

# SOME ASPECTS OF VERBAL POLITENESS IN MAGHREBI ARABIC DIALECTS

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**ABSTRACT** • The study of verbal politeness has aroused, since the publication of Brown and Levinson's seminal work *Politeness, Some universals in language usage* (1978), a renewed interest from scholars and researchers. The concepts of *face-wants* and *Face-Threatening Acts* (FTAs), in particular, have been extensively employed to organise the great bulk of data obtained through field research. Despite the high number of contributions published over the past decades, however, few studies have so far tackled the description of the code of politeness of Maghrebi Arabic-speaking societies. This code is mostly founded upon positive-politeness strategies, i.e. strategies aiming to make the addressee know that his wants are shared and that he is a valuable and appreciated member of the community. This marked preference for positive politeness, despite some remarkable exceptions, results in a considerable refinement of the correlated strategies. In several occasions, moreover, phenomena of verbal politeness occur in predictable and standardised ways even when no FTA has to be redressed, calling for further research and, possibly, for partial adjustments of the general theory of verbal politeness.

**KEYWORDS** • verbal politeness, Maghrebi Arabic dialects, sociolinguistics.

## 1. Politeness as a language universal

The study of verbal politeness has received, over the past few decades, considerable attention from sociolinguists. While the deep structures governing the phenomenon as a whole have been the object of new and accurate analyses, field researchers have been employing the methodological tools provided to describe the outer manifestations of such inner structures in different languages and cultures. The starting point of the renewed interest in verbal politeness can be traced back to the publication of Brown and Levinson's seminal work *Politeness, Some universals in language usage*, in 1978. In their paper, updated several times during the following years, the two scholars attempted to outline a universal theory that was able to account for the entire range of the phenomena generally labelled as verbal politeness. Given the evident universality of the phenomenon, which seems to occur in all known languages, Brown and Levinson brilliantly hypothesised that its causes might have to be looked for on a pre-linguistic, anthropological level. As a consequence, they resorted to Erving Goffman's concept of *face* and *face-wants*. The anthropologist assumed that all human beings possess a face, which can be considered as a reflex of their social personae. The face, in turn, features two contrasting sets of wants, respectively designed as positive and negative face-wants. Positive face-wants stem from the basic human need to be accepted and approved of by the members of the group, while negative ones stem from the likewise universal need to be unimpeded in one's freedom of action. Human beings are engaged in social exchanges and interaction throughout their lives, and their social persona is always the first thing that is exchanged. Speakers (Ss) always try to

preserve their face at all costs, but the goal-oriented nature of most human exchanges constantly threatens it. Such threats are inseparable parts of everyday verbal interaction, as evidenced by the list of face-threatening acts (FTAs) provided by Brown and Levinson (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65 – 68). Among the most common ones, requests and orders threaten the hearer's (H) negative face, inasmuch as they explicitly attempt to influence his future freedom of action, making him perform an action that he hadn't been planning. Criticisms and expressions of disapproval, on the contrary, threaten H's positive face, since they inevitably question the positive image that he has of himself. Even apparently innocuous speech acts, like thanks and compliments, hide potential threats. When thanking, in fact, the speaker explicitly incurs a debt that will have to be repaid, thus setting a limit to his own future freedom of action and consequently damaging his negative face. Addressing compliments, on the other hand, forces the hearer to return it or to denigrate the object of S's prior compliment, damaging in both cases his face-wants.

As evident from the examples reported above, a complete avoidance of these speech acts would result in a complete paralysis of everyday verbal interaction. On the other hand, a bald on-record performance of the above mentioned FTAs would endanger not only the realisation of S's goals, but also his relationship with the collocutor. Verbal politeness, in this case, provides suitable strategies that enable the speaker to pursue his goals without jeopardising the ongoing verbal interaction. The FTA, in brief, is still performed, but redressed through an appropriate action aiming to *give face* to the addressee, i.e. informing him of the fact the no real harm was intended or that, at least, his interlocutor is sorry for bothering him or causing him distress. An exhaustive description of the most common redress strategies is also provided by Brown and Levinson (Brown and Levinson 1987: 102 – 131). As a general rule, they can be redressive of either the positive or the negative face-wants of the addressees. Actions addressing H's positive face can be narrowed down to three main strategies:

- 1) Claim common ground;
- 2) Convey that S and H are co-operators;
- 3) Fulfil H's want (for some X).

Negative-politeness based strategies, on the other hand, include:

- 1) Be direct;
- 2) Don't presume/assume
- 3) Don't coerce H
- 4) Communicate S's want not to impinge on H
- 5) Redress other wants of H's, derivative from negative face

## 2. Verbal politeness in Arabic dialects: state of the art

The detailed survey provided by the two scholars represented, since it first appeared, a valuable tool in the hands of field researchers, inasmuch as it allowed them to interpret and organise the data collected in different languages. Although alternative models have been sketched in the subsequent years, none of them seems to be able to account for the phenomenon as a whole, in all its faceted aspects (Ogiermann 2009: 12 – 17).

Studies concerning verbal politeness in Arabic dialects have mainly focused on Mashreqi varieties, while few contributions have so far addressed the subject with regard to Maghrebi ones. This paper, thus, will highlight some of the main features of the code of politeness of

Maghrebi Arabic-speaking societies, with the support of a wide exemplification. The corpora upon which the research has been conducted include written sources, mainly consisting of grammar of Arabic dialects and collections of ethnotexts, integrated by field research and the analysis of a corpus of 600 telephone conversations between native speakers.

### 3. General features of verbal politeness phenomena in Maghrebi Arabic dialects

Maghrebi societies feature a rich and refined code of politeness, which has always been a source of fascination for scholars and travellers. Its first and most evident peculiarity consists in its marked preference for the preservation of positive face-wants over negative ones, and a consequent massive employment of positive redress. Writing about verbal politeness, Brown and Levinson correctly pointed out that “When we think of politeness in Western cultures, it is negative-politeness behaviour that springs to mind. In our culture, negative politeness is the most elaborate and the most conventionalised set of strategies for FTA redress; it is the stuff that fills the etiquette books” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129 – 130). This means that speakers of European languages will first strive to avoid impeding their collocutors freedom of action, leaving in-group solidarity in the background and resorting to redress strategies linked, according to the two scholars, to Durkheim’s ritual of avoidance. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129). The opposite is true with reference to Maghrebi societies, probably due to their more collectivist nature, which attributes greater importance to group membership and solidarity. Speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects, as a consequence, will be much less concerned to preserve their collocutor’s freedom of action than to make them feel appreciated and valuable members of the community they belong to.

Another consequence of such a preference is represented by a higher degree of tolerance for positive-politeness redress. Generally speaking, in facts, negative-politeness strategies are safer choices than positive ones when a FTA has to be redressed. The latter have to count necessarily upon the collocutor cooperativeness, upon his will to receive in-group solidarity and to know that his wants are shared, which is not always the case. Negative politeness, on the contrary, is founded upon the universal will not to be impeded in one’s freedom of action, which can always be presumed. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 73). This statement is obviously true also with reference to Arabic-speaking societies, but the analysis of the data collected evidences that speakers of Maghrebi dialects usually resort to positive redress in a high number of situations that more or less strictly require negative-politeness strategies in most Western countries.

Requests represent a typical example of such a difference. When requesting, as already said, speakers are openly trying to modify their collocutor’s behaviour, which is usually perceived as rather imposing in Western societies. As a consequence, common redress strategies generally address H’s negative face-wants and include, amongst the other strategies, apologies for the annoyance, explanations and expressions of deference, as evident from the following examples:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Could you please help me with this bag? It’s too heavy for me to carry.
- 2) Would you mind making some coffee?
- 3) Do you think you could do me a favour?

<sup>1</sup> This trend is, obviously, subject to several exceptions, especially in peer relations or when young and intimate speakers are involved.

FTAs are generally performed in multiple micro-sequences, in order to avoid H's sharp impact with the imposing part of the speech act (the propositional content of the utterance), divert his attention and provide, at the same time, a sufficient amount of face redress. In 1., the three micro-sequences can be analysed as follows:

[shift H's attention from willingness to possibility (provide a way out)] + [REQUEST] + [explanation (provide a suitable reason for performing the FTA)]

The FTA is thus encapsulated within two redressive actions, both addressing H's negative face-wants. Through the first one, S shifts the focus from H's willingness to his possibility to comply with the request, leaving a safe way out to his collocutor in case of refusal. Through the second, on the other hand, he provides a suitable explanation for performing the request, making sure it's not perceived as bully on unmotivated. Similar strategies are employed in the second and third sample. In 2., S avoid presuming H's compliance with his request, while in 3., the shift from willingness to possibility is enhanced by the initial question.

When similar requests are performed by speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects, a complete change in the redress strategies employed is immediately noticeable:

- (1) *allāh ixellīk, hezz mʕaya hād əs-sāk!* (Ben Alaya 2000: 96) (Mor.)  
 [(May) God keep you (alive), bring with me this bag!]  
 "Could you please help me with this bag?"
- (2) *yā wuddi dīr li maʕrūf allāh ixallīk!* (Lib.)  
 [Oh my dear, do me a favour, (may) God keep you (alive)!]  
 "Could you do me a favour?"
- (3) *hayya ndīru gahwa!* (Lib.)  
 [Let us make a coffee!]  
 "Let's make some coffee!"

(1) is a typical example of requests among peers, which do not usually require more than two sequences to be safely performed. In this case, S redresses his request giving a symbolic gift to his collocutor, here in the form of a blessing, and thus "paying" his debt in advance. In other words, knowing that the balance of the ongoing exchange has to be inevitably altered in order for him to reach his goal, S deliberately choose to alter it in the first place. The addressee receives a symbolic gift and consequently incurs a debt, although unwanted, thus feeling compelled to comply with S's request. In that respect, the redress strategies employed for requests closely resemble or are identical to thanks. It's worth mentioning, moreover, that the propositional content of the utterance, i.e. the request itself, is performed in a straightforward imperative tense, which is not perceived, at this point, as impolite.

The second sample employs the same strategy, integrating it with an additional micro-sequence, positioned at the beginning of the utterance. The speaker, in this case, addresses his collocutor with the endearing form *yā wuddi* 'My dear', creating a relaxed atmosphere that makes the subsequent FTA even less disturbing by means of the extension of the sphere of intimacy.

The third sample was collected within an office. S was the boss, asking one of his subordinate to prepare some coffee. The hierarchy on the power axis didn't call for a redressive action, which is nonetheless performed. There is, however, a significant shift in the choice of the strategy, which doesn't involve anymore a superfluous gift (given the hierarchical relationship between the two speakers). The FTA is here redressed conveying that S and H are

co-operators through the employment of a 1<sup>st</sup> person plural verb. S, in other words, pretends he is taking part in the action that he is asking H to perform, thus making his order less imposing.

It is possible to add, in conclusion, that all the redressive strategies employed to mitigate simple requests in not too formal situations address H's positive face-wants. None of the requests, moreover, was formally uttered as a question, since all of them included other forms of redress deemed sufficient in Maghrebi Arabic-speaking societies.

It is not surprising that the high frequency of employment of positive-politeness redress results in a considerably refined enhancement of such strategies, which is particularly evident in the so-called situation-bound expressions. The few samples reported above showed that the collocutor's positive face is often redressed by means of a symbolic gift, usually offered in the form of a blessing. The blessing reported above (*allāh ixallīk*) can be employed by all speakers in any kind of situation, regardless of the sex, age or perceived condition of the collocutor. The following samples, which report some samples of in-context employment of the [give symbolic gift] strategy, feature a customer addressing his request to a receptionist in a hotel (4), a man addressing one of his friends (5) and a request for information addressed to a stranger in the street (6):

- (4) *šūfi lī n-nomro bārak allāhu fik, rāni nāsīh!* (Dziri 1970: 45) (Alg.)  
[See for me the number, God bless you, I'm forgetting it!]  
Could you please check the number for me? I've forgotten it!
- (5) *ya ʕali, irḥam wāldīk, ruḥ žib li warqa mən əl-mektəb bāš nrūḥ ʕand ət-ṭbēb, rāni mrēd!*  
(Tapiero 1978: 66) (Alg.)  
[Oh ʕAli, (may God) have mercy on your parents, go and bring me a paper from the office to go to the doctor, I'm sick!]  
“ʕAli, could you please bring me a document from the office so that I can go to the doctor? I feel awful!”
- (6) *allāh ibārk fik, əl-m<sup>a</sup>ḥaṭṭa d-əl-kirānə mən hna?* (Ben Alaya 2000: 96) (Mor.)  
[(May) God bless you, is the bus station from here?]  
“Excuse me, is this the road to get to the bus station?”

The following list reports the blessings most commonly resorted to as symbolic gifts by speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects:

- (7) *allāh yerḥəm būk / bbāk / bbwāk!* (Gen.)  
“(May) God have mercy on your father!”
- (8) *allāh irəḥmək / irəḥmək allāh!* (Gen.)  
“(May) God have mercy on you!”
- (9) *iʕāyšək!* (Tun.)  
“(May) God keep you alive!”
- (10) *llāh yəʕṭək əs-stər!* (Caubet 1993: 246) (Mor.)  
“(May) God give you the protection!”
- (11) *llāh yəstər ʕlīk!* (Caubet 1993: 246) (Mor.)  
“(May) God protect you!”
- (12) *llāh itūb ʕlīk!* (Caubet 1993: 247) (Mor.)  
“(May) God give you the chance to repent (of your sins)!”

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- (13) *ʕafāk!* (Mor.)  
“(God) forgave you!”
- (14) *iḥammar wažhak!* (Alg.)  
“(May God) let your face be red!”<sup>2</sup>
- (15) *isažžik!* (Dekkak 1979: 222) (Alg.)  
“(May God) make you succeed!”
- (16) *allāh yaʕtek al-ḥužža!* (Dekkak 1979: 222) (Alg.)  
“(May) God give you (the chance to perform) the Pilgrimage!”

As said above, the forms reported in the previous list can be addressed in any situation to all kinds of speakers. Maghrebi Arabic dialects, on the other hand, also feature some blessings whose employment is conditioned either by the perceived status of the addressee or by the situation in which the verbal exchange takes place. In such redress strategies, in other words, the symbolic gift offered to the collocutor is specifically tailored upon his status or the nature of the ongoing exchange. The phenomenon is particularly widespread and it is possible to find countless examples in polite requests, thanks, greetings and even condolences. If the blessing is tailored upon the perceived status of the addressee, the speaker usually tries to identify his most evident wish or desire and shapes it into a blessing. The *allāh ixallik* form discussed above, for example, is systematically changed into *allāh ixallih lak!* ‘(May) God keep him (alive) for you!’ if the addressee is accompanied by his little child, since S presumes that the child’s life is dearer to his collocutor than his own one. Similar strategies can be found in all known languages. The relevant difference is that, in Arabic dialects, the great majority of these situation-bound forms is standardised and available to all mature native speakers as a part of their competence. In most cases, moreover, mature native speakers are *expected* to perform these polite verbal acts, which are no longer spontaneous. The following samples include some of the most common situation-bound expressions employed to thank the addressee:

- (17) *inšallāh f-əṭ-ṭuhūr!* (Gen.) – To a young child  
[If God wants on your circumcision!]
- (18) *inšallāh f-əl-ʕers!* (Gen.) – To an adolescent  
[If God wants on your wedding!]
- (19) *allāh iqawwi saʕdāk!* (Dornier 1952: 32) (Tun.) – To a girl who is going to get married  
[(May) God strengthen your happiness!]
- (20) *inšallāh f-əl-ʕlāʕ!* (Dornier 1952: 33) (Tun.) – To a pregnant woman  
[If God wants on the day you give birth!]

In all the previous samples, the speaker expresses the wish to be present on the mentioned days and thus, indirectly, wishes his addressee that they may eventually come. Other situation-bound expressions, as mentioned above, are not linked to the perceived status of the addressee, but to the nature of the verbal exchange during which the speech act is performed. This strategy

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<sup>2</sup> A florid and rubicund face is considered as a sign of good health.

is particularly employed in thanks, since it allows the speaker to shape an expression that specifically targets the kind of service or favour he has just received, e.g.

- (21) *sallām īdēk!* (Gen.) – After being served food  
[(May God) save your hands!]
- (22) *māyda f-əl-žanna!* (Gen.) – After being served food  
[(May you have) a table in paradise!]
- (23) *inšallāh təšrobha f-əl-ženna!* (Gen.) – After being offered coffee  
[If God wants (may) you drink it in Paradise!]
- (24) *ikattarhum ašlik!* (Dziri 1970: 73) (Gen.) – Salesman, after being paid  
[(May God) multiply them for you! (i.e. the money you have just spent)]

As evident from the above samples, situation-bound expressions are quite widespread and cover a great number of possible everyday situations. Even though the scope of the phenomenon goes beyond the scope of this paper, it should also be noted that the same strategy is commonly employed during manifestations of verbal impoliteness to convey anger, annoyance or frustration (Dekkak 1979: 196).

#### 4. Occurrences of negative-politeness strategies

Even though there is strong evidence of the marked preference given to positive face redress by speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects, it should always be remembered that the choice of the most suitable strategy is always determined by the perceived weightiness (the “rank of imposition”) of the FTA. This means that in Arabic-speaking societies the requests involved in the samples reported above are not felt as particularly imposing, consequently allowing the speaker to employ a friendly positive redress. The situation, however, is susceptible to change in relation to several factors, for example if:

- 1) The request is perceived as particularly imposing;
- 2) There is a great imbalance of power between the collocutors, with S holding the lower ground;
- 3) S wants to be sure of H’s compliance with his request;
- 4) The request, though not particularly imposing, displays other disturbing aspects such as, for instance, violating the socially agreed upon code of behaviour.

In all these cases, S will resort, to some extent, to negative face redress or will, at least, blend it with positive one. The reason behind this change, as previously mentioned, is that positive-politeness strategies have to rely upon the collocutor’s willingness to be the object of in-group solidarity and to know that his wants are shared by S, which cannot be taken for granted and may even be perceived as socially unseemly, for example if the request is addressed to an unknown woman.

The first three situations receive a similar treatment in Arabic-speaking societies. The first possible action consists in adding an expression that gives deference to H within the already observed strategy, such as in the following example:

- (25) *yerḥam būk yā sīdi, doxxolni šand sīd əl-žūž!* (Ph. Marçais 1954: 71) (Alg.)

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[(May God) have mercy on your father oh my master, let me enter (the room of) the master judge!]  
 “Please sir, let me see the judge!”

In this case, given that the imbalance of power is not extreme (S is addressing his request to the judge’s doorman), the [give symbolic gift] strategy can be maintained, with the addition of a deferential term of address. When the imbalance of power is greater, the request is felt as particularly imposing or S wants to be sure of H’s compliance, on the other hand, the strategy may change. Speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects, in such cases, resort to peculiar strategies of impersonalisation, performing their request on someone else’s behalf. Request, thus can be performed referring to the addressee’s parents and children and even to his own life, such as in the following examples:

- (26) *b-rās ummāk aḥḥīni xamsa yūru!* (Tun.)  
 [For your mother’s head, give me five euro!]  
 “Could you please give me five euro?”<sup>3</sup>
- (27) *āna mzāug lək f-l-ūlīdāt!* (Mor.)  
 [I beg you for your little children!]  
 “I beg you for your children!”
- (28) *b-rāsək (enta) žīb li bāk sġāyər!* (Lib.)  
 [For your head bring me a pack of cigarettes!]  
 “Could you please bring me a pack of cigarettes?”

Another common option consists in resorting to items pertaining to Islamic religion, such as God, the Prophet, several local saints or allegedly sacred items (especially in female speech). Requests performed using this strategy have a particularly binding character and can be refused only with great difficulty and a high degree of face loss, e.g.

- (29) *bi-llāhi warrīni wuldi!* (Trombetti 1912: 109) (Lib.)  
 [By God show me my son!]  
 “Show me my son, for God’s sake!”
- (30) *neṭlāb mn-allah u mennək!* (Harrell 1962: 237) (Mor.)  
 [I ask from God and from you!]  
 “For God’s sake!”
- (31) *ħorṃət sīdī...* (Colin 1994: 311) (Mor.)  
 [For the protection of Sīdī...]  
 “I beg you for...”
- (32) *žabt lək šabbek ən-nbi!* (Dekkak 1979: 223) (Alg.)  
 [I brought it (i.e. the request) for the window (of the grave) of the Prophet!]  
 “For the Prophet’s sake!”

The fourth situation, finally, is treated in quite a different way. When a mature competent speaker has to address a request to an unknown woman, for example, he is perfectly aware that

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<sup>3</sup> In this case, even though the request in itself is not particularly imposing, the speaker (a young Tunisian temporarily living in a shelter for immigrants), wants to be sure of his addressee’s compliance.



his behaviour is potentially disturbing, so that he has to conceive a thoughtful blend of negative redressive actions, as evidenced by the following examples:

- (33) *smeḥ li ā lalla, fīn kayn šī oṭīl hna?* (Ben Alaya 2000: 113) (Mor.)  
 [Forgive me oh Madam, where is a hotel here?]  
 “Excuse me madam, where can I find a hotel here?”
- (34) *smeḥ li ma ddirhaš mānni qallt aš-šwab, baraka-llahu fik a lalla!* (Mercier 1957: 17) (Mor.)  
 [Forgive me, don’t take it from me as a lack of judgment, God blessed you oh Madam!]  
 “Excuse me Madam!”

The choice of the redress strategy is here perfectly coherent with the ongoing verbal exchange. The speaker, perceiving that his behaviour might be considered as unseemly, apologises and even makes explicit (in 2.) the potential threat hidden in his speech act, mitigating and then redressing it with a symbolic gift (the blessing).<sup>4</sup>

### 5. Beyond Brown and Levinson’s universal theory?

The analysis of the code of politeness of Arabic-speaking societies also poses some questions concerning Brown and Levinson’s theory. As stated above, the two scholars mainly focused their description of redressive actions on negative-politeness strategy. For Western societies, in fact, negative politeness is really “the stuff that fills etiquette books”, especially when speakers have to redress a FTA. Positive politeness holds a marginal place in their description of face redress, and is generally described as an extension of the sphere of intimacy and of the normal verbal behaviour between intimates. From this point of view, only an element of exaggeration allows us to distinguish positive politeness from a relaxed, friendly verbal behaviour. (Brown and Levinson 1987: 101). The other key difference between negative and positive politeness, moreover, consists in the fact that, while negative-politeness actions always redress a FTA, positive ones can also be employed spontaneously, as social accelerators, to create and maintain comity between speakers.

This analysis represents an accurate description of how verbal politeness operates in Western societies, but it suits only partially the reality of Arabic-speaking ones. As far as face-redress is concerned, in fact, Arabic speakers tend to employ and to tolerate positive face-redress to a greater extent, opting for positive strategies in a high number of situations that would strictly require negative ones in Western societies. Negative redress, in certain cases, is even stigmatised as overly formal. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear the following exchange between Libyan speakers:

- (35) – *yā sīdi!* (Lib.)  
 “My master!”
- *sīdak rabbi!*  
 “Your master is God!”

In this case, H explicitly rejects the term of deference addressed to him by his collocutor, expressing an idiosyncrasy for excessive formalism which is typical of those societies still

<sup>4</sup> The exclusive employment of the [give symbolic gift] strategy, on the other hand, would have been considered overly too familiar and thus threatening in itself.

retaining a strong link with their Bedouin socio-cultural heritage. The situation in great urban realities (such as Rabat or Casablanca), on the other hand, is certainly different.

The most evident difference between the situation described by Brown and Levinson and the reality of actual language usage in Arabic-speaking Maghrebi societies, however, concerns the circumstances and modalities in which positive politeness legitimately operates. Apart from being the preferred option whenever a FTA has to be redressed, in facts, positive politeness is exchanged in a high number of other situations that don't seem to fit comfortably into Brown and Levinson's description. Speakers of Maghrebi dialects tend to exchange positive politeness outside the FTA / redress dyad quite frequently and in predictable ways, whereas the same situations, in most Western societies, do not display a standardised manifestation of verbal politeness. In some cases, for instance, a potentially disagreeable situation is neutralised by means of an adequate redressive action. Such is the case with the formulae exchanged between salesmen and customers just after a purchase and already mentioned in this paper while describing situation-bound thanks. The loss of a determined amount of money represents, for the customer, the disturbing part of the ongoing transaction, while the acquisition of goods can be considered as its positive counterpart. The salesman, thus, often addresses both the aspects of the transaction, magnifying the positive and minimising the negative ones in order to neutralise any possible tension even though, as already said, no FTA can be envisaged. The following samples belong to the first strategy:

- (36) *tbayyad b-əl-hnē!* (Lib.) – After buying a new dress  
[May you wear it in happiness!]
- (37) *tāklū b-əl-hnē u š-šfē!* (Lib.) – After buying food  
[May you eat it in happiness and health!]
- (38) *ma iqattāš h<sup>a</sup>bīb!* (Lib.) – After buying knives or sharp objects  
[May it not cut a dear one!]

The neutralisation of the disagreeable part of the transaction, i.e. the expense, also takes the form of a well-wish, through which the salesman expresses the hope that the sum of money just spent may be increased or multiplied by God, reversing the external reality and triggering a further response from the customer:

- (39) – *ikattərhum ašlīk!* (Dziri 1970: 73) (Alg.)  
[(May God) multiply it on you!]  
“Thank you for your purchase!”
- *b-əl-ḥlāl! əbqa šla xīr!*  
[In lawful (ways)! Stay in the well being!]  
“You're welcome! Good bye!”

Similar expressions, not by chance, are employed by guests to express their gratitude when leaving their host's house.<sup>5</sup>

The customer, however, may also take the initiative, especially if he is satisfied with the transaction. In such cases, standardised expressions usually wish the salesman success in his affairs:

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *allāh yexlef ša-n-nefāq b-əl-xīr!* “May God repay you for the hospitality! (lit. ‘for the expense’)” (Dornier 1952: 33).

- (40) *allā iṣammārha b-əṣ-ṣeṣa!* (Lib.)  
 [(May) God fill it (i.e. the shop) with stuff!]  
 “Good luck with your business!”
- (41) *allāh iṣammār ṣalēk!* (Lib.)  
 [(May) God fill for you!]  
 “Good luck with your business!”

The situation described above doesn't feature any FTA and does not strictly require, as a consequence, any redressive action. In most Western societies, thus, no manifestation of verbal politeness is usually involved. When that happens, usually, the expressions are left to the spontaneous inventiveness of the speakers. In Maghrebi Arabic dialects, on the contrary, the above mentioned expressions are part of the competence of any mature speaker and their employment is usually expected of them. Such an elaborate speech act cannot be exactly defined as face redress, but as a sort of a preventive action meant to neutralise the potential tension hidden in the ongoing exchange.

In some cases, moreover, similar strategies are put in action in perfectly neutral situations, when no potential danger can be envisaged. When a speaker meets a collocutor who is accompanied by his little child, for example, it is customary to add a polite *rabbi iṣūnah!* “(May) God protect him!” (Lib.) to the usual formulae traditionally exchanged. In other situations, the speaker tries at all costs to show to his collocutor that his wants are shared. If, for instance, a speaker mentions a rough period, his collocutor will immediately hasten to address him a suitable well-wishing expression, such as *allāh iferrāž!* “(May) God deliver!” or *allāh iṣāwb!* “(May) God set it all right!” (Mercier 1957: 92). If, on the other hand, the speaker expresses a wish, his collocutor will immediately add *iżīb allāh* “(May) God bring (it)!” (Gen.) or *mən fummək l-allāh!* “From your mouth to God!” (Mor.) (Mercier 1957: 73).<sup>6</sup>

All the previously mentioned manifestations of positive politeness occur in a complete absence of FTAs. In each case, S informs H that his wants are shared without being compelled to do so by the presence of a potentially threatening situation. All cultures contemplate the possibility of a spontaneous, overly polite behaviour, but in Maghrebi dialects all the expressions reported are encoded in the system of politeness and part of the socially agreed upon and expected verbal behaviour. As already mentioned, the strong preference given to positive politeness in Arab societies has been linked to their collectivist nature, in which the necessities of the group precede those of its members and group membership itself is a value to cherish. In such a situation, thus, verbal politeness, especially positive one, can be considered as one of the endless ways in which social bonds are generated, maintained and strengthened. Its employment outside the FTA / redress frame, thus, serves to create a relaxed atmosphere for the upcoming interaction and to re-establish it continuously during the verbal exchange. Since an effective interaction can exist only when the bonds of in-group solidarity are active and clearly stated, in fact, such bonds have to be re-established over and over again. Verbal politeness, from this perspective, is one of the several ways through which this task is accomplished, and it consequently has an independent existence alongside its usual employment in redressive actions. For this reason, moreover, several manifestations that are left to the speaker's spontaneous inventiveness in other languages are here encoded in a rich system that enables mature native speakers to deal with a countless number of everyday situations.

<sup>6</sup> The form *iżīb allāh*, however, can also be employed to prevent the addressee from addressing a request to his collocutor.

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## 6. Conclusions

This paper has analysed the most peculiar traits of the code of politeness of Maghrebi Arabic-speaking societies. Within the general frame of the universal theory conceived by Brown and Levinson, speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects display a marked preference for strategies addressing the positive face-wants of their collocutors. Such strategies include manifestations of in-group solidarity, elaborate exchanges of symbolic gifts and a series of expressions aiming to inform the collocutor that his wants are shared. Given the strong preference towards positive politeness, it is not surprising that the correlated strategies display a high degree of refinement and specificity. Such is the case, for example, with the so-called situation-bound expressions, i.e. standardised formulae which specifically address the peculiar needs of the collocutor, as they are perceived by the speaker. Despite the massive employment of positive-politeness strategies, however, particularly imposing FTAs, like those involving the violation of the traditional segregation between sexes, still require negative redress, confirming the solidity of Brown and Levinson's theory if one of its main tenets.

The code of politeness of Maghrebi societies, on the other hand, features some traits that, though not irreconcilable, go beyond the theoretical framework designed by Brown and Levinson. The evidence shows that speakers of Maghrebi Arabic dialects exchange positive politeness outside the FTA / redress dyad, a fact which is contemplated within their general theory of verbal politeness and considered as a sort of social accelerator. The main difference concerns the fact that such exchanges occur in predictable ways, employing highly standardised expressions, and that their performance is generally expected of mature native speakers. In other words, the exchanges are not spontaneous, but seem to function as a means to create and strengthen social bonds. From this perspective, thus, the speaker may even incur in a FTA of its own if he abstains from performing them. These preliminary observations leave a wide space for future research, inasmuch as the non-redressive role of verbal politeness in Arabic-speaking societies still has to be investigated and described in all its elaborate details.

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