Interpretive Constructs in Contrast: The Case of Flattery in Hebrew and in Palestinian Arabic

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Abstract

The contrastive study of interpretive constructs, the end products of evaluative processes, enables identification of patterns of meaning-making that may result in cross-cultural misunderstandings. The study focuses on judgments of flattery in Israeli Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic. Using contrastive metapragmatic methodology, it examines how flattery is used and perceived in two neighbouring speech communities with different cultural speaking styles: Israeli dugri (and its related firgun) and Arabic musayara. Findings indicate more similarities than differences in the performance and evaluation of flattery, with a slight departure with regard to evaluation and stance. We hypothesize that following the asymmetrical contact between Hebrew speakers and Arabic speakers in Israel, younger Arabic speakers tend to adopt the majority group's patterns of politeness.

Keywords

flattery – Hebrew – Palestinian Arabic – metapragmatics – dugri – musayara
1 Introduction

Flattery is a strategic non-conventionalized social behaviour that constitutes an exploitation of politeness strategies for the benefit of the flatterer. Through a mediating effect of pleasing the hearer, the flatterer aims to achieve three goals: transactional (i.e. exchanging of goods), self-promotional (i.e. achieving likeability), and relational (i.e. establishing, improving, or restoring relationships). However, accomplishing the pleasing effect is dependent on how participants in an interaction evaluate the action and the speaker’s intent (Danziger, 2020). If judged as non-face-threatening, it may serve a relational function; if judged as overpolite (Locher and Watts, 2005), it is commonly seen as manipulative (Eylon and Heyd, 2008; Kapust, 2018).

Flattery is, therefore, an interpretive construct, an evaluative product of meaning-making processes (Danziger, 2020; for a discussion of the term interpretive construct, see Culpeper, 2011). Judging an action as flattery involves the assessment of textual cues and contextual clues (Weizman and Dascal, 1991) filtered through culture- and society-specific meanings attributed to the action (Danziger, 2020). Through an examination of evaluations of flattery as a test case of interpretive constructs, we can learn about social and cultural sensitive processes of meaning-making (Blum-Kulka and Hamo, 2011) and how they are manifested in a specific interpretive community. Studying flattery contrastively may allow us to understand differences in strategic use and abuse of positive communication, and the ways in which interpretations are constructed by two communities with differing communicative ethos (Katriel, 1986, 1999).

In this paper we examine judgments of flattery in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Building on the premise that pragmatic misunderstandings are especially detrimental in pre-existing conflictual relations (Ellis, 2018), a contrastive pragmatic study of two politically separate yet geographically and socially interconnected communities of Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel can provide an opportune setting for understanding the ways in which cultural differences are manifested in patterns of meaning-making. Identifying the similarities and differences between their culture-specific manifestations and judgements of flattery, the two linguacultures can exemplify how interpretive constructs are a rich source of analysis for contrastive pragmatics, historical pragmatics, socio-pragmatics, linguistic politeness, ethnography of communication, and cross-cultural communication. Moreover, the methodological integration of metapragmatics and ethnography of communication offered in this study extends contrastive pragmatics research by suggesting a culturally informed analysis of similarities and differences in the performance and meaning-making patterns of relational work across languages.
In the following section we outline a theoretical framework that links between the concepts of interpretive constructs and communicative ethos. First, we conceptualize flattery as an interpretive construct and, second, survey the communicative ethos of Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel and their expected manifestations in positive communication. By so doing, we wish to demonstrate that, similar to metacommunicative terms, interpretive constructs are informed by the culture-specific ethos of linguacultures. Through focusing on a specific interpretive construct – flattery – which is only available for analysis through metapragmatic labelling, we aim to show that the evaluation of certain communicative actions as flattery is informed by values endorsed by members of a specific linguaculture. This theoretical framework sets the ground for a methodology that will advance contrastive pragmatics analysis by allowing the examination of the lines drawn by members of different yet connected linguacultures around acceptable and unacceptable positive behaviour.

2 Flattery as an Interpretive Construct

Relational work theory offers a fitting framework for conceptualizing flattery as an interpretive construct, owing to its approach to politeness as a “discursive concept arising out of interactants’ perceptions and judgements of their own and other’s verbal behaviour” (Locher and Watts, 2005: 10). A social behaviour is judged appropriate or inappropriate (polite/non-polite; unmarked/marked) in a specific context by participants in an interaction. In light of this framework, any positive communication can potentially be labelled as flattery; labelling an action as such is a result of interactants’ judgement of the communicative action in question as either positively marked or overpolite. A previous metapragmatic study that analysed 661 judgements of flattery and examined its use and perception in the Israeli-Hebrew speaking community has led to the following definition:

A marked communicative action; it is intended to be face-pleasing to the recipient, an effect that mediates one of three interactional goals of the flatterer: transactional, self-promotional, or relational. The action is perceived by at least one participant in an interaction as instrumental after evaluating textual cues and contextual clues.

DANZIGER, 2020: 423
This definition qualifies flattery as an interpretive construct since its evaluation depends on the judgment of the action and the speaker’s intent as instrumental. The interpretive process of judging an action as flattery involves an evaluation of textual cues and contextual clues (Weizman and Dascal, 1991) in regard to what the interpreter identifies as conventional positive communication (e.g. compliments, praise, terms of endearment). In the first stage, the addressee detects a potential mismatch between the positive words that flattery relies on and the context in which they were uttered, including asymmetrical power relations, character of the participants, potential gain for the speaker, and the appropriateness of language and behaviour used in specific settings. Following the identification of a mismatch, the addressee labels the communicative action as flattery, attributing instrumental intentions to the positive words.

Since norms of communication are constructed around culture-specific values (Katriel, 1986), analysing interpretive constructs allows outlining the ways in which members in a specific community connect between cultural values and norms of politeness. Evaluating a positive action as either appropriate (e.g. polite, conventional, acceptable) or inappropriate (e.g. overpolite, flattery, unacceptable) is informed by culture-specific perception of values such as sincerity and solidarity, and preferred modes of speaking in a certain community, such as directness or indirectness (Blum-Kulka, 1992 [2005]). As a result, differences in the communicative ethos endorsed by members of a community affect their norms of politeness; what is expected and appropriate in context for one community may not be perceived as such by another. The advantage of this link between norms of politeness and communicative ethos for contrastive pragmatic analysis is clear: similar to politeness-realization strategies comparatively studied in the past (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Ogiermann, 2009), (im)politeness evaluation strategies are also subjected to cultural, social, and other contextual variations. Such variations make interpretive constructs a valuable point of departure for a comparative analysis of meaning-making processes in different cultural communities.

3 Israeli and Palestinian Communicative Ethos

The Israeli-Palestinian context provides an interesting test case for contrastive pragmatics since it includes two politically separate yet socially interconnected communities. Hebrew speakers and Arabic speakers in Israel share a social space, but their points of contact are limited. Due to the enduring intractable conflict and its effect on the geo-politics of Israel, the two communities
are simultaneously geographically and politically separate and socially and economically intertwined. While native Hebrew speakers are mostly Jewish, Arabic native speakers in Israel are of three different faiths: Muslim, Christian and Druze. The Muslim Arabic speakers in Israel broadly self-identify ethnonationally as Palestinian (Amara, 2017).

The power relations between the cultures are asymmetric. As the majority population (79.1% in 2018), Jewish Hebrew speakers are largely monolingual. Arabic speakers are 20.9% of the population and have a certain level of Hebrew proficiency required for official and everyday contexts such as tertiary education, work, commerce, and state institutions such as public health and political participation (Henkin-Roitfarb, 2011; Amara, 2017). Israeli-Palestinians' Hebrew proficiency depends on place of residence and education level. Each group, having its own language and history, represents different speech communities that have traditionally been considered complete opposites in their communicative ethos: the Hebrew *dugri* and its extension, *firgun*, and the Arabic *musayara*.

### 3.1 Jewish-Israeli *dugri* and *firgun*

*Dugri* (דוגרי) is a metacommunicative term for the Jewish-Israeli cultural speaking ethos (Katriel, 1986). Borrowed from Arabic (meaning to be honest, to speak the truth), the cultural keyword manifests in a straightforward and unembellished speech that in linguistic politeness terms is connected with directness, sincerity, and solidarity at the expense of face maintenance (Blum-Kulka, 1992 [2005]; Ellis and Maoz, 2002). Since the 1980s, an erosion of the *dugri* style has been documented, parallel with the emergence of two related speaking styles: *kasah*, and *firgun*. *Kasah* (כסאח) refers to a hostile, bashing talk that maintains the assertive directness of *dugri* without its infrastructure of solidarity. *Firgun*, (פרגון), in contrast, is an interpersonal speaking style that maintains sincerity and solidarity in a competitive, individualistic environment (Katriel, 1993; Maschler, 2001; Dori-Hacohen, 2016; Danziger, 2018). The Hebrew verb *lefargen* roughly translates as “to support, not to envy or begrudge another’s success” (Katriel, 1993: 31), and denotes a selfless, sincere supportive verbal activity towards another.

As an indirect communicative strategy, flattery may be seen as directly related to *firgun* when the latter is perceived as exceeding the norms of appropriate supportiveness. In cases where words of support are evaluated as instrumental or insincere, they are often labelled flattery (*ḥanfanut*, Katriel, 1993). Since

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1 The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics’ official report for 2018; https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/DocLib/2019/Shnaton70_mun.pdf (accessed July 2020).
firgun has been shown to be a communicative pivot for Jewish-Israeli solidarity-oriented social behaviour (Danziger, 2018; Kampf and Danziger, 2019), this metacommunicative term needs to be taken into account when studying the evaluation of strategic language use by Hebrew speakers.

3.2 Palestinian-Arabic musayara

Despite wide variations among Arabic communities, it is commonly accepted that Arabic linguacultures share beliefs, values, practices, and a sustained communal identity (Zaharna, 1995; Feghali, 1997; Abuarrah et al., 2013). Common discursive features documented in pan-Arabic are affective argumentation, repetition, frequent use of formulas, ornate and elaborate language use, and emphasis on context over code in meaning-making (Johnstone, 1991; Zaharna, 1995; Feghali, 1997). Pragmatic and ethnographic scholars have commonly referred to this set of features that comprise the Arabic speaking ethos as musayara (Griefat and Katriel, 1989; Feghali, 1997; Nelson et al., 2002; Henkin-Roitfarb, 2011). Musayara is a folk-linguistic term in Arabic linguaculture (ٍمُسَأَر; literally “to accommodate” and “go along with”), commonly used to describe a cultural orientation towards maintaining harmony in social relations. The musayara interactional code is face-maintaining, other-oriented, socio-linguistic behaviour. It refers to behaviours “designed to enhance commonalities rather than differences, cooperation rather than conflict, and mutuality rather than self-assertion” (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 123).

Verbal acts of musayara can be marked by both conversational effusiveness and conversational restraint. Conversational effusiveness is manifested through repetition, elaboration, and affective communication, i.e. “interactional tactics that function to dramatize and to intensify interpersonal bonds, [e.g.] layered greetings, the use of multiple, accentuated deferential or affectionate forms of address, accented display of attentiveness, and the open sharing of personal resources, in both time and effort” (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 124; also, Feghali, 1997; Ellis and Maoz, 2002). Studies in Arabic linguistic politeness found empirical indications for such effusiveness. For example, Egyptian and Syrian compliments were found to be longer and more verbose than American English, as well as heavily relying on formulaic expressions of compliment responses (Nelson et al., 1993, 1996). Eshreteh (2014) found prevalent use of exaggeration as a positive politeness strategy when performing invitations in Palestinian Arabic. Conversational restraint is manifested through indirectness, deference, and an effort to avoid discord or confrontation, even if it entails a momentary concession of oneself. Importantly, the two characteristics of musayara are

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2 Following Feghali (1997), “Arab” is anyone who speaks Arabic and feels as an Arab.
complementary; in order to maintain social harmony, speakers are said to use both indirect and effusive language aimed at avoiding confrontation.

Musayara can be read as positively marked communication when it does not entail “subornation of one’s self-interests to those of one’s interlocuter” (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 128). Nevertheless, its main characteristics – indirectness and effusive language – may trigger an interpretation of overpoliteness, and thus flattery, when judged as instrumental (Danziger, 2020). The literature connects musayara and flattery in a specific context entitled “political musayara” (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 125), by which one pursues self-interest while maintaining politeness norms, namely attempting to address the other’s face needs with a particular goal in mind without transgressing acceptability. Nevertheless, “political musayara” is vulnerable to crossing from positively marked (musayara) to overpoliteness (flattery or masaḥ juḥ3), namely, when a behaviour “is perceived as overly self-ingratiating” (p. 128). Interestingly, the crossing from musayara to flattery parallels the crossing from firgun to flattery (hanfanut or hanupa) in the Hebrew-speaking community. In both cases, evaluation of others as failing to realize cultural communicative ethos represents the peril of overpoliteness or crossing from appropriate to inappropriate positive social behaviour.

Similar to the erosion of the Jewish-Israeli communicative ethos in the late 1980s, scholars have documented an erosion of musayara ethos among younger speakers of Arabic (Griefat and Katriel, 1989; Zupnik, 2000) and a general pragmatic change towards directness in expressive speech acts performance among younger speakers of Arabic (Syrian God wishes: Ferguson, 1983; Omani greetings: Emery, 2000). Nelson and colleagues (2002) reported a preference for direct communication in expressing refusals in Egyptian Arabic. Against the backdrop of mixed findings, they concluded that while Arabic speakers may present similar communication pattern at times, over-generalization should be avoided and “cross-cultural examinations of communication style and patterns should be based on data, systematically collected and analyzed” (p. 42).

As previous cross-cultural studies have shown (Griefat and Katriel, 1989; Ellis and Maoz, 2002), the opposite communicative ethos of dugri (and firgun by extension) and musayara can bring about cultural misunderstanding and hinder problem-solving discourse (Katriel, 1999; Ellis, 2018). While Israeli Hebrew speakers’ directness can be experienced as aggressive by Arabic speakers, the indirect and effusive style of Arabic speakers can be perceived as

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3 According to Griefat and Katriel (1989), going overboard in humouring others is sometimes referred to as /masah juḥ/ ([masah juḥ]; lit. wiping the dust [off the elegant, silken clothes of the ruler]).
insincere and manipulative. Against this backdrop, understanding differences and similarities in evaluating flattery in both linguacultures is of special value. Studying the culture-specific properties of the use and perception of flattery in a contrastive manner underscores differences between the linguacultures’ perception of acceptable and unacceptable positive verbal behaviour and may aid in preventing cultural misunderstandings in an already tense socio-political environment.

4 Methodology and Data

The present study compares evaluations of flattery made by Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel. Since metadiscursive labelling of interpretive constructs plays an essential role in constituting an interpretive community (Danziger, 2020; Caffi, 1998), a contrastive metapragmatic analysis was applied for discovering differences and similarities in the utilization and evaluation of flattery. Two separate yet complementary metapragmatic datasets were collected through a diary method of interpersonal interaction (see also Culpeper, 2011) and a “metacommunicative” online corpus method for public interaction (see Jucker and Taavitsainen, 2014). Each dataset was analysed separately and then comparatively, with special emphasis on power relations, social distance, and interactional functions. Lastly, findings were triangulated by conducting a focus group with native speakers of Hebrew and Arabic in order to give a more detailed picture of the social behaviour under investigation. Table 1 summarizes the data collection process and levels of analysis.

| Data   | Diary method      | Online corpus   | Focus groups          |
|--------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Level of analysis | Interpersonal | Social          | Interpersonal and social |
| Hebrew data    | 79 reports   | 561 items of hanupa | 15 native speakers   |
| Arabic data     | 37 reports   | 43 items of tamalluq | 9 native speakers    |

4 A similar claim has been made repeatedly when comparing variations of Arabic and English (e.g. Cohen, 1987; Zaharna, 1995).
The diary corpus comprised reported evaluations of flattery events. Respondents’ evaluation of what counts as flattery in their own eyes allowed us to ask the following questions: What verbal acts count as flattery? What are the common contexts in which flattery is performed? Why did the participants judge them as such? Respondents were instructed to report on events in which they flattered someone, they themselves were flattered, or they witnessed flattery. They were asked to detail what had happened, what was said, and who took part in the event. Following the descriptive part of the process, we solicited “retrospective comments” (Culpeper, 2011: 11) by asking the respondents what led them to judge a specific behaviour flattery. The responses allowed us to identify the textual cues and contextual clues (Weizman and Dascal, 1991) Hebrew and Arabic speakers resorted to when making their evaluation. Finally, in order to identify evaluations of flattery, respondents were asked what they thought of the flatterers and what they felt following the flattery event. Consequently, comparable diaries that include information on the content of the utterance, the socio-pragmatic context of the interaction, and the informant’s reflections on the event were produced.

The evaluations were collected by the Israeli research firm iPanel.co.il, which specializes in online surveys. The Hebrew corpus comprised 100 reports by a representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel in terms of gender, age, religiousness, and place of residence. The Arabic corpus included only “1948” Palestinians (John and Agbarya, 2020), who reside within the borders of Israel. Unlike Palestinians who reside in the Occupied Territories, the former have frequent contact with Hebrew speakers in a variety of professional, commercial, and educational contexts. The 165 respondents represent the Arab population in Israel in terms of religion, gender, age, and area of residence.

Only 18 Arabic-speaking respondents provided relevant and coherent answers; while some confused the literary Arabic words for flattery /tamalluq/ (تسامع), with bullying /tasallut/ (التساطل), others indicated their disdain to answer the questions, probably because of an ideological refusal or a political reluctance to participate in a Jewish-Israeli-led study. In order to increase the number of respondents, we enlisted a research assistant from East Jerusalem, a native Arabic speaker, who contacted potential Israeli-Palestinian participants. Through this process we added 19 reports to the corpus, all of

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5 John and Agbarya (2020) encountered a similar challenge when collecting data from “48” Palestinians. Although the questions were formulated by an Arabic native speaker, it was evident from the names of the two PIs that they were part of the Jewish-Israeli community. A few participants replied in Hebrew, demonstrating their awareness that the study was conducted by Hebrew speakers.
which were completed by 20- to 22-year-old Arabic-speaking respondents. In order to balance the demographics (age and gender) of the Hebrew and Arabic datasets, we created new, comparable datasets. (The final Arabic-speaker dataset was comprised of 37 respondents, 40% men and 60% women, of the age ranges 18–35; 51%; 36–50; 18.9%, 51–59; 8.1%. The final Hebrew speaking dataset was comprised of 79 respondents, 45% men and 55% women, of the age range 18–35; 59.5%, 36–50; 31.6%, 51–54, 8.9%).

The online public dataset was compiled through keyword searches for the literary Arabic root for flattery /tamalluq/ (تمالق) and the Hebrew root /ḥanupa/ (חנופה) in SketchEngine, an online tool that allows access to large linguistic databases. Hebrew script was used in .il domains and therefore provided text produced by Jewish-Israeli Hebrew speakers (561 items). The Palestinian Arabic search was limited to .il and .ps domains, which are used in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, respectively (43 items). The Arabic SketchEngine database contains all webpages published until 2012 and the Hebrew one all webpages published until 2014. The items were collected during these time-frames and translated into English by professional translators.

The challenges we faced in collecting the Palestinian Arabic materials led us to adopt a complementary strategy for increasing the validity of our findings. In addition to meticulously cross-checking our contrastive analysis with a native Arabic-speaker research assistant, we discussed our findings with a focus group comprised of ten native speakers of Arabic, BA students in the Department of Communication and Journalism at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A similar discussion was conducted with 15 native speakers of Hebrew, also BA students in the same department.

5 Findings and Discussion

Our findings indicate similarities in the use of flattery in the two linguacultures in terms of context, performance, and evaluative process. The slight points of departure between the Hebrew and the Arabic speakers were found in their perceptions of and stance towards flattery and will be discussed in Section 6.

5.1 Contexts – When Do Hebrew and Arabic Speakers in Israel Expect to Encounter Flattery?

Flattery was found to be prevalent and expected by both Hebrew and Arabic speakers in similar social (settings and relationship types; e.g. social distance and status) and local (interactional) contexts. The three recurring social settings of flattery in both datasets were workplace, commerce, and politics, all of
which serve as main meeting points for Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel (Amara, 2017).  

Examples E1 and E2 demonstrate the common occurrences of flattery in sales. The salient similarities of discourse patterns in a commercial context is to be expected due to what Fairclough (1995) calls “the technologization of marketing discourse”, which is largely engineered and scripted towards pleasing customers. The first example was reported by an Arabic speaker in a shop.

E1) When I was buying clothes, the saleswoman started flattering me using a gentle tone of voice that is filled with hospitality and respect [saying] “Welcome”. (42-year-old woman)

ُحَنَّا اَرَادَتُ أَن اَشْتَرَى مَلَابِسَة بِدَا تُ تُلْبَيْتِي تَلْبِيَّة صُوْت لَطِيْفَة

ِحَيْنَ أَرَادَتْ اَن اَشْتَرَي مَلَابِسَة بِدَا تُلْبِيَّة

The second example was reported by a Hebrew speaker in a telemarketing context. The respondent told how she was flattered by an insurance company salesperson who wanted her to purchase a retirement plan:

E2) A representative will come to your house, we will schedule at the most convenient time for you. […] we can offer you a better plan than the one you have. (32-year-old woman)

يَأْو لَكَ نَزِيجٌ عَلَى الْحَابِي نِكْبَة شَأْوَت شَنْوَات لَكَ […] يَنْتُو لَكَ حَدِيطَة يَوْتَر شَيْء مَثْعَب مَعْهُ

يَاو نَزِيج عَلَى الْحَابِي نِكْبَة شَأْوَت شَنْوَات لَكَ […] يَنْتُو لَكَ حَدِيطَة يَوْتَر شَيْء مَثْعَب مَعْهُ

In both examples, the salespersons used flattery to encourage a transaction of goods by attempting to please their potential customers (Danziger, 2020; Chan and Sengupta, 2013). In E1, the addressee identified the “gentle” tone of voice used by the salesperson when welcoming her as flattery, while in E2 the

6 The following analysis focuses on the two first settings since the last adheres to the internal logic of public discourse (Kampf, 2013) and thus requires a separate study.
addressee judges the representative’s accommodating utterance “the most convenient time for you” as aiming to please.

The second recurring setting in both datasets was the workplace, which includes asymmetrical power relations and thus is more open to evaluation of communicative actions as flattery (for example, “my employee flat ters and justifies me all the time” [41-year-old Hebrew-speaking man]). Cases of flattery between equal colleagues were also reported, as demonstrated in the following words of a 30-year-old Arabic speaker: The respondent was flattered by a colleague, who reportedly said “You are the best person ever, thank you for all the help that you provided” (אنت أفضل شخص على الإطلاق شكرًا لكل المساعدة إلي قدمتها). While both datasets had examples of bottom-up and equal power relations in the workplace, only the Hebrew respondents reported top-down examples of employers flattering employees (6%), as in “to get free hours out of me, I was told I was hard-working, professional, and essential to the business” (40-year-old man; בניסיון להוציא ממני שעות עבודה лишコピー, נאמר לי שאני מקצועי וחרוץ ונצרך לUSART למשתנה). In discussing the latter example, participants in the Arabic focus group suggested that even though it may be for strategic purposes, instances of top-down positive behaviour in the workplace are not commonly considered flattery by Israeli Arabic speakers. It may be possible, however, that the corpus size was too small to account for flattery events in an infrequent context.

In local, interactional contexts, both Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking respondents reported encountering flattery in pre-requests as a means for encouragement to comply. Although overpolite pre-requests were identified in various social settings, a striking resemblance was noted in higher education where students coax each other for help. In the following examples, both participants are women in their twenties. The Arabic speaker reported:

E3) In university, my friends/colleagues flattered me and said that I was hardworking, all in order to copy my homework in a course. I responded with thank you, but I cannot give you [the homework].

fi l-ǧāmiʿati, ṣāḥibāt-ī/zamīlāt-ī fi l-taʿlīmi tamallaqū ‘alay-ya ‘inna-nī muṭḥahidatun li-ʾaḥdi l-wāǧibi l-dirāsiyyiyi fi muṭāqīn (sic). qultu la-hunna šukran lakin lā yumkinu-nī ʾiʿṭā’u-kunna

في الجامعة. صاحباتي/زميلاتي في التعليم تملقوني علي إنه مجهدة لأخذ الواجب الدراسي في مباق. قالت لي شكرًا لكن لا يمكنني أعطائك
The following Hebrew speaker was similarly approached by schoolmates, who reportedly said:

E4) They wanted me to do the assignment alone [...] they said I would do it best.

hem [rotzim] sheʾavatseʾa ’et haʾavoda levad [...] ’amro sheʾani mevatzaʾat ’et ze hakhi tov

As demonstrated in both examples, pre-requests were formulated as “sweeteners”, positive evaluations given to the addressee regarding their ability to fulfil a certain request (“You will do this best”; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984). In other cases, flattery was identified in pre-starters for a request, as demonstrated by a 20-year-old Arabic speaker who reported her friend told her she looked “beautiful today” before asking for help in a school assignment.

5.2 Pragmatic Strategies: How Do Hebrew and Arabic Speakers Flatter?
Similar patterns of resemblance were also found in how flattery is performed in both linguacultures. Hebrew and Arabic speakers reported on using positive politeness strategies, either linguistic strategies such as terms of endearment (“In the dorms, she treated me in such a good way [saying habibtī] and nice words”; 21-year-old Arabic speaking woman في السكن تعامل بطريقة جيدة،(حيبيتي) وكلمات لطفة), and/or paralinguistic markers such as tone of voice and facial expression. Respondents from both communities identified flattery when speakers used positive evaluations; redressive actions; gifts and bribes; and various expressive speech acts, such as boasting, thanking, and blessings.

As Figure 1 shows, the difference in performance strategy distribution between the linguacultures was insignificant (p>0.5).

The distribution of strategies for performing flattery is quite similar, with positive evaluation and positive politeness taking up the majority of reports (83% of the Arabic and 81% of the Hebrew reports). The following examples (E5, E6) for positive evaluation pre-starters demonstrate the resemblance:

7 ḥabībtī is a common term of endearment in Arabic, literally meaning “my loved one” (here in feminine form).
E5) A: Hi, why do you look very beautiful today?
B: Hi, thanks, thanks, you too.
A: I wanted to ask if you can help me in my assignment later.
B: Yes. Off course. (A 20-year-old Arabic-speaking woman)

A: marḥaban, limāḏā tabdīna ǧamilatan ǧiddan l-yawma?
B: ahlan, šukran šukran, ‘anti ʾayḍan
A: ʾaradtu ʾan ’as’ala-ki ’idā kāna yumkinu-ki musā’adat-ī fī waẓīfat-ī lāḥikan
B: ‘ağal, bi-l-ṭabʿi

E6) I am a nurse in a clinic, a mother came in without an appointment and told me sweetly, with a huge smile: “Oh, there, I was looking for you, you are the nicest nurse, could you vaccinate my son even though I don’t have an appointment?” (48-year-old Hebrew-speaking woman)

’ani ’aḥot bemirpa’a, nikhnasa ’ima lelo’ tor ve’amra li bemetikut ‘im ḥiyukh ‘anan ... ‘ah hine ‘otakh ḥipasti ’at ha’ahot hakhi nehmada sheyesh tokhli leḥasen ’et bni lamrot she’en li tor?
Both respondents identified compliments (“Hi, why do you look very beautiful today?”; “the nicest nurse”) as flattery in a pre-request context (“I wanted to ask if you can help in my assignment”; “Could you vaccinate my son?”). The juxtaposition between positive evaluation and request served as clues for the strategic use of these solidarity-oriented verbal actions, which in both cases benefited the requesting speakers.

5.3 Evaluative Categories: How Do Hebrew and Arabic Speakers Identify Flattery?

A previous study on how Hebrew speakers judge an action as flattery listed six common textual cues and contextual clues: (a) perceived potential gain for the addresser, (b) perceived undeserving addressee, (c) unequal power relations that affect contextual expectations, (d) evaluation of an action as exaggerated or hyperbolic, (e) recurrence or change in the addresser’s behavioural patterns, and (f) the public performance of the actions (Danziger, 2020).

The analysis of the Arabic data indicates that both Hebrew and Arabic speakers apply the same evaluative categories in identifying flattery. The following example demonstrates three of the six contextual clues (a, b, c) that a respondent noted in the evaluation of flattery:

E7) I witnessed a conversation between a [female] employee and our [male] employer in the office. The employee wanted to flatter her employer in order to get special attention from him, and praised him by saying things that are not true at all (48-year-old Arab man, who replied in Hebrew).

In this example, the participant interpreted insincere praise as flattery. The potential gain is surmised from the workplace power relations between employers and employees. The ‘undeservedness’ of the addressee is described...
in noting the participants’ judgement that the positive evaluation is untrue ("She praised him by saying things that are not true at all").

A slight difference between the respondents from the two communities was found in the textual cue of verbal exaggeration and hyperbole. While this cue of flattery was absent in the Arabic corpus, Hebrew speakers tended to judge textual exaggeration or hyperbole as overpolite. The following example from the Hebrew corpus demonstrates a speech event in which a recipient judged strategic behaviour intended to achieve the interactional goal of (heterosexual) relational success as flattery due to textual exaggeration.

E8) Don’t be ashamed to please her. The biggest problem men have today is that they’re embarrassed to admit they want someone, and if they do so they do it moderately. They skimp on compliments [...] on expressing their feelings [and] passion. [...] Now, I’m not saying be a creep and fill her door with heart-shaped Post-its. That happened to me once. And to teach you a lesson on the power of flattery: a door full of Post-its is very exaggerated and I thought it was creepy as hell, but do you think I didn’t sleep with him? Of course I did!

Xnet.com, 2014

ʾAl titbayesh leratzot. Habaʿaya hakhi retzinit shel gvarim beyameynu hi shehem mitbayshim lehodot shehem rotzim mishehi, veʾim hem modim ’az hem osim ’et ze bimsura, yaʾani, mitkamtsenim. Mitkamtsenim al maḥmaʾot, mitkamtsenim al habaʾat regashot, al bituey tshuka [...] akhshav ani lo omeret tihye ḥole nefesh vetemale laʾet kol hadelet beptakim nidbakim ʾim levavot. Ze kara li paʾam. Vekedey lelamed etkhem shiʿur meʾanyen ’al koḥa shel ḥanupa: delet meleʾa beptakim ze mugzam meʾod veze haya niraʾa li si’ hakripuyt. ʿAz ma Ᾱatem ḥoshvim, shelo shakhavti ʾito? betah sheken!
The Hebrew speaker in ES perceived the actions of her suiter (“a door full of Post-its”) as overpolite sexual behaviour because it was “very exaggerated” and “creepy as hell”.

In contrast, Arabic speakers based their judgments of overpolite behaviour on contextual clues, such as potential gain for the flatterer (a) and a gap between current and previous behaviour (e), leading to labelling the verbal action flattery. In a similar context of overpolite sexual behaviour, an Arabic speaker judged his friend’s action as flattery by noting contextual clues rather than textual ones; he detected insincerity due to conflicting previous patterns of expression (“He expressed his hatred for this other [female] colleague”, “أحد (زملائي عبر لي عن زميلة أخرى)”) and a benefit to the speaker (“He tries to court and flirt with her to receive ‘special treatment’”; حاول ملاطفتها بالكلام للحصول). The difference between the communities in evaluating the textual cue of verbal exaggeration and hyperbole as flattery was discussed with the Arabic-speaking focus group. Participants confirmed that although exaggeration can serve as a textual cue for flattery, “over-complimenting does not necessarily mean flattery”. One participant stated, “sometimes I over-compliment but I don’t want something, I don’t have an interest”. This observation may suggest that textual exaggeration and hyperbole are not the most obvious flattery cue for Arabic speakers, leading them to turn to other contextual clues in their evaluations. The finding aligns with previous pragmatic studies arguing that Palestinian Arabic is a high-context linguaculture (Abuarrah et al., 2013), where “meaning is embedded more in the context rather than the code” (Zaharna, 1995: 242). Studies have recognized verbal exaggeration as a common characteristic of Arabic (Pan-Arabic: Zaharna, 1995; Jordanian Arabic: Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008) and specifically of Palestinian Arabic (Eshreteh, 2014). The finding also corresponds with studies on speech acts of compliment in Egyptian Arabic and Syrian Arabic that have found them long and verbose, displaying repetition and common formulas (Nelson et al., 1993, 1996).

5.4 Stance – How Do Hebrew and Arabic Speakers Perceive Flattery?

The most notable point of departure between the two communities regards their stances towards flattery. Although no differences were found in the web datasets (79% of the Arabic texts and 76.1% of the Hebrew texts included negative lexical choices when discussing the phenomenon), major differences were found in the solicited datasets. Arabic speakers demonstrated almost an entirely negative stance, with 92% of the respondents representing flattery with negative terms (e.g., “sad and sorry for myself; used and exploited; disgusted
The vast majority of the Arabic speakers explicitly mentioned that they were offended by flattery and the negative consequences it had on their relationship with the flatterer. Several respondents even reported confronting their flatterers and exposing their malign intentions. For example, a 20-year-old woman reported she was praised by a fellow Muslim woman for wearing a headscarf. Rejecting the implicit re-enforcement of a desired behaviour of praise (Wolfson, 1984) she responded: “Is this what makes you love me, my outer appearance or my relationship with god? Is that what makes me a good girl?”

The negative stance of Arabic speakers towards flattery can be further demonstrated by the two respondents who admitted they flattered someone (5.4%; compared to 15.2% of the Hebrew speakers). In both cases the speakers justified the use by shifting the blame to an external person. A 28-year-old woman reported she flattered her boss by smiling at him because she was late, although she “cannot stand her [boss]” (“لا أتحملها”). The respondent added that she “felt annoyed” (“أحسست بالزعاج”) because she is not a flatterer but “was forced to act that way in order to keep [her] job” (“ الجنوب على التصرف هكذا للحفاظ على العمل”). The other respondent reported that she flattered her daughter’s teacher because she felt she had no other choice if she wanted to make her daughter the teacher’s favourite.

Additionally, a recurring metacommunicative perception of flatterers as having low communicative competence was found in the Arabic data. Participants perceived “the flatterer” as “a person who lacks communication skills with others and resorts to un-useful ways that might hurt others”, “very ignorant and uneducated person who needs awareness” and “socially stupid. (...) a person who does anything to reach what he wants” (عابد). Discussing with the Arabic focus group the perception of flatterers as having low communicative skills revealed a more nuanced perception: People with good communicative skills are undetected in their flattery, and therefore are not labelled flatterers.

Although Hebrew speakers expressed negative stances towards flattery and reported the negative consequences its use may have on relationships, they
also admitted the potential of flattery to achieve interactional goals. For example, a 34-year-old man reported,

E9) I was talking on the phone with a [female] friend, who was crying and telling me how she is having a hard time because she and her boyfriend don't see each other enough during their military service. In order to calm her down and to make her feel good about herself, I told her that I happened to see her sitting in a café with her boyfriend by the beach the other day. She asked how she looked, and I said, in an impressed tone, that she looked gorgeous. I was flattering her to make her feel better.

dibarti ʿim yedida batelefon, ’asher sipra li bebekhi shehiʾ hova tkufa kasha ‘ekev kakhl she’en la maspik zman lirʾot et ben zuga meʾahar vehuʾ batzavaʾ vehiʾ besherut leʾumi+ʾovedet. ʾal menat lehargiʿa ʾoti (sic) vebkhdey shehiʾ targish tov im ʾatšma, siparti la shebeemikre raʾiti ʾota lo mizman ʾim haben zug shela yoshvim bebet kafe leyad hayam. Hiʾ shaʾala ʾoti ekh hiʾ nirʾata beʾenay veʾaniti la bekol mitrashem shehiʾ “nirʾata mehameemet”. hithanafti ʾeleia kdey leʾoded ʾota lehargish yoter tov.

In this example, the respondent strategically performed a positive evaluation (“I said […] she looked gorgeous”), with the intention of pleasing his friend so she would “feel good about herself”. His compliment (“looked gorgeous”), namely the attribution of credit for some “good […] which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes, 1986: 485), is evaluated by the respondent as serving a relational function. The framing of the compliment as flattery is explicitly described in his words; “I was flattering her to make her feel better”. Notice that the compliment in this case is not necessarily insincere; the speaker may indeed think that his friend “looks gorgeous”. It is strategically deploying a positive evaluation with awareness of the pleasing effect it may have on the friend.

Not only did Hebrew speakers explicitly mention the relational benefit of flattery, but they also used neutral or positive terms when they reported on
flattery events (31% of the respondents in the solicited corpus reported feeling “flattered” as “wonderful, excellent, better, powerful, respected”; הממחאה, מפלא, מוחמד, ירוח, יאסר, כבוד). For example, an employee (42-years-old) said she felt “appreciated” (מעניקה) when her female boss flattered her, and a mother reported laughing and enjoying her daughter’s strategic expression of love before being asked for a present.

The latter example illustrates the transactional function of flattery, when a speaker intends to please the addressee in exchange for goods. While both communities reported flattery events they perceived as serving the transactional function, our finding suggests that Hebrew speakers perform a semantic transfer from the economic to the social domain, frequently using economic terms and metaphors to describe the act of flattery. Speakers used verbs like to buy (“[She] didn't buy [his] flattery”; לא קנתה חנופה), gain (“he gained his capital by flattering”; הרשיט שמעכיר את עכברים), and sell (“I felt like I was selling myself by flattering him”; התענער. לא אמרתי לך לייבת...), nouns like an investment (“flattering egos is an investment”; השקעה. חנופהLANG: ...), a debt (“I was mad. I don’t like to be in debt [to someone]”; התעצבנתי. לא אוהבת להיות חובב), money (“flattery is addictive as money”; הבורר דף חנופה [diğiniz] תфанנו, and price (“the price of flattery”; מחירה של חנופה), and adjectives like cheap (“this is a cheap act of flattery”;

Perceiving flattery as transaction echoes Goffman’s social contract approach. In the strategic “game” (Goffman, 1970: 85) of flattery, one provides face enhancement in exchange for something valuable. Similar to the case of compliments (Yu, 2003), flattery presents an inherent risk of being negative face-threatening through the unsuccessful execution of addressing one’s need to be liked. Positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987) is thus perceived as a strategy to impose on the hearer to “give” something in return to the “verbal gift” of flattery. This explanation aids in understanding the possible negative consequences of flattery. When the addressee judges sweet talk as an imposition, a challenge is posed to friendly interpersonal relations expected to be established on sincerity, trust, and positiveness (Kong, 2003; Rawlins, 1991).8

To conclude, while both linguacultures display a mostly negative stance towards flattery, the Arabic speakers display significantly more disdain toward the discursive phenomenon. While Hebrew speakers admit the relational potential of flattery, like in example E9 (in which a respondent strategically used a positive evaluation to make his friend feel better), the Arabic speakers in the focus group strongly argued that the label ‘flattery’ (tamalluq) cannot

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8 It will be interesting to examine whether additional cultures use this economic metaphor for flattery. The English collocation of “paying compliments” may indicate it is not an Israeli-specific understanding.
be applied in instances where the speaker has the other’s needs in mind. For them, addressing the other’s face needs for the speaker’s benefit is an inappropriate relational practice in this specific context. In the next section, we discuss how the practice and perception of flattery is informed by the cultural communicative ethos of Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel.

6 The Metapragmatics of Flattery in Hebrew and Israeli-Palestinian Arabic

In Section 3 we hypothesized that both firgun and musayara are expected to inform the use and perception of flattery since they entail a communicative ethos that comes into play in the strategic use of solidarity-oriented communication. While firgun is anchored in the values of sincerity and solidarity, “political musayara” provides guidelines on how to strategically and politely deploy communicative actions in order to achieve an interactional goal. Both are positively marked social behaviour, but are in constant peril of crossing a normative line into overpoliteness. When a positive act of communication is judged as strategic, what can be seen at first glance as a compliment, praise, or an authentic sign of endearment, turns into instrumental flattery. In this section we discuss how each communicative ethos is both reflected and constructed in the use and perception of flattery in each linguaculture, where they overlap, and where they depart.

6.1 Firgun and Flattery

Although Hebrew speakers commonly see flattery as insincere, some considered even the sincere action of firgun as flattery when it was realized in a public context. Publicly expressing approval or approbation led respondents to evaluate it as intending to intensify the enhancing of positive face. For example:

E10) Yesterday, my daughter’s kindergarten teacher helped me wean my daughter of her pacifier; in response I supported her (lit. /firganti/) by flattering her on the kindergarten's Facebook group. (35-year-old Hebrew-speaking woman)

ʾetmol haganenet shel habat sheli ʿazra li begmila shel habat sheli mimotzetz betguva firganti la bedivrey ḥanupa bafeisbuk baʿamud shel hagan

אזרתagneה של הבת שלי עזרה לי בגמילה של הבת שלי ממוצץ בבדיבות 현ועפ במאדים של הagan

垲 שונים חוסם בפייסבוק בזמן של הagan

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In this example, the mother amplified the intended pleasing effect by expressing public appreciation for the kindergarten teacher. Posting a supportive Facebook post enlarged the circle of in-group community members aware of the teacher’s professional achievement.

_Firgun_ was mentioned explicitly eight times in the Hebrew corpora. While some mentions contrasted flattery with _firgun_, others used it as a synonym or in a sequence. Example E11, written by a personal career coach, was found in a business website “for women who know”. Characterizing the workplace environment of an organization led by a woman, the actor contrasts negative flattery with positive _firgun_.

E11) The way [they] work looks fun [...] like friends hanging out, being serious and deep. There is no chumminess (Hebrew lit. _/sahbakiyut_[^9]), not a drop of _flattery_. And yet, there is an intense feeling of _firgun_, of re-evaluating strengths, and that there is someone in charge of the process.

from Women.Biz, undated

derekh ha’avoda nir’et kmo biluy [...] kmo yeshivat ḥaverim, retzinit ve’amuka. ‘en saḥbakiyut, ‘en tipa shel ḥanupa. vebekhol zot yesh ṭusha ‘aza shel firgun, shel ha‘arakha meḥudeshet shel ḥozakim vesheyesh kan ba’al habayt ‘al hatahalikh

The writer describes a healthy working environment as truly supportive. For him, flattery is destructive to the creation of such an environment since it promotes workplace relations that are built on exaggeration and insincerity.

In contrast, example E12 was found in the “Official Website of Freedom”, an organization supporting separation of religion and state. Criticizing supportive interviews with celebrities who have become religious, the writer treats

[^9]: _Saḥbak_ (סחב) is a slang Hebrew word that means “a close friend who does not require formalities in interaction”. It originates from an Arabic word meaning “a friend” and became common in the 1970s. _Saḥbakiyut_ is term that describes a familiar friendly encounter between people who are long-time friends, an extremely informal encounter and a light-hearted atmosphere. https://blog.ravmilim.co.il/tag/סחב/ (Retrieved July 2020).
flattery and *firgun* as partial synonyms, placing both terms in the same list of positive nouns.

E12) The media's job is of course to review, report and even criticize, but I can't recall even one interview with a celebrity who had become religious that wasn't reported lengthily in the weekend papers in the spirit of *firgun and empathy, flattery and understanding.*

hofesh.org,10 2009

tafkida shel hatikshoret hi’ kamuvan lesaker, ledaveaḥ ve’af levaker, ’akh ‘eyni zokher velu re’ayon ‘eḥad ‘im yedu’an shenafal letshuva she’eeyno sukār beharḥava bemusafey hashabat beruāḥ shel firgun vehavana, ḥanupa ve’empatya.

In this example, *firgun* and flattery are interchangeable nouns for (unjustifiable) positive treatment of newly religious Israeli celebrities. These examples demonstrate that positive evaluation and supportiveness, i.e. compliments, praise, and *firgun*, can be labelled flattery when they exceed appropriateness (Danziger, 2020; Katriel, 1993).

6.2 Musayara and Flattery

*Musayara* is considered a cultural code that informs the successful navigation of a layered social hierarchy through indirectness and effusiveness (Griefat and Katriel, 1989). While previous studies have documented indirectness as a cultural feature in Arabic-speaking communities, others have found a preference for directness in performance of speech acts (e.g. Nelson et al., 2002; Abuarrah et al., 2013). Our findings join the latter studies in indicating directness and sincerity as valued by Arabic speakers. Several evaluations of flattery made by young respondents (ages 20–22), included a negative stance towards indirectness:

E13) A bad feeling generally and it is a type of exploitation since you can ask what you want from me without flattery ... There were a lot of “preparations” that were unnecessary. (man)

10  http://hofesh.org.il/articles/maavak/a_lost_war.html (Retrieved October, 2019).
When discussing this finding with the Arabic speakers focus group, participants evoked the sentiment of communicative competence in navigating social hierarchy in the Arab culture, stating that they are obligated to be indirect and follow *musayara* with people who are higher in the social hierarchy, like an in-law or a grandfather. However, when communicating with close friends, they reported on an expectation for sincerity and directness, as in “*if my friend has gained weight, I will tell her because I care for her, but I would flatter someone I don’t care about, tell that person she looks good*”. Interestingly, the same expectation for sincerity among close friends was documented in Blum-Kulka’s (1992 [2005]) study on the metapragmatics of politeness among Hebrew speakers in Israeli society. The Hebrew speakers in her study expressed the sentiment of affect in friendship, that is, “people who are emotionally close [and] deserve to be treated ‘dugri’” (p. 265).

The finding that directness is expected by Arabic speakers is in line with studies that document the erosion of the communicative ethos of *musayara*.
among young Palestinians (Griefat and Katriel, 1989; Zupnik, 2000; Ellis and Maoz, 2002) and may be further explained by language contact theory. According to Jakobson (1938 [1962]: 241), “a language accepts foreign structural elements only when they correspond to its own tendencies of development”. We hypothesize that the long-term, asymmetrical social contact between Arabic and Hebrew speakers in Israel (Henkin-Roitfarb, 2011; Amara, 2017) affected verbal routines demonstrated by Arabic speakers. The Jewish Israeli direct communicative style, conflated with the already ongoing erosion of musayara, has led to a convergence in flattery perception among all speakers in Israel. In addition to extensive lexical borrowing from Hebrew to Palestinian Arabic (Henkin-Roitfarb, 2011; Amara, 2017) and a phonological “near merger” (Horesh, 2015: 228), our study suggests indications for a pragmatic overlap in a specific pattern of linguistic politeness realization and evaluation. A possible reason for this can be found in Amara (2017), who suggests that Hebrew acquisition by Palestinians originates from an instrumental motivation, that is, a means of acquiring similar economic, social, and educational levels to those of Hebrew speakers in Israel, especially in contact contexts of work, commerce, and political participation. Moreover, Amara describes the obligatory teaching of Hebrew as a means for inculcating it as a second language in Arabic schools in Israel. Analysing the Hebrew curriculum in schools, he argues that language teaching is shaped by the Jewish-Zionistic ideal.

When Hebrew enters the Palestinian education field, the implication was that it would become an integral part of the Palestinian Arab linguistic repertoire. Its impact exceeds the communicative functions. It also affected matters of culture and identity. (p. 76)

Since schools play a major role in social contacts and socialization processes, it may be that acquiring Hebrew from early childhood has introduced the Hebrew cultural ethos devised by the Zionist pioneers into Palestinian Arabic in Israel.

7 Conclusion

Analysing an interpretive construct like flattery benefits contrastive pragmatics in that it encapsulates cultural and social norms regarding use of language, specifically the pragmatic meaning-making process wherein interactants make sense of language use. Contrastively analysing interpretive constructs across different linguacultures can provide a comparable point of reference.
with regards to a specific discursive norm, like the strategic use of positive language in interaction.

Against this backdrop, we set out to conduct this study in order to discover differences in uses and perceptions of flattery between Arabic and Hebrew speakers in Israel. Surprisingly, we found more similarities than differences in the contexts in which flattery is performed or expected, in its verbal performance, and in the evaluative categories utilized when judging an action flattery. Differences were identified in the evaluation of textual cues of verbal exaggeration and hyperbole as flattery and in the stance towards the use of flattery. The Arabic-speaking respondents tended to ignore the verbal cue of verbosity as a sign of flattery and demonstrated a more negative stance toward flattery than the Hebrew-speaking respondents. We hypothesized that just like other linguistic fields susceptible to language contact (e.g. phonology, morphology, and semantics), growing similarities can be found in specific routines of linguistic politeness such as flattery. Nevertheless, residues of traditional communicative ethos may be still identified, as indicated in the greater tolerance towards exaggeration and verbosity among Arabic speakers. Future research within the purview of historical pragmatics could further study the meeting points of linguacltures as a means for tracing residues and transformations in traditional communicative ethos.

In terms of realization, this study has found that the pragmatic strategies used to perform flattery by both Arabic and Hebrew speakers in Israel are exclusively solidarity-oriented politeness strategies. This may be an indication that although flattery can potentially exploit any communicative actions, Arabic and Hebrew speakers tend to use a limited repertoire that includes positive politeness strategies, positive evaluations, expressive speech acts, gifts, and redressive actions.

Finding a greater negative stance towards the social use of flattery among Arabic speakers in Israel may suggest that the social norms that govern the strategic use of language are culture-specific, and that the line between positively marked communication and overpoliteness, i.e. acceptable and unacceptable positive behaviour, is susceptible to cultural values. The range in perception between acceptable and unacceptable flattery is dependent on its perceived harm to the face. According to Danziger (2020: 424), “what is harmful is defined both individually and on a societal level, according to personal values and social norms, respectively”. While for Israeli Hebrew speakers, strategic use of positive language becomes unacceptable when it is perceived as face-harming, for Palestinian Arabic speakers, a detection of self-interest in deploying positive communication is more likely to be deemed socially
unacceptable (i.e. flattery). Future research would benefit from contrastively analysing interpretive constructs across linguacultures. Specifically, behaviours that would be positively marked in a certain linguaculture in specific contexts, for example a positive evaluation of a boss considered as “polite” in Chinese linguaculture (Ran, Zhao and Kádár, 2020: 55), could be evaluated as flattery by a Hebrew or Arabic speaker.

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, it would be productive to compare other metacommunicative terms in Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic in order to discover the extent of the language contact between the cultures. The Palestinian Arabic linguaculture represents a complex case of an identity repertoire (Amara, 2017: 39), nevertheless it is grossly under-studied. We suggest to further study the socio-pragmatics of Palestinian Arabic, especially the interplay between identity and politeness. Lastly, we believe that utilizing the findings of this research could aid the field of cross-cultural communication and conflict-resolution studies. Drawing awareness to the peril of deploying flattery unskilfully, or wrongly assuming familiar interpersonal relations, can facilitate a better understanding of how Hebrew and Arabic speakers in Israel communicate, and as a consequence, advance an informed and respectful inter-cultural interaction.

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