

## The Effect of Culture Learning on Neo-Aramaic: Empirical Evidence from Politeness Theory

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### Abstract

The current study investigates the universal notion of ‘face’ in interdependent cultures: Neo-Aramaic<sup>19</sup> (NA) and Iraqi Arabic (IA). The study sheds light on NA as an endangered language in home and in dispersion on a par and the fact that language change goes beyond grammar to affect human communication and language pragmatics. We first examine the impact of Arabic on NA by providing an account of the core strategies used to express thanks and apologies in Arabic<sup>20</sup> and NA. Then, the study shows how the NA diaspora in Canada is under the hegemonic pressure of English. Our experiment shows that young NA-English bilinguals (NA-E) differ significantly from older NA speakers in their reaction to (im)politeness in daily interactions, but we have not found a significant difference between NA-E bilinguals and Canadian English monolinguals (CE). These results support our assumption that NA-E bilinguals have the potential (i.e. culture learning) to circumvent pragmatic failure at the expense of their mother tongue. The results have also shown that culture plays an important role in language change that goes beyond grammar.

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**Keywords:** politeness; Neo-Aramaic, face; thanks; apologies; culture learning.

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<sup>19</sup> NA refers to a group of language varieties that are descendants of Middle Aramaic. NA dialects of the North-Eastern NA (also known as NENA) are spoken in northern Iraq, northwestern Iran and southeastern Turkey. The study attempts to shed light on Christian dialects spoken in two towns in the north of Iraq, viz. Mangesh and Bartella. Dialectal variation (lexical or phonological) does not play a role in our investigation; therefore such instantiations are overlooked, for example, *smiqen şuryāt-eh* (Bartella dialect) and *smiqley paṭwāt-eh* (Mangesh dialect).

<sup>20</sup> Arabic is used in a narrow sense to refer to Iraqi Arabic. More specifically, we use the Baghdadi dialect, which is the variety used in the mainstream media.

## 1. Introduction<sup>21</sup>

The ubiquity of politeness is undeniable as it is at the heart of every community. However, speakers of different cultures express various levels of politeness relative to context, age, gender, social status, etc. Consequently, the dominating values and beliefs in a specific culture motivate certain conventionalized formulas (verbal and/or non-verbal) that may become prevalent, socially acceptable and polite in that culture but may appear bizarre or rude in another. In other words, different cultures assign different values and connotations to such formulaic expressions because, Goody (1978) states "... different societies select different basic signals to elaborate and institutionalize. These then become special strategic forms and are subject to *learning just as are other aspects of culture* [emphasis added]" (p.7). Therefore, intercultural communicators should be au fait with their conflicting interpersonal needs, which stem from the culture-specific values. However, this does not preclude, in any way, the fact that there are some shared and universally agreed-upon, polite formulas that interactants from various cultural backgrounds utilize in their day-to-day interactions.

There is compelling evidence in support of the claim that some aspects of politeness phenomena (e.g., face, thanks, apologies, compliments, etc.) are, in fact, a universal characteristic of human intricate, linguistic system of communication (see see Ide 1993; Watts 1992). Wierzbicka (2003), a staunch supporter of this view, states that "The widely accepted paradigms were those of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory of politeness, which affirmed "pan-cultural interpretability of politeness phenomenon" (1978, p. 288) and Grice's (1975) theory of conversation, which posited a number of universal conversational principles" (p.v). There are at least three viable reasons to vindicate this stance. Taking into consideration that teasing apart niceties and subtleties of the rules of daily interaction in any culture requires more practice to reach the degree of melding two distinct cultural perspectives (i.e., NA and CE) into one. First, second language learners usually do not face difficulty in 1) acquiring these formulaic expressions, 2) learning the difference between severe and mild conditions, and 3) realizing that the use of these expressions should be carried out with the utmost discretion. Second, Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of politeness into two types (i.e. positive and negative) sheds light on the fact that cultures will necessarily be either positively or negatively oriented towards politeness (cf. Hwang et al. 2003; Leech 2007; Park and Guan 2009). This point will be elaborated in the subsequent section. Third, Goffman's (1967) notion of face

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(or public image) is claimed to be universal because interactants across cultures usually strive to maintain and enhance hearer and/or speaker's face.

The study is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on some theoretical aspects of linguistic politeness in independent and interdependent cultures. It also tackles the concept of face from an interdependent perspective. In section 1.1, we provide an overview of theoretical approaches to politeness and face, and how face and its components play an important role in IA and NA daily interchanges. In section 2, we elaborate on the difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures which influences and shapes the dynamics of politeness. We pinpoint some social and cultural factors in the process of formulating individualistic and collectivistic conceptualizations. Sections 3 and 3.1 explain how NA is under the incessant influence of IA and CE. Then, thanks and apologies in NA and IA are discussed in section 4. The second part of the study (sections 5, 6, and 7) is based on an empirical investigation of older NA speakers, NA-E bilinguals and CE monolinguals' reaction to two sets of scenarios representing solidarity on the one hand and social violations on the other. The methodology is summarised in section 5. In sections 6 and 7, we analyze and then discuss the results of the study. The appendix consists of two sections: section 1 is an overview of the study and its objectives, and section 2 includes some demographical information about the participants and a consent form.

### **1.1 Face in connected and separate cultures**

Goffman's (1967) work on face has inspired many linguists for decades. Building on Goffman's concept of face, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) developed their politeness theory with the concept of face at its core. Arundale (1999, 2006, 2009 and 2010) takes issue with Goffman's view of face and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. In Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (FCT), face is neither a psychological construct nor a reflection of one's public image or social wants and desires; contrarily, face is an interactional and relational, not person-centered, phenomenon that is conjointly co-constituted by two or more individuals. As such, Arundale (2006) employs the dialectical relation between 'connection' with others and 'separation' from them to conceptualize Brown and Levinson's dualism (two distinct components of face): positive and negative face. Furthermore, Arundale (2006) rejects the assumption that interaction arises between an independent encoder whose output must be interpreted by the independent decoder. According to Arundale (2006, 2010), interactional achievement models maintain that communication is a 'non-summative' process involving a single system of two or more interdependent individuals (i.e. interacting dyads) unlike the model adopted by Brown and Levinson where

communication is a summative process arising from two distinct systems involving two independent individuals (i.e. monadic individuals). He expounds that "Encoding/decoding models address only the unilateral effect of one person's utterance on another person, not reciprocal conditionality" (Arundale 2010, p. 2085). Although the current study is not intended to critique Arundale's theoretical model, it is important to note that Arundale's model of communication is "curiously abstract and neutral" (p. 2094) to cope with the concrete components of real life communication. In addition, the model is precisely designed to deal with a conversational sequence as it unfolds during real time; this instantaneous dynamicity does not cover the broad range of human communicative processes where face is involved in communication that can be removed in place and time. Besides, Arundale and Brown and Levinson's theoretical models of linguistic politeness are both subsumed under second-order politeness (politeness 2) which represent the analyst's external conceptualization of politeness. Our work takes the participants' actual uptake of communicative interaction to determine what is (im)polite- theorist's analysis and evaluation are not involved in first-order politeness (politeness 1) (Eelen 2001; Locher and Watts 2005; Watts et al. 1992).

It is important to elucidate the significance of this concept, which has gained a universal value as Scollon and Scollon (2000, p.48) stated that "there is no faceless communication" (for more on the cross-cultural significance of face see also Matsumoto 1988; Swi 1997; Ting-Toomey et al. 1991). In physiognomical parlance, face can tell it all; physiognomy is the skill of analysing and discovering the makeup of personality and character from facial features. In his book *Christian Morals*, Browne (1716) claimed that it is possible to discern the inner qualities of personality from outward countenance:

SINCE the Brow speaks often true, since Eyes and Noses have Tongues, and the countenance proclaims the Heart and inclinations; Let observation so far instruct thee in Physiognomical lines... we often observe that Men do most act those Creatures, whose constitution, parts, & complexion do most predominate in their mixtures. This is a corner-stone [*sic*] in Physiognomy, & holds some Truth not only in particular Persons but also in whole Nations. There are therefore Provincial Faces, National Lips and Noses, which testify not only the Natures of those Countries, but of those which have them elsewhere. (Part 2, section 9)

In Semitic languages such as A and NA, face is a crucial factor in social exchanges; face is central to the human body because it includes the eyes, mouth, nose, cheeks, forehead and moustache or beard for men, all of which play an important role in body language. In other words, face is a

complicated system, which controls our sight, language use, respiration, etc. Each organ has various, positive and/or negative connotations and a wide range of idiomatic uses associated with it. Below are some examples from IA, and, where applicable, their NA counterparts. Some of the IA and NA data come from fieldwork conducted by the author in Iraq between (2008 and 2010). Two techniques were used to collect data: discourse completion test and personal observations.

1a- *’iḥmarrat xdūd-a* (IA) 'his cheeks turned red'<sup>22</sup> → 'he blushed'

b- *smiqen šūryāt-eh* (NA)<sup>23</sup> 'his face turned red'

2a- *xašm-a ‘ālī* (IA) 'his nose is high' → 'he is arrogant'

b- *puqan-eh ‘lūlyale* (NA) 'his nose is high'

3a- *’in‘aqada ḥājib-āh* (SA) 'he knitted his brow' → 'he became angry'

b- *widle qarmīteh* (NA) 'he made his brow'

4a- *y-štughul b-‘arag j̄bīna* (IA) 'he works by the sweat of his brow' → 'he works very hard'

b- *kim-šāghil b-deṭid bugīn-eh* (NA) 'he works by the sweat of his brow'

5a- *’auxudha min ha(dā) ‘iš-šārib* (IA) 'take it from this moustache' → 'I honestly or solemnly promise'

b- *šqulla mānī simbilāle* (NA) 'take it from this moustache'

6a- *xarah b-šawābarbak* (IA) 'shit be on your moustache' → 'an expression of censure and disgust'

b- *’ixre b-simbilāl-ux* (NA) 'shit be on your moustache'

## 2. Individualistic and interdependent perspectives on politeness

There is a gap in the cross-cultural research conducted on Arabic politeness because most of the available literature is descriptive in nature and tackles individual speech acts and politeness formulas. Al Zadjalay (2012) flatly pointed out that "[M]ost research on Muslim and/or Arabic politeness to date just blindly applies Brown & Levinson's (1987) face-saving model without taking into account current theories of face and politeness"(p.420). In support of this claim, we cite some of these studies. Al-Qahtani (2009) investigated the use of offers in Saudi Arabic. Al-Shboul et al. (2012) explored advice giving by Jordanian learners of English. Atawneh (1991) worked on requests by native and bilingual Egyptians. Bouchara (2012) talked about religious greetings in Moroccan Arabic. Bassiouney (2012) tackled interruption and floor control in Egyptian Arabic. Bataineh & Bataineh (2008) studied apologies in Jordanian Arabic. Nelson et al. (1993) examined compliments in Egyptian Arabic. Stevens (1993) studied refusals

<sup>22</sup> For the sake of consistency, all the pronouns are masculine unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>23</sup> Arabic has a tremendous effect on NA; therefore, we do not provide examples that are lexical borrowings.

in Egyptian Arabic. The gap grows wider when we talk about politeness in NA because this area has not received any scholarly attention to date.

Brown and Levinson's seminal work built heavily on Goffman's (1967) notion of face and its usage in English folk term. We have already pointed out the importance of face in the Semitic culture, which meshes well with the concept of viewing face as a source of both honour and humiliation. Face is a semi-abstract construct that amalgamates merits with demerits. Brown and Levinson distinguish between two aspects of face: "**negative face**: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others; **positive face**: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 62). In this paper, we take issue with Brown and Levinson's claim that all 'Model Persons' have both positive face and negative face. The point that we are raising here is that positive and negative face do not have the same significance cross-culturally. Our previous discussion provides evidence that in different cultures one aspect of face may be more salient than another, as shown in diagram 1. Technically, Brown and Levinson's positive-negative dichotomy does not support the presumption that members of a specific culture may exhibit various degrees of interdependence, congruence and solidarity in some situations and still being capable of demonstrating independence, divergence and dissociation in others. Brown and Levinson's dichotomous terms constitute a complementarity in which the presence of one implies the absence of the other. Therefore, we are going to adopt the terminology employed in relational communication, viz., connectedness and separateness instead of Brown and Levinson's positive and negative face, which underlie the concept of positive and negative politeness (see Arundale 2006 and Baxter and Montgomery 1996). Connectedness and separateness constitute "a functional opposition in that the total autonomy of parties precludes their relational connection, just as total connection between parties precludes their individual autonomy" (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, p.9). As such, there is a reflexive link between the dialectical opposition of connectedness and separateness; therefore, connectedness may be 'voiced' as solidarity, interdependence, and convergence in different situations and different cultures but 'voiced' as distance, dissociation and independence in other situations or cultures (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, p. 30, 89; Arundale, 2006, 2010).

In support of our assumption, previous work (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Park and Guan 2009; Somech, 2000; Triandis et al., 1985; Wu and Keysar 2007) has already established the difference between two types of cultures. The independent culture prevails in individualistic communities where the independent self is more salient and its goals intersect with those of the in-group. There is more focus on autonomy, priority of personal

objectives, and personal achievements and aspirations. On the other hand, the interdependent culture lays emphasis on accomplishing the in-group objectives and puts a strong focus on cooperation, integration and mutual interests. In collective societies, individuals have and strive to maintain stronger social ties with each other. These social and interpersonal bonds are nurtured outside the zone of formalities; the independent society is characterized by having weaker social ties because such ties are formed to comply with the social norms and formalities of the individualistic community. The use of teknonyms in the collective culture (e.g. father or mother of the child instead of a person's name) is an outstanding example of interconnectedness. It is the name of the eldest child, but this rule usually drops elder females in order to establish what the culture considers the positive connotation that has to do with manhood when a male child is born. Teknonyms are widely used in some interdependent cultures, such as NA and IA, and they are not associated with one geographical position rather than another or with one age group more than another. An interesting linguistic fact is that teknonyms can be used to address both men and women. They are also used to address bachelors by anticipating the names of their future offspring. Furthermore, a teknonym can be used as an emotional supportive technique to address an infertile individual or old bachelor by using *'abu ġāyib* 'Father of the absent one'. Even men in power are known to the public by their eldest children's names, for example, the Iraqi deposed president Saddam Hussein was usually addressed as *'abu 'addaji* 'Uday's father'. However, teknonyms may carry negative or derogatory connotations when used to belittle someone, for example *'abu dartaḥ* 'Father of a fart'.

In individualistic cultures, individuals are raised to be self-dependent and independent members of the society early in their life; most children take the decision to move out when they can support themselves 'financially'. The financial factor plays a vital role in determining the length of stay under their parents' roof. Some parents ask kids as young as 18 years old with a stable financial resource to move out. Individualistic objectives and personal autonomy are pervasive cultural values triggered by the general atmosphere which dominates the society. Collectivists are completely at variance with this Western view. In Iraq, for example, kids usually do not move out because they are never asked to, even if they are financially stable. Even after getting married, kids are more than welcome to live with their parents except females who, according to tradition, must move to live with their husbands. However, young adults (both males and females) are not allowed to move out before getting married. Eventually, this kind of interdependence spreads across the whole society and passes over from one generation to another. How can this be linked to linguistic politeness? The across-the-board interconnectivity maintains face, builds strong ties, and blurs the

borders among individuals when they interact. Connectedness with others promotes interpersonal communication and reduces the severity of potentially face-threatening acts. In section 5, thanking strategy 4 is a good example of connectedness in these cultures, because in example 2 the thanker is asking God to have mercy on the thankee's parents (not necessarily deceased) instead of thanking him/her directly. This example may not make sense or may sound outlandish to Western ears where parents have a more marginal role in their children's personal life after moving out. In individualistic cultures, the independent individual is the center of interaction, hence thanking a person other than thankee would result in a pragmatic failure. There is a more convoluted way to say this in Iraqi slang: *raḥma 'ala dāk 'id-des 'ir-riḍa'ta* 'may God have mercy on the breast that you suckled'. This example is of special interest as it is an amalgam of heterogonous components; a taboo word *des* 'breast' and God's mercy are implicitly referring to the thankee's mother as a symbol of fertility.

It is clear that in an interdependent culture, linguistic politeness is a function of these collective interpersonal relations. In diagram 1, we summarize the effect of individualistic and interdependent cultures on politeness as a scalar phenomenon. Unsurprisingly, Hofstede (1997) showed that independent cultures, represented by Western countries, scored very high on individualism index value, viz., USA 91, GB 89, and Canada 80, whereas the interdependent societies, such as Arab, scored much lower (38).

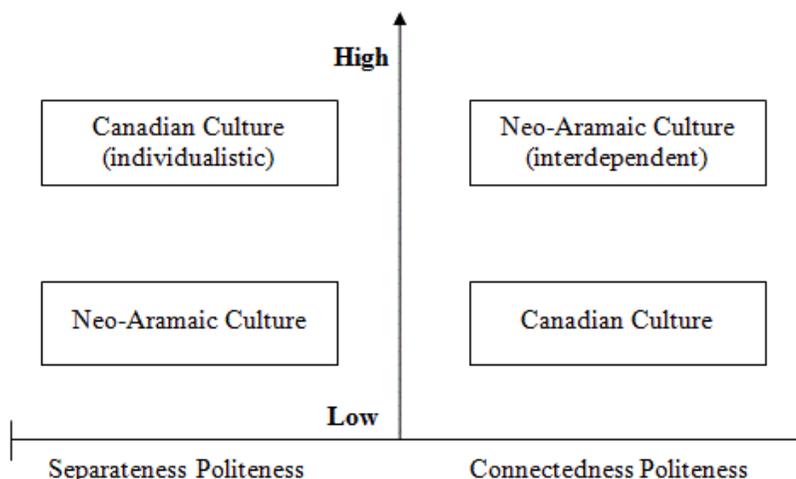


Diagram 1 A cross-cultural perspective of connectedness and separateness politeness

The distinction between connectedness and separateness politeness lends support to this line of argument. They are tailored to meet the interpersonal needs of the individuals in these two distinct cultures. Apart from the technicality issue discussed above, Brown and Levinson's

"[p]ositive politeness is approach-based [...] : S considers H to be in important respects 'the same' as he, with in-group rights and duties and expectations of reciprocity" (p.70). Unlike positive politeness, negative politeness "is oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) H's negative face, his basic want to maintain claims of territory and self determination. Negative politeness, thus, is essentially avoidance-based..." (p.70). Brown and Levinson focused more on the individuality of interactants, their wants and territory, which deepens the gap between the individuals; they were driven by the western values. Connectedness politeness or 'solidarity politeness', as Scollon and Scollon (1981, p.175) legitimately described it, meshes well with interdependent cultures values and beliefs. Brown and Levinson's definitions sound superficially viable, but, again, interactants cannot be viewed as two independent systems during communication. Moreover, Lakoff's (1975, p.65) rules of politeness:

- 1- Formality: keep aloof;
- 2- Deference: give options;
- 3- Camaraderie: show sympathy

should be reordered in order to meet the face requirements of a collective society (see diagram 1). Consequently, rule number (3) is ordered higher in the interdependent culture due to the established common ground among the individuals. Intuitively, separateness politeness and independent cultures are two sides of the same coin; they are both formal and seek to avoid interference with or impediment of the speaker's freedom.

### **3. NA speakers: sociocultural perspectives**

NA speakers who participated in this study are descendants of Iraqi immigrant families that left Iraq in the early 1990s looking for a better life and religious freedom. Most of them came to Canada between the ages of 4-8 years. They use their mother tongue at home and in other social and religious ceremonies, as it is the main language of both parents who prefer to use NA for two reasons: 1) to preserve their native language and 2) because their English is not advanced to a degree that would allow them to engage in elaborate conversations. For the young generation, NA is, to some extent, the in-group language, however, outside their homes, English is the language of social interaction.

NA speakers are bilinguals who rely heavily on English in their day-to-day interactions. NA and English are for them two competing rivals for linguistic dominance, though on unequal terms. With English being the exclusive language of communication in the educational system, job market, hospitals, media, etc., NA is fighting a losing battle. Succinctly, NA is a language of an ethnic minority that is being assimilated by the hegemonic English-speaking mainstream.

Exogamous marriages are not encouraged in this ethnic group; therefore, some males (rarely females) travel to Iraq to get married. Marriage partners do not have to be fluent English speakers to enter the country which is a linguistic advantage for NA. In fact, this conspicuous leaning towards endogamous marriages played an important role in keeping NA as a sporadic means of communication among the second-generation speakers. Children born to such couples, where the mother is brought from home, indulge in the 'fad' of learning NA in their early years- a process that fizzles out as soon as these children join kindergarten and mingle with their peers. The influence of the contact language (i.e. English) becomes greater when the children pursue their study and, later, their career in an English milieu.

Social and religious gatherings such as church services, weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and the close family bonds that tie the members of the NA community are not enough to maintain their language. Consequently, St. Thomas Chaldean Church, in cooperation with Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB), launched a Saturday school program to teach elementary students their mother tongue. Does this project work toward language maintenance? The program teaches Standard Syriac instead of NA. Teachers, some of them participated in our survey, are young and most of their instructional strategies are given in English. Accordingly, I would suggest that these children will grow up with a rusty mother tongue, particularly where continuous practice is required to instil and hone the communicative skills that are crucial in establishing mutual understanding, such as politeness, idioms, metaphors, humour, irony, etc. There is extensive literature on child language development, which provides ample evidence that children's linguistic (i.e. lexical, phonological, and syntactic) repertoire starts to develop in early infancy. Apparently, NA speakers in this study have acquired lexical, phonological and syntactic knowledge of their mother tongue in their early childhood but other aspects of language which go beyond the literal meaning and require well-developed socio-pragmatic knowledge do not get the chance to develop systematically. Unlike syntax, semantics and phonology, these communicative aspects are characterized by rapid and constant changes which would eventually lead to language loss. Empirically speaking, children, at approximately age six and on, start comprehending and interpreting figurative language and formulaic communicative constructions that require various complex linguistic and cognitive skills. For more details about politeness acquisition see Axia and Baroni 1985; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990; Gordon and Ervin-Tripp 1984; Nippold et al. 1982; on children's interpretation and comprehension of idioms see Ackerman 1982; Hsieh, and Hsu 2009; Levorato and Cacciari 1992, 1995, 2002; Levorato et al. 2004; on children's metaphor see Gardner 1974, 1975; Gentner 1977; Keil 1986.

#### **4. Thanks and apologies: indebtedness and regret**

Thanks and apologies are expressive (Searle, 1976) illocutionary acts (Austin, 1962). The intention of the speaker is enunciating his/her gratitude and/or regret respectively; an illocutionary act is the force of the uttered words. The impact of the speaker's expression of gratefulness or repentance on the addressee is termed the perlocutionary or social effect. In other words, the interactional purpose is to assuage the H when performing apologies and to appreciate H's action when expressing gratitude. Searle (1976) noted that the illocutionary point of expressives is "to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content" (p.12). Norrick (1978) challenged Searle's view that expressives express emotions, because emotions are often difficult to measure and they are a function of situation. Emotions are not the main factor in determining the social functions of expressives. Instead, he builds on Searle's argument that the speaker presupposes that the specified state of affairs is true, thus expressives are generally 'factual' (or sound sincere). Second, expressives are differentiated from each other by how they relate to the speaker. The speaker assigns a 'value judgement' to the recognized state of affairs. Consequently, expressing 'thanks' has a positive value (i.e. it is face enhancing) whereas 'apologies' have a negative value (i.e. are face threatening). Third, apparently thanks and apologies differ in assigning the thematic roles to the involved arguments. In apologies, the agent is the speaker and the patient is the addressee but the agent, in case of thanks, is the addressee and the speaker is the patient or recipient of the benefit (for similar claim see Bergman & Kasper 1993).

Norrick (1978), further, propounds that "thanking is generally the most formulaic and least 'heartfelt' of expressive illocutionary acts... In English only 'thanks' and 'thank you' are common, although both occur with a wide range of intensifiers; the situation is much the same in other languages" (p. 9). We take issue with these claims and we provide evidence from IA and NA to support our stand.

##### **4.1 Indebtedness**

Expressing gratitude in these Semitic languages is more elaborate and does not rely heavily on intensification. Using 'thanks' or 'thank you' is not as common as in English because there exist various alternative strategies and each one of them is a function of various variables: age, sex, power, value of the favour, etc. There is a positive correlation between the employed strategy and the received favour. We can also deduce that sincerity increases as the value of the offered favour or service increases. Here are some of the

strategies<sup>24</sup> employed to express gratitude in IA and NA when identical equivalents are available.

**Strategy 1:** This strategy is used with small daily favours and represents the direct use of expressives, which makes it more formulaic and routinized than other strategies. Even within expressives, there is hierarchical importance stemming from the value of the favour offered.

1. *šukran* (IA) 'thanks'
- 2.a *'āškurak* (IA) 'I thank you'
- b. *tāwit basīm-a* (NA) 'be sound' → 'stay healthy'
- 3a- *mamnūn* (IA) 'I am grateful'
- b. *basīm-a rāba* <sup>25</sup> (NA) 'be extremely sound'
4. *'āni 'ājiz 'an 'iš-šukur* (IA) 'I do not know how much I should thank you' → I am speechless'

**Strategy 2:** In this strategy, the thanker wants to clearly manifest his or her indebtedness to the thankee. It may sound as if the thanker is exaggerating, but s/he tries to emphasize the high value of the received favour; therefore, the thanker makes a direct reference to the unforgettable, indescribable and beneficial action, which makes him/her sound more genuine.

- 1a. *'in šālla mā 'ānsa faḍl-ak* (IA) 'God willing, I will not forget your graciousness'
- b. *kan 'āyn 'āla la-gnāšin faḍl-ux* (NA) 'God willing, I will not forget your graciousness'
- 2a. *'illī sawetā māynnīsī* (IA) 'what you have done is unforgettable'
- b. *mindī tkīm muḍītle la-gmanše* (NA) 'what you have done is unforgettable'
3. *hal xidma ma-rāḥ 'ānsā-hā ṭūl 'umrī* (IA) 'I will not forget this favour all my life'
- 4a. *haḍa 'ad-den b-rugubī w-ma rāḥ 'ānsā-h ṭūl 'umrī* (IA) 'This debt will remain on my neck for the rest of my life'
- b. *'āda dena paqartīle w la-gnāšinne māqā dīyyin bixāyy* (NA) 'This debt will remain on my neck and I will not forget this debt as long as I am alive'

**Strategy 3:** The recipient of the favour, service or gift tries to maximize the giver's beneficial action and makes him/her feel the importance of what s/he has done or given. It is worth noting that indebtedness is expressed indirectly in this strategy; the actual expression of gratitude has to be inferred. It stresses that the thanker has caused trouble that needed to be mitigated by the action of the thankee.

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<sup>24</sup> The strategies used throughout this paper are part of an unpublished MA thesis "Thanks and apologies in Iraqi Arabic with special reference to English" (1999).

<sup>25</sup> This expression is widely used by Assyrians but rarely employed by Syriac and Chaldean speakers who prefer using the Arabic version (*mamnūn*).

- 1a. *ta'abnāk-um wīyyā-na* (IA) 'we have caused you a lot of trouble'  
 b. *kim-mačhax-un minnan* (NA) 'we have caused you a lot of trouble'  
 2a. *leš 'itkalafit* (IA) 'why have you bothered/troubled yourself to do it?'  
 b. *qāi mučhel-ux rūx-ux* (NA) 'why have you troubled yourself?'

Strategy 4: The thanker expresses his gratefulness by wishing for giver's happiness, success and health. These wishes are more direct and effective when they take a supplicatory form by mentioning God explicitly. However, wishes can also be directed to the benefactor or his/her body parts.

- 1a. *xulf 'ālla 'alek* (IA) 'may God repay you'  
 b. *'āla xālif 'il-ux* (NA) 'may God repay you'  
 2a. *raḥm 'ālla wāldek* (IA) 'may God have mercy on your parents'  
 b. *'āla mḥāse nišwāt-ux* (NA) 'may God have mercy on your parents'  
 3a. *'ālla yzīd-a* (IA) 'may God plentify it (food)'  
 b. *'āla mazid-le* (NA) 'may God plentify it'  
 4a. *tislam* (IA) 'be safe and sound'  
 b. *tāwit basīm-a* 26 (NA) 'be sound'  
 5a. *t'īš* (IA) 'may you live a long life'  
 b. *xayyt or basma gyān-ūx* (NA) 'may you live a long life' or 'may your soul be sound'  
 6a. *'āšat 'īdak* (IA) 'long live your hand' 27

## 4.2 Apology

The other type of speech act that we want to discuss here is apology. Norrick (1978) said that 'acts of apologizing and forgiving are more basic and important to society than such acts as thanking and congratulating which by comparison are its pleasant by-product rather than functional principles' (p.8). This claim correlates with his previous assumption that thanks are formulaic and less heartfelt. Many studies focused on apologies because they are viewed as a result of a breach or violation of social norms, which creates a requisite for remedy and repair. This is somehow a superficial approach that is built on the assumption that apology is depicted as a scenario where there is a victim who needs remedy and a culprit to shoulder responsibility. Failure to meet the anticipated requirements of each one of them will definitely result in misunderstanding and a threat to face. In fact, thanks are as important as apologies and some languages use them interchangeably in some interactions- "In Japanese, many gratitude expressions can be replaced by apology expressions, but not all" (Coulmas, 1981, p.84). Expressing our sincere gratitude gives meaning to our existence as it shows our dependence

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26 It is not a coincidence that *basīma* (be sound) appears in strategy 1 and 4. Neo-Aramaic does not seem to have in its lexicon a word that identically corresponds to *thank you*.

27 This expression corresponds to the British 'more power to your elbow!' It is used to praise the benefactor or approve of his action, which may have involved physical activity.

on others; the expressed appreciation relieves the benefactor and reflects our recognition of the action. Emmons and McCullough (2003) examined the effect of thanking on the psychological and physical well-being in daily life. They conducted a study on undergraduate students who were assigned one of three different experimental conditions. One group kept daily journals of things they were grateful for; in second condition, another group was asked to keep journal about their hassles, whereas the third condition was a downward social comparison. Unlike the other two groups, the group which kept journals of gratitude demonstrated a significant increase in psychological and physical functions.

In what follows we try to prove that cultural values and norms play a vital role in formulating apology strategies. In other words, in different cultures, it would be odd to expect to have the same apology strategies and the same hierarchical order because the severity of the offense and the importance of some contextual variables such as age, sex, power, etc. differ cross-culturally. We rarely hear public *mea culpas* offered by Iraqi officials (i.e. politicians, school headmasters) even for severe offenses. Apology is a face-threatening act because the speaker has to regret or at least take responsibility for the wrong s/he has done. In a male-dominated culture, such as Iraq, the majority of the politicians are men who perceive apologizing as a weakness; it is a social system where males hold the primary power. Religion, both Islam and Christianity, confers power upon men but women are often considered subordinate to them. For example, Saddam's notorious apology to Kuwaitis for invading their country, burning oil wells, and killing innocent people was Machiavellian in its essence: "We **apologize to God** [emphasis added] for any act that has angered Him in the past, unbeknownst to us but considered our responsibility, and we apologize to you on this basis as well" (Saddam Hussein's apology, 2002). Saddam arrogantly implied that his apology was not out of weakness. First, in an attempt to evade the direct face-threat, Saddam did not read the letter but made one of his ministers read it. Second, his apology did not state the offense clearly or take responsibility for his atrocious acts, it was a verbose speech about his pyrrhic victory. Politicians may not be a perfect representation of the population, but they are a reliable index of power and gender. A lack of apology is not limited to politics, but it extends to other governmental public services, such as educational institutions. In 2014, a primary school student passed away after going into a coma, because a month earlier a school principle had beaten him "with a metal rod" and did not apologize (Bassem, 2015). Consequently, we assume that teachers and other officials in general do not offer apologies. In this and many other incidents with varying degrees of severity, power obviates the need to express remorse and admit responsibility. However, making amends for a physical injury or psychological insult is a more

common manoeuvre that perpetrators use to acknowledge responsibility implicitly. Succinctly, there is an inverse correlation between power and apology, as power increases, apologizing decreases. On the other hand, a considerable number of western politicians have had enough courage to express regret and apologize for offenses that have not necessarily been committed by them. In 1988, Ronald Regan apologized for the internment of Japanese and George Bush, in 1992, issued another formal apology from the government. In 2015, British Prime Minister Tony Blair apologized for the war on Iraq due to inaccurate intelligence information about mass destruction weapons. In 2008, Stephen Harper apologized for residential schools and the damage they caused to Canada's First Nations.

In accordance with the axiom: 'the customer is always right, business owners, in Iraq, are obliged to offer apologies to their customers. It is for the benefit of their business to give a high priority to customer satisfaction. It is axiomatic that businesses excel in providing services; therefore, admitting responsibility and offering apology is an important element in the business equation. On the other hand, people of higher professional status such as doctors, lawyers, and professors, expect apologies from their patients, clients and students, when agreed-upon social norms of conduct are violated. For example, coming late to an appointment triggers the need for an apology to white-collar workers. High-status professional are not also expected to apologize for minor infringements such as coming late or making the apologizee (i.e. their clients) wait longer than expected. However, because of the power factor, these professionals reluctantly offer apologies when they fail to provide the expected high standard of service. They are motivated by the severity of the offense (see Hatfield 2011 for power in Korean lexical apologies).

Strategy 1 below shows that the speaker is not the agent but apologizes for a violation that s/he has not been part of. This strategy lends more support to interdependent cultures where individuals partially or completely accept shouldering the blame for others. This is similar to Hatfield and Hann's (2011) 'group face' in modern Korean dramas, but, in the Iraqi culture, 'group face' is part of real-life situations. Expressions like those in 28 and 29 can be morphologically modified to clarify this notion: *mukiml-ux şalman* (NA) 'you blackened our face' (you abashed us) and *muxwer-ux şalman* (NA) 'you whitened our face' (you dignified us). Some practices and social norms derive their strength and legitimacy from Islam, such as blood money, which is also common in Japan and Korea, where the family (including but not limited to father, brothers, uncles, etc.) of the offender pays out to the family of the victim, who can accordingly appeal to the court for clemency. In Iraq, according to Islam, there are various compensations paid out to recompense injuries other than murder, such as theft, physical

damage, libel, etc. In these cases, the offender is usually not present during the negotiations over the compensation; therefore, the offender is not given the chance to express his/her remorse.

The discussion above supports our claim that a promise of forbearance is a highly face-threatening act and apologizers usually avoid using this strategy. Two interactional variables play an important role in promising forbearance by the speaker: power and severity. The apologizer must be younger (i.e. a student, soldier, employee) than the apologizee to make a promise of forbearance. At the same time, the offense should be severe in order to exhort the apologizer to mull over the consequences and eventually decide whether to acknowledge responsibility. The apologizer weighs promising forbearance against the severe consequences of the offense. When the apologizer and apologizee are within the same age group, promise of forbearance is fulfilled by evading the direct responsibility for the offense. Here, the apologizer uses something along the lines of "this will not be repeated again" or "this will be the last time"- the apologizer resorts to a circuitous technique to mitigate the severity of the face-threatening act. The perpetrator tries to magnify the offense in order to divert the apologizee's attention away from the apologizer; the apologizer does not want to project him/herself as a volitional agent.

Cohen and Olshtain (1981, p.119), based on a study of Americans and Israelis, proposed four main apology strategies:

- 1. An expression of apology**
  - a. An expression of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry")
  - b. An offer of apology (e.g., "I apologize")
  - c. A request for forgiveness (e.g., "Excuse me" or "Forgive me")
  - d. An expression of an excuse (not an overt apology but an excuse which serves as an apology)
- 2. An acknowledgment of responsibility**
- 3. An offer of repair**
- 4. A promise of forbearance (i.e., that it won't happen again)**

They further claimed that their results 'suggest that these speakers of English as a foreign language utilized, for the most part, the same semantic formulas as native English speakers, when their proficiency permitted it. This finding is consistent with Fraser's claim (1979) that "these formulas are universal" (p. 130). Fraser (1978) made a similar claim for the universality of requesting strategies.

We agree with Fraser (1979) that these semantic formulas are universal; therefore, we are not presenting their A or NA equivalents. However, we suggest that there are culture-specific strategies used to mitigate an offensive action (verbal/non-verbal) in social interaction are:

Strategy 1: This strategy looks like Cohen and Olshtain's 'promise of forbearance', but the speaker is not the agent; the speaker apologizes for an offense that s/he has not committed. S/he takes on responsibility for a third party, which can be his/her son, younger brother, or a friend.

1a. *ba 'ad mā ysawī-ha* (IA) 'he will not do it again'

b. *labiṣ kāwidla* (NA) 'he will not do it again'

Strategy 2: The apologizer uses a self-demeaning strategy to admit that he has perpetrated a foul deed that requires remedy. The apologizer directs the blame to him/herself explicitly or implicitly (by justifying and supporting the apologizee's reaction).

1. 'ānīl ḡaltān (IA) 'I am mistaken' → 'I am the one to blame'

2a. 'ilḥaq ḥaqq-ak (IA) 'the right is your right' → 'you are absolutely right'

b. *ḥaqq-ux-le* (NA) 'it is your right'

Strategy 3: When the offense is not severe, the apologizer uses a strategy to mitigate his/her gaffe. It is a tacit apology because the apologizer explains his/her action instead of explicitly apologizing for it. It is not a fauxpology as the speaker uses first person pronoun to avoid circumlocution and clearly demonstrate that s/he takes full responsibility for the mistake.

1a. *ma liḥagt 'il-pāṣ* (IA) 'I did not catch the bus'

b. *la ṭp-elī pāṣ* (NA) 'I did not catch the bus'

In the second part of this paper, I shall argue that 'culture learning' enables NA-E bilinguals to avoid 'pragmatic failure' or 'cross-cultural communication breakdown' (Thomas 1983), but at the same time threatens the existence of NA. Pragmatic failure occurs when non-native speakers misinterpret the pragmatic force of an utterance or wrongly apply non-native formulas to native contexts. As shown earlier, different cultures employ different strategies to meet the requirements of the context. Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) distinguished between pragmatic competence (having the skill to convey linguistic messages efficiently by understanding the contextual cues), and linguistic competence (having the main grammatical components of language, viz., semantics, syntax, morphology, etc.). Our main concern is the sociopragmatic misinterpretation of contexts that invoke culture-specific values and beliefs. However, we prefer to use sociocultural competence (Ervin-Tripp 1972; Hymes 1974) as we try to draw attention to how NA-E bilinguals conceptualize the sociocultural rules of politeness and how they react in contexts that may induce conflict with their cultural beliefs.

## 5. Method

**Experimental design and instruments.** Ten native NA speakers, most of them fluent speakers of English (six males, aged +45) participated in the

pilot study. They were unanimous in their judgments throughout both parts of the survey (Table 1 and 2). There was a consensus that the scenarios in Table 1 express social favours, achieve solidarity or induce social reciprocity. They clearly demonstrated a high propensity for connectedness politeness. We noticed a general agreement on considering the situations in Table 2 as some kind of social violations that may require or motivate the use of lexical apology terms (i.e. 'I am sorry' or 'excuse me') except in scenarios 2 and 10.

Our experiment was designed to examine older NA speakers' reaction to 20 conversational scenarios that require acceptability judgments. The scenarios or conditions were developed to show some degree of politeness in day-to-day interactions. Some of the scenarios did not involve immediate face-to-face interaction. The scenarios were designed to investigate participants' reactions to thanks or reciprocation (i.e. connectedness) on the one hand, and apologies or social violations (i.e. separateness) on the other. We tried to avoid using situations where the high indebtedness may have an influence on the speaker's choice, because we are not tracing speaker's reaction to favours or services of varying beneficial degrees. Similarly, we avoided grave offenses (serious offences and material damages have been excluded) that can culminate in readily induced responses. We tried to keep the offence low so that speakers do not feel obliged to choose one option rather than another. Some situations have an implied offence or social breach that requires remedy according to a preliminary questionnaire conducted among NA speakers who have more rigid beliefs about their culture than the young students do. Instead, we tried to keep the value of the action constant throughout the survey to eliminate any confounding factors that might have an effect on participant's judgments. The first ten conditions represent situations that are built on acknowledging solidarity whereas the other ten conditions are structured around small social violations of conventional manners. These conversational scenarios have been designed to assess the ability of NA-E bilinguals to adapt to the Canadian cultural norms in situations that require showing a certain degree of politeness.

We have examined NA-E bilinguals' responses to see if they reacted differently from older NA speakers. We predicted that there will be a significant difference in most of the conditions between NA-E bilinguals and older NA speakers in spite of being members of the same linguistic community and sharing the same cultural values. According to this assumption, politeness is not necessarily a function of language. We, thus, assumed that NA-E bilinguals and their English-speaking peers may share a similar understanding of both sets of scenarios.

**Subjects.** Three groups volunteered to participate in the main study. The first group consisted of thirty CE monolinguals and thirty NA-E

bilinguals made up the second group. Participants were students at McMaster University and belonged to the same age group (20-28). There were twelve CE monolingual males and fourteen NA-E bilingual males. The third group consisted of thirty old NA speakers (17 males and aged +55). Three of them did not speak English very well; therefore, we had to explain to them some of the conditions. Pilot study participants did not take part in this experiment.

**Procedure.** The researcher gave the participants a brief account about the survey and explained the objectives behind collecting this kind of data. Then, the researcher handed out the survey, which included a briefing about the objectives of the study and instructions for the convenience of the participants (Appx. § 1). The participants were given enough time to read through the questions of the survey (Table 1 and 2) and answer at their own pace. They were told that responses should be accurate and reflect personal attitudes toward politeness. We collected some demographic information about the participants (Appx. § 2). After answering all the questions, participants signed a consent form.

N o.	Conversational Situations (scenarios)	Responses	
		Yes	No
1.	In the elevator, you meet someone living with you in the same building. You say hi and start a conversation.	Yes	No
2.	At Wal-Mart, you said 'Thank you' to the cashier whose reply was 'Yep'. Do you consider that odd?	Yes	No
3.	Somebody saw you coming but he/she did not hold the door for you. Is his/her behavior odd?	Yes	No
4.	Somebody held the door open for you. You thanked him/her.	Yes	No
5.	While requesting some information, you thanked your colleague in advance in an email for their help. Would you send another email to say 'thank you' again?	Yes	No
6.	You hold the door for somebody (on his/her cell phone) who goes right through without saying anything. Is this behavior odd?	Yes	No
7.	You are working on an assignment, which is a kind of a questionnaire. You gave a copy to one of your colleagues to fill out, but he/she never brings it back. You consider this an odd behavior.	Yes	No
8.	You are rewarded for being an active member in a small class or group (10 persons). Accordingly, you sent an email thanking everybody for being helpful and cooperative, but only four responded. Is this a rude behavior?	Yes	No
9.	Somebody compliments you on your new hair-do, shirt, shoes, etc. You reply, 'We have the same elegant taste'.	Yes	No
10	A friend wishes you a nice flight or trip. You reply, 'Thank you'.	Yes	No

**Table 1:** Conversational situations employing social favours and friendly gestures

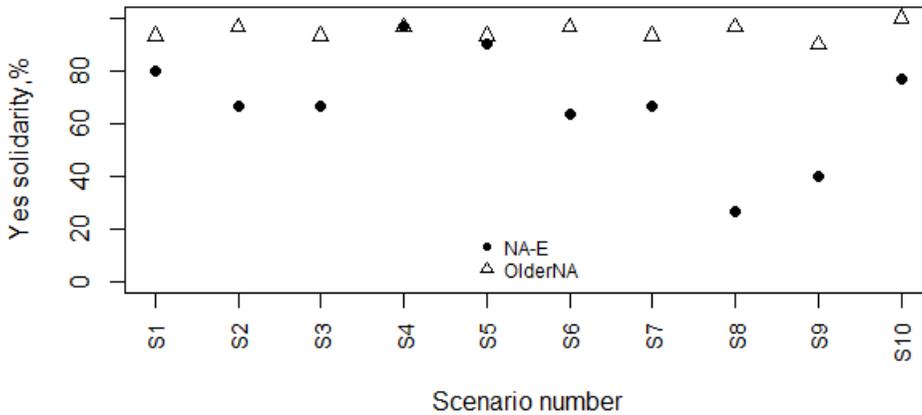
N o.	Conversational Situations (scenarios)	Responses	
		Yes	No
1.	While on a full bus somebody steps on your foot, but he/she apologizes. Would you say something such as 'no worries' or 'that's ok'?	Yes	No
2.	While walking on a narrow sidewalk somebody passes by without saying 'excuse me'. Is this an odd behavior?	Yes	No
3.	Somebody interrupts your conversation without saying 'excuse me'. Is this behavior annoying?	Yes	No
4.	You do not say 'excuse me' after sneezing when there are people around you.	Yes	No
5.	You have an appointment with your family doctor at 10:00, but the secretary calls your name after 45 minutes. You consider this rude.	Yes	No
6.	You are getting off the bus from the front door while other passengers are trying to get on at the same time. Would you say 'I am sorry'?	Yes	No
7.	You are filling out a form for your health card at Service Ontario. You have to ask for a new form because you have made some mistakes on the first one. Would you say 'I am sorry'?	Yes	No
8.	In a restaurant, you spill some of your coffee on the table cover. Would you apologize to the waiter for this?	Yes	No
9.	A friend of yours requested your book that he/she does not have access to, but you forgot to bring it. Would you apologize?	Yes	No
10.	You realize that you have acted poorly towards your colleague or classmate. You would send him/her a text message or Facebook message saying 'you are sorry' instead of waiting until you meet him/her next week?	Yes	No

**Table 2:** Conversational situations employing mild social violations

## 6. Results

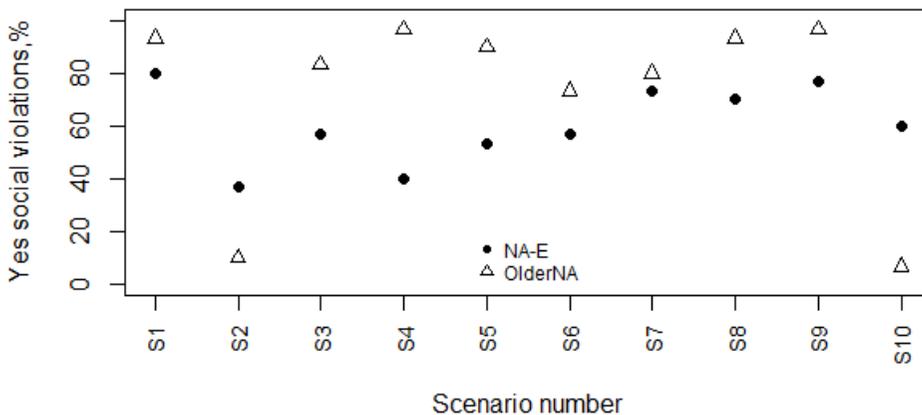
We used R programming language for statistical computing to analyse our data (Field et al. 2012). The Wilcoxon rank-sum test (two-tailed) showed that there was a significant difference at .05 threshold between older NA speakers ( $Mdn=28.5$ ) and NA-E bilinguals ( $Mdn= 20$ ),  $W= 7.5$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $r = -0.68$  (see Fig. 1). The analysis used an equal number of observations in each condition. The median is higher for older NA speakers, which tells us that they have scored higher. In other words, they were more inclined to connectedness politeness by agreeing that these situations establish some kind of solidarity through various ways ranging from starting a conversation to accepting compliments. 50% of their scores were between 28 and 22.5. The (IQR) did not overlap along the vertical axis, suggesting that NA-E bilinguals and older NA speakers differ significantly. There was more variability in NA-E bilinguals 'Yes' scores (IQR= 4.5) than the older NA speakers who demonstrated a high level of agreement with each other (IQR =1).

Fig. 1 Older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals Yes scores for social favours



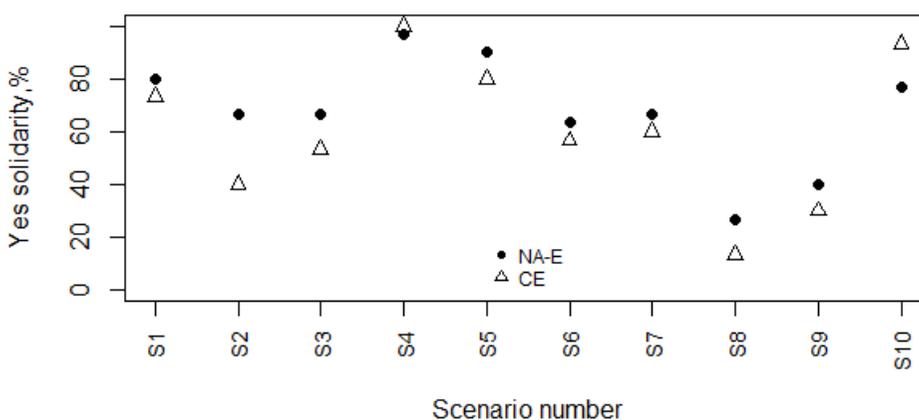
Situations that induced mild social violations and invoked remedy have also shown a significant difference at .05 level between older NA speakers ( $Mdn= 26$ ) and NA-E bilinguals ( $Mdn= 17.5$ ),  $W= 23$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ,  $r = -0.37$  as shown in Fig. 2. Older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals held quite different attitudes toward social violations. This highlights the fact that the majority of older NA speakers tend to agree that *most* of these scenarios have violated certain social norms and require remedy- they scored higher than NA-E bilinguals did. 50% of their scores lie between 28 and 22.5 whereas NA-E bilinguals have 50% of their scores between 21.75 and 16.25. Again, the difference between the upper and lower quartile is 5.5 for older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals.

Fig. 2 Older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals Yes scores for social violations



The Wilcoxon rank-sum test (two-tailed) revealed that solidarity-achieving scenarios (connectedness politeness) for NA-E bilinguals ( $Mdn=20$ ) did not differ significantly at .05 level from CE speakers ( $Mdn=17.5$ ),  $W= 41$ ,  $p = 0.49$ ,  $r = -0.12$  as shown in Fig. 3. NA-E bilinguals scored a bit higher and 50% of their scores are between 23.75 and 19.25. CE speakers showed more variability because their 50% is between 23.5 and 13. There was more variability in the scores of CE speakers compared to NA-E bilinguals- the IQR = 4.5 for NA-E was small relative to IQR = 10.5 for the CE speakers.

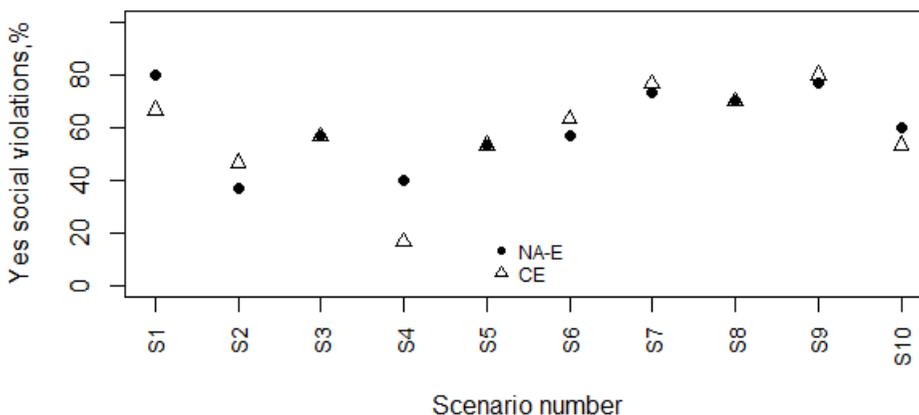
Fig. 3 NA-E bilinguals and CE monolinguals Yes scores for social favours



The plot in Fig. 4 shows that the two groups did not differ significantly in evaluating mild social violations,  $W = 47.5$ ,  $p = 0.84$ ,  $r = -0.034$ . However, the range is slightly larger for NA-E bilinguals than for CE speakers, which means if we take the bottom 25% of NA-E bilinguals then there is more variability in their scores than the bottom 25% of CE speakers. The second quartile has been slightly different: 17.5 for NA-E bilinguals and 18 for CE speakers.

We have also run a chi square test to determine which scenarios or conditions were significantly different at .05 level. For the first set of conditions, we have found that scenarios 8 and 9 have low  $p$ -value= 0.00 and 0.0163. The second set of conditions showed that three scenarios were significantly different. In scenario 4 the  $p$ - value was 0.01,  $p= 0.02$  in scenario 10, and in scenario 2 the  $p$ -value was 0.0325.

Fig. 4 NA-E bilinguals and CE monolinguals Yes scores for social violations



## 7. Discussion

The results showed that NA-E bilinguals differ significantly from older NA speakers in both connectedness and separateness politeness. Older NA speakers have high expectations of their classmates or colleagues; therefore, not receiving an email from the thankee (scenario 8) has been marked as rude- 96% of older NA speakers have considered it rude compared to 26% of the NA-E bilinguals and 13% of the CE speakers. The significant difference between older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals is self-explanatory. Two factors play an important role in classifying classmates and colleagues as (close) friends and consequently expecting a reply from them is legitimately in line with connectedness politeness. The importance of the first factor stems from the fact that the majority of collective cultures have a homogeneous demographic combination. They usually have a common descent or ethnicity, which reveals other interrelated elements such as religion, culture and language. These sociocultural factors, in addition to other biological factors such as skin, hair, and bone structure, etc., facilitate the process of communication and mutual understanding, and lay solid foundations for cooperation and interdependence. Second, relations and ties in interdependent cultures are not built on haphazard predictions; the general atmosphere in the educational institution, which is based on annual rather than semester system, strengthens them. Practically, classmates and colleagues see each other every day for years and take part in various personal, social and academic occasions. These two factors seem to motivate members of collective cultures to freely cross over the individualistic borders and go beyond the basics of formal relations. The convergence between NA-E bilinguals and CE speakers is a function of the consistent merging process

into a culture that upholds separateness politeness as the mainstay of their daily interactions.

The same effect can be noticed in scenario 9 where 90% of the older NA speakers have agreed that reciprocating a compliment is the default in NA culture. Compliment reciprocation may vary depending on different factors, such as, the compliment giver and the object of the compliment. In an interdependent culture, such as NA, complimenting someone on a new piece of clothing or haircut they have been sporting obliges the compliment receiver to use something along the lines of *'en-ux biš xilyena* 'your eyes are nicer' or the reply in scenario 9. On the other hand, it was all right for NA-E bilinguals and CE speakers not to deflect a compliment with 40% and 30% respectively. According to individualistic cultural rituals, a compliment receiver, in a similar situation, is bound to take a certain course of action that is rarely adopted in NA, viz., to smile and thank the compliment giver. There are probably other forms of returning a compliment, but to downplay the compliment is the commonest in such cultures. It is worth noting that failing to efficiently reciprocate a compliment in NA or assuming that a *'thank you'* will suffice is considered rude by the compliment receiver. This kind of reciprocity creates a kind of equilibrium, which is a corollary of connectedness politeness, between compliment giver and receiver.

For the second set of scenarios, we found three clear cases of divergence between older NA speakers and NA-E bilinguals. The first case is scenario 4 where 96% of older NA speakers have agreed that sneezing in public does not call for the unnecessary use of *'excuse me'*, whereas 40% of NA-E bilinguals compared to only 16% of CE speakers have preferred not to say *'excuse me'* after sneezing. The chi square test did not show a significant difference between them,  $p= 0.0895$ . Why do older NA speakers behave in such a blunt manner, with brazen negligence of solidarity-achieving protocols? It is legitimate to intuit that this is not the case. It is just a situation that older NA speakers conceive of as a biological reflex that does not need to be mitigated by using one of the designated tools for expressing separateness politeness strategies. According to the NA culture, the strength and abruptness of this involuntary activity pressurize the sneezer to extol a deity by uttering the religiously motivated phrase *shtabaḥ shim-ux rabbī* 'praise be to your name, my Lord'. Although the sneezer has rendered homage to a physically nonexistent third party (i.e. a deity), it is typical in NA to reciprocate the sneezer's exaltation with *rahmeh*<sup>28</sup> (may God have mercy on you).

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<sup>28</sup> If somebody sneezes during a debate, the sneezer himself or one of the debaters can use the sneeze as a confirmation that s/he is telling the truth: *'ādī p-shahāde* (here comes the testimony).

The second case is scenario 10. Here we thought that some older NA speakers might not be interested in electronic gadgets and, as a result, might not have access to phones or social media. Thus this condition could be confounded. Quite the reverse, they proved us wrong when some of them confirmed having Facebook and Twitter accounts. As members of a collective culture, 94% of older NA speakers preferred face-to-face apology to text messages or other forms of social media compared to 40% of NA-E bilinguals and 47% of CE speakers. Although it is a kind of face threatening act, older NA speakers still wanted to express their sincere apology in person. Scenario 10 reveals an interesting aspect of separateness politeness in NA. The older NA speakers thought sending a message is somehow rude and might add insult to injury, and eventually backfire on them. Again, this kind of reaction can be attributed to their inherent inclination towards achieving solidarity by being physically close to the offended party. It is very important for them to make it clear that their intention is to right the wrong and get the relationship back on track. Heartfelt apologies pave the way for gradual normalization of interpersonal exchanges. For NA-E bilinguals and CE speakers priority is given to the immediacy of the offence, which brings about the urge for apology through any possible channel.

In scenario 2, 90% of older NA speakers have agreed that passing by someone while walking on a narrow sidewalk without saying 'excuse me' is not odd. On the contrary, NA-E bilinguals and CE speakers have found it odd but with varying degrees. However, the difference between NA-E bilinguals (36%) and CE speakers (46%) was not statistically significant. It is important to keep in mind that this very specific setting excludes jostling and shoving. In this case, older NA speakers would avoid using separateness politeness signals such as 'excuse me', because, the sidewalk is a communal public property according to their interdependent makeup which moulds their perspective of the interactional milieu. Therefore, moving past other people in a narrow sidewalk does not warrant the use of an unnecessary 'excuse me'; conversely, the use of '*excuse me*' can be interpreted as an alien behaviour (i.e. being more formal) or a distraction.

We have noticed that not only NA-E bilinguals but also older NA speakers have adapted to separateness politeness patterns in some cases. A very clear case is scenario 6 (Table 2). 73% of older NA speakers found that getting off the bus from the front door while other passengers are trying to get on sanctions the use of 'I am sorry'. Older NA speakers have spent most of their life in a country where interdependence and establishing rapport is considered the core of interactional machinery. Therefore, we predicted that older NA speakers would not envisage this as a violation of social conduct that can be attributed to some spatial and temporal factors. Buses in their home country are usually packed, people spend long times waiting, usually

not in line, and most of the buses are not equipped with a back door. All these factors should make it hard for the passengers to conceive alighting from a bus as transformed into a violation. Nevertheless, the Canadian setting has brought about a major change into some of their basic conceptualizations of politeness in interactional milieu.

In scenario 5, older NA speakers have shown a high degree of cultural integration. Here we have again two contrastive images depicting two distinct cultures. The first image depicts their home country where the concept of family doctor is not recognized and elastic appointments are quite familiar. Consequently, cancellations without prior notice and waiting longer than expected time are the norm. With all these drawbacks in the services provided, neither doctors nor their secretaries acknowledge that a social breach has occurred. It is important to note that in collective cultures small gatherings, such as patients in a waiting room, usually result in phatic communion. These small talks often go beyond superficial exchanges about weather and time to discussions of various topics, such as religion, politics, and economy. In the same vein, 'how are you?' is usually not taken to be an empty question, thus replying with 'good' or 'good, thanks' is odd; a bona fide in-depth reciprocation is sought out. Contrary to individualistic cultures, the inquirer expects an answer loaded with content. That would be a breach of manners in the Canadian culture. The second image depicts the Canadian culture where designated family doctors and relatively more organized appointments are factors that considerably shorten the time spent at clinics. That said, we could infer that old NA speakers at family doctor clinic either feel alienated because of the lack of solidarity or have successfully adapted from one culture to the other. They have scored 90% on scenario 5 whereas NA-E bilinguals and CE speakers both have scored 53%. It is interesting that older NA speakers have developed tolerance of cultural shift from connectedness to separateness politeness.

## **8. Conclusion**

As a dominant language, IA has a huge, immediate impact on NA (i.e. a minority language) on various linguistic and cultural levels. The convergence of IA and NA in connectedness and separateness politeness which occur in particular niches paves the way for language shift and plays an important role in determining language vitality.

In situations of linguistic contact, it is normal for bilingual speakers to borrow from the lexicon and syntax of one language and employ in another. Borrowing lexical items and syntactic structures is supposed to be easier and faster than borrowing elements of pragmatic or communicative competence. Components of communicative competence such as metaphors, idioms, and politeness strategies are based on conceptualizations that are shaped by the

ingrained social values in the collective minds of the members of a community. However, NA-E bilinguals proved that borrowing the components of pragmatic competence and putting them into day-to-day interpersonal use is on a par with lexical and syntactic borrowings. Borrowing, lexical items or pragmatic components, is usually considered a source of linguistic richness. It is, also, a facilitating factor of communication among interactants with different linguistic backgrounds, but, for an endangered language, it is a side effect that nudges NA downhill fast.

Older NA speakers provided further evidence with probative value that language change is not bound by age, because they unexpectedly showed signs of cultural adaptation in particular situations. This outcome supported our claim that politeness is not a function of language, but rather a result of interpersonal relations. It is also important to note that older NA speakers are not fluent in the language of the dominant culture (i.e. English) and do not use it to communicate with their family members. Therefore, it is easier to trace the effect of acculturation on younger NA speakers who demonstrated signs of a profound shift towards the pragmatic norms of the host culture. In other words, instead of adhering to the values of their interdependent culture, NA-E bilinguals took an individualistic approach to connectedness and separateness politeness

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## **Appendix**

### **Section 1**

#### ***What I am trying to discover?***

In this study, I want to explore how students speaking a second language would react in specific daily situations compared to monolinguals. The situations may, explicitly or implicitly, imply the use of expressions such as *thank you, I am sorry, hi, etc.*

#### **Instructions**

Imagine yourself in the following daily interactions. Circle 'Yes' if you agree or if the described prompt is what you would do, and 'No' when you disagree. Try to be yourself; do not try to project an ideal image that does not reflect your genuine personality.

### **Section 2**

#### **Focus group background and information sheet**

#### **Instructions**

Please fill in this that will provide us with some basic background information about you.

1. I am a (check one):  
[ ] Male  
[ ] Female
2. I have been in Canada for:  
[ ] year(s)
3. I use English in my communication (check one):  
[ ] always  
[ ] usually  
[ ] often/frequently  
[ ] sometimes; [ ] seldom  
[ ] never
4. I am a native speaker of English: Yes [ ] No [ ]

### **CONSENT**

- I have read the information presented about a study being conducted by Ala Al-Kajela of McMaster University.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (optional): \_\_\_\_\_