. It is the desire for autonomy (negative face) (Brown and Levinson, 1987). (The notion of face is fully discussed in the next sections.

<sup>60</sup> The term face in the sense of 'reputation' or 'good name' seems to have been first used in English in 1876 as a translation of the Chinese term 'diu lian' in the phrase 'Argument by which China has lost face' Since then it has been used widely in phrases such as 'losing of face', and 'saving of face' (Thomas, 1995:168)

Goffman (1967) states that the image that people adopt reflects their understanding of themselves.<sup>61</sup> He argues, to maintain face, people take into account their position in society and normally refrain from actions or activities that would be awkward to face up to later (Goffman 1967:7). He deems face a person's 'most personal possession and the centre of his security and pleasure', which, however, 'is only on loan to him from the society' and 'will be withdrawn unless s/he conducts her/himself in a way that is worthy of it' (1972:322). This concept is separated by Brown and Levinson into 'positive face', essentially the wish that others will respect the individual's public self-image, and 'negative face', which is the desire for freedom of action to project this image. Goffman defines face as:

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes - albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for himself (1967:5).

Brown and Levinson approach this notion from two different angles. First, they define face as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for her/himself'.<sup>62</sup> They state:

in general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. That is, normally everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others' face (1987:61).

Secondly, they believe the notion of face exists in all languages and cultures. They argue that

the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions is (negative face), and the desire (in some respect) to be approved of is (positive face). This is the bare bones of the notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much cultural elaboration (Brown and Levinson 1987:13).

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<sup>61</sup> Ho (1975) argues that 'face is a translation of Mandarin mianzi and lian which carry a range of meanings based upon the concept of honour' (1975:867).

<sup>62</sup> Brown and Levinson presume that speakers use language to achieve their goals on strategies, that they want other people to respect their face, and that face is interpreted in negative and positive terms. People try to achieve their goals, and at the same time avoid threatening their interlocutors' face.

Their theory presumes all adults in any society are concerned about their self image, the 'face' that they display to others, and recognize that other people have similar or different face wants. They state that

while the content of face will differ in different cultures (what the exact limits are to personal territories, and what the publicly relevant content of personality consists in), we are assuming that the mutual knowledge of members' public self-image of face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal (Brown and Levinson 1987:61).

According to them, the hearers' face could be threatened if the speaker imposes on them their own beliefs about the world in a way with which the hearer might not agree.

They also discuss different kinds of Face Threatening Acts, distinguishing between those that primarily threaten the speaker's face and acts that threaten the addressee. The first types are those that offend the speaker's negative face, for example, expression of thanks, acceptance of hearer's thanks, excuses, acceptance of offers, or unwillingness to accept promises and offers. In such acts, speakers put some pressure on the addressee to do or stop doing certain acts. Other threats are those that directly damage the speaker's positive face. Examples are apologies, acceptance of compliments, self-humiliation, behaving stupidly, self-contradiction, confessions, admission of guilt or responsibility, emotional outbursts, and non-control of laughter or tears. Acts that threaten the positive face needs, by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings include: acts which show that the speaker has a negative evaluation of an aspect of the hearer's positive face, for example, expressing disapproval, criticism, accusation, insult, contradictions or disagreements, challenges, etc. Expressions of violent emotions, irreverence, bringing bad news about hearers and addressing hearers in an embarrassing way are some other acts that show the speaker does not care about the hearer's positive face.<sup>63</sup> However, the above discussion indicates that the notion of face can be differently interpreted. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that they have expanded upon Goffman's notion of face, but they sound as if they are insisting on individual understanding of what is appropriate rather than social values as Goffman claims. The next section discusses some other views of the

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<sup>63</sup> Carrell and Konneker (1981) investigate the judgement of politeness made by both speakers of American English and non-native speakers of English. They argue that there is a high correlation between native and non-native judgment of politeness. They also conclude that ESL learners tend to perceive more politeness distinctions than do native English speakers (1981:27).

notion of face, and argues that face is sometimes differently understood across cultures, and that Brown and Levinson's understanding of face is not universal.

### 2.2.3.1 Other views of face

Because face is interpreted differently across cultures, Brown and Levinson's view of face as a universal notion has been criticised. Nwoye (1992) proposes a view of face which is slightly different from Brown and Levinson's; instead of negative and positive face, he introduces what he calls individual face and group face. He posits that

Individual face refers to the individual's desire to attend to his/her personal needs and to place his/her public-self image above those of others. Group face on the other hand, refers to the individual's desire to behave in conformity with culturally expected norms of behaviour that are institutionalized and sanctioned by society (1992: 313).

Group face, however, might better be understood as the individual's acts which have the group's reputation in mind.

Scollon and Scollon (1995:34) argue that, from a cross-cultural perspective, it is necessary to ask 'Is it the society that gives a person face or do people decide it for themselves?'. Spencer-Oatey (2000a) suggests that we should use the term 'rapport management' instead of the notion of face. This is a broader notion because 'it examines the way that language is used to construct, maintain and/or threaten social relationship' (2000:12). She argues that rapport management suggests more understanding of the relationship between self and society (See Spencer-Oatey later in this chapter).

I consider Spencer-Oatey's term is certainly more appropriate for describing face in Arabic. Loss of face differs from context to context, from culture to culture. It is sometimes a collective rather than an individual issue in some cultures. The notion of face, in Arabic, is derived from the conventional expressions

وجهي	ماء	افقد
wajhi	maa'a	Afqed
of my face	water	I lose

I have done something socially unacceptable.

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وجهي	ماء	احفظ
wajhe	maa'a	Ahfad
of my face	water	I protect

I avoid doing something socially unacceptable.

Thus, when someone is impolite they are described as losing the water of their faces.<sup>64</sup> Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) describe face 'as the social glue that keeps people attuned to each other in interaction – it is what keeps them coordinating their actions closely' (2003:59). However, Mills (2003a) criticises this notion. She argues that

the notion of face is not adequate to encompass the negotiations between people in conversation: although it covers the details of managing harmonious relationships, it does not deal with the negotiation of interests, manipulateness, external pressure, and one's relation to the community of practice (2003a:77).

Mills broadens this issue to involve analysis of more factors than individual interaction. Face seems to involve not only consideration of your interactant's face, but also what is culturally appropriate. Thus, while face exists in every society, the term is interpreted differently and the strategies that a person may adopt to protect his/her self-image in a society remain culturally and contextually dependent.

### 2.2.3.2 Criticism of Brown and Levinson's notion of face

The notion of face as proposed by Brown and Levinson can be seen as not being as universal as they claim, and is challenged by scholars. Mao (1994) argues that face is differently understood by interactants from different cultures. Ide (1989) too, holds that speech acts such as honorifics and greetings are not the same across cultures and that the use of ritual expressions differs. Grundy points out that:

more egalitarian societies [...] will employ positive politeness strategies as a way of encoding and thus confirming a less territorial view of face. In such societies face is said to be "ascribed" on merit rather than "acquired" by birth. (2000:162)

The first criticism which might be made is that a Face Threatening Act is not just an exchange between individual interactants, as Brown and Levinson claim. Locher and Watts (2005) distinguish between their notion of face and Goffman's, arguing that

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<sup>64</sup> The water is associated with face because face colour changes in front of other people when they realise their behaviour is unacceptable.

for Goffman face does not reside inherently in an individual, as would appear to be the case of Brown and Levinson, but is rather constructed discursively with other members of the group in accordance with the line that each individual has chosen (2005:12).

Face is, therefore, a social issue and reflects the relationship between individuals and their social group or community of practice.<sup>65</sup> A second criticism is that Brown and Levinson do not discuss how face is perceived cross-culturally. This relationship between individuals and their social groups leads us to consider again what happens, in relation to understanding what is appropriate, in interactions between people from different cultures. In such interactions, we would expect to find social principles that may organize interaction differently from what has been suggested by Brown and Levinson.

Hiraga and Turner (1996) examine the presentation and response to FTAs in tutor-student interaction in British and Japanese academic contexts. They show that Japanese students show more concern for the positive face of the tutor than British students. According to them

Complexions vary within cultures as well as across cultures, and this translates to different individual reactions in the same situation, although each situation usually throws up a dominant type (1996:625).<sup>66</sup>

Thus, face, in certain contexts, is interpreted differently across cultures. O'Driscoll (1996), however, in his paper 'A defence and elaboration of universal dualism', attempts to elaborate the concept of positive and negative face, with a view to upholding the claim that these are universal phenomena.<sup>67</sup>

Watts (2003) argues that 'a more satisfactory model of linguistic politeness that is grounded in a theory of social interaction needs to return to Erving Goffman's notion of 'face' rather than continue with the dual notion of positive and negative politeness'

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<sup>65</sup> A community of practice consists of a loosely defined group of people who are mutually engaged on a particular task and who have 'a shared repertoire of negotiable resources accumulated over time' (Wenger, 1998:76)

<sup>66</sup> They argue that 'the interaction displays different complexion according to where they are predominantly 'shame faced' (losing positive face), 'bold-faced' (defending own or threatening other's face), or 'effaced' (where there is no face to attend to). (1996:625)

<sup>67</sup> The aim of the paper is to revise the notion of face in Brown and Levinson's model, in the context of its application to studies of cross-cultural communication. For a detailed discussion of the notion of face Bargiela (2002 and 2003).

(2003:25). He sees Goffman as viewing the notion of face as when someone is considered socially appropriate, whereas Brown and Levinson hold face to be concerned with maintaining good relationships with another person. Watts introduces the term 'relational work' as a return to Goffman's notion of face. According to Locher (2004)

relational work comprises the entire continuum of verbal behaviour from direct, impolite, rude or aggressive interaction through to polite interaction, encompassing both appropriate and inappropriate forms of social behaviour (2004:51).

Following Goffman, Watts believes that 'any interpersonal interaction involves the participants in the negotiation of face. The term "facework", therefore, should also span the entire breadth of interpersonal meaning' (2005:11). Watts also believes that face work concentrates only on appropriate and polite behaviour with a focus on face threat mitigation, whereas 'relational work' encompasses, in addition, rude, impolite, and inappropriate behaviour. However, we may conclude this section with Eelen's (2001) argument that what is positive politeness in one culture might not be in another, and what is an FTA in one culture might not be so in another. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's negative and positive politeness and the way in which rationality operates in different cultures are not universal.<sup>68</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Brown and Levinson's Strategies**

Brown and Levinson's interpretation of face as negative and positive leads them to introduce what they call politeness strategies. They explain these two aspects as follows;

- a- Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987:61).
- b- Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown and Levinson, 1987:61).

They claim that both face needs are universal in avoiding breakdown in communication. Ji (2000) argues that 'Brown and Levinson's dichotomy of positive and negative faces is

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<sup>68</sup> Fraser (1982) considers politeness as face saving; Watts (1992d) analyses politeness as a political issue; Al-Saied (1995) sees face as when a person does or says something unacceptable by others; Spencer-Oatey (2000) sees face as rights-threatening behaviour. The notion of face might be a result of religious beliefs, social agreements or norms, and there are therefore different interpretations across cultures.

justifiable because, although the two types of face may play an unbalanced role in a particular culture, there has been no evidence that they cannot be identified in that culture' (2000:1061). Brown and Levinson suggest that language strategies explain the speaker's intention, instead of using norms and conventions that already exist in a particular society (cf: Ide,1989), with the speaker deciding strategies after evaluating his/her relationship with the addressee. They suggest there are certain strategies performed by speakers which threaten the face needs of hearers, and that politeness strategies are developed to save the hearer's face and deal with these Face Threatening Acts.

Brown and Levinson suggest four types of politeness strategy, covering all human linguistic 'politeness' needs, and dealing with face threatening acts. These strategies are:

- a- Bald On Record: These provide no effort to minimize threats to the hearer's face.
- b- Positive Politeness: The speaker recognizes that the addressee has a desire to be respected, and confirms that their relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.
- c- Negative Politeness: The speaker recognizes needs for respect, and also assumes that he is imposing on them.
- d- Off-record or indirect: The speaker tries not to directly impose.

Through these strategies, Brown and Levinson link linguistic politeness with redress and argue that the degree of indirectness is reflected in the positives and negatives a speaker uses, (i.e. on-record and off-record).<sup>69</sup> They say that 'there are good arguments for insisting that off-record strategies are generally more polite than on-record...the appearance of utterances constructed as off-record hints in cases where they are actually on-record requests' (19987:20)

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<sup>69</sup> Nelson, G. et. al. (2002) 'The danger in accepting the universality of an indirect communication style in Arabic is that multiple opportunities for cross-cultural misunderstandings arise. For instance, non-Arabs, who have been taught that Arabs use indirect communication, may perceive Arabs as impolite, rude, or arrogant if they use direct strategies in refusing or in other face-threatening acts when, in fact, they are behaving appropriately according to the norms and rules with which they were socialized' (2002:53).

Thus, the indirectness or off-record acts are more likely to be considered as politeness strategies than direct or on-record in Brown and Levinson's terms.<sup>70</sup> They consider off-record as: direct in relation to the implicit meaning, and indirect in relation to the explicit structure of the utterance. They point out that

off-record strategies are a solution half-way between doing the FTA on-record and not doing it at all; therefore, in the absence of context-specific implicature to the contrary, we would expect them to be more polite than on-record performance of the FTA (ibid:20).

However, even if we agree that off-record is the more polite, it is not easy to agree that it is universal, as cross-culturally we may not find agreement on what is classified as off-record, and what meanings an off-record utterance would imply to interactants from different cultures.

### **2.2.5 Universality in Brown and Levinson's Model**

One of the criticism of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness is its claim of universality in the linguistic strategies used between interactants to minimize FTAs, or their connecting of particular linguistic forms with politeness across cultures. Scholars such as Held (1992), Kerbrat-Orecchioni, (1997) Janney and Arndt (1993), Christie (2000), Mills (2003a), Watts (2003), Eelen (2001) and Spencer-Oatey (2000a) suggest that Brown and Levinson's claim of universality of linguistic politeness is indicative of Anglo-centrally biased research.<sup>71</sup> Mills (2003a) considers their claim of universality of their linguistic politeness strategies to be one of the causes of difficulty - theoretically and methodologically. She argues that 'when we analyse deference in Asian cultures, we may be working with a Western model of deference which does not fit those cultures' (2003:105). She goes on to say that 'this tendency to characterise classes and cultures as homogeneous is not easily sustained when we examine the complexity of politeness in even one culture, or even within one class' (2003:107).

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<sup>70</sup> Critical discussion of this assumption is left to the next section, where different views of Brown and Levinson's work are presented in relation to the aims of this thesis.

<sup>71</sup> Wierzbicka (2003) states that 'Brown and Levinson see two principles as the most important ones in human interaction: 'avoidance of imposition' ('negative face') and 'approval of the other person', which they exemplify with the English compliment "what lovely roses!"' (2003:67).

Sifianou (1999) does not completely agree with Brown and Levinson's claim of universality of linguistic politeness, but she tries to justify their claim of universality on the grounds that

it seems reasonable to assume that the concept of politeness, which represents an abstract social value, is most probably universal in some form or other, even though the way in which this concept is visualised and thus defined and how it is realised verbally and non-verbally will most probably be culture-specific (1999:46).<sup>72</sup>

Sifianou's argument is that, although we have different interpretations to our behaviours because of cultural differences, there are common grounds that we draw on in our interaction even when we are from different cultures.<sup>73</sup>

Disagreeing with Brown and Levinson's view about universality in repairing FTAS, Liebersohn et al. (2004) point out that

while there are cultures that deny any possibilities of repairing a face-threatening act through a verbal act per se (such as classical Greek culture), there are cultures that support their members with cultural resources for repairing a face-threatening act through a verbal speech event' (2004:298).

Thus, there is disagreement about understanding face and face repair and Brown and Levinson's strategies of politeness as being universal. In cross-cultural interaction, a particular utterance which is supposed to repair face damage in English, would lead to more FTA in another culture, because the hearer did not feel there to be a need for a repairing utterance.

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<sup>72</sup> Sifianou seems to be convinced by Brown and Levinson's claim of universality in linguistic politeness strategies across cultures. She does not entirely agree, but states that 'the many similarities detected by Brown and Levinson in their study of politeness phenomena in three unrelated languages do point to a certain degree of universality, but they do not preclude major differences which were not detailed so extensively in their study' (1999:38).

<sup>73</sup> Sifianou (1999) also argues 'the fact that there is a possibility of translation and of comparative study is, I believe, indicative of the fact that there is some common ground on which studies of politeness may be based' (ibid.:4). But at the same time in an earlier work on the use of diminutives in expressing politeness. Sifianou (1992) argues that 'Brown and Levinson's arguments to the effect that such elements minimize imposition are rather unconvincing' (155). She also argues that 'requests, one of the most common speech activities, do not necessarily entail imposition on the addressee' (1992:172).

The other issue in criticising Brown and Levinson's claim of universality in linguistic politeness is that their model does not clearly classify some speaking situations; for example, 'irony' or what happens when people intend to insult each other indirectly. Because some speaking situations are not clearly specified in Brown and Levinson, we may support the claim that their model is speaker-specific rather than hearer and speaker specific. As argued by Werkhofer (1992) 'Politeness involves speakers and hearers and/or any third party who might be part of the interaction. It is a mixture between interactional relations and linguistic behaviour' (1992:159). This view is supported by Haverkate (1987), who says 'politeness is a social interaction, a form that mediates between individual and social' (1987:28). In addition, Grundy reasons that if Brown and Levinson's theory of universality of their model of politeness is right, 'we should be able to extrapolate the intra-societal politeness behaviour we noted in over- and under-class communication to whole societies' (2000:162). For example, in most Arab societies, a tribal social system rather than a class social system prevails. According to Ali (2004) the tribal system is the real power structure for most Iraqis, which makes it difficult for the West to understand them. I consider such an argument to apply to different parts of the Arab world, regardless of the class system which is preferred by some Arab groups. Such tribal system of the Arab societies may entail different interpretations of what is thought to be negative or positive politeness in English.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Brown and Levinson (1987)'s claim of universality for linguistic politeness cannot be accepted in cross-cultural interaction. The strategies they suggest as universal strategies for linguistic politeness do not engage sufficiently to analyse cross-cultural context of interaction, and the variables that they propose to their analysis are not interpreted similarly in a cross-cultural context.

### **2.2.6 Brown and Levinson's Variables for Politeness Strategies**

Brown and Levinson assert that speakers think of their relationships and social distance before formulating the appropriate linguistic politeness strategy. They note variables that

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<sup>74</sup> Tribal system is different from the class system, as the tribal system is related to how a person is important in his/her tribe, and a particular tribe has agreed upon to organize its people's life. In the Arab world, the creation of the state system (which is understood as a class system) in stead of a tribal system has always faced difficulties. Although the I and II World War had brought changes in the lives of Arab people which were run in a tribal way, people, until now, use their tribal system to solve their problems or manage their everyday lives. As argued by Atiyah (1968), 'the emergence of colonial governments with centralizing ambitions; the creation of international borders; rapid economic changes; and the spread of national ideologies were among the factors that threatened the survival of old tribal order and indeed put enormous pressures on tribespeople everywhere'. He argues that 'Even today, tribal identities, though significantly modified since the days of the Mandate, continue to play a major role in Jordanian politics' (1968:99).

influence interaction and affect not only the choice of forms and their meanings, but also the strategies used by speakers and the way they conceive of each other's linguistic behaviour, including the choice of the topic.<sup>75</sup>

Brown and Levinson (1987) note the importance of cultural variations in social relationships and highlight some of the implications. Besides the politeness strategies discussed above, they propose three universal cultural/social variables in assessing the seriousness of an FTA in many, and perhaps all, cultures: social distance (D), relative power (P), and absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a particular culture (1987:74). They describe (D) as a regular social dimension of similarity/difference between the speaker and hearer, (P) as the relative power between the hearer and the speaker and (R) as a culturally and situationally defined ranking of imposition. They suggest that P, D, and R are used by the actors to assess the danger of FTAs (1987:80), and that these are context dependent. They explain:

Our social dimensions P, D and R can be viewed in various ways. Taking P as an extended example, we would argue that individuals are assigned an absolute value on this dimension that measures the power that each individual has relative to all others (Brown and Levinson 1987:78).

Brown and Levinson see these variables as important in any Face Threatening Act saying 'in any case, the function must capture the fact that all three dimensions P, D, R contribute to the seriousness of an FTA, and thus to a determination of the level of politeness with which, other things being equal, an FTA will be communicated' (1987:76). How these variables function in cross-cultural interaction and which affects the utterance most is not specified. Whereas these variables are essential in deciding the strategy required for each situation, which might be universal, their importance is not the same in different cultures.

Unless we can define more clearly what is considered to be social distance, power, and ranking of imposition, we cannot accept Brown and Levinson's claims (see chapter 5). Classifying power, distance and ranking of the imposition between interlocutors from different cultures cannot be determined by comparing what happens in every culture separately from others. How a variable such as power influences an interaction, and how it

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<sup>75</sup> Boxer (1993) argues that 'social distance is one of the foremost factors that determines the way in which interlocutors converse precisely because it is an important determinant of the degree of comfort or politeness/deference in a verbal exchange' (1993:103).

is interpreted in a cross-cultural context is not clearly explained in Brown and Levinson's model. To them context is fixed, and such variables are working in a systemic way in interaction, which might not be the case in cross-cultural interaction.

### 2.2.7 Brown and Levinson's model of cross-cultural interaction

Brown and Levinson's linguistic strategies have been heavily criticised by researchers from different cultures, particularly Japanese and Chinese (Meier 1997). They find that Brown and Levinson's classification of acts of thanks, apology and compliments as FTAs, to either of the interactants, is not accurate in all cultures, such classification being defined by scholars such as Wierzbicka (1985), Blum-Kulka (1987) and Meier (1997) as being specific to Westerners. In Arabic, for example, 'expressing thanks' is too complicated to be included in just one strategy that threatens the speaker's face. For example, if someone is insulted, instead of reacting aggressively, they may thank their interlocutors;

1A: You are a bad person.

انت شخص سيء

**Anta shakhs sayee**

2B: Thanks

شكرا

**Shoukran**

Analysing such an incident is complicated within Brown and Levinson's model. For them, thanking usually comes as a result of an invitation or an offer. In Arabic, 'thanks' in such a context constitutes a 'threat' from the speaker to the addressee.<sup>76</sup> Utterance 2B cannot be discussed using Brown and Levinson's model, for three main reasons; firstly because their model assumes that all interactants aim for a good relationship, and that there are strategies that people use to avoid or redress any Face Threatening Acts. Secondly, because their model is speaker-centred, the way the utterance is understood is not analysed. Thirdly, because the influence of context and meaning of the utterance in relation to what precedes and succeeds it is not analysed. In Arabic, when you thank someone for insulting you, you

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<sup>76</sup> Hobbs, P. (2003) argues that 'positive politeness, which functions to express interest in, and approval of the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987:101), may appear to have no place in all types of communications' (261).

are in fact insulting them and telling them that you are better than them because you will not insult others as they do.

However, even if we examine an utterance as an individual act, we find that, according to Brown and Levinson's classification, thanking is a Face Threatening Act to the speaker, whereas this might not be the case in other cultures. The issue of different interpretation of negative face is discussed by Matsumoto (1988), who explains that in 'Japanese the structures associated with negative politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's model do not have a negative politeness function' (cited in Grundy 2000:162). Discussing how negative politeness is differently understood, Sifianou, (1992) in her comparative study of English and Greek politeness, also notes that requests are frequent in everyday encounters in Greek, and different strategies can be assigned to them.

Thus, in their model of politeness, Brown and Levinson argue that speakers are solely responsible for finding the appropriate method to protect their own and their hearer's face. In Arabic, particularly in Libya, almost all people use the strategy of bald-on-record in their everyday life. The direct request and imperative is common between people, whether they are requesting others or offering them something. For example:

'Give me your car to get my children to school'  
اعطيني سيارتك من اجل ايصال اطفالي الى المدرسة.  
*Ehtenee sayaratic men ajele eysal atfalee ela almadrassa*

'Come in and have a cup of tea'<sup>77</sup>  
ادخل و اشرب شاي.  
*Eoudkhal wa esrab shaye*

If we analyse these strategies we find that, in spite of being imperatives, they do not threaten the face of any of the interactants. Firstly, this is because, culturally, Arabs, especially Libyans, do not classify speech acts that are direct or imperative as threatening to face; secondly, because implied meaning is usually judged contextually. Thus, it is true that sometimes a speaker threatens his/her interactant's face by using certain types of strategies, but the evaluation of the context plays the most important role in judging whether there is an FTA or not.

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<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that this is also the case in English. These imperatives signal intimacy and positive politeness amongst close friends and family.

To sum up, what I have argued here is that Brown and Levinson (1987) have not shown real consideration of analysing politeness and considering the role of culture and context in relation to all interactants. Their model of analysis does not consider all that influences interaction in relation to the context of interaction. The need to find an approach of analysis that does not just compare different cultures through analysing certain speech acts is needed in cross-cultural interaction. My claim is that cultural backgrounds and understanding of context can lead to misunderstandings in interaction between native and non-native speakers of English, and that Brown and Levinson have not considered such factors accurately. I will, in what follows, move away from the reliance on a theory that emphasises individuals and their strategies, to develop a form of analysis which is more focused on culture and context. In the next section, I will discuss post-Brown and Levinson theorizing of politeness, and consider the issues, in relation to cross-cultural interaction, that post-Brown and Levinson scholars have considered. The discussion of all these issues will be developed further in the next chapter.

### **2.3 Post-Brown and Levinson Theorizing of Politeness**

In this section I draw on the work of post-Brown and Levinson theories and views of politeness and their criticism of Brown and Levinson's model in order to develop an adequate approach to analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction. The post-Brown and Levinson theories of politeness consider more variables than those addressed by Brown and Levinson, and they suggest that because of such ignorance Brown and Levinson's model is inadequate in analysing politeness.

#### **2.3.1 Blum-Kulka (Cultural norms)**

To Blum-Kulka (1992), politeness is a linguistic behaviour upon which others judge us. She suggests that

politeness is positively associated with tolerance, restraint, good manners, showing deference and being nice to people, but is simultaneously referred to in a negative manner as something external, hypocritical, unnatural (1992:257).

She emphasises the difference between cultural and strategic aspects of politeness, building on previous theories, but perceiving their analytical methods as inadequate. While agreeing with Brown and Levinson's notion of face, she sees this as determined by culture and not

individuals. In her article 'The metapragmatics of politeness in Israeli society' she details the role of culture in negotiating perceptions of politeness. She notes that

it is when Israelis are called upon to formulate their ideas and feelings of politeness in the private sphere that a strong cultural bias emerges. Among friends and family, some find politeness completely irrelevant, others severely restrict its appropriate modes of expression (1992:259).

She sees similarities and differences between cultures in what is considered polite, noting that Israelis and Americans are not similar in respecting the Maxim of Relevance in some interactional situations. To Blum-Kulka, all differences are due to culture. She believes

expression of impolite illocutions distinguishes cultures and individuals sharply; for acts threatening the other's (positive) face, Israelis can view as polite the expressing of unpleasant "truth" ... where other cultures would view it as impolite; for acts threatening the positive face of self, they often recommend avoidance as the preferred strategy (1992:266).

While acknowledging individual performances and cognitive understanding of what is polite and impolite, she suggests that these draw on cultural backgrounds emphasising cultural norms as an important factor in analysing politeness, and arguing that face is culturally determined. This view adds more dimensions in analysing politeness, as it argues against Brown and Levinson's claim of universality in linguistic politeness strategy. In cross-cultural interaction, we need to admit that there are differences between interactants because of their cultural backgrounds that might lead to misunderstanding.

### **2.3.2 Fraser (Conversational contract)**

The social-norm view, in Fraser's (1990) classification of politeness, is associated with 'good manners'. Definitions of 'good manners', however, again depend on culture and the nature of society.<sup>78</sup> Fraser adds the association with style – a more formal style implying greater politeness. Fraser depends, to some extent, on Grice's Cooperative Principle in his conversational-contract view, and refers to the group as well as to society. This means that the Conversational Contract he proposes is not fixed by society alone; it can also be up to the interactants to decide on the rules or rights that should prevail in conversation

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<sup>78</sup> As Nwoye (1992) points out, 'in the social norm view, politeness is seen as arising from an awareness of one's social obligations to the other members of the group to which one owes primary allegiance, while the face view espouses the notion that politeness is a strategy acquired and manipulated by individuals to attain specific objectives, goals, or intentions' (1992:312).

(Conversational Contract).<sup>79</sup> Fraser argues that 'being polite does not involve making the hearer 'feel good' 'a la Lakoff or Leech, nor making the hearer not 'feel bad' 'a la B[rown] and L[evinson]. It simply involves getting on with the task at hand in light of the terms and conditions of the CC.' (Fraser, 1990:123).

However, although I consider Fraser's view to be inadequate for analysing cross-cultural interactions - because it does not clearly tell us what is and is not polite when the interactants are strangers to each other - it does demonstrate the complexity of analysing politeness. Unlike Brown and Levinson, who only consider the speaker, Fraser's view emphasises the role of the hearer in determining whether what is said is polite or not. It suggests especially that analysing politeness is more complicated in cross-cultural than in monocultural interaction. In an earlier article, Fraser and Nolen (1981) point to their awareness of the difficulty in judging politeness. They make it clear that one cannot follow linguistic traditions and appeal directly to the intuitions of the native speaker to decide the degree of deference associated with a particular expression (1981: 93). Thus, Fraser's view differs from Brown and Levinson's in that it emphasises the argument that politeness is an issue of both the speaker and the listener understanding of what is meant, and that misunderstanding may occur if what is considered polite is contentious or debatable to all interactants.<sup>80</sup>

### **2.3.3 Arabic views of Politeness (religion and politeness)**

What is politeness in Arabic, although it is highly contextual, is influenced by religion as the main base of Arabic culture. (See details in chapters 1 and 5) Al-Gorgani (1978) and Alnayhome (2001) point out that there are different ways in which utterances can be understood as polite in Arabic. The usual way is through a religious formula according to the context of the interaction. I am not arguing that most of the polite strategies among Arabs are taken from religious beliefs; rather that interactants, in Arabic, are influenced by, and prefer to use socially agreed religious expressions to appear polite. Not all Arab societies are religious, and there are different ways of interpreting religious expressions, but generally an Arab interactant would feel it appropriate if such religious expressions are

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<sup>79</sup> This is different from Goffman's (1967) notion of face, in which all are expected to behave in a certain way to protect their own and their interactants' face.

<sup>80</sup> Fraser, like Lakoff and Leech, agrees that Grice's Cooperative Principle has established rules in interaction, but Fraser's view is still deficient in cross-cultural situations as it is not clear how strangers or people from different cultures can be bound by a set of rights and obligations in a casual conversation.

used. According to Albassier (2004), whatever the source of their religious differences, Arabs use religious expressions and strategies that are accepted by society. Even if there are contextual or societal differences in understanding these religious expressions, they are all concerned with signalling politeness.

There are words in Arabic that are either not mentioned or are mentioned mainly through euphemisms. This would be the case when describing certain parts of the body or sexual intercourse. For example, the euphemism 'approaching' "يقترّب" "yaqtareb" is used in place of the words 'making love' which itself a euphemism. The topic or the context would lead listeners to understand the implied meaning, because in the Quran such issues are usually spoken about indirectly. Mary asks Allah "O my Lord! how shall I have a son when no man has touched me?"(Chapter 19, verse 20).<sup>81</sup> This example of what is thought to be appropriate in Arabic is influenced by religious background. A person speaking openly about such things would be classified as inappropriate or impolite.

Although not all Arabs are Muslims, such strategies are recognised even if they are not always complied with. They are religiously motivated, and even if violated, the interactants will be reminded from a religious standpoint on how to behave towards others. For example, greeting in Arabic is influenced by religion. To be considered appropriate, a person needs to greet their interactant in a better, or the same, way as that used to greet him/her, but never less than the greeting received, and with a welcoming intonation.<sup>82</sup> This is the rule in the Quran of how to appear appropriate. In Arabic, greeting is systemized. Some Arabs complain that Westerners do not greet them properly, and sometimes do not answer greetings. Thus, we may conclude that what influences politeness is not the same across cultures, and what might be considered an important factor in one's culture, does not have an effect in the other. This argument enforces the call for a new broader approach to

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<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in the Christian Bible, Mary says 'How can this be when I have never known a man?'

<sup>82</sup> Different cultures place different emphasis on what is considered appropriate in their strategies of communication. Arabic culture is described as collective culture by El-Barouki (1987), Tannen (1984), Cohen (1987), Coates (1988), and therefore greeting is very important. In Arabic, for example, it is not acceptable that a person passes by someone without greeting him/her, regardless of whether s/he knows him/her or not. In English, this [i.e. such absence of greeting] is something that is more likely to happen between people who do not know each other. Greeting is one of the most important aspects in Arabic culture, and warm greeting is essential between people who know each other. If greeting has not been performed appropriately between interactants, they may not communicate as they usually do or may not communicate at all. In addition, in Arabic, if the speaker used a two word expression to greet his/her addressee, then the addressee should use a greeting expression that has the same number of words or more to express his/her appropriateness.

analysing politeness. As we have seen, religion plays an important role in shaping what is considered polite in Arabic, and it influences most interactants' linguistic strategies. It is a factor that needs to be analysed in a similar way to gender and power in cross-cultural interaction.

### 2.3.4 Eelen's critique of the core theory of politeness (Politeness and Social reality)

Eelen, in his critique, disagrees with the major politeness theorists.<sup>83</sup> He criticises some for relying on Speech Act Theory, and others because they have not considered different interpretations of what might influence linguistic politeness. Eelen (2001) believes that all the core theories of politeness confuse two perspectives on politeness; that is politeness1 and politeness2 (see Watts, 1992b). To Eelen, politeness1 refers to the commonsense view, and politeness2 to the scientific notion of politeness. He believes that even if a theory pays attention to one perspective, the other perspective also exists implicitly or explicitly.<sup>84</sup> He states that

this uniquely scientific viewpoint is also evidenced in the integration of politeness rules with Gricean CP and its maxims: rather than capturing ordinary speakers' argumentative evaluations, they are general linguistic principles, involved in the process of how people understand each other (Eelen, 2001: 49).

Eelen considers Lakoff's rules of politeness as capturing ordinary speaker's politeness1 evaluation, for example, do not impose; remain aloof. Therefore, he argues that, although she claims to be dealing with politeness2, she is in fact dealing with politeness1.

Eelen also sees two perspectives on politeness existing in Leech's Politeness Principle. Leech, he says, shows an awareness of the distinction between politeness1 and politeness2 when he qualifies his framework as a 'scientific paradigm' and situates it within pragmatics. He argues that 'the PP does provide specific stipulation on how to be polite: by "minimizing the expression of impolite beliefs" and "maximizing the expressions of polite beliefs" ' (2001:54). According to Eelen, Leech's claim that his theory is more concerned with real communication constructs only one part of the politeness principles.

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<sup>83</sup> Eelen, in his book *A Critique of Politeness Theories*, criticises most of the theories of politeness such as those of Lakoff, (1973) Leech, (1983), Fraser and Nolen, (1981;1990), Brown and Levinson (1987), Ide, (1989), Gu, (1990), Blum Kulka, (1992), Watts (1992b), and Arndt and Janney, (1993).

<sup>84</sup> Eelen argues that Lakoff's rules of politeness confuse the two perspectives, and that in spite of the fact that Lakoff does not explicitly mention the distinction between them, her rules of politeness are seen as part of pragmatic rules.

In discussing Ide's work, Eelen suggests that 'overall Ide's position regarding the distinction does not seem to be directly and unequivocally inferable from her own theorizing' (2001:56). Ide's (1989) explicit view of politeness<sub>1</sub> as an everyday concept and politeness<sub>2</sub> as a strategy of language use distinguishes her from other scholars, but Eelen thinks her position regarding the distinction is not clear and that she confuses the distinction between the two modes of politeness.<sup>85</sup> According to Eelen, Watts (1992b) is quite clear about the concept of politeness.<sup>86</sup> His general epistemological and methodological approach to research indicates a concern for understanding and capturing ordinary speakers' assessments of the interactional process.

#### 2.3.4.1 Eelen's critique of Brown and Levinson

Eelen sees Brown and Levinson's model as similar to Lakoff's,<sup>87</sup> seeing their concept of politeness as a linguistic tool used by interactants (Model person) and the social context. Thus, their theory is broader than the commonsense notion. He refers to their conceptualisation of politeness as FTA redress. Eelen holds that all the theories, including Brown and Levinson's model, focus too closely on the speaker's utterance, and whether an utterance is understood as intended by the speaker or not, and also see politeness as a strategy, as principles or as rules. This view can be considered an extension to his first conclusion that their theories pay attention to speakers at the expense of hearers. For him, these theorists reify politeness, characterising it as something which hearer and speaker can

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<sup>85</sup> 'Ide's explicit reference to the politeness<sub>1</sub>-politeness<sub>2</sub> distinction is offset by its equivocal definition, and although by subsuming both Volition (politeness<sub>2</sub>) and discernment (politeness<sub>1</sub>) her theory appears to place itself above the distinction, this is only seemingly true, since in order to accomplish this it needs to blur the distinction itself, watering it down to one between formal and strategic politeness' (Eelen, 2001:57) Eelen also analyses Blum-Kulka's (1992) research in relation to the distinction between politeness<sub>1</sub> and politeness<sub>2</sub>. Politeness, to Blum-Kulka, looks as if it is identified by its situational contextual factors that are associated with the interactants. He also discusses Gu's (1990) approach as similar to Ide's view, and describes Fraser and Nolen's model as an approach which aims to analyse politeness<sub>2</sub>. Eelen holds that Gu's notion of politeness is based on Leech's, as it consists of a number of maxims, with the addition of an explicitly moral component, and also manifests itself in the ordinary speakers' minds. He also argues that Fraser and Nolen's definition of the notion of politeness stays within the then-current terms of the Conversational Contract. Their approach, generally, attempts to set up a rank order of linguistic structure on a high-low deference scale. Eelen considers Arndt and Janney's (1985) explicit focus on intuitive concepts places them in politeness<sub>1</sub>. They argue for a shift from a logical approach to a socio-psychological approach in which the people are the focus of language and politeness. Eelen thinks that their model contradicts Blum-Kulka (1992) who associates commonsense notions of politeness with hypocritical, insincere behaviour. However, this clash between Arndt & Janney and Blum-Kulka of the understanding of sincerity and insincerity comes back to how politeness is understood.

<sup>86</sup> For further discussion, see the section on Watts in this chapter.

<sup>87</sup> He cautions 'their concept of politeness warns us that it should not be confused with an ordinary everyday understanding of the concept. It is a concept carved out by the linguist, in an attempt to grasp the relationship between language and social context' (Eelen, 2001: 50).

recognise unproblematically. Furthermore, Eelen holds that the theoretical frameworks involve a conceptual bias towards the polite end of the polite-impolite distinction, conceptualising politeness and impoliteness as opposites, and displaying bias towards the production of polite behaviour.

Eelen provides five qualities of politeness<sup>1</sup>:

- a) evaluativity, where politeness and impoliteness are connected to social values and always evaluative in nature;
- b) argumentativity - situations where there is something to lose or gain;
- c) politeness, where each individual considers themselves and their cultural group as polite, others impolite;
- d) normativity, where politeness is the result of the pressure of social norms; and
- e) modality and reflexivity, which refer to optionality of polite interactional strategies for the actor.

Eelen sees notions and norms differing not just from culture to culture, and one language to another, but also from one regional and social variety to another. Eelen (2001) suggests a possible alternative conceptualization of politeness. Drawing on Bourdieu, he considers the issue of culture as the core issue in the field of politeness, and questions 'how do these theories handle the normativity of commonsense politeness and the situation of culture?' (2001:227). He sees politeness as subject to cultural expectations arising from cultural norms that are its driving force, an approach inspired by Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' that takes full account of the hearer's culture and position.<sup>88</sup> Unlike Brown and Levinson (1987), Eelen (2001) introduces politeness as a social reality, which is consciously built up and maintained through interaction among human beings. He argues that politeness research should focus on social reality, which should be analysed by involving longer stretches of talk between interactants responding to each other, rather than in one particular context. This argument along with Eelen's other criticisms of Brown and Levinson's model of analysing politeness and the other models, supports this thesis's argument that politeness is not subject to the analysis of utterances in isolation from other utterances in the same conversation.

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<sup>88</sup> This is also argued by Weizman (2006). He states that 'we conceive of people in terms of their social rights and obligations and we form our expectations accordingly (2006:174).

### 2.3.5 Spencer-Oatey (Cross-cultural communication)

Spencer-Oatey also emphasises culture as central in understanding politeness and how it is understood, and in understanding whether an utterance is judged to be appropriately performed.<sup>89</sup> She maintains speakers should be judged to be polite or rude, depending on subject and context (2000:3). She defines politeness in relation to culture and context, with culture being notoriously difficult to define.

The issue of politeness is seen, by Spencer-Oatey (2000), as more than just an analysis of certain speech acts from the notion of face of Brown and Levinson (1978-87). She also disagrees that politeness is only for minimizing the risk of confrontation as Lakoff (1989) argues. In her article with Xing (2000) she introduces what she calls 'rapport management' instead of 'politeness', and suggests that research into the management of relations in cross-cultural communication needs to use a broader analytic framework than that typical of cross-cultural discourse research.

Theoretically, Spencer-Oatey (2000a) provides five interrelated domains for managing 'rapport': *illocutionary* (the performance of speech acts); *discourse* (the choice of discourse content, such as topic, and the management of the structure of an interchange, such as organization and sequencing of information); *participation* (the procedural aspects of an interchange such as turn-taking, inclusion/exclusion of people present, and the use/non-use of listener responses); *stylistic* (such as choice of tone, choice of genre-appropriate lexis and syntax, and the use of honorifics); and the *non-verbal*, such as gestures and other body movements, eye contact, and proxemics (Spencer-Oatey 2000a:20). These domains provide a model for how interaction is influenced by different situational or contextual and social factors, which affect rapport. These include norms, conventions (sociopragmatic, pragmalinguistic), values, and linguistic strategies. She accepts that people from different cultural groups may assess these factors differently but

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<sup>89</sup> Spencer-Oatey (2000) agrees with Brown and Yule (1983) that language has two main functions; the 'transactional' and the 'interactional'. She defines the former as 'information-transferring', and the latter as 'maintenance of social relationships'. This is an interesting issue in cross-cultural interaction. As there may be disagreement on what is appropriate, when and how, there may be disagreement on what is considered to be transactional and/or interactional. It is not clear whether the distinction between these two aspects is clear-cut.

believes these differences do not necessarily cause misunderstanding in cross-cultural encounters.

Spencer-Oatey insists that 'rapport management' is a social judgement, which is therefore, largely dependent on the hearer to judge whether what is said is polite. This might support the argument that there are no correct or incorrect interpretations of pragmatic meaning. The different understandings or knowledge of the world, which probably lead to different understandings of the context, and the different conventions, norms, and values derived from different cultural backgrounds, all contribute in any cross-cultural interaction.

Like Brown and Levinson (1978/87), Spencer-Oatey considers face a crucial issue in understanding interaction, but she explains that

I use the term 'rapport management' rather than 'face management' because the term 'face' seems to focus on concerns for self, whereas rapport management suggests more of a balance between self and other. The concern of rapport management is also broader: it examines the way that language is used to construct, maintain and/or threaten social relationship (2000a:12).

The introduction of rapport management, and the way in which Spencer-Oatey defines this, provides a better view of what is happening in communication between interactants.<sup>90</sup>

Because of the criticism that Brown and Levinson's notion of face has received, Spencer-Oatey reacts to what she sees as the overemphasis on individual freedom and autonomy, by proposing a modified framework conceptualizing face and rapport. She states that

face is associated with personal/social value, and is concerned with people's sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation, competence and so on, solidarity rights, on the other hand, are concerned with personal/social expectancies, and reflect people's concerns over fairness, consideration, social inclusion/exclusion and so on (Spencer-Oatey 2000b:14).

This broader view of the notion of face suggests more interrelated aspects to face which include a) quality face - a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our persona; b) identity face - a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and

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<sup>90</sup> It is clear that Spencer-Oatey has taken her view of face from Brown and Levinson, who consider face as the key force for politeness, and conceptualise it as including negative and positive face, but Spencer-Oatey considers face to be the positive social value a person effectively claims for themselves by the line others assume they have taken during a particular contact.

uphold our social identities or roles; c) equality rights - a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly; and d) association rights - a fundamental belief that we are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the types of relationship that we have with them.

Spencer-Oatey argues that her framework considers the role of the listener as well as that of the speaker, and also takes into account the factors that influence communication. She maintains that 'the framework thus differs from Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness in two ways. Firstly, it incorporates a social or interdependent perspective to the management of relations' (2000b:15). Secondly, in this framework, Brown and Levinson's view of face is treated as a sociality-right.<sup>91</sup> Spencer-Oatey suggests that not every uncomfortable or offending act means 'loss of face', and accordingly that face can be threatened through face threatening, and rights threatening behaviour. She points out that

sometimes, though people's treatment of us may not simply irritate or annoy us: it may go a step further and make us feel as though we have lost credibility or have been personally devalued in some way (2000b:16).

She does not consider all minor incidents as face threatening acts; some may infringe on context and the hearer's interpretation may play a part. This, she points out, is not the case in Brown and Levinson's model, where certain speech acts are inherently threatening to either positive or negative face.<sup>92</sup>

I do not see a crucial difference here, but what is perhaps important is how such acts are managed in cross-cultural interaction, and how the notion of face is managed in cross-cultural interaction. The difference between Spencer-Oatey's view of face and Brown and Levinson's view is that Brown and Levinson's view of face is related just to whether a certain speech act is face threatening or not, whereas Spencer-Oatey is related to the individual in relation to society. This means that loss of face is not only linked to

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<sup>91</sup> According to Spencer-Oatey, the management of sociality rights involves the management of social experiences, which she defines as 'fundamental personal/social entitlements that individuals effectively claim for themselves in their interaction with others' (2000:14).

<sup>92</sup> This view might be felt in Arab-English interaction. For example, Arab friends or close relatives usually do not include any form of explicit request when they ask for something to be done, and usually do not thank their friends for their help. Such linguistic behaviour does not include any threat of face, because, culturally, respect of face is included, but not necessarily in linguistic behaviour. English use different forms of request and show their gratefulness to everybody for any type of work. Failing to do so may cause loss of face between the interactants. Such different views of face come back to cultural differences in strategies.

particular speech acts in relation to particular speaking situations, but may extend beyond that to include more cultural factors and issues relating to all interactants.

### 2.3.5.1 Contextual variables and Culture

An important issue not fully considered by Brown and Levinson's theory, but which Spencer-Oatey sees as important, is what she calls 'contextual variables'. Although seeing power and distance as key variables relating to participant relations, she analyses them in terms of how they influence rapport-management strategies, and not just when conveying messages, as suggested by Brown and Levinson. Power here includes social power, status, dominance and authority.<sup>93</sup> She adopts French and Raven's (1995) five bases of power: reward power is when a person has control over positive outcome<sup>94</sup>, coercion power is when a person has a control over a negative outcome<sup>95</sup>, expert power is when a person has some expert or special knowledge<sup>96</sup>, legitimate power is when a person can prescribe or expect things from another<sup>97</sup>, and referent power is when a person admires another person.<sup>98</sup> Although this classification is contextual and as such not relevant to every interactional situation, power should have more consideration than it is given by Brown and Levinson (1987). Spencer-Oatey considers the concept of power to be understood differently across cultures, because it is culturally influenced. Interactants from different cultures associate different cultural and contextual variables, which change according to the context of interaction. For example, the conception of power in teaching contexts or leadership is different between the English and Arabs, which might be a result of religious, cultural and even ideological reasons.

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<sup>93</sup> 'In sociolinguistic and pragmatic research, power is typically operationalised in terms of unequal role relations, such as teacher-student or employer-employee. Very often there is no problem with this, but sometimes it can lead to confusion' (Spencer-Oatey 2000:32). An example is the problems that non-English teachers experience when they teach English young students or pupils. In Arabic, teachers are allowed to beat, threaten, shout, or sometimes swear at their students. Such behaviour is not accepted here.

<sup>94</sup> Reward power is if a person, A, has a control over positive outcomes (such as payment) that another person, B, desires, A can be said to have reward power over B.

<sup>95</sup> Coercive power is if a person, A, has control over negative outcomes (such as allocation of undesirable task adds that another person, B, wants to avoid, A can be said to have coercive power over B.

<sup>96</sup> Expert power is if a person, A, has some especial knowledge or expertise that another person, B, wants or needs, A can be said to have expert power over B.

<sup>97</sup> Legitimate power is if a person, A, has the right (because of his/her role, status, or situational circumstances) to prescribe or expect things of another person, B, A can be said to have legitimate power over B.

<sup>98</sup> Referent power is if a person, B, admires another person, A, and wants to be like him/her in some respect, A can be said to have referent power over B.

Another variable that Spencer-Oatey considers is distance. She associates this with social distance, solidarity, closeness, familiarity and relational intimacy. Spencer-Oatey points out that 'it is much more embarrassing and face threatening to be criticised in front of one or more other people (for example in front of a class of students) than to be criticised privately' (Spencer-Oatey 2000b:35).<sup>99</sup> The difference between Brown and Levinson and Spencer-Oatey is that whereas the former argue, that depending on the speaker's understanding of the context, speakers compute the amount of power, distance and degree of imposition, Spencer-Oatey's model involves social rights, and allows previous experience for both participants to influence assessment of power and distance between the interactants. Spencer-Oatey has not completely rejected Brown and Levinson's model, but modified it. She states that cross cultural interactions require a more analytical method than that of Brown and Levinson, one that goes beyond the analysis of individual utterances in isolation from the cultures and the contexts that are involved in the interaction.

However, Spencer-Oatey's view of the rapport management model of communication proposes that face is not subject to certain linguistic strategies. It investigates face in particular, and politeness behaviour in general in relation to social rights of the speaker and the listener in producing polite and impolite utterance. She argues that power and distance or any contextual variable influence rapport management. The issue of contextual assessment of politeness involves how people from different cultures assess differently what influences interaction, which is crucial in my research's argument. It supports the argument that interactants' ability to understand what is meant in relation to what is said is important, especially in cross-cultural interaction, where what is said might lead to different implicatures for each interactant. This view is important in relation to this thesis's argument, that politeness is an issue of understanding between all the interactants and not judged by the meaning of linguistic choices and adopted strategies in isolation from the context.

### **2.3.6 Mills (Individual speaker and wider community)**

Mills, like Eelen, tries to provide a more widely applicable model for analysing linguistic politeness. She raises the problem associated with data collection, analysis and

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<sup>99</sup> In Arab societies, the loss of face or gaining face is highly related to the presence of a third party.

interpretation in linguistic research. (Mills, 2003a:16). Mills concentrates on discussing the problematic aspects of linguistic analysis of the speaker, the individual's relation to the group, the model of communication and language, and methodology.

Mills sees the term 'model speaker' as problematic in Brown and Levinson's research. In her model, Mills shows that treating interactants as identical in all types of interactions, and assuming they are not subject to any changes because of culture, relationships, mode, or any other factor, is an inadequate method of analysis. She says:

I would like to move away from the use of the notion of the Model Speaker in linguistic analysis to a form of analysis which questions the autonomy of the individual and tries to set him/her in relation to a range of communities of practice where they negotiate their position and their gender, race, and class identities. ... I would like to question the degree of control which this model of speaker is assumed to have' 'Whilst I do not wish to portray the speaker as simply being subject to a range of discursive pressures which determines what is said, it is necessary to be aware of the forces which are at play in shaping the construction and interpretation of utterances by individuals (2003a:33).

Mills believes individuals are not always in control of their utterances, and sometimes factors such as social pressures influence their production and interpretation. She points out

speakers do not necessarily decide consciously to utter every word that they say; there are other factors, such as subconscious motivations, verbal routines, and social pressure which play a major role too (2003:19).

Thus, considering more factors that influence the construction and interpretation of utterance is a key issue in Mills's model of analysing politeness.

### **2.3.6.1 A community of practice approach**

Mills emphasises the shift from traditional approaches such as Brown and Levinson's to the more social approaches of Eelen (2001) and Spencer-Oatey (2000a). She argues that we need to see the utterance as a result of a longer process of thinking, habit, and past experience (2003a). Thus, Mills calls for analysis of interaction that involves not just a single utterance, but a discursively complete discourse. Mills concentrates on motivation and intention to be considered in the analysis of interaction. Thus, even if a certain linguistic behaviour is classified socially as impolite, the motivation and intention of the

interactant should be considered in the analysis and also the interpretation made of that utterance by the hearer.

Mills sees the intentions of the speaker as crucial in analysing utterances, since 'individuals expect others to judge them on the basis of their verbal habits; particularly in relation to politeness. They expect to be judged not only in relation to the community-of-practice norms or the wider society's norms, but rather in relation to their own particular habitual style' (2003:22). She states;

whilst I am not suggesting that individuals have no power to create their own meanings in utterances, it is important to distinguish between those utterances which can be seen as relatively creative and those which are more recycled or which seem to be determined by agencies outside the individual her/himself. We need to be aware that the utterances have a history outside the individual (2003:24).

She maintains that individuals are evaluated in relation to others, not through immediate or wider groupings. She sees Grice's Co-operative Principle and Speech Act theory as omitting the analysis of interactants' motives and aims, which are very important in understanding what they intend to say.

Mills opposes generalisations which do not involve issues that might influence interactions such as identity, motivation and interest, because such analysis cannot be justified on theoretical or methodological grounds. In other words, she calls for a shift from dependency on models that idealise, generalise, or stereotype, to a model that considers more variables, plus cultural or contextual differences.

These aims in analysis differentiate Mills (2003a) from Spencer-Oatey (2000a) and Watts (2003,1992b) and even Eelen (2001), and she sees her model of analysis as achieving better understanding than those, for example, of Brown and Levinson (1987) 'which cannot deal with the way politeness operates in real conversations as a form of assessment of behaviour' (2003a:116). Mills is calling for an analysis in relation to context, who is involved and how they judge these things, particularly in relation to the community of practice and interaction, rather than analysis of a surface message in isolation.

Mills's view is important for this research's argument in that it suggests that appropriate decisions over what is polite or impolite can only be achieved through turning from the isolated sentence level to the level of discourse. She does not say that analysing politeness is impossible, but that while Brown and Levinson's model appears to be very systematic, it is insufficient for considering all possible variables, which we have argued are changeable, especially in cross-cultural interactions. She supports the call that analysing politeness requires a flexible approach that considers these complexities of cross-cultural interaction more comprehensively.

### **2.3.7 Watts (assessing social behaviour)**

Like Mills, Watts (2003) focuses on the fact that evaluating behaviour as polite is not simply a matter of analysing the expressions used but of the interpretation of the behaviour in the context of the cultural and social environment. He concentrates mainly on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) work, and how their model of analysis might be exploited in the analysis of politeness.

Watts reiterates the views of Spencer-Oatey 2000a, Eelen 2001, Mills 2003a who consider politeness to be contextually, culturally and socially influenced, and, as a development of his earlier work on 'polite and politic behaviour' (1992) aims to provide a more appropriate analysis of what is socially acceptable/unacceptable. He defines politic behaviour as

socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group, whether open or closed, during the ongoing process of interaction (1989:135).

Watts identifies four main problems in analysing and forming theories of polite/impolite behaviour.

- a) The impossibility of evaluating behaviour out of context
- b) Consideration of the perspectives of speakers and hearers
- c) As a corollary of the above two, the impossibility of developing a predictive model, and so, in consequence
- d) The impossibility of producing an idealised, universal, scientific concept of politeness. (Watts:2003:23)

Watts discusses a social model for analysis as an alternative to Brown and Levinson's, which, like Mills, he sees as a production model, and aims to offer ways of recognising polite or impolite utterances. Instead of evaluating in terms of social harmony, mutual consideration for others, comity, etc., he provides a means of assessment by understanding 'how lay participants in verbal interactions assess social behaviour that they have classified as (im)polite utterance' (2003:143). This, he feels, allows us to understand politeness from the point of view of social members.<sup>100</sup>

As explained earlier, Watts uses Bourdieu's theory of practice together with his own theory which emphasises the importance of culture and participants' understanding, since politeness is not just a matter of the spoken word or fixed structures, nor, he points out 'is it restricted to forms of language usage. Its value is not only realizable in linguistic capital, it can also be converted into different forms of cultural capital, e.g. acquired competences, behavioural skills, etc.' (2003:152). He argues 'the struggle over politeness thus represents the struggle over the reproduction and reconstruction of the values of socially acceptable and socially unacceptable behaviour' (2003:11). Therefore, what is considered polite or impolite is subject to how it is interpreted socially. Similarly to Mills (2003) Watts leaves the decision about whether the utterance is polite to the interactants, whereas Brown and Levinson base their model on what a speaker says and means, regardless of the hearer's interpretation.

### 2.3.7.1 Watts and Relevance Theory

Watts (2003) considers that the implicit meaning which is inferred through context is not adequately considered by applying Gricean's pragmatics, and that what is 'said' will automatically be communicated.<sup>101</sup> According to Christie (2007) 'a problem that Watts (2003) attempts to resolve by drawing on Relevance Theory in his analysis is the failure of the Gricean account to sufficiently predict or explain how either explicit or implicit meanings are generated' (2007:9). Basing his work on Relevance Theory (Sperber and

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<sup>100</sup> Watts, in (1989) argues that 'maintaining Group cohesion' is achieved by means of relational work. He states that relational work considers every thing that interactants, in an activity, are engaged in such as the nature of the social activity, the type of speech event, the degree in which interactant share a common set of cultural assumptions relating to the social activity, and the social distance between and the status of interactants with respect to the social activity. (Watts, 1989:137)

<sup>101</sup> According to Christie (2007) 'Watts uses the utterance *Sorry I don't know* to illustrate this issue, pointing out that the word *sorry* in this instance could be interpreted by the addressee 'as a stalling strategy or as a genuine expression of regret' (2003: 211).

Wilson 1995), Watts sees importance in how the individual 'knows' when a structure is open to interpretation as politeness or impoliteness. He asserts that politeness is an area of discursive struggle in every society and language, and can be evaluated morally. According to him, 'Relevance Theory provides an excellent means of assessing how potential violations of polite behaviour can be recognised and inference process can be postulated that result in the interpretation of (im)polite behaviour' (2003:203). He introduces Relevance Theory because he holds that the models which he discusses pay more attention to what he calls politeness<sup>1</sup>. Such models cannot be cross-culturally universal. He states that

it is therefore a model of (im)politeness<sup>1</sup> rather than politeness<sup>2</sup>, and it makes no claim to be cross-culturally universal, even though we can expect other speech communities to apply roughly equivalent attribution in other language or varieties (2003:201).<sup>102</sup>

Watts further argues that

in Sperber and Wilson's terms any utterance within a discourse is a stimulus which alters the cognitive environment of the hearer(s). In making the utterance, the speaker goes on record as having done something which is ostensibly manifest to his hearer(s) and which alters the context within which the speaker and the hearer(s) are interacting socially (2003:209).

Sperber and Wilson see what is missing in understanding communication as the role played by cognition and the nature of inferencing processes. The agreement between speakers and hearers on their shared knowledge will lead them to infer the intended meaning, and whether it is polite or not. Thus, what is relevant is subject to shared knowledge and the interactants' understanding of the context,

Relevance, therefore, is not a black-and-white property of utterance – either the utterance was relevant or it was not – but a sliding scale which may differ from speaker to addressee, from one addressee to the next and from one context to another (Watts, 2003:210).

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<sup>102</sup> Having stated that utterances cannot be analysed in isolation from their cultures or contexts and that decisions as to politeness/impoliteness should be left to the participants, Watts does qualify this by claiming that there are types of linguistic behaviour which are open to interpretations as polite, but which might not be understood so by others in the same interaction. He sees Gricean Cooperative Principle as simply too static to allow us to judge the appropriateness of an utterance according to when and how it is used. This also argued by Alshnatic (1970) who argues that the meaning of what is said changes according to the context of the interaction.

Thus, the utterance does not have a fixed meaning intended by the speaker and understood by the hearer. Watts thinks that hearers usually make more than one assumption, but that they exclude certain assumptions because of the new contextual effects<sup>103</sup> that they infer. He claims that Relevance Theory is flexible in understanding an utterance, as it can help us to measure what we say against the possible reactions of the addressee, and it helps us in understanding that politeness is not limited to face-threat avoidance or mitigation, whilst at the same time not abandoning the idea of face altogether.<sup>104</sup>

What is polite/impolite is not necessarily always explicit. What is not clear is whether interactants interpret polite behaviour positively or negatively, and Watts points out that interactants tend to notice the appropriate politic behaviour only when an interactant's strategy is different from what is considered to be appropriate. Christie (2007) explains

Watts' distinction between 'politic behaviour' and 'polite behaviour' is predicated on the assumption that the former is unmarked and the later is marked behaviour. While, consequently, this might appear to be consistent with Brown and Levinson's model, in that politeness in Watts' model potentially constitutes a message, the models differ in that the strategies and forms that Watts considers politic behaviour would, within Brown and Levinson's model, be categorized as politeness (2007:8).

Watts identifies two major criticisms that can be applied to most of the current empirical investigations being carried out in linguistic politeness using the Brown and Levinson model. Even when speakers use strategies of positive or negative politeness, when faced with the need to mitigate the force of a projected face-threatening act to their interlocutors, there is no guarantee that the addressee will not be offended. Watts asks

what about a situation in which the speaker would be quite within her/his rights to be absolutely blunt towards the interlocutor, i.e. to commit a 'bald on-record FTA', but chooses instead to 'soften' it in some way, intending the interlocutor to infer that this was a deliberate strategy? (2003: 251).

He states

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<sup>103</sup> By contextual effects Sperber and Wilson mean that the assumptions which can be derived from the utterance will significantly alter the speaker's and addressee's mutual cognitive context, i.e. their shared knowledge of that part of the ongoing social and discursive practice (2003:209).

<sup>104</sup> Watts suggests 'this presents a further problem for a theory of politeness that equates politeness with mitigation of face-threatening (cf the Brown and Levinson model), since face-threatening itself has become the appropriate form of politic behaviour, in such programmes' (2003:248).

the principal problem with the current theories of politeness, in particular Brown and Levinson's model, and at the same time the major reason for the lack of any substantial progress in empirical work based on it, is the status of those theories as quasi-objective descriptions and/or explanations of an abstract term, 'politeness'/'impoliteness' (2003:252).

In conclusion, what politeness is may not be agreed upon even in one community of practice, so it is not strange to find dispute on what is considered politeness between two interactants from the same culture. Watts explains that

A speaker might use a linguistic expression intended to be heard as more than adequate to uphold the level of appropriately polite linguistic behaviour, but the hearer may not interpret the utterance in the way it is intended to be interpreted (2003:253).

Hence, Watts, by emphasising the social aspect of politeness, indicates that politeness might be differently interpreted by interactants, and criticises Brown and Levinson's claim of universality for linguistic politeness strategies. Watts, like others who criticise Brown and Levinson, concentrates on new issues in the area of politeness that they do not consider in their model. He holds that politeness exists in all cultures, but he argues that it is not possible to develop a theory that can be applied to all languages because politeness is performed in different ways. He also integrates Relevance Theory to the analysis of politeness, firstly, because politeness is a process of understanding what is intended as we have argued in this thesis. In his suggested model of analysis, Watts argues that judging politeness depends on interactants and their understanding of the context and what is socially appropriate.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Identifying universal politeness strategies that can be used cross-culturally, as Brown and Levinson claim, does not seem to be an easy task. Different crucial criticisms of the main theories of politeness have been raised by linguists who argue that these theories sometimes fail even in considering politeness in mono-cultural interactions, and that there are many different interactional situations where these theories fail either to consider or classify their strategies. In response to this need, my research calls for an approach that does not simply compare Westerners to Arabs or any other cultures, and describe what constitutes polite and impolite linguistic behaviour in every society; rather this research investigates how interactants belonging to different cultural backgrounds communicate

with each other. It challenges Brown and Levinson's claim of universality by providing evidence that what might be considered as polite linguistic behaviour in one culture may not be so in another, and shows that this may create misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication, which might lead to conflict or accusation of being impolite.

Cross-culturally, it is not easy to decide whether there is a face threatening act or not in an interaction. Differences between cultures may affect what is perceived by the hearer in relation to what is intended by the speaker. Fraser (1990) argues that 'nearly all (perhaps all) acts can be construed as non-FTAs under appropriate circumstances' (1990:220). He disagrees with Carrell and Konneker (1981) who conclude that 'use of interrogative mood, stating requests as questions, gives the hearer far greater negative "face," or negative politeness, than does either declarative or imperative mood' (1980:22).

If we accept that an utterance allows only one or two interpretations, then we are denying the role that culture and context may play in determining the appropriate meaning. Christie argues that 'where sentence meaning appears to be largely explicable in terms of the language system, utterance meaning clearly requires an engagement with contextual phenomena' (2000:7). As we have seen, Spencer-Oatey (2000a) argues that a face threatening act should not necessarily mean the loss of face as Brown and Levinson claim, even if we feel uncomfortable, annoyed or angry because of it. The call for moving politeness research away from the analysis of necessarily strategic behaviour by Mills (2003a), Watts (2003), Eelen (2001) and others highlights significant reasons why Brown and Levinson's model is not applicable for analysing politeness. Mills (2003a) argues that we need to move to

an analysis which views politeness as a practice enacted within a community of practice with all the gender, race, and class constraints on linguistic behaviour that this entails, and which also stresses the flexibility and variability of the assessment of politeness from group to group and from person to person (2003:74).

Because of such problems in Brown and Levinson's theory we see scholars such as Spencer-Oatey (2000a) incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives and arguing that we need to analyse what she calls 'management of rapport in spoken interaction' (2000:29). Eelen (2001) concentrates on social reality in analysing politeness. Watts (2003) shares Eelen's views on analysing politeness and argues that the concentration should be on

politeness and impoliteness on the same level; Mills (2003a) stresses the need for investigating politeness in relation to all participants and at a discourse level and calls for the investigation of politeness and impoliteness as a judgement about other's interventions in an interaction.

Hence, politeness or impoliteness are long term strategies, and are left to interactants to decide through their understanding of the context. An interactant might be classified as impolite not because s/he has not used what is socially thought to be a polite utterance, but because the context does not give it its force as a polite utterance. This means that such behaviour is assessed by the interactants as well as the factors that influence the context of interaction. Investigating all the factors that might influence interaction provides us with a better understanding of what is considered polite or impolite by interactants. Investigating pragmatically the strategies used by speakers, and how they are interpreted by their addressees, helps us to understand whether there is any misunderstanding between interactants. In other words, investigating the conversation as a whole, and not as individual utterances, understanding cultural differences, and consequently how the context of the interaction is interpreted, helps in understanding what politeness is and how it is perceived across cultures.

### Chapter 3: Pragmatics and politeness

The aim of this chapter is to examine politeness as a pragmatic issue, having too wide a range of influencing factors to be understood simply by analysing linguistic utterances out of their interactional context. I will first define the role that pragmatics plays in analysing interaction and show that there are issues that cannot be addressed if we depend only on linguistic analysis of utterances such as 'apology, 'blame' or 'thanks' taken out of context, as is the case with most politeness theories. Instead, I consider cultural, contextual variables and personal differences between interactants, and how these influence the construction and interpretation of utterances. I then go on to show how the core theories of politeness such as those of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) encounter problems when analysing misunderstandings and pragmatic failure that can take place in cross-cultural communication, and can lead to interactants considering each other impolite. I will first show that the core politeness theories do not analyse culture adequately, and then I will explain their lack of analysing context in cross-cultural analysis. The goal of this chapter is to prove that, despite claims that they consider culture and context in their models, these core politeness theories have concentrated on analysing linguistic utterances out of context, and there is insufficient consideration of the cultures of all the interactants involved and understanding of the contexts of the interactions.

#### 3.1 Pragmatics and linguistics

As I have argued, an issue such as politeness cannot be analysed adequately if we only depend on what is literally said, as what is communicated might not be what is literally said. As Ravid et. al. (2003) point out, in language communication<sup>105</sup> there are many issues that cannot be solved by concentrating only on the structure and meaning of vocabulary (syntax, phonology or semantics). Syntax, semantics and phonology traditionally deal with grammar, meaning and sound systems as a dyadic relation, but pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation as defined by Davis (1991).<sup>106</sup> The distinction between the study

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<sup>105</sup> Language communication is generally the communication of thoughts, assumptions and information (Sperber and Wilson 1993). All conversational theories of communication were based on a single model, which is, according to Sperber and Wilson, called the 'code model'; that is, communication is achieved by decoding and encoding messages. What is proposed as an alternative model is what Sperber and Wilson call an 'inferential model'; that is, communication is achieved by producing and interpreting what is relevant, or rather by interactants paying attention only to information which seems to them relevant.

<sup>106</sup> Crystal (1997) defines the term "triadic" as a term used to characterize a theory of meaning which postulates that there is an indirect relationship between linguistic forms and the entities, states of affairs, etc., to which they refer (i.e. referents). 'Instead of a direct two-way relationship (a dualist theory), a third step is proposed, corresponding to the mental concept or sense of the linguistic form' (1997:398). In relation to

of the general conditions of the communicative use of language, and the more specific 'local' conditions of language use explains the difference between syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Taylor defines pragmatics as being 'concerned with relations between words, things, and the speakers of a language' (1998:81-82). Whereas semantics attempts to establish the relationships between verbal descriptions and states of affairs in the world as accurate (true) or otherwise, regardless of who produces the description, pragmatics studies the relationships between linguistic forms, the users of these forms, and their meanings.<sup>107</sup> Thus, pragmatics involves different factors that traditional linguistic analysis does not take into account.<sup>108</sup> It relates the sense (grammatical meaning) of an utterance to its pragmatic meaning (illocutionary force), which is an act performed by the speaker and understood by the hearer by virtue of the utterance having been made, in relation to whatever the influence of the context of interaction, whether 'promising', or 'commanding', etc. As Crystal (1997) defines it 'the field pragmatics focuses on an "area" between semantics, sociolinguistics, and extralinguistic context; but the boundaries with these other domains are as yet incapable of precise definition' (1997:301).

### 3.2 Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics

Every speaker of a language is a part of a community, whose social dialect will be largely determined by their environment, and this in turn will become apparent in their speech. The mode of study that investigates such a relationship is called sociolinguistics, the study of language in society.<sup>109</sup> Foley (1997) defines it as the analysis of language that individuals and groups use in social interaction. Holmes (1992), Crystal (1980) and Dittmar (1976) define it as a branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society.<sup>110</sup> I aim to make clear in this section that sociolinguistics is different from pragmatics, since, as suggested by Thomas (1995), sociolinguistics concentrates only

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pragmatics, triadic means the relation between linguistic forms, their meanings (direct and indirect) and the interactants (what they mean and understand from the utterances).

<sup>107</sup> Morris (1938) points out that 'syntactical rules determine the sign relations between sign vehicles; semantical rules correlate sign vehicles with other objects; pragmatical rules state the conditions in the interpreters under which the sign vehicle is a sign (cited in Verchueren 1999:6).

<sup>108</sup> Although pragmatics is described as principle-controlled and non-conventional by Austin (1969), Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), Levinson (1983) and Biletzki (1996) argue that it is perhaps difficult to decide principles.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Issa (2003) argues that for L2 (2nd language) learners to become competent in the target language, they need more knowledge not only about grammar but also about the sociolinguistic rules of the L2 speech community (2003:595).

<sup>110</sup> This includes matters such as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes towards language, standard and non-standard forms of language, and the patterns and needs of national language use, social varieties and levels of language, the social basis of multilingualism (Crystal 1998:353).

on social relations, and analyses language in relation to certain fixed social variables without linking them to the context of interaction, which is considered as a core issue in pragmatics.<sup>111</sup>

Thomas (1995) identifies overlaps between the goals of sociolinguistics and pragmatics:

sociolinguistics is mainly concerned with the systematic linguistic correlates of relatively fixed and stable social variables (such as region of origin, social class, ethnicity, sex, age, etc.) on the way an individual speaks. Pragmatics is parasitic upon sociolinguistics, taking the sociolinguistic description of an individual's repertoire as the point of departure (1995:185).

Thus, the call for the analysis of cross-cultural issues through pragmatic analysis can be considered a step towards considering all types of interaction and factors that influence them.<sup>112</sup> Rather than looking at an utterance with a specific social meaning which might have been allocated to it in a different context, pragmatics calls for analysis of an utterance in relation to the context in which it is used.

### 3.3 Defining Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined as a concern with how people make sense of each other's verbal interaction (Yule, 1996). It investigates meaning in conversations and how it is understood in relation to the context of interaction. Blommaert and Verschueren (1991) and Verschueren (1999) see pragmatics as being defined as the study of language use, arguing that 'pragmatics cannot possibly be identified with a specific unit of analysis' (1999:2). He considers pragmatics as a field of study that does not constitute an additional component of a theory of language, but offers a different perspective to that which deals with syntax, semantics, and phonology.

Pragmatics is also seen as adding more dimensions to the analysis of language than linguistics has so far dealt with. But the question here is 'what part does linguistic

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<sup>111</sup> Muhawi states 'Sociolinguistics can act as a bridge between literary criticism--the text--and the folklore--the context. It can serve as corrective to excesses of both, and they in turn will keep it aware of the expressive element in all communication' (1994:172)

<sup>112</sup> Richards and Schmidt (1983) point out that 'sociolinguistic competence ... addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction' (1983: 7). Harley et al. (1990) also argue that sociolinguistics is 'the ability to produce and recognize socially appropriate language in context' (Harley, 1990:14).

knowledge play in the process of communication and what is the other knowledge that interactants need in order for communication to occur?' (See Christie 2000). The knowledge we have is what makes us understand each other. But interactants, especially non-native speakers, complain that although their linguistic knowledge is excellent, they sometimes cannot convey their messages appropriately, and tend to misunderstand native speakers or be misunderstood by them.<sup>113</sup> Christie maintains that

... it is axiomatic to pragmatics that our linguistic knowledge does not provide us with sufficient information to be able to understand examples of language performance, that is to say actual uses of language (2000:4).

Christie analyses utterances in which only the literal meaning, and not the intended meaning, is comprehended, when the only way to understand the utterance correctly is to go beyond the literal meaning. This means pragmatics considers language as it is spoken and in terms of what influences it, rather than just dealing with written or spoken texts as sentences and words isolated from context.

Pragmatics requires a consideration of how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they are talking to, as well as where, when, and under what circumstances the interaction is taking place. It studies contextual meaning, explaining how hearers can make inferences about what is said in order to understand the speaker's intended meaning.

Many authors stress that using linguistics alone is not sufficient to understanding the intended meaning. Green defines pragmatics as '... the study of understanding intentional human action' (1996:2).<sup>114</sup> Mills (2003a:2) maintains that 'pragmatics focuses on the interaction of individuals and context', while Mey (1993) defines pragmatics as '... the science of language as it is used by real, live people for their own purposes and within their limitations and affordances' (1993:5). These definitions all stress that using linguistic analysis alone is not sufficient for understanding what is meant by an utterance, and that analysing factors such as context and culture, and how these influence utterances, is as

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<sup>113</sup> As El-Sayed (1990) argues 'a failure to grasp the often subtle differences between first language and target language formulas can lead to serious misunderstandings and misjudgements' (1990:1).

<sup>114</sup> Toolan considers communication as a matter of what might be interpreted and predicted or presupposed between the interactants. He argues that '... we are constantly making provisional assessments of the current gestalt – of what we are at now and what will likely be understood (what probable sense will be made or taken)' (1996:31).

important as analysing linguistic knowledge. In an interaction, the link between what people say and its effect on their relationships should be made clear by analysts, which means going beyond what linguistic evidence allows us to understand.<sup>115</sup>

Many Arab scholars hold views similar to Verschueren's (1999:1) that 'pragmatics is the study of language in use', that is, of the meanings that are exchanged in a particular context. Yunis (1999), Jahfar (2000) and Albasseir (2004) emphasise pragmatics as focussing on the hearer understanding the message as intended, and pragmatic failure occurs when this understanding is not achieved. This view is also held by Eben-Jenee (1952), Al-Saied (1995) and Albeseer (2004).

Al-Gorgani (1978) is one of several Arab scholars who discusses the relationship between language and its use, arguing that 'a language generally is not the speech that a person uses, its rhythm or structure; rather it is what allows meaning to be understood from speaker to interactant enabling interactants to communicate effectively, whether that was linguistic or non-linguistic' (1978).<sup>116</sup> Al-Saied, who adopts Eben-Jenee's view (1952), argues that

language and society are inseparable, because society consists of a number of people who meet to achieve certain goals, and language is the tool used to achieve their collective or individual goals (1995:6).

So, language to Eben-Jenee and Al-Saied, is not just a number of sounds put together to construct meaning; rather it is what these sound systems mean within the context of the interaction, which involves other factors that influence the production and interpretation of utterances that need to be considered in analysing.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Pragmatic analysis may include the analysis of phonology, syntax and semantics. For example, if a high voice, pitch or intonation means intimacy; or if a certain structure conveys politeness, or if the selection of a certain lexical item refers to closeness or reflects distance in a particular context, in relation to a particular culture.

<sup>116</sup> Alnayhome (2001) similarly argues that 'any language consists of a set of sounds which are created by certain machines, but people do not listen to these sounds and how they are put together, rather they listen to what is meant by putting these sounds together. The brain understands the meaning of what is put together in relation to the context of the interaction, and not digging out about the meaning that has been stored for the words or the utterances used.

<sup>117</sup> There is no mention of the term pragmatics in Eben-Jenee's and Al-Gorgani's books, but their argument is that language is not what is grammatically and phonologically appropriate, but is what constitutes relevant meaning in a particular context to interactants.

### 3.3.1 Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence means that speakers should be appropriate in their speech not just linguistically, but also socially and contextually.<sup>118</sup> Crystal sees it as 'the study of the principles and practices of conversational performance – this including different aspects of language usage, understanding and appropriateness' (1997:301). He defines pragmatic competence as the knowledge that an interactant needs in order to be able to communicate effectively. Hymes (1972) and Levinson (1983) also investigate the social use of language from a cultural perspective. They believe studying pragmatics involves dealing with the relationship between language and the principles that influence language use. Leech sees understanding an utterance as a process starting from understanding the literal meaning, and then what might be inferred in relation to the context of the interaction, not just to the meaning of the linguistic units in isolation.<sup>119</sup> The same linguistic structure might generate more than one interpretation depending on the context in which it is used.

#### 3.3.1.1 Pragmatic analysis

As argued above, pragmatics explores how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated. Christie observes that 'inferring meaning is not only based on linguistic evidence, but also visual and cultural evidence' (2000:6). Wong (2004), similarly states

meaning is in fact the missing link between language and culture, in that cultural values, social attitudes, and world views are all captured in meaning, which is in turn encoded in the cultural key words and grammar of language or dialect (2004:744).

Thus, pragmatics focuses on implicit meaning - that is the meaning that exists beyond the literal - and engagement with contextual phenomena (Christie, 2000:7). It is necessary to discuss the relationship of the interactants, who need to assess their social distance in order to construct appropriate speech forms. Pragmatic analysis explains how the influence of factors such as context and culture may allow for different interpretations of one utterance. Wolfson (1989) shows that

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<sup>118</sup> Pragmatic competence is one of the main issues in the fields of communication which pragmatics focuses on. Ladegaard (2004) emphasises the importance of the socio-cultural context and peer group influence on children's language, as well as children's sensitivity to contextual norms, i.e. their pragmatic competence.

<sup>119</sup> Leech discusses "pragmalinguistics", a term 'applied to the study of the more linguistic end of pragmatics – where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions' (1983:83).

a sentence interrogative in form may be now a request, now a command, now a statement; a request may be manifested by a sentence that is now interrogative, now declarative, now imperative in form: and one and the same sentence may be taken as a promise or a threat, depending on the norm of interaction applied to it (1989:6).<sup>120</sup>

In conclusion, we may argue that we need pragmatics to be able to consider all the factors that influence communication, especially in analysing cross-cultural interaction. As Nuyts (2004) reflects:

dealing with the pragmatics of intercultural communication requires the consideration of quite a number of different dimensions, which probably all extend beyond the domain of language use and even communication, and which will therefore require interdisciplinary attention and collaboration, far beyond the linguistic sciences (2004:149).

Thus, we may argue that grammatical errors in target languages are more recognizable and can be more easily overcome than pragmatic errors.<sup>121</sup> As Sperber and Wilson (1993) point out, the role of pragmatics is supplementary to grammar, and utterances may still be interpreted to mean something that is not said literally. Because of cultural and contextual factors in the context of interaction, an utterance might have a completely different meaning from what it means literally. In the next section, I will concentrate on the importance of culture and context, key factors in pragmatics, in interaction. I will suggest that these two important factors are not adequately considered in the core theories of politeness, in spite of their claims that they incorporate pragmatics, and especially that culture and context sometimes receive different understanding in cross-cultural interaction.

### **3.4 Problems with the core theories of politeness**

Having explained how pragmatics considers more variables in analysing interaction than linguistics or sociolinguistics, I will examine how the core theories of politeness have

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<sup>120</sup> Kreckel argues that '... what counts as (for example) a "warning" depends on rules evolved and sustained in concrete interaction within social groups' (1981:60).

<sup>121</sup> Yule (1996) discusses the role of pragmatics in interactions, specifying that pragmatics studies speaker meanings because it pays more attention to what people mean by their utterances in a particular context and how more gets communicated than is said. He argues that pragmatics 'explains how listeners can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning' (1996:69).

problems in analysing cross-cultural interaction, and argue that pragmatic analysis addresses these issues.

In relation to pragmatic analysis, Kopytko (1995) makes a distinction between what he calls 'rationalistic pragmatics' and 'empirical pragmatics'. According to him, rationalistic pragmatics is the means-ends or ends-driven explanation. In other words, it is when prior assumptions are made about the data. He sees Brown and Levinson's treatment of politeness as an example of rationalistic pragmatics. He calls for what he describes as 'empirical pragmatics' in analysing politeness. He believes data should drive our theorizing, and not the opposite, which the core theories of politeness do. Grundy (2000), in relation to Kopytko's view, argues that 'the conversation analytical approach to language understanding is characterized by the search for patterns in talk which reflect its culturally recognizable and therefore acceptable nature' (2000:186). This section concentrates on the failure of the core politeness theories in analysing politeness, their lack of analysis of interactants' cultures, and their understanding of the context of interaction.

### **3.4.1 Lack of analysis of culture**

In order to explain the importance of culture in analysing politeness, and how it influences the context of interaction in cross-cultural interaction, I will first discuss various definitions of culture and how that definition of culture is too broad to be considered in a politeness model of analysis such as Brown and Levinson's. I will then discuss culture in cross-cultural interaction and suggest that the different understandings of what culture is across cultures are not adequately considered in the core theories of politeness. In this section, I will argue that cultural differences are too complicated to be considered in theories of politeness such as Brown and Levinson's (1987), and that a broader approach to politeness analysis is needed in order for it to be applicable in a cross-cultural context.

#### **3.4.1.1 Defining culture**

Defining culture and how it influences interaction has always been a controversial issue among scholars. According to Agar (2002:23) 'communication in today's world requires culture' and 'without the knowledge of culture you won't communicate' (2002:29-30).<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Gudykunst (1983) sees interaction as more effective when interactants are aware

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<sup>122</sup> Nida and Reyburn (1981:2) argue that 'difficulties arising out of differences of culture constitute the most serious problems for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstandings among readers'.

of the cultural meaning of utterances. But defining culture is complicated, as we will see in this section. However, the aim of this section is not to show that culture is difficult to define, or that it has no precise definition; rather, it is to explain that many of the theories of politeness have failed in considering it adequately in analysing interaction, especially in cross-cultural interaction, because their methods of analysis depend on linguistic analysis, and do not consider culture in relation to the context of interaction. As discussed above, this thesis argues that culture is an important factor to be considered in analysing interaction. It also argues that, in different speech contexts, culture is interpreted differently among interactants. Culture might influence interactants differently in cross-cultural interaction, for example, than it would when both interactants belong to the same culture. Although Spencer-Oatey (2000a) emphasises that there is a problem in defining 'culture', she views it as:

a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each other's behaviour and each member's interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2000:4).

Spencer-Oatey includes almost every experience an individual may have, whether within their immediate group, or from their own understanding of meanings. Similarly, Watts (2003) considers the term 'culture' to be difficult to define, arguing that 'the term itself is probably as discursively disputable as the term politeness' (2003:78).<sup>123</sup> Mey (1993) and Foley (1997) agree with Goodenough (1964) who maintains that 'culture consists of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members' (1964:36, cited in Foley, 1997). They all agree that culture is not defined clearly and needs to be considered more adequately in interaction.

In relation to gender and interaction, Sadiqi (2003) provides a general definition of culture. In her book Women, Gender and Language in Morocco she holds that culture is 'a system of practices, rituals, beliefs, values and ways of meaning of a community' (2003:17), a view reflected and supplemented in the definitions of writers such as Watts (2003) and Scollon and Scollon (1995:126). Mills characterises culture as 'a set of assumptions made by the individual because of his/her involvement with groups where those values are

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<sup>123</sup> Eelen also argues that 'culture should not be treated as a given entity, but rather as an argumentative practice' (2001:158).

affirmed and contested' (2003a:32). This is also discussed by Gudykunst (1998) who argues that culture includes everything that is human. Keesing conceives of culture as

a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his [or her] world (1974:89).<sup>124</sup>

Such a definition interprets culture as something that people in one society share, but also something for which every individual has her/his own interpretation. Cushner and Brislin (1996), to some extent, do not agree with Keesing (1974) in that they consider culture as a collective creation. They state that

Culture is socially constructed by human beings in interaction with others. Cultural ideas and understandings are shared by groups of people who recognize the knowledge, attitudes, and values of one another, and who also agree on which cultural elements are better than others. Culture is, thus, transmitted across generations by parents, teachers, respected elders, and religious leaders, and is mediated through a variety of sources, including the media, the stories parents tell their children, and the various experiences individuals have in a given culture's schools (1996:7).

Mead (1994) also holds the view that 'culture includes systems of values, it is particular to one group and not to others, it is learned and is not innate; it is passed from one generation to the next' (1994:6). But there is a problem with such definitions in terms of understanding and interaction, because it classifies culture as something specific and known to all, transmitted from one group to another, perhaps performed in a specific way. Even if we agree with such definitions, they would create a problem in cross-cultural interaction where such means of transmitting such values are different from one culture to another.

However, as a link between the above views that discuss about culture as the value that society shares, and what individuals have as their own interpretations of culture, Fukushima (2000) presents Robinson's (1988) four different views of culture, as follows:

- a) The behaviourist view of a 'culture of discrete behaviours or sets of behaviour', which

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<sup>124</sup> In defining culture, Keesing (1974) goes on to state that culture is the theory to which a native actor [or actress] refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernatural), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he [or she] creates the stage on which the games of the life are played.

'...is something which is shared and can be observed. (p 8); b) Culture: as '...an attempt at making sense out of social behaviour' and as a sharing of '... reasons and rules for behaving' (p 8-9); c) Culture as a shared 'means of organizing and interpreting the world, a means of creating order out of the inputs' and '...a process through which experience is mapped out, categorized and interpreted' (p 10); and d) the symbolic view which considers 'culture as a system of symbols and meanings' (Robinson, 1988:11, cited in Fukushima, 2000:102).<sup>125</sup> These four views may be considered as one multi-faceted view which broadens the meaning of culture, rather than emphasising one view over the other.

With this in mind, we should bring to bear a greater number of considerations when analysing politeness, especially in cross-cultural interaction, Verschueren (1999) argues that culture correlates to linguistic choices along with norms and values<sup>126</sup> and that such values, norms and identity are expressed in utterances, and these aspects constitute the greater part of culture. According to Gumperz and Robert (1991)

in the existing literature on culture and communication, "culture" tends to be treated as a loosely defined term to refer to the group level values, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions which an individual brings to an interaction' (1991:52).<sup>127</sup>

Whether culture is acquired or learned, it influences the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of individuals in a certain society, but, as explained, is still subject to their understanding of it, and their evaluation of it in relation to the context of interaction. Understanding its components in relation to what influences the context of the interaction in relation to all interactants is what shapes individual linguistic production and interpretation.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Vedder and Virt (2005) and Barraja-Rohan (2003) argue that people's experiences and past events may have some impact on their language production and interpretation.

<sup>126</sup> Verschueren argues that 'norms and values use in linguistic analysis has a tendency to unduly reify or even mythologize cultures as real-world 'entities' that can be handed as natural organisms with clearly identifiable properties' (1999:92).

<sup>127</sup> They further assume that 'understanding in everyday encounters is in large part a matter of inferences that rely both on linguistic presupposition and on knowledge of the world, much of which is culture bound' (1991:52).

<sup>128</sup> Mills (2003a) states 'I shall not be assuming that culture exists "out there" in any simple form, but that rather I shall characterize it as a set of assumptions made by the individual because of his / her involvement with groups where those values are affirmed and contested' (2003a:32).

### 3.4.1.1.1 Defining culture in cross-cultural interaction

The argument of the above section is that culture, in spite of the fact that it is too complex to be limited to one definition influences interactants' linguistic choices and interpretation of speech. In this section, I argue that sometimes in cross-cultural interaction, interactants do not share the same language knowledge, do not use the same strategies in conveying their messages, and may not deduce the same meaning because of different interpretations of the language.<sup>129</sup> Interactants, in cross-cultural interaction, might experience problems because issues such as norms and values differ from one culture to another. Akman and Bazzanella (2003) note that in interaction 'problems arise when one tries to cope with a different cultural context that asks for different behaviour' (2003:322). Wierzbicka (1991/2003), Janney and Arndt (1992), and Caffi and Janney (1994) also agree that the meaning a speaker tries to convey may not be understood because of cultural differences.<sup>130</sup>

Cultures differently determine the linguistic choices that a speaker produces, and how that is interpreted. Alhouf (2003) and Abu-Haider (1994) state that societal evaluation gives meaning to what is said in certain contexts, and Mills (2003a) holds that culture is what individuals assume about their societies. In this concern, Sadiqi (2003) explains that

all cultures control their members, but they differ in the degree of the control they impose on the individual and social behaviours of their members, as well as parameters within which the members exercise control over their destiny and their environment (2003:17).

While Farghal (1995) also notes that

the language user's option for a euphemism often emanates from contextual factors such as the social relationship between speaker and addressee or the level of formality induced by the setting (1995:367).

Al-Khatib (2001) states 'speakers engage in stylistic variation not because they are affected by a particular topic, but because they identify themselves as speakers belonging to or addressing a particular group of addressees' (2001:407). In native/non-native interaction,

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<sup>129</sup> Mei (2002) argues 'that the lack of speech convergence in the speech styles of both native and non-native speakers may be attributed to differing participant backgrounds in cultural and communicative conventions' (2002:79).

<sup>130</sup> Wierzbicka (2003) explains that 'Anglo-Saxon institutions such as schools, courts or government departments, as well as the streets and "market places" are, inevitably, an arena of cultural clashes and cultural misunderstandings for foreigners' (2003:64).

one of the interactants has to depart from his/her way of speaking to his/her interactant, which might be different from his/her own because of cultural differences. For example, the way Arabs greet each other is different from greeting in English. An Arab, interacting with an English person, has to depart from his/her way of greeting to appear appropriate.<sup>131</sup> If an Arab, greeting an English person, has not departed from his/her own way to take on his/her interactant's way, then a pragmatic failure between them might take place. Cohen (1987), discussing the influence of culture on diplomatic relations between Americans and Egyptians, explains that the US Secretary of State Kissinger was always clever in being warm with Egyptians, whereas the then president Carter failed, which made it more difficult for Carter to achieve a good personal relationship with them.<sup>132</sup> Scollon and Scollon's view is that non-native interactants' cultural backgrounds do not always allow them to communicate in their own way. For example, if we compare swearing between the English and Arabs, Arabs find it difficult to swear in an English manner (Al-Saied, 1995).<sup>133</sup>

Thus, we may argue that every culture emphasises different norms and values, which means that in cross-cultural interaction, there is more possibility that interactants will misunderstand each other, and also accuse each other of being inappropriate. For example, Wierzbicka (2003) argues that

the complex of cultural attitudes which conditions every individual to be constantly aware of other people, other voices, other points of view, to see oneself as one individual among many ... leads to objectivism and anti-dogmatism being regarded as important social and cultural values (2003:49).

However, all this emphasises my argument that social, cultural, and linguistic differences between interactants, in cross-cultural interaction, are more salient than in monocultural interaction, and may cause trouble in communication. In the next section, I will discuss how theories of politeness fail in analysing certain cultural aspects, and how we need more consideration of cross-cultural differences in analysing interaction

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<sup>131</sup> Arabic greetings usually take from eight to ten exchanges or more. Cohen (1987), in his article on the problems of intercultural communication in Egyptian-American diplomatic relations, argues that a truly yawning gulf clearly separates the two cultures.

<sup>132</sup> 'Kissinger's reward for this nonverbal diligence was to be called first "friend" and then "brother" by the Egyptian' (1987:43). For example Carter in the early 70s was described as ignorant when he kissed Anwar Alsadat's wife (the ex-president of Egypt) in public on their visit to America. Also Alsadat's wife was attacked by the media by allowing him to receive her in this way in public.

<sup>133</sup> Arabs rarely swear in the same way as English do because it is culturally unacceptable due to the teachings in the Quran and the Prophets' sayings, although it must be noted that English people are not homogeneous on this issue. For some, swearing is highly problematic for religious or moral reasons.

### 3.4.1.2 Politeness theories' weakness in analysing culture

Although theorists of politeness (Lakoff, 1973, Brown and Levinson, 1978, Leech, 1983) claim that they have concentrated on the function of utterances and their relations with social aspects, the problem of misunderstanding in conversations due to cultural differences has still not been adequately analysed.<sup>134</sup>

Examining how cultural influences are seen in the core theories of politeness we find that these theorists have not explained themselves clearly enough to enable us to apply their work in the analysis of cross-cultural interaction. By way of examples, Lakoff does not explain how her rules work in relation to social relationships, and she is not clear about how social differences are treated when the interaction is cross-cultural. Eelen (2001) explains that rules of politeness exist in any interaction, but cultures are different in determining what is polite or appropriate. He states that 'definitions of politeness – of how to be polite – differ interculturally' (2001:3). Fraser (1990) also criticises Leech's principle of politeness, in seeing an utterance as polite or impolite, with no consideration of any cultural or situational influences on its meaning.

Brown and Levinson (1978/87) build their analysis of politeness on the premise that there are two forms of politeness: positive and negative, which are universal. Eelen (2001) and Mills (2003a) criticising Brown and Levinson's view, point out that Brown and Levinson only consider their own culture in their two central themes: the principle of rationality and their notion of face (See chapter 2). Their claim of rationality is also challenged by Ide, who argues that

if the framework of linguistic politeness is to restrict the scope to a rational or logical use of the strategies, we will have to exclude not only the use of honorifics but also greetings, speech formulas used in rituals, and many other formal speech elements which are used according to social conventions (1989:242).

She views the principle of rationality as dissimilar across cultures, because sometimes we use interactional strategies according to our social conventions and norms.

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<sup>134</sup> See chapter 2.

Mills (2003a) suggests that 'the individual is not generally assumed to be a self-contained unit, but rather a process, a site in construction through interaction' (2003:18). Eelen's (2003:18) argument is that politeness, because it is determined by cultural norms, is a cultural phenomenon before it can be a linguistic phenomenon, and regardless of whether what is performed is polite or impolite it should be evaluated in relation to culture. Thus, whether Brown and Levinson mean that the model person is one who can be rational in general, according to what is acceptable culturally, or according to the situation of interaction, the principle of rationality faces a challenge in cross-cultural interaction.

As argued above, one utterance may convey different meanings to different interactants because of cultural differences. For example, as I have mentioned before, from my experience as a teacher of English as a second or a foreign language, there are different linguistic strategies requesting something in Arabic and English. A request in Arabic sounds like an order to an English person. For example, in a classroom context, if an Arab student were to ask a teacher to provide the meaning of a word; s/he would say in standard Arabic.

الكلمة ؟	هذه	معنى	ما
? al-kaleemah	hathheeh	Ma'na	ma
? the word	this	meaning	what
What is the meaning of this word?			

Or

لي	هذه	ترجم
Lee	hathheeh	Tarjm
for me	this word	translate
Translate this for me.		

The above example is a "request" in Arabic, but is considered an order in English (See chapter 1). An English speaker would prefer an utterance like "What is the meaning of this word please? or "Could you tell me the meaning of this word please?"<sup>135</sup> Despite this, Pavlidou (2000) believes that, in a classroom, students and teachers seem to agree that

<sup>135</sup> The word "Bellahe" (بإله) which means "By God" cannot be considered to substitute for "please" or "pardon" because even in quarrelling or conflict the word or the expression "Bellahe" is used. For example, a person may say to her/his interactant "Bellahe Eskot" (بإله اسكت) which means "By God keep quiet" in quarrelling; or "Bellahe Sahednee" (بإله ساعدني) which means "By God help me" Therefore, "Bellahe" is rather an expression to start a conversation or to ask your interactant to pay attention to what you intend to do.

what is considered a face threatening act in normal life should not be considered so in classrooms as long as the objectives are attained.

An example such as the above illustrates that universal theories of politeness sometimes are not workable when cultural differences are not adequately considered. A fixed strategy of politeness might not be found in an utterance, but the utterance can be polite to one particular group and impolite to another because of cultural differences. It is difficult to accept a model of analysis if this model is not flexible enough to consider cultural differences and all the factors that may influence the context of the interaction differently.

### **3.4.2 Lack of analysis of context**

In order to support this thesis's claim that context is differently understood in cross-cultural interaction and that, because of this, it differently influences interactants' understanding of each other's utterances; I will first discuss different definitions of context. I will then discuss context in cross-cultural interaction and the different understandings of it. Again in this section, similarly to what I have discussed in the above section, I will argue that context is too complicated to be considered in the core theories of politeness, and that a need for an approach that considers context is necessary in order to be able to analyse politeness in cross-cultural contexts.

#### **3.4.2.1 Defining context**

Context has always been a controversial issue in linguistic research, because of the fact that there is no clear agreement among scholars on defining its roles in interaction.<sup>136</sup>

Crystal holds that

context refers to 'specific parts of an utterance (or text) near or adjacent to a unit which is the focus of attention. The occurrence of a unit (e.g. a sound, word) is partly or wholly determined by its context, which is specified in terms of the unit's relations, i.e. the other features with which it combines as a sequence (1997:87).

This definition of context appears very general, as there are no details of the other features and how they join together. Dilley (2002) holds that

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<sup>136</sup> According to The Oxford English Dictionary 'The word "context" is derived from the Latin verb *textere*, "to weave", and the related Latin verb *contexere* carries the meaning of "to weave together", "to interweave", "to join together" or "to compose".

the concept of context has a very broad currency (in social anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, history and so forth), and its forms of exchange are varied across the boundaries of various disciplines (2002:437).

Dilley's view of context involves linguistic aspects and social aspects surrounding the environment of interaction. Goodwin and Duranti, in relation to "context", agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide an accurate definition. They explain that

it does not seem possible at the present time to give a single, precise, technical definition of context, and eventually we might have to accept that such a definition may not be possible (1992:2).<sup>137</sup>

They consider context as the most important factor in providing interactants with the intended meaning. They state that 'the context, in the sense of a set of recognizable conventions, provides the infrastructure through which the utterance gains its force as a particular type of action' (1992:17). This is similar to Schiffrin's (1994) view that through context we can argue whether the utterance "can you pass me the salt?" is a 'question' or a 'request'. Her argument is that, although there are two different interpretations of this utterance, they are largely separable by the context.<sup>138</sup>

Meanings of utterances are agreed socially or culturally between participants. These meanings might be associated with certain factors such as age, gender, the relationship between participants, class/tribe, religion, occupation or education. These variables play different roles depending on the context of interaction. Levinson (1983) holds that context is related to how participants understand each other's messages in a certain discourse. Thus, analysing interaction involves more than one force for a speech act.<sup>139</sup> Context determines or provides the interactants with the appropriate way of understanding the

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<sup>137</sup> Asher (1994) considers context as one of the linguistic items that is constantly used, but he argues that it is never explained (1994:731). Asher believes context too wide a concept to be included in one specific definition.

<sup>138</sup> Schirato and Yell (2000) argue that even agreeing that a context is a simple amalgam of cultural features such as meaning system, material conditions and participants and members would not solve the problem of defining what context is. Also Toolan (1996) along with Schirato and Yell (2000) agree that there is a problem in defining context because a) the perception of what constitutes a particular context is not likely to be shared by everyone; and b) the meaning of those communication practices will change across persons, places and time.

<sup>139</sup> Grundy (2000) distinguishes two types of contexts: presumptive contexts which he describes as 'distal' or 'macro'; and contexts created in talk which he describes as 'micro' (2000:273).

intended meaning, and means that an utterance may have different meanings in different contexts.<sup>140</sup>

What makes context more complex is that individual participants can attempt to shape context in ways that further their own interests. This is why providing a concise definition of what context may mean is not an easy process. Goodwin and Duranti remind us that 'within interaction participants are faced with the task of accomplishing understanding' (1992:22). They argue that there is no obvious agreement among scholars on how context influences interaction.<sup>141</sup> They suggest that context is shaped by talk in the same way that talk is shaped by context, but they diminish the importance of other variables that influence interaction. Alshnatie (1970) and Astythyh (2005) similarly perceive that context does two things; firstly it determines a specific meaning, and secondly it excludes any other meaning that the utterance might have.

To sum up, context is an important factor in interaction and the importance of the relationship between linguistic, cultural and cognitive factors is woven by the context. It is crucial in determining the appropriate meaning of an utterance, and should be considered in relation to all interactants, which the core theories of politeness fail to do. One of Dilley's (2002) stresses the different implications of context. In interactions that involve strangers there may be miscommunication because of how context is defined, which is crucial to this thesis's argument.<sup>142</sup> In other words, he stresses the importance of context and challenges the theories and perspectives that view language as context-free grammars or structures of meaning. Dilley (2002) stresses that context can not be seen in terms of linguistic factors only; situational factors need to be considered in analysing any type of interaction.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Bouquet et. al. (2003) argue that 'each context has its own content, lexicon, and transaction rules but, although named with different identifier, the same unit can belong to two (or more) context' (2003:479).

<sup>141</sup> Goodwin and Duranti (1992) argue that 'context' involves a fundamental juxtaposition of two entities: (1) a focal event; and (2) a field of action within which that event is embedded' (1992:3).

<sup>142</sup> In the 'Language and Communication' special issue on "context", context is explained as being 'based on the premise of agents who share a common linguistic code and employ it as a means of communication. It is at the interface of any sociocultural linguistic performance where social, linguistic and cognitive contexts meet. It is a necessary condition for a successful performance of a communicative act to be tied to linguistic, cultural and cognitive surroundings' (Language and Communication: 2002:391).

<sup>143</sup> Taylor (1998) links context with the notion of circumstances, although he considers them as two different issues. He argues that 'circumstances and contexts do not have the same sorts of coordinates because of the factors relevant to determining the content of expression in context are not, in general, identical to the factors relevant to determining its extension at a circumstance once its context is fixed' (1998:275).

However, the view that individuals may have different interpretations of the same utterance makes relationships between such factors more complicated. Discussing the role of context in interaction is complicated and it does not seem that the theories of politeness discussed manage to consider it adequately. Context in cross-cultural interaction is not interpreted similarly, and might be distinguished differently by the interactants.<sup>144</sup> Mey (1993) argues that

the pragmatic approach has been often criticized for failing to account for the full role of context in the process of communication. One of the main arguments has been that by focusing on single speech acts, it underestimates not only the role of the situational and socio-cultural contexts as frames of reference for interpreting speech, but also the role of context in shaping the talk or text that emerges on any given occasion' (1993:58).

Thus, Mey's definition of context includes whatever factors may influence the meaning. He suggests that dependence upon certain speech acts in analysis does not allow for the analysis of all factors that may influence interaction, such as the previous and proceeding utterances or interactants' attitudes towards each other, etc. How context is analysed, then, differs from one individual to another and from one group to another, which makes establishing what is appropriate or inappropriate too complicated to be judged by analysing linguistic use in an utterance, especially in cross-cultural interaction where context is differently interpreted.<sup>145</sup>

#### **3.4.2.1.2 Defining context in a cross-cultural context**

In this section, I contend that a context of interaction is more likely to be interpreted differently by interactants in cross-cultural than in mono-cultural interaction. This is a

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<sup>144</sup> Grundy also distinguishes two types of contexts: presumptive contexts which he describes to be 'distal' or 'macro'; and contexts created in talk which he describes as 'micro' (2000:273). To him, context is related to meaning because it helps interactants to decide the intended meaning. The meaning of an utterance is related to the context it occurs in, which helps in deciding the intended meaning of what is said. Schegloff (1992:195) discusses two types of interactional contexts: the 'external' or 'distal' in one hand and 'inter-interactive' or 'discourse,' or 'proximate' on the other. The external refers to social life such as class, ethnicity, gender; on the institutional level such as legal order, economic or market order, and also ecological, regional, national, and cultural settings. The second type (inter-interactive/proximate), (Schegloff 1992) refers to stories, request sequences, the initiator of a conversation or topic, or its recipient, etc. Schegloff compares what shapes what goes on under social life with the sort of occasions or genre of interaction which participants make.

<sup>145</sup> Fadel (2004) argues that the linguistic text as a whole is a context which is linked not only by the modifications that the interactants make to their language but also those modifications that happen in their behaviour as well (2004:121).

crucial argument in this thesis.<sup>146</sup> In cross-cultural communication, the meanings that a word carries may be different, perhaps because the salient meanings of an utterance or a word are differently interpreted between cultures, which may lead to different inferring of what is intended.<sup>147</sup> The investigation of the problem of context necessitates an appreciation of the orders of knowledge that provide the conditions for the context emergence. For example, nowadays, the salient meaning of the word “love” “حب”, “houb” in Arabic (in Libya) refers to the romantic relationship between men and women, or between people who intend to marry. Because of this meaning, males rarely use it when talking about loving their close female relatives such as mothers, daughters, sisters or aunts, just as females when they talk about loving their close relatives such as fathers and brothers. Instead people use expressions such as “my sister is everything for me”, “اختي هي كل شي بالنسبة لي”, “Oukhtee heya koul shaae be anesba lee”, “You are the most important person to me”, “انت اهم شخص عندي”, “anta aham shakhes hendee”. Although context would reveal only the appropriate meaning for a particular word, a speaker may prefer to avoid using it in certain contexts, because of the other meanings that are associated with it. Thus, what an Arab would bring to the context of interaction is sometimes different from what an English speaker would.

Arab linguists such as Eben-Jenee (1952), Al-Saied (1995), and Albeseer (2004) concentrate on context as the basic reference point of what is meant by what is said. They agree that there is no way that the speaker can assume that the intended message has been understood until the listener responds in a way which reflects the same understanding of the context of the interaction. They argue that any interaction is influenced by the interactants’ understanding of the context, and this may lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. Takahayashi et. al. (1993) and Takahayashi (1996) also state that there are different factors that influence any context of communication, and as these are different for each interactant, they may allow different interpretations in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Dilley (2002) argues that ‘different constructions of the concept of context rest upon different bodies or forms of knowledge’ (2002:452).

<sup>147</sup> Rogers, et. al. (2003) argue that ‘the degree to which various strategies are interpreted as polite is ultimately determined by the communication context. In other words, politeness is situated and interpretative’ (2003:383).

<sup>148</sup> Takahayashi (1996) states ‘it is argued that redressive strategies (see Brown and Levinson, 1987) for refusal can be explained as two-way interactive, goal-oriented operations based on global and local knowledge of discourse’ (1996:228). She argues that ‘many things contribute to the interactional happenings in a conversation – the physical and social context, the history of the participants’ relationship, both verbal and nonverbal cue’ (1996:243).

Kakava (2002) investigates disagreement strategies at three levels of context; 1) conversation in Greek among family members, 2) conversation in Greek among friends, and 3) classroom discourses by Greeks in English. Using tape-recorded data, he argues that disagreement constitutes a social practice and that context is a crucial factor at the macro- and micro-level that shapes and reflects the various strategies that the interactants use.

Thus, we may conclude that context is important in analysing interaction because it plays a central role in determining the intended meaning. This view also raises the question "are factors that influence contexts of interaction different and understood differently in cross-cultural communication?"<sup>149</sup> If the context of an interaction is understood differently by interactants, then disagreement on what is appropriate may arise, and interactants' expectations of what is considered an appropriate strategy may also differ.

#### **3.4.2.1.2.1 Native and Non-native cultures in cross-cultural context**

Misunderstanding in native and non-native interaction can be felt at almost all levels and in different contexts. Children who have parents from different cultures usually experience difficulties in communicating appropriately with them, or in understanding what is appropriate in certain contexts of interaction. Because of the different cultures that parents have, they struggle in conveying the appropriate norms and values that their children need in certain contexts. According to Geer et. al. (2002) 'in conversation with children, parents make use of language in order to convey norms and rules governing both linguistic as well as social and cultural behaviour' (2002: 1782). For example, my cousin, who has two daughters with an English woman, swore at one of his daughters in Arabic. She asked him either to swear at her in English or to translate his swearing into English. When he asked her why; she said that she wanted to understand whether she needed to be sad, to cry, or to apologise. From the context, his daughter understood that her father was swearing at her, but she also wanted to understand what was said in order to react appropriately.

Similarly, Arabs in the west who meet with westerners, whether they are close friends or strangers, may experience misunderstanding or conflict in their linguistic use in certain contexts. For example, an Arab person, when first meeting a stranger, would expect to be

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<sup>149</sup> See chapter 5 for discussion.

asked what job s/he does, about how much money s/he earns, his/her religion, his/her tribe. Such topics usually crop up in first meetings among Arab strangers. In a meeting of female Arabs, it is expected for one interactant to ask another whether she is married, how many children she has, and, if the addressee has none, even the reason for not having children. An Arab's interpretation of the first meeting context with strangers differs from an English person's, and topics such as the above, where interactants can discuss issues and compare financial situations, religious background or cultural difference, are always appreciated among Arabs, but may not be among English when meeting strangers.<sup>150</sup> However, I have established that understanding context in an interaction is a crucial issue in determining what is intended by an utterance. In the next section, I will discuss how such facts are not adequately considered in the core theories of politeness, and that an analytical approach that considers context more deeply is needed to understand politeness in cross-cultural interactions.

#### **3.4.2.2 Politeness theories' weakness in analysing context**

As has already been discussed, problems in cross-cultural communication can be due to cultural differences, or different interpretations of the context of interaction. These two factors seem to be related, because culture influences how an interactant may interpret a context. As has already been shown, theorists of politeness claim that their models are universal, but in practice there are no clear explanations as to how these theories may work in analysing cross-cultural interaction.

Lakoff's rules of politeness do not explain how assessing the level or weight of politeness or a context is to be evaluated. Leech's principles provide more consideration of the differences between cultures; but how context is understood cross culturally is not clearly stated.<sup>151</sup> Leech's principle and maxims of politeness analysis concentrate on the speaker. This means that politeness is considered only on the basis of what is said. Interpretation,

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<sup>150</sup> In Arabic, an older person in a classroom would expect to receive different treatment compared to other young students when her/his teacher is talking to her/him. This may even put pressure on the teacher to avoid discussing certain topics, or if necessary to discuss these topics in a different way when an older person is with other students in the classroom. Verbal interaction between interactants from different cultures is subject to the understanding of the context. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that '... the choice of form determined primarily by the social characteristics of participants and setting, and thus the form's valence derives from the way in which it encapsulated those social determinants' (1987:280).

<sup>151</sup> Thomas (1995) states that 'Leech's principle allows us, better than any other approach discussed here, to make specific cross-cultural comparisons and to explain cross-cultural differences in the prescription of politeness and the use of Politeness strategies' (167-8). Although I agree with this view, I do not think that that is all we need to know in analysing cross-cultural interaction.

or how the other interactant's culture may influence the context, is not considered. Thus, applying Lakoff's rules of politeness, Leech's principles of politeness or Brown and Levinson's strategies might be adequate if the goal is to analyse isolated speech acts and compare them across cultures, but not for cross-cultural data in which politeness is judged through different understandings of contextual and cultural factors that influence interaction.

Brown and Levinson give the mathematical formula ( $D + P + R$ ) to assess the weight of a Face Threatening Act, and they claim that this is universal for evaluating the context of an interaction (See chapter 2). Although they agree that cultural and situational variations make a difference in working out Face Threatening Acts, they do not explain why. The cultural and contextual factors that influence what is considered to be appropriate or not in conversation are too broad to be included in a formula or specific strategies as Brown and Levinson attempt to do. Takano (2005) argues that

language is not only defined by the context but also helps define a context in which particular aspects of speaker-addressee relationships are foregrounded, and the distributions of power and rights/obligations are statistically negotiated or controlled by the speaker (2005:657).

This confirms that politeness cannot be analysed solely from individual utterances, and that we need a contextual pragmatic approach that considers the relationship between utterances in relation to their context, considering everything which might influence it. An utterance may sound appropriate in one context and not in another, and have different meanings in different contexts. As Mey (1993) argues, context is important in assigning proper values and also in dealing with pragmatic issues. Context determines what one can or cannot say and understand, and, in cross-cultural interaction, is influenced by more than one culture differently to the interactants. What a pragmatic approach may do, then, is help us to determine the intended meaning of what is said and what is communicated by interactants in relation to what influences the context.

### **3.5 A Pragmatic Approach**

The aim of this chapter, which is part of the core concept of this thesis, is to justify the need for a more pragmatic approach to the analysis of politeness instead of the models of the core politeness theories which I have discussed in chapter 2. The following is a

discussion of what a pragmatic approach might consider that has not been considered by the core politeness theories.<sup>152</sup> Identifying similarities and differences across cultures might enable us to recognise whether certain utterances are considered polite or not in relation to certain cultures, and this is what the core theories of politeness might do in a cross-cultural context. But whether an utterance is appropriate or inappropriate and why in some contexts in cross-cultural interaction cannot be identified. The main theories of politeness have largely depended on such an approach, and most of their investigations are built on analysing certain speech acts and finding similarities and differences between cultures. This is one of my main criticisms of the theories of politeness, and a significant reason for searching for a more applicable pragmatic approach. Christie (2005) points out that

as well as an awareness of inter-cultural variations, debates that have stressed the range of intra-cultural variation in politeness norms have triggered a need for a more “bottom-up” approach to analyses of interactive behaviour’ ‘Such debates stress the need for more sensitive and nuanced approach to context and social identity, and place greater emphasis on the collection and analysis of naturally occurring linguistic phenomena (2005:3).

Mills (2003a) also calls for a greater consideration of the possibility of multiple interpretations for utterances and stretches of interaction. She posits:

rather than assuming that each participant knows exactly what is going on in an interaction, we can allow that perhaps there is ambiguity in all interaction, and that certainty over intentions and interpretation is precarious, and is achieved only fleetingly (2003:244).

Mills' view is also supported by Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003), who explain that 'like other features of conversational practice, politeness cannot be understood by looking at isolated individual moves or speech acts' (2003:138). Thus an analytical approach should see utterances as sets of conversational strategies, analysed in relation to one another and to the context of the interaction. By such analysis we are able to identify the reasons for any pragmatic failure between interactants, especially in cross-cultural interaction.

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<sup>152</sup> Silva (2000) argues that 'the pragmatic aspects of a language (be it L1, L2, or Ln) seem to be very susceptible to changes, motivated by a mixture of psychological and sociolinguistic factors. Language proficiency and intuition are directly influenced by the environment in which we live and by all languages and cultures we are in contact with. Thus, the way we feel and use languages is in continuous adaptation throughout our lives' (2000:128).

A pragmatic approach allows us to find out how a certain utterance may have more than one interpretation between interactants. It does not allocate definite meanings to what is said, or define meanings with any certainty. Thus, a speaker might feel they are appropriate but the hearer may believe that s/he is impolite. Christie (2000) points out that 'describing communication in terms of intentions and expectations is not the same thing as arguing that people are entirely in control of what their utterances signify' (2000:80). Pragmatics is dynamic, can analyse any cross-cultural context and consider its variables in relation to other interactional contexts.<sup>153</sup> It provides new insights into linguistic investigation by understanding the relationship between culture and context.

However, pragmatics has received some criticisms, even from pragmaticists. According to Mey (1993) pragmatics has failed to account for the full role of context in interaction; for example, analysing discourse through speech acts is criticized in that it does not consider the role of context, a point with which, to some extent, this research agrees.<sup>154</sup> MacMahon (1996) also mentions a criticism of pragmatics, namely that it 'cannot deal with literature, or can only deal with it by marginalizing it, and therefore that there is something wrong with pragmatics' (1996:209). Similarly, Christie mentions the marginalisation of pragmatics in her book Gender and Language. She mentions three assumptions: 1) that pragmatics is unable to address either the social or cultural contexts of language use, (2) that pragmatics is predicated on a liberal-humanist conceptualization of the individual and (3) the obscurity of pragmatic terminology (2000:3). In response to these criticisms, Christie argues that 'even though the first two objections might appear to have been partially valid in the past, they have never been entirely valid, and are even less so today' (2000:23). The criticisms by Schiffrin (1994) that pragmatics draws on hypothetical contexts and not real language, and that the communicative meanings of utterances are derived through general assumptions, are not applicable now. It is clear that pragmatics analyses more areas in interaction than traditional methods. Christie (2000) maintains that

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<sup>153</sup> This claim is also taken as a weakness in pragmatics. It is claimed that pragmatics does not have a clear-cut focus like other fields of linguistics; its principles are vague and fuzzy; it does not do any more than what semantics already covers. But in defending that, we can argue that analysing interaction to study the unsaid meaning or speech act has been introduced through pragmatics.

<sup>154</sup> Mey argues that 'one of the main arguments has been that by focusing on single speech acts, it underestimates not only the role of the situational and socio-cultural contexts as frames of reference for interpreting speech, but also the role of context in shaping the talk or text that emerges on any given occasion' (1993: 58).

pragmatics has begun to theorise the relationship between language use and the impact of socio-cultural factors on the different types of knowledge that play a role in interlocutors' attributions of meanings to utterances (2000:7).

In summation, treating culture as a defined term, without clearly defining it, is problematic. This is one of the main criticisms that Brown and Levinson's model has received (See chapter 2; Watts, 2003). The other issue is that theories of politeness are culturally biased and context is not clearly considered. A pragmatic analysis may lead us to consider more cultural differences in analysing utterances. A more pragmatic analytical approach is needed because it provides a method of defining and analysing the structure of conversation, that is, understanding utterances in relation to each other. Non-native speakers of a language may not be aware of the reasons behind a misunderstanding with a native speaker. Pragmatic analysis allows us to determine these reasons and discover whether they are caused by linguistic, cultural or contextual difference. Pragmatics is seen as the best method of analysis, especially for issues such as politeness<sup>155</sup> and appropriateness in intercultural communication, where it is not always possible to understand the intended meaning through linguistic analysis.

### **3.6 Pragmatic failure and politeness**

In this thesis, I argue that the core politeness theories do not provide analysis of pragmatic failures or misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction, because they do not consider all of the interactants' cultures and their understanding of the context of interaction. Pragmatic failure cannot be fully investigated by analysing individual utterances in isolation. Analysing an utterance in relation to other utterances explains whether there is pragmatic failure or not between the interactants. Taleghani-Nikazam (2002) states that 'by analysing isolated sentences, one cannot capture the interpersonal situation and the context in which pragmatic transfer and miscommunication occur' (2002:1822). It is sometimes difficult to determine the intended meaning of an utterance, if the utterance is not analysed in relation to other utterances and their context.<sup>156</sup> Valdes (1986) argues that 'speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution,

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<sup>155</sup> In pragmatics in general, politeness is seen as a set of conversational strategies that a speaker can use to avoid a conflict with his/her addressees (Escandell-Vidal, 1996). Escandell-Vidal's definition is rational and maybe universal, but what is considered to be a set of conversational strategies that help in avoiding conflict is usually something disagreed between the interactants in cross-cultural conversation.

<sup>156</sup> Hua et. al. (1998) argues that 'much of what is regarded as appropriate gift offer acceptance behaviour depends on the context of its occurrence, especially the occasion, the motive and interpersonal relationship between the gift offeror and the recipient' (1998:87)

their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve' (1986:119). Ascertaining the reasons for misunderstandings might be more complicated than just recognizing the illocutionary force of a particular utterance, as different social knowledge and different linguistic strategies influence interaction and culture plays a role in constructing this knowledge and how it influences speech.<sup>157</sup>

Regarding the complexities of social interaction and literary interpretation, Adegbite's (2005) view is that 'pragmatic failure is a case of misinterpretation of utterances in communicative interaction' (2005:1473), although he reasons also that pragmatic failure does not necessarily lead to breakdown in communication. Similarly, Thomas (1983) states 'pragmatic failure is conceived in the general sense as the "inability to understand what is meant by what is said" (1983:91). Considering pragmatic failure in a cross-cultural context, Kasper and Blum-Kulka point out that there are three major approaches to the study of pragmatic failure. One of these is contrastive pragmatics which 'involves the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparison of speech act realization patterns throughout identifying similarities and differences between the pairs of group of languages studied' (1993:12). Although they discuss different types of misunderstanding, they mainly concentrate on pragmatic failure at the pragmalinguistic<sup>158</sup> and sociopragmatic<sup>159</sup> level. Bialystok (1993) notes that 'when listeners fail to understand the intention of their speakers, conversation and sometimes more than just conversation break down' (1993:43). Interactants may carry with them their past experiences, which may lead to different interpretations of what is intended.

Communication between strangers of different cultures may involve more difficult pragmatic failures.<sup>160</sup> An utterance may cause embarrassment to one of the interlocutors which may lead to pragmatic failure. It can cause a breakdown or even conflict if both

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<sup>157</sup> Like Cole et al (1975) Platt and Platt (1975) argue that 'an important factor in the communication between S (speakers) and R (hearers) participants is their role relationship. In some speech events, roles are fixed by the social status both participants hold in the community (e.g. the speaker may be judge, government minister or important business man – the hearer may be a person of lower social status, or vice versa) or the two participants could hold positions of a different status in an employment situation (e.g. director-secretary, accountant-typist). However, there are also the indefinable indirect roles that people assume in everyday conversation' (1975:17).

<sup>158</sup> Pragmalinguistics refers to the more linguistic 'end' of pragmatics.

<sup>159</sup> Sociopragmatics studies the way conditions on language use derive from social situations.

<sup>160</sup> Winder (2005) points out that 'encounters between strangers, meanwhile, are rarely straightforward; the mingling of peoples has always been accompanied by fear, suspicion and animosity. Migration has never, not for a thousand years, been easy. People have rarely been treated as well as they hoped or deserved, and roll-call of names who have suffered the worst excess of bigotry is long' (2005: xiii)

interactants presume that they are being appropriate in their production and interpretation.<sup>161</sup> Pragmatic failures, because of contextual or cultural variability, can be observed in different types of speech act such as apology, compliment, agreement and greeting, among others. Here are some examples which emphasise that there are pragmatic failures in cross-cultural interaction because of cultural and contextual differences that the core theories of politeness cannot analyse or account for. These examples also confirm the need for another analytical approach.

### 3.6.1 Indirectness and pragmatic failure

The issue of indirectness is one of the main causes of pragmatic failure in interaction, whether cross-cultural or mono-cultural, and which Brown and Levinson link to politeness and impoliteness. Tsuda (1993) states that 'in conversational interaction, indirectness is realized in various ways such as avoidance of confrontation, joking, overstating, or understanding' (1993:11). Blum-Kulka (1987), criticising Brown and Levinson's view of indirectness, states that indirectness and politeness are not necessarily linked, as they suggest. She believes 'politeness and indirectness are linked in the case of conventional indirectness, but not always in the case of non-conventional indirectness' (1987:132).<sup>162</sup> But this criticism does not mean that indirectness, if not linked to politeness, does not cause pragmatic failure. Every culture has its own understanding of what indirectness is and what its function is in an interaction. According to Wierzbicka (1985) 'terms such as "directness" and "indirectness" are much too general, too vague to be really safe in cross-cultural studies' (1985:175). Wierzbicka (1985) also argues that, although indirectness may mean politeness, different cultures may have different language structures and considerations for indirectness and politeness. She suggests that strategies such as spontaneity, directness, intimacy and affection as opposite to indirectness, distance, tolerance and anti-dogmatism are differently interpreted across cultures. These issues are culture-specific, and it is not easy to decide whether a direct message may convey closeness. Yeung Lorrita (2000) explains that the Chinese are indirect because they are

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<sup>161</sup> Van Dijk (1997) argues that 'languages around the world provide their speakers with alternative modes for the achievements of communicative goals' He goes on to argue that 'in essence, research on the pragmatics of politeness aims at explaining contextual and cultural variability in linguistic action' (1997:50).

<sup>162</sup> Blum-Kulka describes conventional indirectness as any accepted practice in the use of language that is inferred or understood from an utterance; and non-conventional indirectness is as inferring the utterance from the context where and when an utterance is performed.

hierarchically-oriented, and recognize the differences between people, acting accordingly to maintain social equilibrium.<sup>163</sup> Jucker (1988) suggests

an indirect formulation, incurring additional processing effort for the addressee, might be more relevant in a given situation because it makes some face-threatening assumptions less manifest than a direct formulation would have done (1988:384).

Thus, to Jucker, indirectness is linked to politeness even when it requires more effort from the hearer to understand. Despite the risk that the addressee misunderstands, this risk seems less important than being accused of inappropriateness or impoliteness.<sup>164</sup> The other problem about indirectness in cross-cultural interaction is that, even if the intended message is understood, the reason for being indirect may not be.<sup>165</sup> The striking cultural differences, which affect both the conditions of the use of a formula and the interpretation associated with it, clearly demonstrate that there are different ways of being indirect but there is no guarantee that the intended message or politeness will be understood in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>166</sup>

### 3.6.2 Request across cultures

Requesting across cultures is differently produced and interpreted, and in some cultures it is performed as a command, but it is still considered polite. According to Blum-Kulka (1992) an Israeli woman of British origin would classify other Israelis as impolite, simply because she would not make a request in the way they request from each other.<sup>167</sup> She emphasises the issue of cultural differences and says that such differences may lead to pragmatic failure between interactants. In Arabic, in some situations, if a speaker is direct in his/her request, and does not give the addressee the choice or freedom to reject the

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<sup>163</sup> This is also argued by Brown and Levinson (1987), but for a different reason. Brown and Levinson claim that there is a straightforward relationship between indirectness and politeness. They base their theory on two assumptions that people are typically caught between wanting to achieve their own goals and the desire to avoid infringing their partners' rights. (see chapter 2)

<sup>164</sup> According to Thomas (1995) 'indirectness has three motives: the desire to be interesting; the desire to increase the force of one's message; and the recognition that the speaker has two (or more) competing goals - generally a clash between the speaker's propositional goal and his or her interpersonal goal' (1995:146)

<sup>165</sup> Blum-Kulka et. al. (1985) emphasise the problems that cross-cultural interaction may involve, such as the different understandings of indirectness.

<sup>166</sup> Escandell-Vidal (1996) argues 'if the interpretation of indirect illocutions is based on general, universal inference mechanisms, as claimed, then this would be a rather unexpected result. The degree of variation shown by different cultures poses, therefore, a strong challenge to the universality hypothesis' (1996:631).

<sup>167</sup> Blum-Kulka (1992) states that 'an Israeli woman of British origin, having lived in Israel for 7 years, expressed her amazement at the kinds of favours Israelis ask from each other, favours she would never ask' (1992:274).

invitation, then this is considered a sign of closeness, regardless of the relationship between the interactants. There are some conversational situations where speakers are expected to use bald-on-record requests with their addressees, even when they are complete strangers. For example, in Arabic, requesting to be served in governmental institutions is usually achieved using a direct strategy. According to Brown and Levinson, such strategies are FTAs, as they do not involve any indirectness, and consequently are impolite.<sup>168</sup> Arabs explicitly express their intention when they are requesting, which is different from the English choice of an interrogative form. Wierzbicka (1985) argues that

in English, if the speaker wants to get the addressee to do something and if s/he does not assume that s/he could force the addressee to do it, s/he would normally not use a bare imperative (1985:135).

Her argument concludes that interaction in cross-cultural settings is always complicated, and the heavy restrictions which English people place on the use of the imperative cannot be accepted as politeness in all cultures.<sup>169</sup> However, across cultures, there are different strategies for making different speech acts, and the appropriate strategy depends on the context of the interaction.

### **3.6.3 Apology across cultures**

Apologies are performed and interpreted differently across cultures. In some cultures, apology is not always overt. Spencer-Oatey states that the issue of spoken apologies across cultures provides good evidence for not seeing Brown and Levinson's model as appropriate for analysing politeness, especially in cross-cultural interaction. Even if apology is defined in the same way across cultures, we still have to face the differences in the strategies used to deliver it, and the importance of it being understood by the listener. Al-Zumor (2003) argues that 'the performance of Arab learners of English differs from their performance in their Arabic L1 and from the way native speakers of British English

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<sup>168</sup> Wierzbicka (1985) argues that English, compared with Polish, places heavy restrictions on the use of the imperative and makes extensive use of interrogative and conditional forms. She argues that linguistic differences are associated with cultural differences. Her analysis shows that the English use indirect requests to ask people to do something and the imperative is mostly used in commands and in orders. Although this claim is not wholly accurate, English people generally tend, in requesting, to avoid the imperative or to combine it with interrogative and/or conditional forms, sometimes even when the addressee is a very close relative or friend.

<sup>169</sup> Wierzbicka (1991) explains that in Polish and Russian, a formula like 'Can you pass me the salt?' would be understood as a genuine question, and not as a polite request, as it would be in English or Spanish. Poles and Russians find this question form strange because they assume that it is evident that they can pass the salt, and therefore they puzzle over the intended meaning.

and American English realise an apology speech act' (2003:3).<sup>170</sup> Tanaka et al (2000) also argue that Japanese and Westerners hold similar stereotypical conceptions of apologetic behaviour. But they still argue that the Japanese apologise more frequently than English people, and that apology, in Japanese, does not necessarily mean acknowledging a fault.<sup>171</sup>

Similarly, clear apologies, which are expressed linguistically, between very close people, such as father and son, sound odd in Arabic. The closer the interactants, the less they expect to apologise to each other linguistically. Thus, native speakers, when interacting with non-native speakers, should consider that indirect use of language and implicit utterances might be differently interpreted in cross-cultural interaction. The analysis of its pragmatic aspects indicates that native speakers (when speaking with non-native speakers) need to consider indirect politeness, and how utterances might be interpreted.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter supports the overall argument of the thesis that the core theories of politeness do not provide us with an adequate analysis of what is considered polite or impolite in cross-cultural analysis. Thus, shifting from how culture and context are treated in the core politeness theories to a more pragmatic approach gives more flexibility in how we approach politeness analysis in cross-cultural interaction. A pragmatic politeness theory should consider issues such as the shared cognitive environment of the interaction. It should be built on what happens between interactants and explain the possible interpretations of what is said.

On a cross-cultural level, politeness should not only be studied by comparing similarities and differences between cultures; how interactants understand each other and what

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<sup>170</sup> Tanaka (1991/1999) uses a production questionnaire; Kotani (1997) uses in-depth interviews to investigate apology. Both of them agree with Trosborg's (1987) view. He discusses apology strategies and then analyses native / non-native communicative behaviour in terms of these strategies. He discusses the forms that apology may have and divides them into two types of apology: direct apology and indirect apology. His main three different strategies are a) minimising the degree of offence; b) acknowledging responsibility; and c) explaining. His study shows that for the selection of direct apology, the influence of dominance and social distance is not significant. In addition, his findings show that the parameters of social distance and dominance do not result in an increase in the number of direct apology, nor in the intensifications of these apologies (1987:152). According to him, 'politeness as defined by Brown and Levinson has a Western ethnocentrism embedded within it. This becomes clear when one attempts to apply the model to Eastern cultures where the group or society may take precedence over the needs and wants of the individual' (1987:134).

<sup>171</sup> Concentrating on apology, Trosborg (1987) argues that 'appropriate social behaviour patterns are built on the norms which constitute polite behaviour and face-saving maxims are believed to lie at the heart of face to face interaction' (1987:147).

influences the context of the interaction are also important, especially given that misunderstanding happens even between interactants from the same culture. In other words, a theory of politeness should be able to account for why and how participants classify certain linguistic structures as 'polite' and others as 'impolite'. It might be that the politeness of any structure is open to evaluation by the interactants in relation to their context and cultures (Watts, 2003).<sup>172</sup>

The next two chapters review research that has dealt with understanding/misunderstanding and politeness between interactants belonging to different cultures in relation to the argument of the thesis. The next chapter, in particular, focuses on the notions of politeness and misunderstanding and the role of context. It concentrates on misunderstandings between strangers, and in particular between interactants belonging to Arab and English cultures, and investigates the problem related to native and non-native speakers of English in understanding what is intended by performing an utterance in a certain context.

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<sup>172</sup> Relevance Theory (RT) is a cognitive theory that considers social factors when it investigates the reasons behind certain linguistic stories. Background or contextual information are considered in RT to a much greater extent than in other models, and it offers an analysis of non-demonstrative inference processes. (see chapter 4) Sperber and Wilson (1997) state, as a theory of communication, Relevance Theory analyses communication as an inferential process, and thus provides a more realistic model than the code model, which has been accepted explicitly or implicitly by most social scientists' (1997:145).

## **Chapter 4: Understanding and Misunderstanding Politeness**

As I have already discussed, politeness is, first of all, a process of understanding what is intended by an utterance in relation to the context of interaction, and not only understanding what is literally said. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first review the relevant literature that deals with understanding and misunderstanding. I will then discuss analysing misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. Under this section, I will discuss explicatures and implicatures, and misunderstandings between Arabs and English people. In order to link understanding and politeness, I will discuss theories that investigate understanding in relation to the context of interaction such as Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1993, 1995), and Integrational Linguistics (Toolan, 1996). The reason for discussing such theories is to develop a contextual, pragmatic approach to analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction. I am arguing that using a theory of cognition such as Relevance Theory enables us to examine the process of understanding in cross-cultural interaction, especially between strangers, and establish a link between understanding and politeness. In particular, I will concentrate on investigating language misunderstanding and politeness between Arab speakers of English communicating with native speakers, and what influences production and interpretation of utterances. My aim is to establish what is needed to analyse politeness, showing that politeness is not only what the linguistic choices or strategies used may mean to the speaker, but also what the hearer understands in a particular context of interaction.

### **4.1 Understanding**

As argued in the previous chapters, misunderstanding is likely to happen in interaction, whether cross-cultural or intracultural. Regardless of what happens in an interaction and however language is used, most conversations are built on the objective of mutual understanding, and, if interactants misunderstand each other, we need to find the reasons. The main reason for discussing understanding is that, as argued in chapter one, politeness is a process of understanding what is intended rather than just what a certain structure may mean. I argue that understanding politeness is too complex to be limited to simply understanding what certain structures or linguistic choices mean, and that in order to understand it in cross-cultural interaction, an approach that investigates the process of understanding is needed.

There are different ways of investigating understanding between interactants. Thomas (1995) sees understanding between interactants on two levels. She distinguishes between “utterance meanings”, i.e. the literal level of the speaker’s words, and “the force of the utterance” i.e. what is actually meant, and argues that communication relies upon understanding both of them at the same time.<sup>173</sup> Thomas identifies potential for misunderstanding in the case of ‘a hearer who fails to establish the utterance meaning correctly or may fail to understand the force the speaker intended’ (1995:20). But the type of misunderstanding she considers unusual is when an interactant understands the force of what is said, but not the meaning. Grundy (2000) discusses ‘entailment’ and ‘implicature’ when investigating the issue of how we understand utterances. He posits that ‘in order to solve the problem of how we understand speakers to mean things that they don’t exactly say, we need first to draw a distinction between “natural” and “non-natural” meanings’<sup>174</sup> (2000:73). (See chapter 3)

Thus, in this section, I will discuss how an addressee chooses between different implications that an utterance might have, and how the different factors that influence the context of the interaction lead to different assumptions on the part of the interactants. First, I will discuss the understanding of literal and intended meaning. I will then discuss shared knowledge and understanding of the intended meaning, and how hearers infer the intended meaning, before moving on to discuss background knowledge and understanding. The main goal of this section is to show that understanding is a process of working out what is intended and communicated and not simply what is said.

#### **4.1.1 Understanding literal and intended meaning**

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) discuss understanding beyond literal meaning. The difference between utterance and intention is the main concern of their Speech Act Theory. Their main point is ‘that language is used not to convey beliefs about the world, but to perform action, and that these actions must be described within a framework of social institutions’ (Blakemore,1987:62). Similarly, Grice (1975) holds that what a word ‘means’ derives from what speakers intend by uttering it, and that hearers are expected to

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<sup>173</sup> Similarly Zaydan (1985) and Jahfar (2004) argue that interlocutors cannot understand the intended meaning if they have not understood the literal meaning and can distinguish between them.

<sup>174</sup> Natural meaning is a meaning that is presented on every occasion when an expression occurs; non-natural meaning is variable on different occasions. It is only sometimes associated with a sentence from which it may be inferred. (Grundy 2000)

understand this. (See chapter 2) The subtleties of intended meaning (or illocutionary force) are usually the cause of misinterpretation.<sup>175</sup>

Wilson (1993) also discusses the issue of what is said and what is communicated. He holds that 'there is a gap between knowing what a sentence of English means and understanding all that a speaker intends to communicate by uttering it on any given occasion' (1993:336), and Christie (2000) points out that the goal of any communication is the hearer understanding what the speaker intended, not the hearer's understanding of sentence meaning (2000:8). A hearer may not be able to distinguish between the intended and literal meanings, or may be unable to choose between two or more possible meanings. Thomas discusses the overlap between the two, and concludes:

when in interaction we have resolved all the ambiguities of sense, reference and structure – when we have moved from abstract meaning (what a particular sentence could mean in theory) to what the speaker actually does mean by these words on this particular occasion – we have arrived at contextual meaning or utterance meaning (1995:16).

Thomas seems to be suggesting that there is only one intended meaning of any utterance. This is not the case, as some have more than one implication in addition to their literal meanings.<sup>176</sup> Thus, according to what Kecskes (2000/2004), what triggers literal meaning is vocabulary and grammar, whereas what triggers implied meaning is dynamic and changeable, meaning that there is no one fixed implicit meaning for an utterance.<sup>177</sup> This means that even recognizing an implicit meaning may not be sufficient to recognize the intended meaning.

#### **4.1.1.1 Shared knowledge and understanding the intended meaning**

Gumperz (1995) suggests that 'lack of shared background knowledge leads initially to misunderstandings' (1995:120). This means that misunderstandings are not confined to interactants from different backgrounds; people from the same background or culture also

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<sup>175</sup> In relation to intended meaning and literal meaning, Verschueren (1999) suggests that 'if pragmatics looks at language as a form of action anchored in a real-world context, or what is perceived as such, one of the most immediate consequences is that it must pay attention to types of meaning that go beyond what is "given" by the language form itself, or what is literally "said" (1999:25).

<sup>176</sup> Fauconnier (1997) asserts the view that grammar reflects only a small number of general frames of the meanings that an utterance may have (1997:190).

<sup>177</sup> The importance of the intended meaning as opposed to the literal, is discussed by Thomas (1995). She examines court sessions, where the judge depends more on the literal meaning of certain words and expressions.

experience problems if they have no shared knowledge about what is discussed. Scollon and Scollon (1995) introduce the notion of shared knowledge to analyse the understanding of intended meaning in conversations. They divide shared knowledge into two types: actions and situations; relationships and identities. For the first type, they believe that 'shared knowledge about these components of such communicative situations is the framework in which successful communicative action takes place' (1995:18). Sperber and Wilson (1995) seem to challenge this view. To them, shared knowledge is what is relevant to the shared goal of the interaction. (See discussion of Sperber and Wilson later in this chapter) For the second type, Scollon and Scollon note that

participants make certain unmarked assumptions about their relationships and about the face they want to claim for themselves ... participants also undertake a certain amount of negotiation of their relationships as a natural process of change in human relationships (1995:35).

They aim to explain how shared knowledge works to reduce the ambiguity inherent in communication. Asking the question, 'What is successful interdiscourse ... communication?' (non-native speakers of English with native) they claim that, because of the ambiguous nature of language, which causes difficulties in interdiscourse, communication may not express the intended meaning of the participants. However, they state that this is not the case when the interactants share assumptions and/or knowledge about the world.

#### **4.1.1.1.1 Hearer's inference and the intended meaning**

As Adham (1993) and Saleh (2003) state, a person who wants to communicate, either verbally or nonverbally, assumes that what they want to communicate is of relevance to their audience and worthwhile for them to process (See section 2 in this chapter). But communication is not only about what the speaker intends by using an utterance. It is also about what the hearer understands.<sup>178</sup> Blakemore argues that 'indeed, a hearer's interest in what the speaker means will often lead him/her to ignore the fact that his/her words mean something else' (1992:5). Blakemore (1992) points out that

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<sup>178</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1993), in their discussion of relevance in interaction, and also Grice (1975) and Blakemore (1992), discuss the issue of understanding from the angle of discovering the meant meaning.

what the speaker means is a set of propositions, one of which is expressed directly through the meaning of the words he uses and the others conveyed indirectly and derived through inference' (1992:7).<sup>179</sup>

Blakemore assumes that it is the speaker's responsibility to facilitate the hearer's inference, and make it possible for the hearer to infer the intended message. But she also maintains that a hearer is responsible for discovering the intended message depending on their ability to supply contextual information. She rationalises that

the hearers use reasoning or inferring in recovering what is communicated. The inference of the hearer depends on contextual information, that is, information which is not derived from the meaning of the word uttered but from the knowledge of the word. In each case the inference the hearer makes appeals to the assumption that the speaker has met or has tried to meet certain standards (1992:12).<sup>180</sup>

Blakemore's position is that a hearer uses his/her relevant experience or observation to come to many interpretations of an utterance. Cushner and Brislin (1996) believe that 'more often than not, an unintended misinterpretation of events or a misunderstanding of the subjective meaning given to a particular behaviour is at the base of the problem' (1996:13). However, inferring in cross-cultural interaction seems to be more problematic, a view held by Scollon and Scollon, who assume that understanding is a question of recognizing the uttered discourse system (1995:248). Thus, understanding of the intended meaning is as important as the syntactic or phonological meaning (see Coupland et. al, 1991a). This view indicates that communication works better the more the participants share assumptions and knowledge that help them to infer what is relevant, a situation which is less likely to occur when interactants are strangers belonging to different cultures.

#### **4.1.1.2 Background Knowledge and understanding**

Understanding what is intended is usually influenced by the background knowledge that speakers and addressees bring from their own environments or cultures. Gumperz (1982) recognizes the importance of background knowledge and social meaning in avoiding misunderstanding. He provides a wide variety of examples of how diversity affects interpretation, pointing out that 'socio-cultural conventions affect all levels of speech

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<sup>179</sup> See detailed discussion of Relevance Theory in this chapter.

<sup>180</sup> Davidson (2002) ties this in with cross-cultural contexts when he explains that 'the difficulty in conducting conversations through an interpreter is precisely the cumbersome process of constructing reciprocity in cross-linguistic discourse' (2002:1298).

production and interpretation' and that 'we must abandon the existing views of communication which draw a basic distinction between cultural or social knowledge on the one hand and linguistic signalling processes on the other' (1982:186). Schiffrin emphasises the issue of the different types of communicative knowledge that are required in understanding, and one of these is social knowledge (2003:67). She holds that

two aspects of communicative knowledge closely related to one another are expressive and social: the ability to use language to display personal and social identities, to convey attitudes and perform actions, and to negotiate relationships between self and other (2003:54).

When there are different parameters for interlocutors in evaluating the meaning of an utterance, there is scope for different interpretations. The search for what is meant might be fruitless. Mey (1993) declares that

When interlocutors come to the communicative event from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with possible mismatches in cultural and contextual presuppositions - as well as in the interpretive frameworks for the linguistic means of signalling pragmatic meanings - the chances for miscommunication abound. Such miscommunication in turn can lead to mutual negative stereotyping, and have grave social implications for further inter-group relations (1993:60).

Scollon and Scollon (1995) agree with the claim that interactants may interpret the same linguistic utterance differently when they do not share the same experience, and may not even be aware of this. According to them,

Where two people have very similar histories, background, and experience, their communication works fairly easily, because the inferences each makes about what the other means will be based on common experience and knowledge (1995:11).<sup>181</sup>

Thus, in cross-cultural communication, as in any interaction, meaning is a shared responsibility between speakers and hearers, but disagreement between intention and interpretation, caused by differing background knowledge, among other reasons, can be expected, and may affect understanding. As Yule (1996) states, 'two people growing up in the same geographical area, at the same time, may speak differently because of a number of social factors' (1996:190). If interactants' background knowledge is different, then misunderstanding may be more likely because their production and interpretation of

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<sup>181</sup> It is not clear whether Scollon and Scollon mean people belonging to the same, or different cultures, as long as they share similar experiences of life.

utterances are influenced differently, culturally and contextually. In the next section I will discuss misunderstanding and its relation with politeness.

## 4.2 Misunderstanding

In a similar manner to my discussion of understanding, I will discuss misunderstanding in order to establish that politeness is a process of understanding what is intended by the speaker, and simply understanding only the literal meaning might lead to misunderstanding. Misunderstanding what the speaker intends may lead the hearer to accuse the speaker of being impolite. In this section, I will first discuss misunderstanding because of linguistic inadequacy. I will then discuss misunderstanding through cultural and contextual variations. Finally, I will discuss politeness/impoliteness and misunderstanding.

Linguists and sociologists provide different interpretations of the term misunderstanding.<sup>182</sup> Valdes (1986) assumes that misunderstood statements risk imposing on or annoying the hearer. This creates misunderstanding, such as when hearers feel as if they have been asked to believe something they already know, or do not agree with. However, this is not possible without a clear concept of understanding in language use which may be partially or totally deviant from what the speaker intended to communicate.

Hirst et. al. (1994) developed two models to address misunderstanding between participants. One covers situations where both conversants know of the referent, and the other where the speaker knows but the recipient does not. They claim that their model combines intentional and social accounts of discourse to support the negotiation of meaning.<sup>183</sup> They divide recognized misunderstanding into two types: self-misunderstandings<sup>184</sup> and other-misunderstandings.<sup>185</sup> They argue that 'other-

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<sup>182</sup> Bazzanella and Damiano (1999) point out that besides comprehension in general, misunderstanding involves a number of different phenomena, such as: reference, the relation between lexical item and sentence; mutual knowledge, the background knowledge or shared knowledge; and misconception, that is, misunderstanding the intended meaning. In relation to misunderstanding because of pragmatic level, they investigate illocutionary force and indirect speech acts, that is implicature, irony, metaphor, relevance, topics and plans. They distinguish between understanding, misunderstanding and non-understanding, and argue that, unlike understanding and misunderstanding, non-understanding means no comprehension between interactants. Eid (1994) also maintains that analysing authentic examples will give us insights into how misunderstanding occurs in interaction.

<sup>183</sup> Hirst et. al. (1994) maintain that 'people are, in general, quite successful in their use of language. That is because they have strategies for coping with their linguistic limitations. If they cannot understand what is being said to them, they seek clarification and try to work things out' (1994:214).

<sup>184</sup> Self-misunderstandings are those that are both made and detected by the same participant.

<sup>185</sup> Other-misunderstandings are those that are made by one participant but detected by another.

misunderstandings occur when a participant recognizes that if one of his/her own acts had been interpreted differently the other's utterance would have been the expected response to it' (1994:215). However, neither Bazzanella and Damiano's (1999) nor Hirst et al (1994)'s works consider misunderstandings where one interactant thinks that the other is impolite or acting inappropriately. They point out that although interactants are very good at noticing when a conversation has gone awry as a result of one party misunderstanding the other, they do not seem to distinguish between misunderstandings caused by language inadequacy, cultural or contextual differences.

#### **4.2.1 Misunderstanding due to linguistic inadequacy**

Generally, it is argued that cross-cultural misunderstanding can be due to either language misuse, or a lack of knowledge of the appropriate language. However, linguistic inadequacies are not always the cause of misunderstanding. According to Dittmar (1976) misunderstanding between cross-cultural interactants may happen because of the lack of language competence by one party. He states 'the speech of non-native speakers is more limited in its competence than the speech of native speakers' (1976:4). Dascal (1999) stresses that assumptions, especially if inaccurate, cause misunderstandings between interactants in cross-cultural interaction. He explains, in such situations, the hearer relies on inference, which may result in an incorrect interpretation.<sup>186</sup> However, the intended meaning of a particular utterance is understood in relation to factors such as cultural variations, context, intentional cues, cultural assumptions and interactants' experiences, and not only through understanding linguistic utterances. Investigating cultural and contextual variations leads to a better understanding of interaction, than only depending on a linguistic analysis.<sup>187</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Misunderstanding due to cultural variation**

Gumperz (1971), Eckert (2000) and Eid (1994) all emphasise that cultural factors are no less important than linguistic factors. Discussing communication problems between different cultures, Eid (1994) perceives that

cross-cultural communication problems can be observed not only between speakers of different languages or in conversation between native and non-native speakers.

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<sup>186</sup> A hearer relies more heavily on inference, even when processing the most direct utterances.

<sup>187</sup> See chapter 5 for a discussion.

Even within the same language, we find different cultural frames belonging to different varieties (1994:28).

Thus, miscommunication is similar to misunderstanding where one of the interactants does not understand what is meant, whether because of linguistic, contextual or cultural factors. Coates argues that '(mis)communication across cultures must take into account the cultural fabric within which interaction takes place' (1998:388).

Coupland et. al. (1991b:11) identify levels of analysis whereby people make a different assumption about what is possible because of different understandings of the context. Two of these levels are because of cultural differences. They are as follows:

At the first level, miscommunication resides in group and cultural phenomena, and may be accountable in terms of code-based or other differences in behaviours, beliefs, or construals. They state that

culture is seen as having communicative consequences for participants. The salient dimensions of context in which interaction becomes miscommunicative are assumed to be status, one's (and one's group's) relationship to a power base or structure, and affiliation' (1991:15).

At the second level, miscommunication is seen from an ideological view, i.e. 'what defines interaction sequences as "miscommunication" communicatively and sociolinguistically, is that they implicitly or explicitly disadvantage people or, more likely, groups, while proposing themselves as normal, desirable, and even morally correct' (1991:15). Coupland et. al. anticipate the importance of intercultural differences in any type of interaction. They argue that not all miscommunication is disruptive, unless it is perceived to be so by one of the interactants.

The first level is crucial in cross-cultural interaction. The more interactants are strangers to each other, the more possibility there is for misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding starts with interactants from different groups and extends to interactants from different cultures. I see the second level raising the importance of culture and ideology in communication in general. As discussed already, when interactants have different cultural backgrounds, they may use different criteria in performing and interpreting utterances.

They may also be restricted by different cultural and communicative factors, which may influence the production and interpretation of what is said.

#### 4.2.3 Misunderstanding due to contextual variations

Linguists disagree about the process that speakers use to convey their messages accurately, and the means they exploit to infer the intended message.<sup>188</sup> Bazzanella and Damiano (1999) discuss the levels at which misunderstandings may arise and suggest that they may be due to different understanding of the context, a mismatch also mentioned by Sperber and Wilson (1995:16). If they belong to different cultures, this may lead to different interpretations of the context. Eid (1994) also offers a distinction between means, (linguistic, visual, cognitive) and purpose, (action function, referential function, predicative function). She shows how misunderstanding can be due to problems in either or both distinctions. She argues that 'the "cognitive means", such as habits and inferential patterns, cannot be applied automatically, but are almost context-dependent presumptions which, when inappropriately applied, lead to misunderstanding' (1994:19).

Discussing the role of context in interaction, Coupland et. al. (1991b) refer to contexts as a cause of misunderstanding. They too propose two levels caused by different understandings of the context: The first level is when miscommunication is taken to be pervasive, inherently constituted in the nature of symbolic meaning-exchange (1991:12). They justify that by the limited code and channel capacities of inferring context; the interplay between linguistic meaning and context; and the need for cognitive heuristics<sup>189</sup> in both encoding and decoding. The second level relates to the communicative adequacy in a particular interpersonal context (1991:14).<sup>190</sup> In the first level, according to Coupland

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<sup>188</sup> Although culture is part of the context of the interaction, it is worth discussing this aspect and its influence separately from context, especially as in cross-cultural interaction it can be considered as a crucial influence on context.

<sup>189</sup> "Cognitive heuristics" are replicable methods often discovered in the field of complex problem solving or learning and provide a high efficiency in performance. Cognitive heuristics are what the strategies that reduces the complexity of making probabilistic judgments, but sometimes they lead to a systematic errors.

<sup>190</sup> The other two levels of miscommunication that Coupland and Jaworski (1997) speak about are related to participants' awareness of the imperfection and personal inadequacy in social environment. They are as follows: Level II. Participants may show some low-level awareness of the imperfection and lack of effort of interaction, recognized to involve both management and compromise. They argue that 'the primary goals of interactants are not the creation of perfect performances, but rather performing so as to avoid undue ambiguity, unpleasantness, threat and confrontation'. (p14). Level III. Miscommunication takes on implications of personal inadequacy and therefore, perhaps, blame. They see such levels involving different interactional and psychological communicative problems. According to them 'whether poor communication skills, unwillingness to communicate, bad temper, personality problems, or some other individual difference is assumed, these attributes typically lead to down-graded evaluations of misperforming participants' (p14).

et al, the interplay between linguistic meaning and context might be differently associated or perceived, because of the interactants' different backgrounds. The second level would cause more confusion in cross-cultural communications, as it relates to interpersonal context where every interactant has his/her own understanding of the context influenced by his/her personality or experience.

Hence, analysing misunderstanding requires the recognition of all the factors mentioned above, such as context, culture, shared knowledge and the cultural backgrounds of the interactants, as well as personal feeling and intentions. Blakemore suggests that 'the hearer's knowledge of what the speaker's words mean only provides a clue as to what the speakers mean, and they must build the speaker's meaning from this clue together with their knowledge of the context' (1992:6). This makes clear how a hearer may infer his/her speaker's meaning, but it does not explain how this happens if interactants have different interpretations for the same context of interaction.

#### **4.2.4 Politeness / impoliteness and misunderstanding**

One of the aims of politeness is maintaining the equilibrium of the interpersonal relationship between the interactants. But what is considered as polite linguistic behaviour in one culture may not be in another. Linguistic behaviour should convey the intended message, and be recognized by the hearer. Hirst et. al. (1994) discuss whether a person misunderstands the other because of a failure to recognize the intended meaning, consequently thinking their interlocutor inappropriate or impolite. They argue that

participants in a dialogue bring to it different beliefs and goals. These differences can lead them to make different assumptions about one another's action, construct different interpretations of discourse objects or produce utterances that are either too specific or too vague for others to interpret as intended. This may lead to non-understanding or to misunderstanding (1994:215).

Similarly, Dascal (1999) maintains that there are situations where what is meant is implicit because a speaker thinks that it would be inappropriate to be explicit, and that too might lead to misunderstanding. For example, from my work experience as an interpreter in a medical setting, in Arabic, when a problem is of a sexual nature, the speaker usually tries to explain it to their doctor implicitly. The aim of such behaviour is mitigation of the shame of speaking about such matters frankly; which in some contexts is considered as

impolite. It also aims to show respect to the addressee by not mentioning sexual terms explicitly in front of him/her. Fraser (1980/1981) also sees the need to be implicit in order to mitigate or ease the awkwardness of the situation for the hearer. But he does not discuss whether this helps in avoiding misunderstanding or not.<sup>191</sup> Eelen (2001), discussing the relationship between the speaker's behaviour and politeness/impoliteness, explains that

It is true that the speaker can aim for politeness but miss because the hearer has a different understanding of what politeness is... But impoliteness is no longer confined to such cases of genuine misunderstanding, as the hearer's evaluation can also be argumentatively inspired (2001:112).

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, some linguists try to develop universal models of interaction to analyse misunderstanding and politeness. For example, Leech (1983) comments that 'indirect illocutions tend to be more polite (a) because they increase the options, and (b) because the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be' (1983:108). Searle (1975) considers an utterance to be indirect when it has more than one possible interpretation, or more than one illocutionary force. Coupland et. al. (1991b) stress that

because meaning resides in the interaction of linguistic form and social context, exchanges of meanings operate under inherent constraints and communicative acts are creative in compensating for the explicitness and indirectness of speech act and text (1991:5).

Both Levinson (1993) and Coupland et. al. (1991b), link indirectness with politeness and consider that not understanding the reason for being indirect between interactants might lead to misunderstanding, and possibly an accusation of impoliteness. In some cultures, the interpretation of an indirect utterance act seems to be closely tied to the degree and type of relationship between the interactants, and not every indirect utterance signifies politeness. However, this is not the only link between politeness and misunderstanding. As has been discussed, not inferring the intended meaning for any utterance, whether indirect or not, might lead to misunderstanding, and the accusation of impoliteness.

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<sup>191</sup> Although they have not openly discussed the relationship between politeness and misunderstanding, Goffman's notion of face (1967), Lakoff's rules of politeness (1973), Leech's maxim of tact (1983), Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and face-saving strategies (1987) all discuss how implicit or indirect utterances are sometimes preferred to mitigate or ease the situation to the hearer, or appear polite. (see chapter 2 for discussion) Sometimes, being polite or impolite and being implicit are inseparable in English, though they are not in other languages.

### 4.3 Analysing Misunderstanding in Cross-cultural Interaction

Analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction has always been a controversial issue to some scholars because of the misunderstanding of what is intended that might occur between interactants. Moeschler draws attention to erroneous evaluation of the communicator's abilities and preferences by the addressee. He argues that 'the nature of the intended meaning is the key to understanding pragmatic misunderstanding in general, and to intercultural understanding in particular' (2004:10). Similarly, Testa (1988) discusses the issue of conversational rules between people from different communities. He believes that 'conversational rules ... as organizational criteria followed by participants engaged in spontaneous interactive talk are intended to represent the basic form through which speakers from different speech communities interact in spontaneous verbal exchanges' (1988:285-286). He suggests that using cultural differences as a source of identifying some of our interactional specifications is important in avoiding misunderstanding, and that

focus on cultural variations may lead to the classification of some interactional phenomena as culture-specific or as bearing different cultural values just because their occurrence is still too obvious and not clearly explained in one's own culture' (1988:286).

He presents an analysis of the distribution and linguistic features of interruptions in British English and Italian conversation. He analyses the differences between these cultures and how that affects communication, seeking possible answers to problems of misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. Thus, how interactants are influenced by their cultures is different, which, in some contexts, would lead to misunderstandings. Cultural difference is a reason why interactants, in cross-cultural interaction, infer different explicatures and implicatures to utterances, which may lead to misunderstanding.<sup>192</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Explicature / Implicature and misunderstanding

In producing or interpreting politeness, interactants depend on the principle of relevance, which would extend from understanding the explicature generated from an utterance to the possible implicatures that an utterance might give rise to in relation to the context of the interaction. For both interactants, there are weak and strong implicatures depending on

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<sup>192</sup> Coates and Cameron (1988) point out that 'the heavy restrictions on its [language] use must therefore be attributed to culture rather than semantic factors' (Coates 1988:27).

what is communicated, and interactants' interpretation. Moeschler (2004) states that the distinction between weak and strong implicatures in an utterance is the main focus of his analysis of the examples he provides in his article 'Intercultural pragmatics: a cognitive approach'. To him, the strong implicature in an utterance is what is important for the addressee to arrive at a relevant meaning, and the explicature helps reach the intended message.<sup>193</sup> Speakers are usually aware of the different meanings that their utterance may convey, but at the same time hope that their addressees will come only to the intended meaning. Giora (2003) refers to a different understanding that 'speakers do not always intend addressees to look for a fully specified interpretation and that comprehension, on their part, is not always after a fully specified interpretation' (2004:117).

Moeschler (2004)'s discussion of pragmatic misunderstandings is based on assumptions supported by Relevance Theory, namely the ostensive-inferential<sup>194</sup> character of linguistic communication and the difference between explicature and implicature. He hypothesises that 'misunderstandings are caused not by difficulty in drawing the intended implicature, but primarily by lack of access to the correct explicature of the utterance' (2004:1). Moeschler concentrates on the importance of the hearer's linguistic knowledge, but hypothesises thus:

the greater the audience's mastery of the speaker's language, the greater the risk of intercultural misunderstanding. The reason is that speakers tend to attribute to non-native speakers cultural background which is in due proportion to their own mastery of language and therefore do not necessarily imply the right explicature of the utterance (2004:1).

Moeschler describes 'the domain of intercultural pragmatics as those facts implied by the use of language that do not require access to mutually manifest knowledge, but to specific contextual knowledge necessary for understanding the speaker's intention' (2004:2). He refers to Sperber and Wilson (1995), who argue that, in intercultural communication, speakers make false choices on the explicature/implicature status of their intended meaning (2004:4). He restricts his discussion to ostensive-inferential communication to show how

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<sup>193</sup> Green (1998) suggests that weak implicatures become strong 'by an act of will; they become strong through textualization' (1998:16).

<sup>194</sup> According to Sperber and Wilson (1995) ostensive-inferential communication involves a) the informative intention (the intention to inform an audience of something); and b) the communicative intention (the intention to inform the audience of one's informative intention). Ostensive-inferential communication involves the production and interpretation of stimuli, and communicator intentionally provides evidence that s/he intends the audience to arrive at certain conclusion

the Principle of Relevance plays a crucial role in the recovery of the speaker's informative intention.<sup>195</sup>

However, not every semantic meaning is an explicature. It is only if it is intended to be communicated. i.e. in irony, the semantic meaning is not communicated as an implicature. To Sperber and Wilson (1995) an explicature of an utterance is when the hearer constructs an appropriate hypothesis about explicit contents, and an implicature is the assumption that the speaker tries to make manifest to the hearer without expressing it, and is recovered by inference.

An example of a failure to understand the intended implicature of an utterance can be seen in an interaction between an Arab, originally from Palestine, and a native speaker of English in a programme on Radio 4 (2002). The Arab, a journalist, had spent a long time in English speaking countries, and the English person was a broadcaster. When the broadcaster tried to interrupt, the Arab journalist kept on saying "you just listen", "you just listen". The broadcaster answered that he was not there only to listen (Radio 4, Sep 2002). It is clear that the English broadcaster failed to recognize the intended message because of different understanding of what the appropriate way of asking not to be interrupted while speaking. In Arabic, when someone says to his/her interlocutor who tries to interrupt/speak to him/her,

فقط	لي	استمع
. fakaṭ	lee	estameř
Only	to me	you listen
You just listen to me.		

This is equivalent to

"please, wait until I have finished, and then you may speak"

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<sup>195</sup> Moeschler's empirical domains on intercultural pragmatics, to some extent, agree with Farch and Kasper (1983), Kasper and Blum-Kulka's (1982), Blum-Kulka et. al. (1989) and Blum-Kulka and House's (1989) argument that pragmatics is not the same across cultures. They argue that learners, unaware of the fact that the pragmatics of their native tongue do not match that of the target language, may transfer pragmatic strategies from their first to their second language; even when they are aware of the differences, they may still formulate wrong hypotheses about the pragmatics of the second language (1982: 57). Moeschler proposes a model for pragmatic misunderstanding based on the hierarchy of levels of comprehension and on the Relevance Theory comprehension procedure. He discusses the basic explicature, high-level explicatures, implicated premises, strongly implicated conclusions, and weakly implicated conclusions.

or

“please let me finish”

The pragmatic meaning does not seem to be understood by the broadcaster in the above example. According to Sperber and Wilson, hearers may stop at the first interpretation that satisfies their expectation of relevance. This means that 'a speaker who wants her/his utterance to be as easy as possible to understand should formulate it so that the first interpretation to satisfy the hearer's expectations of relevance is the one she intended to convey' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). But what happens in this instance is that the speaker fails to formulate his utterance to convey what he intended as the first interpretation or the strongest implicature to his hearer. The culture of the speaker influenced his linguistic choices in this cross-cultural context. In Arabic, the utterance “you just listen to me” gives rise to the implicature "Please, let me finish" or "wait until I have finished" as the strongest implicature. The English broadcaster did not understand this intended meaning. Rather, he understood the literal sense (explicature), and therefore answered by saying “I am not here just to listen”, showing he did not understand the pragmatic meaning behind “you just listen, you just listen”.<sup>196</sup> What has happened in this interaction is that the hearer's understanding of the context is different from the speaker's, each being influenced by their own cultures about what is considered as appropriate in such a context of interaction. The hearer's goal is to construct a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning that satisfies his understanding of the context, which is at the same time an appropriate hypothesis about the explicit content of the utterance; this is the explicature of the utterance.

However, interactants vary in the ways they interpret utterances, and different factors play a role depending on the illocutionary forces of the utterance. A speaker may use a different language pattern to another interactant, or the addressee may infer a different implicature from the speaker's utterance. How what is said leads listeners to define one

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<sup>196</sup> However, “you just listen” could give rise to various implicatures including “you just listen for the moment, until I have finished” or, “your role is just to listen and mine is to speak”. I think that there is an element of pragmatic inferencing beyond the linguistic decoding on the part of the speaker, but it seems that the broadcaster prefers to respond to the literal meaning of the linguistic forms. In Arabic, it is acceptable to ask someone to give you the chance to complete in an imperative way such as in the above example. Of course there are some other strategies, but such an imperative strategy is culturally acceptable and would not lead to an answer such as the answer of the broadcaster of the above example. However, the broadcaster's reply ‘I am not only here to listen’ does not rule out the possibility that he has interpreted the journalist's utterance correctly.

implicature as weak and the other as strong is controversial, and might lead to misunderstanding or even conflict in cross-cultural interaction.

### **4.3.2 Misunderstanding between Arabs and Westerners**

Misunderstanding between Arabs and Westerners can be of different orders and arise for different reasons. They can be caused by linguistic differences (word or strategy choice), cultural differences, different understandings of the context of interaction, or by the influence of stereotypes. In the following section, I will discuss misunderstanding in relation to these two different cultures and how the reasons detailed above might lead one interactant to consider another inappropriate.

#### **4.3.2.1 Linguistic strategy and misunderstanding**

As discussed in the previous chapters, a certain strategy might lead to misunderstanding between interactants because of the different meaning that it has to different interactants, for example, the strategies used when officials meet, or when citizens talk to their leaders. It seems to me that Cohen (1987) stereotypes Arabs when he asserts that 'the Arab proclivity for exaggeration may not only offend, it may also lead to a serious loss of credibility, real warnings being overlooked as overblown rhetoric' (1987:37-38). This is in some cases true, an obvious example occurring during the Israeli-Arab war in 1967.<sup>197</sup> But this is not the case in all types of interactional situations; political or military contexts may require different strategies from social situations, which are also differently understood between interactants. There are situations in which Arabs minimize what they are expected to do in comparison to some other cultures. For example, in male/female interactions, exaggeration or overstatement from any of the interactants may cause misunderstanding that might be negatively interpreted; in these cases, interactants are more likely to appear very specific in their interaction in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretation of what is said as being a strategy to be closer to the other or convey a covert desire to start a relationship.<sup>198</sup>

Cohen sees cultural differences changing according to context. He discusses social desirability as a factor that causes cross-cultural misunderstanding, explaining that 'the

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<sup>197</sup> In the Arab world, Arab defeats are attributed to either the overstatements of military leaders about the ability of their forces, or to their failure to tell the truth to their chiefs and presidents, for fear of admitting their failures.

<sup>198</sup> See discussion in chapter 5.

Arab dislike of giving offence and of disappointing his interlocutor may result in promises being given that cannot be kept and of statements being made of which the accuracy is in doubt' (1987:38). However, misunderstanding the strategy used, or the reason for using this strategy, might lead to misunderstanding between Arabs and English people. I agree with Cohen that whereas an Arab considers giving promises is no more than hoping for the best and being nice to others by not disappointing them, some Americans see this as dishonesty and insincerity. Disappointing others when they make requests by saying "No" or "Sorry" in an all-Arab interaction may lead to the speaker being accused of not being co-operative. Misunderstanding of these strategies would lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction, because they are interpreted differently.<sup>199</sup> Thus, there are reasons for using certain strategies which are sometimes culturally determined, and when these are not understood by all interactants, misunderstanding may occur.<sup>200</sup>

#### **4.3.2.2 Misunderstanding and Indirectness**

As discussed above, indirectness does not necessarily indicate politeness or conflict avoidance, as Brown and Levinson argue. Thomas (1995) argues that indirectness takes longer for the speaker to produce and for the hearer to process. But this is not always the case. Indirectness is contextual, which means that it might only take longer for one of the interactants to process or produce. What indirectness means is not always the same to the interactants, and does not mean the same across cultures. Because of this, indirectness may lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. There are two reasons why indirectness may lead to misunderstanding: first, the hearer not understanding what the speaker means by his/her utterance; and the second, the hearer not understanding what the speaker means by being indirect. The two reasons may lead the hearer to consider the speaker impolite because of misunderstanding the reason behind the indirectness. MacMahon (1996) holds that Sperber and Wilson's theory accounts for the ways in which different kinds of indirectness achieve their effect. She points out that

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<sup>199</sup> Generalization in Cohen's article on the strategies of Arab interactants is not convincing. Offence and disappointment are situational and/or contextual issues, and even if we agree that culture affects how and when people disappoint each other, and that it is a factor that usually hinders communication between interlocutors from different cultures, it is not always possible to generalize from one interactional situation to others. Thus, even if there are clear differences between Arabs and Westerners, they might be a result of certain contextual factors and cannot be generalized.

<sup>200</sup> Moerman (1996) discusses how cultural strangers organise and make sense of their world. He argues that 'invoking a culture or a language cannot account for something being said. We must investigate the particular and peculiar circumstance that meshes with general rules and that requires our investigation' (1996: 148).

instead of seeing indirectness as a flouting of conversational principles, as in Grice's account, the interpretation of cases of indirectness, like that of other utterances, is said to follow a search for an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance (1996:211).

Thus, by implication 'indirectness' is not a linear process, as Thomas suggests. In Arabic, for instance, there are different interpretations of indirectness and what is considered as impolite/polite. I consider the issue of indirectness to be more complicated than they are considered to be in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), in which indirectness is judged on performance. In their interpretation of indirectness Brown and Levinson argue that the closer you are to your interactant the more direct you can be. In Arabic, for example, there are topics, such as marriage, which a son or daughter cannot discuss with their father directly. Some topics, even between close friends, need to be discussed indirectly, and the illocutionary forces of the utterance, whether apology, request, blame etc., must also be performed indirectly. In such situations indirectness is subject to the context, culture and the topic.

Van Dijk (1997) holds that cultures determine people's linguistic strategies. For example, they differ in determining when and how one should be 'indirect' to others. We may be unsure about how an utterance will be understood by our addressee, and whether the intended meaning will be perceived when we deliberately use an indirect strategy for the purpose of appearing polite. Because an utterance is shaped by understanding of the context, sometimes interactants convey meanings indirectly, assuming that their interlocutors will grasp their meaning by inference rather than by explicit statements.<sup>201</sup>

#### **4.3.2.3 Misunderstanding Politeness priority across cultures**

Another misunderstanding because of cultural differences is how politeness is given priority over goals in certain context. On a political level, for example, Arabs seem to interact with Westerners in the same way as they do amongst themselves. They see the performance of rejection in an appropriate style as more important than achieving their goals. To Arabs, politeness is a higher priority than goals of a meeting with Westerners, and much of what is interpreted as irrelevant to Americans or Westerners seems to be important to Arabs. This is clear when Arab officials visit Westerners. Reporting such

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<sup>201</sup> Thomas argues that 'there are times when people say (or write) exactly what they mean, but generally they are not totally explicit (1995:56). Words and sentences contribute to our understanding as well as other factors such as culture and context (see chapter 3 and 5 for discussion).

visits, Arab media broadcasts speak explicitly about how a certain leader was received, and who received him, but what has been achieved is not given emphasis. Thus, to Arabs, the social aspects are of primary importance; what was discussed and whether the objectives of the visit were achieved are secondary. (If an Arab observer wants to understand what was discussed and what objectives were achieved, then s/he needs to listen to an independent or foreign broadcast such as BBC World, CNN, Aljazeera, etc.)<sup>202</sup>

This contradictory view of what is important makes cross-cultural political relations, or negotiations between Arabs and Westerners, problematic, regardless of who is visiting whom. This is clear in what takes place in the relationship between the Saudis and the Americans. The Saudi government believes that the American government will consider them as cooperative because of their conduct when they meet, and the Americans think that, regardless of what is said or done, as long as the objective of their relationship has not been achieved, the Saudis are uncooperative. An example of this is Prince Abdulla's visit to USA in 2002. Whereas he thought that Saudi Arabia was doing well and coming into line with the Americans to beat terrorism, the Americans accused him of not doing enough, and asserted that the Saudi school curriculum was inspiring terrorism. The Saudi Arabian Broadcasting agencies spoke about how their prince was received and glorified, whereas channels such as BBC, CNN and Aljazeera spoke about the disagreement between the two parties. The views that the Arabs and Westerners have about receiving visitors and what is appropriate in a business visit, and what should be given priority is different, which might hinder the process of communication between these different cultural groups. In such a context, the Saudis, because of such treatment by the Americans, would consider them as not respecting them, and this might even be an obstacle for achieving future plans.<sup>203</sup> Cohen is justified in assessing why Arab officials complain about how Westerners treat them. He states 'Arabs give the priority to the type of congregation they receive, the time they are given, and the way their demands are met or rejected; whereas it is not the case with Westerners' (1987:44). Even when Westerners feel that they have done everything

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<sup>202</sup> Arabic broadcasts are expected to be lenient when they talk to, or talk about an important person in the country, which is entirely different to Western broadcasting. For an Arab broadcaster it is not polite (and may be not acceptable) to ignore how a leader was received and by whom, or to speak about any political failures.

<sup>203</sup> According to Cohen, 'the Arab need for personal contact with his/her interlocutor is associated with an outlook that defines relationships in affective and familial, not instrumental terms' (Cohen, 1987:41). Cohen also states that 'when Arab representatives meet, whether as friends or rivals, they do so as brothers. They embrace, hold hands, acquire a strong physical sense of the other's presence' (Cohen, 1987:41). This is generally what happens.

possible to behave appropriately, Arab officials usually claim that Westerners do not know how to respect them. Arabs would expect to be received for as long as they want, with no time limit imposed, and they wish to hear praise and compliments. The different parameters that interlocutors depend upon in their interaction may lead to misunderstanding. Thus, Cohen's argument that cultural differences usually hinder communication is important, and can be applied to what happens between Arabs and Westerners.<sup>204</sup>

#### 4.3.2.4 Cultural norms and misunderstanding

Wierzbicka, in her article 'Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts', discusses how misunderstanding may happen because of differences in cultural norms. She holds that 'cultural norms reflected in speech acts differ not only from one language to another, but also from one regional variety to another' (1985:146). Similarly, Hammad et al. (1999) point out that practices, behaviour and attitudes, while subject to common influences, are not universal (1999:2). They argue that the role of cultural norms cannot be ignored as they influence every component in an interaction and consequently allow for a variety of strategies according to what is culturally acceptable.

Various Arab scholars describe how Arabs are restricted by their own cultural norms when communicating with others. For example, Arab linguists such as Farghal (1992/1993), Farghal and Borini (1997) and Al-Saied (1995) remind us that an interaction in Arabic is highly influenced by Arab cultural norms which are built upon religious foundations. For example in the following expression:

الله يساعذك  
Yessařek Allah  
Help you God  
God help you

Arabs would use this expression when one person leaves another's company. It is similar to the expression "Goodbye", "Take care" or "God Bless you" in English. But if such an

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<sup>204</sup> Although Cohen (1987) discusses the effect of cross-cultural factors on international diplomacy, and how such factors hinder communication between the elites of different nations, he also sheds light on the issue of miscommunication between different cultures. Cohen explains what causes misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultures, and how international relations reflect the issue of misunderstanding. He presents a comparison of two specific cultures at the level of international relations and their respective notions of appropriate behaviour.

expression is said by an Arab to an English person, it would not be understood as “Goodbye”. To an English person, the expression “God help you” is likely to mean that the speaker assumes that s/he is suffering or is heading for disaster. e.g. ‘if you walk this street alone at night – God help you’. In spite of such a difference, Arabs would still use such an expression in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>205</sup>

An Arab speaking in English may try to act as native English speakers do in certain situations, but, because of cultural constraints, not in others, even if this causes misunderstanding or is classified as inappropriate. For example, an Arab would not allow his/her daughter to talk with her friends as the English do, or swear, or invite her English friend to a pub just because they are in England or communicating in English. On the other hand, an Arab would not mind greeting the English as they do and not in the Arabic way.<sup>206</sup>

Valdes (1986) argues that ‘at the base of intercultural understanding is recognition of the ways in which two cultures resemble one another as well as ways in which they differ. Resemblances usually surface through an examination of the differences’ (1986:49). His argument is that we need general discussions and theories regarding cultural differences for consideration of how specific cultures relate to the target culture. Valdes also stresses the importance of considering behaviour and values when studying culture, and supports the claim that we need to find ways to compare cultures, and analyse misunderstandings because of cultural differences in cross-cultural communication.

#### **4.4 Theories of understanding and cross-cultural interaction**

As I have already discussed, politeness is not only performing a strategy or structure that if used, would convey politeness. Politeness might be implicitly performed and it is a matter of the hearer understanding what is said by the speaker as it is intended, and not merely understanding the literal meaning. Investigating the theories of understanding in relation to politeness is an important issue in analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction. In chapter two, in order to provide an alternative approach to analysing politeness, I discussed

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<sup>205</sup> See discussion of religion in chapter 5.

<sup>206</sup> Levinson argues that ‘there are cross-situational constraints enjoining appropriate social decorum, while there are others appropriate just to specific interactional moments or specific kinds of cultural events’ (1983: 45). This means that culture constrains or influences communication in different ways; from what is appropriate for certain specific interactional situations, to what is general and left to interactants to decide how to be appropriate.

the post-Brown and Levinson theories of politeness that concentrate on culture and context. I have also discussed Watts' use of Relevance Theory in analysing politeness. In this section, I will discuss theories of understanding in order to provide a better approach to analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction, and I will concentrate on using Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory to analyse the link between politeness and understanding. .

There are two different views, as discussed earlier in this chapter, that discuss the relationship between literal meaning and pragmatic meaning. One argues that analysing the literal meaning is necessary to understanding the pragmatic meaning, and the other that, given sufficient context, interactants can understand the pragmatic meaning without first understanding the literal. In this section, I discuss Toolan's integrational linguistic approach (1996) and Relevance Theory (1995) in order to reassess the current models used in analysing speakers' use of language and hearers' interpretations in performing politeness. The theories that I am discussing in this chapter hold that interaction depends heavily on both literal and pragmatic meanings, and that people select linguistic items in order to make it easier for the hearers to understand their intended meaning according to the context. They suggest that hearers depend on speakers' linguistic choices and the context of the interaction in order to understand pragmatic meaning, a view which we need to build on to politeness in cross-cultural interaction more adequately.

#### **4.4.1 Toolan's Integrational Linguistic Approach**

Toolan tries to link linguistic and pragmatic issues in the discussion of the notion of understanding. He suggests that 'the determination of an utterer's meaning in using a particular sentence can be seen to rest, typically and heavily, on principles or phenomena that are in a sense both semantic and pragmatic' (1996:29). I agree with this view, as, cross-culturally, misunderstanding is possible even if grammar or language structure is known to all participants.

Toolan (1996) introduces 'an integrational linguistic approach'<sup>207</sup> to language, stating that 'language is one of the most essential and significant of human attributes, alongside and interwoven with memory, imagination, bodily experience, and mortality' (1996:1). He introduces the theory of integrationalism, which does not accept that text and context, or

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<sup>207</sup> Integrational approach, in general terms, means that 'language should be set in the context of other forms of human behaviour' (Mills, 2003a:34)

language and world, are distinct and stable categories. He calls for a radical change in contemporary theorising about language and communication, arguing that attention to a language's inevitable contextual embeddedness can be of explanatory value.

Toolan holds that interaction and context include speakers' and hearers' shared knowledge. He emphasises Lyons's view (1968) that the context of a spoken utterance includes 'a particular spatiotemporal situation which includes the speaker and hearer, the action they are performing at the time and various external objects and events' (Lyons, 1968, cited in Toolan, 1996:6). Toolan builds on Lyons's argument, maintaining that 'the context of an utterance must also include interactants' shared knowledge of what has been said earlier. That is, the context of an utterance must include accumulated cotextually derived information' (1996:6). He claims that there is nothing that can be literal, or free of context, and that 'free meaning' is in fact a reflection of social interests. He argues that,

Although a conceptualization of literal meaning as a basic, determinate, and context-free meaning of words and sentences is necessary for standard linguistic treatment of the semantics and pragmatics of a language, in practice no such domain of context-free meaning exists ... the literal meaning is itself a highly contextualised notion, that is a cultural and ideological construct very much designed to characterise some language practices as orderly, authorised, and authoritative (and others as not so); it is therefore well suited to and reflective of societal interests in literacy, order, and authority (Toolan 1996:25).

Toolan sees literal meaning as essential to any account of language, and some contrast between that and the speaker's meaning is essential. He notes that the 'speaker's meaning may include literal meaning but go beyond it, as in the case of direct speech, may depart from it, as in the case of metaphor, or may be the opposite of it, as in the case of irony' (1996:25). To Toolan, the distinction between speaker and linguistic meaning is important for listeners to recognise in order to successfully accomplish appropriate speech. He considers the notion of literal meaning as essential in constructing the intended meaning in our communication, and crucial in reaching the illocutionary force of an utterance. He comments:

literal meaning might be the conventional meanings of words of a language and the meaning of sentences in that language where any sentence meaning is derived from a complex synthesis of the meaning of its composite words ... each speaker carries in memory a fluid field of probable and possible meaning of every word of which they have had some experience (Toolan, 1996:37).

From a cross-cultural point of view, Toolan's view that there is a specifiable literal meaning of certain words may be challenged to some extent.<sup>208</sup> There are some words and expressions that are used differently across cultures. Toolan also argues that, in cross-cultural interaction, understanding depends on the knowledge of all interactants; language is interwoven with the imagination and experience of interactants, and language and world are not distinct and stable categories. Such views hold potential for different understanding and interpretations for speakers from different cultures.

The relationship between the speaker's utterance and the intended meaning of an expression in a discourse is addressed in Toolan's integrational approach. He emphasises the role of an individual's meaning in understanding the whole meaning. He states:

likewise, for any discourse, the meaning of the individual sentences of the discourse can be combined to form the meaning of the discourse. Arguably, this program of semantic analysis can provide a reasonable account of the conveyed meaning (that is, what the listener understands upon hearing the sentences uttered in context) of many sentences in English (1996:38).<sup>209</sup>

The factors that participants depend on in cross-cultural communication may vary. Even if the same factors influence the context, such as religion, gender, stereotype, etc, these factors might give rise to different interpretations. In addition, there is no guarantee that the factors that have an influence on cross-cultural interaction would receive the same attention or prompt the same interpretation. To Toolan, the meaning of an utterance is defined in relation to speech situations, which is different from semantics, which is defined in relation to the literal meaning of the word not to the context.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Toolan (1996) argues that 'there is a specifiable literal meaning of words such as I, here, etc, and without this the derivations and determination of a particular context-bound referents and values for these words, in actual utterances, would be impossible. Literal meaning, such as I, they, etc., is not affected by the particular reference of an indexical or the truth or otherwise of a particular statement in context: the truth conditions may vary, but the literal meaning cannot (1996:30).

<sup>209</sup> This view is similar to the criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory in that it focuses on speakers and individual strategies. '... Thus, politeness should be seen as a set of strategies or verbal habits which interlocutors set as a norm for themselves or which others judge as the norm for them, as well as being perceived as a socially constructed norm within particular communities of practice' (Mills 2003a:109).

<sup>210</sup> Toolan states that 'pragmatists hold that meaning can be fully determined only by adducing certain delimited aspects of context for adequate and coherent determination, most word and sentence meanings themselves being determined in relation to aspects of interaction that will emerge only from within the relevant speech encounter, rather than being given essentially by lexicon or grammar'(Toolan 1996:39).

Thus, we may conclude that Toolan's integrational approach makes us rethink critically the current model of analysis of producing and interpreting politeness. He argues that 'the integrationist seeks above all an "inward" account of language, as opposed to a detached abstracted and idealized one' (1996:22). Interaction is influenced by the interactants' history in producing and interpreting utterances. An interactant's experience with individuals or groups influences interaction, but individuals' feelings of solidarity and reliance on what is stereotyped about certain groups of people influence interactants' production, interpretation and evaluation of the context. Toolan also considers intentionality as indispensable in the process of understanding what is meant by an utterance. Judging whether a word or an utterance is appropriate or inappropriate is contextual, because interactants usually try to make sense of what happens during interaction.

#### **4.4.2 Relevance Theory and Communication**

Sperber and Wilson's (1993) Relevance Theory sets out to explain how communication can be achieved. They argue that people, in a conversation, turn their attention to what is relevant to them, and can consistently distinguish relevant information from irrelevant or less relevant information. Interactants decide which is more relevant depending on their understanding of the context, and there is no way of controlling exactly which context someone will have in mind at a specific moment.<sup>211</sup> To Sperber and Wilson (1993), communication is inferential in that the audience infers the communicator's intention from evidence provided for this precise purpose.<sup>212</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1993) point out that their model is a result of the Gricean approach to provide direct evidence for the information to be conveyed and of one's intention in conveying it. But, they claim that Grice's model does not discuss the notion of 'shared information' or how it is exploited in communication, while its relevance and how it is achieved are also not clear. They suggest the term 'mutual knowledge' and state that 'a true communicative intention is not just an

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<sup>211</sup> See chapter 3 for more discussion of context

<sup>212</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1986/93/95) discuss the code model, in which communication is achieved by encoding and decoding messages, and the inferential model, in which communication is achieved by producing and interpreting evidences. They debate the value of upgrading either of the models. They explain that the code model and the inferential model are each adequate to a different mode of communication. They argue that 'while assuming that the code model provides the framework for a general theory of communication, and hence for a theory of verbal communication, most pragmatists have described comprehension as an inferential process. Inferential and decoding processes are quite different. An inferential process starts from a set of premises and results in a set of conclusions which follow logically from, or are at least warranted by, the premises. A decoding process starts from a signal and results in the recovery of a message which is associated to the signal by an underlying code. (1993:9).

intention to inform the audience of the communicator's informative intention, but an intention to make the informative intention mutually known to the communicator and the audience' (1993:31).<sup>213</sup> They criticise Grice, seeing the process of cognition as being more complicated than just conveying intention from speaker to interlocutor; rather, the process of cognition involves consideration of all the factors that influence communication, whether contextual, cultural or personal. Sperber and Wilson also add to Grice's implicature what they call ostensive or non-ostensive uses. They posit that

Ostensive-inferential communication provides evidence of one's thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance. It implies such a guarantee because humans automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them. That is, an act of ostension carries a guarantee of relevance (1993:50).

Thus, ostensive-inferential communication is the stimulus that a communicator produces to make meaning manifest to his/her interlocutor. Such ostensive-inferential view should be considered in cross-cultural communication, because it helps analysts to realize the relationship between what is said and what is understood in relation to interlocutors who might have been influenced differently by the context of interaction.

Like Toolan (1996), Sperber and Wilson (1993) consider communication as realizing the intended rather than the semantic meaning, and as successful only when hearers infer the speaker's meaning. Thus, although I have stressed the importance of culture in interaction, we should not consider communication as a purely cultural issue. Utterances may lead to inferences being made by the hearer that are intended by the speaker.<sup>214</sup> Sperber and Wilson discuss the gap between the semantic representations and the thoughts actually communicated by utterances as 'mutual knowledge' and explore how this difference might lead to misunderstandings. In cross-cultural interaction, there is no guarantee that interactants will distinguish between the literal meanings of an utterance, and the intended meaning, if there is

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<sup>213</sup> Sperber and Wilson suggest the more precise term 'mutual manifest' as a solution to the notion of communicative intention, which disagrees with Strawson's idea that communicative attention must be overt. They argue that 'to communicate by ostension is to produce a certain stimulus with the aim of fulfilling an informative intention. Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention' (1995:60).

<sup>214</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1993) discuss Grice (1971) and Strawson's (1971) usage of the term 'utterance' which refers 'not just to linguistic utterances, or even to coded utterances, but to any modification of the physical environment designed by a communicator to be perceived by an audience and used as an evidence of the communicator's intentions' (Sperber and Wilson 1993:29). Their argument is that communication should be distinguished from covert forms of information transmission.

a difference between them. In fact, there is not even a guarantee that the literal meaning will be understood similarly.

However, in spite of the argument that Relevance Theory is considered a cognitive approach to communication rather than a linguistic or sociological one, I believe that it is useful in the analysis of cross-cultural interaction, in that it considers whatever might influence the context of interaction, and explains the meaning of an utterance according to both interactants' understanding of the context. The issue of literal and intended meanings might be a problem in this matter if we depend on Grice's Cooperative Principle, which seems to consider only one of the interlocutors (the speaker), or on the code model, which sees communication as signal-oriented rather than other-oriented.<sup>215</sup> Unlike the Cooperative Principle, Relevance Theory accounts for cultural inference in terms of relevant encyclopaedic information by considering the roles of context and listener in interaction, which are crucial issues in understanding politeness, especially in cross-cultural interaction.

#### **4.4.2.1 Relevance Theory and misunderstanding**

Sperber and Wilson (1993, 1995) emphasise the role of background or contextual information in spontaneous inference, and offer an analysis of non-demonstrative inference processes. They recognise the fact that people speak different languages, and master different concepts. As a result, they construct different representations and make different inferences arguing that what they call cognitive environments (a set of facts that are manifest to an interlocutor)<sup>216</sup> differ from one another. They say that 'an individual's total cognitive environment is the set of all facts that he can perceive or infer: all the facts that are manifest to him' (1995:41). They argue that

at the heart of the human ability to perform spontaneous demonstrative inference is a set of deductive rules: a set of computations which take account

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<sup>215</sup> Grice (1972) and Sperber and Wilson differ in their understanding of interlocutors; according to Grice, interlocutors must know the norms of communication, be able to detect an overt violation of the norms, and understand implicature as a result; to Sperber and Wilson, interlocutors need to know the principles of relevance to communicate.

<sup>216</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1995) define an individual's cognitive environment as 'the set of all the facts that he can perceive or infer: all the facts that are manifest to him' ...' in the shape of assumptions that might be either true or false' (1995 1995:39). More specifically, they suggest that 'an individual's total cognitive environment is a function of his physical environment and his cognitive abilities. It consists not only of the facts that he is aware of, but also all the facts that he is capable of becoming aware of, in his physical environment' (ibid.).

of the semantic properties of assumptions only insofar as these are reflected in their form (1993:85).

However, this does not necessarily mean that Sperber and Wilson claim that communication operates independently of social factors, which are part of the context (See Jary, 1998b/1998a).

However, Relevance Theory has been criticised for providing inaccurate analysis of interaction by relying on stereotypes rather than using authentic data. Toolan, (1992) states that 'Sperber and Wilson's examples 'seem to rely more on stereotypes of behaviour than on a free-standing account of inference-based communication' (1992:150). Green (1997) also considers using Relevance Theory has problems in analysing certain contexts. He states that 'one of the main problems with relevance stylistics is the poor readings it seems to elicit' (1997:134). He also argues that 'Relevance Theory could not be used for the analysis of texts per se. Relevance Theory cannot tell us what a text means. It is a theory of communication not a discovery procedure' (1997:134). Furthermore, 'it does not account for how readers differ in their interpretations' (1997:137). However, the main aim of Relevance Theory in the field of verbal communication is to explain how utterances are understood, and how verbal communication demands more than just the decoding of what is linguistically conveyed.

Another criticism is that Relevance Theory does not have sufficiently developed account of the social aspect. This criticism is defended by Christie (2007) who points out that Sperber and Wilson are aware that interlocutors also communicate information about their relationship with each other through their utterance, and that there is an evidence in their interaction that scholars can use to analyse politeness. Wilson and Sperber (2005) argue that they are considering the social aspects in analysing communication. They state that

although pragmatists generally see communication as both a cognitive and social process, they do not always devote their efforts equally to developing rich accounts of both the cognitive and the social factors. We see this as a difference in interests and research strategies rather than in theoretical commitments. In our own work, we have focused on cognitive factors, but we still assume that a comprehensive picture of communication should integrate both kinds of factors. (Wilson and Sperber (2005), cited in Christie 2007: ..).

Mey (2001) also believes that Sperber and Wilson's work is seriously flawed in that it does not consider authentic data in its analysis, making it difficult to analyse how social factors influence communication. Mey also claims that Sperber and Wilson's analysis is based on invented data. Mey (2001) argues that 'a serious problem lies in the fact that Relevance Theory, despite its pronounced commitment to communication, says very little about real communicative interaction as it happens in our society' (2001:87). The argument against this view is that what Sperber and Wilson are really interested in is the inferencing process, and there is no way of empirically observing it, so 'real' data would not help. Mey (2003) also argues that the social dimension of language is not considered in Relevance Theory, which weakens its claims. Sperber and Wilson confess that it is true that they have used artificial examples to establish their claims; but they argue that even invented examples can provide evidence for theoretical claims. However, regardless of what type of data is used, their claim that the search for relevance is a constant factor in human communication seems valid, especially in cross-cultural communication where inferring, context, and what is manifest from them are important.

However, the goal of Relevance Theory is to explain how the hearer infers the meaning on the basis of what is provided by the speaker. In other words, it discusses what Grice's theory, which ignores the hearer and does not explain how s/he infers what is intended by an utterance, fails to consider. Relevance Theory explains how the speaker's expectations contribute to understanding, and why and how factors may be relevant in an interaction. Sperber and Wilson hold that interactants understand each other not because they are obeying Grice's Cooperative Principle and its Maxims, but because the search for relevance is a feature of human communication. Understanding what is relevant is considered a crucial factor in judging whether or not a person's utterance is polite to his/her interactant. In the next section, I will discuss Relevance Theory in relation to politeness, and how recognising the intended meaning is part of judging politeness.

#### **4.4.2.2 Relevance Theory and Politeness**

Discussing the relationship between understanding what is intended and politeness is the main reason for linking Relevance Theory to the analysis of politeness. Christie picks up three key elements of Relevance Theory that distinguish Sperber and Wilson from Grice that can be used in analysing politeness. The first is that Relevance Theory is a theory about cognition. 'for the hearer to be sufficiently motivated to look for an interpretation of

utterance, he must assume that the information conveyed by the utterance will be relevant to him' (Christie, 2007:284). The second is that in Relevance Theory contextualization is a dynamic process: 'a context is a psychological construct, consisting of any set of mutually manifest assumptions that interlocutors in the process of producing and interpreting utterances infer to be relevant to the meaning of that utterance' (Christie, 2007:285). The third is that Relevance Theory focuses on process: 'Sperber and Wilson develop a vocabulary that brings into view the processes involved. (Christie, 2007:288). All these three key elements support the claim that there is a relationship between politeness and understanding and the use of Relevance Theory helps in realizing the relationship between understanding and politeness.

Jucker (1988) suggests that 'Relevance Theory explains why some assumptions are made more or less manifest by a given utterance, but it does not make any claims as to whether polite or impolite behaviour is more likely' (1988:275). In his article, 'The relevance of politeness', Jucker investigates Sperber and Wilson's theory relative to the phenomenon of politeness, concluding that 'Relevance Theory does not predict whether it is more likely that communicators are kind and polite towards each other, or whether they are more likely to be rude and uncaring about the joys or sorrows of the others' (1988:382). Interactants may perceive the intended meaning but may not understand that their interactant was trying to be polite.<sup>217</sup> Jucker suggests that 'the theory of relevance can also account for instances of language usage for which Leech felt it necessary to set up his politeness principles, that is to say for language usage in which the maxims of Grice's cooperative principle are flouted for reasons of social interaction' (1988:376). Jucker believes

the principle of relevance is more general than the cooperative principle because it applies to all instances of communicative behaviour and, moreover, it accounts for the inferential process needed to establish what is explicitly said and not just - as does the cooperative principle - for what is implicated' (1988:378).

His reasoning is that Relevance Theory does not tell interactants what to say and how to say it in order to be perceived as more or less polite. It explains what happens and offers possible interpretations, but it cannot explain why a less direct formulation may be more

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<sup>217</sup> Farghal and Borini (1997) argue that 'sociopragmatic failures occur due to the lack of knowledge of social conditions or conventions that govern conversation, including size of imposition, social distance, etc. That is, sociopragmatic failures are caused by faulty cross-cultural perceptions of appropriate linguistic behaviour' (1997:78).

relevant than a direct one. The question of whether Relevance Theory can be exploited in an account of politeness is complicated. As explained earlier, there are factors that this theory seems to ignore to some extent in analysing interaction. But this does not mean that it cannot be used as a method of analysing linguistic politeness. In my opinion, understanding whether a person is polite or not depends on understanding, in relation to the context of interaction, the intended message, which is the aim of Relevance Theory, whether explicit or implicit.<sup>218</sup>

Relating relevance to politeness, Rudi and Dogan (2001) ask whether there are linguistic structures and strategies specific to the communication of politeness. Their real concern is to find out whether politeness can be communicated linguistically. They provide conditions for polite/impolite behaviour; for politeness (a) the speaker holds the hearer in higher regard than s/he had assumed was mutually manifest; (b) the speaker still holds the hearer in high regard, which is already mutually manifest; for impoliteness (c) the speaker holds the hearer in lower regard than s/he had assumed mutually manifest; (d) the speaker still holds the hearer in low regard, which is already mutually manifest. In relation to phatic communication, they state that

in acts of phatic communication two things are mutually manifest: (i) it is mutually manifest both to the speaker and hearer that the main relevance of the utterance lies with the act of ostension; (ii) the circumstances in which the proposition built on the linguistic meaning of the utterances would be highly relevant are also mutually manifest (2001:347).

Although we may agree that the former points are characteristics of polite and the latter points of impolite behaviour, this is not always the case. It is still the listener who determines, at least, what s/he understands depending on her/his understanding of the context. Across cultures, the way in which speakers make an impact on their listeners varies, and the linguistic units and strategies used to express that vary as well. These differences between cultures make Relevance Theory of use in analysing linguistic politeness. Rudi and Dogan explain that:

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<sup>218</sup> Rudi and Dogan (2001) analyse interactions between linguistic structure and contextual assumption concluding that 'no matter how close the interlocutors are, their "esteem" is at risk most of the time' (2001:342). They define phatic communion as a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words. They believe there are different types of utterance that we should distinguish; utterances that only tell about a certain state of affairs without affecting the nature of the relationship between the interlocutors, and utterances that particularly connect with the relationship between people.

we believe that human being's concern about how other people regard them affects their self-esteem and any information that is related to one's self-esteem would naturally modify mutual cognitive environments via politeness and/or impoliteness' (2001:351).

They see Relevance Theory as an attempt to explain human communication in cognitive terms and their study to be dependent on the claim that the theory is able to account for social aspects of language in an inferential fashion. Such a theory might be more applicable in cross-cultural interaction, especially as the linguistic strategies used in expressing different kinds of politeness differ among cultures. Thus, a dependence upon what is meant to be manifest in relation to the context of the interaction provides a better chance of understanding whether interactants communicate appropriately or not.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Investigating the reasons behind misunderstanding, whether cultural, linguistic or contextual, may help in analysing cross-cultural communication. As Bargiela et. al. (2001) argue

whilst in intra-cultural encounters, norms are often assumed to be shared, and if they appear to be clashing they can be renegotiated relatively easily, in inter-cultural encounters, different tacit and often conflicting interactional norms and assumptions are usually at work, which speakers tend to take for granted until misunderstanding arises (2001:1).

Thus, in interaction, Relevance Theory helps in understanding not only the differences, but also whether these differences cause misunderstanding and why. As Scollon and Scollon suggest, 'differences between ... participants would most likely be understood as arising from a history of socialisation to different groups and therefore a misunderstanding of contextualization cues in the actual situation of communicating with each other' (2003:545). It seems that they believe that different interpretations of the context of the interaction, as a result of different understandings of what influences it, may lead to communication breakdown.

Failure to understand intended meaning does not necessarily mean that speakers have failed to select the appropriate message for their hearers. Hearers may interpret the context of the interaction differently from speakers, because of cultural difference. In foreign language teaching and learning, as Stern (1992) points out, understanding the literal is as

important as understanding the intended meaning<sup>219</sup> Therefore, it is important that an illocutionary act is recognized by the hearer.<sup>220</sup> This is also argued by Toolan (1996) and Sperber and Wilson (1995), who conceptualise communication as a speaker trying to draw attention to an intended message. Speakers always seek to include or create a relevance in their messages that their addressee can exploit to infer the intended meaning. It means that the meaning of an utterance might be implicit; because of different factors that influence interaction, such as context, so the intended message can be implied rather than said overtly. Green (1997) states that 'one of Sperber and Wilson's most useful insights, that context is not fixed, but is a psychological subset of possibilities' also leads, again paradoxically, to a 'fixing' of the text' (1997:137). This is a very important view for this thesis, one of the main arguments of which is that interpretation of politeness is not dependent solely on linguistic uses. Politeness is understood by interpreting these linguistic uses in relation to the context of the interaction. This view is also important for analysing my data, as I have argued that politeness or impoliteness does not need to be overt, as Brown and Levinson (1987) argue. Politeness might be implicit and recognised contextually rather than only linguistically.

Escandell-Vidal (1996) sees the possibility of a cognitive approach to politeness such as Relevance Theory. She views modern research on politeness as having been dominated by a strategic approach for several years, with politeness considered the result of the rational need for balanced interpersonal relations, its mechanisms universal. She argues that 'evidence against universality is no longer crucial, and cultural differences regarding basic assumptions fit in quite naturally, so a new approach to the relationship between politeness and universality can be suggested' (1996:633). She points out that

the investigations carried out on different cultures soon began to show that things were not that simple: cultures strongly differ not only in forms, but also on the social meanings associated with various strategies, in the internal structure of speech acts, or in the expectations concerning verbal behaviour (1996:633).

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<sup>219</sup> Hamza (1995) argues that 'a successful communication does not mean that interactants can express themselves, but also understand other people's underlying meanings when they perform language' (1995:40).

<sup>220</sup> Thomas maintains that 'more often than not, we fail to notice ambiguities of sense and reference at all, unless some misunderstanding occurs or unless, as in jokes or word-play, our attention is deliberately drawn to their existence' (1995:16). Davis (2003) also discusses the problem of understanding jokes between native and non-native speakers of English.

She concludes that politeness is a social matter, and hence culture-specific, and that this is the reason why politeness studies are placed between universality and culture-specificity. (See Watts, 2003, in chapter 2)

The communication process can be very complicated, and even more so cross-culturally. The distinction between what is said and what is communicated is a shared process between hearers and speakers; such a distinction should be considered in any approach to analysing interaction, especially in cross-cultural interaction. In interaction analysis, overlooking any factor that features in the communication process may result in an ineffective approach to analysis. The claim that Sperber and Wilson's model lacks the social dimensions or cultural variables does not mean that it is not suitable for analysis of cross-cultural conversation, or linguistic politeness. MacMahon (1996) posits that 'Relevance Theory, in its recognition of the possible disjunction between what is said and what is communicated, is a model which overcomes some of the inadequacies of earlier pragmatic approaches' (1996:209).<sup>221</sup> Relevance Theory focuses on what is universal about human communication (and more generally human information-processing), but this does not mean that cultural influence is ruled out, since the model predicts that variation in individual context, cognitive environment and individual cultures is likely to have a significant influence on the interpretation of utterances and the analysis of politeness. I believe an inferential approach such as Relevance Theory is important in order to build up a contextual, pragmatic approach that can be used in analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction.

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<sup>221</sup> MacMahon (1996) also claims that 'Relevance Theory offers an alternative to earlier assumptions in pragmatics (in particular those assumptions about relationship between what is said and what is communicated), as well as an attention to literary questions and a scope for development which literary theorists are no longer justified in dismissing' (210).

## Chapter 5: Analysing Cross-cultural Interaction

This chapter develops the argument that utterances are influenced by the interactants' cultures, and that, consequently, in cross-cultural interactions, an utterance may be interpreted differently by the listener from what the speaker intended. Thus, in this chapter, I investigate the relationship between language and culture in cross-cultural interaction. I examine the role of culture in the interpretation and performance of linguistic utterances, and also discuss the variables that determine linguistic strategies in cross-cultural interaction, such as power, distance, gender, religion, and stereotypes, etc. The main aim is to highlight the need for a broader approach to analysing politeness in cross-cultural analysis - one that considers all interactants' cultural differences.

### 5.1 Linguistic use and social meaning across cultures

All speakers are part of a community that influences their identity and is usually apparent in their production and interpretation of language. This community influence is described as social competence,<sup>222</sup> which differs from one person to another. Richards and Schmidt (1983) maintain that 'social competence is very important in reaching the pragmatic meaning of an utterance' (1983:7).<sup>223</sup> For example, when an Arab interacts with a Westerner, historical, social, religious and political views influence utterance production and interpretation. Fraser points out that 'each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behaviour, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context' (1990:220).<sup>224</sup> Hirschon (2001) also discusses social meaning in relation to social norms and values and linguistic performance. He focuses on aspects of Greek politeness behaviour, as well as contrasting Greek and Turkish responses to insults. He views politeness codes as having a direct bearing on notions of honour and reputation and the social structure as based on the relationship between cultural values, social conduct and language use. He states 'linguistic expression may also reveal key elements in the social construction of reality of a particular community or society' (2001:18). He identifies links between verbal expressions, cultural context and prevalent

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<sup>222</sup> Generally, social competence is the possessing and using the ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes valued in the host context and culture. But social competence differs from one sitting to another, and from one group to another.

<sup>223</sup> Wierzbicka (2003) argues that 'it is of course very important for the immigrant to know what the rules of the different conversational game in the new country are, and how they differ from those prevailing in the old country' (2003:147-148).

<sup>224</sup> For more details see chapter 2.

values and uses the Greek case to illustrate how to 'make sense' of cultural patterns characteristic of politeness, or its obverse – rudeness.

Nydell believes that 'Arabs talk a lot, repeat themselves, shout when excited, and make extensive use of gesture. They punctuate their conversations with oaths (such as "I swear by God") or emphasise what they say, and they exaggerate for effect' (2002:120). According to her, their cultures may differ from Western cultures non-verbally and linguistically in terms of what is considered to be appropriate. An example is that Arabs do not use the word 'operation' for compulsory medical operations because of religious beliefs such as circumcision. They use the word 'operation' only for serious medical illnesses. An Yemeni Arab cancelled the circumcision of his son in Britain because the doctor, via an interpreter, used the word 'operation' to refer to the procedure. The Arab person said that his son was well, and that what he came for did not require an operation.<sup>225</sup> Thus, relationships between people from different backgrounds are influenced by cultural and societal differences, which reflect how they see the context.

Clifford (1997) emphasises understanding the differences as well as the similarities in terms of norms and patterns of meanings. He stresses that differences between different cultural groups may lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. For example, Al-Issa (2003) explains the difference in understanding the concept of friendship between Arabs and Westerns. He states that:

In an Arab society, the concept of friendship, with its rights and duties, is quite different from that in Western society. In Arab society, friendship is inseparable from social obligation. For instance, part of a "healthy" friendship among Arabs is that a friend "must" feel indulged to fulfill certain obligations such as offering help and doing everything he/she can to comfort a friend. Furthermore, one is always expected to show admiration for his/her friends, and praise their goodness, preferably in their presence (2003:587).

Thus, in cross-cultural interaction, conflict may occur when one of the interactants violates the other's linguistic and social norms. Sometimes, an interactant feels insulted because his/her norms or values have not been respected, even if the interactant is not aware of the appropriate norms or values of that particular cultural context. Tannen (1989) maintains

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<sup>225</sup> This incident took place in 2003 in Sheffield Children's Hospital between an English doctor, an Iraqi interpreter and a Yemeni parent.

that 'cultural influences do not determine the form that a speaker's discourse<sup>226</sup> will take; instead, they provide a range from which an individual chooses strategies habitually used in expressing an individual style' (1989:80). Tannen believes it is not cultural influences but the social context that determines the form or the way in which interactants communicate. In other words, culture provides choices, but the most appropriate choice is determined by the context of interaction.

## **5.2 The influence of culture in cross-cultural interaction**

Foley maintains that variations in cultural practices are expected because of different factors. He points out that

in modern complex societies, with people in a specific interaction potentially drawn from different classes and ethnic backgrounds, the distribution of cultural practices and knowledge of their meaning can become extremely difficult' (1997:23).

Such a distribution of different cultural practices can be a source of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>227</sup> Although we may agree that culture is a shared set of beliefs, values, and patterns of linguistic behaviour common to a group of people, we cannot guarantee that different members of this group will be influenced by it in the same way in their language choices.<sup>228</sup>

### **5.2.1 Cross-cultural analysis and politeness**

Differences between cultures create misunderstanding between interactants in cross-cultural interactions. Thus, in analysing politeness, we need an approach that identifies such differences and assesses whether they lead to misunderstanding. Gudykunst (1998) emphasises that the importance of cross-cultural analysis is not just about understanding the differences and similarities in communication, but rather how and why these cultures differ, what such differences might lead to.<sup>229</sup> Gudykunst's view is very important, especially for this research, which argues that understanding the reasons behind any

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<sup>226</sup> According to Tannen (1989:80) 'A discourse is a behavioural unit which has a pre-theoretical status in linguistics: it is a set of utterances which constitute any recognizable speech event; e.g. conversation'

<sup>227</sup> Van Dijk (1997) argues that 'in different societies people not only speak different languages and dialects, they use them in radically different ways.' (1997: 231). (See also Chapter 3 of this thesis).

<sup>228</sup> According to Van Dijk 'In some societies, normal conversations bristle with disagreement, voices are raised, emotions are conspicuously vented. In others, people studiously avoid contention, speak in mild and even tone, and guard against any exposure of their inner selves. (1997: 231)

<sup>229</sup> He holds 'it does not make any sense to say that 'Sakuraka communicates indirectly because she is a Japanese' or that "Kimberly communicates directly because she is from the United States' (1998:44).

pragmatic failure is as important as understanding that there is misunderstanding. Understanding the reason behind linguistic choices is important in understanding whether a speaker intends politeness, and whether that is understood by his/her hearer (See chapter 1).

According to Blommaert and Verschueren (1991/1989) 'any approach to intercultural and international communication should start from the amazing complexity and dynamics of crucial notions such as "culture", "nation", "society", "race" or even "group"' (1989: 4). They emphasise that concentrating on one aspect to determine whether a particular behaviour is individual, group or universal is not an adequate method of understanding cross-cultural conflict. O'Driscoll (1996) holds that 'we can "understand" another culture only when we are able to enter into it and completely pass ourselves off as "insiders" ' (1996:3). We may ask, "which party is expected to master perfectly the linguistic system, the interactional rule, etc., of the other party?" In other words, as Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) ask, which of the interactants is expected to perform the other's culture? O'Driscoll seems to put the responsibility on the non-native speaker. Thus, if an interaction is between an Arab and an English person, in English, then the Arab non-native speaker is expected to master the linguistic system and cultural norms, and be aware of what is appropriate and how it should be performed in his/her addressee's language.

However, societies have their own strategies for establishing and maintaining relationships in conversations, and these strategies may differ from one society to another (Leech 1983).<sup>230</sup> Leech maintains that 'it is clear that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle operate variably in different cultures or language communities, in different social situations, among different social classes' (1983:10).<sup>231</sup> Farghal and Borini (1997) stress that

the cultural problem becomes quite obvious in the case of Arabic politeness formulas that feature religious references. Such situations are experienced with students taught by a teacher from a different background. When students are not aware of the culture and the norms of their teacher, they usually

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<sup>230</sup> After a lesson in which I said to my British students that in Arab culture, Arabs say 'nice hair-cut' *نعيمًا* "Naeeman" (which means prosperity) to any person who has had his hair cut, most of them said that to me, although they do not say that to each other. In fact, I was happy that my students said that to me, regardless of what it means in English, because in Arabic, it means that they are telling me 'we care about you'.

<sup>231</sup> See chapter 2 for a discussion of Cooperative Principle and Politeness principle.

experience different situations of pragmatic failure with their teacher, and vice-versa (1997:81).

They point out that when Arabs are taught by non-Arabs, both may misinterpret each other's verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Unless there is a clear agreement on what is appropriate, pragmatic failure is to be expected. They go on to explain that

speakers of standard English may use the strategy of interrogation to perform a highly conventionalized polite request, while speakers of Arabic may not use this. Thus, rendering an Arabic polite request into English or vice versa using the same strategy will often lead to pragmalinguistic failure (1997:78).

Thus, even if the pragmatic meaning of an utterance is understood, the polite strategies might not be.<sup>232</sup> Similarly, Farghal and Borini maintain that 'culturally, some situations may necessitate the use of polite expressions in Arabic, while the same situations in English may not call for politeness' (1997:92).<sup>233</sup> This is why an utterance might sound appropriate to one interactant and not to the other in a cross-cultural interaction.

#### **5.2.1.1 Politeness / impoliteness and social relations**

Social relations seem to be differently understood across cultures, and ignoring or respecting social considerations is linked to politeness/impoliteness in some cultures. For example, in Arabic, social relations are usually given priority in interactions over individual interests, because a person might be classified as impolite if he/she ignores them. For example, if someone visits another person without an appointment, or visits a friend who is busy, the friend is still obliged to receive them. Certain linguistic expressions may be used to imply that the person visited is busy, but if the visitor does not understand, or chooses not to, then the host has to postpone plans until the visitor leaves. In Western cultures, people tend to visit each other by appointment, and if someone is visited without one, they might then apologise to the visitor if s/he cannot receive them. For example, in contrast to English culture, it is normal in Arabic culture for a person to

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<sup>232</sup> Tanaka (1988) notices that Japanese do not use different politeness expressions as native speakers of English do. (See chapter 4 for more details)

<sup>233</sup> Once, a friend of mine asked me to help him because an English person was visiting him to fill in some application forms. My friend does not speak English, and wanted me to be with him as an interpreter. When the English person entered the flat, he was holding a cup of tea in a plastic cup, and started drinking his tea once he had sat down. This behaviour distressed my friend, who requested that I ask the person whether he had been told that my friend was mean or that he might not be offered anything to drink. I told the English person that it is not acceptable among Arabs to bring your tea or food with you when you are visiting others, and that doing so means you are insulting them or suggesting that they are mean.

come without an appointment or later than his/her appointment and be received, regardless of the inconvenience that this would cause. A visited person usually leaves it to visitors to decide whether to stay or go, but may still use certain expressions which implicitly encourage the visitor to leave. For example, an Arab person, upon receiving a visit, might use an expression like

مع اني مشغول و لكن ادخل  
**adxol laken wa mašğol enee mař**  
 come in but and busy I am with  
 Although I am busy, you can come in

to apologise about reluctance in accepting a visitor who is late or has no appointment. Another way of apologising is for the visited person to explain that plans are having to be postponed in order to entertain his/her guest. There is, however, no explicit refusal to receive a visitor, or any direct reference to the visitor arriving without an appointment or to the visitor's late arrival. Thus, if an Arab is late or comes without an appointment, s/he may still expect to be received. There are expressions that a person might use to apologise for being late or coming without an appointment. An expression such as

اسف ، خارج عن ارادتي  
**eradatee řn xarej , aseef**  
 my control of out , sorry  
 Sorry, it was out of my control.

Or

انا اعرف اني تاخرت  
**taxart enne ařreef anna**  
 I am late that I know I  
 I know I am late, I am sorry

would give rise to the implicature "we still need to do what we have planned, in spite of my being late". This is a strong implicature to both interactants because of what is

culturally acceptable in this context. Comparatively, in such a case, while an English person may accept the apology, but not receive the late comer, an Arab may not accept the apology, but still receive the late comer.<sup>234</sup>

There are cultural and linguistic habits that are characteristic of English people which Arabs adopt because they live in English society and want to appear polite. This is not always the case, however. As explained in chapter 4, section 4.3.2.4, an Arab speaking in English may try to speak as the English do in certain situations, but, because of cultural constraints, not in others, even if this causes misunderstanding,<sup>235</sup> For example, Arabs speaking in English can adopt an English way of offering thanks; frequently apologizing even for mistakes for which you were not responsible, greeting with the fewest number of words, for example, 'Hi', not shaking hands or visiting only with an appointment. But there are other English habits that Arabs accept but cannot imitate, because they are unacceptable culturally. For example, if somebody has lost a relative, just saying "sorry" might be considered rude, as might everybody paying individually in a coffee shop or restaurant.<sup>236</sup>

### **5.2.1.2 Individual differences and interaction**

Individual differences, in Arab society, are influenced by culture. Religion, which is considered as the cornerstone of the Arabic language, influences almost every group or individual behaviour, which makes it difficult for an individual not to consider others in almost every linguistic behaviour. Wierzbicka argues that 'we remain within a certain

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<sup>234</sup> I do not deny that Arabic customs of visiting and being visited might not be very different from English in some contexts, especially in some social situations. Sometimes, similarly to Arabs, many English people would not explicitly refuse a guest because they are late or have not previously arranged their visit. But in Arabic, such customs of visiting and being visited sometimes happen even when there are pressing circumstances, such as being late for work, due for a job interview or having a family emergency to attend to or a meeting with a supervisor. In a situation like this, an Arab person would still be obliged to accept their guest, and they might use the same implicit tactics that I have described to encourage the visitor to leave or to cut short their visit.

<sup>235</sup> Levinson argues that 'there are cross-situational constraints enjoining appropriate social decorum, while there are others appropriate just to specific interactional moments or specific kinds of cultural events' (1983: 45). This means that culture constrains or influences communication in different ways; from what is appropriate for certain specific interactional situations, to what is general and left to interactants to decide how to be appropriate.

<sup>236</sup> Arabs most of the time say different expressions, including many linguistic units, when showing respect to a person or a relative when s/he has lost a relative such as a father. They usually mention religious expressions that are said in such contexts. For example such as "Only Allah lives forever". Also if two Arabs or more decide to have something in a restaurant, then one of them is expected to pay. They usually agree who might pay, but if not, then the first of them who suggests to have something is expected to pay. If the first person pays only for her/himself, then this might be considered as strange or inappropriate behaviour.

culture, and we are inevitably guided by certain principles and certain ideals which we know are not necessarily shared by the entire human race' (2003:9). But in spite of this view, interactants may disagree on what is socially appropriate, as discussed by Scollon and Scollon (1995), who place emphasis on personal variations. Even if culture is shared by a group, personal variation and individual evaluation of context play a role in the way people speak and understand each other. Watts indicates that 'European societies, despite the similarity in their behavioural codes, vary in terms of how politeness is structured' (1992c:49). Hence, differences exist within a culture, just as similarities exist between different cultures. The case is the same in the Arab world; Arabs in different parts of the Arab world agree and disagree with each other in what is considered to be appropriate/inappropriate in certain interactional social contexts. This means that analysis of speech in interaction needs to include not only social and cultural differences but, in addition, individual differences between interactants.

### 5.2.1.3 Cultural differences and interaction

Different scholars agree that cross-cultural interaction may include more situations of misunderstanding than monocultural interaction. For example, Ervin-Tripp (1972) points out that 'the dangers are greater when we fail to appreciate how the terms in a new address system are related to one another (1972: 231). In Arabic, the use of a person's first name does not necessarily indicate friendship or closeness, nor does the use of a person's surname with or without a title indicate formality.<sup>237</sup> Also, in Arabic, a male addressing a female by her name on its own conveys a different meaning than it does in English. According to Wardhaugh:

our choice of terms is usually determined by a variety of social factors: the particular occasion; the social status, or rank of the other sex; age; family relationship; occupational hierarchy; transactional status (i.e. a doctor-patient relationship); race or degree of intimacy' (1990: 251).<sup>238</sup>

Thus, culture determines how factors such as age or gender should be considered in utterances. The pragmatic meaning may not be the same across cultures, and the

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<sup>237</sup> This used to be the case in middle-class male circles in Britain.

<sup>238</sup> AL-Khatib (2001) argues that 'previous research has shown that there is some evidence that the addressees, gender of the addressee, age of the addressee and number of the addressees are all seen to be determining factors in code-selection' (2001:408) AL-Khatib, M (1995) also highlights the influence of the interlocutor's sex on linguistic accommodation.

misunderstandings in such cases might lead to one interactant being considered impolite towards his interactant.

#### 5.2.1.4 Cultural differences and understanding context

As argued above, because cultural factors influence interaction, contexts of interaction might be understood differently by interactants. Discussing the reasons for misunderstanding, Cameron (2001) says 'miscommunication can result not only from variation in the use of contextualization cues, but also from conflicting assumptions about the norms and conventions of particular speech events' (2001:111). For example, an incident that happened between a Libyan student (B) and an English student (A) sharing a house in Swansea in 1993 demonstrates how cross-cultural interaction influences misunderstanding of intention:

1 A : *tea?*

2 B : *thank you.*

3 A : *sugar?*

4 B : *no, no I do not want tea, thank you.*

In this context the expression 'thank you' has a different meaning in response to A's (the native English speaker) invitation to B (the Libyan student) to have some tea. In Arabic, (شكرا) "šoukran" (Thank you), the answer in 2B, means that B does not want tea. The English person interprets 2B as if B had said yes, and therefore asks B whether or not he wants sugar with his tea. In this example, the wording of the question in 1A and the answer in 2B are clear and exist in Arabic language as well as English, but the expression in 2B has a different pragmatic meaning across the two cultures in such contexts of interaction.

Levinson (1983) reflects:

there can be significant inter-ethnic misunderstandings due to different pragmatic analyses of utterances whose literal content is perfectly well understood; leading questions, probes, hints, etc, may well not be interpreted correctly (1983:377).

What an utterance means in a particular context is usually negotiated between interactants, but cultural differences, and how they influence production and interpretation, often have the potential to cause pragmatic failure or even conflict.<sup>239</sup> Schirato and Yell (2000) maintain that 'there are strong connections between a person's cultural trajectories, the kind of attitudes, values, and agendas they have, and their activities and behaviour' (2000:51). Similarly, Sunderland (1994) and Coulthard (1977) see our talk as culturally constructed, such that conversations are structured and governed by cultural rules, norms and conventions. Thus conflict may arise because of differences in the ways people interpret the same sets of linguistic behaviour in certain interactional contexts.<sup>240</sup>

The ignorance of cultural differences has always been the most significant problem with different approaches to analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction. Van Dijk (1997) points out that there is a danger if we understand others' cultures only through the prism of our own cultural-specific practises and concepts. He states that

if our metalanguage for cross-cultural comparison consists of terms like 'directness', 'deference', 'face', 'politeness', hierarchy', and so on, our analysis can easily slip into ethnocentrism because the relevant concepts are not found in the culture being described and usually cannot even be translated easily into the language involved (1997:235).

Mills (2004) discusses whether 'there might be different associations and evaluations of certain politeness forms which depend on how one locates oneself in relation to class, gender and race' (2004:171). These concepts, and others such as hierarchy, deference, or directness, have different meanings between cultures and often produce different interpretations. Thus, we cannot analyse cross-cultural interaction by considering one culture and overlooking what these utterances may mean cross-culturally. The concentration on speakers recommended by Brown and Levinson might lead to inadequacy in understanding whether the speaker was polite or not to his/her addressee, especially in cross-cultural interaction.

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<sup>239</sup> According to Wright and Taylor (1994) 'lack of understanding of differences in an interaction may have adverse effects in two ways. First, we may have different cultural norms. One of the interactants may misinterpret the other or inadvertently give offence. The other thing is that we may not realise that this has happened and need to take steps to rectify the situation, or if the offence is very great, there may be little we can do to rectify the situation' (1994: 162-163).

<sup>240</sup> Scollon and Scollon (1995) point out that 'each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behaviour, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context' (1995:18).

### 5.3 Cross-cultural interaction and discourse system

Different discourse systems,<sup>241</sup> in an interaction, might lead interactants to misunderstand each other, or even accuse each other of being inappropriate. Scollon and Scollon discuss systems of communication from a cross-cultural view.<sup>242</sup> They try to provide solutions for those who may need to communicate within cultures which are not their own. For them, 'the main concern is to see how the ideological positions of cultures or of discourse systems become a factor in the interpersonal communication of members of one group with members of the other group' (1995:126). In such communication, people may not be able to avoid misunderstanding because of their different discourse systems. Such differences, which do not necessarily need to be clear in forms of speech acts, determine not only the linguistic structures and strategies, but also the interpretation and understanding of these structures.<sup>243</sup> Shamir and Melnik (2002) point out that

cultures may differ with respect to the extent to which they are characterised by rigid or more permeable boundaries; namely, the extent to which the culture emphasizes boundary between people, positions, roles, activities, and spheres of life (2002:220).

Schirato and Yell (2000) also maintain that 'meanings are not to be found or understood exclusively in terms of acts of communication, but are produced within specific cultural contexts' (2000:1). They discuss the relationship between communication and culture, defining communication as 'the practice of producing meaning, and the way in which systems of meaning are negotiated by participants in a culture; and culture as the totality of communication practices and systems of meaning' (2000:1).<sup>244</sup> Moerman (1996) believes social rules and cultural values are learned, enforced, and manipulated. Ochs (1982, 1988,1992) holds that children are affected by what surrounds them, including the social discourse system and relationships between members of society. She concludes that

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<sup>241</sup> Discourse system is defined as 'a unified and structured domain of language use (and the activities associated with language use) that organizes and constrains what can be said, thought, or done around certain issues.' (Schiffrin 2004:205).

<sup>242</sup> They argue 'broad systems of discourse form a kind of self-oriented system of communication with a shared language or jargon, with particular ways in which people learn what they need to know to become members, with a particular ideological position, and quite specific forms of interpersonal relationships among members of these groups' (Scollon and Scollon, 1995:95).

<sup>243</sup> Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003) state: 'sociopragmatic interactional principles are 'socioculturally-based principles, scalar in nature, that guide or influence people's productive and interpretative use of language' (2003:1635).

<sup>244</sup> See chapter 1 for a definition of culture.

children learn by observation of their parents and older siblings, by explicit prompts, instructions, and explanations, and discussions on how to behave in communication to understand the discourse system of their environment.<sup>245</sup> Such process of learning discourse system might be a problem of children grown to parents from different cultures. Scollon and Scollon (1995) also note that that the cultural differences that arise from being a member of different gender or generational discourse systems are more problematic than other cultural differences such as those in professional contexts.<sup>246</sup>

Just as communication between members from the same culture can be impeded by the use of alien discourse systems, our analysis of cross-cultural misunderstanding must be informed by our awareness of the variety of ways in which the meaning of an utterance is encoded in different cultures. The above discussion explores the extent to which misunderstandings are rooted in the lack of equivalence between different discourse styles used by speaker and addressee. Such misunderstandings, in cross-cultural interaction, might arise because of other social factors such as using social deixis, honorifics, compliment or titles.

### 5.3.1 Social deixis and discourse system

The use of deixis is linked to the discourse system of cultures. Deixis involves aspects of verbal social behaviour.<sup>247</sup> They are also sometimes called indexicals.<sup>248</sup> Because deictics exist in every language, they play an important role in achieving pragmatic understanding between speakers and hearers. Hanks states that

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<sup>245</sup> Van Dijk (1997) in an analysis of Malay, states that 'The main social dimensions determining discourse style are "ingroup" vs "outgroup" and status differences between interlocutors. In Malay society, the most important dimension is whether the individuals belong to the same household. In other places, clan, ethnicity, caste, or rank determine different discourse style' (1997:254).

<sup>246</sup> In addition, they also provide a description of salient differences which can be expected between speakers of English who come from different cultural backgrounds. Scollon and Scollon argue that 'each of us is simultaneously a member of many different discourse systems. We are members of a particular corporate group, a particular professional or occupational group, a generation, a gender, a region, and an ethnicity' (1995:3). Scollon and Scollon focus on professional communication. Their purpose is to introduce professional communicators to the basic principles of discourse as they apply to communication between members of different cultural groups.

<sup>247</sup> Verschueren argues that 'one of the phenomena that scientific consideration of language use could not ignore was this 'anchoring' of language in a real world, achieved by 'pointing' at variables along some of its dimension. This phenomenon is called deixis, and the 'pointers' are indexical expression or indexicals (1999:18). Deixis are classified into; Person Deixis (me, you, etc.), Spatial Deixis (here, there, etc.), and Temporal Deixis (now, then, etc). All of these expressions depend on the speaker and hearer sharing the same context. Proximal terms are "this, here, now"; Distal terms are "that, there, then"; Social Deixis means the choice of one of these forms (deictic expressions) rather than another.

<sup>248</sup> This means pointing via language. When you see an unfamiliar thing and ask 'what is that?', you are using a deictic expression.

A basic property of the indexical context of interaction is that it is dynamic. As interactants move through space, shift topics, exchange information, coordinate their respective orientations, and establish common ground as well as non-commonalities, the indexical framework of reference changes. Patterns of deictic usage reflect these changes, and thereby provide us with a powerful tool for investigating them (1992:53).

But the question is “do differences in using deixis between cultures lead to misunderstanding?” According to Levinson (1983), ‘social deixis concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participants’ roles, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and address(s) or speaker and some referent’ (1983:63).<sup>249</sup> Grundy holds that ‘it isn’t these propositional meanings that change when a deictic occurs, but the place or time picked out or referred to which shifts as the context changes – hence the name ‘shifter’, which is sometimes applied to deictics’ (2000:33). For example, whereas the tag question is a very clear question in Arabic and requires an answer from the addressee, it sometimes just signals uncertainty or a request for confirmation in English.

According to Hanks (1992), the use of deixis is organized culturally and is accordingly affected by changes in culture and context. In Arabic, the use of the plural form "you are" ( انتم ), “**antoum**” instead of (you are) ( انت ), “**anta**” implies respect and a degree of distance and power between the interactants. Thus, if the plural "you are" is used to address a singular second person, then it means that the speaker has less power than the addressee and that he needs to be formal. The use of "you are" conveys whether interactants are close to each other, or from a different class, or even conveys something implicitly, which might be insulting. This means that if it is used by a person who is in a higher position or has more power to a person who is in a lower position or has less power, then it might mean an insult from the speaker to his/her listener.

Deixis plays a central role in the routine use and understanding of appropriateness in using language. Hanks (1992) focuses on a more restricted class of referential usage of lexical deictics. The question he asks is “do components differ from utterance to utterance, context

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<sup>249</sup> Foley argues that one central way to enact social roles is through linguistic practices, and languages typically have various means to mark such social categories. This is called social deixis, and common illustrations are the presence of formal and deferential second-person pronouns (1997:343).

to context, language to language?" The use of the pronoun 'you' in Standard Arabic and English varies between the two languages, in both linguistic and social meanings. For example, there are more pronouns that represent the second person in Arabic than in English, and 'you' in Arabic may refer to you ( انت ) "Anta" which is singular, you ( انتما ) ( "Antmaa" referring to two people, you ( انتم ) "Antom" referring to more than two males or you ( انتن ) (Antouna) to more than two females. It is also possible to use you ( انتم ) "Antom" (normally used for the second person plural), when speaking to an individual to indicate respect, particularly if the addressee is socially or culturally higher.<sup>250</sup> Verschueren (1999) sees the interpretation of indexical expressions as dependent on context, speaker's intention, the relative distances between the speaker and listener, and how their meaning is socially agreed. Ochs (1991/1992) states that some linguistic features have more than one social interpretation, and deixis is some of these. The differences in the number of pronouns and what they reflect in that deixis system may have different meanings across cultures, and depend on the context in which they are used.

### 5.3.2 Honorifics and discourse system

The use of honorifics also differs between languages and cultures because they reflect a social system. The titles 'Mr' and 'Mrs' in English, for instance, do not convey what 'Mr' and 'Mrs' ( السيد "Al-sayed or سيدة Al-sayedah" ) in Arabic denote in relation to respect, or politeness towards others. 'Mr' and 'Mrs' in Arabic are more likely to be used with the first name, and might be used with a close friend, a brother or a sister. Also, linguistically, it is not possible in Arabic to say 'Mrs Ali' ( السيدة علي ), "al-sayedah Ali", if the addressee's surname is "Ali". In such a case, her first name would be mentioned before her surname. For example, we may, in Arabic, call a female whose surname is Ali 'Mrs Fatma Ali', to indicate to her and to anybody listening that we are addressing a female. In spite of the title 'Mrs', because, in Arabic, if 'Mrs' is used before a male name, this might be considered as an insult in some contexts of interaction.<sup>251</sup> In her article "What is a name" Eid points out that

<sup>250</sup> In Arabic, using a female pronoun for a male is an insult and vice versa.

<sup>251</sup> Arabs who pretend that they are assimilated Westerners and adopt a western speech convention are rather considered by other Arabs negatively, whether in the way they address each other, or in using certain way of greeting each other. Sometimes, some Arabs, even without realizing, use the masculine name after Mrs, which might be considered as an insult to those who do not know anything about Western Culture and how people there address themselves in a polite way. Such addressing is grammatically incorrect as Al-Sayedah )

if other forms of reference such as title, honorifics, and other descriptors are to be included under 'names' (not to be confused with the subset "proper name") and naming practices, even more support can be adduced for the non-arbitrariness of such practices and their effect on people's perception of each other and of themselves (1994:81).

In cross-cultural interaction, certain expressions such as those refers to title, honorifics, etc., may cause problems because of inappropriateness, or may pass unnoticed because neither interactant is aware of the cultural appropriateness of the language.

Agreeing that all languages have indexicals and honorifics does not mean that they are used in the same way across cultures and does not guarantee that there will be no misunderstanding. Foley argues that

Asian languages like Japanese and Javanese have specially complex systems of social deixis, besides expressing solidarity or deference vis-a-vis the addressee, they also employ honorifics or humbling expressions to indicate the social rank relative to the speaker of participants in the utterance (1997:343).

Thus, cross-culturally, people interact differently, and the way in which they show respect to each other may not be understood. Failure to recognize honorific systems in the language of interaction is largely dependent upon misunderstanding the social system appropriate to the context of interaction. Appropriate honorific usage in some cultures such as Arab culture is linked to politeness, and not applying it, in certain contexts, may lead to accusations of impoliteness.

### 5.3.3 Compliments and discourse system

The use of compliments is differently understood across cultures. In some cultures they are widely used and are considered part of the social system, while in others they are not. Aymursy and Wilson (2001) distinguish between Egyptian and Western compliments.<sup>252</sup>

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(السيدة)(Mrs) refers to a female name, and if a masculine name is used after it, then there would be no agreement between the title and the name.

<sup>252</sup> They argue that 'modification of politeness formats is required in order to explain the nature of Egyptian complimenting behaviour' (2001:134). I agree with them that one model of politeness might not provide a comprehensive solution to describe all cultures. They think that Brown and Levinson's model cannot be universal for the speech act of compliment, for example. 'We should not be surprised, therefore, if a model of politeness based on 'face' and individual wants and desires, does not easily explain complimenting behaviour

They disagree with Brown and Levinson's model, which suggests that compliments are sometimes classified as insults. In Arabic, teachers, supervisors or managers expect verbal compliments from their students or employee, regardless of their performance, whereas in English culture, students might criticise their teachers if they have a different view. Another example occurs in local broadcasting stations in different parts of the Arab world. They are not expected to criticise the government; broadcasters in Libya, Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, etc., usually compliment their governments and do not broadcast any criticism of them. This is not the case in English broadcasting stations, such as BBC1, BBC2, ITV etc., which often broadcast severe criticism or even ironic sketches about the government. In Arabic, a compliment is sometimes considered a way of showing respect to your interactants, and not doing so may lead to accusations of inappropriate behaviour.

In Arab society, group needs are placed above individual needs. Therefore, a person might give a compliment to another person because of his/her father, friend, audience or relative, or even because of his/her gender.<sup>253</sup> It may be necessary to analyse what influences the construction and performance of a compliment, including the interactants' relationship and their future relationship. Such differences in complimenting others may lead to pragmatic failure that may in turn result in misunderstanding, as what is considered to be a compliment is subject to the cultures of the interactants and their interpretation of the context.

#### **5.4 Variables leading to different linguistic strategies across cultures**

As I have shown above, certain variables that influence the production and interpretation of utterances are interpreted differently across cultures. Variables such as power, distance, gender, religion and stereotype influence interaction in every culture, but how these variables are interpreted across cultures is not the same. What constitutes power, distance, gender, etc., and how these factors influence production and interpretation, is not necessarily the same in Arabic as it is in English. Furthermore, the way in which interactants from different cultures stereotype others influences interaction, especially as

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in those cultures where the needs of a group are placed above the individual' (Alymursy and Wilson 2001:134).

<sup>253</sup> Farghal and Al-Kbaib (2001) state that 'the gender of the speaker in Jordanian society seems to be a crucial parameter in the formulation and acceptance or rejection of a compliment' (2001:1458). Kharraki (2002) also argues that 'men and women use different syntactic strategies in paying compliments, and that men, more than women, perceive complements as a token of social distance rather an act of solidarity' (2002: 65)

stereotypes have different causes, which might be historical or religious. In the following sections, in order to establish whether core politeness theories have considered cultural differences appropriately or not, I will discuss the variables that influence interaction and examine whether they might lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction.

#### 5.4.1 Power

Harris (1995) holds that power is a significant determinant of strategic choice or lack of choice (1995:133). Brown and Levinson maintain that power is 'the degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S's plans and self-evaluation' (1987:77). Thornborrow (2002) considers power from a contextual view. She defines it as 'a set of resources and actions which are available to speakers and which can be used more or less successfully depending on who the speakers are and what kind of speech situation they are in' (2002:8).<sup>254</sup> She argues that power is evaluated on structural and interactional levels. She distinguishes between power in ordinary conversation, and power in institutionally shaped interaction, arguing that power is more difficult to identify in ordinary conversation, where the relationship between the interactants is not established by the context. She points out that

in conversational interaction, where the social role of participants may not be so clearly contextually structured or institutionally defined, it becomes more difficult to make any analytical assumptions about what counts as powerful discursive action and what does not (2002:9)

To some extent, Sadiqi (2003) has a similar view to Thornborrow (2002), but in relation to feminism. She sees the relationship between language, gender, and identity as deeply related to power, and asks three questions: (i) Who controls language, in what way and to what extent? (ii) Does power in language derive from other kinds of power (physical, political, economic)? and (iii) Does linguistic power define reality, and thus, is it the key to all other forms of domination? (2003:277).

For example, to Arabs, power is the influence that a person has over others, and the respect that s/he demands. Generally, this view of power may appear universal, but when it comes to actual practice, interactants sometimes disagree, regardless of their status. If you have

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<sup>254</sup> Thornborrow (2002) states 'Power means different things to different people; it is multi-faced, and can take many different forms. It is always seen as a quantifiable thing - some people have more of it than others' (5)

influence then you have power regardless of your position in the society. This influence is interpreted by how much respect you receive from others. This view is similar to Phillip's definition of power. He comments 'in earliest politicized work focusing on discourse, power was understood as something that some people have more of than others' (2001:190). In some parts of the Arab world, a leader of a tribe is more powerful than a president or a highly official person, because of his influence. A religious scholar may receive more respect than a highly qualified person, and people from certain tribes would feel that they have more power than others.<sup>255</sup> Thus, power is differently interpreted cross-culturally.

#### **5.4.1.1 Power and cross-cultural interaction**

There are different ways of evaluating power depending on the context of the interaction. Fairclough (1989) argues that

power relations are not reducible to class relation. There are power relations between social groupings in institutions, and there are power relations between women and men, between ethnic groupings, between young and old, which are not specific to particular institutions (1989:35).

His point is that there are different levels of power, and relations between speakers are crucial in determining which of them is the more powerful, such that no one person is always in power. Social relations may mean one person is in power in one interaction, and another person in another. Mercer (2000) comments that

it may seem obvious in conversation between lawyers and witnesses, police and suspects, employers and employees, teachers and students, that the first named of each pair will be the speakers who are the more powerful and so will inevitably control the structure, content and social consequences of the talk (2000:94).

However, Mercer (2000) also points out that powerful people do not necessarily control an interaction. How powerful people are respected and treated is not the same across cultures. The speaker may give the impression of practising power, but whether this is understood by the hearer or not is sometimes not clear. Thus, if the speaker is exercising power in

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<sup>255</sup> In different parts of the Arab world, tribal leaders are often misunderstood when they come to cities or towns. They speak in the same way they do when they are in their villages, but they do not receive the same respect.

speech and the addressee fails to understand that, then a situation of pragmatic failure occurs.<sup>256</sup>

Discussing power and politeness, Dogancay-Aktuna et. al. (2001) argue that there is a link between them, but this link is understood differently cross-culturally. They suggest that power relations are expressed through different expressions and different strategies according to how people understand power in that particular society or group. They hold that it is not necessary for these expressions or strategies to be similar in all societies, even when the context of power appears to be universal across all cultures. For example, all cultures may agree that a supervisor has power over students in any part of the world, but how supervisors perform this power, and how students recognize it, is different from one culture to the other. A request or order from a teacher to students is a way of using power, but while Arab students would accept direct orders from their teachers, English students may still expect their teachers to use expressions such as 'please', 'would you agree', 'if you could ...' although a request from a teacher to a student may, in actual fact, be an order. Koutsantoni (2004) states that

power and differences in status do not have the same connotations in all cultures, and there is variation in the strategies which are employed to deal with power inequalities by individuals in various discourse communities (2004:111).

Zeyrek (2001) comments that 'individuals from a high power distance culture<sup>257</sup> consider power as a normal part of their social life, while low power distance cultures believe power should be used only when it is legitimate' (2001:56). An Arab student would find it difficult to criticize a teacher. This might be interpreted as an issue of power in some cultures, whereas it is a mixture between power and respect in Arabic.

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<sup>256</sup> Holmes (1995) has a different view of power. He states that 'relative power or hierarchical status is another important consideration in determining the appropriate degree of linguistic politeness' '...Power refers to the ability of participants to influence one another's circumstances' (Holmes 1995:16-17). Generally, power means the possibility of one speaker to impose on his/her addressee or control their verbal and non-verbal behaviour in certain contexts.

<sup>257</sup> According to Hofstede (1980) 'high power distance culture is when subordinates expect to be told what to do, bosses are expected to be benevolent, teachers are expected to take all initiatives in class, hierarchy in organizations is seen as reflecting natural differences, inequalities between people are expected and desired, children respect parents and parents expect obedience. A low power distance culture, however, is one in which subordinates expect to be consulted, bosses are expected to be resourceful democrats, teachers expect initiatives from students in class, hierarchy in organizations is seen as exploitative, inequalities between people should be minimized and parents and children treat each other as equals' (1980:67).

Considering leadership styles and relationships usually holding between professors and students, it has been suggested that distance and power in these situations are generally not perceived as totally negative. This may ultimately manifest itself in the use of deferentials, leading, say, university students to address their professors with deferentials that carry a sense of affect (Zeyrek 2001:66).

A person in power is in a position to use any language strategy s/he thinks suitable, but is still governed by the norms and conventions that his/her culture obliges. The following example of power in cross-cultural interaction is from a conversation between an English teacher and her Libyan Arab students, at the University of Sebha in 1999:

1- *Student : What is the meaning of the second word, teacher?*

2- *Teacher : Sorry?*

3- *Student : I want to know the meaning of the second word in the first paragraph.*

4- *Teacher : Could you add please to your question when you ask others for help?*

Line 1 implies that the student is making an order to his English language teacher rather than requesting help from her. In line 2, the teacher gives the impression that there is something wrong with his question. An English student would ask by using a structure like 'What is the meaning of the second word please?' or 'Could you explain the meaning of that ....?' In line 3, the student repeats his question without realizing that the problem is with his way of requesting. In line 4, the teacher explains that the student needs to use appropriate language when talking to others and not give them orders. It is not clear whether the teacher felt that her student was giving her an order or whether she was trying to teach him a polite way of requesting others in English, but, to an English person in a position of power, the implicature that utterances 2 and 4 might give rise to is that "the way you have asked me is inappropriate and unacceptable", which is a weak implicature to the Arab non-native speaker of English.

However, as Lambert (1996) points out, we may conclude that there are variations in understanding power. Who controls the interaction, initiates it, and determines the topic or turn or end of an interaction cannot always be established, and neither can the criteria by which to judge which interactant is more powerful than the other. These criteria have different roles in conversations across cultures.

In cross-cultural interaction, power seems to be highly contextual and influenced by cultural variables. I agree with Thornborrow (2002) that 'power relations in interaction are not necessarily fixed, predetermined states of affairs, but are constantly shifting and being redefined between participants on a very local level' (2002:134). As Blommaert and Verschueren explain, power can emanate from many factors (1989:336), such as age, tribe, relationship, and that every society may differently emphasise these factors.<sup>258</sup> Thus, even if we agree on a definition of power, it is difficult to provide rules of how it works or how interactants negotiate it, especially in cross-cultural interaction. Every culture emphasises certain aspects concerning power, and agreement between interactants from different cultures is difficult to arrive at.<sup>259</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Distance

It seems that social distance and power are similar, and related in interaction. The concept of distance varies across cultures, as does that of power, and both are differently interpreted in cross-cultural interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) and Holmes (1995/1990) believe that the amount of linguistic politeness that is needed between interactants depends on social distance. Thomas feels 'it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between power and social distance and in fact some studies conflate the two' (1995:128). Spencer-Oatey believes that this is not always the case in British and Chinese understanding of power and closeness in tutor-postgraduate student relations. She states 'for the British respondents, the greater the degree of power difference perceived between tutors and postgraduate students, the greater the degree of distance perceived, and vice versa' (2000b:35). Spencer-Oatey sees the variables "power" and "distance" as being correlated.

Generally, social distance is the relationship between individuals or different groups of a society. It includes all differences such as tribal, religious or social class, status, race/ethnicity, etc. Wierzbicka (2003) points out that no-one seems to have a direct definition of what social distance means. She accepts that Brown and Levinson (1987)

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<sup>258</sup> Blommaert and Verschueren (1989:336) are not accurate when they claim that 'when power and age are in conflict, power tends to overrule age'. Although this might be accepted in a Western society, in the Arab world, age is always a crucial factor, and if not considered, the participants would be classified as impolite.

<sup>259</sup> There are some other variables which influence linguistic strategies, such as education. People with different levels of education have different views of practising power, even within one society. A person who might be considered as less powerful because of his/her linguistic strategies in one group is classified as a powerful person in another group or culture because of his/her tribe, wealth or social class.

discuss social distance, but treat it as if it were self-explanatory. Distance determines how interactants verbally behave with each other and what politeness strategies they use. In assessing social distance, Fukushima (2000) states that 'there are some difficulties in assessing social distance. One of the difficulties is due to the fact that the relationships among speakers are dynamic and open to negotiation' (2000:83). Holmes (1995) also points out that 'social distance is best seen as a composite of psychologically real factors (status, age, sex, degree of intimacy, etc.) which 'together determine the overall degree of respectfulness' within a given speech situation' (1995:128). Thus, this is a concept crucial to determining the relationship between interactants. However, it is difficult to measure because, like power, it is not fixed, and subject to the interactants' interpretations of the context. Van Dijk (1997) maintains that

people everywhere adjust their speech according to how they view those they are speaking with, and although some dimensions of social identity (such as gender and age) are of near-universal relevance, the social constructs involved vary enormously (1997:253).

Thus, social distance is influenced by different factors which are understood differently in society. Sometimes the social system is uncertain between the individuals of a society, and not as clear as the class system. The tribal system in different parts of the Arab world exemplifies that social distance is influenced differently across cultures.<sup>260</sup>

#### **5.4.2.1 Distance and cross-cultural interaction**

The task of understanding social distance encounters more obstacles in cross-cultural interaction. In Arabic, as in any other language, the type of questions asked and the choice of utterances made reflect the distance between interactants. This element of interacting is difficult to measure in cross-cultural interaction, in which such measures might differ from one another, or be differently interpreted. Wierzbicka (2003) suggests that the types of language which reflect distance differ in different cultures:

in a sense, the infinitive directive functions as a distance-building device in Polish, just as an interrogative directive does in English. But in Anglo-Saxon culture, distance is a positive cultural value, associated with respect for the autonomy of the individual. By contrast, in Polish culture it is associated with hostility and alienation (2003:37).

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<sup>260</sup> Although the class system has started creeping into different parts of the Arab world, the tribal system still prevails. (See footnote, 74, page 47)

Thus, the meaning and interpretation of social distance differs from one culture to another. For Arabs, social distance is influenced by a number of factors, such as religion, tribe, race, and interpersonal interest.<sup>261</sup> Mills (2003a) states that

social distance cannot be characterized as achieved or stable. ... Social distance, because it is, like power, not something which is ever discussed explicitly, but which is negotiated in each interaction, is a variable about which interactants might have different perception (2003a:101)

Certain questions would be classified as strange between interactants in cross-cultural interaction. An English person would find it strange if s/he were asked 'What is your tribe?' 'ما هي قبيلتك', "ma heya kabeelatouk" by an Arab. As in any other language, greetings in Arabic tell us how a person is distancing himself/herself from his/her interactant, or to which tribe or class the speaker belongs. Such ways of greeting might not sound relevant to cross-cultural interactions, but if any of the interactants tries to evaluate the other according to his/her own culture, then misunderstanding may occur.

#### 5.4.3 Gender

Gender is an important factor that influences interaction and may determine the linguistic choices of the speaker. A male-female interaction is different from a male-male or female-female interaction, and culture will influence its interactants. An Arab culture will view a female differently to an English culture, and this is usually apparent in people's speech. Ahmed (1992) and Ochs (1992) perceive the relationship between language and gender as being very complicated, and not a simple straightforward mapping of linguistic forms to the social meaning of gender. Ochs (1992) states that gender relationship is constituted and mediated by the relation of language to attitude, social acts, social activities, and other social constructs. Ahmed (1992) and Ochs (1992) maintain that scholars in gender and language have now advanced their research understanding to investigate the relationship between gender and discourse.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> According to religion, people are equal socially, and their social relations should be built on this assumption. Conventionally, this, in some situations, is not possible either because of the race, tribe or sex.

<sup>262</sup> Gender studies started from the feminist movements in the 1970s by scholars such as Lakoff (1973) to recently with scholars such as Coates (1986/1993), Holmes et. al. (1999), Holmes (1995), and Mills (2003a).

Coates (2003) identifies two approaches to gender differences in language: the dominance and the difference approach. The dominance approach 'sees women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination' (2003:12). The difference approach 'emphasises the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures' (2003:13).<sup>263</sup> Coates concentrates on linguistic differences or variations, but her analysis is based on describing the differences found in speech and relating them to the social roles assigned to women and men. This method of analysis investigates gender and language through isolated speech acts, and examines speech as discrete from other factors, such as context.

Sadiqi (2003) identifies four sets of factors for examining gender and language in Morocco: (i) the large power structures that constitute Moroccan culture: (ii) social variables: (iii) contextual variables: and (iv) identity variables (2003:1). With regards to social variables, she sees the geographical origin, class (tribe), level of education, job opportunities, language skills and marital status as important factors in examining gender interaction. But how such factors influence the interpretation of speech depends on what is considered acceptable and unacceptable in a society.<sup>264</sup> An educated woman needs to consider whether her society will accept her if she speaks differently from what is thought to be appropriate when interacting with a male. According to Zeyrek (2001):

men's language reflects authority and dominance, women's language submissiveness and secondary status. Such sharp distinctions can blur the subtlety and complexity of gender-differentiated styles and obliterate the reasons why women's language developed the way it did (2001:57).<sup>265</sup>

Although, to some extent, how Coates distinguishes gender talk between men and women apply to Arab women's speech, there is often misunderstanding because of gender differences across cultures. Mills (2003a) moves beyond the assumption that women's speech is always necessarily different from men's speech, and examines gender when

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<sup>263</sup> Coates (2003) argues that 'in different social contexts an individual will speak in different ways ... moreover, speakers who differ from each other in terms of age, gender, social class, ethnic group, for example, will also differ in their speech, even in the same context' (1993:4).

<sup>264</sup> Highly educated females in the Arab world face more problems than males do. Generally, females in the Arab world need to be more cautious in their language. Their knowledge, education and social status should not make them forget that they are females, and that they need to observe this fact in their linguistic utterances.

<sup>265</sup> Coates also argues that 'control of topics is normally shared equally between participants in a conversation. In a conversation between speakers from the same gender, this seems to be the pattern, but when one speaker is male and one female, male speakers tend to dominate' (2003:113)

analysed alongside other variables and stereotype forms. She argues that the analysis of women's speech is based on a stereotypical language usage of a very small group of women and then generalized about all women. She contends:

What has to be considered is the simple binary division between female and male, and also the way that gender operates at the level of a system which has been institutionalised, and which operates in stereotypes and assumptions about context which have a material impact on groups as well as individuals, rather than as something which functions simply at the level of the individual (2003:174).

For example, discussing 'gossiping' in Arabic, Al-sheha (1998) explains that 'men, in fact, gossip more than women, but the contexts in which men gossip are different from the contexts in which women gossip, and that men's understanding of gossip is different from women's understanding of gossip' (1998:7).<sup>266</sup> This may be a result of how men and women are seen in Arabic society. Much of what is argued about gender interaction is influenced by stereotypes (see discussion of stereotype in this chapter). Some of Coates's claims cannot be applied to female-male interaction in Arabic. For example, she argues that 'women are careful to respect each other's turn and tend to apologise' (2003:189). This is not the case in Arabic female interaction. Females, in Arabic, usually speak simultaneously, and try to dominate conversation when interacting with other females, but do the opposite when interacting with males. Because of some religious teachings which are considered the cornerstone of Arab culture, and cultural conventions, Arab females' way of interacting is sometimes different. Arab females usually sound more respectful towards their male addressees, and try to talk less and apologise more often because of religious teachings in the Qur'an. Such cultural restrictions may lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction.

#### **5.4.3.1 Gender and cross-cultural interaction**

Cultures differ in how they allow people to interact in order for them to be considered polite. What is endorsed for an Arab female communicating with a male, by her culture, is different from what is endorsed for an English female communicating with a male. Although such difference is contextual and not fixed, female-male interactions are always different from male-male and female-female interactions. Coates (2003) suggests that across the majority of cultures, men's language is 'the language of the powerful' and

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<sup>266</sup> It is stereotyped in Arabic that women gossip, talk more politely than men, but also swear more than men.

'women's language that of those "without access to power"' (2003:206). Coates, referring to Arabic speakers, argues that males are more dominant in interaction than females. She holds that

women are linguistically at a double disadvantage when entering the public domain: first, they are (normally) less skilful at using the adversarial, information-focused style expected in such contexts: second, the (more cooperative) discourse styles which they are fluent in are negatively valued in such contexts (1993:14).

Coates' view is true to some extent. Perhaps dominant is not the right word, but we may argue that Arabs allow more freedom to males than to females in different interactional situations. A female's speech is interpreted differently from what she may intend by her society if she has not used language acceptable to her society. If a female compliments a male colleague, for instance, then this may lead to misunderstanding from her male interactant, because this is not permitted culturally.<sup>267</sup> Sadiqi states that

it is not that women are nurturing while men are not; rather, it is the potential sources of social power that are not the same for men and women: they are associated with different social roles and social roles do not carry the same social power (2003:276).

She considers this as a reason why men and women use different linguistic strategies. Thus, the linguistic choices that are made by females, in female-male context of interaction, are expected to be different from the linguistic choices made in female-female interaction. For instance, a female to female interaction, in front of men, would include different utterances to when women interact with men. Also, female to male interaction between strangers is different from female to male interaction between relatives or those who belong to the same community of practice.<sup>268</sup>

Kharraki (2001) discusses different strategies that Arab men and women use when bargaining. He states that

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<sup>267</sup> Compliments are also discussed by Holmes (1988). She argues that in English 'women use compliment to each other significantly more often than they do to men or men do to each other' (1988:463).

<sup>268</sup> Communities of Practice are groups of people engaged in a task. They do not emerge randomly, but are structured by the kinds of situations that present themselves in different places in society. 'The community of practice is the level of social organization at which people experience the social order on a personal and day-to-day basis, and through which they jointly make sense of that social order' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003:57-58).

women and men are found to adopt different strategies when bargaining. There are some strategies which tend to be widely used by men, such as depreciating the quality of the vendor's goods - a way of bargaining that demands quite considerable talking and a certain amount of audacity' (2001:629).

He also believes 'women use more direct bargaining strategies than men, due to social factors' (ibid: 629). Although Kharraki discusses bargaining, his conclusion suggests that some societies allow more freedom to women than to men in some contexts and less freedom in others. He suggests that

bargaining is a shared feature between men and women. What seems to provide a very interesting debate, in this context, is the way in which each gender engages in the activity of bargaining – that is to say the distinctive strategies that each gender makes use of in an attempt to persuade vendors to reduce the prices quoted for commodities (2001:619).<sup>269</sup>

According to Alrafahi (1926), in most parts of the Arab world, interaction is governed by the Islamic teachings from the Quran or the Prophet Mohammed's sayings. For example, any male/female interaction should be in an open place, and probably supervised by a third party, especially if they are strangers. A male may not be able to ask about certain subjects if he is answered by a female relative of the person he is visiting or phone calling. Compliments between males and females who are strangers are forbidden. This makes interactants more cautious in male/female interaction, and a male might be considered impolite if he is not cautious as to what he says when interacting with a female, especially in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>270</sup>

Male/female interaction in Arabic involves numerous variables that male/female interaction in English does not. In Arabic, females are stereotyped as talkative, but only when among themselves. They are more respected by their societies when they use short

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<sup>269</sup> The respect and the freedom that a society gives to its people reflect what is acceptable or unacceptable in that society. This freedom ranges from the choice of the topic, the linguistic strategy, the intonation and the type of interaction.

<sup>270</sup> Generally, in Arabic, communication between male and female strangers is not acceptable, even if they work in the same place and/or teach one another. Such behaviour may lead to conflict which may involve other members of the families. Abu-Haidar (1995), in relation to male/female Arabic interaction, points out that 'men and women do not sit separately, but it is usually men, or older women who have acquired status of seniority in the clan, who initiate conversation' (1995:184). Females interact depending on what role they are performing. In some situations females are considered more polite if they answer by keeping silence. For example when an Arab female is asked, by her father, whether she agrees to be a wife for a particular male, then she usually keeps silence which means agreement and respect of the her father as well.

utterances, and are very concise and specific in targeting the main points discussed and do not discuss topics related to sex.<sup>271</sup> When interacting with females, males are more respected when they use only the least amount of words. For example, in answering a greeting, the answer from the hearer to the speaker, in male/female interaction should include either the same amount of words or fewer than the one used by the speaker. The situation is different when the greeting is from male to male or from female to female, where the hearer is expected to use more linguistic units than that which s/he has received in order to be considered as polite.

In her article "The effect of social class and ethnicity on the discursive of femininities in the talk of British Bangladeshi girls", Pichler (2001) demonstrates how the socio-cultural backgrounds of these girls affect the discourse they position themselves in. She proves that the girls are affected by the dominant discourse of both cultures. The influence of social background in determining gendered behaviour in Arabic societies is also discussed by Baker (1986). She explains that

although there are many types of institutions where women and men meet and work together, the men's society and the women's society are still separate, and women are expected not to trespass on men's grounds by doing men's work or assuming roles and participating in functions that men are expected to perform (1986:6).

Baker is arguing that, regardless of what individuals think of the relationship between men and women, women are expected to do what is considered culturally appropriate and follow the norms of their societies. Fishman (1990) argues that 'women's conversational troubles reflect not their inferior social training but their inferior social position' (1990:240). On a political note, Christie (2003) comments:

the terms within which women are able to access and utilise the resources of public discourse such as parliamentary debate are strongly related to the meanings they are able to generate in that context. I would argue that differential access to and use of these recourses will affect the impact that women as a group are able to have on political decision-making (2000:3).

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<sup>271</sup>Manhart et. al. (2000) state that 'social norms often exercise a negative influence in the form of a low social view of condoms and deeply rooted taboos against discussing sex (2000:1380).

Kharraki (2000) investigates how and why eastern Moroccan men and women mark politeness differently. In his cross-cultural study, he selected three different speech acts: apology, compliment and bargaining, in order to examine the different genders' strategies and what their linguistic behaviours may reveal. He discusses social variations at two levels: in men's and women's speech at the linguistic form (lexicon, syntax, and phonology), and gender differences at the discourse level, concentrating on differences in politeness, beyond the sentence level. He maintains that 'women appear to be very careful to maximize the cost/benefit for their addressee to show solidarity and protect their good relationship; whereas men minimize it so as to maintain social distance' (2000:196).

Discussing women's speech and politeness, Antonopoulou (2001) believes that 'women are supposed to use, more often than men, speech that involves markers of politeness, tact, hesitancy and uncertainty' (2001:252).<sup>272</sup> He offers analysis of male-female interactions in terms of sociological factors. He divides them into three factors; the deficit model, which assumes that women are disadvantaged speakers because of their upbringing; the dominance model, which assumes that women are socially powerless in relation to men; and the cultural difference model, which draws a parallel between gender and other social variables like ethnicity (Antonopoulou 2001:252).<sup>273</sup> He argues that when men interact with women, they sometimes sound patronizing in their jokes, treating them like children (Antonopoulou 2001:260). This is culturally specific. For example, in Arabic, it rarely happens that men make jokes to women in a public place regardless of their relationships. Men often try to show a higher degree of politeness to women, especially when there is a third party listening.

The above discussion establishes that there are differences between male-male/female-female and male-female interactions. I have also confirmed that examining male and female language against their cultural background in certain contexts is very important in analysing interactions. How gender differences are perceived across cultures is different, and how such differences influence the production and interpretation of speech is also different. It is important first to realise whether there are misunderstandings between

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<sup>272</sup> Holmes (1995:144) suggests that 'women are more positively polite than men and are consequently expected to use more devices expressing positive politeness, such as greeting, expressions of gratitude, friendly address forms and leave-takings'. We may agree with Holmes that women are more positively polite than men, but this depends on the context and the addressee, and, probably, cultural factors.

<sup>273</sup> Macaulay (2001) argues that 'female speakers are not so much powerless in speech as culturally distinct from male speakers' (2001:294)

interactants because of cultural difference in understanding certain factors that influence interaction; and second whether either interactant considers the other to be impolite.

#### 5.4.4 Religion

The influence of religion in communication differs from one society to another and from one person to another. In Arabic, as I have explained in previous chapters, religion influences the choice of the linguistic strategies in almost every context of interaction, even the choice of the topic of discussion.<sup>274</sup> According to Abu-Akel (2001) and Farghal (1995) terms that refer to sex are highly euphemized in Arabic. The Holy Quran, for instance, frequently refers to 'sexual intercourse' as 'touching' or generally as 'committing sin' (1995:372). To Arabs, religion is something that influences education, the legal system, and almost any aspect of life. Gully (1994) and Holt (1994) state that modern Arabic is influenced by religion. Holt (1994) argues that the Arabic language is influenced by religion because it is the language of the Holy Quran.<sup>275</sup> Blommaert and Verschueren, (1989) agree that religion influences behaviour, but they argue that it has a different effect, for example, between Eastern societies and Western societies.<sup>276</sup> They state that

religion has lost much of its importance in present-day Western Europe in the interaction between religious and non-religious segments of the population (a contrast which was a dominant political parameter until recently), whereas it has assumed renewed vigour in defining relations between a Christian majority and Muslim minority (1989:1).<sup>277</sup>

Holt (1994) refers to the influence of Westerners in religious culture that was experienced by the Algerians during French occupation. He points out, for instance, that the French

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<sup>274</sup> Islam, to Arabs, is the foundation of any cultural activity and verbal/nonverbal performance. It forms the basis of complete social, economic and political plans to Muslims, amongst themselves and others.

Therefore, it is the orientation that Muslims are guided by in their everyday life.

<sup>275</sup> The language of the Quran is understood by any speaker of Arabic whose mother tongue is Arabic, even non-educated. There are some words and expressions which are not used by any or most of the Arabic dialects these days. (see chapter 1 for discussion)

<sup>276</sup> Harris and Moran (2000) define a religious system as 'the means for providing meaning and motivation beyond the material aspects of life, that is the spiritual side of a culture or its approach to the supernatural' (2000:10). They argue that 'possibly the most difficult classification is ascertaining the major belief themes of a people, and how this and other factors influence their attitude toward themselves, others, and what happens in other world' (2000:7).

<sup>277</sup> Arabs think that they are protecting Islam with their language, and that Islam is protecting their language, and also that they need to protect their language and society from any intrusion such as Western influence. Gully (1994) argues that 'a society founded on a revealed religion requires the mechanism to guarantee the validity of those texts (Quran and its teachings) at all times' (1994:268).

built their exclusion policy on language and religion when they colonized Algeria.<sup>278</sup> Holt sees religion influencing the structure of societies more than race. Pointing to what he calls tribal and urban Islam, he explains that 'the move to the town, coupled with the earlier pacification of the tribes, meant that the urban form of Islam came to dominate as elsewhere in the Middle East (1994:35).<sup>279</sup>

Eid (1994), trying to find an explanation for the avoidance of mentioning females' names in certain public places, explains that some of her results point to religion. She argues that

in view of the results pointing to religion as a strong predictor of the variation and to differences in the way the Muslim and Christian populations react to change, can the practice of identifying women without their names be attributed to Islamic culture (1994:97).

This view of naming and its link to religion is also discussed by Gardner (1994), who views the influence of religion in naming as being clear in the culture of Sudan. She examines why the Sudanese do not accept the change towards naming new generations with non-religious names.<sup>280</sup> She argues that 'the concern among some Sudanese was not so much that traditional names were decreasing in popularity, but that this might somehow be a sign of declining religiosity among the people' (1994:119).

Rarely do we find a conversation in Arabic, whether short or long, that does not include Allah or any of His known ninety-nine names. The use of Allah's name is crucial in creating harmony between Arabic interactants. Omitting it where it should be used may lead to breakdown in civility and to accusations of a lack of appropriateness.<sup>281</sup> In Arabic,

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<sup>278</sup> He points out that 'the French state had particularly defined the emerging Algerian nation as Muslim and Arab/Berber by a policy of exclusion, which included exclusion from the economic benefits of a modern state, exclusion ... This exclusion was ultimately based, not on race, as the differences ..., but on language and religion' (1994:34).

<sup>279</sup> Benrabah (2004) and Holt (1940) agree that religion and personal identity are different among Arabs, and that the way education and the modern world influence people makes for differences in understanding and practising Islam. This view is challenged by some modern Islamic scholars such as Alqaradawee (2002), AL-kerni (2001) who argue that there is nothing called old Islam and New Islam or any difference between rural and urban Islam.

<sup>280</sup> Mills (2003b) sees naming as an area that women can negotiate a position for themselves (2003b:103).

<sup>281</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the religious words or expressions are intended pragmatically. Arabs sometime say words and expressions without even understanding what they mean, but they use them only because they understand that such expressions should be used in such contexts. As argued by Piamenta (1979) 'religious Arabic formulas such as wishes, greetings, farewell expressions, condolences, etc. were originally non-ritual personal invocations for help, protection, and support. However, they were developed in

interactants may be irritated if others do not use Allah's name, or certain expressions that include Allah's name, in certain contexts. For example, a speaker talking about future plans should follow their utterance with "God Willing", ( ان شاء الله ) 'Inša Allah', and their interactant is expected to repeat 'Inša Allah'. Inša Allah can be said initially by either of the interactants and then repeated by the other.<sup>282</sup> 'Insha Allah', or the phrase 'if Allah wishes', looms large in the thinking of the average Arab Muslim. Farghal and Borini (1997) explain that 'Jordanians often use some politeness formulas in order to save face for mentioning a stereotypically negative lexical item in conversation such as shoes, toilet, donkey, etc' (1997:80). In fact, all Arabs use some polite expressions after mentioning some tabooed words, expressions or some animal names such as dogs or donkeys.<sup>283</sup>

However, it seems that religion is variously considered as a factor that influences and determines linguistic behaviour. Whereas it is seen as a very important factor in maintaining good relationships in communication in one culture, it is considered as alien in another. Farghal and Borini (1997) argue that 'it is the area of belief where differences between Arab and Western societies are greatest (1997:81).<sup>284</sup> This religious cultural background is different from the West, where religion does not play the same role that Islam does in Arabic culture.<sup>285</sup> Islam intervenes in male/female interaction, same sex interaction, conflict solution, understanding of appropriate behaviour in certain contexts, naming, and in addressing others. Thus, religion provides ways of maintaining a good relationship between interactants, regardless of whether they are religious people or not.<sup>286</sup> Such a development is difficult to understand cross-culturally, and interpreting pragmatic meaning in a cross-cultural interaction is also difficult. All this reflects the importance of

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everyday spoken Arabic and became idiomatic and stereotyped without losing their Islamic essence' (1979:1).

<sup>282</sup> Another example of the use of Allah is when a person is waiting for results of his/her exams, what s/he would expect from others is expressions like خير انشاء الله Khayraa Insha Allah' which means 'good results God Willing' or موفق انشاء الله 'Mwafak Be-edn Allah', which means 'successful by the permission of Allah'.

<sup>283</sup> Farghal and Borini (1997:87) argue that 'a close examination of the use of the formula 'al-hamdu li-llah (praise be to Allah') and similar expressions reveals that they frequently occur in everyday Arabic conversation'

<sup>284</sup> The Islamic culture has a far-reaching influence on the patterns of thought and speech of Arabic speakers, as belief is one of the basic components of culture.

<sup>285</sup> Hammad et. al. (1999) point out that 'in the current Western world view, religion and daily life tend to be viewed dichotomously, whereas the Semitic tradition of Judaism and Islam both viewed all aspects of life within the context of religion' (1999:14). Of course, how Islam restricts and controls the behaviour of Muslims cannot be seen to be the same for all Muslims.

<sup>286</sup> It is important that despite all the above, not all norms in the Arab world come from Islamic or religious backgrounds. For example, in some parts of the Arab world, Arab Muslims still believe in culturally inherited beliefs rather than Islamic religious teachings.

religion in communication in Arabic, and how it is an important factor which must be considered when analysing cross-cultural interaction.

#### **5.4.5 Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are generally defined as generalizations or assumptions that societies make about the characteristics of all individual members of a particular group, based on their perception of that group. Gudykunst (1998) defines stereotypes as 'the pictures we have in our heads for the people we place in the various social categories we use' (1998:122). Wodak and Reisigl (2003) hold stereotypes to be typically an element of common knowledge, shared to a high degree in a particular culture. They define stereotype as 'the verbal expression of a certain conviction or belief directed toward a social group or an individual as a member of that social group' (2003:378). There are different factors such as the knowledge that a person has about others or share with them, the media, and what we read about others that influence people's production of interpretation of utterances. How often people are influenced by these factors is not consistent, and consequently their effect on each individual is different.

Drawing on Hewstone and Brown (1986), Gudykunst (1998) identifies three essential aspects of stereotype: (1) categorization based on easily identifiable characteristics; (2) assumptions that certain attributes apply to most or all of the people in the category, and that people in the category are different to people in other categories with respect to these attributes; and (3) assumptions that individual members of the category have the attributes associated with their groups (1998:123). These three aspects illustrate that stereotypes are not always accurate and are built on generalization rather than on actual facts. Gudykunst (1998) distinguishes between stereotypes in general and social stereotypes. He maintains that stereotypes are certain generalizations made by individuals, or the general cognitive process of categorization, whereas social stereotypes are the stereotypes shared with members of a group. Mills (2003a) recognizes the importance of stereotypes, pointing out that they play a role in the way people interact. At the same time, however, she argues that finding an agreement on their role in an interaction is difficult. While we cannot ignore stereotypes, we cannot fully depend on them to make generalisations. Gudykunst (1998) argues that there are many reasons that stereotypes might be inaccurate or false, and that positive and negative aspects of our views of others influence our speech. Attitudes such as

prejudice, ethnocentrism, ageism and sexism may lead us to wrongly stereotype certain groups of people.<sup>287</sup>

#### 5.4.5.1 Stereotypes and cross-cultural interaction

Interactants from different cultures may communicate with each other, influenced by stereotypes which have been gained either from the others' cultures or from the media. Arabs sometimes complain of being stereotyped, and sometimes misunderstand each other because of stereotyping. For example, Arabs are usually shocked when they come to live in Britain because they do not find it to be as they had expected. There are different reasons for cultural shocks, and one of these reasons is that they compare British cultural values with their own. Mills, discussing male/female interaction and stereotype, argues that 'the hypothesised forms of stereotype are equally damaging to both males and females, since they consist of assumptions about us which often clash with our own perception of ourselves' (2003a:185).

Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly (1998) discuss the differences between Americans and Arabs. They argue that 'the United States is categorized as an individualistic culture, whereas responses from the Arab sample categorize it as a collectivistic culture' (1998:487).<sup>288</sup> Arabs interacting with British / American people interaction is one of these types of interactions which are usually influenced by stereotypes that are not necessarily true. For example, Arabs think that the British and Americans are notoriously selfish and care only

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<sup>287</sup> Presuppositions may be influenced by stereotypes. According to Mey (1993), speakers, not sentences, have presupposition. Fillmore (1971) explains that 'we may identify the presuppositions of a sentence as those conditions which must be satisfied before the sentence can be used in any of the functions just mentioned' (1971:380, cited in Verschueren, 2003:44). Grundy (2000) argues that 'when someone speaks to us, we typically make all sorts of assumptions about the background to their utterance which we presume to be mutually known before the utterance ever occurred' (2000:120). The presupposition that we have about an utterance is influenced by the context in which the utterance is performed, by the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the linguistic items used, by the experience that the interactant has with the person with whom she is interacting and the history that they have together, including how they speak. All these factors are influenced by stereotypes which are not necessarily accurate.

<sup>288</sup> Although it is not easy to classify members of certain societies in these terms, Westerners are classified as individual-centred interactants, whereas Arabs are classified as situation-centred interactants. Having a reasonable experience in English and Arab cultures, I can argue that there are situations in which Arabs seem to be more individual-centred than Westerners. Lindgren and Tebcherani (1971) explain that Arabs usually assign to themselves traits of high context culture, and claim strong emphasis on how one should appear to others. They also explain that Americans assign to themselves low context type, and emphasise individuality. From an interactional point of view, the linguistic patterns that Arabs use sometimes reveal that they are individual and do not pay attention to how they appear before others. On the other hand, linguistic utterances that Westerners use sometimes reveal that they respect their addressee more than Arabs do. An English person may use the word "sorry" even when s/he has not done anything wrong; for example, if s/he is pushed aside accidentally by a stranger, s/he may say "sorry". Such linguistic behaviour, although it is not impossible, does not ordinarily happen among Arabs.

about themselves. They are not helpful to strangers and pay very little attention to their children when they are over sixteen.<sup>289</sup> In addition they have very weak family relations, and girls are given freedom from a very early age and, therefore, do not respect their parents properly. Arabs think that Americans are arrogant, and lazy in understanding others' culture, whereas the British understand others' cultures in order to govern or divide them. Looking at what is happening in English societies, as an example, from an Arab perspective, we may find that what Arabs classify as bad conduct is classified as good conduct by the English, and an Arab person who has lived with English people and understood their culture would come up with a different conclusion about them from that which is stereotyped.

However, as Huntington (2003) points out, people differ because of their religion, history, language and tradition, which makes them understand others differently from reality. What people presuppose about others influences their performance or interpretation, and may lead them to a different interpretation from what is intended by an utterance. For example, after 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 or the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2005, when Islamic groups attacked American and Britain, a Westerner may have a different interpretation of what an Arab Muslim intends when communicating.<sup>290</sup> This is because Islam, according to the Western media, is linked to the cause of most of the current problems in the world. Hence, what is stereotyped, whether because of political or cultural background, may influence the production and interpretation of utterances.<sup>291</sup> Generalization and stereotyping in relation to cross-cultural interaction are causes for misunderstandings in Westerner-Arab cross-cultural interaction.<sup>292</sup> In analysing Arab-English interaction, this factor should be considered, although we should be careful not to generalize.

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<sup>289</sup> Nydell (2002) points out that 'Arab society is built around the extended family system. Individuals feel a strong affiliation with all of their relatives - aunts, uncles, and cousins - not just with their immediate family. The degree to which all blood relationships are encompassed by a family unit varies among families, but most Arabs have over a hundred "fairly close" relatives' (2002:91).

<sup>290</sup> Weston (2002) discusses how perceptions of Arabs in America are influenced by the local press. They state that 'the local press tends to treat such groups as multifaceted members of the community and that stereotyping and over-generalization increase as distance from the community increases' (2002:8). They continue that 'the implication of stereotyping of Arabs in domestic and international news coverage would appear to be exponentially greater in the post-September 11, 2001' (Ibid:2002:23).

<sup>291</sup> Yang (2002) explains that 'the speaker's sociocultural background and the communicative environment inevitably affect the way people talk' (2002:69).

<sup>292</sup> I do not think that Islam is being blamed by the Western media for every type of problem that the world faces, but perhaps only what is called "terrorism".

## 5.5 Conclusion

The chapter introduces a cultural concept that should be considered in theorizing for cross-cultural interaction. What we understand from the above is that communicative competence, the knowledge that underlies socially appropriate speech which Hymes (1972) introduced, is an important issue in theorizing in cross-cultural interaction. According to him, 'analysis of miscommunication in intercultural research is concerned with degrees of communicative competence (in the sense of appropriate social skill), rather than as the achievement of competent relationships' (1972:6). The above discussion also stresses Gudykunst's (1983) argument about theorizing in cross-cultural communication. He argues that 'the initial goal of theory in cross-cultural communication is understanding rather than prediction or control' (1983:15). In aiming to find an appropriate approach to analysing cross-cultural interaction, he suggests that cross-cultural communication is an important field that studies how people from different cultures interact successfully, but he holds that it needs to move from discussion on sensitising concepts toward consistent theoretical frameworks (1983:13). He addresses the question; "why is theory necessary in cross-cultural communication?" or "what is the function of theorizing in analysing cross-cultural communications?" These are important questions which need to be answered in order to understand the process of understanding in cross-cultural communication, and how the same factors that influence interaction are interpreted differently across cultures.

However, the above discussion addresses these issues and shows how interactants may have different understandings of certain phenomena because of their different cultural backgrounds, and consequently different understandings of the context. As Levinson et. al. (1998) stress, understanding the reasons for such different interpretations is valuable in analysing cross-cultural interactions. They state that

in analysing and understanding cultural differences it is important to pay attention to how members of various cultures see i) the nature of people, ii) a person's relationship to the external environment, iii) the person's relationship to other people, iv) the primary mode of the activity, v) people's orientation to space, and vi) the person's temporal orientation (1998:1-2).

The criticism that this chapter offers is that cultural factors are still not considered sufficiently in the applicable methods of analysing politeness that are used in cross-cultural

communication. Because of such arguments, Gudykunst stresses that there is a desperate need for conceptual frameworks that will give direction to the diverse research efforts taking place within it, and this is the aim of this chapter. To solve this problem, Okabe (1983) presents an alternative way of theorizing in cross-cultural communication. He calls it an 'Eastern way'. He suggests that

the Eastern way is a way of looking at human communication by analysing and categorizing cultural assumptions, values, and characteristics of communication and rhetoric as they are found in Japanese culture in comparison and contrast with those in the American counterpart (1983:21).

Okabe presents the cultural values in Japan and USA from different aspects and in a comparative way. He discusses definitions of certain concepts of communication such as rhetorical substance, which, he argues, enables the speaker to link his commitment to those of his listeners. Okabe holds that cross-cultural communication can be analysed in forms of structure, strategy and style and what influences them, which all create discourse problems between speakers who have different cultural backgrounds, as cultural values are different.

Motivations in each culture are different, and the cultural variables that influence interaction are different, with the interpretation of utterances being built on these differences. Simply identifying differences and similarities between cultures might not be sufficient to provide a framework of cross-cultural communication. If what is considered appropriate is a controversial issue within one culture, even between individuals, then cross-cultural interaction will create more discrepancies. Theorizing in such an environment is more complicated because of the different understanding of the variables that influence communication, as I have explained. A speaker, in cross-cultural situations, may sound impolite to his/her interactants because he/she does not use the same patterns that are expected to be used by his/her interactant in a particular situation, or because s/he understands a variable such as gender or power differently from his/her interactant. An analytical approach to cross-cultural interaction should explain why speakers from different cultures misunderstand each other.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

As discussed in previous chapters, cross-cultural interactions are influenced by a number of factors which can lead to misunderstandings. These factors can be linguistic, cultural, contextual or interpersonal. Because cross-cultural interaction is the focus of the current study, I concentrate on culture and its influence on how individuals understand context and how their cultural background shapes this, through the analysis of cross-cultural interaction. My aim has been to investigate whether core theorists of politeness such as Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) have adequately considered cultural differences and potential misunderstandings arising from contextual and cultural issues in their analysis. I will conduct my analysis using what I suggest is a more pragmatic approach in analysing cross-cultural interaction. In this chapter, I will again argue that a contextual, pragmatic approach does not just analyse politeness in non-contextualised utterances that convey speech acts, such as "apology", "blame" and "thanks", as do most politeness theories. Instead, I argue that such an approach considers cultural and contextual variables, as well as personal differences between interactants, allowing an analysis of how these influence the construction and interpretation of utterances.

This chapter investigates the core questions and hypotheses of this thesis by examining data from interactions between native and non-native English speakers. I will focus on the examination of misunderstandings (as defined in Chapters 1 and 4) caused by differing interpretations of intentions, leading to interactants' consideration of each other's contributions as impolite. I also examine the strategies used to avoid potential conflict.<sup>293</sup> Thus, after providing a summary of the aim of the thesis, I will discuss the method of the research and my analytical approach. Then I will discuss the data, before moving on to the discussion and findings of the data, where I will first discuss FTAs and indirectness in cross-cultural interaction. I then discuss context and culture, and finally context and understanding.

##### **6.1.1 Summary of the aims of the thesis**

As discussed in the aims and the research questions of this thesis in chapter 1, misunderstandings may occur between interactants in cross-cultural interaction.

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<sup>293</sup> In chapter 1, I defined understanding/misunderstanding and politeness/impoliteness as discussed in this thesis. In chapter 2, 4 and 5, I discussed different views of misunderstanding.

consequently, this misunderstanding may lead interactants to consider each other of being inappropriate or impolite. The aims of the thesis can be summarised as follows:

- 1) To analyse the extent to which linguistic utterances are influenced by different cultural, contextual and interpersonal factors. These factors have an effect not only on utterances but also on the way they are understood (see chapters 2 - 5).
- 2) To analyse the data in relation to Relevance Theory (1995) and the theories of politeness, in particular Brown and Levinson (1987) to find out how interactants understand each other and how politeness is understood across cultures. I also examine misunderstandings caused by different interpretations of what is considered to be polite by interactants. (See chapters 2 and 4)
- 3) To investigate the ways that culture and context are enmeshed, and how interactants try to negotiate an appropriate position for themselves from what they hypothesise as a cultural stand on a particular issue (See Chapter 1).
- 4) To show that misunderstandings between interlocutors from different cultures arise from their failure to understand the different politeness norms or the linguistic realisation of politeness in different cultures. I also aim to show that an approach to politeness that focuses on the pragmatics of interpretation is needed to explain where pragmatic failure occurs, and to isolate the cultural differences that lead to misunderstandings.

After describing my methodology, I will provide a description of my analytical approach. I will then analyse the data in relation to my main concerns.

## **6.2 Method of Research**

### **6.2.1 Data Collection**

My data comes from recordings of conversations between native and non-native English speakers. I chose this method rather than DCTs<sup>294</sup> because the DCT is an instrument to

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<sup>294</sup> DCT stands for Discourse Completion Test. According to Billmyer and Varghese (2000) DCT was adopted in 1982 by Blum-Kulka (1982) for the purpose of investigating speech acts. It is a questionnaire

investigate speech acts and I, like many other researchers discussed in the theoretical chapters of the thesis, consider such analysis to be fundamentally flawed. Further, DCTs do not provide researchers with examples of authentic interaction. Analysing recordings of natural talk, on the other hand, gives examples of how language is performed and interpreted and what influences these processes. As Golato (2003) points out:

recording naturally occurring talk-in-interaction enables the researcher to study how language is organized and realized in natural settings, whereas responses from data elicitation procedures such as DCTs indirectly reflect the sum of prior experience with language (2003:90).

The data was gathered as follows:

A) 15 conversations were recorded between pairs of native and non-native English speakers. The 15 native speakers were all male or female post-graduates from different parts of England. The 15 non-natives were Arabs, again all post-graduates, male and female from Libya, who have lived in the United Kingdom for at least two years. All the non-native speakers learned the English language both in their own country's school systems, and in the UK. They are fairly fluent with some awareness of British culture.

The discussions each lasted for about twenty five minutes. No specific topics were given. Consequently, there was a wide range of subjects: social, religious, and political, including the relationship between Arabs and the West. The participants were given a questionnaire in order to provide background information concerning their linguistic and cultural experiences with people of other cultures. Some were subsequently selected for follow-up interviews (See Appendix 2) to investigate the reasons behind their language choices, and certain implicatures that these language choices may have created in situations where misunderstandings occurred.<sup>295</sup>

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containing a set of briefly described situations designed to elicit a particular speech act. Subjects read the situations and respond in writing to a prompt (2000:517).

<sup>295</sup> After transcribing all of the 15 conversations, I selected 8 extracts from 5 conversations because I found that the others were either similar or did not warrant detailed analysis.

B) TV and radio conversations were selected from British and American sources<sup>296</sup>, between native speakers of English and non-native speakers from different parts of the world where Arabic is the mother tongue. The samples were selected from 20 recordings. The topics deal with political issues which are sensitive for both the interviewers and interviewees, and understood differently within each culture. I have chosen 7 extracts from 4 interviews to analyse. I decided to analyse casual conversation as well as TV and Radio interviews in order to include as many different conversational contexts as possible involving native speakers and Arab speakers of English.

### 6.2.2 Procedure

Some recordings were selected for analysis because explicit or implicit conflict, conflict avoidance or misunderstandings were apparent. These conversations were transcribed, and the linguistic strategies used within the situations of misunderstanding were analysed in relation to the theories of politeness and understanding discussed in the previous chapters. Having identified specific examples, the participants were asked to take part in a follow-up interview (See Appendix 2).

The main aim of the analysis is to investigate how cultural and contextual factors influence interaction and their roles in the delivery and interpretation of what is said. This is based on my argument that there are a number of theories that address the issue of misunderstanding and politeness, but their claims cannot always be upheld in cross-cultural interaction. Therefore, I concentrate on the interactants' meanings in relation to the context to see what has influenced their utterances. I examine how interactants infer each other's intended meaning and how relevance determines whether interactants consider each other to be polite or impolite. Utterance meaning in cross-cultural interaction has more possible interpretations than in a monocultural interaction. How interactants communicate depends on inferring what is intended. Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that

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<sup>296</sup> On the whole, the thesis is an investigation of the speech of Arabs with British speakers, but in several interactions I have included the speech of Americans. I am aware of the differences in American and British speech and this may have some impact on the way that the interactions play out especially in relation to politeness norms, but I hope that does not substantially change the nature of the points that I have to make. As explained by Cohen (1987), Farghal and Borini (1997) and Farghal, M. (1993) Arabs use the word "Westerners" to refer to Europeans and Americans. The terms "West" and "Westerners" are still used by Arabs to refer to Americans and Europeans, especially on a political level. For example, it is usually said (in different types of media) that one Arab country has a good relationship with the West, which means with European countries and America. Arabs also refer to Americans and Europeans when they say that they are invaded by Western cultures.

inferential communication involves the application, not of special-purpose decoding rules, but of general-purpose inference rules, which apply to any conceptually represented information (1995:176)

As discussed in chapters 1 and 4, the notion of context is a central issue within Relevance Theory. It is the set of assumptions that a hearer uses in the interpretation of a particular utterance. Escandell-Vidal (1996) states 'the hearer, guided by the presumption of relevance, selects the context that will yield an optimally relevant interpretation: the context is not given, but chosen by the hearer' (1996:637). Furthermore, Sperber and Wilson state that 'the propositional form the hearer should be interested in recovering is the one that is consistent with the principle of relevance' (1995:184) Thus, identifying the propositional form of an utterance by the hearer is not a straightforward process in all types of interactions. It is related to the interpretation of what is relevant.

I examine cultural differences along with the different and sometimes conflicting understandings of context, which I believe theories of politeness do not adequately consider.

### **6.3 My Analytical approach**

Whilst I do not claim that models of politeness are unable to analyse cross-cultural interaction, it is certainly the case that no one model seems to be able to provide an adequate analysis. Kallia (2004) posits that

if we consider that perceptions of politeness change through time and vary from culture to culture, then the complexity of the matter starts to become obvious ... Politeness is not a matter of a form (presence of politeness markers in an utterance) but also a content (2004:147).

I propose a contextual, pragmatic approach to allow us to analyse politeness more adequately by considering variables such as context and culture, as well as linguistic and cognitive issues<sup>297</sup> as considered in Relevance Theory and post-Brown and Levinson theory of politeness (See chapters 2 and 4). The following table illustrates the variables

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<sup>297</sup> Edstrom (2004) maintains that 'factors, such as professional training or personality, may also shape one's conversational style' (1499).

influencing the analysis of politeness which are either not considered or not adequately considered by the core theories of politeness.<sup>298</sup>

**Table 1**

Interactional factors		
	Context	
linguistic	Interpersonal	culture
vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, style, content	Attitude, motivation, interest, power, distance, degree of imposition, previous utterances, intentionality of understanding, time, place, audience, professional, personality, shared/available knowledge, previous utterances	Society, norms, conventions, values, habits, social relation, social pressure, gender, age, mother tongue, class, tribe, education, stereotypes and religion

The factors in table one are based upon my review of theories of politeness in chapter 2, and of theories of understanding in chapter 4. As discussed here, these factors influence interpretations of politeness which are either not analysed, or not considered adequately in the core theories of politeness dealing with cross-cultural interaction. Such factors influence utterances and their interpretation by interactants from different cultures, and some change according to the context of the interaction. Because of such factors, what the speaker means is sometimes misunderstood (intentionally or unintentionally) and so utterances may give rise to different implicatures than intended by the speaker. An utterance may also be intended to give rise to a strong implicature that the hearer interprets as weak, because of contextual or cultural factors.<sup>299</sup> (See chapter 4, section 4.3.1) As Escandell-Vidal (1996) states:

there is a crucial difference between implicature and explicature. Implicatures are the assumptions that the speaker tries to make manifest to the hearer without expressing them; implicatures are recovered by inference. Explicatures are the assumptions that the speaker explicitly communicates, i.e., the assumptions that can be directly developed from the logical form of the utterance (1996:637).

<sup>298</sup> Some of the interactional variables are considered by the core theories of politeness such as distance, power, language use, but not in relation to all interactants involved.

<sup>299</sup> Also Kallia (2004) maintains 'implicatures are calculated by the hearer on the basis of general knowledge shared with the speaker, knowledge of the particular situation, the semantic content of the utterance produced and the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative' (2004:151).

Understanding politeness depends on interactants' understanding of what is communicated, influenced by their cultural backgrounds and experiences. This includes understanding the link between what is said and how it is interpreted.

The following table summarises how interactants are influenced:

**Table 2: Production of utterance**

Speaker
Evaluation of the context Cultural factors Interpersonal factors Production of utterance/s

This table does not simply list what influences interaction, but explains what happens when someone speaks and why the factors influencing that speech are not stable. When a speaker produces an utterance, s/he first evaluates factors that influence interaction, whether contextual or cultural. Speakers are also influenced by their cultural background, but the pressure this puts on their evaluation of the context of the interaction includes the assumed intentions of the interactant. Interpersonal factors are also influential in evaluating context, and analysing how what is intended is interpreted because of the context.<sup>300</sup>

**Table 3: Interpretation of utterance**

Hearer
Understanding explicature/s Evaluation of the context Cultural factors Interpersonal factors Interpretation of utterance

Understanding is also influenced by the hearer's evaluation of the context as shown in table 2. The difference between table 2 and table 3 is that the context in table 3 includes the speaker's utterance, which means that the hearer is also influenced by what the speaker says.<sup>301</sup> How an utterance is, or is not, intended to be interpreted by the hearer in relation

<sup>300</sup> The process of producing an utterance changes according to the speaker's understanding of the context, as Relevance Theory (1995) points out. Before using an utterance, the speaker evaluates the context of the interaction in relation to her/his culture which includes his/her relationship with his/her addressee, plus personal interests. The outcome of this evaluation results in linguistic choices which reflect what s/he wants his/her interactant to understand.

<sup>301</sup> The evaluation of the speaker's utterance in relation to the context of the interaction by the addressee when starting talking has an impact on the conversation because they explicitly or implicitly include the purpose of the conversation.

to his/her cultural and interpersonal factors is important in this contextual, pragmatic approach. The same utterance may produce different interpretations because of different understandings of its relevance. Identifying the speaker's meaning is one of the difficult communicative processes that interactants belonging to different cultures face, since they interpret the context of interaction differently. Sperber and Wilson (1995) state:

if comprehension is identified as a process of identifying the speaker's informative intention, linguistic decoding is not so much a part of the comprehension process as something that precedes that real work of understanding, something that merely provides an input to the main part of the comprehension process (1995:177)

The speaker's evaluation of context might be close to or very different from the hearer's. The speaker may intend an utterance to give rise to strong implicature, which the addressee might understand differently because of a different evaluation of the context.<sup>302</sup> I therefore posit a different approach to analysis since an utterance usually offers more than one implicature in relation to the context of interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) also consider implicature in their analysis, suggesting that certain implicatures are fixed within utterances analysed in relation to certain variables. (See chapter 2) I argue that this is not always the case, since the context of all interactions can not itself be fixed. This means that we cannot associate certain explicatures and implicatures with an utterance without considering the context of the interaction. In cross-cultural interaction, the context of interaction is not the same for all of the interactants. Thus, there would be no fixed interpretation for an utterance that all interactants would reach.

The contextual pragmatic approach that I propose posits that an utterance does not necessarily have a fixed meaning that is drawn from the linguistic choices and the strategy used. Sperber and Wilson (1995) state that

In Relevance Theory, there is no claim about a constant correlation between sentence types and illocutionary act types. Linguistic forms do not directly encode illocutionary forces, but merely serve as a guide for interpretation, i.e., as a

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<sup>302</sup> As discussed in chapter 4, understanding occurs when the content of the message is filtered out from the utterance, then the information evaluated in relation to the context of the interaction (See Watts, 2003 chapter 2, and Sperber and Wilson chapter 4). The context of the interaction provides the hearer with the relevant assumption (see Sperber and Wilson, 1993/95) depending sometimes upon previous discourse or encyclopaedic knowledge, if the communication is successful (see Scollon and Scollon, 2005). Both the speaker and the addressee produce or interpret an utterance influenced by cultural background and the contexts of their personal situations.

constraint on relevance: they "make manifest the direction in which relevance is to be sought" (1986:254).

An utterance should be analysed in relation to the whole context. Green (1997) believes that in Relevance Theory an utterance should be analysed in relation to the meaning of the other utterances in the conversation or the background of the interactants which might give rise to different implicatures than those the speaker intended. As Watts (2003) states, interactants need to guess what is mutually manifest or available to one another, and cultural differences might result in them making bad guesses (2003:70).<sup>303</sup>

The core theories of politeness do not provide us with an adequate analysis of politeness, especially in cross-cultural interaction.<sup>304</sup> Spencer-Oatey and Jiang (2003) argue that 'people's use of language is influenced not only by immediate contextual factors, such as D, relative P and R, but also by underlying sociocultural principles or concerns' (2003:1645). Christie's (2003) critique that 'the descriptive power of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness may be limited and therefore not be the most useful analytical tool in this context' (2003:26), is pertinent in suggesting another approach to analysis. I also take into account some critiques of politeness theories such as Eelen (2001), Mills (2003a), Watts (2003), Sperber and Wilson (1993/95) and Toolan (1996) in order to analyse more adequately the variables that influence interaction.<sup>305</sup> The main goal is to consider the factors which might influence the production and interpretation of utterances through analysing what is understood and how it is relevant.

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<sup>303</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1993/95) discuss how shared knowledge is exploited in communication and argue that the cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him/her, but not necessarily to his/her interactant in cross-cultural interaction.

<sup>304</sup> Hernandez (1999) tries to establish a better cross-cultural theory of politeness by considering the working of some universal cognitive tools. He holds that Brown and Levinson do not provide adequate support in their claims of universality. Meier (1995b) argues 'it is time to critically re-examine Brown and Levinson's framework and its manifestations in the treatment of so-called politeness phenomena' (1995:381). She argues for a broader view of politeness, one which leads to the rejection of equating politeness with specific speech acts, lexical items, or syntactic constructions. Fukushima and Iwata (1985) also insist that there is still much research to be done in the area of politeness and how interactants understand and produce utterances, especially in cross-cultural interaction.

<sup>305</sup> In order to show that analysing how politeness is managed in interaction is not adequately considered in the core theories I indicate some other theories of politeness such as Spencer-Oatey (2000), Eelen (2001), Mills (2003a) and Watts (2003) which are more pragmatic in considering more variables in their analysis (See chapter 2). I also discuss some approaches, such as Sperber and Wilson (1993/95) and Toolan (1996), which examine the relationship between linguistic meaning and intended meaning (see chapter 4). In chapter 3, I discussed how context and culture are important factors in interaction and a theory of analysing politeness should adequately analyse these factors and how they influence interaction.

### 6.3.1 Procedure of analysis

My approach shows a clear link between analysing interaction in general and politeness in particular. As shown by the theorists drawn on in the different chapters of this thesis (see chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), interaction is influenced by cultural and contextual factors.<sup>306</sup> In order to understand whether interactants are communicating appropriately or not in cross-cultural interaction, we need to consider the contextual factors that influence that interaction in relation to all interactants. Thus, drawing on the Relevance Theory and those theories of politeness that are critical of Brown and Levinson (1987) such as Spencer-Oatey (2000), Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003) (See chapter 2), I have proceeded as follows:

- a) I analyse utterances to set out the explicatures and implicatures that they might give rise to; (See Sperber and Wilson (1995))<sup>307</sup>
- b) I examine which might be strong implicatures and whether there are agreements on these between the interactants in relation to the context of interaction;
- c) I determine whether there are any misunderstandings between the interactants, and the reasons behind them. This includes analysing any factors that influence the context to identify whether there are different understandings of the context in cross-cultural interaction; (See chapter 2)
- d) I analyse whether the strategy used by the speaker is or is not polite to the hearer, linguistically and pragmatically (Spencer-Oatey (2000), Mills (2003), Watts (2003)).
- e) I investigate the reasons behind interactants' evaluation of each other's utterance (Eelen

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<sup>306</sup> For example Mills (2003a) argues that interaction can be influenced by culture and relationships of the interactants or any other force that is part of the interaction, and Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) also argue that the first step in developing a cultural model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is to investigate the identity and nature of these variables that contribute towards ICC.(2005:138). (See chapter 2).

<sup>307</sup> The analysis is focused on setting out the explicatures and implicatures that an utterance might give rise to because by spelling out the explicatures and implicatures that an utterance has we would be able to understand the meaning of what is said and what goes beyond what is said in relation to all interactants, and whether there are misunderstanding between interactants. Through setting out an utterance's explicatures, we understand its direct meaning, that is the meaning connected to the semantic content of the sentence. Consequently we can understand the explicit content of an utterance, or what is directly conveyed. And, through setting out an utterance's implicatures, we understand its indirect meaning, where a speaker means one thing and conveys something else. By analysing the implicatures that an utterance might give rise to we can understand what is implicated and not said in cross-cultural context, and whether what is meant by the speakers is understood to the addressee through the explicatures that an utterance generates. This means that by using implicatures, we can understand what an utterance means, implies or suggests, irrespective of whether that was part of the sentence's meaning or dependent on the conversational context. (See chapter 2 and 4)

As viewed by Sperber and Wilson (1995) explicatures are a product of both linguistic decoding and pragmatic inference, whilst implicatures rely solely on inference. A single utterance may have more than one explicature and implicature. It yields a range of semantic representations. The utterance will lead to different explicatures and implicatures, their main difference being in how the content is derived. The main goal of the hearer is to identify the explicatures and implicatures communicated.

I conclude from reviewing the relevant literature (See chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), that the contextual pragmatic approach I suggest is based on analysing contextual variables and is sensitive to a range of influences, allowing analysts to look at wider implicatures by analysing understanding of both speakers and hearers, and consider the meaning of utterances in better relation to the context. Christie (2007) states that 'the analysis of politeness would require an engagement with the way in which a word or phrase is functioning within the specific text' (Christie, 2007:292). Understanding whether an utterance is polite is a matter of analysing interactants' utterances in relation to each other, and the reasons behind their linguistic choices. Utterance meaning is worked out according to the context of interaction and its relation to other utterances in a conversation. Analysing an individual utterance may lead to an understanding that it is polite or impolite according to Brown and Levinson's model, but analysing it as a part of a discourse may lead to an alternative judgement.

Analysing politeness using my contextual pragmatic approach acknowledges that hearers too have responsibility for interpreting politeness. In order to understand politeness, we should therefore analyse how the hearer infers what is relevant in an utterance from the several interpretive possibilities that it might give rise to. As Sperber and Wilson assert, 'every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance' (1995:260). According to them, the correct interpretation of an ostensive stimulus is the first accessible interpretation; and that 'the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences' (1995: 275).

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<sup>308</sup> I am not claiming that I am using only what is offered by Relevance Theory in my approach of analysis, although it appears to be more informed with Relevance Theory. I have used, along with what Relevance Theory offers, other post-Brown and Levinson views to develop my contextual pragmatic approach of the analysis in order to combine social views and views of cognition to analyse politeness.

The hearer's interpretation of the relevance of an utterance is crucial in determining what is communicated. Even if the speaker aims to be polite, the hearer may misunderstand intentionally or unintentionally.<sup>309</sup> Thus, my approach broadly investigates politeness, examining any factor that might influence the interaction and considering politeness as a discursive phenomenon, working at a discourse rather than at a sentential level.

## **6.4 Data**

### **6.4.1 Tape-Recorded casual conversations and TV / Radio conversations**

I decided to analyse both casual conversation as well as TV and Radio conversation, in order to include different types of cross-cultural contexts. This is because, in this thesis, I am arguing that politeness should be analysed culturally and contextually, since utterances are judged in relation to the variables that influence the context of the interaction. The context of casual conversations is different from TV and Radio conversations. In the casual conversations I analysed interactants who a) do not have clear prearranged plans and goals for their conversations; b) who have no previous ideas about their interactants in person; i.e. all they know about each other is that they are not from the same culture, and have a different mother tongue; and c) conversations usually taking place outside of specific institutional settings. In the TV and Radio interviews, a) interactants have prearranged plans and goals for their conversations (for example, the interviewer knows the interviewee's attitude and interest in a political discussion, and also knows the interviewee's name); b) either one or both of the interactants have some knowledge of their interactants and their goals in the interaction, and c) they usually take place within specific institutions.

Hutchby (2006) states that 'utilizing what we know about how humans communicate on the interpersonal level can reveal much about how communication occurs at a 'mass' level, at least in the context of radio and television' (2006:17). There are factors that influence television and radio interviews that are not present in every day conversation.<sup>310</sup> Scannell (1991) states that the main audience for any broadcasting talk differs not only physically

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<sup>309</sup> Badawi (1996) argues that analysing an utterance involves the hearer in the same way that it involves the speaker. They argue that there is no communication unless the listener has understood what the speaker has meant. Sperber and Wilson (1993) argue that communication includes the stimulus that an interactant produces to make meaning manifest to his/her interlocutor.

<sup>310</sup> Cameron (2002) states 'the broadcast media may seem like a very convenient source for all kinds of spoken data, but they should be approached with some caution. Broadcast talk has special characteristics which arise from the nature of the medium and the relationship it produces between speakers and (different sets of) addressees' (2002:26)

but culturally and temporally. Hutchby (2006) summarizes the differences between ordinary conversation and broadcasting conversation:

Broadcast talk adopts elements of everyday conversation as part of its overarching communicative ethos; broadcast talk is nevertheless different from ordinary conversation by virtue of being an institutional form of discourse that exists at the interface between public and private domain of life (e.g. the studio setting in which the talk is produced and the domestic setting in which it is received); broadcast talk is a specific type of institutional discourse because it is directed at an 'overhearing' audience separated from the talk's site of production by space and also, frequently, by time (2006:18).<sup>311</sup>

However, the difference is more complicated when the media context includes different cultures. Factors that influence broadcast conversations are sometimes evaluated differently between interactants from different cultures and by their audiences, for example in relation to the topic of the conversation. Thornborrow (2002) believes that 'participant status and identity can in some cases shape the kind of talk that is produced within the context of an interview' (2002:87)<sup>312</sup> Al-Khatib (2001) states that 'style shift is determined by a number of such sociological factors as topic, situation and addressee; and in order to design a speech style, the speaker should be aware of these factors in relation to the audience involved' (2001:393). An utterance in a face-to-face interaction might not provide the same implicatures in a radio or TV interaction. What might only be considered an annoying or inappropriate utterance by a speaker in a casual conversation might be considered as an insult or an impolite speaker in a radio or TV conversation.

This difference in contextual or cultural factors within an interaction may lead to misunderstandings between speakers. For example, in TV and radio conversations, there may be a gender difference between interviewer and interviewee. This makes for a greater possibility of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Macaulay (2001), in the analysis of indirectness in male and female interviewers in topical and political interviews on radio and television, states that:

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<sup>311</sup> In an earlier edition discussing media talk, Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) point out that it is important to study interaction in institutional settings because 'we listen to an enormous amount of talk that has been produced within the institutional and organizational context of television and radio studios' (1998:145).

<sup>312</sup> However, Thornborrow (2002) discusses different issues in news interviews and explains the difference between turn structure, formulation of the data, institution neutrality, controlling of the agenda, getting the sense, arguing and striking back, etc. These issues distinguish media conversation from ordinary conversation.

while...male interviewers favour indirect forms that foster attunement, the female interviewers favour indirect forms that engage their interviewees analytically. The female interviewers employ indirect requests for information to ask "tough" questions, maintain a line of questioning, and maintain their position as speakers who have power (2001:293).

Arab males interact differently when their interviewee is a female. Because most of the rules in male-female interaction in Arab cultures are drawn from religion, male-female interactions are bound by certain contextually-based 'rules' that should not be breached. If they are breached, they do not only affect the interactants, but their relatives as well. Macaulay (1996/2001) adds that the level of familiarity between the interviewer and the interviewee is also crucial. He argues that 'the relationship between the speaker and the hearer is central to the activity and is being constantly monitored, negotiated and adjusted in the course of conversation' (2001:298).<sup>313</sup>

Thus, as explained in earlier chapters, politeness is too complex to be understood simply through the analysis of individual utterances, as the core theories of politeness suggest (see Christie, 2000, 2003, Watts, 2003). Other views of politeness and understanding should be considered as shown in chapters 2, 3 and 4, in order to provide a more pragmatic way of analysis that considers more variables than the core theories of politeness. Issues such as the cultural values associated with directness or indirectness, explicit or implicit meaning, topic choice, appropriateness or inappropriateness, face, establishing common ground, stereotypes, presuppositions, power, distance, gender and religion are understood differently through influences on the context of the interaction.

## 6.5 Analysis

This analysis deals with recordings of face-to-face casual conversations and TV and Radio conversations. These were selected in order to include different types of contexts that enable broad exploration as to how politeness is understood in cross-cultural interaction. The following sections will analyse the data in relation to my arguments in the previous chapters, with the objective of justifying the need for a broader contextual, pragmatic analytical approach of politeness that explains how politeness is understood in cross-cultural interaction.

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<sup>313</sup> Johnstone et. al. (1992) indicate that in their data female interviewers were challenged by their male interviewees more frequently.

In the following sections, I will analyse the data in order to discover how politeness and impoliteness are performed and understood in cross-cultural interaction. I will discuss these under a number of headings. In section one I will critique the universality of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model in relation to the notion of face and indirectness. One of the main thrusts of this research is to demonstrate the limitations of their model as a method of analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction and their claim of the universality of the notion of face. In section two, I will investigate how context plays an important role in understanding and producing speech. I will argue that whatever influences the context of the interaction should be considered in the analysis of it, especially cross-culturally, because context influences understanding and consequently whether an utterance is considered to be polite or impolite. I will divide this section into two subsections; the first discusses cultural differences and the second discusses what is considered to be relevant between interactants in cross-cultural interaction because of the influence of the context. In both subsections I argue that the variables that influence interaction are sometimes differently interpreted and this may consequently lead to different understanding. Finally, I will conclude that all these factors influence the process of understanding, and in order to analyse what is meant and understood in producing an utterance in cross-cultural interaction, we need to analyse all these factors to understand how the implicit meaning is generated and what influences it, and whether the hearer understands his/her addressee's intended meaning.

## **6.5.1 Universality of Brown and Levinson in cross-cultural interaction**

### **6.5.1.1 FTAs (Face threatening acts) in Cross-cultural Interaction**

As discussed in chapter 2, Brown and Levinson (1987) state that interactants must maintain each other's face in order to establish a good relationship. They claim that they do this through situations that take into account 'negative face' and 'positive face', which they see as universal. In this section, I argue that FTAs are differently interpreted across cultures and different contexts, and that this will yield different sets of implicatures and interpretations of an utterance. This may lead to some misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. How an interactant interprets what an utterance gives rise to (a decision influenced by context), is crucial in determining whether or not an FTA has been committed. I will therefore also investigate FTAs in cross-cultural interaction and whether they can be identified by Brown and Levinson's model.

### 6.5.1.1.1 FTAs and Asking questions

#### Extract 2 (Casual Conversation)

This conversation took place in Bristol in late 2003 between a British native speaker and a Libyan non-native speaker. The native speaker is a 43 year old married male who had no real experience in interacting with Arabs. The non-native speaker is a 41 year old postgraduate student studying pharmacy. He has lived for more than 4 years in England whilst studying for a PhD. The recording took place at the University of Bristol.

H = Non-native speaker of English

I = Native speaker of English

1H : you got children? =  
2I : = not yet, no  
[  
3H : ah, not yet, ((not clear)) new married =  
4I : = about  
18 months =.  
5H : = OH nice  
(0:2)  
6I : yeh, we're thinking about it but we'd like to try  
and get a house first if possible =  
7H : = yeh sure =  
8I : = who knows (0:5) how long  
have you been married =  
9H : = now, er, (0:6) more than four years but not five  
years  
(hhh)  
10I : four and a half  
(hhh)  
11H : yeh, four and a half and two children  
(hhh)  
12I : tiring =  
13H : = umm  
(0:2)  
14I : is, is, are the children tiring ((not clear))  
[  
15H : yeh  
[  
16I : do they wear you out?  
(hhh)

In Arabic, utterance (3) and utterances (8 - 11) in this extract would usually be interpreted as an FTA. Utterances (3) and then (9 and 11) in this extract would usually constitute a

FTA if both interactants were Arabs. In Arabic, as probably in all cultures, a person does not ask the reason for not having children, directly or indirectly to a stranger, and if s/he asks, as in the utterances (1 and 3) in this extract, then s/he knows that it is embarrassing to his/her interactant, which might give rise to different implicatures. In such a context, utterance (3) is likely to give rise to a number of implicatures. One of the implicatures is that the non-native speaker tells the native speaker of English that "there must be a problem with you if you are not newly married". In Arabic, this interpretation would be considered as a strong implicature of the utterance, and also as impolite, because, as explained in chapter 5, in Libya the main reason for getting married is to have children. Therefore, if a couple has no children after a period of time, then there might be a problem, which it would be embarrassing to ask about.

Utterance (11) 'I have been married less than 5 years, but I have two children', emphasises that there is a different understanding of being married between the interactants, and a problem if a person has married and has no children in Libya. In Arabic, any other meaning would be a weak implicature in such a context because of what is culturally acceptable. If the native speaker of English were an Arab, he would consider the non-native speaker in the above extract to be either impolite or inappropriate Al-Khatib (1995). Thus, although in Arabic, the explicature of " ah, not yet?, ((not clear)) new married?" "؟ متزوج حديث "Eelaa al'aan?, motazaweej ḥadeth?" would generate an implicature that could threaten the face of the hearer, there is no sign that the non-native speaker understands that he might have threatened the face of his interactant or caused any discomfort.

In the follow-up interview, I asked the non-native speaker about the reason for asking such a question, despite the fact that he would probably not do this with a stranger from his own culture. He said he would not ask this of a person from his culture because this is not acceptable in such a context, but he wanted to show his interactant that children are very important in his culture. I asked him whether he thought that his utterance would be classified as inappropriate had he been interacting with an Arab; he said that his interactant was English, so he thought that he was appropriate with him.<sup>314</sup> I then asked him why he

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<sup>314</sup> The detailed answer from the non-native speaker in utterances (9) and (11) extract 4 to his interactant indicates that in his understanding, children are important when someone is married. In utterance (11) the non-native speaker tells his interactant that he has had two children in less than five years of his marriage.

spoke about his children to someone who said that he has no children despite this being unacceptable in Arabic. He said he might have not done so had his interactant been an Arab (follow-up interview with the non-native speaker; extract 2, See Appendix 2).

I would classify such questions as misunderstandings due to different interpretations of the context of the interaction. Such a question might arise because of stereotypes that Arab speakers have about Western culture. The non-native speaker of English might think that Westerners would not be offended when talking about not having children. However, when asking the native speaker whether he felt any discomfort about utterance (3) or (11) he said that he did not but that it was a rather strange question. (follow-up interview; extract 2, See Appendix 2).

As Sperber and Wilson argue, context involves different types of factors such as cultural knowledge of others. Thus, although the non-native speaker knew that such types of questioning as in utterances (3) or (11) might be embarrassing to his interactant and might threaten his face, he still asked him, building on a wrong assumption about his interactant, with no intention of threatening his face. If we ask why the non-native speaker asked such a question despite knowing that it would cause an FTA had his interactant been an Arab, we find the non-native speaker, in this extract, draws on the context and his knowledge of the culture of his interactant. The way the non-native speaker selected the context of the interaction, together with his cultural knowledge, led to different interpretations of what this linguistic strategy might mean. (See chapter 2 and 4)

#### **6.5.1.1.2 FTAs and Redress Strategy**

Another type of FTA, according to Brown and Levinson, is when the speaker directly asks questions of the hearer. In such situations, the speaker needs to use a face-redress strategy in order to avoid any FTA. Utterance (32) in the following extract from the native speaker is an FTA to the non-native speaker according to Brown and Levinson (1987), in that it is a direct question and requires an answer of 'yes' or 'no'.

#### **Extract 1 B (Casual conversation)**

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This comparative answer would have been insulting had his co-interactant been an Arab. It is also impolite to speak about children if you already know that your interactant is married and does not have children.

This conversation took place in 2003 between a British native speaker and Libyan non-native speaker of English. The native speaker is a 31 year old married male and had no real experience in interacting with Arabs. The non-native speaker is 36 years old, has lived for more than two years in England and is studying for an MSc course in Information Technology. This conversation took place at the University of Bristol, and the interactants did not know each other beforehand

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

- 31B : = in here er I mean citizen student (,) they take er  
(,) a low low grant, I mean it is not expensive I mean (0:3) like foreign  
students (0:2) in EU as an example er (,) they take £1,500 yes and from  
citizen ((not clear)) they take £6,500 =
- 32A : = who is paying the fees? (,) who is  
paying? are you paying that? =
- 33B : = no no for me I have someone to pay (,) my  
government I mean I've got a grant but here it is not a lot of money  
£1,500 =
- 34A = no  
(0:2)
- 35B so here don't know how how much in Bristol University

According to Brown and Levinson, direct questions such as in utterance (32) should happen between close interactants, but not between strangers in a casual conversation. The explicature of such an utterance is "tell me who pays your tuition fee". The implicature that might arise to an Arab in such a context of interaction, where he criticises his interactant's country treatment of overseas students, is that "as long as you do not pay, you should not say what you have said". However, from the progress of the interaction, in the extract, the native speaker did not feel that he had threatened his interactant's face, nor did the non-native speaker consider that his face was threatened by the nature of the question. This does not rule out the fact that the non-native speaker did not like the way he was asked, but yet he still answered his interactant's question.<sup>315</sup>

What happens in this conversation is that the non-native understanding of the context, and what it involves, excludes any implicature that his interactant is imposing on him or is

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<sup>315</sup> The native speaker does not command his interactant, but this does not rule out that the structure and the context of the question might cause an FTA to the hearer.

trying to challenge him with, in spite of the fact that the explicature "who pays your fee" would give rise to a challenging implicature in the non-native speaker's culture. Although the non-native speaker understands, from the explicature of the utterance, that the strong implicature is that the native speaker is telling him that "as he does not pay, he should not complain", *and* he does not like the native speaker's insistence on him to answer, he said in the follow-up interview that he did not feel discomfort with the question. The explicature "tell me who pays your tuition fee" ؟ "من يدفع مصاريف دراستك؟", "Akhberni, man yadfah masarif derasatic?" is a direct order from the native to the non-native speaker, and implies a challenge from the native to the non-native speaker because of his question in utterance (31). Asking the non-native speaker whether he felt that his interactant was inappropriate in questioning him in utterance (32), he said that he did not like the way he was asked, but did not think of whether it was appropriate or not (follow-up interview with the non-native speaker, extract 1B, See Appendix 2).

This means, as Sperber and Wilson point out, that understanding context is a significant element of utterance interpretation, which means that there is disagreement on what is considered as FTA. (See chapter 2 and 4) This also means, as Spencer-Oatey (2000) says, that not every annoying utterance causes an FTA, and the context and influences such as cultural difference can have an effect on interpretation of utterances.

#### 6.5.1.1.3 FTAs and Interactant's goals

Attention to each other's face between interactants seems to be less important in media talk than in casual conversation, especially in political media talks. This means that not only power, distance, and degree of imposition determine the strategy of the interactant, but it is more complicated and is subject to more factors that influence the context of the interaction.<sup>316</sup>

#### Extract 7 A (TV interaction)

This recording is from CNN TV channel, in late 2004, from a programme called 'CNN Live Today'. It is between an American native speaker of English (the interviewer), and a Palestinian male representative of the PLO living in America

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<sup>316</sup> Mullany (2003) argues that 'in political broadcast interviews, it is not in the interests of participants to mutually pay attention to each others' face needs, and failure to do so does not result in conversational breakdown' (2003:5).

- 1 Interviewer you are, you are seriously saying that there has been no attempt on the part of Palestinian authority to collect and distribute these sort of things  
[
- 2 Interviewee absolutely not  
[
- 3 Interviewer do you like them doing  
[
- 4 Interviewee absolutely absolutely listen Tony I am gonna tell you this (0:2) listen you take what the Israeli tell you for granted absolutely you never question what the Israeli  
[
- 5 Interviewer I've just questioned them  
[
- 6 Interviewee no because that you are repeating to me what the Israeli intelligence telling  
[
- 7 Interviewer I am repeating what you told me =  
8 Interviewee = yeh yeh  
[
- 9 Interviewer what you should do rather than insulting me is to is to answer  
[
- 10 Interviewee no I am not insulting you what I am telling is  
[
- 11 Interviewer of course you are

Interactants do not always pay attention to each other's face, contrary to Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim. Face is sometimes not considered between interactants in such conversations as in the above extract, and interactants do not attempt to mitigate any potential threat of face if it occurs. Utterances (1) and (6) in this extract are examples of how interactants do not really pay attention to each other's face in certain contexts. For example, although the explicature of utterance (1) is that the interviewer is asking a confirmation of a statement from his interviewee, the implicature that utterance (1) may give rise to is "you're intentionally saying that I said something which I have not said", which is an accusation from the interviewee to the interviewer and is understood from the following utterances. The reason for this way of talking is due to the context of the interaction, where the interviewer and the interviewee have their own goals and consider their audiences differently, which I have posited as a factor that influences interactants differently when they are from different cultures (see chapters 1 and 5). Although the

explicature of utterance (6) is a clear statement from the interviewee to his interviewer that he is repeating what is said to him, in Arabic, this utterance would give rise to an implicature that directly accuses the interviewer of inappropriateness: "you are with the Israelis" "انت مع الاسرائيليين", "anta maha alesraeleyeen" which, in utterance (9), the interviewer considers as an insult. However, in Arabic, such a way of talking does not mean that the interviewee is trying to insult his interviewer, but it might mean that he does not care if his interactant's face was threatened because of what he says.

As argued by Sperber and Wilson (1993), distinguishing what is made explicit by certain linguistic choices from what is really implied because of the context is an issue that might lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction. The goal of an interaction which is being observed by another person, and how important that person is to either of the interactants, results in certain implicatures in an utterance being interpreted as a strong implicature to one, but not to the other. Thus, the context of the interaction is differently selected and understood by each speaker (see Thornborrow (2002) and Hutchby (1998 / 2006)).<sup>317</sup> Direct attacks and direct retaliation between the interactants implies that interactants in the above extracts do not pay attention to each other's face.<sup>318</sup> Therefore, although there is an FTA, it is because of the interactants' goals in carrying out the interview. They rather seem to need to score points, or perhaps one or both of them does not wish to continue with the conversation. In Arabic, in such types of interaction, interactants usually pay attention to the audience more than their interactant's face, which might not be the case in this situation with the Arab speaker towards his interviewee.

#### 6.5.1.1.4 FTAs and Irony

Another type of FTA that Brown and Levinson's model does not seem to analyse is when the speaker discusses a provocative subject or asks a challenging question.<sup>319</sup> An example is utterance (9) in the following extract where the interviewer asks about a controversial subject about which the interviewee seems to have a different view to the interviewer, and answers in an ironic way.

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<sup>317</sup> We rarely find such confrontational attitudes in casual conversation, especially between strangers or people from different cultures. What usually happens in casual conversation between strangers, is that interactants give each other chances to repair or perhaps change what they have said or understood.

<sup>318</sup> In Arabic broadcasting, such a way of interacting is not expected, although it is not impossible. When it happens, this means that either the interactants have prepared for such conflict or they do not like each other.

<sup>319</sup> In Arabic, provoking a person in front of others is far worse than provoking him/her when no-one is listening. Provoking someone in front of another may lead to high stages of conflict, or even to fighting.

### Extract 6 A (TV interaction)

This recording is from Fox News TV channel, recorded in late 2004 from a programme called 'On the Record'. It is between a male American native English speaker (the interviewer) and a Palestinian born Lebanese, non – native American citizen.

- 1 Interviewer : what is the goal of (AR)<sup>320</sup> Hizbollah  
(0:2)
- 2 Interviewee : why do not we consider it in  
this way Israel is causing problems for a lot of its Arab neighbours  
((not clear))  
[
- 3 Interviewer : right let's have what you think ((not clear)) what is (AR)  
Hizbollah's major's goal =
- 4 Interviewee : = well there is a lot of rage in the Arab  
world as well as in Lebanon and the party of God is under pressure  
to try to do something ((not clear))  
[
- 5 Interviewer : the party of god is the English translation  
((not clear)) of (AR) Hizbollah  
(,)
- 6 Interviewee : right correct and there is a lot of  
interest in Lebanon in the part of not only the fundamentalist of the  
party of God but others too (,) to try to force the Israelis who still  
persisting occupying the piece of Lebanese territories with the  
viewers do not know if that Israel does only had a problem with the  
Palestinians but many with the Arabs who live under its occupation  
((not clear))  
[
- 7 Interviewer : but let me put another question professor why is it  
why is it that the Lebanese are upset about the Syrian occupation of  
Lebanon, some people would call it an occupation which has gone  
on for decades.  
(0.2)
- 8 Interviewee : well maybe because they do not subscribe ((not  
clear)) whole they view the Israelis as occupiers and that is  
why  
[
- 9 Interviewer : but why could you explain professor I do not have a point of  
view I am just asking you to explain why is it the Syrian army  
has been in in place ((not clear)) in Lebanon for  
for decades now correct me if I am wrong =
- 10 Interviewee : = they do not hold the  
same grouch against the Syrians as they do against the Israelis  
because

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<sup>320</sup> (AR) means the word next to it is either an Arab name or an Arab word.

- 11 Interviewer [ why =  
 12 Interviewee = I am telling you because Israel has not occupied the Arab land for the last fifty years has not brutalized the Palestinians the Syrians and the Lebanese and has not dehumanized all Arabs in this method of terrorist ((not clear))
- 13 Interviewer [ now Syrians said not mistreated the Lebanese Palestinians
- 14 Interviewee [ yes they have =  
 15 Interviewer = in a way

Utterance (12) in the above extract can be considered to be a direct answer to the question “why” in utterance (11). Although the interviewee's answer is an ironic way of answering by an Arab, such irony is not intended to threaten the face or insult the native speaker, rather to imply that the answer is obvious and the question is unjustified. The explicature of utterance (12) is that "Israel has not occupied the Arab land for the last fifty years and has not brutalized the Palestinians, etc," but the presumed context of the interaction gives rise to the implicature of "how could you ask such a question when you know that the Israelis have occupied, brutalized and dehumanized", " كيف تسال هذا السؤال وانت تعرف ان ..... "الأسرائيليين فعلوا", " kayefa tasal hatha asoual wa anta taheraf ana alesraelyeen fahalou .....”, which seems to be a strong implicature for both interactants,. Again, because of the context of the interaction (where interactants do not want to be ironic of each other), such a message can be interpreted as blaming, which does not necessarily mean an FTA, but rather allotting blame for asking such a question. In a different context, in Arabic, such a message might be considered to be insulting. For example, in a social event where the interaction is between male and female, if an utterance such as (11) is said from a female to a male, then it is considered to be ironic and insulting, as females in such contexts of interaction are expected to talk directly. In such a context, a male speaker might feel his face is threatened in front of his audience. What is understood as ironic is therefore contextual in relation to whether an utterance constitutes an FTA.<sup>321</sup> According to Relevance Theory, the meaning of an utterance has a contextual implication. This means that by analysing the influence of contextual factors, an explicature of utterance to an Arab would generate an implicature that would not cause an FTA regardless of the linguistics

<sup>321</sup> Early in extract 7 A, the interactants argued without a clear reason, accusing each other directly and indirectly, using provocative ways of speaking, and understanding and answering according to what saved their faces in front of their audiences. After utterance (10) extract 7 A, interactants started to listen to each other more respectfully and tried to establish a common ground so that no confrontation occurred.

used or the strategy adopted. This argument emphasises Sperber and Wilson's point, that in analysing politeness, there is no fixed link between what is said and what is intended, and that what is said might cause an FTA or be considered as an insult in one context and not in another.

#### **6.5.1.1.5 Conclusion of section 6.5.1.1 FTAs in Cross-cultural Interaction**

What counts as politeness / impoliteness or what threaten an interactant's face is not only the way in which a speaker expresses his/her wants, but also in how a hearer understands a contribution in relation to the context of the interaction and in the interactant's interpretation of the factors that influence their acceptance of the politeness or impoliteness of what has been said. Therefore, even if we agree that the goals of the interaction may make one of the interactants adopt a certain strategy which might threaten their own face or that of the interactant, understanding of what constitutes an FTA is not always reflected by the linguistic choices or the strategy adopted. An explicature of an utterance might generate different implicatures to the interactants because of their cultures or their understanding of the context of interaction. As argued in chapters, 1, 2 and 3, and the discussion in the above section, Brown and Levinson (1987) cannot identify or analyse all types of FTA. The strategy or the linguistic choices that they consider as an FTA do not apply in all types of interaction. As explained by Wierzbicka (1985 / 2003), Meier (1997), Ide (1998) and Hiraga and Turner (1996) FTAs are not the same across cultures and therefore Brown and Levinson's model cannot be universal. Brown and Levinson's view, as discussed in chapter 2, does not address the listener's understanding and what influences his/her interpretations in their analysis, which is important in understanding how an utterance is perceived. It is also evident from analysing the above extracts that threatening an interactant's face or mitigating any potential FTA in cross-cultural interaction is cultural and contextual. Regardless of how an utterance is said, what is intended by that utterance is judged contextually, and the implicatures that an utterance gives rise to, as a result of certain explicatures, are influenced by the context, and not only by the possibilities that the linguistic choices might generate. It can also be seen that, in cross-cultural interaction, what is considered to be an FTA and the circumstances in which interactants need to mitigate differ from one interactant to another because of cultural differences.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Blum-Kulka (1992) considers mitigation as a cultural style; although it appears as an individual aspect, it is evaluated culturally. She adopts a constructivist position in regard to politeness, arguing that systems of politeness manifest a culturally filtered interpretation of the interaction between four essential parameters:

### **6.5.1.2 Indirectness / Directness in cross-cultural interaction**

It is difficult to speak about directness / indirectness without speaking about FTAs, so this is in effect an extension of the previous section about FTAs. It therefore concentrates on another issue which Brown and Levinson link to politeness, and about which they claim universality. Thus, although I am using their categories by selecting certain speech acts, I aim to explain that these issues are not subject to certain linguistic choices. Because they are differently performed and interpreted across cultures, and a specific culture influences how interactants infer what an utterance might mean, this impacts upon whether a speech act is performed implicitly or explicitly.

As explained in chapter 2, Brown and Levinson observe that if an interactant challenges someone's face, s/he will challenge him/her back. Although, as stated in chapter 3, I agree with Brown and Levinson that indirectness and politeness are sometimes linked, I also see it realized in different ways across cultures, and neither indirectness nor the reasons for it are universal across cultures. I argue that in a cross-cultural interaction, the reason for indirectness might be misinterpreted, because of different understandings of what indirectness means, and different understandings of indirectness and the reason for it may lead to pragmatic failure.

#### **6.5.1.2.1 Indirectness and provocative utterance**

Brown and Levinson (1987) assume that indirectness is universally polite. Yet, an indirect strategy might not be interpreted as such by the hearer because of different understandings of the context of interaction. A provocative question, for example, may still be understood as such even when performed indirectly. In addition, the context of the interaction determines whether an indirect utterance becomes less provocative because the speaker is indirect.

#### **Extract 8 A (Radio conversation)**

This recording is from CNN Radio, in early 2004 from a programme called 'CNN Radio, Newscaster'. It is between a female American broadcaster, a native speaker of English,

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social motivation, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings. Cultural notions interfere in determining the distinctive features of each of the four parameters and as a result, significantly affect the social understanding of "politeness" across societies in the world (1992:270).

and a Palestinian non-native speaker of English. He is an active member of an anti-Israeli movement in Palestine, considered a terrorist group by the interviewer.

Interviewer 1 has an organization has an organization taken responsibility for the bus bombing suicide bombing today

(0:6)

Interviewee 2 ah (,) I am not pretty sure who is responsible at this moment because there are two organizations by their own military wings are aha taking responsibility but aha the situation that in Jenin is terrible and the Israelis damaged a lot of houses and a lot of infrastructure and killed so many people =

Interviewer 3 = an I'll get to that but let me first let me I am talking a little bit first about the suicide bombing your organization has taken responsibility for the bus massacre which led to this latest incursion by the Israelis so is that not true

(0:2)

Interviewee 4 ah let me aha tell you something the aha what you call suicide operation is called martyrdom operations, ah second ah ah

Interviewer 5

[  
well let

me let me to make sure that to make sure that

Utterance (1) in the above extract is a direct question from the interviewer, but the pragmatic meaning of the utterance is indirect.<sup>323</sup> The explicature of utterance (1) does not imply directly that the interviewer is provoking her interviewee, but the hearer's interpretation in this context suggests he sees that in utterance (1) the interviewer is indirectly provoking her interviewee, because the interviewee is a member of one of the organizations that claims responsibility about the suicide bombing. The interviewee knows that the interviewer already knows the answer to the question she is asking, and that she wanted to embarrass him rather than just seek information.<sup>324</sup> Such an indirect way of accusing is disliked in Arab culture in such contexts of interaction. In such a context, where both interactants know each other's attitude towards each other, the strongest implicature that utterance (1) would give rise to is "are you asking me or telling me that my organization has carried out the attack", "هل انت تسالني ام انك تقول لي ان منظمتي هي من قام ...."

<sup>323</sup> It is an indirect FTA because the interviewee knows that his interviewer is telling him indirectly that his organization carried out the attack. This is clear from some following utterances in the same conversation, and also because of the Palestinian groups which carry out the attacks in Israel.

<sup>324</sup> In utterance (1) extract 8 A the interviewer asks a direct question. This question does not appear to be provocative to the interviewee, but when we realise, from the context, that the interviewer is pro-Israel, and that this interviewee is a person who belongs to an anti-Israeli organizations that might be responsible for such an attack, it can be considered provocative.

بهدا الهجوم.”, “**hal anta tasalouni am anaka takoul lee in monathamatee heya man kama behtha alhjoum**”. In Arabic, such a way of indirectness, as in utterance (1), enhances the possibility of provocation by the interviewee to having a challenging attitude towards his interviewer.<sup>325</sup>

Thus, even if we agree with Brown and Levinson (1987) that indirectness mitigates FTAs from the speaker to the hearer, we see that it is sometimes used to provoke, which means that, in analysing interaction, more consideration to the context is needed. An utterance's effect is contextual and pragmatic, as argued by Sperber and Wilson, and if the pragmatic meaning of the utterance is provocative, then the strategy adopted may not always mitigate an FTA. In utterance (1), the strategy's direct meaning is a question that would not provoke the interviewee, but, because of the context of the interaction, the utterance gives rise to the implicature that "you are, indirectly, telling me that my organization has carried out the attack", which is the strongest implicature to the interviewee. The context of hostility between Israel and Palestine, and the fact that the interviewee is a Palestinian and the interviewer is pro-Israel would lead to a provocative implicature rather than just a direct question. Thus, in such a context, indirectness does not mitigate or help in avoiding conflict. This way of talking may lead to misunderstanding because of what is mutually manifest and relevant to the interactants in relation to the context. In Arabic, such indirectness may also lead the interviewee to infer that his face is being threatened in front of his audience and to consequently accuse his interactant of being impolite towards him. What an utterance means is therefore subject to how the hearer infers it, rather than how s/he decodes what certain linguistic choices mean.

#### 6.5.1.2.2 Indirectness / apology and request

##### Extract 1 B (Casual conversation) (See pages 193-140 for details of interactants)

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

40A : = they  
can make they can make more money out of foreign students  
[

<sup>325</sup> The interviewer, in utterance (3) extract 8 A, prefers to discuss the suicide bombing, which is a less important topic for her interactant, especially as they do not agree about the terms that they use to describe the attack.

- 41B (hhhh)  
yes (hhh) =  
=
- 42A it's very very lucrative  
(0:4)
- 43B : I study study you know very nice but when a man  
become bigger and bigger it's very very very (0:3) difficult to (0:2) I mean to  
manage yourself to study again =
- 44A = yes =
- 45B = yep I got a very very very difficult  
time last three months =
- 46A : = you have to learn to be disciplined again don't you =  
:  
=
- 47B yeah student again you stay in class again examination again assignments  
again

Culturally, utterances (43 and 45) in the above extract, would, in Arabic, be a polite, indirect request from the non-native speaker to his addressee to ask him about his problems. The explicature of the utterance is a statement about his study and his feelings and the difficulties that he had, but these utterances give rise to the implicature that "I have problems, and I want to explain them if you ask me about them". This type of indirect request is common in Arabic. Instead of saying "I have this type of problem and I find it difficult to do this", "عندي هذه المشكلة ولكن لا استطيع ان اعمل هذا" "Endee hathehee almoshkellah, walaken la astateeh an ahmal", the speaker complains and leaves it to his/her interactant to ask about it specifically. It is an indirect way of 'requesting to be asked'. In Arabic, general complaints in front of another person function as a request that their interactant ask for more details about that complaint. For example, mentioning that one's children are not well means the speaker is hoping to be asked to provide details about the problem. The native speaker's answers, in utterances (44 and 46), do not seem to reflect an understanding of the non-native speaker's intentions in utterances (43 and 45) because of cultural differences in the meaning of the complaint strategy. Understanding the intention behind saying something differs between the two interactants' cultures. The core politeness theories claim that indirectness can take different linguistic forms. However, they fail to adequately explain the occasions when the utterance's explicature does not suggest any indirectness, but the intended meaning is indirect. In such contexts, the speaker usually complains indirectly in order to be asked to provide details. If not asked, s/he might accuse his/her interactant of being inappropriate, not paying attention to him/her or not understanding him/her.

Although, as Brown and Levinson (1987) argue, indirectness may be a strategy for avoiding loss of face, in this type of indirectness, the speaker does not want to speak about his problems without being asked. The non-native speaker implies that he wants to be asked indirectly by using certain strategies of requesting, perhaps in order not to be inappropriate by speaking about himself and his problems without being asked, but he was misunderstood by his interactant. Again, this means that indirectness does not always function as conflict avoidance or the mitigation of FTAs, and it might not be realized because of cultural differences.

### Extract 6 B (TV conversation)

This recording is from Fox News TV channel in late 2004 from a programme called 'On the Record'. It is between a male American native speaker of English (the interviewer) and a male Lebanese American non-native English speaker originally from Palestine.

- 16 Interviewee    yes they have yes they have you see yes I am sure you would love that the Lebanese and Arabs have the same atrocity as they do to the Syrian?
- 17 Interviewer    [ why should I love that professor professor why should I
- 18 Interviewee    [ because
- 19 Interviewer    [ why should I love anybody having antipathy antipathy for anybody else I do not want people to hate each other no professor
- 20 Interviewee    [ you clearly you clearly are unhappy that the Lebanese are not as anti Syrian as they are anti Israeli ((not clear))
- 21 Interviewer    [ professor let's hold right here professor I am not unhappy about anything with regards to Lebanese I am just asking you to explain the situation I do not understand why one occupier is hated more than one occupier that's all I am asking I don't take pleasure in anybody hating anybody else believe me ((not clear))
- 22 Interviewee    [ right right one wishes there is no hate in the Middle East whatsoever but there is and hate is spread by occupation and brutalization as we seeing in the West Bank it is very easy now to predict that hate against Israel and the United States is going to increase on the bases of the hundred of civilians have been killed by the Israeli occupation
- 23 Interviewer    [ right professor let me get back and let me see if I could get a

Although there is no direct or indirect request for an apology, in Arabic, utterances (19) and (21) in the above extract are likely to be received as indirect requests from the interviewer to his interviewee for an apology. In Arabic, in certain contexts, if you condemn an accusation as in utterances (19) and (21), then this means indirectly asking for an apology, which does not necessarily need to be a direct apology. However, the way the Arab interviewee responds in utterance (22) is likely to be considered an indirect apology by him<sup>326</sup>, but it does not seem that the interviewer has understood it as an apology. In Arabic, utterance (22), in such an unfriendly context, means a withdrawal by the interviewee of his accusation of his interviewer, which would be considered an indirect apology to his interviewer. Thus, the use of "one wishes" may give rise to the implicature of "I trust that you don't like hatred to spread among people", "انا اصدقك انك لا تحب ان تنتشر الكراهية بين الناس", "ana ousadekouka anaka la toheeb an tantashera alkarahya bayna alnas", which the interviewer said in the previous utterance. This way of apologising may lead to misunderstandings if not interpreted similarly by the interactants, and the addressee might claim that no apology has been made. An Arab would usually consider an utterance such as (22) as an apology when it comes after arguing, as in utterance (21). Culturally, an explicit apology such as "I am sorry", or "I apologise" in such contexts is usually not requested and not given if requested even implicitly, as in the extract 6 B utterance (21). The context of interaction determines whether an apology is performed implicitly or explicitly, but again this is a subject of disagreement in cross-cultural interaction.

Such ways of requesting or apologizing cannot be analysed by Brown and Levinson's model of politeness, because such processes are not universal and also cannot be understood by merely analysing what the explicature of an utterance might give rise to without considering the context of the interaction and what it involves. Arabs do not ask directly for an apology in such unfriendly situations because they know that it will not be given and would also lead to loss of face. Thus, in such contexts, an interactant may prefer to accuse his/hwe interactant of being inappropriate which, indirectly, means requesting an apology. As we explained, the Arab interviewee response in utterance (22) is likely to be considered an indirect apology by him to his interactant.

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<sup>326</sup> Whether the interviewer requests an apology or not in utterances (19) and (21), the interviewee, in such contexts, would understand that he is requested to apologise, and that the context of the interaction suggests an accusation, and requires him to apologise to his interviewer.

Again, the reasoning behind such ways of apologizing is also not considered by Brown and Levinson's model of analysis in such a cross-cultural context.<sup>327</sup> The interviewee considered utterances (19) and (21) as implicit requests for an apology and he apologized implicitly because in Arabic, when interactants argue in a challenging type of interaction and one of them feels insulted, it is not possible to ask for a clear apology – all they can do is explain the disagreement and dissatisfaction and leave it to the other to apologise. On the other hand, in Arabic, the person who intentionally or unintentionally accuses his/her interactant of wrongdoing in a provocative atmosphere finds it difficult to apologise directly, as it might mean acknowledgment of wrongdoing, especially on the TV / radio where the factor of an audience plays a role. Such cultural differences and different understanding of the context would lead to different interpretations, and could be analysed only contextually, as they are not realized linguistically. Thus, as argued by Sperber and Wilson (1995), it is only after the process of inferential enrichment that a hearer can infer the proposition that it is expressing.<sup>328</sup> The context and the interviewee's linguistic choice together enrich the implicit rather than the explicit meaning. Such interpretation meets the expectations of the interviewer and relevance in relation to utterance (21) and utterance (23). In the second part of utterance (22), the interviewee gives the impression that he does not want to accuse his interactant any more, while the interviewer tries to avoid any more accusations.<sup>329</sup>

Deciding whether a speaker is really asking for an apology or just wants to accuse his interactant of being impolite towards him is not always clear but, as Relevance Theory argues, hearers may stop at the first interpretation that satisfies their expectation of relevance in relation to their understanding of the context. Utterance (23) constructs an appropriate interpretation that both interactants do not want to carry on accusing each

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<sup>327</sup> In Arabic, in some contexts, this use of apology after an accusation is face saving to the speaker. For example, if the speaker has power over his/her interactant, or if s/he is too arrogant to apologise openly, or even because of the speaker's social status such as his/her position, tribe or attitude towards the background of his/her interactants, or his/her interactant's gender (a man apologizing to a woman). Thus, it is not possible to analyse apology by only analysing the explicit meaning in such a context of interaction.

<sup>328</sup> Inferential enrichment is what contributes to truth-conditional semantics, to the explicatures rather than the implicatures of utterances.

<sup>329</sup> I would assume that utterance (22) has been interpreted by the interviewer as an utterance that puts an end to the conflict between them, because in utterance (23) the interviewer explains, indirectly, that the problem of not understanding each other is because his interviewee does not provide straight answers when he is asked.

other. However, utterance (23) also suggests that the interviewee has not been answering honestly, as the interviewer sees it, by not providing straight answers to his questions.

### 6.5.1.2.3 Indirectness and sensitive questions

Indirectness in the above interaction is different from that in utterance (56) in the following extract.

#### Extract 1 C (Casual conversation) (See page 193 for details of interactants)

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

- 48B : yeh it's only one year's course =  
49A : = then after that do you go back or do you want  
to stay ((not clear))  
[  
50B : er (,) no no I go back sure yeah (,) I've got my job =  
51A : = yes =  
52B : = already  
my car my job my house (hhh) everything is there so no (,) it's a short period of  
time I'm coming here =  
53A : = yeah =  
54B : = to do something and come back to my job  
again (0:2) so there be for me (0:2) to come back not to stay here (hhh)  
[  
55A : yeh  
(0:4)  
56B : what  
about study here if you want to study (0:1) I mean your monthly payment here.  
It's er (0:2) becomes (0:2) ((not clear) how I can explain it (,) they give you  
monthly er  
[  
57A : no  
[  
58B : I mean your job I mean how you can manage study with your job  
(0:2)

- 59A : The way it's gonna work for me individually (,) is that um  
 (0:2) I'm going to be doing I work as a technician so I make all the  
 equipment and keep it running for the research and the academic who is  
 trying to get me the money to do that er is based in Manchester now so what  
 will happen is if it all works I will be getting a salary to do his technical  
 support work and I'll be registered with Manchester to do a higher degree (,)  
 and I'll have to do the degree in my own time yes so I work and I do my  
 degree as well =
- 60B = ah ha =
- 61A = but the degree is spread over three years so it's it's not  
 cramming everything into a single year =
- 62B = hum hum

The above extract indicates that indirectness is used for sensitive questions such as salaries, as Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, but this still leaves the question of whether interactants use indirectness to avoid asking direct sensitive questions that do not threaten other's faces, or whether there might be any other reasons. Utterances (56) and (58) from the non-native speaker indirectly ask the native speaker how much he will be paid when he starts his course. Instead of answering, the native speaker provides a description of what he is expected to do and does not provide a direct answer. However, such indirectness does not mean that the interactants have the same feelings in asking about salary, and that they aim to avoid any FTA by being indirect. Although the strongest implicature of the indirect questions in utterances (56) and (58) is "how much money do you earn a month?", " كم نقبض شهرياً ", " Kam takbeed Shahreyan", and the strongest implicature of the answer to utterances (56) and (58) in utterance (59) is "I do not want to say how much money I earn", " لا اريد ان اجيب هذا السؤال ", "la aoureed an oujeeb hatha assoual", neither of the interactants seem to feel that their behaviour might be interpreted as inappropriate, or that face is threatened because of this indirectness. In Arabic, asking about salaries is done directly, and not receiving an answer may not threaten the face of any of the interactants.<sup>330</sup> This means that although there is no answer for the non-native speaker's question, he (in utterance (60)) seems to accept this, and the conversation continues on the same topic. In addition, the context of the interaction is understood differently. Questions about salary in Arabic do not cause FTAs or discomfort, and do not even need to be asked indirectly, as a lack of an answer does not cause any FTA to the interactants. In English, questions about salary can sometimes cause discomfort. Such a view is also discussed by Sperber and

<sup>330</sup> It is not clear to me, as a native Arabic speaker, why the non-native speaker of English has asked his interactant about salary in this indirect way. As explained, in Arabic, questions about earning in any type of business is asked directly, but I would refer this to the influence of the context.

Wilson in what they term "cognitive environment" which they consider as a set of all the facts that are manifest to individuals, including their understanding and knowledge of others. What is understood from asking a question about salary is not the same across cultures. Whereas it is interpreted as a sensitive question and might lead to threatening face in one culture, it is understood as a normal question, even when it is asked implicitly, in another.

#### 6.5.1.2.4 Indirectness and Disagreement

There are situations where a speaker wants to disagree with the interactant but wishes to do so indirectly in order to avoid threatening another's face.

#### Extract 3 A (casual conversation)

This conversation took place in late 2003 between a British native speaker of English and a Libyan non-native speaker. The non-native speaker is from Southern Libya. He is a 39 year old married male with two children, studying for a PhD in dental studies and writing up his thesis. He has lived for more than 5 years in London. The native speaker is British and has no real experience of interacting with Arabs. This conversation took place at the University of London.

J = Native speaker of English

K = Non-native speaker of English

1J : do you have to go very deep to sink a well =

2K : = no I mean, something like its  
very amazing I mean when you dig around ah one metre you find (0:0)  
beautiful water =

3J : = how extraordinary =

4K : = yeh

5J : (,) does does this originate from  
mountains nearby or

6K : [ no, when (0:2) people er our scientists I mean claim that this water  
(,) I mean I was told from thousands and thousands of years during the Ice  
Age. (,) ((not clear))

7J : (0:2) the trouble about that if it's true, is that it's a finite  
resource (,) it's not a resource that is being replenished continuously.

8K : [ ah hh  
[

- 9J : do you think  
[
- 10K : ah well some aaa  
researcher they said hh they might er (0:2) er be (0:3) something like er  
rivers =
- 11J : = subterranean =
- 12K: = er ka hh well the Nile river is not very far from the  
desert, you know what I mean, it's just 1000 or 2000kms =
- 13J : = (hhh) that seems  
to me a long way (hhh)  
[
- 14K : no but I mean er because the result you can imagine it's like this  
so I mean Nile river is just on the edge of er of the desert you know what  
you call the Sahara

The native speaker in utterance (3) in the above extract does not seem to accept what is said and his utterance, to an Arab, seems to give rise to the implicature 'what you say is impossible, or rather stupid', 'ما تقوله مستحيل او لا يصدق', ' "ma takoulhou mostaheel aw la yousadeek". This is insulting to the non-native speaker in terms of what is culturally acceptable. In Arabic, utterance (3) is considered an indirect way of doubting what is said, which is usually insulting if the speakers are strangers to one another. Thus, although the explicature of utterance (3) is explaining that what is said is odd, its strongest implicature in such a context in Arab culture is "I cannot accept what you say", "انا لا استطيع ان اقبل ما", "ana la astateeh an akbala ma takoul". Such cultural difference would override any mitigation that the native speaker intends through his indirectness towards the non-native, because this is how Arabs say "what you say is not true" when they are strangers.

Again utterance (7) where the native speaker indirectly explains his suspicions by saying "This is, If it is true, ....", "هذا، اذا كان ذلك صحيح، ....", "hath, etha kana thalka saheeh, ...", would be interpreted differently by the non-native speaker in such a context. To the non-native speaker, such an utterance would give rise to the implicature that "what you say is not true", "ما تقوله غير صحيح", "matakoulaho kayro saheeh". In Arabic, disagreement between strangers (especially complete strangers) in such a way on the first meeting might give rise to different implicatures that might lead to the discomfort of the non-native speaker. For example, in Arabic it may mean, as a strong implicature "I do not trust you", "انا لا اصدقك", "ana la ousadeekak", or "I do not like talking to you because of a personal attitude towards your race or gender, etc.", "لا اريد التحدث معك و ذلك بسبب امور شخصية", "la aoureed al thahdotha maheek wa thaleeka besabab oumour shakhseeayah". Culturally, in

such contexts of interaction, Arabs, on the first meeting, do not usually disagree, directly or indirectly, even when they are not convinced of what their interactant is saying. The non-native speaker, in the above extract, seems either not to understand any of these implicatures or pretends that there is nothing to suggest such a meaning. In utterance (12), the non-native speaker tries to offer his own interpretation of what scientists say, which indicates that he felt discomfort.

Again, it seems that what the non-native speaker says in the utterance (12) is not convincing, as the native speaker in utterance (13) again disagrees with the non-native speaker more indirectly. More importantly, the non-native speaker does not bring to the fore the implicature that the water may run out in the distant future. In Arabic an utterance like (13)

هذا يبدو لي طريق طويل  
 ḥawieel ḥarieek lee yabdow haḍ  
 long way to me it seems this  
 that seems to me a long way

gives rise to the implicature that "I do not believe what you say", "انا لا اصدق ما تقول", "ana la ousadeek ma takoul", which would be considered as an unacceptable disagreement by an Arab in such a context. Thus, because of different understanding of the appropriate way of disagreeing in certain contexts, even being indirect does not guarantee that what one says indirectly will mitigate any FTA, or be interpreted as an appropriate strategy. When the non-native speaker was asked whether he felt that he was called a liar because of what the native speaker's utterances seemed to suggest, he said that he did not think that his interactant thought that he was not telling the truth. However, he also said that he did not like the way he was asked (follow-up interview; extract 3A, Appendix 2)<sup>331</sup>. Although this sounds like a weak implicature (that the native speaker thinks that the non-native speaker is a liar or exaggerating), how the rest of the conversation proceeds confirms that there is misunderstanding between the interactants.<sup>332</sup> However, judging what is appropriate is a contextual rather than a linguistic issue. How cultural differences in cross-cultural

<sup>331</sup> In Arabic, this way of talking means that the person talking is either being ironic or is calling their interactant a liar.

<sup>332</sup> This means that indirectness / directness is not only connected to the interactant being afraid of threatening the face of the other, but also it may mean that the speaker has felt a Face Threatening Act from his/her interactant because of the way a question is asked.

interaction influence the interpretation of certain linguistic uses differs, which might lead to some misunderstanding or even an accusation of being impolite.

#### 6.5.1.2.5 Indirectness and threat

##### Extract 9 (Radio conversation)

- 1 Interviewer Sharon has said that Israel will not pull back until Palestinian militias are crushed what does that mean to you for future.  
(0:4)
- 2 Interviewee Sharon  
just playing games with all of his promises Sharon intention is to continue his occupation Sharon plan is to ahh get rid of all Palestinians out of their country this the transfer in his mind so he plans to transfer all the Palestinian whether to death or to any place other than Palestine and their home land ..... so I don't believe Sharon
- 3 Interviewer [ Eshmael Eshmael
- 4 Interviewee [ started his career with massacre in 1948 yes

Again, utterance (1) in the above extract is a provocative question by the interviewer. Although the explication of the utterance is a clear statement of what Sharon has said, the first (and strongest) implicature that the utterance might give rise to is that the interviewer is warning and threatening the interviewee that their activities might lead to more violence on his side. The reason for such an implicature is that this way of speaking in such a context, to an Arab from a person known to him as pro-enemy, is a very direct threat regardless of how this threat is expressed, directly or indirectly. The other implicature is that she is trying to make him aware of the consequences, and the weakest implicature is that she really wants to know his opinion about the issue discussed.<sup>333</sup> However, it does not seem that the interviewee thinks of any of the above implicatures in his answer to the question. Even his answer in utterance (2) does not seem to be relevant to the question. There is a possibility that the interviewee has misunderstood what is meant by utterance (1), but also there is a possibility that he does not want to answer what he is expected to answer and prefers to say what he feels is important.

Again in the above extract, utterance (1) is interpreted as an indirect threat by the interviewer. But, in Arabic, such a threat (especially when it is from a female to a male) if

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<sup>333</sup> The first implicature is more likely to be the strongest to an Arab from a Westerner in such context, because firstly, the interviewer uses a threat strategy in front of an audience, and secondly, because the interviewer is a person who is known to the interviewee as pro-Israeli.

it is indirectly performed, usually causes hearers to pretend to pay no attention to the threat, or to treat the utterance as nonsense because they do not want to be labelled as fearing their enemy, even if they do. In Arabic, such a way of answering means that the interactant understands the utterance as a threat but does not want to recognise it as such. This would not happen if the interviewer was a male Arab. As I discussed in chapter 4, what is communicated depends on what is manifest to the hearer, which may not necessarily be conveyed linguistically. There is no guarantee that the hearer will infer the same meaning that the speaker intends by an utterance. Because of the influence of the context, the implicature that an Arab might understand from utterance (1) is that "if you resist you will be crushed" or "you are too weak to resist, you should surrender". Whether that is what is intended by the interviewer or not, this way of talking with an Arab would lead to a threatening implicature, which would also lead to more conflict between the interactants. To an Arab, to talk in such a way is to threaten the interviewee in front of his audience, and it is an indirect challenge by the interviewer.

#### **6.5.1.2.6 Directness and Naming strategy**

In the next radio conversation, the interviewer sounds appropriate by calling her interactant by his first name in utterance (11), but the second part of the utterance is asking the same question that she has asked in utterance (8) in an imperative way, which provokes her interviewee. In this context, it seems that the reason for arguing is the imposing manner of the interviewer; the imposition by a female to a male in a media programme might be considered insulting in some contexts, not necessarily only by the hearer, but also by his audience. In such contexts, calling by first name will not override the imposing strategy from a female to male.

#### **Extract 9 (Radio Conversation)**

This recording is from CNN Radio, in early 2004 from a programme called 'CNN Radio Newscaster'. It is between a female American native English speaker (the interviewer) and a male Palestinian non-native speaker, an active member of an anti Israeli movement in Palestine considered a terrorist group by the interviewer.

6 Interviewee

aha as far as the Palestinians are not  
recognized I mean are not having this recognition from the  
Israelis, I will not give it to the Israelis until they recognize our right  
to exist

- 7 Interviewer (,) Eshmael um if Arafat calls a cease fire will your organization (AR) Hamas stop the suicide bombing or will you act independent of what Arafat says or does
- 8 Interviewee (0:4) when Arafat asks for a cease fire look at the situation the Israeli tanks do they move a leave Palestinians live a life a alone? do the tanks and the Israeli soldiers withdraw? if they are not withdrawing so the Palestinian situation are facing Israeli military forces with tanks with closure so they have to resist they have to defend themselves if there is no Israeli soldiers Palestinians are not interested in attacking
- 9 Interviewer [ does it
- 10 Interviewee [ Israeli or  
resisting any
- 11 Interviewer [ Eshmael I am unclear I am unclear Eshmael let me ask it again, if Arafat calls a cease fire says stop the suicide bombing will your organization (AR) Hamas stop the suicide bombing YES or NO  
(0:3)
- 12 Interviewee ah it's not like this you know yes or no I am not in a court but let me tell you the truth, the Israelis occupation is continued military forces is are I mean are abusing our people and causing suffering when we resist this it is not a cease fire it is this cease fire aha expression is not ahaha
- 13 Interviewer [ I take it
- 14 Interviewee [ acceptable
- 15 Interviewer (,) I take that you won't answer the question whether not you will stop if Arafat give a signalled that he thinks what should be stopped and let me move on to another question am (,) to you and that's are you funded in anyway way by Sadam Hussan

The first part of utterance (11), although she is calling him by his first name, may give rise to two different implicatures: 1) is that the interviewer tells the interviewee, indirectly, that what he has said is irrelevant to her question, and this is clear in the previous utterances in the conversation. 2) is that the interviewer tells him that he does not want to answer her question, and maybe she needs to ask a different question or the same question in a different way, which she has done in the last part of the same utterance. Although, linguistically, in utterance (11) the interviewer asks her interviewee to answer her question, the context of interaction where every speaker has their own goals to achieve plus their

own understanding of each other would lead to such implicatures. In addition, the using of terms such as " Hamas stop the suicide bombing", and the use of "YES or NO" by the interviewer in such an unfriendly context would imply that the interviewer is more concerned with what she wants to say rather than whether or not this is an appropriate way of asking questions. Thus, setting the same question that was asked in utterance (8), and then ordering him to answer "Yes or No" suggests that the interviewer knows that the interviewee will not provide her with the answer she wants and that this is the only way to show her audience that he is not answering her questions, especially since in utterance (15) when she clearly accuses him of not answering her question.<sup>334</sup>

Utterance (11) is an example of the influence of context in inferring what is meant, as argued by Sperber and Wilson (1995). In spite of the interviewer calling her interactant by his first name, considered by the interviewer to be an inclusive way of talking, so that the interviewer is telling her interactant "we are not in a situation of arguing because I am calling you by your first name", the utterance should be considered a direct attack by the interviewer. Culturally, in Arabic, the "Yes or No" question in front of an audience in such a context of interaction, and being ordered by a female, would often override any strategy considered as conflict-avoiding, which might be intended by the interviewer when she called her interviewee by his first name.

#### **6.5.1.2.7 Conclusion to the section 6.5.1.2 Indirectness / Directness in cross-cultural interaction**

Indirectness and how it is understood in cross-cultural interaction can be a main cause of pragmatic failure and misunderstanding as argued in chapters 2 and 3. As has been argued in the above section, directness and indirectness are not always necessarily linked to politeness or impoliteness as Brown and Levinson (1987) argue. Directness and indirectness are differently interpreted in cross-cultural interaction (Coupland et. al. 1991b, and Levinson 1983).

From my analysis it is clear that there are different reasons for being indirect, and that these are contextual, as Van Dijk (1997), MacMahon (1996), Sperber and Wilson (1993)

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<sup>334</sup> However, we find that, in different situations of my data, indirectness might be understood as an introductory part of an utterance, where the intention is either to prepare the addressee for a difficult question or to mitigate anger caused by a question. Indirectness is sometimes used to avoid disagreeing directly because interactants consider each other's face.

and Christie (2000) illustrate. This means that directness and indirectness cannot be limited to negative and positive orientation as Meier (1995a) suggests. Mills (2003a) and Thomas (1995) believe directness/indirectness depend on understanding the intended meaning and have different meanings in different contexts (see chapters 2 and 4). One of my arguments is that directness and indirectness are influenced by cultural and contextual factors, and cannot be limited to certain interpretations. Thus, Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that indirectness or off-record is considered more polite than on-record or direct speech is not applicable in cross-cultural interaction, as we have seen in the above interactions. Interactants were influenced by the context of the interaction and their cultural background to produce or interpret what was said, rather than by only the strategy and the linguistic choices.

If the structure of the question is indirect, then this does not necessarily correspond that the intended meaning does not cause a Face Threatening Act, or that the FTA (if there is one) is mitigated, as Brown and Levinson claim.<sup>335</sup> In extract 1, there are direct strategies between strangers that do not cause FTA. In utterance (32) in extract 1 B (See pages 139-140 for details of the extract) the native speaker asks his interactant about who is paying his tuition fee. This means that it is not only the relationship between the interactants that determines whether directness creates FTAs, but rather the content as well as the type of questions in relation to the context. Thus, it is the context of the utterance and not its structure which determines whether direct or indirect utterances are interpreted as impolite or not.

From understanding the implicatures that the utterances might give rise to in relation to the interactants and their understanding of the context, we can conclude that an utterance can cause an FTA to the other interactant. Mills (2003a) and Eelen (2001) argue that in Brown and Levinson (1987) the focus is on the speaker's utterance. However, as discussed in chapter 2 (see Spencer-Oatey 2000a, Mills 2003a), what threatens face differs from one culture to another and one context to another. Thus, the use of solely linguistic analysis to assess FTAs is not adequate analytically in cross-cultural contexts.

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<sup>335</sup> This means that being direct or not using expressions such as "please ..." "Could you ..." or " (pardon, *řfwan*" عفو ) or "if you allow, *Law Samahit*" (لوسمحت ) etc. is not always interpreted as giving commands, and also that using them does not mean that the person is indirect.

## 6.5.2 Understanding context in cross-cultural interaction

### 6.5.2.1 Context and Culture

As explained in chapters 3, 4 and 5, context involves different factors that influence the production and interpretation of utterances. These include; conventions, values, habits, topics of discussion, age, class, ethnicity, education, gender, audience, stereotypes and religion which are differently interpreted from one culture to another (see chapter 5). Sperber and Wilson (1995) argue that a "cognitive environment" does not only include what is understood from the linguistic use of the utterance, but also all of what might be inferred and might influence interaction, including interactants' beliefs and knowledge about the world. The following factors might lead to misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction.

#### 6.5.2.1.1 Topic choice

**Extract 1 C (Casual Conversation) (Casual conversation) (See pages 193-140 for details of interactants)**

- 61A : = but the degree is spread over three years so it's it's not cramming everything into a single year =
- 62B = hum hum =
- 63A = but that's the only way I can manage it I can't afford to not have a job um so (0:2) yeh my wife works as well ((not clear)) which will make it easier (hhh) but we're trying to get enough money to buy a house and if I just don't have a salary coming in we wont be able to do that but, hopefully what will happen is er there (,) will be some money er put on my grant to pay my fees so I don't have to pay my fees
- 64B [ yeh, yeh
- 65A [ but all
- .that's being negotiated (hhh) (0:2)
- 66B : right so you can do it yeah (,) in this way you can
- [
- 67A : you can do it if you're in the right place at the right time =

- 68B : = sure (hhh) nice to  
meet someone married here in this country you know as you  
[
- 69A : it's getting rarer  
isn't is  
[
- 70B : yeh: (hhh) very rare (h) (0:2) but, but there is there is er I met a lot not a lot  
but some people who is married I respect him I respect who one ones who is  
going to to this way I mean yes ones the marrying way (,) you know here I  
don't know why nobody like (hhh) to marry =
- 71A : = I think we've become a very  
secular (,) society

To an Arab, utterance (68) may give rise to the following implicatures: a) in Britain, people prefer not to marry which is a bad thing,<sup>336</sup> consequently I would consider them bad people; b) people in this country prefer to live with each other without being officially married;<sup>337</sup> and c) the non-native speaker considers a married person better than an unmarried person. Utterance (70), although praising the native speaker because he is a married person, could be interpreted as patronizingly insulting. What makes me suspect that there is a misunderstanding here is that the non-native speaker did not think of his interactant's feelings about his own culture. He only focused on his own beliefs and cultural knowledge to evaluate this context. However, the strongest implicature to both might be that "you are among the few who have a legal relationship in your society", which could be considered an indirect criticism of British culture.

Linguistically, utterance (71) explains that the native speaker is not happy with what the non-native speaker thinks of unmarried people, by using the pronoun 'we', which implies that he is a member of the society of people who can choose not to marry. Utterance (71) also explains that there is difference in understanding the reasons behind remaining

<sup>336</sup> Although marriage is considered important by many in Western societies, Arab societies are different because any type of relationship between male and female is frowned upon unless they are officially married.

<sup>337</sup> Arabs think that the terms the Westerners use to describe couples who are living together and unmarried such as 'boy/girl friend' or 'partners' are terms that are polite. Using these terms helps them to avoid any FTA when addressing people collectively; for example if there is a group of couples, some of whom are married and some who may not be, another party may say 'Will you all come here with your partners' which would mean both married and unmarried couples. However, an English priest told me that he has had to change his own views on this matter. He said he now regularly comes across couples who are practising Christians with children but who have not married. The difference is that, without exception, they intend to marry sooner or later, and he also has conducted marriages for several couples in the past few years that have been together for several years. He said to me that many native speakers of English with no religious faith seem to think that people who live together but do not marry must have a secular outlook which, he thinks, is not the case. He says that there are Christians who disagree with the morality of living together without marrying.



desert which is the source of the water and there will be big er lakes something like you can say to gather water from these er (,) wells. ah after that er from these lakes will other pipes will go to different cities in the northern part ((not clear))

- 30J : [ I see so this is a distribution from the best source of groundwater =
- 31K : = yeh yeah  
(,)
- 32J : very interesting.  
(0:2)
- 33K : so you haven't been living in the desert climate?

Utterance (22) in the following extract is a question that the native speaker has asked the non-native speaker. The native speaker here is suspicious of what the non-native speaker says in utterance (21). His utterance does not seem as if it is only a question. In Arabic, "هذا مدهش ، من اين تاتي المياه؟", "Hatha moudhesh", men ayna tatee almeayah, " that's amazing where does the water come from?" in such context of interaction is considered as an accusation that the interactant is not telling the truth. This causes discomfort to the non-native speaker in the above extract. As discussed in the section on FTAs (FTAs and asking questions), this kind of questioning between strangers is sometimes classified as inappropriate in Arabic. It is usually used to reflect power (that is either by a powerful person over a less powerful one, such as employer to employee, or a person wanting to embarrass his/her interactant in a general conversation in front of other people), which is considered to be impolite. In such a context, where the conversation is between complete strangers, utterance (22) raises an implicature that "there can be no pipes for such a long distance". Although his question is answered several times, the native speaker continues to ask the same question or talk about the same topic. As discussed earlier, utterance (22) may also imply for the non-native speaker "what you say is difficult to believe", "ما تقوله", " كيف يكون هذا ", " صعب التصديق", " ma takoulho saab atasdeek" or "how is this possible?", " كيف يكون هذا ", "ممكن", " kayfa yakoun hatha momkeen", because in Arabic, in a first meeting between strangers, expressions that give the possibility that what is being said is not true are not used. When I asked the non-native speaker whether he was comfortable with the native speaker insisting on him answering certain questions, he said that he did not feel that he was challenging him, but he would not expect this type of behaviour from a stranger. He also said that, in his opinion, English people generally build their impressions about

another person without asking too many questions (follow-up interview; extract 3 B, Appendix 2).

The non-native speaker in extract 3 B had the impression that his interactant was causing him discomfort. The explicature of utterance (22) extract 3 B is that the native speaker asks "where the water comes from", but in Arabic, such an explicature may even give rise to the implicature that "you are a liar". This lack of understanding of what might be appropriate culturally between the interactant, and what might cause an FTA in certain contexts, are grounds for potential misunderstanding. Thus, in utterance (22), regardless of the intention of the speaker, his way of talking was not appreciated by his Arab interactant due to his culture and the particular context. An interactant's reaction to what is considered to be an FTA in his own culture does not necessarily reflect whether he felt that his face was threatened in cross-cultural interaction. Because of the influence of the context, a person may decide not to respond as if his face was threatened, although he would consider that his face had been threatened.

#### **Extract 8 B (Radio conversation)**

This recording is from CNN Radio, in early 2004 from a programme called 'CNN Radio, Newscaster'. It is between a female American broadcaster, a native speaker of English, and a male Palestinian non-native speaker of English. He is an active member of an anti-Israeli movement in Palestine, considered a terrorist group by the interviewer.

9 Interviewer to make sure that I am plain Sir did your organization

10 Interviewee [ OK=

11 Interviewer =

did your organization send someone in with a bomb strapped to his body into that bus over celebration

(0:5)

12 Interviewee aha it aha needs that to tell you what is the Palestinian situation and then this is a Palestinian reaction against Israeli mass massacre against Palestinians so we are in a war time and Israelis are killing us with the F16 Fighters which comes from the United States and the Palestinians are poor and have nothing except to sacrifice their lives, so this is the situation if you want to compare it this way

(,)

13 Interviewer what is your view on suicide bombers

Sir

(0:2)

14 Interviewee ah our view of this kind of resistance we are defending ourself

against Israeli attacks it's as simple as this the Palestinians are under Israeli occupation more than thirty five years Israelis are killing Palestinians all the time until this moment

Utterance (11) includes consideration of the interviewee's face-wants, in that she has not used the expression "suicide bombing" as she did in utterance (3) in extract 8 A (see page 201 for details of the interaction), In view of the context and the interviewee's culture, utterance (11) may lead the interviewee to assume that his interviewer is being ironic towards him in front of his audience because he refuses to answer the same question in utterance (3), and now she is asking the same thing in a different way. So, what he is implying is that "even changing the linguistic units that might consider my belief or the strategy, I will not change my attitude towards the question, because it is still provoking".

In Arabic, this question in utterance (11), because of the previous utterance (3) in extract 8 A, would not be considered insulting had it been taken out of the context of the interaction and not interpreted in relation to any previous utterance. But asking the same question again, as in utterance (11) in the same context from the same interviewer to the same interviewee, would give rise to different implicatures to the interviewee, such as "you still accuse us of carrying out suicide bombing", or " you insist that we send suicide bombers". The interviewer might implicitly want to say to his interviewee "you do not want to answer because you are the person who carried out the attack". This is why the interviewee's answer in utterance (12) reveals that he feels as though he was provoked, which might not have been the interviewer's intention. Thus, understanding what an utterance might mean in relation to what has already been said, or for what it means to the hearer, is crucial – especially when interactants' interpretations are influenced by what is acceptable linguistically or strategically in the interactants' cultures.<sup>339</sup>

#### **6.5.2.1.3 Solidarity**

Using a supportive strategy is considered to be a polite way of interacting. If this is not understood, then a misunderstanding may arise, leading to accusations that one of the interactants is being inappropriate. In Arabic, utterance (2) in the following extract is a supportive utterance, despite stopping the speaker from completing what s/he intends to

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<sup>339</sup> Utterance (11) extract 8 B might be considered an indirect request to the interviewee to answer the interviewer's question, in spite of the disagreement that exists between the interactants. This does not necessarily mean that this is what is understood by the interviewee. It might mean that the interviewer poses her question again in a different way in order to get a different answer.

say. This way of taking turns in a conversation is not interpreted in the same way across cultures.

### Extract 5 (casual conversation)

This conversation took place in 2003 between a native British speaker and a postgraduate non-native speaker of English. The native speaker is a 31 year old married male with no experience of interacting with Arabs. He is doing research at the University of Bristol. The non-native speaker is 36 years old, has lived more than two years in England and is doing an MSc course. This conversation took place near the University of Bristol.

R = Native speaker of English of English

T = Non-native speaker of English

- 1R : LoLondon London was just too expensive to stay  
(0:2)
- 2T : I stayed there last year  
(0:2) for two months  
(0:2)
- 3R : whereabouts? =
- 4T : = in the centre (,) city er near  
Oxford Street  
[
- 5R : Oxford Street yeh =
- 6T : = £400 a week =.
- 7R : = For just a room =
- 8T : = er (,) two-room flat  
my family and me one bedroom one sitting room small kitchen small  
bathroom that's it  
[
- 9R : that's pretty good =.

In Arabic, utterance (2) is a strategy for establishing common ground and not an attempt to stop the speaker from carrying on. It is not possible to analyse this by merely analysing the explicature that an utterance might give. It involves what is culturally acceptable. In Arabic, utterance (2) gives rise to the implicature "I agree because I had a similar experience, carry on", "انا اوافق لانني مررت بنفس الشيء، استمر", "ana awafeek leanie marartou benafs alshaye, istamer", and such way of supporting is classified as a polite strategy. In Arabic, such as utterance would be interpreted as evidence of active listening.

Utterance (1) sounds like an introductory part to something that the native speaker intends to speak about. Utterance (2) sounds as if the interviewee does not give him the chance to carry on talking. An English person might think that the non-native speaker's intervention is inappropriate, but in fact his utterance can be considered an agreement to what has been said about London, and a request to his interactant to carry on. Asked why he did not allow his interactant to carry on, he said that all he wanted was to say that R was right in what he said about London because T had experienced a similar situation (follow-up interview extract 5, Appendix 2).

Hence, as argued by Bargiela et. al. (2001), solidarity might not be understood between interactants (See chapter 5). Also, as Arndt and Janney (1985) point out, what constitutes a supportive utterance or shows solidarity is not fixed, especially in cross-cultural interaction. The pragmatic meaning of turn-taking in a conversation before the first speaker has finished what s/he intends to say may be considered inappropriate. However, the reason for taking the turn in speech in utterance (2) *before* the native speaker has completed is not understood by the native speaker. In Arabic, as explained, it is a sign of agreement and respect for what has been said. The strongest implicature of utterance (2) might give rise to an Arab in such context as saying "I agree; that is true, carry on." It is clear from the flow of the utterances that the native speaker did not understand utterance (2) as being supportive, which may have led to the misunderstanding. This type of solidarity is not understood similarly in the two cultures of the interactants, and also cannot be analysed or explained through using Brown and Levinson's strategic model, Lakoff's (1973) rules or Leech's (1983) principle of politeness, as the pragmatic meaning is implicit and contextually interpreted<sup>340</sup> (see chapters 2, 4 and 5). The way that the context of an interaction is influenced by what is culturally accepted is different between the native and non-native speakers.

#### 6.5.2.1.4 Stereotypes

Sometimes, an interactant's answer is influenced by stereotyping, rather than what the explictures of certain utterances might lead to, even if the answer appears to be relevant.

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<sup>340</sup> As explained, such turn taking is different from the other types of turn taking where there is an agreement between the interactants when the hearer is expected to take the turn in the conversation. In utterance (2) extract 5, the non-native provides a complete statement about his experience, but to support the speaker's view, he asks him to carry on (see chapter 5, gender across cultures).

48B : yeh it's only one year's course =  
49A : = then after that do you go back or do you want  
to stay ((not clear))  
[  
50B : er (,) no no I go back sure yeah (,) I've got my job =  
51A = yes =  
52B = already  
my car my job my house (hhh) everything is there so no (,) it's a short period of  
time I'm coming here =  
53A = yeah =  
54B = to do something and come back to my job  
again (0:2) so there be for me (0:2) to come back not to stay here (hhh)

The native speaker's question in utterance (49) appears to be relevant to what is being discussed. The non-native speaker's answer does not seem to say anything directly that may make the question in utterance (49) sound inappropriate. The implicature that the question in utterance (49) might give rise to is "will you stay here to work and earn money or go back home?", an implicature which seems to trigger not only the non-native's answer to this question, but also his answer in utterances (52 and 54) in the same extract where the non-native speaker tells the native speaker that he has all this in his own country. The non-native speaker infers what is meant depending on how he culturally stereotypes the reason for being asked such question, and not merely on the explicature of the utterance and what it might generate. Thus, because of what is stereotyped culturally, utterances (52 and 54) give rise to an impression that the non-native speaker inferred more than what was intended by utterance (49), which might imply that the non-native speaker does not want to stay in the native speaker's country, because he does not need to. Even if the non-native speaker has no intention of saying this to the native speaker, providing reasons for not staying means that the native speaker's question raises problematic implicatures for the non-native speaker.

Arabs think that if they stay in England, they are seen by the English as taking their jobs. Even Arabs think that anyone who chooses to live there does so because of money and nothing else (see chapter 5, stereotypes). When I asked the non-native speaker about why he mentioned his reasons for not staying in the UK after completing his study despite not being asked to, he explained that he said that because he was sure that English people think that others come to their country to work and earn money only. He said he wanted to tell

his interactant that he is not like them. He also said that he had been asked such a question by more than ten English people before (follow-up interview, extract 1 C, Appendix 2).

It is quite common for an interactant to give more information than asked for, but this might be built on different assumptions in cross-cultural communication.<sup>341</sup> Wodak and Reisigl (2003) state that stereotypes are shared culturally and influence interpretation and performance (See chapter 5). As discussed in chapter 2, Mills (2003a) also links appropriateness with stereotypes and says that they are built on different presumptions which influence interaction. Toolan (1996) and Gudykunst (1998) also point out that stereotypes influence interaction, although they might not be accurate or true (see chapters 4 and 5). Thus, because of how interactants stereotype each other and the topic of discussion, what is inferred from a question in certain contexts of interaction might be different between the interactants, which might lead to not inferring what is intended by the speaker.

#### 6.5.2.1.5 Religion

Understanding certain expressions and strategies is sometimes differently interpreted because of the influence of factors such as religion, which does not receive the same interpretation in cross-cultural interaction, as argued in chapter 5.

#### Extract 8 A (Radio conversation) (See page 201 for details of the interactants)

- Interviewer 3 = an I'll get to that but  
let me first let me I am talking a little bit first about the suicide  
bombing your organization has taken responsibility for the bus  
massacre which led to this latest incursion by the Israelis so is that  
not true  
(0:2)
- Interviewee 4 ah let me aha tell you something the aha what you call  
suicide operation is called martyrdom operations, ah second ah ah

The question in utterance 3 is a challenging question because of two reasons. Firstly, the utterance includes expressions like "suicide bombing", " انتحايي ", " enteharee"

<sup>341</sup> For example, stereotypes may influence interaction. The non-native speaker in utterances (1 and 3) in extract 4, might have asked the interviewer the two questions about children because of what is stereotyped about English people, namely that they are not embarrassed if they are asked about having children (see discussion in section 6.5.3.1 in this chapter). Utterances (3 and 5) in extract 3 explain that it is an answer built more on a stereotypical view than on what the question actually means. The answer in utterance (3) in extract 3 can be considered an answer built on an implicature that utterance (2) may give rise to. It also provides more information than the question may require.

"responsibility for the bus massacre", "مسؤول عن عملية الحافلة الدموية", "masoul han amaleeyat alhaffela aldamaweeyah" "led to the incursion by the Israeli" "ادت الى الاحتلال من", "اسرائيل", "adat ella alehtelal men esrael". Secondly, he felt that his interviewer was ordering him to provide a certain answer. Both reasons are not accepted by the interviewee because of the influence of religious values in such contexts. Females in Arabic are not expected to speak to males in this way in a media context because of religious values (see chapter 5). Again, because of the interviewee's religious beliefs, he disagrees with the interviewer about the use of the expression 'suicide bombing'. The interviewee, in utterance (4) prefers to correct his interviewer about what the expression 'suicide bombing' means to him. The way he corrects his interviewer corresponds with his religious beliefs, which is his main justification to defend such a type of attack. The difference in understanding the meaning of "suicide bombing" is religiously triggered. An implicature of utterance (4) is that the interviewee wants to tell his interviewer that "they have an entirely different understanding of what she calls "suicide operations" "عملية انتحارية", "amaleeya entehareeya. Thus, the explicature of the utterance generates different implicatures to the interactants of the interaction because of the influence of culture and the selection of the context. Because of the different understanding of the context, in utterance (3) in extract 8 A, the interviewee considers religion to be an important factor shaping his interpretation of what is said, whereas the interviewer considers the political factor as important in her linguistic choices, and probably considers what she calls 'suicide bombers' as evil people, which is not the case for her interviewee.

#### **6.5.2.1.8 Conclusion to section 6.5.3 Context and Culture**

Building on Levinson's (1983) work on the potential for pragmatic failure arising from cultural differences, I have investigated and discussed in this section the misunderstandings that are attributable to cultural differences which influence the context of an interaction. For example, the way that requests are differently performed and interpreted across cultures (Blum-Kulka 1992); the effect of culture on assumptions (Coupland et al 1991); and the relationship between cultural differences and context causing misinterpretation between hearers and speaker (Janney and Arndt 1992, Caffi and Janney 1994).

As argued earlier in chapters (4 and 5) , cultural differences may lead to different understandings and misinterpretations of the strategy used by the interactant leading to the wrong assessment of politeness. My analyses confirm the need for a more analytical

approach that considers all interactants and their cultures and how they influence context. As Escandell-Vidal (1996) and Valde (1986) posit, we need theories regarding cultural differences, how specific cultures relate to the target culture, and to identify subsequent misunderstandings. Van Dijk (1997) emphasises that ignorance of cultural difference in cross-cultural interaction has always been a problem with different approaches to analysing politeness. Thus, cultural factors should be considered in relation to all interactants, and analysed in terms of how each individual interprets these factors in relation to their understanding of the context.

### **6.5.2.2 Context and understanding**

As I pointed out in chapter 4, how a speaker uses an utterance and how s/he intends to be understood is influenced by their understanding of the context of the interaction and what influences it. Relevance Theory has discussed this and has argued that understanding relevance is a crucial issue in understanding what an utterance might mean, and consequently whether it is considered as polite or not. It considers context as a psychological construct. Thus, factors such as background knowledge, encyclopaedic entry, background experience, attitude, intentionality, motivation, interest, power, distance, personality, shared/available knowledge, etc., all influence the production and interpretation of an utterance, and should be considered in any type of analysis (see chapters 2 and 4). Because of the influence of contextual factors, there is no guarantee that the listener will infer the intention of his/her speaker and respond relevantly in cross-cultural interaction. As Christie (2000) argues, seeing context as a fixed *a priori* element of an utterance is highly problematic. Interactants might have a different interpretation of the context of an interaction because of the influence of such factors.

#### **6.5.2.2.1 Background knowledge**

Background knowledge about certain aspects or certain types of people cannot be realized before those aspects are discussed, and sometimes may not be realized at all even if they cause discomfort for one party in an interaction.

#### **Extract 4 (Casual Conversation)**

This conversation took place in early 2004 between a British native speaker and a Libyan non-native speaker of English. The native speaker was originally from Ireland, a 37 years old married male with no real experience of interacting with Arabs. The non-native

speaker is 43 years old, has lived more than three years in England and is doing research in accounting. This conversation took place in Sheffield Hallam University.

N = Native speaker of English

Q = Non-native speaker of English

- 1N : it's true and was Libya a French colony no it's like Morocco and Algeria =  
2Q : = no it wasn't is there any chance that you are Scottish =  
3N : = no close  
I'm Irish =  
4Q : = mm Oh ra oh you're Irish OK ((not clear)) =  
5N : = yeah I am  
impressed I am very impressed yeah =  
6Q : = er (0:2) er it was colonised by the  
Italians =  
7N : = by the Italians OK  
8Q : [ er 19 (,) ah 11 first world war and then up to the  
beginning of the '30's 1932 '42 sorry ((not clear)) yeah  
9N : [ 42 OK so during er the second world war  
10Q : [ yeh well it was mostly  
Italy and then when the Italians left the country it was colonised by the  
British and the er (,) and the er (,) French aha so it's a period before the  
independence =  
11N : = yeh =  
12Q : = so it's but the British didn't I mean did stay for so  
long like they did in Egypt or  
13N : [ and and most other places  
14Q : [ most other places yeh (hhh) so we were more  
like an Italian colony  
(,)  
15N : ahah when did it get independence =  
16Q : = Er 40 hh 45  
ah 47 '47 yeh. I'm not very good with history you can tell  
(hhh)  
(,)  
17N : no, it's  
Always really embarrassing whenever anyone asks me about Irish history  
as well I'm like well I think we got independence in '22 give or (hhh) take  
5 years I don't know.  
18Q : [ (hhh) especially if you are having some Guinness (hhh)  
19N : [ yeah

In utterance (1), the native speaker asks the non-native speaker about whether his country was a French Colony. Sometimes Arabs dislike such a question, especially when historically uninformed Westerners raise it.<sup>342</sup> The explicatures of utterance (2) are that the non-native speaker is answering the question in utterance (1) and also asking his interactant. These two explicatures generate implicatures that the non-native speaker is uncomfortable with answering the question about colonialism because he tries to change the subject. What led to such an interpretation is the background knowledge of the non-native speaker about such questions that involve colonialism. Asking the non-native speaker why he did not fully answer the question in utterance (1), he said that he did not like the question, and he would have preferred it if he was first asked whether Libya was colonized or not (follow-up interview, extract 4, Appendix 2). The strongest implicature, because of the non-native background knowledge, is "this is not an appropriate question in such a context".

Thus, the non-native speaker's answer in utterance (2) extract 4 can give an implicature that he is not happy discussing this topic. Rather than providing an answer to the native speaker's question, he prefers to shift to asking the person another question. Asking the native speaker why he did not realize that the non-native speaker was not happy with his choice of topic because of his answer in utterance (2), he said that the non-native's answer to him was fine and that he answered the question later (follow-up interview, extract 4, Appendix 2). His comments in the follow up interviews do not agree with the utterance (17), where the native speaker explains that he finds it highly embarrassing to be discussing history, but not for the same reasons as the non-native speaker, though ostensibly he is suggesting that they were both embarrassed because they forgot dates.<sup>343</sup> What influences the non-native speaker in interpreting utterance (2) is different from what influences his interactant because of the different background knowledge that they have

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<sup>342</sup> Arabs think that one of the reasons why they are very much behind the rest of the world and disunited is because of Western colonization, and usually are annoyed when discussing colonization with Westerners who often view colonization uncritically (see chapter 1).

<sup>343</sup> I think the second part of utterance (17) extract 4 does not agree with what he said in the follow-up interview when asked (See Appendix 2). It is a redressive utterance from the native speaker to the non-native speaker. It is a polite way of repairing any face damage that the non-native have felt from asking him about who colonized his country. He is trying to say that we are in the same situation in that we were both colonized by the British.

about the topic or question, especially when the question is from a person belonging to a group whom the non-native speaker, historically, considers to have colonized them.

### 6.5.2.2 Background experience

As argued in chapter 4 in discussing Relevance Theory, relevance is a crucial issue in understanding what an utterance might mean, and whether it is considered to be polite or not. In the same way, as I have argued in the above section, how a speaker uses an utterance, and what s/he intends to be understood from that utterance, is influenced by the speaker's understanding of the context in relation to background experience. That is the interactant's experience in relation to what s/he is asked. Because of the influence of such factors, there is no guarantee that the listener will understand the intended meaning or respond relevantly.

#### Extract 1 A (Casual Conversation)

- 15A : one year =  
 16B = yeh =  
 17A = so you are studying?, =  
 18B = yeh  
 (,)  
 19A in the  
 University?, =  
 20B : = Er yeh in the University but in UWE<sup>344</sup> =  
 21A : = UWE (,)  
 22B UWE yeah  
 [  
 23A ah  
 right do you prefer it there?

In utterance (19) in the above extract, the native speaker asks whether the non-native speaker is a student in the University. In utterance (20), the non-native speaker answers by saying "yes", but then follows his answer by saying 'but in UWE'. The non-native speaker provides more information than is required (See Grice in chapter 2).<sup>345</sup> This is, again, influenced by the interactant's experience of discussing or answering such questions.

<sup>344</sup> UWE means the University of West of England (UWE)

<sup>345</sup> According to Brown and Levinson's model, utterance (23) would be classified as an indirect way of asking for an explanation. Utterance (21) in extract 1 A appears to be a result of an implicature that the use of "but" in utterance (20) has given rise to. This becomes clearer in utterance (23) when the native speaker asks the non-native speaker whether this was his choice. The native speaker understands that the use of 'but' in utterance (20) is irrelevant, and prefers to ask him about being in the UWE University.

However, when I discussed the interactants' use and understanding of 'but' in one of the follow-up interviews, I found that the non-native speaker considered the use of 'but' as relevant to answering his interactant's question. He said that he thought it was important to explain that he was in the UWE University and not in Bristol University because his interactant would think that he was in Bristol University if he did not say (follow-up interview, extract 1 A, Appendix 2).

According to Brown and Levinson, providing an irrelevant answer for a question may threaten the hearer's and speaker's face. The reason for such an answer, which might sound irrelevant to his interactant, is that among Arabs, if you do not make it clear that you are not studying in the main University, then you would be classified as not telling the truth by others. We usually emphasise the name of the University when we are not in the main University, usually by saying "a student but in .....". The native speaker thinks that the use of 'but' is irrelevant to his question. However, it is relevant to the whole conversation, although it is not important for the native speaker to know at which University he is studying, as he said in the follow-up interview (follow-up interview, extract 1 A, Appendix 2). Thus, although the intention of using 'but' is understood differently, the conversation may continue and interactants consider each other relevant.

### 6.5.2.2.3 Encyclopaedic entries

#### Extract 5 (casual conversation) (See page 224 for details about the interactants)

- 4T : = in the centre (,) city er near  
 Oxford Street  
 [
- 5R : Oxford Street yeh =  
 6T : = £400 a week =.
- 7R : = For just a room =  
 8T : = er (,) two-room flat  
 my family and me one bedroom one sitting room small kitchen small  
 bathroom that's it  
 [
- 9R : that's pretty good =.  
 10T : = (hhh) for £400 a week =
- 11R : = oh for week =  
 12T : = a  
 week yeh £400 a week so its cost £1,600 a month two months it cost me  
 £3,200 for two months.
- 13R : [ (hhh)

Utterance (10) in the above extract has more than one implicature to the native speaker; the first is that 'it seems that you have not understood what I mean'; the second is that he is telling the native speaker that he is wrong; the third implicature is that the non-native asks the native speaker to review what he has said and consider whether he has paid a lot of money.<sup>346</sup> In addition, the way that the non-native speaker has described the flat in utterance (8) gives the native speaker the impression that he is expected to realise that the non-native has paid a lot, but that the accommodation is not expensive, which might be the strongest implicature to the native speaker.<sup>347</sup> Thus, the reason for the misunderstanding in utterances (8), (9) and (10) is because of different encyclopaedic entries that they associate with the word 'expensive' due to living in different parts of the world where what is expensive to one is cheap to the other.<sup>348</sup> In Arabic, disagreeing about such an issue might lead to arguing, or even mutual accusations of ignorance<sup>349</sup> (see chapter 5).

Watts (2003) points out that most individuals know when an utterance structure is open to different interpretations. From the above discussion, we find that individuals have their own understanding of what is said, what is polite and what is relevant (see Watts 2003, chapter 2). Although we might agree that the production and the interpretation of any utterance is subject to the principle of relevance, we may add that this relevance is influenced by the interactants' encyclopaedic experiences as well as their cultural backgrounds. This means that interactants would use and understand language in relation to the context, influenced by what is available to them. As Christie (2000) stresses, two people sharing a cognitive environment do not make the same assumptions. Individuals build their understanding depending on their encyclopaedic knowledge which is influenced by different factors. That is, the interactants' understanding of the context in relation to

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<sup>346</sup> In Arabic, a question in a statement structure is usually a request from your interactant to review what you have just said and say the opposite. It is also an accusation that the addressee is not listening, as in utterance (10). Although that is what is understood by the native speaker, it is because of a different understanding of the word expensive due to different cultural backgrounds. Also, the use of 'That's pretty good' could be ironic rather than being interpreted as seeing it as cheap, especially if he is not familiar with London prices.

<sup>347</sup> The reason for such different understanding is because of where the interactants came from. £400 in Libya is a lot of money. It is two month's worth of salary for a Libyan lecturer at a University.

<sup>348</sup> Rather than discussing their differences, the native speaker in utterance (11) extract 5 prefers to withdraw what he thought first in utterance (9) and agree with the non-native speaker that 400 pounds a week for that flat is a lot of money.

<sup>349</sup> The differences between interactants in understanding certain terms or expression because of different background knowledge or culture, usually leads to pragmatic failure in interactions. What the non-native speaker tries to say in utterance (8) extract 5 is that what he has paid is a lot of money, but what the native speaker seems to understand is the opposite, as evidenced in utterance (9) extract 5.



convince others'. To the interviewee, utterance (9) would generate an implicature such as 'you are insulting me', which can be considered to be the explicature of the utterance as well, especially because in Arabic, 'you are insulting me' in such contexts means 'you are impolite'.<sup>351</sup> Such understanding might be a result of the interactants' intentions towards each other. The interviewer may even wish to embarrass his interviewee in front of the audience by saying to him indirectly that "you are impolite, because you are insulting another".<sup>352</sup>

#### **6.5.2.2.5 Conclusion of section 6.5.2.2 Context and understanding**

Relevance is defined as the relationship between a given assumption and a given context (see Sperber and Wilson 1995). This section has analysed the relationship between misunderstanding and politeness, examining the process of understanding in cross-cultural interaction, and judging that politeness initially depends on interactants' understanding of what is relevant within the context of the interaction. Understanding what factors influence a context and whether they receive a similar interpretation from interactants is crucial in deciding whether there are misunderstandings. Understanding how factors influence interaction in relation to all interactants can be done through the contextual pragmatic approach, which I therefore propose as an approach for analysis. As explained here and set out throughout this thesis, what is relevant may differ from speaker to addressee, and from one context to another (See Watts 2003, chapter 2). From the explicatures of what is said, hearers usually make more than one assumption, and exclude certain assumptions because of the new contextual effects that they infer.

As I have shown, the main aim of Relevance Theory is to explain how utterances are understood by establishing their relevance in a wide range of implicatures generated because of certain explicatures. As proposed in my approach, through investigating the explicatures and then the implicatures that utterances of both interactants may give rise to in relation to their context, we can understand whether interactants are relevant in their

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<sup>351</sup> In Arabic, accusing someone of insulting you means that you are indirectly telling her/him that s/he is impolite. " انت تهينني " " **Antah tohenani** "It also means that you want to escalate the situation and want to retaliate because you have been insulted. Or it might mean that the speaker is insulting his/her interactant by telling him indirectly that s/he is impolite.

<sup>352</sup> In Arabic, an utterance such as (9) reflects power, and indicates that the interviewer has the greater power because he can interpret what he wants as the strongest implicature in spite of of his interactant's denial.

understanding of each other, consequently determining where there is misunderstanding. Such a way of analysing will also help in deciding whether this misunderstanding is open to interpretation as politeness or impoliteness. However, how I analyse what is relevant emphasises what Christie (2000), Watts (2003), Mills (2003) point out, that politeness is far too complex to be limited to simply a face threatening act.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) assume that people have intuitions about relevance, and can consistently distinguish relevant from irrelevant (or less relevant) information. They see intuitions about relevance as related to context, and show that there is no way of controlling exactly which context someone will invoke at a specific moment. Therefore, as set out in the theoretical chapters, the influence of background knowledge or experience, encyclopaedic entries, interactants' knowledge of each other, attitude, interests, intentionality, stereotypes, and understanding of audience and gender, may (if understood differently between interactants) lead to different inferences from those intended. My suggested approach posits that the stimulus that an interactant produces to make meaning manifest to his/her interactant is seldom understood in the same way across cultures.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

We may conclude that there is a problem in applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, especially in cross-cultural interactions. Brown and Levinson's FTA strategies are not universal and cannot be applied in all cross-cultural contexts, not only because there are situations of FTAs that occur but which are not classified by their model, but also because there are situations that, according to their model of analysis, cause FTAs, when in fact they do not. The reason for such problems with Brown and Levinson's model is that politeness and politeness are not always explained linguistically, and that they are sometimes inferred contextually.

The follow-up interviews confirm the need for a new approach of analysis. They explain that what is going on between interactants and how they communicate does not necessarily reflect what they really think of each other's utterance; that what is communicated does not necessarily mean what is understood. We also observe that interactants sometimes misunderstand each other, which might cause an FTA, but they prefer not to communicate this overtly. In addition, when an explicature of an utterance gives rise to an implicature that might be heard as inappropriate, this is sometimes because of different understanding

of the context of the interaction. Thus, although there are different implicatures which can be drawn from the utterances because of cultural and contextual variables that might be considered as inappropriate to one of the interactants, interactants mostly seem to choose one that does not indicate they have felt discomfort.

Degree of politeness/imposition and distance are sometimes subject to individual interpretations and negotiation rather than by agreement between interactants, or being determined by culture or using certain strategies. Mitigating strategies and utterances of directness/indirectness are not interpreted in the same way, because what threatens face is not similarly understood in cross-cultural interaction. Like degree of imposition or distance, power or an interactants' opinion of the other is not just subject to agreement between interactants from the beginning, but changeable throughout the conversation. Power and distance in the above interactions are inconsistent, even within one conversation, and are not always realized by certain linguistic choices such as the use of 'titles' or 'first names', as Brown and Levinson (1987) argue. In casual conversations, speakers seem cautious to show their interactants that they are in a better position or show any distance because of the context.

In the data, native and non-native speakers of English chose topics for discussion, asked questions that intentionally or unintentionally embarrassed their interactants, and answered questions, including providing indirect and irrelevant answers or simply not answering at all. In the TV/Radio conversations, power seems to be understood differently between the interactants. For example, in Arabic TV/Radio, interviewers have more power than interviewees and are usually not challenged. It seems that the Arab interviewees do not interpret power in this way in the TV / Radio conversations of this research. They sometimes accuse their interviewers and do not provide direct apologies.

In the radio conversations analysed in this research, the interviewee in extracts 8 and 9 seems to be influenced by religion and culture when interacting with his female interviewer. To Arabs, his reaction towards her when she asked him provocative questions is considered polite compared to what would have happened had his interactant been male. His answers or objections would then have been more challenging. Thus, interactants' interpretations or answers are sometimes the subject of different understandings of the context of interaction.

The data also shows that accusing an interactant of being inappropriate is sometimes related to misunderstanding, but misunderstanding does not always mean impoliteness, as discussed in the casual conversations and TV or Radio interviews.<sup>353</sup> The data shows that there are reasons behind being polite, and these are sometimes different across cultures, which may lead to misunderstandings. For example, turn-taking is sometimes differently interpreted across cultures. As we have seen, an interruption or taking of a turn might be a supportive strategy and a polite way of talking, regardless of its length, but interactants might not realize this in cross-cultural interaction. Analysing such reasons for misunderstanding is important in understanding the meaning of a certain strategy during an utterance.

As stated earlier, what influences interactants' decisions in using or interpreting an utterance is crucial, and cannot be realized from analysing individual utterances out of context. It is obvious in almost all of the conversations studied that the meanings of the utterances are subject to understanding other factors that influence the conversation as a whole. My approach shows that misunderstanding is sometimes not realized by the interactants in cross-cultural interaction because the strategy used is understood as a polite strategy only by the speaker. Thus, the addressee might not infer that his interactant aims to be polite. It also shows that a strategic theory of politeness such as Brown and Levinson's model may not always classify how politeness is performed or understood in cross-cultural analysis.

Using explicatures of utterances and what implicatures they generate to both interactants in a conversation is a key factor in my approach in which I analyse what they involve and why what is a relevant answer to one interactant is not to the other. The analysis of implicatures helps in understanding whether interactants provide relevant answers and consider each other's face, and whether or not they behave appropriately. Interactants with entirely different beliefs might have a more or less volatile attitude towards certain issues or certain ways of communicating. The implicatures that an utterance might give rise to in a mono-cultural communication context might be different to those in a cross-cultural

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<sup>353</sup> We have argued that misunderstandings between interactants from different cultures may lead to impoliteness, but this not always the case because what is considered politeness in one culture might not be so in another.

context. This means that what might be a strong implicature in one context might not be the same in another.<sup>354</sup>

Thus, from analysing the data, we may agree with Werkhofer (1992) that an utterance might be appropriate but the intended meaning might not be (see Watts (2003) chapter 2). Politeness is context-based, and it involves different factors such as interpersonal issues, which includes the interactants' interests and their intentionality in determining what to communicate as Mills (2003) notes. Politeness is also related to understanding the intended meaning as discussed by Spencer-Oatey (2000a), Neydell (2002), Dittmar (1976) and Dascal (1999), and also to understanding linguistic and social issues of the language of interaction as described by Hymes (1972) and Eelen (2001), and Scollon and Scollon (1995) who show that interaction works better when participants know each other's cultures.

One of the main conclusions in this chapter is that politeness is 'a discursive concept arising out of interactants' perceptions and judgements of their own and others' verbal behaviour in relation to the context of the interaction' (Locher and Watts, 2005:10) (see Eelen, 2001). Disagreement on whether an utterance is relevant or appropriate is sometimes related to the culture and background knowledge of the interactants. An utterance, whether it is direct/indirect, relevant/irrelevant, appropriate/inappropriate or polite/impolite, might be judged from analysing the linguistic structure. But such an analysis cannot include all that influences the context of the interaction. Thus, the approach I propose in this chapter includes analysing linguistic choices in relation to the context, which includes the cultural differences of the interactants, their intentions or attitudes towards each other, stereotypes and personal interests (see chapter 4, Sperber and Wilson (1995)). A speaker might consider himself/herself appropriate while his/her utterance sounds irrelevant to the addressee because the intention is different from that of his/her interactant.

As explained, the implicatures of what is said in relation to the cultures of the interactants and their backgrounds provide us with what might lead to conflict or misunderstanding between interactants and consequently determine whether interactants are polite or

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<sup>354</sup> An utterance may have two contradictory implicatures, but a hearer determines what to understand regardless of the effort of the speaker to make his / her utterance appropriate (See Sperber and Wilson 1996).

impolite.<sup>355</sup> The sequences of the interactants' utterances in the conversations are organized, and there is always an understood implicature of what is said.<sup>356</sup> Interactants work to maintain politeness in their conversation even if they have behaved in a way they would not with a person from the same culture.

It seems that interactants usually communicate drawing on what we may call "positive implicature"<sup>357</sup> rather than the strongest implicature, or one may argue that the most positive implicature is the strongest implicature to the interactants in the above conversations. The data shows that every context of interaction has its own parameters defining what an FTA is. Thus, it is not only a matter of what the speaker may mean or what the culture of the speaker considers to be appropriate, it is also a matter of the listener's understanding and his/her selection of the context of an utterance which involves both interactants' culture and their interpersonal interests in cross-cultural context. The data shows that what is regarded as negative and positive face is not universal, and that FTAs are not only related to the type of speech act and strategy used. It is a matter of understanding the context of the utterance in relation to the context of the interaction and the intention of the interactants towards each other. Listeners' interpretations are crucial in analysing politeness.

The data shows that in cross-cultural interaction, background knowledge is usually influential in providing a different implicature to the one that the speaker intended, whether that was in constructing or interpreting the language. The data also shows that previous experience and stereotypes influence interaction. Particularly in the TV and Radio conversations, it is perhaps inevitable that a hearer might accept or reject an interactant

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<sup>355</sup> Moeschler (2004) discusses pragmatic misunderstandings. His reasoning is based on some assumptions supported by Relevance Theory, namely the ostensive-inferential character of linguistic communication and the difference between explicature and implicature. He hypothesises that 'misunderstandings are caused not by difficulty in drawing the intended implicature, but primarily by lack of access to the correct explicature of the utterance' (2004:1). He restricts his discussion to ostensive-inferential communication to show how the Principle of Relevance plays a crucial role in the recovery of the speaker's informative intention.

<sup>356</sup> Have (2002) maintains that 'the idea of "sequence" refers to the common experience that 'one thing can lead to another''. He argues that 'utterances in interactional talk are sequentially organized' (2002:113).

<sup>357</sup> Positive implicature is one of the implicatures that an utterance may give rise to that the addressee decides to select to communicate with his interactant. It does not need to be the strongest implicature or the weakest implicature. It might be any implicature that either helps to mitigate or avoid any type of disagreement or conflict.

because of what is stereotypical or previously known.<sup>358</sup> The topic choice in most of the conversations is not controlled by one party, and uncomfortable topics or utterances can come from any of the interactants influenced by what is stereotyped, from background knowledge or previous experience.

To sum up, in this chapter I have demonstrated that analysing politeness and impoliteness is too complex to be judged through analysing individual utterances and certain linguistic choices alone. I have also proved my argument in the theoretical chapters that judging whether an utterance is polite or not is contextual, rather than being linked only to certain speech acts performed by using certain strategies. I demonstrated that we need Relevance Theory in analysing politeness because it provides us with the link that we need in understanding how interactants understand each others' utterances in relation to what influences the context of the interaction. In this chapter I have also demonstrated that to analyse politeness we need to analyse understanding, which my contextual pragmatic approach does by considering interactants' understanding of all the variables that influence interaction, whether they are contextual, cultural or interpersonal. My contextual pragmatic approach analyses the explicatures/implicatures of utterances, examines understanding, and determines whether there are any misunderstandings that might lead to impoliteness and the reasons behind them. It considers the factors that influence the context in relation to the interactants, and analyses whether the strategy used by a speaker is considered as polite by the hearer both linguistically and pragmatically.

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<sup>358</sup> Barraja-Rohan (2003) states that interactants sometimes interact with others drawing on previous experiences or how they stereotype them and also on their attitudes towards them, as in the data of the TV and Radio interaction.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Conclusion**

I conclude this research by providing a summary of my main objectives. Firstly, I cover the aims and the theoretical framework of this thesis. Secondly, I give a summary of the main findings, finally, noting the implications, and recommendations for future work.

#### **7.1.1 Aims**

This study has investigated the understanding of linguistic politeness between the cultures of Arabic and native English speakers and the relationship between language use, context and culture. Although focussing on these particular cultures, the main aim of the research has been to explore cultural and contextual differences that influence interaction when analysing politeness/impoliteness, in any cultural exchange situation. One of the main goals has been to call for a new approach in analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction as an alternative to the principle, rule or strategic models. (see chapter 2).

Throughout, I have criticised the core theories of politeness, Brown and Levinson in particular, and their claims to universality in politeness strategy across cultures. I have argued that there are problems with the core theories of politeness that prevent them from analysing politeness adequately, whether in mono or cross-cultural interaction, in that they do not consider all the factors that influence interaction, and their judgement of politeness is not based on all the influences in the context of interaction.

I have also posited that Brown and Levinson's model of analysis does not adequately distinguish between contextual and cultural differences, nor acknowledge how politeness is understood and interpreted in cross-cultural contexts. Further, their model does not question misunderstandings and the reasons behind them, especially at a cultural level, and their theory ignores the listener's role, an important element in constructing and interpreting utterances.

#### **7.1.2 Theoretical Framework**

In chapter 2, after discussing the core politeness theory, I provided details of a range of theories that give different ways of defining and analysing politeness. These theories do not completely reject Brown and Levinson's theory, rather, they try to provide different

understandings of what is considered to be politeness/impoliteness by considering more factors than do politeness theories, consequently either criticising, modifying or providing their own models of analysing politeness. The chapter also introduces other methods of analysis which can be used to provide an adequate approach for analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction.

In chapter 3, I emphasised the contextual and cultural variables that influence interaction that have not been considered or adequately analysed by the core theories of politeness. This chapter shows that the core theories of politeness do not engage sufficiently in considering cultural differences, and the dynamics of context selection in interaction. It also establishes the need for a more contextual pragmatic approach in analysing politeness, and confirms the argument that adopting one theory to analyse politeness, especially in a cross-cultural setting, might not always be possible if that model depends solely on analysing individual utterances or tries to distinguish what is or is not polite by analysing only in relation to the speaker, speech acts out of context.

Chapter 4 discussed alternative approaches to the politeness models. It showed that analysing understanding and misunderstanding and the causes of any pragmatic failure is very important in any model or approach to analysis, and that we need a theory of cognition such as Relevance Theory in order to analyse politeness contextually.

Chapter 5 showed that interactants from different cultural backgrounds sometimes misunderstand or challenge each other because they do not know what is culturally appropriate in certain contexts, and because they have different understandings of the cultural variables that influence the production and interpretation of utterances.

### **7.1.3 Contribution of the research**

This study contributes to cross-cultural interaction literature on politeness by updating our understanding of influences on interactions in cross-cultural contexts. Reducing dependency upon the core theories of politeness, I have suggested an approach to analysing politeness that can be widely used in cross-cultural interaction, as it includes the multicultural representation of all respondents and what influences context. By analysing native and non-native speakers of English, I have shown the complexity of understanding politeness in a cross-cultural context and also shown how different influences on cross-

cultural interactions lead to different interpretations. I have shown the importance of cultural knowledge and context in inferring what is meant by what is said, because what is said is never a product of an encoding process. (See Christie 2000)

In chapter 6, I have shown that misunderstanding between interlocutors from different cultures arise from the failure of interactants to understand the politeness norms of other cultures. I have also shown that, in cross-cultural interaction, interactants sometimes fail to recognize the way that politeness is realized because of different understanding of the context. In this chapter I have also set out to prove what I have argued in the theoretical chapters, that in order to recognize any pragmatic failure that might occur in cross-cultural interaction we need a contextual pragmatic approach that considers adequately any factors that influence interaction in relation to the interactants. Therefore, in chapter 6 I have introduced an approach to analysing the data which shows a clear link between analysing interaction in general and analysing politeness in particular. It links analysing politeness to cultural and contextual factors that might influence the context of interaction and considers how interactants differ in their interpretations of the same utterance because of their different cultural backgrounds. It emphasises the argument that selecting a context plays an important part in working out what the speaker means by an utterance, and that a context is necessary in explaining how an addressee comes to an understanding of an utterance.<sup>359</sup>

I have called my approach a contextual pragmatic approach. It proves the arguments that have been highlighted in the previous chapters, and also shows that adopting any of the core theories models including Brown and Levinson's does not solve the problem of analysing politeness in cross-cultural interaction, as argued in the theoretical chapters. (See chapters 2 and 3). I have argued that variables that influence interaction are interpreted differently across cultures, as set out in chapters 4 and 5. The data of this thesis shows that Brown and Levinson's theory cannot analyse how politeness is understood or performed, and that broader understanding, cultural, and contextual views are needed in analysing politeness (See chapter 4). In my approach, I have considered how politeness is perceived between interactants in cross-cultural situations and explored the situations leading to misunderstandings caused by different interpretations of what is polite. The

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<sup>359</sup> Referring to Speber and Wilson (1993), Christie explains that 'Contextual assumptions are inferred in the process of interpreting utterances and that they play a part in the hearer's assessment of what a communicator has said, and in the assessment of what the communicator means by what she has said' (2002:180)

proposed approach has proved that politeness cannot be analysed through principles, rules, a strategic model, or a model built on speech act theory, nor by understanding and analysing only semantic meaning.<sup>360</sup>

#### 7.1.4 Findings

The criticism of the core politeness theories including Brown and Levinson's model, theoretically and empirically, shows that politeness is a complex issue that cannot be judged by analysing only issues such as the notion of face, considered an important factor in Brown and Levinson's theory. I have shown that the notion of face in their model cannot be universal, but is differently realized in cross-cultural interaction. The analysis confirms what I have argued in the literature chapters: that what is considered as an FTA in one culture might not be so in another. Certain speech acts in some contexts might be considered appropriate, or might cause discomfort to only one interactant, but cause an FTA to another in cross-cultural interaction.

As Spencer-Oatey (2000a) points out, the fact that we feel offended, uncomfortable, annoyed or angry; does not necessarily imply feeling a loss of face, nor does loss of face necessarily mean that a person made an impolite utterance.<sup>361</sup> Even accepting that there are FTAs in all cultures, we need to point out that not all conversational contexts, as Brown and Levinson believe, are indicative of FTAs (See chapter 2). What is an FTA and impoliteness is not the same for all interactants, and what needs redress strategy is not the same across cultures.

Another important finding is that directness and indirectness are not always interpreted the same across cultures, neither are the contexts for being indirect. The relationship between interactants is not the only factor which determines the degree of indirectness between them; rather understanding the context and what influences it. Indirectness does not always mean conflict avoidance or mitigating of an FTA. Variables such as power, distance and degree of imposition determine the strategy that an interactant may adopt, but these are understood differently across cultures. They are also not the only factors that

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<sup>360</sup> Perry (2003) Jr. (2002) states that understanding what speakers imply in context demands pragmatic information and not just specific or semantic knowledge.

<sup>361</sup> Spencer-Oatey (2000) argues that 'sometimes, though, people's treatment of us may not simply irritate or annoy us; it may go a step further and make us feel as though we have lost credibility or have been personally devalued in some way. When this happens we talk of 'losing face'. (2000:16).

determine the linguistic choices and the strategies used. Variables and factors that influence interaction are not fixed because contexts of interactions are not fixed.

Another finding is of the different understanding and interpretation of what certain aspects mean because of cultural differences between interactants. Across cultures, there are different ways of showing respect to others. For example, as seen, there are certain contexts for naming strategies to be considered as appropriate, and they are sometimes differently interpreted. In addition, appropriate topics for discussion are understood differently, and what is considered as an appropriate question is also different.

Another cultural problem that this research highlights is the different understanding of certain speech acts. For example, irony, request and apology are not understood similarly. They are usually contextual and judged by the utterance's pragmatic meaning. In Arabic, in certain contexts, apology and request are sometimes performed implicitly by the speaker and accepted by the addressee, but that is not the case in English. There are different strategies used to show solidarity such as turn taking or interruption, which are usually implicit and understood by only one of the interactants.

I also found that there are no correct or incorrect interpretations for utterances without considering their contexts. This finding emphasises that the way hearers come to agreement with their speakers and distinguish literal from intended meanings is very complicated in cross-cultural interaction. It shows there are different reasons for misunderstandings between interactants and conflicts happen because of these differences. The generated explicatures and implicatures from utterances in cross-cultural interaction are not the same, or rather what is considered as a strong implicature of an utterance is not the same because of cultural and contextual differences between the interactants. Cultural and contextual factors such as gender, religion, power, distance, background experience, background knowledge, encyclopaedic entries, etc., are differently interpreted in cross-cultural interaction, consequently influence inferences as to what is relevant.

For example, a factor such as religion differently influences Arab speakers' and Westerners' cultures. Because of such influence interactants may misunderstand the intended meaning of an utterance. The data also has shown that in spite of such differences in interpreting what influences interaction, and what might lead to misunderstanding,

interactants usually draw on what we may call "positive implicature". In spite of provocative topics and questions in relation to interactants' cultures, interactants, most of the time, prefer to avoid being inappropriate, which means politeness is always assumed to be intended even in situations where one feels discomfort because of topic choice, question, or linguistic strategy.

### **7.1.5 Implications**

Because my approach is to investigate the factors that influence the production and interpretation of politeness in relation to speakers and addressees, this research might have implications in other fields where communication is analysed. For example, this study can be seen as an attempt to examine Brown and Levinson critically and emphasise the need for a new model of analysis, especially in cross-cultural interaction. My approach of analysis does not completely reject Brown and Levinson's model as a model of analysis, but calls for more research to modify this. It encourages the link between theories of understanding and theories of politeness in order to provide a more pragmatic model of analysis. My approach enables analysts to explain how addressees derive the implicatures they do, it accounts for how other implicatures might be derived, and it supports the fact that because of cultural differences and different understanding of the contexts of interaction, addressee might infer different implicatures of what his/her speaker intended.

The contextual pragmatic approach I have suggested supports further studies in the field not only to compare similar or different kinds of linguistic behaviour across cultures; rather, it encourages the understanding of the factors that are behind such similarities and differences and how they influence interactants. It also explores the importance of investigating politeness on organizational levels in cross-cultural interaction such as foreign language teaching and learning because politeness involves linguistic along with social, cultural and contextual factors.<sup>362</sup> Another crucial point is that this research might be considered as a basis for creating a theory that mitigates any potential conflict or breakdown in conversation, whether in mono or cross-cultural interaction. For example, in the data of this research, I find that most of the utterances have positive implicatures that

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<sup>362</sup> Adebite (2005) argues that 'an understanding of the various means of expressing politeness or breaches of politeness in English is crucial for ESL' (2005:1477). And Bou-Franch and Garces-Conejos (2003) also argue that 'Linguistic politeness constitutes the most suitable tool with which to approach the teaching of L2 sociopragmatic in the classroom context' (2003:19). As Tallman (2002) argues 'teaching is a fundamental pedagogical engagement before it is an instructional one, containing immediate social, cultural, moral, and political dimension' (2002:368)

interactants preferred to build on when communicating in order to carry on communicating and avoid conflict or breakdown. If we could provide interactants, especially in cross-cultural contexts, with strategies to communicate building on 'positive implicatures' of what is said rather than 'strongest implicatures', then we might solve or reduce the problem of conflict, or interactants accusing each other of being impolite.

Thus, this thesis has shown that analysing politeness does not only depend on analysing certain utterances. It is a process that involves the analysis of utterances as part of longer stretches of speech, the analysis of what is said in relation to the interactants' cultures, and the analysis of the interactants' understanding of what influences the context of the interaction in relation to what is said. The theoretical and empirical chapters of this thesis can be considered as a source for further research in the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics or investigations into interculturalism or multiculturalism.

This thesis contributes to the development of cross-cultural research that aims to move beyond the analysis of literal meaning of what is said. It is research that helps in understanding what cross-cultural interactants think of each other when interacting because of different understandings of what influences the context of the interaction. As such, it contributes to a growing body of research which while questioning Brown and Levinson's model, modifies it so that it can more adequately analyse complex cross-cultural interactions. It is clear from this research that a more pragmatic focus, drawing on Relevance Theory, can help in our understanding of misunderstanding of politeness.

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## Appendix 1 (Data analyzed in the thesis)

### 1 - Tape-Recorded Conversation

#### Extract 1 A

This conversation took place in 2003 between a British native speaker of English and Libyan non-native speaker of English. The native speaker is 31 years old married male and had no real experience in interacting with Arabs. The non-native speaker is 36 years old, has lived more than two years in England and doing an MSc course in IT. They were not asked to discuss particular topics. It was left to them to discuss whatever they liked. This conversation took place between the interactants in Bristol near the University of Bristol, and interactants did not know each other before the conversation took place.

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

1A : is it starting (04) OK=  
2B : = yup  
(0:2)  
3A : I'll tell you my name again shall I  
(0:2)  
4B : er (,)  
my name is F.....=  
5A : = is F..... =  
6B : = yup  
(,)  
7A : I'm D...  
(0:2)  
8B : D... ((not clear)) =  
9A : = that's it =  
10B : =  
yeh (,) nice to meet you =  
11A : = and you (,) hh er where do you come from? =  
12B : = I'm  
from Libya =  
13A : = Libya  
[  
14B : Um, now about one year =  
15A : = One year =  
16B : = yeh =  
17A : = so you are  
studying?, =  
18B : = yeh  
(,)  
19A : in the University?, =  
20B : = er yeh in the University but in  
UE =  
21A : = UE (,)  
22B : EU yeah

**Extract 1 B (Casual conversation)**

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

- 24A : (hhh)  
so what's the course? =
- 25B : = MSc (,) er IT =
- 26A : = IT  
:  
[
- 27B : Information technology yeah =
- 28A : = ah  
I'm thinking of doing an MSc in, um, geophysical information systems =
- 29B : = ah  
nice nice one  
(0:2)
- 30A : but Er it depends on the grants and it depends on whether  
they can get me the money =
- 31B : = in here er I mean citizen student (,) they take er  
(,) a low low grant, I mean it is not expensive I mean (0:3) like foreign  
students (0:2) in EU as an example er (,) they take £1,500 yes and from  
citizen ((not clear)) they take £6,500 =
- 32A : = who is paying the fees? (,) who is  
paying? are you paying that? =
- 33B : = no no for me I have someone to pay (,) my  
government I mean I've got a grant but here it is not a lot of money  
£1,500 =
- 34A : = no  
(0:2)
- 35B : so here don't know how how much in Bristol University  
(,)
- 36A : er  
(0:2) well the one I'm looking at is based in Manchester is I think for 3 years  
£3,800 =
- 37B : = A-ha a part-time one =
- 38A : = part- time yes =
- 39B : = ah nice nice one =.
- 40A : = they can  
make they can make more money out of foreign students  
[  
(hhh)
- 41B : yes (hhh)
- 42A : it's very very  
lucrative  
(0:4)
- 43B : I study study you know very nice but when a man become  
bigger and bigger it's very very very (0:3) difficult to (0:2) I mean to manage  
yourself to study again =  
= yes =
- 44A : = yeap I got a very very very difficult time last  
45B : three months =
- 46A : = you have to learn to be disciplined again, don't you =
- 47B : = yeah  
student again, you stay in class again, examination again, assignments again

**Extract 1 C**

A = Native speaker of English

B = Non-native speaker

- 48B : yeh it's only one year's course =  
49A : = then after that do you go back or do you want  
to stay ((not clear))  
[  
50B : er (,) no no I go back sure yeah. (0:0) I've got my job =  
51A = yes =  
52B = already  
my car my job my house (hhh) everything is there so no (,) it's a short period of  
time I'm coming here =  
53A = yeah =  
54B = to do something and come back to my job  
again (,) so there be for me (0:2) to come back not to stay here (hhh)  
[  
55A yeh  
(0:4)  
56B what  
about study here if you want to study (,) I mean your monthly payment here it's  
er (0:2) becomes (0:2) ((not clear)) how I can explain it (0:1) they give you  
monthly er (0:1)  
57A [  
no  
58B [  
I mean your job I mean, how you can manage study with your job  
(0:2)  
59A : the  
way it's gonna work for me individually (,) is that um (0:2) I'm going to be  
doing I work as a technician so I make all the equipment and keep it running  
for the research and the academic who is trying to get me the money to do  
that er is based in Manchester now so what will happen is if it all works I will  
be getting a salary to do his technical support work and I'll be registered with  
Manchester to do a higher degree (,) and I'll have to do the degree in my own  
time yes so I work and I do my degree as well =  
60B = ah ha =  
61A = but the degree is  
spread over three years so it's it's not cramming everything into a single year  
=  
62B = hum hum =  
= but that's the only way I can manage it I can't afford to not have  
63A a job um so (0:2) yeh my wife works as well ((not clear)) which will make it  
easier (hhh) but we're trying to get enough money to buy a house and if I just  
don't have a salary coming in we wont be able to do that but hopefully what  
will happen is er there (,) will be some money er put on my grant to pay my  
fees so I don't have to pay my fees  
[  
64B yeh yeh  
[  
65A but all that's being negotiated

(hhh)

(0:2)

- 66B : you can do it yeah (0:0) in this way you can right so
- 67A : [ you can do it if you're in the right place at the right time =.
- 68B : = sure (hhh) nice to meet someone married here in this country you know as you
- 69A : [ it's getting rarer isn't is
- 70B : [ yeh (hhh) very rare (hhh) (0:2) but but there is there is er I met a lot not a lot but some people who is married I respect him I respect who one ones who is going to to this way I mean yes ones the marrying way (,) you know. here I don't know why nobody like (hhh) to marry =
- 71A : = I think we've become a very secular (,) society

## Extract 2 (Casual Conversation)

This conversation took place in late 2003 between British native speaker and Libyan non-native speakers. The native speaker is 43 years old married male and had no real experience in interacting with Arabs. The non-native speaker is a 41 years old, postgraduate student studying pharmacy. He has lived more than 4 years in England doing a PhD. The recording took place in the University of Bristol.

H = Non-native speaker of English

I = Native speaker of English

- 1H : you got children? =  
2I : = not yet, no  
[  
3H : ah, not yet, ((not clear)) new married =  
4I : = about  
18 months =.  
5H : = OH nice  
(0:2)  
6I : yeh, we're thinking about it but we'd like to try  
and get a house first if possible =  
7H : = yeh sure =  
8I : = who knows (0:5) how long  
have you been married =  
9H : = now, er, (0:6) more than four years but not five  
years  
(hhh)  
10I : four and a half  
(hhh)  
11H : yeh, four and a half and two children  
(hhh)  
12I : tiring =  
13H : = umm  
(0:2)  
14I : is, is, are the children tiring ((not clear)),  
[  
15H : yeh  
[  
16I : do they wear you out?  
(hhh)  
17H : yeh  
you know children is children nice but more more more (,) they need  
more more time and more (0:3) an I mean look after them to look after the  
children you have to (0:2) do a lot of things =  
18I and H : = ((not clear))  
(0:3)  
19I : my wife is  
a primary school teacher =

20H = ooh she know about  
 21I [ she knows what to do (hhh) (0:2)  
 22H : it make her job very easy yeh (hhh) maybe she hate children, that's why  
 23I : [ at the moment she can give them back at the end of the day but when we've got our own you can't do that can you (0:2)  
 24H : she know about children yeh so now she prepare herself to welcome  
 25I [ she's she's trying to get used to the idea ((not clear)) (hhh) (,)  
 26H she is trying to (laugh) prepare everything yeh nice nice yeh (0:3) children is very very nice in this world very very nice =.  
 27I : = best decision you made is it =  
 28H = yeh sure (,) if you see your son grow and make like what we our fathers our family in our society I mean (0:2) respecting fathers respecting family father and mother is very, (,) very big. (0:2) yeah may be its finished yeah that one ((not clear)) so is very big things to leave your family or to not take care for your family for your father and mother .... so that is the meaning of children nno not a big meaning but when you becomes a big man have someone look after you visit you give you a lift (hhh)  
 29I : yeh (hhh)  
 30H [ visit you  
 and has children coming and visit you =  
 31I = yeah (,) my family is similar we have er part of my family is Italian

### Extract 3 A (casual conversation)

This conversation took place in late 2003 between a British native speaker of English and a Libyan non-native speaker. The non-native speaker is from Southern Libya. He is a 39 year old married male with two children, doing a PhD in dental studies and writing up his thesis. He has lived more than 5 years in London. The native speaker is British and has no real experience of interacting with Arabs. This conversation took place in the University of London.

J = Native speaker of English

K = Non-native speaker of English

1J : do you have to go very deep to sink a well =

2K : = no I mean, something like its  
very amazing I mean when you dig around ah one metre you find (0:0)  
beautiful water =

3J : = how extraordinary =

4K : = yeh  
(,)

5J : does does this originate from  
mountains nearby or

6K : [ no, when (0:2) people er our scientists I mean claim that this water  
(0:0) I mean I was told from thousands and thousands of years during the Ice  
Age. (,) ((not clear))  
(0:2)

7J : the trouble about that if it's true, is that it's a finite  
resource (,) it's not a resource that is being replenished continuously.

8K : [ ah hh

9J : [ do you think

10K : [ ah well some aaa  
researcher they said hh they might er (0:2) er be (0:3) something like er  
rivers =

11J : = subterranean =

12K : = er ka hh well the Nile river is not very far from the  
desert, you know what I mean, it's just 1000 or 2000kms =

13J : = (hhh) that seems  
to me a long way (hhh)

14K : [ no but I mean er because the result you can imagine it's like this  
so I mean Nile river is just on the edge of er of the desert you know what  
you call the Sahara

15J : [ yes ((not clear))

16K : this is the the desert ((not clear))  
[  
17J : yes =  
18K : = but er ahh today I cannot  
consider myself as desert man I mean  
[  
19J : no well you are a ((not clear))  
cosmopolitan man =  
20K : = yeah my city is a big city at the moment.

**Extract 3 B (casual conversation)**

J = Native speaker of English of English

K = Non-native speaker of English

- 21K : yes I think it's the biggest artificial river because the pipes are around 4m diameter and running for more than 4000kms =
- 22J : = that's amazing where does the water come from? ((not clear))  
(0:2)
- 23K : well ((not clear)) (0:2) we are living in a big river I mean ah (0:2) it has been said that the water can (0:2) er can run in these pipes for more than 50 years I think it's 50 years more than 50 years
- 24J : [ yes but the the 4000k away the source of these pipes =
- 25K : = ah yeh  
[
- 26J : what is that water is that where does it come from =
- 27K : = well the wells which will  
[
- 28J : ah these are wells =
- 29K : = yeh the wells in the desert which is the source of the water and there will be big er lakes something like you can say to gather water from these er (,) wells. ah after that er from these lakes will other pipes will go to different cities in the northern part ((not clear))  
[
- 30J : I see so this is a distribution from the best source of groundwater =
- 31K : = yeh yeah  
(,)
- 32J : very interesting.  
(0:2)
- 33K : so you haven't been living in the desert climate?

#### Extract 4 (Casual Conversation)

This conversation took place in early 2004 between a British native speaker and Libyan non-native speaker of English. The native speaker was originally from Ireland, a 37 years old married male with no real experience in interacting with Arabs. The non-native speaker is 43 years old, has lived more than three years in England and doing research in accounting. This conversation took place in Sheffield Hallam

N = Native speaker of English of English

Q = Non-native speaker of English

- 1N : *it's true and was Libya a French colony no it's like Morocco and Algeria, no it wasn't* =
- 2Q : = is there any chance that you are Scottish =
- 3N : = no close  
I'm Irish =
- 4Q : = mm Oh ra oh you're Irish OK ((not clear)) =
- 5N = yeah I am  
impressed I am very impressed yeah =
- 6Q : = er (0:2) er it was colonised by the  
Italians =
- 7N = by the Italians OK  
[
- 8Q er 19 (,) ah 11 first world war and then up to the  
beginning of the '30's 1932 '42 sorry ((not clear)) yeah  
[
- 9N 42 OK so during er the second world war  
[
- 10Q yeh well it was mostly  
Italy and then when the Italians left the country it was colonised by the  
British and the er (,) and the er (,) French aha so it's a period before the  
independence =
- 11N = yeh =
- 12Q = so it's but the British didn't I mean did stay for so  
long like they did in Egypt or  
[
- 13N and and most other places  
[
- 14Q most other places yeh (hhh) so we were more  
like an Italian colony  
(,)
- 15N ahah when did it get independence =
- 16Q = Er 40 hh 45  
ah 47 '47 yeh. I'm not very good with history you can tell  
(hhh)  
(,)
- 17N no, it's  
Always really embarrassing whenever anyone asks me about Irish history

as well I'm like well I think we got independence in '22 give or (hhh) take  
5 years I don't know.

18Q [ (hhh) especially if you are having some Guinness (hhh)

19N [ yeah

Guinness, yeh you gotta love the Guinness. Have you ever tasted  
Guinness

20Q [ no I don't drink =

21N = strict Moslem

22Q [ yeah (0:2) but people in my country do drink I

mean er

23N [ ah that's something I was really surprised in Morocco lots lots of people  
drank there and mean it's very well (,) a strict Moslem society well it's  
(,) quite liberal but you know everyone (,) you know lots of the women  
wear burkas and er yeah (,) but lots of people drink beer as well.

**Extract 5 (casual conversation)**

This conversation took place in 2003 between a British native speaker and postgraduate non-native speaker of English. The native speaker is a 31 year old married male with no experience of interacting with Arabs. He is doing research at the University of Bristol. The non-native speaker is 36 years old, has lived more than two years in England and doing an MSc course. This conversation took place near the University of Bristol.

R = Native speaker of English of English

T = Non-native speaker of English

- 1R : LoLondon London was just too expensive to stay  
(0:2)
- 2T : I stayed there last year  
(0:2) for two months  
(0:2)
- 3R : whereabouts? =
- 4T : = in the centre (,) city er near  
Oxford Street  
[
- 5R : Oxford Street yeh =
- 6T : = £400 a week =.
- 7R : = For just a room =
- 8T : = er (,) two-room flat  
my family and me one bedroom one sitting room small kitchen small  
bathroom that's it  
[
- 9R : that's pretty good =.
- 10T : = (hhh) for £400 a week =
- 11R : = oh for week =
- 12T : = a  
week yeh £400 a week so its cost £1,600 a month two months it cost me  
£3,200 for two months.
- 13R : [ (hhh)

## TV conversation

### Extract 6 A

This recording is from Fox News TV channel, recorded in late 2004 from a programme called "On the Record". In is between an American Native Speaker of English who is the interviewer and a Lebanese, American citizen who is the interviewee. The interviewer is a male broadcaster on this channel. The interviewee is a male non-native speaker of English originally from Palestine.

- Interviewer 1 : what is the goal of (AR) Hizbollah  
(0:2)
- Interviewee 2 : why do not we consider it in  
this way Israel is causing problems for a lot of its Arab neighbours  
((not clear))  
[
- Interviewer 3 : right let's have what you think ((not clear)) what is (AR)  
Hizbollah's major's goal =
- Interviewee 4 : = well there is a lot of rage in the Arab  
world as well as in Lebanon and the party of God is under pressure to  
try to do something ((not clear))  
[
- Interviewer 5 : the party of god is the English translation ((not  
clear)) of (AR) Hizbollah  
(,)
- Interviewee 6 : right correct and there is a lot of interest  
in Lebanon in the part of not only the fundamentalist of the party of  
God but others too (,) to try to force the Israelis who still persisting  
occupying the piece of Lebanese territories with the viewers do not  
know if that Israel does only had a problem with the Palestinians  
but many with the Arabs who live under its occupation ((not clear  
[
- Interviewer 7 : but let me  
put another question ((not clear)) professor why is it, why is it that  
the Lebanese are upset about the Syrian occupation of Lebanon  
some people would call it an occupation which is gone on for  
decades.  
(0.2)
- Interviewee 8 : Well Maybe because they do not subscribe ((not  
clear)) whole they view the Israelis as occupiers and that is  
why ((not clear))  
[
- Interviewer 9 : but why ((not clear)) could you explain professor, I do  
not have a point of view I am just asking you to explain why is it  
the Syrian army has been in in place ((not clear)) in Lebanon for  
for decades now correct me if I am wrong =
- Interviewee 10 : = they do not hold the  
same grouch against the Syrians as they do against the Israelis  
because ((not clear))  
[
- Interviewer 11 : why =
- Interviewee 12 : = I am telling you because Israel has not occupied the Arab  
land for the last fifty years has not brutalized the Palestinians the

Syrians and the Lebanese and has not dehumanized all Arabs in this method of terrorist ((not clear))

Interviewer 13

[  
now Syrians Syrians said not mistreated the  
Lebanese Palestinians

Interviewee 14

[  
yes they have =

Interviewer 15

= in a way

**Extract 6 B (TV conversation)**

This recording is from Fox News TV channel in late 2004 from a programme called "On the Record". It is again between a male American native speaker of English (the interviewer) and a male Lebanese American non-native English speaker originally from Palestine.

- Interviewee 16    yes they have yes they have you see yes I am sure you would love that the Lebanese and Arabs have the same atrocity as they do to the Syrian ((Not clear))?
- Interviewer 17    [ why should I love that Professor Professor why should I
- Interviewee 18    [ because ((not clear))
- Interviewer 19    [ love ((not clear))  
why should I love anybody having antipathy antipathy for anybody else I do not want people to hate each other no ((not clear))
- Interviewee 20    [ you clearly you clearly are unhappy that the Lebanese are not as anti Syrian as they are anti Israelis ((not clear))
- Interviewer 21    [ professor let's hold  
right here professor I am not unhappy about anything with regards to Lebanese (not clear) I am just asking you to explain the situation I do not understand why one occupier is hated more than one occupier that's all I am asking I don't take pleasure in anybody hating anybody else believe me ((not clear))
- Interviewee 22    [ right right one wishes there is no hate in the Middle East whatsoever but there is and hate is spread by occupation and brutalization as we seeing in the West bank it is very easy now to predicate that hate against Israel and the United states is going to increase on the bases of the hundred of Civilians have been killed by the Israeli occupation
- Interviewer 23    [ right professor let me get back and let me see if I could get a straight answer from you here =
- Interviewee 24    = right =
- Interviewer 25    = why is it one occupier Israel is hated more than another occupier Syria by the Lebanese
- Interviewee 26    (,) because because the Israeli (not clear) blood is longer and heavier perhaps (0:2)
- Interviewer 27    that's fine that's that's a good that's the answer I was looking for just kind of answer here now other people have said that beside Syria Iran has played a very important part for the culture of Lebanon right now

because they put a lot of money into (AR) Hizbollah, (AR) Hizbollah is a part of Lebanese legislator as well who is taking more influence now? is Syria more influential in Lebanese politics than Iran.

Interviewee 28

[  
((not clear))

Interviewer 29  
Interviewee 30

[  
or the other way around =

= no, you're right Syria has a VERY influential role in to stay within Lebanon it does control a lot of ((not clear)) power within the government. Iran did try to capitalize in Lebanon did try to exploit Lebanese internal politics in the nineteen eighties, but they were not widely received. The Iranians are very different culturally from the Lebanese and it was made very clear that the Lebanese do not wish any ((not clear)) big influence in Lebanon so they are become very marginal, they tried to become a big player but they did not succeed =

Interviewer 31

= now rofessor((not clear)) you are an expert in Lebanon you've written book about it you know it very well it was a beautiful country before civil war starting to rib a part a part it was known as the Paris of the Middle East for those who don't know it but then you got the Israeli incursion the Syrians in there causing trouble you have just mentioned Iranians (,) what do the Lebanese people think? what do they want? =

Interviewee 32

= Well at this point, they very much would like a resolution of the Palestinian problem because there are three hundred thousand Palestinians who live in Lebanon refugee camps and they are very unhappy to what happened to their ((not clear)) occupied territories and I come of the area of South Lebanon part of it is still under the occupation of Israel and the Lebanese would like to get rid of too =

Interviewer 33

= all right ((not clear)) from the University of California believe me professor, nobody would like hatred in the Middle East, we thank you for coming on =

Interviewee 34

= Thank you.

**Extract 7 A (TV interaction)**

This recording is from CNN TV channel, in late 2004, from a programme called "CNN Live Today". It is between an American native speaker of English (the interviewer), and a Palestinian male representative of the PLO living in America

- Interviewer 1    you are, you are seriously saying that there has been no attempt on the part of Palestinian authority to collect and distribute these sort of things  
[
- Interviewee 2    absolutely not  
[
- Interviewer 3    do you like them ((not clear))  
[
- Interviewee 4    absolutely absolutely listen Tony I am gonna tell you this (0:2) listen you take what the Israeli tell you for granted absolutely you never question what the Israeli  
[
- Interviewer 5    I've just questioned  
((not clear))  
[
- Interviewee 6    no because that you are repeating to me what the Israeli intelligence ((not clear))  
[
- Interviewer 7    I am repeating what you told me =  
Interviewee 8    = yeh yeh  
[
- Interviewer 9    what ((not clear)) you should do rather than insulting me is to ((not clear)) to answer  
[
- Interviewee 10    no I am not insulting you what I am telling is  
[
- Interviewer 11    of course you are

**Extract 7 B**

- Interviewee 12 Rahman, I want to propose something that is being discussed and debated on area of their land which's a possibility to trying to come to the table maybe under American hostesses ((not clear)) American's Arab allies a peace proposal I know like that discussed in Taba ((not clear)) Mr Rahman you have said that there is something that probably acceptable to the Palestinian side do you think therefore what suppose that the United States ((not clear)) and Prince Abdulla and maybe king Abdulla, and maybe president Mobark to put their stamp on it would your government or the Palestinian authority be going to the table today ((not clear)) straight to the point =
- Interviewee 13 = immediately uh (,) first of all we have to get the Israelis out of the cities and that's(( not clear)) people can
- Interviewer 14 [
- Interviewee 15 stables and security concerns =
- Interviewee 15 = yeh yeh we have no problem with the Israeli security concern but that does not mean that they have to occupy every single Palestinian house they have to imprison every single Palestinian they have to kill any one ((not clear))
- Interviewer 16 [
- Interviewer 16 Ok OK we getting back to the ((not clear))
- Interviewee 17 [
- Interviewee 17 I am saying it is (,) and this is a challenge to be put the to the Israelis and it can ((not clear)) call C P today (,) we are ready on the basis (,) of the peace initiative the Saudi peace initiative that was endorsed by the Arab League that calls for Israel that we recognize the right of Israel to exist in peace and security within the nineteen 1967 boundaries and that the Palestinian state would be created on the West bank and Gaza next to Israel we are ready on the basis of this to sit down now and negotiate
- Interviewer 18 [
- Interviewer 18 Ok =
- Interviewee 19 = and end of Israeli occupation and a peace treaty with Israel =
- Interviewer 20 = you answered a slightly different question of what I asked
- Interviewee 21 [
- Interviewee 21 what
- Interviewer 22 [
- Interviewer 22 mine has to deal with subsequent talks that they were already taken ((not clear)) representative and Palestinian authority and the Israeli government =
- Interviewee 23 = yes =
- Interviewer 24 = are you still willing to acknowledge those rather than simply taking the Saudi proposal? =
- Interviewee 25 = yes we we made a great ((not clear)) we start on the basis of those negotiations that we reached with Israel in Taba we want the

Israeli government to say yes they are coming to continue the negotiations from where they took off in Taba =

Interviewer 26

= ((not clear)) I know that there is a different government you've got to look at this is a labour government, there are differences BUT let's suppose first that there are no bombings for a while and there is ((not clear)) and peace and for them all Israel therefore feels comfortable to withdraw from the West bank but that be the kind of mixed up ((not clear)) would that be a possible next step

## Radio Conversation

### Extract 8 A (Radio conversation)

This recording is from CNN Radio, in early 2004 from a programme called "CNN Radio, Newscaster". It is between a female American broadcaster, a native speaker of English, and a Palestinian non-native speaker of English. He is an active member of an anti-Israeli movement in Palestine, considered a terrorist group by the interviewer.

Interviewer 1 has an organization has an organization taken responsibility for the bus bombing suicide bombing today

(0:6)

Interviewee 2 ah (,) I am not pretty sure who is responsible at this moment because there are two organizations by their own military wings are aha taking responsibility but aha the situation that in Jenin is terrible and the Israelis damaged a lot of houses and a lot of infrastructure and killed so many people =

Interviewer 3 = an I'll get to that but let me first let me I am talking a little bit first about the suicide bombing your organization has taken responsibility for the bus massacre which led to this latest incursion by the Israelis so is that not true

(0:2)

Interviewee 4 ah let me aha tell you something the aha what you call suicide operation is called martyrdom operations, ah second ah ah

Interviewer 5

[  
well let

me let me to make sure that to make sure that

**Extract 8 B**

Interviewee 6

ah the operations against Israelis yes?

(0:2)

Interviewer 7

to make sure that I am

plain =

Interviewee 8

= yeh

(0:2)

Interviewer 9

to make sure that I am plain Sir did your rganization

Interviewee 10

[

OK=

Interviewer 11

=

did your organization send someone in with a bomb strapped to his  
body into that bus over celebration

(0:5)

Interviewee 12

aha it aha needs that to tell  
you what is the Palestinian situation and then this is a Palestinian  
reaction against Israeli mass massacre against Palestinians so we are  
in a war time and Israelis are killing us with the F16 Fighters which  
comes from the United States and the Palestinians are poor and have  
nothing except to sacrifice their lives, so this is the situation if you  
want to compare it this way

(,)

Interviewer 13

what is your view on suicide bombers

Sir

(0:2)

Interviewee 14

ah our view of this kind of resistance we are defending  
ourselves against Israeli attacks it's as simple as this the Palestinians  
are under Israeli occupation more than thirty five years Israelis are  
killing Palestinians all the time until this moment



Interviewee 16

aha, Sadam Hussan aha is aha leader for his people we are not aha interfering with any internal ef fairs with any other counties we are concerned about our own struggle against

Interviewer 17

[ do you get money from him, do you get

Interviewee 18

[ Isreal =  
= but

Interviewer 19

the question is do you get money from him

interviewee 20

[ no no (not clear)

interviewer 21

[ do you get arms from him

(0:3)

interviewee 22

no no we are self supported we do not get money from any aha formal regime or any aha aha or organizations like this we are self suppurating and we we support each other.

**Appendix 2 (Follow-up interview questions)**

**1- Questions asked to all the selected interactants native and non-native:-**

a- Did you find it interesting and easy to communicate and understand your interactant?  
.....

b- Do you think he was polite in the way he was talking to you?  
.....

c- Do you think that he asked you question that you did not like, or you did not think that he would ask you?  
.....

d- Did you think that you were considered as a polite person by your interactant?  
.....

**2- Questions asked to the selected interactants in relation to certain aspects in their conversations such as topic, questions.**

**Interaction 1 A**

a- Do you think that using the word "but" and telling in which University you are studying in this utterance is relevant to your interactant's question? (utterance 20)  
.....  
.....

**Native speaker**

a- Did you think that your interactant was relevant in telling you about his place of study in this way as an answer to your question? (Utterance 20)  
.....  
.....

**Interaction 1 B**

**Non-native speaker**

a- Did you feel that your interactant was inappropriate in asking you in this way? (Utterance 23)  
.....  
.....

b- Did you feel that your interactant was inappropriate in talking to you in this way; like ordering you to answer in a specific way in certain sensitive issue.  
.....  
.....

**Interaction 1 C**

**Non-native speaker**

a- Why did you ask him about his Salary in this way? You could have asked him directly. To me you sound strange. (Utterance 58)

.....  
.....

b- Why did you mention reasons why you are not staying here as an answer? You could just say that you are going back. (Utterance 50 and 52).

.....  
.....

**Native speaker**

a- What did you feel when a stranger asks you about your income like that? (Utterance 58)

.....  
.....

b- Why did you not answer him?

.....  
.....

**Interaction 2**

**Non-native speaker**

a- Would you ask this question if your interactant was an Arab? (Utterance 1)

.....  
.....

b- Did you think that you were considered as a polite person by your interactant by asking this question?

.....  
.....

c- Why did you ask your interactant whether he has children or not?

.....  
.....

d- Why did you speak about your children to some who said to you that he has not children and did not ask you? This is impolite or inappropriate in Arabic. (utterance 11)

.....  
.....

**Native speaker**

a- Did you feel any discomfort when you were asked about children. and when you were told about children? (Utterances 3 and 11)

.....  
.....

**Interaction 3 A**

**Non-native speaker**

a- Did you fee that you were indirectly called a liar from your interactant?  
(utterances 3,  
7, 13)

.....  
.....

**Interaction 3 B**

**Non-native speaker**

a- Did you like the native speaker insisting on you to answer certain questions?  
(utterance 22)

.....  
.....

b- Why is that you feel that? (for all utterances 3, 7, 13, 22)

.....  
.....

**Interaction 4**

**Non-native Speaker**

a- Why did you not answer your interactant's question in the first time? (Utterance 2)

.....  
.....

b- Did you realize that your interactant did not like your question about who  
colonized Libya? (utterance 1)

.....  
.....

**Interaction 5**

**Non-native speaker**

a - Why did not you allow your interactant to carry on talking about London?  
(Utternance 2)

.....  
.....

## A- Follow-up Interviews included in the thesis

### Follow-up interviews 1

#### Follow-up Interview questions

##### Part one: Question 1 interaction 1

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

##### Part two: Question 2 interaction 1

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 1 A

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 A

a- Do you think that using the word "but" and telling in which University you are studying in this utterance is relevant to your interactant's question? (utterance 20)

I think it is important to explain that I am in the UE University and not in the main University because he would think that I am in the main University if I do not say that . (follow-up interview, interaction 1 A)

##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 A

a- Did you think that your interactant was relevant in telling you about his place of study in this way as an answer to your question? (Utterance 20)

I did not ask about the University he was in. Perhaps it was not an answer to my question, but I would consider it as relevant to the conversation. My question tohim whether it was his choice to study in the EU was because I felt, from his answer, that he needs me to ask him. ((follow-up interview, interaction 1 A)

#### Question 2 interaction 1 B

### **Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 B**

- a- Did you feel that your interactant was inappropriate in asking you in this way?  
(Utterance 23)

'I did not like the question or the way he asked me, but I have not thought of whether

he is appropriate or not. I have not felt that he was inappropriate in any part of the long interaction we had' (follow-up interview with the non-native, interaction 1B)

- b- Did you feel that your interactant was inappropriate in talking to you in this way; like ordering you to answer in a specific way in certain sensitive issue.  
I do not know, but I do not think so. He was normal

### **Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 B**

### **Question 2 interaction 1 C**

#### **Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 C**

- a- Why did you ask him about his Salary in this way? You could have asked him directly. To me you sound strange. (Utterance 58)

Yes, I asked him indirectly, but he did not answer my question. I just wanted to compare between my allowance and his allowance. (follow-up interview, interaction 1 C)

- b- Why did you mention reasons why you are not staying here as an answer? You could just say that you are going back. (Utterance 50 and 52).

English people think that we come here to work and we stay here for money; I am not so. I gave him all this long answer to tell him that I am not like those whom he thinks like this country. I have been asked the same question by more than ten English people before. (follow-up interview, interaction 1 C)

### **Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 1 C**

- a- What did you feel when a stranger asks you about your income like that?  
(Utterance 58)

I usually do not answer this question when I am asked by a stranger. I think my answer was relevant and I told him about what he wanted him to know  
(follow  
-up interview, interaction 1 C)

- b- Why did you not answer him?  
I think I have answered him.

## Follow-up interviews 2

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 2

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 2

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 2

##### Non-native Speaker Question 2 interaction 2

a- Would you ask this question if your interactant was an Arab? (Utterance 1)

No, I would not if I do not want him, or if he is a relative.

b- Did you think that you were considered as a polite person by your interactant by asking this question?

Yes, even if he was as Arab, I am still polite

c- Why did you ask your interactant whether he has children or not?

I know my interactant is not an Arab, and English people in particular do not mind to be asked such a question. Such question are normal in English societies, but I would ask in the same way if I speak to an Arab. (follow-up interview, interaction 2)

d- Why did you speak about your children to some who said to you that he has not children and did not ask you? This is impolite or inappropriate in Arabic. (utterance 11)

Now, I do not think so. I wanted to say that children are very important.

##### Native Speaker Question 2 interaction 2

a- Did you feel any discomfort when you were asked about children. and when you were told about children? (Utterances 3 and 11)

Yes, I felt that he was asking something that I might have not asked to him..

## Follow-up interviews 3

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 3

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 3

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 3 A

##### Non-native Speaker Question 2 interaction 3 A

a- Did you fee that you were indirectly called a liar from your interactant?  
(utterances 3,  
7, 13)

. I do not think that he thought I am a liar, but he suspected what I have said.  
He was polite in the way he spoke. Yes, we do not like this way of talking in Arabic, because it means that the person talks to you is either ironic or calling his/her interactant a liar, but he was not like this with me. (follow-up interview; interaction 3A)

##### Native Speaker Question 2 interaction 3 A

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**Question 2 interaction 3 B**

**Non-native Speaker Question 2 interaction 3 B**

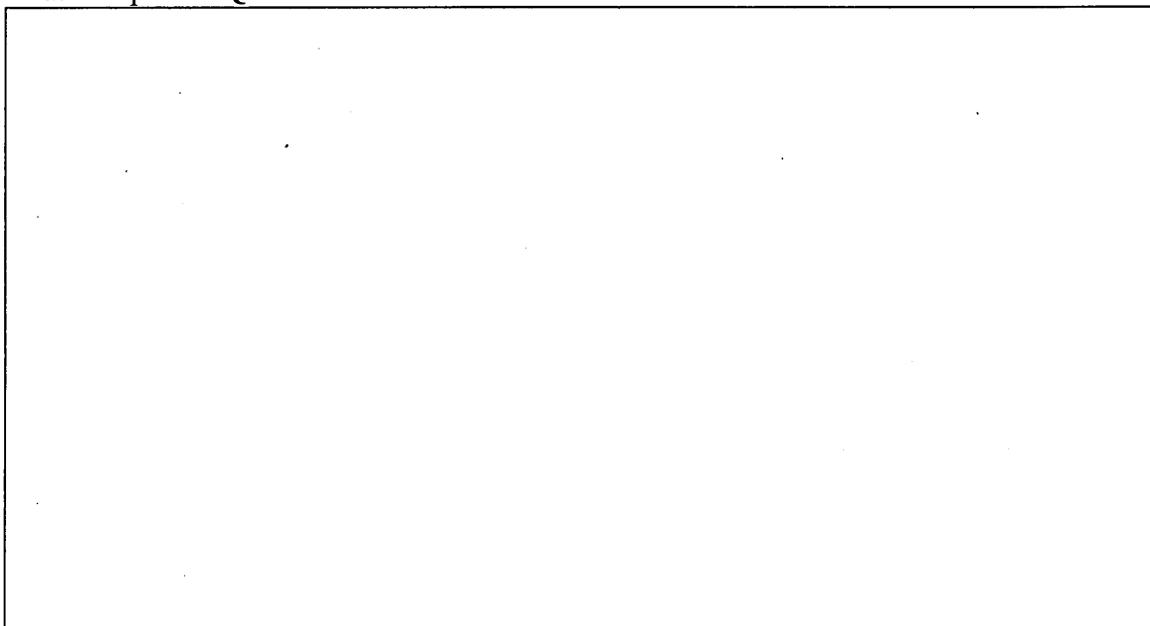
a- Did you like the native speaker insisting on you to answer certain questions?  
(utterance 22)

to me, the way he was talking was polite and does not say that he is challenging me, but I would not expect this from a person that I have not met before, especially that he is English. (follow-up interview; interaction 3 B)

b- Why is that you feel that? (for all utterances 3, 7, 13, 22)

English people usually build their impression without asking too many question. He was more serious than I was in discussing the topics that we have discussed' (follow-up interview; interaction 3 B)

**Native Speaker Question 2 interaction 3 B**



**Follow-up Interview questions**

**Part one: Question 1 interaction 4**

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

**Part two: Question 2 interaction 4**

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

**Question 2 interaction 4**

**Non-native Speaker Question 2 interaction 4**

a- Why did you not answer your interactant's question in the first time? (Utterance 2)

I did not like the question. I did not like even the way he asked the question. He could first ask me whether Libya was colonized or not. But he was talking in a friendly way. (follow-up interview, interaction 4)

**Native Speaker Question 2 interaction 4**

b- Did you realize that your interactant did not like your question about who colonized Libya? (utterance 1)

Not at all. I think his answer was fine. He answered the question later on. I think my question was fine to him. (follow-up interview, interaction 4)

.....



**B- Follow-up Interviews not included in the thesis**

**Follow-up interviews 6**

**Follow-up Interview questions**

**Part one: Question 1 interaction 6**

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

<b>non-native speaker of English</b>	<b>native speaker of English</b>
<b>a- Yes</b>	<b>a- Yes</b>
<b>b- Yes</b>	<b>b- Yes</b>
<b>c- Yes</b>	<b>c- Yes</b>
<b>d- Yes</b>	<b>d- Yes</b>

**Part two: Question 2 interaction 6**

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

**Question 2 interaction 6**

**Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 6**

a- Your conversation went fine. It seemed that you were communicating very well. What, do you think, the reason is. ..... .....
b- Was there any question that you did not like? ..... .....
c- Why did you come to discuss religion? ..... .....

**Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 6**

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**Follow-up Interview questions**

**Part one: Question 1 interaction 7**

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

**Part two: Question 2 interaction 7**

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

**Question 2 interaction 7**

**Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 7**

<p>a- Was it a good start from the native speaker? what do you think?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>b- What did you feel when he was talking about the places that you want to avoid in Sheffield? He almost named the places where Muslim live?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>c- Do you think that you have understood everything to you?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>d- Where there questions that you did not like?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

**Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 7**

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## Follow-up interviews 8

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 8

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 8

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 8

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 8

a- How did you find it talking to a female? ..... ..... .....
b- You discussed what I would call as safe-topics, was this right? Why? ..... ..... .....

##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 8

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## Follow-up interviews 9

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 9

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 9

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 9

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 9

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##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 9

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## Follow-up interviews 10

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 10

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

<b>non-native speaker of English</b>	<b>native speaker of English</b>
<b>a- Yes</b>	<b>a- Yes</b>
<b>b- Yes</b>	<b>b- Yes</b>
<b>c- Yes</b>	<b>c- Yes</b>
<b>d- Yes</b>	<b>d- Yes</b>

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 10

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 10

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 10

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##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 10

--

## Follow-up interviews 11

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 11

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 11

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 11

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 11

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##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 11

--

## Follow-up interviews 12

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 12

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 12

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 12

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 12

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##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 12

--

## Follow-up interviews 13

### Follow-up Interview questions

#### Part one: Question 1 interaction 13

This part is presented in 4 'yes or no' questions. It is meant to have general idea of what interactants think of each other. Interactants, in this part of the interview, are not expected to mention the reasons. They were asked straight after the interactants had finished their conversation.

non-native speaker of English	native speaker of English
a- Yes	a- Yes
b- Yes	b- Yes
c- Yes	c- Yes
d- Yes	d- Yes

#### Part two: Question 2 interaction 13

This part is presented in questions in relation to certain answers and questions interactants performed in their conversations. It is meant to have a view of how interactants interpret certain utterances and why. It also aims to understand the reasons why an interactants asked certain questions. These questioned took place after I had listen to the conversation and decided what to ask about.

#### Question 2 interaction 13

##### Non-native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 13

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##### Native Speaker Part two: Question 2 interaction 13

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### Appendix 3 (Questionnaires)

#### Questionnaires I

#### To non-native speakers of English

Because the aim of this research project is to investigate talk between native and non-native speakers of English, you are kindly requested to; first, fill in the questionnaire with the relevant details; second, interact with your addressee as naturally as possible (I recognise that this is a rather artificial situation)

##### 1-Personal details

- a- Name .....
- b- Nationality .....
- c- Age .....
- d- Occupation .....
- e- Education (Level) .....
- f- Telephone / E-mail address .....@.....

##### 2-English language background details

- a- How long have you studied English?  
I- one year ( ) II- more than one year ( ) III- more than two years
- b- How long have you lived in an English speaking country?  
I- No ( ) II- Yes ( ) (For how long .....
- c- Have you lived with native speakers of English during your stay in an English speaking country?  
I- No ( ) II- Yes ( ) (for how long .....
- d- How often do you have communicated with native speakers of English?  
I- once a month ( ) II- once a week ( )  
III- twice a week ( ) IV- almost every day ( )

**Thank you for your co-operation**

**Questionnaire II**  
**To native speakers of English**

Because the aim of this research project is to investigate talk between native and non-native speakers of English, you are kindly requested to; first, fill in the questionnaire with the relevant details; second, interact with your addressee as naturally as possible (I recognise that this is a rather artificial situation)

**1-Personal details**

- a- Name .....
- b- Nationality .....
- c- Age .....
- d- Occupation .....
- e- Education (Level) .....
- f- Telephone / E-mail address .....@.....

**2-foreign language background details**

- a- Do you speak a foreign language?
  - I- No ( )
  - II- Yes ( ) What is your level? Basic ( ) Fair ( ) Good ( ) Fluent ( )
- b- Have you ever studied or taught a foreign Language?
  - I- No ( )
  - II- Yes ( ) If yes, for how long: one year ( ) more than one year ( )
- c- Have you ever lived with foreign people?
  - I Yes ( )
  - II No ( )
- d- Have you ever lived in a non-English speaking country?
  - I- No ( )
  - II- Yes ( ) (for how long .....
- e- How often do you communicate with non-native speakers of English?
  - I- once a month ( ) II- once a week ( ) III- twice a week ( )
  - IV- almost every day ( ) V- other. Please specify .....
  - .....

**Thank you for your co-operation**

**Appendix 4**

**Ethics**

**Ethics Guidelines for Tape Recording Conversation**

If researchers are planning to record conversations within the School of Cultural Studies, they need to first discuss the parameters of the recording sessions with the Head of Department and also the uses to which the data will be put

All participants in conversations which are to be recorded must first be notified by the researcher and their permission given. Recording without notifying the participants is ethically suspect.

If the data is to be transcribed and appended to or analysed within a piece of published work, all participants must sign a consent form, following these lines.

<p>Consent Form for the Use of Recorded Material</p> <p>Date: .....</p> <p>I .....(name)</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>give my consent to .....(name)</p> <p>to transcribe, and use the data which has been recorded by him/her</p> <p>Signature.....</p>
--

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## Appendix 5 (Other data)

This section includes part of the data I collected. Parts of the data analysed are selected from this data. There are no detailed description of this part because I have provided detailed description only to the extracts included in the analysis.

### Conversation (1)

Fathi = Non-native Speaker

Darryl = Native Speaker

- Darryl : Is it starting?  
Fathi : Yup  
Darryl : Ok, I'll tell you my name again shall I?  
Fathi : Er, my name is Fathi  
Darryl : Fathi  
Fathi : Yup  
Darryl : Right, I'm Darryl  
Fathi : Darryl  
Darryl : Darryl, that's it  
Fathi : Yeh, nice to meet you.  
Darryl : And you; so, er, where do you come from?  
Fathi : I'm from Libya  
Darryl : Libya (*yeh*) Oh right. How long have you been here for?  
Fathi : Um, now about one year.  
Darryl : One year (*yeh*) so you are studying (*yeh*) in the University  
Fathi : Er, yeh, in the University but in UE.  
Darryl : UE (*yeh*) Ah right, do you prefer it there?  
Fathi : Um, not actually, but, er, I don't know, how can I - I go there, come here, just to put papers, er, they give me, er, acceptance very soon. (*Right*) so that's why I'm going there (*oh, I see*) it's very, very limit time; I put my papers in September so it's the time for beginning, you know (*yes*) here maybe it take long time to do them (*things in here do take a long time, yes*) yeh, but they are, just I, er, um, I'm lucky that they, er, only made vice-dean (*say that again*) the dean of the faculty (*oh the dean, yes*) not the dean, the (*head of department?*) no, vice president or vice-dean or (*oh yes, the, is it the chancellor, I don't know, second in charge*) yes, second one, just speak to me, see my papers OK just to sign. I'm lucky 'cos I got, er, appointment in that day I mean, so they prepare a letter and that's it (*uhm that's good*) here take a long time, that's why I prefer the one (*oh, this place*) I go through the course, that's it, (hhhhh)  
Darryl : So what's the course?  
Fathi : MSc IT  
Darryl : IT  
Fathi : Information technology, yeh  
Darryl : I'm thinking of doing an MSc in, um, geophysical information systems (*ah, nice one*) but it depends on the grants and it depends on whether they can get me the money.  
Fathi : Here, I mean, citizen students, they take er, a low grant, I mean, it is not expensive like foreign students. As an example, er, they take £1,500 and from citizen students they take £6,500.  
Darryl : Who is paying the fees, who is paying, are you paying that?  
Fathi : @ No, no, for me I have someone to pay, my government I mean. I've got a

grant, but here it's not a lot of money £1,500 (no) so here I don't know how much, in Bristol University.

Darryl : Er well, the one I'm looking at is based in Manchester, but that's, I think for 3 years, £3,800.

Fathi : @ A-ha, a part-time one?

Darryl : Part-time, yes.

Fathi : Ah, nice one.

Darryl : They can make more money out of foreign students, (hhhhh yes) it's very lucrative.

Fathi : Study you know very nice, but when a man become bigger and bigger, it's very, very, very difficult to, I mean, to manage yourself, to study again. (yes, yeh) I got a very, very, very difficult time last three months.

Darryl : You have to learn to be disciplined again, don't you.

Fathi : @ Yeeeah, student again, you stay in class again, examination again, assignments again.

Darryl : Less money.

Fathi : Less money, of course (hhhhh) and with, you know, your family, children, you know, the life so it's v-v-very difficult to manage your time between study and your family.

Darryl : Did you have to leave your family behind.

Fathi : No, no (they're here) with me here as well, yeh, so children, nurseries, schools, blah, blah, blah, a lot of problems, big problem, long period of time studying.

Darryl : Yep, yep, so it's just a year's course though?

Fathi : Yeh, it's only one year's course.

Darryl : Then after that, do you go back or do you want to stay.

Fathi : Er, no, no I go back, sure, yes. I've got my job (yes) already, my car, my house, everything is there so no, it's a short period of time I'm coming here (yrs) to do something and come back to my job again, so there be for me to come back, not to stay here. (Yeh) Whats about study here, if you want to study, I mean your monthly payment here. It's er, becomes, I don't know how I can explain it. They give you monthly, er (no) I mean your job I mean, how you can manage study with your job?

Darryl : The way it's gonna work for me individually is that um, I'm going to be doing - I work as a technician so I make all the equipment and keep it running for the research and the academic who is trying to get me the money to do that is based in Manchester now so what will happen is, if it all works, I will be getting a salary to do his technical support work and I'll be registered with Manchester to do a higher degree and I'll have to do the degree in my own time (yes) so I work and I do my degree as well (ah ha)but the degree is spread over three years so it's not cramming everything into a single year (hum) but that's the only way I can manage it, I can't afford to not have a job um, so, yeh my wife works as well which will make it easier but we're trying to get enough money to buy a house and if I just don't have a salary coming in, we wont be able to do that but, hopefully, what will happen is there will be some money put on my grant to pay my fees so I don't have to pay my fees (yeh, yeh) but all that's being negotiated (yeh, sure).

Fathi : So you can do it in this way.

Darryl : You can do it if you're in the right place at the right time.

Fathi : Sure, (hhhhh). Nice to meet someone married here in this country, you know, as you (it's getting rarer, isn't is?) Yeh, (hhhhh), very rare but there is a bit, a lot, not a lot but some people who is married, I respect them, I respect ones who are going this way I mean, ones the marrying way you know. Here, I don't know

why, nobody like to marry.

Darryl : I think we've become a very secular society

Fathi : Yes, (hhhhh). You got children?

Darryl : Not yet, no

Fathi : Ah, not yet, new married?

Darryl : About 18 months. (*Oh nice*) Yeh, we're thinking about it but we'd like to try and get a house first if possible, (*yeh sure*) who knows. How long have you been married?

Fathi : Now, er, more than four years but not five years, (hhhhh)

Darryl : (hhhhh), four and a half

Fathi : Yeh, four and a half and two children

Darryl : Tiring, (*umm*) is, is, are the children tiring, (*yeh*) do they wear you out?

Fathi : (Hhhhh) sure, yeh, no, children is children, nice but more, more, more they need more time and more, I mean, look after them, to look after the, children, you have to do a lot of things. (*Yeh, yeh*)

Darryl : My wife is a primary school teacher (*ooh, she know about*) she knows what to do, (hhhhh)

Fathi : It make her job very easy, yeh, (hhhhh), maybe she hate children, that's why

Darryl : At the moment she can give them back at the end of the day but when we've got our own you can't do that can you?

Fathi : She know about children, yeh, so now she prepare herself to / she's (*she's trying to get used to the idea*) trying to / prepare everything, yeh, nice, nice, yeh. Children is very, very nice in this world, very, very nice.

Darryl : Best decision you made is it?

Fathi : Yeh, sure. If you see your son grow and make like what we - our fathers, our family. In our society, I mean, respecting fathers, respecting family, father and mother is very, very big. So is very big things to leave your family or to not take care for your family, for your father and mother. They are becomes big, becomes old, they was elder, you have to look after them, help them, visit them; maybe they are living with you in the same house so that is the meaning of children. Not a big meaning but when you becomes a big man, have someone look after you, visit you, give you a lift (*yeh, hhhhh*) visit you and has children coming and visit you.

Darryl : Yeh, my family is similar; we have, er, part of my family is Italian (*ah ha*) and we've got a very similar approach.

Fathi : Yes, yes, south European like our, yeh, like our, yeh, I see.

Darryl : My grandmother, my Italian grandmother lives just around the corner, um, we're gonna be living with my parents for a while and you know, you all look after each other.

Fathi : Nice, very nice things, yeh, that's what, that's very, very nice decision and when you are young it's like your friend, you know, sharing ideas, you know, it's very nice.

Darryl : Yes, it's nice as you um, as you grow older to be able to talk to your father and mother as a friend. (*Yeh, sure*) You grow into that, (hhhhh)

Fathi : You complet your study in this university or, I mean graduate study.

Darryl : Yes, I did my degree in London, I did geology, but that was ten years ago now.

Fathi : Oh, so my age, sure

Darryl : How old are you?

Fathi : I'm 37.

Darryl : I'm 32, well, 32 on Monday. Yeh, so, yeh, I started out as a geologist and er, ended up being a technician, so a varied career. London was just too expensive to stay.

Fathi : I stayed there last year for two months.

Darryl : Whereabouts?

Fathi : In the centre, er near Oxford Street, , (*Oxford Street, yeh*)£400 a week.

Darryl : For just a room?

Fathi : Er, two-room flat, my family and me. One bedroom, one sitting room, small kitchen, small bathroom.

Darryl : That's pretty good.

Fathi : For £400 a week.

Darryl : Oh, a week.

Fathi : A week, yeh, £400 a week, so its cost £1,600 a month, two months it cost me £3,200 for two months. I'm looking for – I'm coming from my country, stay there in London, looking for some city nice so I take one day, go and coming here to Bristol, lot of cities I mean and then I got the decision to come here, but take from me £3,200 two months in London, only for accommodation I mean (*that's...*). Very, very, very expensive. Here also it's expensive but not like, here two bedroom flat, £450 a but month, that is including bills though.

Darryl : You'd hope so, wouldn't you. (*Yeh*) I come from London originally, so we've got some family still in London.

Fathi : Your family originally stayed in London.

Darryl : The English side are Londoners and the prices of houses are just unbelievable. We were looking at houses and they wanted a quarter of a million just for a flat and we couldn't possibly afford that. Mind you, it's getting just as bad up here.

Fathi : For quarter of a million you can get a nice, nice nice, house here.

Darryl : Yes, it's just getting quarter of a million isn't it.

Fathi : When you get above £100 here, £100,000 I mean, you get a nice house but, er, under that, you can't. In the north, Manchester, I mean, buy £20,000, £30,000 you can get a nice, nice, nice house, (*yeh*) also in Sheffield or Liverpool or many towns north, Birmingham, but here in this side of the country, south, all south is expensive.

Darryl : So is it cheaper to live in your country?

Fathi : Yeh, sure, my country is very cheap. We don't have, er, this kind of life, you know. My country petrol are very cheap, insurance very cheap, I mean on the cars OK, parking free everywhere, er, food is very, very, very, very cheap, bread, sugar, er, a lot of things, I mean, very cheap and er, houses depending on your choice, you know. Small flats like here (*like here, yeh*) big house here is like small house there (*hhh, right*) so you can get nice flat within from £5000 to £15000 you can find a nice flat. House is dependent on from £50,000 you can take very big house, 400m sq. and something like that.

Darryl : How's that – how are the wages then, are they, um – when I, if I'm earning my, what is it, say £17,000 odd a year here the thought of buying a £90,000 odd house seems very big, expensive. Um, so for someone in your country looking at a £5000 house, how is that in respect to how much they would, on average, earn?

Fathi : Um, average earn dependent on, umm, from £12,000 to £24,000.

Darryl : That's for average wage?

Fathi : Yeehhh, yearly, so comparing with houses, not like here, no. Maybe more less 'cos here, you know, salaries very high but here, you got salary from here, you pay it from here. (*Yeh*) We don't have, er, any council tax, TV licence, water, da, da, da, blah, blah, blah, electricity very cheap, gas very cheap, maybe every, er, any family, big family, er, they pay maybe £2 a month for gas, £10 for electricity. (*Right*) Here you have to pay (*pay everything*) a lot, a lot amount of money so it's very expensive. Three months telephone there, I think it's maybe

£50, here, er, £200 or £300 every three months you have to pay here, telephone only.

Darryl : So people earn about the same as us and they pay a lot less.

Fathi : Er, no, they pay less, they pay nothing comparing with here, (*right*) but they earn less, sure, sure, sure they earn less, but comparing with here, I mean, the rent, there is no rent, everybody have his house, if he have some rent it is very, very, very cheap. (*Right*) £100, £200 you have, you can rent house, not like, not here, a big house I mean, a huge one.

Darryl : I'll move out there I think

Fathi : But, food and whole life is very quiet and very nice, er, schools are free, er, hospitals and medicine are free, er, as I said no taxes at all, no 17.5% VAT, no VAT (hhhhh). So, but the salary, more less, yeh.

(long pause)

Dependent every country have, yeh, // something nice, something, here you have everything but you have to pay for it. (*Yes*) If you don't have money you can't live, can stay very quiet. What about the life here, I mean, everybody is happy?

Darryl : You mean in society?

Fathi : Nooo, with the salary I mean, with this amount of paying I mean. (*I don't think*) society sure, everybody's life because there is a big area of freedom.

Darryl : Yeh, no I don't think anyone's happy with the housing situation because the housing prices have far out-stripped the ability to // so the house we are renting at the moment I know is gonna be sold and I know it's value is about £140,000. Even if we could put down a 10% deposit, er, we'd still have to find a mortgage for over £115,000 um, which is beyond what I can get anyway so whatever way you look at it, you can't buy a house and no-one's happy, er, so you go to rent and you're looking for, I've seen bedsits going in Bristol for £650 a month, em, which compared to London, that's all right, but if you're trying to save the money to buy a house you can't pay that, you can't pay the rent and save to get, er, your deposit and all your fees to pay so it is a very difficult situation, em, so we're going, 'cos our house we're living in at the moment is being sold we're going to go back to live with my parents who have a bigger house, em, and, er, I hope that the market crashes (hhhhh) so everyone else is unhappy but we are happy 'cos we can buy their house (hhhhh) so (*it will crash*) it'll crash, so, yeh, I think people are pretty unhappy with the cost of living but, er, we still live.

Fathi : I mean here if anybody, er, you earn two thousand, your wife one thousand, three thousand a month, it's good for living? You can save or, how much I mean, the main paying for me, I mean, now, I pay sometimes from £1,300 to £1,500 a month, here in this country. What about English families, same situation or they are spending more than us, less than, maybe we, we don't know about situation here, just we are playing //

Darryl : How would it work for us, we, in my situation, in the present situation of renting this house, em, over half my salary a month goes into paying, er, the rent, which, and the, er, council tax and all the bills, em, how much do I earn a month. Yeh, I would say all of my salary will go towards paying bills basically and that would include having to pay the insurance on the car, em, and, er, road tax, servicing the car, things like that, em, so if you were to combine my wife's salary as well; she also has to pay off student debts from training to be a teacher, em, and from getting a degree, so we've still got debts coming on from educating ourselves, so, er, yeh, we're probably spending about £1500 to £1600 a month on the bills of the house, the running of two cars, em, and odds and ends. I would say that we save £400 a month, em, and, er, sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less, so I would say you're probably averaging out about the same as me (*same situation*)

so the only way in which we could save more money is to not pay a rent so by going back home, em, we can split – because my parents have had the house for so much longer, their mortgage repayments are so, are very small. So even if we split the bills three ways, my parents, myself and my wife, we'll be paying probably £150 a month so we can – huge amount more saving. (hhhhh) // (*huge amount of saving, big decision though, huh?*) It is, yeh. Fortunately my parents are very easy to get on with (hhhhh).

Fathi : But what about your wife, she is happy with this decision.

Darryl : Oh yes, yes, she gets on very well with my, she, she handles my father

## Conversation (2)

Ibrahim = Non-native Speaker

Antony = Native Speaker

Antony : Right, Ibrahim, I've never lived in a desert, I've, I have lived in a dry part of the world for a bit, Denver, Colorado, (*yeh*) but never in a desert and I was wondering what the situation is. Is, is your, is your town on an oasis?

*Ibrahim : Er, yes, you can say, yeh, I mean, er, my town now is you can say a small city with a population of about 100,000 people. In Debas, I mean, people they used to habiate just close to the source of water and there used to be something like oasis and if you go out of my city, say for 30k or 40k, I mean, you will find some oasis with some lakes, very beautiful lakes.*

Antony : Yes, yes, if you can combine water with high temperatures you get a // very good.

Ibrahim : Yes, actually it is, temperature is very high in the summer but in the winter it is very, very cold, sometimes the temperature is minus 1 or minus 2 degrees and getting maybe 40, 45 degrees in the summer.

Antony : That winter temperature, is that a ground frost or is it an air temperature, minus 2?

Ibrahim : What do you mean?

Antony : Would that be just at ground level or would it be true in a column of air?  
We always

Ibrahim : Yeh, yeh, I think, er, because where I live is, er, we are living at, er, er, you know - the latitude (*yes*) 23.5, called, er, the track of Capricorn, no, no, not Capricorn, the one in er, yeh, yeh, Capricorn (*Capricorn is the northern one and Cancer is the south*) yes, Capricorn actually just passes by my city.

Antony : I see, so you are in the Tropics.

Ibrahim : Yes, that's why it's very, very hot actually.

Antony : Yes. The, em, the water comes from ground water does it? (*yeh*) there are no rivers.

Ibrahim : You can say we are living in a lake of drinking water.

Antony : You can say that? (*yeh*) Do you have to go very deep to sink a well?

Ibrahim : No, I mean, something like, its amazing, I mean, when you dig around one metre you find beautiful water.

Antony : How extraordinary (*yes*) Does this originate from mountains nearby or?

Ibrahim : No, when people, er, our scientists, I mean, claim that this water, I mean I was told from thousands and thousands of years during the Ice Age. //

Antony : The trouble about that, if it's true, is that it's a finite resource. It's not a resource that is being replenished continuously, do you think?

Ibrahim : Ah well, some researcher, they say that there might er, er, be something like, er, rivers (*subterranean*) er, well the Nile river is not very far from the desert, you know what I mean, it's just 1000 or 2000k.

Antony : That seems to me a long way.

Ibrahim : No, but I mean, er, because, the result you can imagine, it's like this, so, I mean, Nile river is just on the edge of er, of the desert, you know, what you call the Sahara (*yes*) this is the desert, (*yes*) but, er, today I cannot consider myself as desert man, I mean (*no, well you are a cosmopolitan man*) my city is a big city at the moment.

Antony : So the city now, obviously it's not based on agriculture around an oasis, it's based on oil (*now it's based on agriculture*) it is based on agriculture?

*Ibrahim : Yes, agriculture, I mean, all people they work their farms. In Debas, I mean, life in Debas based on agriculture, but it was primitive life, you can say.*

Antony : Yes, so the present agriculture is watered by groundwater that's extracted (*yeh, yeh*) so the question of how this is refilled is very important for the long term.

Ibrahim : Yeh, now the government is establishing, er, what you call it, a great artificial river which runs from the south of the country to, er, feed, I mean, the northern parts of the country.

Antony : So this is an aqueduct.

Ibrahim : Yes, I think it's the biggest artificial river because the pipes are around 4m diameter and running for more than 4000k.

Antony : That's amazing, where does the water come from?

Ibrahim : Well, we are living in a big river; I mean, it has been said that the water can er, can run in these pipes for more than 50 years, I think it's 50 years.

Antony : Yes, but the 4000k away, the source of these pipes, (*ah, yeh*) what is that water, is that, where does it come from?

Ibrahim : Well, the wells which will (*ah, these are wells*) yeh, the wells in the desert which is the source of the water and there will be big, er, lakes, something like, you can say to gather water from these, er, wells. After that er, from these lakes will, other pipes will go to different cities in the northern part.

Antony : I see, so this is a distribution from the best source of groundwater (*yeh*) very

interesting.

Ibrahim : So you haven't been living in the desert climate?

Antony : I've never been in a desert, the nearest I've been to a desert is in parts of the Western United States because I lived in Denver, Colorado for a year and I've been back many times since, (*yeh*) and we did travel into, well that is a semi-desert area. The water there, of course, comes from snow melt in the mountains, primarily.

Ibrahim : So there should be some rivers running.

Antony : Yes, there are, there are, and I've been in South Africa in quite a dry part in the dry season.

Ibrahim : There is a question, I mean, I want an answer, but I mean, people in the British Islands (*in the British Islands? British Isles*) *yeh*, Britain you can say, I mean, 1000 years ago what was their food?

Antony : A thousand years ago things were not hugely different, the climate was very similar.

Ibrahim : *Yeh*, but I mean you, I mean, you find all these different kind of vegetables?

Antony : I see what you mean, probably not, no but there were, there were vegetables grown and, of course, there were cereals grown, cattle were raised, livestock were used for providing power as well as meat and milk, *em*, there was a lot of wild game available.

Ibrahim : What about wheat and say?

Antony : Oh yes, wheat has been grown here, I can't tell you exactly how long but it came from the fertile crescent of course, not very far from where you live, (*yes*) in what is now Iraq.

Ibrahim : Well, I mean you can say (*bread is very old*) bread is very old, *yes*.

Antony : Yes, and you'll find the word bread in most European languages is very similar because it's such an old common thing; (*yeh, yeh*) *em*, and of course we've grown barley and oats as well. (*Oats, yeh, we don't have oats.*) In Scotland (*you will not find it in the Middle East or Northern African countries*) *no*. What cereals do you grow, wheat presumably?

Ibrahim : Yes, barley and wheat and you can also find, *er*, what do you call it?

Antony : In the southern half of Africa millet was, I think, an important cereal, but now everybody grows maize (*maize, yes, yes, maize*) or sweetcorn, but of course that came from America originally.

Ibrahim : Yes, but it's also grown in my area, we've had it for a long, long time.

Antony : Because I think it was grown by the Amerindians in the southern part of the

middle of the United States and over into Mexico, (*yeh*) that's where it originally came from (*the maize*) yes.

Ibrahim : Well, it is very common now in central Africa (*oh yes, I know*) // I mean, using the flour of maize for making bread and those kind of foods.

Antony : Yes, but I think it only came out of the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, at the very, probably via the Spaniards. We take for granted some of these things that originated from completely different areas (*yeh*) and then rapidly expand (*yeh, yeh*) through world agriculture.

Ibrahim : Now the world has becomes like small village, even in terms of food; you find now pasta everywhere, fish and chips wherever you go, pizza, pizza? (*pizza, yes*) and I think people they start changing from their, er, they used to depend on wheat, flour and barley but now they move to rice because the main dish (*do you grow rice?*) no (*because you need a lot of water, don't you*) yes, lots of water and you will find rice grown either beside rivers or if there is, I mean, continuous raining.

Antony : Um, we buy rice, most of it comes from the southern United States, although some of it probably comes from (*China*) India, (*yeh, Pakistan*) China and Indo-China. Yes, in this country, there is a small move not away from the wide source of foods from the rest of the world, but, em, in a way a compensatory interest in locally produced food; people are now interested in where things come from within this country and we still have specialised locally produced foods. For instance, there is a cheese you may know of called Stilton (*Cheddar*) well Cheddar is produce almost worldwide but Stilton is only allowed to be sold as Stilton if it's produced in the parish of Stilton in Leicestershire. (*Yeh*) It's strange isn't it?

Ibrahim : Monopoly, you call it?

Antony : I don't think so, no, it think there are several small producers; I suppose your source of meat, when agriculture was based on your own environment, your own area, would that have been mainly mutton or lamb.

Ibrahim : Yes, Lamb, beef and camel meat as well (*oh yeh*) camel is very, very common.

Antony : What's it like to eat? Is it good?

Ibrahim : It is very good if it is a small camel (*before they get too tough*) yeh; I have a rule in my life, I mean, the smaller the animal, the more tasty you'll get so I prefer er (*you don't eat mice though*) (hhhhh) but I prefer chicken which for me is more tasty than lamb, lamb is more tasty than beef, beef is more tasty than camel.

Antony : The camel is a marvellous animal isn't it?

Ibrahim : Yeh, it's very patient animal.

Antony : It's patient, it's incredibly robust physiologically, a quite extraordinary

animal.

Ibrahim : It can travel the desert, probably, 5 or 6 days without drinking, (*without water*) maybe more, 10 days, it's amazing.

Antony : It's almost as if it was designed (*yeh, yeh*) for people living in deserts.

Ibrahim : Exactly, yeh, people two thousand years ago. I mean, people used to, while they are travelling in the desert, they used to make warm in the body of the camel.

Antony : I've heard this, that you can actually remove meat from the live camel.

Ibrahim : No, just use the blood I mean (*oh it's only blood*) but I mean now nobody is doing this any more. You know that blood can ..... after it comes out.

Antony : I think that's still true in parts of Africa, is it, I think it's the Masai who eat cattle blood. As long as you take it carefully from the animal, it's, it's fine.

Ibrahim : Well, I think, medically, it shouldn't be a good source of (*well, it's very high in potassium, I suppose*) yes, but I mean in terms of transmitting disease, I mean, a blood transfusion from man to man is accepted, I mean, but once it's exposed to air it should not be used.

Antony : No, em, obviously you're right that if it's carrying a viral infection or some such thing, it could be very dangerous, (*yeh, but*) but if it's cooked, em, the Germans use blood a lot for making blood sausage and black pudding but it's all cooked.

Ibrahim : Yeh, but nowadays we know that blood itself is a very good medium for growing bacteria, viruses, (*oh yeh*) etc. (*yes*) so I mean if you just leave blood just half an hour you will see, after coagulation and you will see how it becomes. I mean, nowadays, I don't think so, at least in my area, I mean, you will find no-one will use the blood of a camel. (*No but, on the other hand, if you are*) This is partly because of religion as well I mean, you cannot use the blood, I mean, the blood is out of the body it is something dirty, you should not (*oh really*) yes, you should wash yourself before you pray.

Antony : Yes, but supposing, if somebody was trapped and it was either a matter of eating blood or dying of starvation, what would the situation be then?

Ibrahim : Well, that is necessity, I mean.

Antony : But the Koran accepts that?

Ibrahim : Yeh, you know, I mean, ham is forbidden in Islam but if you don't have, you are starving and you need to save your life, you eat it of course. Wine, as well, is forbidden but usually it is said in, in our teachings that if you, if something block your throat and you only save your life by drinking glass

of wine (*you do that*) yeh, if it is the only available, so necessity usually er, make forbidden thing unforbidden.

Antony : Yeh, so it's a common sense approach. (*yeh*) I went to a talk in London, er, three weeks ago and Michael Palin, I don't know whether you saw his programme, but he travelled. I didn't see his programme but I did go to his talk because it was actually in support of a charity that has it's headquarters in our home near here, called Motivation. This charity makes wheelchairs in the developing world (*yeh*) and sets up units all over the world for making wheelchairs for disabled people and Michael Palin was giving his talk as a means of supporting this charity and the talk was very, very interesting. He made quite a long journey through North Africa, much of it actually in the Sahara. Did you see the programme at all.

Ibrahim : But, let me ask, I mean, if, if, if this charity specialises in providing wheelchair, I'm sure. I mean, wheelchair cannot, would be useless in some area where there is no er, I mean, roads and streets like back here.

Antony : Well, yes that's possibly (*you cannot use wheelchair on sand*) you can if you design it properly and what Motivation do is they go out to, I mean, they've been all over the world, pretty well and they go out to a place, there's a very big enterprise at the moment in Sri Lanka being done by them and they've just finished in Uganda and they, they find out what the environment is that the wheelchairs users need to be able to deal with and then they design a wheelchair that is first of all, feasible to make in that environment with, as far as possible, materials available there (*wide wheels, yeh*) and then they design it for the terrain and they design it, often, for individuals.

Ibrahim : It must be cheap as well.

Antony : It must be cheap; none of them are motorised, they are all self propelled by the patient, the subject. They've done a fantastic job, they've made, I think, about 10,000 wheelchairs now and (*it's good*) they are either customised to individuals or made to fit an environment where there are lots of people suffering from the same problems, in the same kind of environment and they've done a tremendous job. It was founded by a most interesting man who is a quadriplegic himself, from a diving accident, (*yeh*) when he was a young man he broke his neck and he's made the most extraordinary remark. He says that the experience of setting up Motivation has been such a dramatic thing for him, that he wouldn't actually wish to replay his life and avoid the initial injury, it's remarkable and he wouldn't say that if wasn't true because he's a very straightforward person. So anyway, the talk was very interesting, of course, the talk was nothing to do with wheelchairs, the talk was given at the Royal Geographical Society just for an audience who paid for tickets and the money goes to Motivation.

Ibrahim : Do you er, do you watch boxing?

Antony : Never.

Ibrahim : Never (*no*) Do you support this kind of sport?

Antony : No

Ibrahim : Why

Antony : Well, I'm not interested in it; at school I was made to box, I didn't enjoy it and I didn't actually do very much. Em, it's not a sport that appeals to me and I think that the damage that it can do, very easily em, makes it difficult to defend.

Ibrahim : Yes, actually, I mean, this is my personal belief, I mean, this sport should be banned, should be stopped, because it's based on damaging the other, I mean it's not like football or volleyball or any other kind of sport but this, this special sport, I mean, depends only on damaging the opponent. (*the opponent, yeh*) That's why I don't support it.

Antony : You don't support it either? I don't know, it's one thing not to support something, it's another to then ban it so that no-one else can do it. That's quite a big step I think because then you are imposing your own view on other people, not personally because you yourself haven't got the power (*yeh*) to ban it yourself but I'm doubtful about this. We've had this problem.

Ibrahim : Do you know that in my country it is banned, I mean (*is it*) there is no boxing since 1980 or 1978, about 25 years.

Antony : Did people box before?

Ibrahim : Yes, now it's, I mean, they said this is an animal sport, not human being sport.

Antony : Does the Koran have anything to say about this type of sport?

Ibrahim : No, but in Islam, I mean, you can practice some kind of sport, I mean, without harming the opponent, (*yeh*) any kind of sport that don't harm the opponent. Wrestling is OK as long as you don't (*as long as the aim is not to damage your opponent*) ye, I mean, you could wrestle and just put me know, that's it, but to break something in my body or to cause damage, this is forbidden.

Antony : That's very interesting, yeh, we've had this argument, I'm sure you realise, recently here, not about a sport that damages other people but about hunting (*hunting, yeh*) with horses and dogs.

Ibrahim : I don't know what was the last decision or resolution, is it banned now?

Antony : No, it's not yet banned in England but it is in Scotland (*still*) yeh and the, the, it's a difficult one I think because there are certainly two sides to it, if not more.

Ibrahim : So what is the view of these people who wants (*who want it banned?*) yes.

Antony : Well, they reckon that it's cruel, that to chase an animal until it's caught or exhausted, as a sport, is cruel and it's not necessary.

Ibrahim : But what is done now in Spain is more (*what, bullfighting?*) yes, it's horrible death, that one.

Antony : Well, bullfighting would never now be allowed in this country, it would never happen in this country. I don't know that it's actually legally excluded but nobody would want to do it.

Ibrahim : I don't know how human beings just enjoying themselves by killing an animal.

Antony : I quite agree, but I don't think that's all that's in it. The really high quality bullfights in Spain, and I've never watched this, but I understand there's a lot of skill on the part of the matador and that the whole technique of how the bull is bypassed, you know, how you get the bull to charge and just at the last moment you withdraw, there are various stylised ways of doing this. This is nearly an art form according to many Spaniards.

Ibrahim : But the animal is killed in stages, I mean just when one goes (*it's not killed outright*) so it's very painful actually.

Antony : Yes, of course the historical perspective is interesting. Is it finished?

Ibrahim : Not yet, but (*have we done half an hour, whatever it was you wanted?*) er, I think now it's OK.

### Conversation (3)

Meghrawi = Non-ative Speaker

Simon = Native Speaker

Simon : OK, so if English isn't your first language, what is your first language?

Meghrawi : My first language is Arabic.

Simon : Arabic? Where are you from?

Meghrawi : I'm from Libya.

Simon : Libya (*yes*) well, well, well, I don't think I've met a Libyan before.  
Whereabouts are you from, are you from Tripoli?

Meghrawi : No, I'm from Bengaza, Tripoli is in the, er, west part of Libya, off the coast and I come from Bengaza which is 1000k to the east.

Simon : It's a big country.

Meghrawi : It's a huge country, yes, in terms of, em, I mean, size but in terms of people, it's very small.

Simon : Yeh, I was in Morocco last year (*yes it's a huge countr*) I was just amazed at the scale, you know, you're just completely looking at the map, you think OK, yes, there's just a country there, but it was just enormous to get around, all the way down the coast, it just stretches and stretches.

Meghrawi : When, when was that?

Simon : It was last Christmas so just over a year ago I went for Christmas, it was really nice.

Meghrawi : Where, where, which, which, areas did you visit?

Simon : We just went to Marrakech (*Marrakech, I've been there for just 4 days*) yeh, probably enough I'd say, 4 days in Marrakech, it's not a huge city.

Meghrawi : It was a conference so (*oh really, oh great*) so it was only a few hours in the evening.

Simon : Wondering the souk, it's a nice place. What's Libya like?

Meghrawi : It is less populated unlike Morocco which is heavily populated, em, well the cities and, em, people more or less the same as Morocco. Well, it's, it's mostly deserts, 90% is deserts, or maybe less, 85% and then the main populated area is the coast, the cities on the coast but then, unlike here where you have a village or a city every couple of miles (*yes, it's just empty and then lots of people and then empty again*) yes.

Simon : Oh, I see

Meghrawi : So you need to travel long distances with car, I mean, with your coach or something. It's, er, the weather is much, much warmer (hhhhh).

Simon : Yeh, 85% desert, it's gotta be, gotta be that much warmer, yeh.

Meghrawi : Yeh, well, you get sometimes colder than Bristol.

Simon : Yeh, cold at night.

Meghrawi : Yeh, I mean, no, I'm not talking about the desert, the cities on the coast, they get actually sometimes colder even, I mean, not very cold but, I mean Bristol is very, very er, mild.

*Simon : Yeh, yeh, it is quite mild, yeh, never gets freezing, (no) it's true and was Libya a French colony.*

Meghrawi : No, it's like Morocco and Algeria, no it wasn't. Is there any chance that you are Scottish?

Simon : No, close, I'm Irish.

Meghrawi : Oh, you're Irish, OK.

Simon : I'm impressed, I'm very impressed. (hhhhh)

Meghrawi : Er, it was colonised by the Italians / *by the Italains OK* / er, 1911 first of all, and then up to the beginning of the '30's, 1932, '42, sorry.

Simon : '42, OK so during the second world war.

Meghrawi : Yeh, well, it was mostly Italy and then when the Italians left the country it was colonised by the British and the er, and the French. So it's a period before the independence, (*yeh*) but the British didn't stay for so long like they did in Egypt / *and most other places* / most other places, yeh, so we were more like an Italian colony.

Simon : When did it get independence?

Meghrawi : Er '45, '47, '47 yeh. I'm not very good with history, you can tell. (hhhhh)

Simon : No, it's always really embarrassing whenever anyone asks me about Irish history as well. I'm like, well, I think we got independence in '22 give or take 5 years. I don't know.

Meghrawi : Especially if you are having some Guinness. (hhhhh)

Simon : Guinness, yeh, you gotta love the Guinness. Have you ever tasted Guinness.

Meghrawi : No, I don't drink, (*strict Moslem, yeh*) but people in my country do drink.

Simon : That's something I was really surprised, in Morocco lots of people drank, you know, and, I mean, it's very, well, a strict Moslem society, well, it's quite liberal, but, you know, everyone, you know, lots of the women wear burkas and, er, // but lots of people drink beer as well.

Meghrawi : Oh yeh, yeh, in my country too they drink all sorts of things, drinks locally made and imported. I remember when I was examined in 4<sup>th</sup> year, er, 5<sup>th</sup> year medical school, surgery, we had a couple of external examiners from this country and the case I got was liver sclerosis and, er, the patient was Libyan and the examiner asked me what he was drinking and I said it's a local made stuff, it's a palm wine and he said, oh, is that nice? (hhhhh). Could we have some, please. (hhhhh) I said no, give me the marks and let's see what I do about it.

Simon : I think it's meant to work the other way round you know (hhhhh). You are meant to give them the palm wine and then they give you the marks. (hhhhh).

Meghrawi : Yeh, so yeh

Simon : How long have you been living in Bristol?

Meghrawi : Quite long now, em, about in total about 7 years.

Simon : Your English is excellent, I was expecting, you know, maybe someone who didn't speak very good English at all but it's just like having a chat with someone who is fluent in English.

Meghrawi : I'd like to think so. (hhhhh) No I'm not that fluent, to be honest, I get, yeh, it's sometimes difficult to express yourself. (*Sure*) Once you start dreaming in the language, then you are probably mastering the language, that's what I've been told.

Simon : Yeh, are you dreaming in English yet? (hhhhh)

Meghrawi : No, never (hhhhh)

Simon : Oh, OK. I used to live in France and it's very true, once you start dreaming in French, you know you can speak in French.

Meghrawi : You speak French as well?

Simon : Em, well, I mean, it was a couple of years ago now so I'm a bit rusty you know. If I practice I'm OK.

Meghrawi : OK, good, excellent. So is there any other language you speak?

Simon : Er, well, we have to study Irish at school but it's a very difficult language to speak. Only about 50,000 people still speak it as their first language and, em, it's an ancient language, it's about ten thousand years old so it's very

Simon : kind of primitive, the structure of the language, the grammar and it makes it really difficult to learn if you are used to Latin based languages. You know, French isn't that different from English or, and Spanish is very similar to

French and so on but Irish is just like, phew, it's maybe like Turkish or something.

Meghrawi : It doesn't contain like a verb and a subject and proverb and these sort of things?

Simon : m, there's verbs and nouns but it's, the thing is there's no regular verbs so, for example, in French, you know, there's a set of rules for every verb and you can say the I, You, He, She, We, according to the rules.

Meghrawi : Yeh, there are certain suffixes or prefixes.

Simon : Yeh, exactly, or the ending of the word. In Irish there are more irregular verbs than regular verbs.

Meghrawi : Right, do you just learn each by heart, so it takes ages.

Simon : Yes, ages and ages and ages and there are lots of strange little rules like sometimes you put an 'n' in front of this letter and, oh, you know, it's a real pain, we hated it. I think it's taught very badly as well (*oh, I see*) and you have to start learning it when you are 5 years old.

Meghrawi : Probably also it didn't er, er, like it didn't progress, I mean it didn't evolve (*exactly*) just maintaining the same old, er, *presuso*, I mean.

Simon : Well exactly, it's, it's, I suppose the reason it hasn't evolved is because it wouldn't be Irish, it would be English if it had evolved or French or something. It's similar to Welsh and to Scottish and also to an ancient French language as well, so it's Celtic.

Meghrawi : Oh, Celti, Celtic language, right. I know that Turkish language for example, is just, er, you go on adding suffixes and prefixes; you don't have, er, well I suppose you should have, I never understand, I was, I discussed this with a Turkish guy for half an hour or more and I ended up saying OK.

Simon : Well, we've only got 25 minutes. (hhhhh)

Meghrawi : Yeh, it's er, er, I noticed that your accent is not very strong.

Simon : No, well, two reasons, my parents aren't from Dublin, er, I was brought up in Dublin but my parents are from Belfast. Belfast has a very distinctive accent, it's probably the typical accent that you hear on TV a lot because there's lots of political problems in the region as well, em, but they lived in Dublin for 20 years before they had me so there accents had really become very moderate and then I've lived in England for 7 years now as well so I suppose I've lost my Irish accent a little bit. I was at home this weekend and as soon

Simon : as I go back into the country, it's back, (*yeh, yeh*) you know, completely normal Dublin accent.

Meghrawi : Yeh, I understand that, yeh. It's quite similar to my case because where I come from the east part of Libya but I lived most of my life in the West

so people all the time say that I don't have an eastern accent but once I go there it just clicks.

Simon : Yeh, exactly, you just go back into the mode.

Meghrawi : Yeh, yeh, otherwise you'd be, everybody, er, talking funny (hhhhh).

Simon : Well, when I first came to England people didn't understand what I was saying, I mean (*I like the Irish accent*) I, I like the Irish accent as well (hhhhh) much better than the English accent (hhhhh) but people go What! and I go you know.

Meghrawi : It's much easier than the Scottish accent I think.

Simon : Um, the thing is, there's not many people that live in Ireland, you know, there's 4 million and there must be 20 accents. There's three different accents just in Dublin, you know, very distinctive, so there's a hugely diverse pool of accents in the country for such a small population. (*Ah right*). Some of them are absolutely unintelligible, just really, really, thick.

Meghrawi : Why is that, it's a very small area, well, no, I mean (*yes, it is a small area*) is that because they come from different, originally they come from different parts of the world or different (*er, it's because, I think*) many immigrants, no, I'm not talking about today's immigration, I mean (*yeh, historically*) historically.

Simon : Um, not really, I mean there was a lot of English soldiers settled in Ireland, em, but I don't think they really impacted the accents, I think it's because the different regions are quite isolated from each other.

Meghrawi : Oh right, it's mountain.

Simon : Very mountainous (*oh right, mountainous*) em, well, in different regions it's, it's, you know, quite mountainous.

Meghrawi : Er, er, each and every, I mean, every group of people, they just live in (*yeh*) in that area and they are satisfied with, I mean, (*exactly*) have their own food (*yeh*) and resources and everything.

Simon : Yeh, yeh, most people, certainly in the old days, you know, there's no TV or radio, and most people wouldn't travel to the big cities, em, so, you know, you're never exposed to the other accents, I suppose.

Meghrawi : This is happening on a large, much, much larger scale in the Arabic world. (*Oh, really*) It's amazing because, er, 20 years ago if you bring, er, say, a guy from Morocco and a guy from Lebanon or from Kuwait or something it's a huge, it's a very, I mean (*a vast distance*) yes, very vast distance, they would both speak Arabic but each would speak his own dialect, or, so sometimes it's very difficult to, to communicate properly but nowadays, 20 years later, er, because I think it's the impact of television and (*I was gonna say, yeh*) people very easy communicate with each other, I mean, the gaps are bridging very nicely.

Simon : Yeh, but it's the same with the whole world really.

Meghrawi : It's the same with the whole world I think, yeh.

Simon : I mean Japanese schoolchildren speak English with an American accent and (*hhhhh, yeh*) you know, the first words French schoolkids learn are the words of pop songs with an American accent (*that's true, yeh*) and so, you know, the whole world's getting smaller (*getting smaller, true*) or something.

Meghrawi : Yeh, but not very tolerable, I could say, could add (*hhhhh*)

Simon : Well, no, no

Meghrawi : So have we passed the half hour. (*hhhhh*)

Simon : I dunno (*hhhhh*).

(*hhhhh*) (*hhhhh*) //

Meghrawi : I er spent, er, 3 years in, em, before I married, in a, a, a, an accommodation here; it was like er, er, rooms with er, with er, a common kitchen.

Simon : Oh yeh, a university (*university accommodation, yhs*) oh, a hall of residence.

Meghrawi : Yeh, well, it's not, yeh, it's a hall of residence but for post-grads and there was a guy from, er, Ireland, he was there for two years, I think I had the most er, fruitful conversations with him actually. (*Oh really*) I really enjoyed talking to him because I think Irish people are quite friendly I think.

Simon : I think so, I think, well, the Irish have a reputation for being, you know, good hosts I suppose, but I think (*only women or men as well*) er the women as well, (*hhhhh*) the women are worse than the men. (*hhhhh*)

Meghrawi : That's what I'm saying, only women I thought (*oh, no, no, no*) (*hhhhh*).

Simon : I think that could be quite rude (*hhhhh*) but yes, it's true.

Meghrawi : No, no, just joking. Yeh, he was a very nice guy and er, yeh, but he never liked politics anyway he, he, (*oh really*) he, he said no, he just don't like to talk about it, (*don't talk about it*) unless he is very drunk or something (*hhhhh*).

Simon : And another thing.

Meghrawi : Yeh, exactly.

Simon : I think a lot of Irish people are like that because we don't talk about politics at home , you know, because it can get you killed, you know I (*that's true*) em, well, my family's from Belfast and they just, they never talk about politics with their friends because you don't really want to know. Er, if you meet someone and you like them, then really, why should you talk about something that might ruin a friendship, you know.

Meghrawi : That's true, that's true; very dangerous, politics and religion, that's what I have been told. .... So how's it, er, going here?

Simon : It's going, it's going well, em, skirting round politics now, quite well. (hhhhh) I finished my PHD about six months ago now, em, and so I'm working post-op stuff, it's quite good. It's different from what I was doing before for my PHD. I've changed labs, em, and it's quite, it's quite fun. The experiments aren't as physically demanding as they used to be. (*Oh right, OK*) I used to do, my experiments were all between 14 and 16 hours long so yeh, phew, you know, it used to kill you. At the end of the day you'd be just like, oh God, you know, please kill me. Er, good now, it's fine. Do you work clinically or are you doing research?

Meghrawi : No, I'm doing research, er, lab based, so I work with er, tissue cultures.

Simon : Oh right, OK, is that down the hill or?

Meghrawi : Yeh, it's in the eye hospital, the ere, the research labs at the back.

Simon : Yup, what's that like?

Meghrawi : Er, well, it start very well and then (*hhhhh sounds familiar*) and then it's reached a stage where it's not gonna end hhhhh (*sounds familiar*) so I think I had enough, I think I got enough data and my supervisor want me to do a bit more.

Simon : Yeh, a few more experiments, a few more experiments (*yeh, exactly*) what field are you doing?

Meghrawi : I am, er, well, it's er, about, it's about corneal preservation in er, organ culture medium so it's about cell viability survivals and different

Simon : Yeh, how long have you been doing research for?

Meghrawi : Er, a good er, three years.

Simon : Um, but do you want to stay in research, or do you want to go back to clinical.

Meghrawi : Now I'm actually; I think I'm going back to my country actually so I'm not, I'm not doing research there, well, I might do but it wont be my main (*no*)er, main work so I'm going back to clinical, yeh. I also miss my v clinical work.

Simon : I bet, I bet, I mean it must be nice to work with people, you know (*yes, yes*) the rats are fun but (hhhhh) they don't talk very well.

Meghrawi : No, cells don't as well (hhhhh)

Simon : No, cells are even worse (hhhhh)

Meghrawi : Exactly, well they talk to each other, that's what we say, that's what we think.

Simon : Clinical, I'd really like to do some clinical stuff. I did some clinical work during my undergraduate degree in a hospital and it was really fun, you know, it was just neurology, working with some patients that had had some knee injuries and er, it was really, it was nice to talk to people, it was cool.

Meghrawi : Yeh, you always get, you know, different, a, a mixed bag, you know.

Simon : Yeh, this is it, although I have some friends who used to work in A & E and they hated it. I mean, I suppose it depends // on who you are working with.

Meghrawi : Yeh, people who come to an ER most likely, you know, (*yeh*) are the type you don't really want to see every day (hhhhh)

Simon : Yeh, beaten up. (hhhhh) Well, 80% of them are, shouldn't be there. My aunt works in A & E in Belfast as well and em, she was saying that, on Christmas day, they only had 3 people the whole day and they were, like, this is what it should be like every day, you know, only coming to the Accident and Emergency if it really is an emergency, em, and they usually get maybe a hundred people a day, it's unbelievable.

Meghrawi : Yeh, they just don't want to, you know, go through the routine (*normal channels*) yeh, normal channels, exactly

Simon : I think we must be done now.

Meghrawi : Yes, that's enough.

(hhhhh)

Simon : Very nice to talk to you

Meghrawi : Yeh, thanks very much

Simon ; Yeh, good luck.

#### Conversation (4)

Mosstfa = Non-native Speaker

Matt = Native Speaker

- Mosstfa : No, I don't understand, what do you mean.
- Matt : Basically, my story for 23 years old and your story for 33 years old
- Mosstfa : Hhhhh, hhhhh // hhhhh, because your birthday tomorrow, isn't it, that's right. Ah so tomorrow you will be 23.
- Matt : It certainly flies though, doesn't it
- Mosstfa : Yeh, time is flying very fast, very fast. Aah, he hasn't got admission, you know, this letter for friend of mine, looking for admission; regret to inform you that we are unable to offer you a place.
- Matt : U-hum, what does he want to do, is it PHD, Masters?
- Mosstfa : Yeh, PHD in er, management // but this is maybe default, yeh, default?
- Matt : But you've had quite a few haven't you of, there's quite a few letters have come in.
- Mosstfa : Yeh, but most of them just, you know, informing that, er, they are receiving the documents (*aah*) but, er, this is the fourth which is saying that they are unable to offer him a place; which is, er, unfortunate. (*Ahem*) So what's your story up to 23 then?
- Matt : Is this recording now?
- Mosstfa : Yeh
- Matt : Oh, er, born in India 1978 (*1978, yeh*) came to this country when I was about 2 ½ , '80, '81 (*OK*) em, lived here since, most lived in West Midlands, Walsall, er, left Walsall in 1991 for Birmingham. Stayed there, I went to school and college and now University.
- Mosstfa : And you still, er, live in the same place.
- Matt : Yeh, still live in the same place.
- Mosstfa : OK, how about, er, oh, that's very short
- Matt : That's very short, innit
- Mosstfa : No, come on, it's 23 years, hhhhh, // 20 seconds hhhhh, but how about your parents, did they move here, or
- Matt : They moved here in, er, 1960's, (*what*) Dad did, (*oh right*) yeh (*OK*) he's been here for the last 30 years, 40 years (*oh, that's quite a long time*) late 1960's, early '70's, yeh, about that time.
- Mosstfa : So why did you choose Hallam to study in
- Matt : Er, the course actually, the course (*oh right*) the course, at that time when I started to apply only er, Sheffield Hallam did the course, networking and communications, BSc honours, so that's why (*you chose that*) I chose Hallam, my cousin was studying here as well (*your cousin studies here*) my cousin studied here, (*ah, studied here, OK*) so he was the first one to say, why not Sheffield Hallam and then, I looked at the prospectus, looked at their computing courses and I thought, ah, yeh, communications.
- Mosstfa : That's good, do you like coffee or tea?
- Matt : I'll have tea with my toast // that's good // hhhhh
- Mosstfa : Tea bags, yeh
- Matt : Yeh, I like tea bags. So what's your story then?
- Mosstfa : Ah, my story is shorter than yours, anyway hhhhh 22 seconds hhhhh you know, I, er, of course I was born in Libya and raised as well in Libya so I didn't er, I didn't, no thank you very much, so I didn't have a chance to be er, born in a country and raised in another country and em, I studied in the same, er, the same village. It's a small village where I live (*yeh*) and er, er, for university degree I studied and, I think, the second university or the first university you can say in Libya (*em*) it's

about a hundred, er, a thousand kilometres away from my village, so, I did my er, partial degree there (*in er, accounting*) accounting, yeh and then I studied for a Master degree as well there (*in accounting*), in accounting, yeh and then, after the Master I taught university for a er, a year and a half (*mmm*) and then I went to, to, er to Canada.

Matt : Oh yeh, Canada, whereabouts?

Mosstfa : Yeh, I went to Montreal (*ah Montreal*) I stayed there for a er, a year (*yeh*) doing my English courses there (*oh right*) yeh and em, er, at the beginning I was supposed to, to do my ..... year there as well, my ..... English courses but, I couldn't er, get get er, a-a-acceptance, in Canadian universities, because, you know, they have, er, like trouble, you know, trouble (*yeh*) er, highest score I think it's about 550 and in, also, there is another exam they call Gmat, it's very, more, more difficult than ..... (*yeh*) and they require about 600 I think, so, so I couldn't, I, I came at the top, I got to 1200 score but I couldn't, thanks, without sugar, but I couldn't manage to get, er, the Gmat (*mmm*) and I was allowed only to stay in Canada a year (*mmm*) and to get an admission, otherwise I have to go back to Libya (*aah*) and look for another place to study. So I didn't manage to get admission there, went back to Libya, while I was in Canada I managed to get admission from Sheffield Hallam University and er, Manchester Metropolitan University. So I went back to Libya, I taught er, a course there while I'm changing my, er, (*mmm*) you know, my sponsorship to, to England and then came back here in 19, er, 1998. Working here, I have, I have two choices, either study in Manchester or (*Hallam*) or Hallam (*is it*) so I went (*study Sheffield*) yeh, hhhhh so I chose Sheffield. I didn't like Manchester anyway, I don't know why (*mmm*) I didn't like the, the, the city itself, not, not people, I mean, city, although it's bigger than Sheffield (*yeh*) but er, I dunno, maybe because I used to, to, to Canada; when I came here I didn't expect, you know (*yeh, yeh*) it's, it's, it's a lot different.

Matt : Oh yeh, definitely, I've been to Vancouver.

Mosstfa : You've been, ah yeh

Matt : Three times

Mosstfa : Three times, ah, I didn't go, I didn't have a chance to go to Vancouver, I've heard it's very, very nice place. (*oh beautiful*) It's the best place I think in Canada, (*yeh*) 'specially, er

Matt : Apparently, it's the best place in the world, (*oh right, yeh*) for living.

Mosstfa : Oh, for living, yeh, OK (*yeh, for living*) and especially the Asians (*yeh*) from Japan and China // they like (*yeh, umm*).

Matt : So what's your friend gonna do with all this tape stuff?

Mosstfa : Apparently he's going to listen to it first of all (*yeh*) and then (*have a good laugh*) hhhhh. Why? hhhhh. First of all, he going to listen to it and then, I dunno what to, he's going to, er, 'cos he's studying, he's studying, he's studying, er, I think er, English, er; I dunno. It's, I mean, ..... the, the conversation I think between, I dunno, the conversation between native and non-native anyway. (*Ah right*) He's looking for er, native and non-native intercommunication or communication aspect. I dunno, I dunno that he, what he's study about.

Matt : You know English, I know English; the only difference I can see is the accent.

Mosstfa : Yeh, the accent but the fluency as well. (*Yeh, yeh*) The fluency and understanding; you might say something that I don't understand (*mmm*) 'cos I don't know all the vocabularies.

Matt : Neither do I // sayings, yeh. I mean it's so surprising how you pick up languages.

Mosstfa : Yeh, you know, when I started doing my em, because of course when you came here, two years and a half, you learned both of the languages I think at the same time; your mother tongue language and the English language, but when I want to

Canada to study English, at the beginning, 'specially the three or four month, first three or four month, I realised how much I learned because, you know, you pick many more, many vocabularies, many new things and, er, the amount of, of, of, understanding, your understanding, is increasing (*sure*) very high at the beginning but then after (*it levels off*) yeh.

Matt : Yeh, but that's with everything.

Mosstfa : Yeh, and then you start, oh come on, I have been here for er, 6 month or 7 month and my level of understanding is, is the same as when I was 4 month, or 4 month ago, so the level of improvement, not, not very increasing very high. (*mmm*) Yeh, it's, it's, er, amazing how you can pick up and understand, communicate with other people in short time. (*mmm*) Also body language is very important, because at the beginning (*ah, yeh, yeh*) when you cannot, when you cannot say something you can hhhhh.

Matt : Some orange juice.

Mosstfa : So what are you going to do for your party then.

Matt : My party, nothing.

Mosstfa : Oh come on Man

Matt : No, no, I got to ..... work, revise, revise all day Monday. Exams aren't far away, you see, and these are my finals so I think I might as well forget it.

Mosstfa : Yeh, you should, er, I'm not saying you shouldn't but, er, it's (*a bit of clubbing*) //

Matt : Er, OK, that's clubbing, yeh, that's, that's one thing. I didn't mean to, to, to waste the whole day just on (*no, no, no, just in the evening*). OK. (*mmm*) So you said you were praying. (*Yeh*) So, er, what er, dunno, what type of praying do you do?

Mosstfa : Just; my mother is Punjabi which is, em, from India, Punjab (*OK*) and it just em, obviously every religion has their own prayers. (*yeh, yeh*) I mean you do yours three, four times a day do you?

Matt : Er, five times, yeh.

Mosstfa : Yeh, five times a day, but we, we're supposed, we do ours about three times a day, you see.

Matt : Oh right, yeh, so I didn't know that.

Mosstfa : Yeh, (*so*) I think every religion, I dunno, I think personally, there's one God (*yeh*) and there's so many different paths leading to it. (*OK*) Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and they're all gonna get you there and there's no point saying oh, my religion's better than your religion and everythings's (*yeh, it's not the point of better*) no, no.

Matt : So how do you practice, is it, is it by physically or just by staying and saying some.

Mosstfa : Yeh, just chanting, well not chanting, just reading from a (*a book*) yeh, prayer book (*prayer book, OK*) yeh.

Matt : Do you have certain position to be in or just to (*no*) yeh, because for Moslems, we have to, to direct ourselves to (*yeh, yeh, towards*) to Mecca (*mmm, mmm*) and er, we have certain er, er, when, what do you call it, not prac, practices, yeh, we have certain practices to do during, during each time and they are different between, within 5 times. (*mmm*)

LONG PAUSE

Mosstfa : Yeh, it's going, (*yeh*) it's going very nice.

Matt : Yeh, ah good, good, good. That's if your friend can understand me when I'm eating my food. Hhhhh

Mosstfa : No, I think he, I think he will manage hhhhh some way, some way or another he will do that.

Matt : Well, we'll do it again if you want. Hhhhh

Mosstfa : So how about after graduation?

Matt : Father's business.

- Mosstfa : Ah, working with your father's business, yeh.
- Matt : IT stuff, webb development (*OK yeh*) er, networking, things, just small things like that, er, databases. (*u-hum*) Just what basically I've learnt over the last four years implemented to the factory. (*OK*)
- Mosstfa : So it will be very good for (*fingers crossed*) hhhhh, no I'm sure it will be, because you know, you are studying at IT (*mmm*) and then you try to implement this in your business.
- Matt : Yeh. I worked, em, for my placement in Cambridge. (*u-hum*) I was there for a year working for em, TWI, and was IT support. 'Cos the business was er, it's a research and development organisation; they research into different welding techniques on fatigue, for example, er, (*for what, sorry*) fatigue. You know when you've got steel (*yeh*) welding, (*OK yeh*) Measures basically pressures on different welds and stuff like that, for example, but they've got industries like petro-chemical, er, mechanical, aerospace (*yeh*) nuclear, er, stuff like that, oil and gas, where, for example, Esso (*u-hum*) the er, (*big oil company*) oil company, they, obviously they've got pipes leading from the, er, sea bed (*oh right*) to the shore (*OK*). Obviously you aren't gonna get a 100, 200 foot pipe, you're gonna have small sections (*yeh*) and those sections will be welded together (*OK yeh*) using various techniques, and what they, they do is basically research into those welding techniques (*oh right, yeh*) and then obviously once you've done one they probably test it as well, under various pressures of heat and exhaustion and stuff like that (*u-hum*) and same for the car industry, welding the chassis together, pivoting, things like that, so that's what they're doing and I was part of the support team, IT, we have most things on computers these days (*oh right, yeh*) so they were using things like word processing, e-mail, and, you know, (*so you all could, er*) I was part of it, networking, IT supporting. (*Oh, that's good*) I learnt a lot.
- Mosstfa : Yeh, that's good in your CV.
- Matt : Well, definitely, 'cos I'd never worked before and that's a big chunk on my CV. I've learnt a lot though. I didn't know how to upgrade computers before I went there, now I can upgrade, build my own computer if I wanted to.
- Mosstfa : Oh right, yeh. So you are good, yeh, you are good in computers now aren't you, so how about a, a laptop. I'm thinking about buying a laptop. Do you know much about laptops.
- Matt : How much do you want to spend? It's all about money.
- Mosstfa : It's about £800, £700, £800 yeh.
- Matt : Yeh, you'll get a nice one.
- Mosstfa : I can get nice one. What, what's the best, em, make?
- Matt : Em, Toshiba's nice, (*u-hum*) Toshiba. 'cos at work we used to have Toshiba laptops and Panasonic, er, Sony.
- Mosstfa : What about er, there's one called Compaq, something like that. (*Compaq*) Compaq, is that nice one or er,
- Matt : Yeh, they're all OK, they're good well-known companies; it's just like the hardware specifications, speed, the memory, the screen size (*u-hum, u-hum*). For £700 or £800 you could get a nice laptop.
- Mosstfa : But you cannot update it, can you?
- Matt : Hum?
- Mosstfa : You cannot update the laptop, after.
- Matt : You can, but it get, ends up expensive, you see, because with a PC, with a computer you've got a mother board and you can, it's easy to upgrade it's not a, 'cos sometimes they're only about that big, (*yeh*) the latest ones out (*mmm*) so you have to buy new memory modules and different, the, the overall structure's slightly different.

Mosstfa : Yeh, (*mmm*) but, but computers you can upgrade easily.

Matt : Yeh, easy, easy.

Mosstfa : So you can upgrade a laptop but it's more expensive to upgrade it.

Matt : Yeh

Mosstfa : OK, so I thought, I thought you cannot upgrade it.

Matt : You can, you can. Yeh, but mostly you see, you don't, you don't, if you buy a new laptop now, there's no, there's no main reason for upgrading 'cos they come with 64 megabyte RAM, pretty high specification, big hard drive.

Mosstfa : But after maybe two or three years hhhhh (*yeh but that's*) you would have a huge // (*exactly*) different speed or different specification and you need to (*Well technology changes every day*) yeh.

Matt : I mean, I remember at work we put this laptop in, Sony laptop, in and er, and you, you ever seen James Bond, you know what I mean, a tracking system (*yeh*), you know, like dddddddddddd, you know like, em, what's it called, like a tracking system, almost you know like a James Bond tracking system. //

Mosstfa : If, if, er, you track somebody or something, (*yeh*) ok yeh, I understand.

Matt : Anyway, you load the software up on this laptop and you put this card, data card and what the PC will do is track it, so if you are moving across the screen (*right*) the data card will actually, the software will actually track it moving across the screen and basically, if you've got, let's say, in a, a company, if you've got, er, a stock item (*OK, u—hum*) you can scan it in front of the computer now. Just all you need to do, you just place it in front of the computer. (*Oh right, bits in front of the computer.*) Yeh, yeh. Technology changes so fast.

Mosstfa : That's amazing, that's amazing. A friend of mine bought a mobile phone, a Siemen, er, the latest model, not sure what it is and he paid, em, £280 something for it and, er, I listened to music from it, you know, (*oh, yeh, yeh*) I listened to music, ahh, that was amazing and (*yeh, yeh*) he recorded my voice on the mobile phone and I heard my voice hhhhh recorded and, em, he said you can download music from the internet to your mobile phone (*yeh*) and listen to it. That, that, very, // and you can access the internet from it. That's very, very interesting but // very expensive, (*oh yeh, definitely*) £280 for a mobile phone, no, come on // no too expensive. (*yeh, too expensive*) But myself, you know, pay as you talk is, er, is you know // hhhhh. Although I try to convince him to swap (*ah, hhhhh, that's better, that is*). Hhhhh, yeh, yeh, this is better yeh, I told him, this is bigger (*reception hhhhh*). Hhhhh, bigger in size, smaller in screen, you know hhhhh. Actually I'm looking another handset, (*yeh*) yeh, this handset is not, although I don't want to spend much, you know. (*No*)

Matt : So when you going back to Libya then?

Mosstfa : I dunno, after I finish.

Matt : When do you finish?

Mosstfa : I dunno, hhhhh

Matt : Can you, can you stay here next year sure.

Mosstfa : Yeh, not that we want, if I want, if my Supervisor wants. (*No*) Because, you know, individually it is difficult to decide when you finish, depend on new work and Supervisor's satisfaction.

Matt : 'Cos I mean, this is a thesis, isn't it

Mosstfa : Yeh, so, er, every time and then my Supervisor come and give me, er, what have you done about this, (*mmm*) when I see it, when he see it, sometimes he says OK but after a while, er, give me again that work we did, when I give him, or you need, you know to do more on this one, this one, this, so every time, and then you change (*yeh*) whatever, even if you agree on something, you might change it again, so it's very hard, although,

- Matt : What's your objective for the thesis?
- Mosstfa : You mean, from getting a PHD or for the thesis itself?
- Matt : For the thesis, for the,
- Mosstfa : Er, er, the objective of the thesis, yeh, I'm looking at, em, the process of providing information, accounting in public law, within Libyan context, Libyan companies and em, accountability relationship between companies, and er, because, you know, in Libya it's er, we have like a Ministry or a Secretary which is responsible for companies (*ah right*) and because it's em, publicly ownership companies, not like here, private companies most of the companies here. I'm looking for a public company and it's relationship with that particular Secretary. (*Ah right*) You know, because, it's, it's it's like, you know, this company is like, owned by the Secretary (*em*) because it's a public company (*em*) and this Secretary is supervising that company so I'm looking for the relationship between them. (*Ah right*) Like how the information flow between these two organisations, accountability relationship between these organisations and, (*sounds hard*) yeh, I'm looking at, you know, the whole, the culture you know, because it's er, it's different from European market economies and also, because this company is a joint venture; there is an Italian partner, yeh, it's owned by the Libyan Government and by an Italian company.
- Matt : Oh right, what's the company called?
- Mosstfa : Er, Calibrasi, (*Calibrasi*) yeh, it's an Italian company so, also there is, you know, a foreign partner here (*oh right*) so what accountability are there between the company and this foreign partner and between the Secretary and this foreign partner, so it's (*like a trail*) Yeh, like a triangle, yeh, so yeh, that's the main (*so it's very complex then*) the main, yeh, the main thesis is very complicated, you know, although it's; add to that my Supervisor is very, you know, demanding (*um*), every time ah, do this, do this, ah, forget this, do this you know, it's very, very hard work (*em*) but hopefully, hopefully // will finish one day hhhhh (*hhhhh one day*).
- Matt : Who is your Supervisor?
- Mosstfa : Er, Professor Tony Perry.
- Matt : Oh, professor?
- Mosstfa : Yeh, (*oh right*) even my second Supervisor is a professor as well.
- Matt : What's the status with , OK, you get doctors, OK, if you do a PHD but what's the status with a professor, how do you get the professor status?
- Mosstfa : Yeh, it's by your publications, by your contribution to knowledge.
- Matt : Ah right, to industry.
- Mosstfa : Yeh, because after, after you get your PHD, if you get your PHD and done nothing, (*yeh*) so that's it, you're still a doctor, forever (*yeh*) but if you contributed to knowledge, like in er, by doing research, by em, yeh, publishing, er, publishing, em, publications, books or articles or whatever, so yeh, by that after, I think, I dunno how, it's different between country and country. After many years they assess your contribution and then they grant you with higher status (*oh right*). You know, the professor is not the last thing but is, is, I think the highest, well, I don't know, not sure the last rank, what it is but after your doctorate you got different er, What is // Er, do you know where is the key for this window?
- Matt : No, no, I've never
- NOISE INTERFERENCE
- Mosstfa : That's nice in the recording, isn't it? (*Right hhhhh*) hhhhh.
- LOUD BANGING NOISE
- Matt : That's the next door neighbour banging holes into the wall hhhhh.
- Mosstfa : Hamza, don't worry about this noise, you know, hhhhh, don't analyse it hhhhh.
- BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG
- Mosstfa : You know, they've started demolishing this building, did you noticed?

Matt : Yeh, they've started down there haven't they.

Mosstfa : Yes, they started down there and er, yesterday they moved one of the, what do you call it?

Matt : The er, girders, or, they make steel.

Mosstfa : Yeh, the metal, yeh, yeh.

Matt : They were supposed to build a massive leisure centre here you know (*this building here*) yeh, 'cos all this is owned by Sheffield United football club, you see.

Mosstfa : Oh right, even these, these houses.

Matt : Well, three of these are. (*OK*) Yeh, I think that next door and the rest of them round here; this one's owned by, obviously, the Landlord.

Mosstfa : So maybe Sheffield United wants to buy this house as well (*maybe they will*) yeh, if they owned all the area and then, yeh. Yeh, it's better actually, I don't like, you know .....

Matt : That's Sheffield for you, it's a very old, old city, steel city you see (*u-hum*) and they make, they used to make all the, sort of, make all the cutlery.

Mosstfa : Cutlery yeh, and it was bombed a lot in, during the second world war.

Matt : Yeh, yeh, they've started to redevelop the city now (*yeh*). They've really started to put money in, money into it (*em*) 'cos you're getting a lot of, getting a lot er, 'cos it's the fourth, fourth largest city in England, (*fourth*) fourth, Sheffield is the fourth. (*Really*) Yeh, (*doesn't, er, Manchester er*) er, London, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield.

Mosstfa : Ah (*um*) I didn't know that (*um*) the fourth, but it's very different from London, from Birmingham, hhhhh. Different from Manchester.

Matt : It's more rainy hhhhh

Mosstfa : Yeh, OK, hhhhh, a lot of hills, you know.

Matt : You get a lot of er, you're getting a lot of er, money coming from the United States and, you know, because there's a lot of steel companies here (*em*) engineering firms, that aren't making any money now and the Americans are buying them (*OK yeh*) so a lot of money coming in. So now I think they can afford to start rebuilding Sheffield.

Mosstfa : Even the European Union, I think, contributing a lot (*yeh yeh*) ..... time.

Matt : I mean er, as you walk down Shore Street, they've built BBC online, tt, the BBC offices (*yeh, the BBC offices*) er, they're building these halls, they're building new housing and they're demolishing that whole warehouse, aren't they?

Mosstfa : Yeh, I've seen the demolition, yeh.

Matt : Yeh, opposite the student accommodation, they, they've demolished everything. You've seen it, I think you have seen it.

Mosstfa : Yeh, OK. (*Yeh*) So, you know, that's why the Landlord want (*yeh*) sold the other house because there are new (*yeh*) considerable accommodation in the area, so it's not, it's not very profitable.

Matt : I really think he's gonna put this on, er (*on sale as well*) on sale soon.

Mosstfa : Yeh, he said that, yeh, I think he waiting for the end of the contract, (*yeh*) contracts.

Matt : Should be enough.

Mosstfa : You think so, go home now.

Matt : Yeh, going university (*hmm*) doing some revision.

Mosstfa : Studying on Saturday?

Matt : Yeh, yeh, you know, no rest for the wicked.

Mosstfa : The wicked? Ah no rest.

Matt : It's another saying, you see.

Mosstfa : Hhhhh, no rest for the wicked hhhhh that's nice.

Matt : But I think because you've been brought up you pick up the sayings, (*yeh*) every

language has their own little (*yeh, their own sayings*) sayings, yeh.

Mosstfa : So, no rest for the wicked, you mean you are the wicked.

Matt : Well, you know, people work hard, you know.

Mosstfa : OK, hhhhh sorry I didn't(*no rest, you see*) OK, no rest for the wicked.

Matt : Don't know what it means, but just say it hhhhh

Mosstfa : Oh, thank you very much for this nice conversation and we might continue as well, if you (*yeh yeh*) depends if er, er, (*if he likes you or not*) if he likes you or not, yeh, if he is satisfied or not.

Matt : Maybe if he finds it funny he may say do it again.

Mosstfa : Do it again, yeh.  
LONG PAUSE

Mosstfa : Oh right, what's the time now.

Matt : Half past

Mosstfa : Sometimes I smell gas, I don't know why, and check everything's OK. My nose are, er very (*very sensitive*) not sensitive, no, lying to me, hhhhh.

#### Conversation (4)

Salam = Non-native Speaker

Simon = Native Speaker

Salem : My name is Salam, I am from Libya

Simon : Can you spell your name for me, please.

Salem : S A L A M

Simon : Ah, OK, there's a place called Salem, I have to know the spelling to picture it in my mind. My name is Simon which is similar. I wonder if Salam is a Libyan equivalent to Simon. So how is it that I'm sitting here talking to you, I mean why are you doing this?

Salem : Well actually, this topic is related to the cultural effect of how people speak to each other and I find myself in the same position now because I think how can I make conversation with you, how can I start, what topic might make sense to you, to discuss with you.

Simon : Yes, well of course the stereotypical British way of breaking the ice is to talk about the weather or, if you're at the bus stop, how late the bus is; finding an area that you are both going to agree on, something that's not too controversial. That seems to be the way, establish agreement first and then you can move on from there. But, I'm aware that in Britain that kind of polite conversation relies on the weather being so interesting because it's so different all the time but I presume, and I may be wrong, that in Libya the weather's probably always the same.

*Salem : Oh, all the same, that's right, especially the area where I come from, Southern Libya, where the area is desert actually and the area is dominated by summer and winter. Summer during the day and winter during the night.*

(Hhhhh)

Simon : That's the only change in the weather?

Salem : Yes, that's all you have.

Simon : So, do you not have a winter?

Salem : Well, we have winter but where the sun rises after 2 o'clock it will be warm but after sunset it will be colder. Generally speaking, it's not as clear as Britain or Northern Libya because the Mediterranean Sea dominates this area.

Simon : Is it very, very hot in the summer?

Salem : Yes, sometimes 40 degrees.

Simon : Hot enough, I would like that I think. I like it as hot as possible really. Mind you, that's in the context of Britain or Europe. When I go on holiday I quite like it to be 30 degrees.

Salem :Where do you usually go?

Simon :I've been to Greece for the last couple of years, have you been to Greece?

Salem :No, I haven't, but I've been to Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, I've been to Ghana.

Simon : It's a lot of travelling, a lot of miles. Was that as a tourist?

Salem :As a tourist, yes, especially Europe

.....  
..... and the conference there on ..... dissertation .....

Simon : Why not.

Salem :Very nice (Hhhhh). Africa, the whole area is green, green. Actually, when I think of my country and other Southern African sections of the Sahara, I thought this applied to where I live, but there are some nice places, rain, grass, trees, very different.

Simon : I would like to see it, I like to travel anyway but I've only been inside Europe so far. So how come you're here now in Sheffield of all places?

Salem :Sheffield? It's all right.

Simon : Sheffield is nice. I'm not from Sheffield, I chose to come here.

Salem : Well, before I came to Sheffield I was in Wales, a city called Swansea.

Simon : Swansea?

Salem :Yes, it's a nice place, quiet.

Simon : I thought Wales was quite a depressed place.

Salem : Yes, it's a remote area but when I compare it with Sheffield, Sheffield is a reasonable place to live in terms of rent, housing and I found Sheffield multi-cultural. There is the Yemeni community there, Pakistani community, Indian, African, Libyan but Swansea is .....

Simon : Did you find the Welsh very exclusive?

Salem :I think so.

Simon : They have a reputation, maybe a stereotype, I don't know, but they have a reputation to be quite exclusive.

Salem :Yes, I noticed that. Generally speaking, it feels difficult to make friends, it's too difficult to go deep with such people, I don't know. I have lived in Sheffield now for nearly 5 years, it's so difficult, not easy. I know the British people are very kind, very helpful and if you need anything they will give you assistance, but otherwise difficult. I don't know if I am right or wrong, correct me if you think so.

Simon : Well, in terms of Britain, the North of Britain is supposed to be is supposed to be significantly warmer, more friendly, than the South. I don't know if you've been to the South of England.

Salem : No.

Simon : Well you'd probably find it much harder, but I'm aware that the British can use politeness as a shield, really. In a way you have this superficial kind of politeness or friendliness but, as you've noticed, try to get beyond that and it's quite difficult.

Salem : Yes, I've found that myself, according to my experience, but I'm not quite sure. In my experience, in other ways, there is something that is not clear to me in the sense that I say to my colleague in the department I say good morning. Some people say hi, other people just ..... I don't know ..... Sometimes I found myself disappointed to be honest because in my country if I said to you good morning you would reply good morning but since I have been in the UK, especially in Sheffield, I found it difficult, some people say good morning, other people say hi, other people say ..... I don't know what you mean by that. Is it good morning or did you want to speak to me.

Simon : Yes, it's a little rude isn't it?

Salem : But culturally, I think I found it hard sometimes to talk actually because in my mind what is serious or sensitive or useful might not be in your culture, it makes sense actually.

Simon : Is Libya quite a sparsely populated country?

Salem : Yes

Simon : Right, I wonder about that because, obviously, England and cities like Sheffield are quite densely populated and I think people tend to be more perhaps, in those sort of situations. I'm only theorising, I don't know. I remember a Texan, an old boss of mine, saying that back in Texas it used to take him nearly half an hour to walk down the road because everybody he came upon wanted a conversation with him. I think where he's from is quite a large sparsely populated area, I don't know, I may be wrong about that. If you acknowledge a complete stranger in Sheffield or anywhere in England when you are walking down the road, give them a look or even say hello, they are very startled. They're completely surprised. But its interesting that, and this is to do with space, when you are out walking, and a lot of people do around Sheffield, go out to walk in the country, in the Peak District, if you encounter somebody coming the other way when you are out in the country you always say hello.

Salem : I see.

Simon : It's interesting, isn't it, that the very same person, if you see them walking down the road in town, you completely ignore them.

Salem :It seems the area, the pressure of the city where people work so hard and they concentrate on work.

Simon :I would suggest that maybe a city is a very competitive environment but on a larger sociological perspective I would say that in the last 10 years or so, maybe 10 or 15 years, in this country anyway we are encouraged to be more individualistic and isolated and competitive with each other. We couple that with fear of crime and I won't say crime but fear of crime. People are very guarded and I say fear of crime because I think crime is not as prevalent as people think because they are afraid of it and they feel they can't trust anybody. So amongst your friends, has it been hard to make friends here, are you friends with any native Sheffield people?

Salem : My landlady actually ..... my family ..... so I go to her house every two weeks, maybe three weeks, just sit and chat with her, she knows my family, but the people in the department, in the University, the people that are more educated and they know my case because I am a student and I'm doing the same reading and writing, I talk about the same problems, if I can say that, because they are working hard, there is common ground between us, more closely than other people. People in the street might ignore you because, as you said before, stress in the city and fear of crime and so on but if you sit in the same place, sharing the same desk, the same computer and you meet each other every day, its an interest, that's right.

Simon : Common ground.

Salem : Yes, common ground and, I don't know, it's not easy actually.

Salem : So have you made friends with immigrants, for want of a better name.

Salem Yes

Simon : So most of your friends would be non-English.

Salem : Non-English, yes.

Simon : Is that easier.

Salem : Easier, yes. I feel it's easier than English people.

Simon : @ Is there a large expatriate Libyan population in Sheffield.

Salem :Well, there is.

Simon : How do you find each other?

Salem : Well, because actually during the ..... and say hello, how are you, how's it going with your study, ask about the family and there is another student, a friend of mine, who is in Sheffield, that's how I came to Sheffield and this is ..... and he is from ..... and he has come to do a PHD or Masters Degree or how long at the University and this is the

communication. Sometimes after there is ..... celebration you call  
..... All the family and people from Libya come to sit together.

Simon : Do you think it's easier to make friends with other Libyans here in England than it would be in Libya because you're in shared circumstances.

Salem : That's right, yes.

Simon : I lived abroad, again in Europe, in Hungary, I lived there for about a year and a half and I made friends. I met a lot of English and Americans and made friends with them just like that and, of course, here in England, you're quite selective about who you make friends with but, over there, you're English. I'll be your friend / might be / yes, sure and culture and shared circumstances. Again, you're all outsiders to some extent. What's interesting though is that you become really good friends. So I wonder if we are a bit too selective.

Salem : Yes, that's right.

Simon : So back home in your own country.

Salem : Yes, who is on the top of the list, that's right.

Simon : Interesting, isn't it, how we grade people, how we put people into a hierarchy.

Salem : A hierarchy, that's right, who is the best friend, because if you have close friends you are sharing a lot.

Simon : It's hard to create the friendships that you have when you grow up with somebody from school and go to college with and all these things. People that you've been friends with since you were a child. You can never seem to create those depths of friendships ever again, can you when you become an adult? Especially, you will find as I have, when you move home you leave all your oldest friends back home and you have to start all over again and you never quite get those close friends back, do you? Particularly, you've moved around a lot haven't you?

Salem : Yes, that's right, and did the area need to be, shall I say, ..... To choose which place you can live in terms of what might be, because if you're in a different ethnic minority you will choose the area where you can find what you need. I'm asking is there an interlink there or not, is there a Halal butcher to buy meat, that's another factor when I select the area, if they are available there, I will move. Also, will it be cheap or expensive in terms of money. There is a lot.

Simon : There's this debate isn't there, integration, assimilation, what you're suggesting is that you would favour, well, the term they use is ghettoisation, which is a really unpleasant term, about creating ghettos within cities for immigrant populations rather than integrating with everybody else.

Salem : Yes, because in Sociology we study this phenomena to see why people move from one place and naturally go to another place where they have relatives, people with the same culture. As I said before, much of the reason to move from one place to another.

Simon : People want to be with, well, I won't say their type, but they want to be with people who share cultural values.

Salem : Well there might be a social factor.

Simon : There's an economic factor as well, don't you think?

Salem : I'm not quite sure. If you move, for instance, from Sheffield to London or another part of Britain, what are your priorities for choosing the area. Would it be in terms of income, economic factor or social factor or reputation? The area, or what?

Simon : For myself, I think I'm very aware of crime, again. There are areas of Sheffield where I wouldn't want to live for that reason because, whether its true or not, I have an idea, based on what I've heard or read, that you're in danger of burglary, robbery. There are places where they have a lot of poverty, for example. These are the areas which I would choose not to live in, because I would expect problems. Problems with theft of my car, burglary of the house, robbery on the street, anti-social behaviour, so that's something that I would think about. Of course, economics is an important issue. The area in which I would really like to live is Netheredge, I don't know if you know it, it's a very nice area, Netheredge

Salem : What's the best area of Sheffield now?

Simon : I would say that within the city Netheredge is the one that I really like. The other ones are really beautiful suburbs on the outside like Fulwood and Tapton. They're getting out more into the country, very leafy suburbs but, within walking distance to the city, Netheredge is where I would like to live. Its very bohemian, leafy, quiet, beautiful houses, but of course I couldn't possibly live there, it's too expensive, so I live quite near to there.

Salem : Are there problem areas in Sheffield?

Simon : Oh, there's a few, The Manor is the first one that comes to mind, Burn Green, Pitsmoor, Firth Park. It tends to be towards the north of the city. The north part of the city tends to be poorer than the south but that seems to be the case so often doesn't it? It's the case with the country as well, the north is always poorer. Is it true in Libya? Is the north poorer than the south.

Salem : Usually, the role is different. South is more the rich area and Southern Libya north is a rich area and Southern Libya is different.

(Hhhhh)

Simon : Interesting. Have you discovered any customs or habits or cultural things in Britain that you really like?

Salem : Yes, if you have an appointment at, say, 5 o'clock, they come sharp at 5 o'clock and I will keep this habit during my life. People work so hard to keep their jobs and there is supervision inside.

Simon : Self discipline.

Salem : Self discipline. In comparison, there are advantages and disadvantages and the advantage is the money, but they forget the disadvantage. Actually, I've been to Spain. Spain is more friendly, it might be because they like tourists a lot. Have you been there?

Simon : Yes, I went to Madrid, very friendly, yes.

Salem : They like to help people.

Simon : Possibly, but I think the climate makes a difference. The warm climate tends to make people more relaxed. That's how it feels to me, certainly in Greece and Spain, it's true of Italy too, lovely climate, the people really relaxed.

Salem : You think the weather helps people to relax?

Simon : I do think so, yes. I don't have any evidence for that, but I do suspect it, that climate has a direct bearing on people.

Salem : Well, that's a good idea for me.

Simon : As I said, it's not proven, I haven't researched it. It's interesting isn't it, maybe there's a PHD there for me. If I did a PHD in that, it would mean I could travel all over the world, wouldn't it? Research, but I do think so. In places like Manchester, especially, it rains all the time. It rains and rains and rains and rains, and Sheffield it rains a lot, but Manchester more, and they say it's the Pennines, you know, the mountain range makes it rain and people have a certain attitude which they don't have in, for example, the West Country. You know, down in the south west which is a sunnier place and East Anglia where it's warmer. People are very different down there, so it's just a theory which I haven't researched.

Salem : Well, it's a good theory.

Simon : There could be economic reasons, as well, particularly in Spain and Italy and places like Greece. When the sun comes out, everybody's happier aren't they, you feel it in yourself. Well, in England anyway.

Salem : Well, if that's all they have, sun all day, like where I come from people will say oh, I'm fed up with it.

Hhhhh.

**Conversation (5)**

Mary = Native Speaker

Ali = Non-native Speaker

Mary : Are you doing a PHD?

Ali : Now I just, hu, am starting to do mphil upgrading to PHD

Mary : Ah, yes, yes, and what is your project focused on?

Ali : ah, hh, My project is focused on (0.0) aa boron (0.0)

Mary : oh, yes,

Ali : and plant physiology.

Mary : emh, I'm afraid I don't know much about science

Ali : =Yes, just in plant science

Mary : Right

Ali : in connection with plant physiology

Mary :  < alright, and how long have you  
been working on it?

Ali :  Just from September.

Mary :  = right, is it going well?

Ali :  yha

Mary : Great, do you have a supervisor through mphil or is it  
 Yes

Mary :  = taught in a  
group?

Ali :  Yes, yes, just I have a supervisor to (0.0) to supervise working in  
my Mphil.

Mary : emh, ah, ah, I've just finished my PHD.

Ali :  Yha, Great

Mary :  Yes, its wonderful to  
have finished,

Ali :  Yes,  
(0.10)

Mary : but I haven't had my VIVA yet

Ali :  When

Mary :  < In four weeks time.

Ali :  < In four weeks  
time

Ali : you have to do a VIVA

Mary :  Yes

Ali :  In which field your PhD

Mary : Its in (0.0) English Literature, in the English Studies Department,

Ali :  Yha

Mary : and, ahm, but the subject of it is a cross between Sociology and English.

Ali :  Yha

Mary : and it's quite interesting for me;

Ali :  Yha

Mary : and it its really about cultural snobbery in the 1920's and 1930's and why  
people looked down

Ali :  Yha

Mary :  on what other people well read it.

Ali :  Yha

(hhhhhhhhh)

Mary : I think so, yes, yes (0.0) but at the moment I'm trying to keep my ideas fresh because, with the VIVA coming, it would be easy just to look at my PHD and think, ah, you know, that's all passed

Ali : [ ] Yha

Mary : <so I'm trying to read some new stuff (0.0) to help

Ali : to help you in your PhD.

Mary : = yes, (0.0) so that I don't get bored and tired of it.

You know, So how many years will it take you to complete your Mphil?

Ali : just two years and after two years we upgrading to PHD

Mary : Oh great, yes,

Ali : < so all with PhD it takes three years

Mary : Yes, so a long haul.

Ali : [ ] I think so.

Mary and Ali : (hhhhhhhhh)

Mary : < I knew a man who taught botany at the University called Mr. Gupta, but I think he's stopped teaching now. His wife ran an Indian Restaurant called Nemals in West Street and Mr. Gupta was a lecturer in botany at the University.

Ali : ah, ah

Mary : Yes

(0.10)

Ali : <And you do some teaching behind your studying?

Mary : Yes, I teach two courses, one modern novel and one 1930's novel

Ali : [ ] ah, ah

so most of my subject is on the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Ali : < In English schools?

Mary : In the English Department next door, but in my life I have taught in schools and colleges and a little bit in the University

Ali : [ ] yha

Mary : so I think I have taught in every single kind of school except for 9 year old. I've never taught 9 year olds.

Ali : Yha,yah, (0.0) You have some international students with you?

Mary : ahm, Not many this year, Ali, actually because I've taught on this course here for the last 4 years but in previous years I've had more international students than this year and I don't know why. Are you an international student?

Ali : Yes,

Mary : [ ] Where is it .,

Ali : <I come from Libya.

Mary : Oh do you. Six years ago I used to teach English as a second language with Sheffield College

Ali : [ ] Yha

Mary : and sometimes we had Libyan students and I met one lady from Libya and I think she told me how to make cous-cous.

Ali : <Yes, its interesting food.

Mary : Really

Ali : <Yah, Yha

Mary : [ ] very complicated.

Ali and Mary : (hhhhhhhhhhhhhh)

Ali : It's very complicated to make cous-cous

Mary : [ ]yha

Ali : but in Libya its simple to make.

Mary : Really? But she said you had to dissolve all the grain and then dry it and then bake it.

Ali : <yha,yhayhsa

Mary : <It didn't sound simple, Ali, to me at all.

Ali : I think its not simple to you but I think in Libyan culture its simple to make a cous-cous and other food which is normally eaten in Libya.

Mary : Yes. (0.0) Is the dried cous-cous you can buy here (0.0)

Ali : [ ] Yes,yes

Mary : good?

Ali : Yes, yes, I can buy cous-cous in some shops here in Sheffield

Mary : [ ]yes,yes

Ali : and I can make cous-cous in my house, to eat with

Ali and Mary : (hhhhhhhhhhhh)

Ali : < some vegetable,

Marry : [ ] oh, yha

Ali : something like that, some meat.

Mary : I like it very much, I buy it from Tesco

Ali : [ ] from Tesco, yha

Mary : and, ahm, because it takes up the flavour

Ali : [ ] Yah, yha, yha

Mary : <of whatever you're cooking.

Ali : Yha, Yha

Mary : <Is your family with you.

Ali : <Yes

Mary : <Oh, that's nice.

Ali : And, sometimes, they have some cous-cous too.

Ali and Mary : (hhhhhhhhhhhhhh)

Marry : you all like it

Ali : Yah

Ali and Mary : (hhhhhhhhhhhhhh)

Mary : ( 0.15) What else do you eat in Libya that

Ali : <There is many famous foods in Libya, such as bazeen.

Mary : Bazeen

Ali : <Bazen yha

Mary : Right

Ali : Bazen is made from barley

Mary : [ ] Yes,

Ali : <and you mix it with water then put it into boiling water

Mary : [ ] Yes,

Ali : <and when it is ready, take it out and you can add some other liquid to it with vegetables and meat.

Mary : Oh

Ali : Yes, that is famous food  
 Mary : <Is it like a soup?  
 Ali : I don't know about soup.  
 Mary : <is it liquid or solid?  
 Ali : <Solid  
 Mary : . aha  
 Ali : <You know barley  
 Mary : Yes  
 Ali : You put the barley in water and leave it above the fire, leave it until  
 the water is boiling and then cook it  
 Mary : [ ]Yha  
 Ali : <for about half an hour until it is  
 ready to eat.  
 Mary : Right, (0.0) it sounds a little bit like English porridge.(0,0)  
 Ali : <oh yha  
 Mary : They eat it more in Scotland, which is oats  
 Ali : [ ] Oats, yah.  
 Mary : and you boil it and then its quite solid. and we have  
 it with sugar and milk.  
 Ali : <wiith sugar and milk,  
 Mary : [ ]Yah  
 Ali : [ ]really?  
 Mary : Yes, but this is .( ) your bazeen is savoury.  
 Ali : Yes, it is diffweerent,  
 Mary : but Cous-cous is made from a grain isn't it?  
 Ali : < Yah  
 Mary : [ ]Semolina is it?  
 Ali : Yes, I think it's from wheat,  
 Mary : <Yaha  
 Ali : but i think, it is a soft grain.  
 Mary : Yeh, yeh  
 Ali : You need the Cous-cous  
 Mary : So, why do you think people made cous-cous and didn't just eat the  
 semolina because it seems a lot of work to change the semolina to the cous  
 -cous.  
 Ali : [ ] to the Cous-cous yeh, I think they make cous-cous because its more  
 solid and the grain is bigger than the semolina.  
 Mary : ah ah  
 Ali : when you make Cous-cus you can have cous-cous is bigger than the  
 semolina.  
 Mary : I see,  
 Ali : so you have the quantity of the cous-cus It's a lot of quantity to eat.  
 Marry : I see, so it condenses, so I suppose if you were travelling and you had  
 cous-cous it would be like having a great big bag of semolina all squashed.  
 Ali and Mary : (hhhhhhhhhhhh)

Mary : I would love to go to Libya because I think there are a lot of Roman remains  
 there. Is it where Carthage is. I don't know what the Libyan name for it is,  
 the old big Roman city.

Ali : Is it Jermar?

Mary : < Maybe

Mary :This is the other part that includes the conversation one utterance by the other between the two interactants

Ali : I think so.

Mary : Where is your family from Ali? What part of Libya?

Ali : In the south of Libya which is called Sebha city. It is in the desert, so I have come from a hot place to England which is a cold place, so it's very different to enjoy the weather. I remember when I arrived here in Sheffield it was difficult to go out into the cold to walk and to travel.

Mary :Do you find it depressing, the weather here, does it make you feel low?

Ali : Sometimes

Mary :Yes, I can imagine. I think it does English people too.

Ali : I think English people are more used to living here in Sheffield or England and to travel and work and do everything.

Mary : I like the cold weather, I must admit, because I grew up in Pakistan and India. I lived there because my father wrote text books for those countries so we lived there and Burma. Pakistan was very, very hot, so I used to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and work from 5 o'clock until 10 o'clock.

Ali : Just until 10 o'clock?

Mary : Well, at my books, at my studies and then I would go out with my mother at 10 o'clock but when it got to 2 o'clock I hated it.

Ali :Also in Libya its very hot weather. During the afternoon its very, very hot. In the summer its 43 or 45 degrees.

Mary :So do you go to sleep in the afternoon?

Ali :Yes, normally, just to sleep with the air conditioning.

Mary :Oh, lovely.

Ali :Just to sleep and not do anything.

Mary :Good

(Laughter)

Mary :In Sebha do you have a monsoon, do you have one time in the year when there is some rain, or never?

Ali :Sometimes a little bit in the winter, but never in the Summer.

Mary :So where do you get your water from?

Ali :Just from deep in the earth.

Mary :Really, very deep wells.

Ali :Yes, very deep wells to take water from deep in the earth by pump. We use pumps and electricity to get water.

Mary :Is the water table staying quite high or does it get low because, in India, the water is going lower and lower.

Ali :Yes, it is in Libya. The water is going lower and lower because they use a lot of water in industry and agriculture.

Mary :In your work, your botany, does it relate to Libyan plants?

Ali :Yes, I'm going to study the physiology of boron in plants and to know the role of boron which is the chemical element in plants, how the boron affects the plant, so boron is the element the plant needs for nutrition.

Mary : So is it a lot of chemistry that you have to know as well as the botany.

Ali :Yes, a lot of chemistry and a lot of ? to use a microscope and sometimes I use the English technique and I use computers to count the cells and the ? inside the plants like the boron.

Mary :How interesting. So when you go back to Libya will you extend that research do you think?

Ali :I would doubt it but if I have some materials which I use in that research, I would continue. So my project is response of ? ? to elevated boron which is the title of my project.

Mary :And how do you spell boron?

Ali :B O R O N

Mary : Right, I've never heard of it. Do you have actual plants that you study or is it mostly computer modelling?

Ali :For the ? ? I use it as a model system in my research.

Mary : Right, is that a Libyan plant?

Ali :No, just from European countries but I have some plants from Libya in the same family as ? ? so as a model system I use it in my projects to study the plant and to have some results.

Mary :How interesting, so why have you chosen that plant and not another one?

Ali :Because that plant is good to grow in the lab and is suited to the conditions of the lab and I can have many seeds from that plant when I grow it in the lab. Many

, many seeds are produced from some numbers of plants.

Mary : I see, and it grows rapidly does it?

Ali : Yes, it takes from 5 to 8 weeks to complete the life cycle of the plant to produce the fruit and the seed, so I save time by using that plant for research.

Mary : That's interesting. You should use my plant at home. Somebody gave me an Amaryllis. Amaryllis is like a bulb this big and I just put it over water and within 4 weeks it has grown this high. It grows almost as you look at it, an extraordinary plant and it will grow into a huge lily like a trumpet, it's like a lily.

Ali : Is it a shady plant?

Mary : No, I think it likes the light, the outside light. It can't grow outside but I put it in my window so it gets a lot of sunlight.

Ali : You know, the light is very important to plants, to make photosynthesis which is very important for plants to make food.

Ali : So if only you had the water in Libya you would have a wonderful growth of flowers. Mary : Do you have many greenhouse cultivations in Sebha.

Ali : Yes, yes.

Mary : You do, vegetables growing?

Ali : Yes.

Mary : I like to travel very much. Have you been to England before?

Ali : No. I have been here now for 1 year and 3 months so I've not been back to my country in that time.

Mary : Really, you haven't been back?

Ali : So, if I have the chance, I would like to go back soon with my family so see some people there.

Mary : I'm sure. But to take the whole family back is very expensive back isn't it.

Ali : Yes, it's very expensive to have a plane ticket.

Mary : Your English is very good, did you learn it mostly here or did you come already having learnt it?

Ali : When I came from Libya I knew a little bit of English but I studied English language here at Sheffield University and I'm maybe a little bit English.

Mary : Oh yes, so you must feel that you are able to cope with all the reading you have to do for your botany.

Ali :Yes, I'm planning to have some reading on my topic and, as you know, a lot of information can be found from the Internet and from books but you need to have specific information about my topic but its very difficult to focus in to find information about my topic.

Mary : Learning to focus can take so much time can't it? I find that when I'm preparing my seminars, I can read forever, but in the end you have to say, whoops, do I need this?

Ali :So can you advise me how to focus on reading as you have experience in your PHD?

Mary :I suppose, what helps me Ali, is when I think, why am I reading this, what do I need this for. I am very easily distracted. If I read something I think that's interesting and that's interesting but I try to say to myself, why am I reading this, what will my students need to know or, if I'm writing my PHD, how does this connect with what I have already raised and that helps me but sometimes when you don't focus I find interesting things can come in so if you're too focused I suppose it can narrow you but, more usually, I need to ask myself questions.

Ali :Every time you ask yourself questions do you, to focus in and to narrow the topic?

Mary :Yes, that's right and talking to other people is, I think, a great help.

Ali :To talk to other people, to have someone ?

Mary Absolutely, have you got fellow students that you talk with about your topic?

Ali : Yes, sometimes. I go to some colleges and someone with me in the laboratory so sometimes I discuss things with him. There are different groups in the laboratory and different topics and sometimes you cannot find somebody who has the same topic as you so it is difficult to find people to discuss the topic with. I think it's a problem.

Mary : I'm sure because when you're doing an mphil or PHD you are narrowing the focus of your studies, so obviously there will not be so many people working in the same area. Do you find you have any other Arabic speaking students with you?

Ali : Yes, some students from Libya and sometimes they don't speak English so its difficult to learn some more English, speaking Arabic you know.

Mary : I found that when I was teaching my Arabic speaking students, now that there is satellite TV they just spend their time at home watching Arabic television, whereas 10 years ago they used to watch some English programmes and learn some English that way. Now they never listen.

Ali :I think it's difficult for International students to have a foreign language, if they are listening to English to practice and to have some information about the language and to solve some problems.

Mary : Certainly and I think if you go to an English class, sometimes you meet more people who speak your own language.

Ali : Yes, but the teacher in the classes says you must not speak Arabic or another language, just speak English so when I'm in class to learn English I speak only English, just to practice.

Mary : Does your wife speak some English?

Ali : A little bit but one thing that's interesting is my child who is a few years old and speaking very good English now.

Mary : Wonderful, Ali.

Ali Also, I have two daughters who are twins so they are also speaking English well.

Mary : That's wonderful and how old are your twins?

Ali : Four years old.

Mary : So your older daughter, the seven year old, where is she at school?

Ali : ? ? ? which is in ? Park.

Mary : And you have been to the school?

Ali : Yes.

Mary : Good.

Ali : Yes, its good to learn English and something about mathematics and science.

Mary : They're so lucky, when they're little they just learn the language.

Ali : Yes, it's very, very simple, there's no difficulty.

Mary : That's right and then when we are older we are working so hard. I tried to learn some Japanese last year because I visited my brother-in-law in Japan.

Ali : Does he study there, in Japan?

Mary : He works there and he speaks Japanese fluently but I found it the most hard language to learn ever. I didn't get very far, but my Arabic students gave me a book to try.

Ali : To try to learn the Arabic language, I think it's not difficult.

Mary : What is nice is that it's so logical, I could understand the system but when I tried to write it, it didn't look anything like it should so I thought no, I'm not going to be able to write it.

Ali : To learn the Arabic language the first time is a little bit difficult but you keep

trying to learn.

Mary :Yes, if I were teaching Arabic students again I would try again with some spoken Arabic but I don't think I'd try to write it, somehow. My father learnt Urdu and I think there are similarities between Urdu and Arabic. Is that right, or not?

Ali : Yes, I think so. I think writing Arabic is the same as writing Urdu, I think so.

Mary :And is the counting the same?

Ali :No, counting is different, I think.

Mary :My sister's son grew up in India and he grew up speaking English and a language called Telugu, which is spoken by about 50 million people I think but, of course, nobody outside of India. He has forgotten all his Telugu now but he remains a very good linguist. He learns languages very quickly and my sister thinks that maybe it is because he grew up learning two languages together. Your son and your daughters will be able to use English.

Ali :Yes, but I think the child learns English very quickly when the child is small . When they grow up, I think they have forgotten the English or another language.

Mary :In Libya, if you are studying at University, maybe he can use English.

Ali :Yes, now in Libya there is a system which uses the English language, to have some terms and some mathematics just in English.

Mary :But Arabic, of course, is spoken so widely isn't it. You can travel so much using Arabic. I was going to ask you is Libyan Arabic the same as Iraqi Arabic, Yemeni Arabic

Ali :Yes, all the same. You can understand when you travel to Egypt or Iraq or Saudi Arabia, any Arabic country. I can understand the language.

mary :Is there a variation of accents?

Ali : Yes, the accent is different in some countries. The Libyan accent

## Reviews

1. Gino Eelen, *A Critique of Politeness Theories*, reviewed by Abdurrahman Hamza
2. Ann Bayraktaroglu and Maria Sifianou, eds., *Linguistic Politeness across Boundaries: The Case of Greek and Turkish*, reviewed by Corinne Boz
3. Saeko Fukushima, *Requests and Culture: Politeness in British English and Japanese*, reviewed by Andrew Merrison
4. Helen Spencer-Oatey, ed., *Culturally Speaking: Managing Rapport through Talk across Cultures*, reviewed by Sara Mills

1. Gino Eelen, *A Critique of Politeness Theories*, Manchester: St. Jerome's Press, 2001, ISBN: 1-9006-5040-1, 280 pp., £17.99.

Reviewed by Abdurrahman Hamza

For about more than fifteen years, politeness has been one of the most important and productive areas of research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Its importance in cross-cultural communication is obvious, and comparative studies of the conceptualisation and manifestations of politeness in different cultures must therefore be regarded as vital in an era of growing internationalisation.

Gino Eelen, in his critique of politeness theories is very critical of the theoretical assumptions of the major politeness theorists, Brown and Levinson, and that of many other theorists influenced by their work, for example, Gu, Lakoff, Leech, Blum Kulka, Fraser and Nolen, Ide, and Arndt and Janney. He is critical of them on a number of counts: because of their reliance on Speech Act theory, they all focus too closely on the speaker, at the expense of the hearer; they also assume that all politeness is strategic. For him, these theorists reify politeness, characterising it as something which hearer and speaker can unproblematically recognise. He discusses two perspectives on politeness which he argues most theorists of politeness confuse: *politeness1* (the common-sense notion of politeness) and *politeness2* (the scientific conceptualisation of politeness). He argues for the importance of the distinction between the two perspectives on politeness in research: 'politeness 2 concepts should not just be different from politeness 1 concepts, or given different names, but rather the relationship between both notions should be carefully monitored throughout the entire analytical process-not only at the input stage.' (Eelen 2001:31). He discusses politeness1 and classifies it to include two aspects: the action-related side which refers to the way politeness actually manifests itself in communicative behaviour; and the conceptual side which refers to common-sense ideologies of politeness. He extends the discussion to involve, as characteristics of politeness1 a) evaluativity, where he argues that politeness and impoliteness are connected to

social values and always evaluative in nature; b) argumentativity, where it is always associated with situations where there is something to lose or gain; c) 'polite'-ness, where each individual considers themselves and their cultural group as polite, where only others are impolite; d)- normativity, where politeness is the result of the pressure of social norms; and e) modality and reflexivity, which refers to optionality of polite interactional strategies for the actor. For him, politeness2 is the scientific conceptualisation of the social phenomena of politeness; in that sense it is the theory of politeness1. Politeness2, he argues, describes how politeness1 works, and also what it does for people. He argues unlike politeness1 which is restricted to the polite end of the polite-impolite continuum, politeness2 should cover the whole range of the continuum. Eelen claims that the core politeness theories fail to distinguish between what he calls politeness one and politeness two because of the normative nature of most of the theories. He argues that impoliteness becomes not only a matter of speakers' producing behaviour, but also of hearers' evaluating that behaviour. He argues that the norms that govern appropriateness are social norms. They are not individual norms held only by the hearer, but rather pertain to situations and cultures, and norms are not individual but shared by all.

In sum, for Eelen, his critique of the theoretical frameworks are: (1) that they involve a conceptual bias towards the polite end of the polite-impolite distinction; (2) that they conceptualise politeness and impoliteness as opposites; and (3) that their conceptualisations of politeness are biased towards the production of behaviour, or towards the speaker in the interactional dyad.

Eelen's critique is based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu which involves a different way of looking at politeness. On the basis of Bourdieu's sociological thinking, Eelen suggests a possible alternative conceptualization of politeness. Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' is used as a guide in the development of such a theoretical framework where the social-cultural is the result of human interaction rather than the opposite.. Depending on Bourdieu, Eelen considers the issue of culture as the core issue in the field of politeness. Eelen asks the question 'how do these theories handle the normativity of commonsense politeness and the situation of culture?' He argues that politeness is subject to cultural expectations arising from cultural norms.

Eelen considers the notion of politeness differs from culture to culture and that cultural norms reflected in speech acts differ not only from one language to another, but also from one regional and social variety to another. Probably this is why he chooses to base his critique on a sociological theory, even though culture is not explicitly theoretically defined in terms of its particular social characteristics. (Eelen 2001:164) He claims that his approach inspired by Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', takes full account of the hearer's position and the evaluative moment; deals with both politeness and impoliteness; and provides a more dynamic, bi-directional view of the social-individual relationship. He believes that the driving force behind the system of politeness is the socioculturally shared norms. He considers that norms belong to the level of culture and part of the sociolinguistic system of which politeness is subsystem: 'communicative success depends on the right amount and kind of politeness applied at the right time to the right speech act, as determined by social norms that stipulate what is appropriate for a specific interactional situation" (Eelen, 2001:128)

Eelen considers the aspects politeness and impoliteness on the same level, and claims that they are captured by the same concept: the empowerment of the hearer and of individual in general in spite of the belief that only polite behaviour can ever be culturally appropriate, while impoliteness is somehow non-cultural in nature.

'The most important characteristics of the notion of 'culture' as employed in theories of politeness are its vagueness and its transformation from an observational into an explanatory notion". (Eelen 2001:169)

However, although this book is an excellent and provocative critique of politeness theory, it does not offer us a workable model of analysis. There are still some issues insufficiently investigated, in spite of his criticism of previous theories for failing to provide adequate explanation for them, for example, he does not give a clear definition of politeness on which we could base future analysis. He also claims that the core theories of the book fail to make a clear distinction between what he calls politeness one and politeness two, but his model is not clearly identifying its principles and leaves many elements vague and ill-defined, for example the definition of the terms 'norm' and 'culture'. However, this book provides a thorough critique of the main theories of politeness and their major findings. Whilst not providing a clear theoretical framework for the analysis of politeness, he does provide suggestions for further discussion and research in the field. This book then will prove to be of value to social scientists and linguists and for those interested in understanding the relationship between language culture and society.

# **Religion and Politeness in Arabic and cross-cultural interaction**

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Religion is an important factor that influences almost every type of interaction in Arabic-speaking cultures, whether male/male, female/female, male/female or any other type of interaction. Religious expressions are mentioned whenever people meet in almost any interactional context to ensure the speaker appears appropriate and polite. In every context of interaction there are religious expressions used before, after or in between the utterance used. For example, certain religious expressions may be used in a conversation when people meet for the first time, when people invite each other, enter houses or places of work, agree/disagree, accept an invitation, blame, promise, greet, etc. to signal appropriateness.

All interactants are expected to use an appropriate religious expression that defines the context of interaction, and ensures that an acceptable level of politeness is maintained. In meeting, for example, interactants usually use religious expressions along with the number of formal and informal greetings to express welcome and concern for their interactants and their family's health including children and wife. If, in such contexts, these religious expressions are not used by one interactant to the other (where they should be used) then this may cause one of the interactants to assume the other is being impolite.

The aim of this poster is to investigate the role that religious expressions play in creating harmony and conveying politeness in Arabic between interactants, and how they are perceived by non-Arabs in cross-cultural interaction. It discusses whether the use of such expressions causes any misunderstanding between interactants in intercultural interaction and whether politeness is conveyed in the same level to non-Arabs. Politeness is differently expressed and interpreted across cultures, especially in cultures such as Arabic where religion plays an important role in interaction, and most of the time provides interactants with the expressions that they need to appear polite in different contexts.