

## **Strategies of Accepting Invitations and Offers in Arabic and English: A Cross-cultural Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the similarities and differences between Arabic and English strategies of accepting invitations and offers from a cross-cultural perspective. It tackles the problem of how people respond to and accept invitations and offers as politeness phenomena in the societies of collectivistic (Arabic) and individualistic (English) cultures. Having the sense of indebtedness, the invitee or the offeree needs to show the proper deference and find the suitable words to express his appreciation sufficiently when s/he accepts an invitation or an offer.

This study also attempts to categorize the various strategies used by the speakers of the two languages. The study is based on the hypothesis that Arabic and English belong to two different cultures and reflect different cultural norms carried through the acceptance expressions.

The findings and conclusions arrived at prove that there are more differences than similarities among the Iraqi Arab and American English speakers in accepting invitations and offers. It is also proved that Arab speakers employ certain strategies that do not

exist in English, and English speakers use strategies that are specific to their culture.

*key words: cross-cultural pragmatics, strategies, speech act acceptance, invitation, offer*

## 1. Introduction

Arab-Anglo interaction has attracted the attention of researchers for three reasons. The first and most important among these reasons is the remarkable expansion in the size of the communities concerned. There are over 200 million native speakers of Arabic and over 400 million native speakers of English. Second, the two cultures are thought to be extremely different and even quite opposed. Third, Arab-Anglo interaction has drawn a world-wide political significance (Davies and Bentahila, 2012:231-232).

The study of speech acts in two different cultures is called cross-cultural. Trosberg (2010:2) defines this term 'cross-cultural' as the study of pragmatic phenomena related to the cultural differences. It also includes the comparative cultural studies based on data obtained from different cultural groups. She (ibid) says that researchers have become interested in two branches: speech acts and Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness.

Unlike refusals which are viewed as face threatening acts, acceptances are beneficial to the addressee, and reflect the speaker's compliance with the addressee's wants and desires and maintain his/her face wants that s/he is accepted in the society. Searle and Vanderveken (1985:194) define acceptances as "commissives which are responses to a certain very restricted classes of directives and

commissives”. If the speaker has been invited to dinner or offered something, he/she can either accept or reject it. The acceptance is a speech act which commits a speaker to a certain kind of action in each case.

## **2. Speech acts of invitation and offer in Arabic and English**

Al-Khatib (2006:272-273) states that invitation is viewed as a social act and it can be defined as “a communicative act addressed to B’s face-needs and intended to enhance and strengthen good and healthy relations between A and B (where A is the inviter and B is the invitee)”. One way that Arabs express their feelings and intimacy towards each other is by inviting one another. Bentahila (1983:47) emphasizes that Arabs regard it as a matter of honour to offer the guest a lavish supplies of food. Hospitality is the characteristic feature of Arab.

As the current study is concerned with two different cultures, it is very important to give a brief account on how the speech acts of invitation and offer are performed by the speakers of the two cultures. Part of the western customs is to give the guest choices of what he likes or dislikes. Dio (1973:12) (cited in Wierzbicka,2003:74) gives the following account concerning this topic:

Another thing that made me nervous was the custom whereby an American host will ask a guest before a meal, whether he would prefer a strong or soft drink. Then if the guest asks for liquor, he will ask him whether, for example, he prefers scotch or bourbon. When the guest has made his

decision, he next has to give instructions as how much he wishes to drink, and how he wants it served.

In the Arabic culture as compared with the western, the host carefully considers what will please his guest and simply serves him a wide range of food and drink, presses more food on him and urges the guest to eat above and beyond his capacity. An Arab guest might be embarrassed or even offended if his host shows coldness and lack of hospitality. It is more appropriate on the part of the guest to eat and drink at least a bit of everything offered to him, whether s/he likes the type or not in order to avoid offending the host. In the Arabic culture it is inappropriate for the host to ask the guest directly what s/he wants. It also seems inappropriate to offer someone a drink by saying ‘Would you like to drink?’. Rather the host puts the drink before the guest and asks him to drink. Arabs use the imperatives to invite or offer, they say (يجب أن تشرب) ‘You must drink.’. This sentence is impositive because the speaker tries to impose his will on the hearer. However, this sentence indicates that the hearer performs the action for his/her own benefit. This offer is regarded positively polite in Arabic since the speaker expresses s/his desire and tries to convince the hearer to accept the offer. Thus, the more sincere and insistent the invitation and offer the more likely to be accepted (Wierzbicka, 2003:74; Al-Khatib, 2006:273; and Davies and Bentahila, 2012:238).

As part of the Arabic culture, invitations and offers are repeated and declined several times before they are finally accepted. The invitation is accepted with hesitation after a series of maneuvers. “To invite without insistence means that the concerned

person is not serious about the invitation, and offers it as a mere remark of courtesy; and to accept the offer without reluctance means that the recipient is gluttonous, and may be described as an ill-behaved person” Al-Khatib(2001:190).The inviter sometimes makes it impossible for the hearer to reject the invitation. For example, when inviting others, Arabs say (والله تأتي إلى الوليمة) ‘lit. By God, you come to the banquet’, while the sentence (ألا تأتي إلى الوليمة؟) ‘won’t you come to the banquet?’ seems an infelicitous invitation and the inviter is apparently trying to direct the hearer towards a negative response. It is a matter of courtesy and an attempt to make the hearer refuse the invitation (Alaoui,2011:13; and Kittani, 2006:29).

### **3. Methodology:**

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

In this study, a modified version of discourse completion test DCT based on the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984 and Beebe et al 1990), has been adopted to collect the data. The DCT consists of twenty situations: ten invitations and ten offers. The situations consist of two different social variables: social status (low, equal, high) and social distance (close, distant). The subjects of the study are twenty Iraqi Arab male undergraduate and MA students enrolled at the University of Tikrit, College of Education, Arabic Department. The second group are twenty American male undergraduate and MA students enrolled at California State University, College of Languages.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

These expressions that have been obtained from our subjects are divided into a number of strategies. Each acceptance expression might be comprised of one or more speech acts. Each of these acceptances was coded according to the semantic formula. For Example, if the speaker accepts an invitation with this utterance ‘Thank you for the invitation. I would love to. We will meet at night’. This utterance is coded as:

Thank you for the invitation. (Thanks)

I would love to. (Expressing pleasure)

We will meet at night. (Direct acceptance)

In addition to categorizing the expressions into a number of strategies in both languages, the frequency of the semantic formulas were counted and analyzed.

## 4. Strategies of Accepting invitations and Offers in Arabic

Arabic language is abundant with the expressions of accepting invitations and offers. These expressions are categorized into a number of strategies that can be expounded as follows:

### 4.1 Direct Acceptance

Al-Shahri (2004:26-27) indicates that نَعَمْ (the bare yes) can function as a complete answer or direct acceptance to an invitation or offer. Example:

(1) A: هل تريد أن تشرب شاي؟ (would you like to drink tea?)

B: نعم (Yes)

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B accepts his friend's offer with (نَعَمْ) 'yes' which does not have a syntactic structure. Syntactically, نَعَمْ does not count as a full sentence, but semantically, it is the traditional and logical answer. It is used among close friends and intimates like family members. There is no need to use the polite expressions such as thanks and gratitude because the participants in conversation are so close to that there is no face work that needs to be observed.

Some expressions of direct acceptance (of invitation) have been elicited from our Iraqi Arab subjects, most of which are realized through the performative verb (سأحضر) 'I'll come', (سأكون) 'I'll definitely be there' or (سأكون أول الحاضرين) 'I'll be the first attendant'. The last sentence represents greater desire and willingness than the other two. In addition, the verb (قبل) 'accept' has also been used to accept an invitation (دعوه مقبولة) 'your invitation is accepted', and the verb (موافق) tends to be restricted to offer acceptance.

#### 4.2 Thanking and Appreciating

Since invitations and offers are addressed towards the addressee's positive face "the individual's self-image in his/her society" who is the biggest benefited from these social acts, and since they constitute cost on the part of the initiator (inviter or offerer), addressors feel themselves obliged to express their thanks, gratitude and appreciation. Here are some of these expressions:

(2) # 8: شكرا جزيلا (thank you very much)

(3) # 7: أشكرك جزيلا (I thank you very much)

They are also used to accept an invitation and an offer. Sentence 3 is regarded as more polite than sentence 2. It also implies greater degree of gratitude since it contains repetition of the word (شكراً) 'thank'. In the Arabic language, this is called an "exaggeration formula". Some people use their gratefulness with thanks together to show greater gratitude. Example:

(4) # 6: أنا ممنون و متشكر منك جدا: (I am so grateful)

### 4.3 Stressing Common Ground (SCG)

Holtgraves (2002:47) says that one of the most important features of common ground is mutual understanding. People try their best to seek agreement so as to seem cooperators. Thus, the speaker shows a great deal of consideration and concern for the positive face of the hearer.

Arabic culture is rich with such expressions that are used among the relatives and very close people. Examples:

(5) #8: أنا واحد منكم ولا أحتاج إلى دعوه. (I am one of you, I needn't be invited.)

(6) # 5: نحن أصحاب دار ولا نحتاج إلى دعوه: (we are like the owners of the house, we needn't be invited)

Although these sentences are negated and reflect little desire on the part of speakers, they are used to express a high degree of intimacy and closeness. The speaker considers himself as a close friend as a family member; therefore, he accepts to come to the invitation. Part of the Arabic cultural traditions, women of the close friends and neighbours help in the preparation of food, and men help in serving

the food for the guests. Therefore, close friends and neighbours feel that attending such general invitations is a duty they must accomplish.

#### **4.4 Expressing Pleasure and Congratulating**

Arab react to some invitations with pleasure and gladness such as an invitation to a wedding party, for having a new baby or any other happy occasion. In addition, s/he congratulates those having such occasions.

Congratulations evoke a positive feeling or rejoicing for the hearer. A congratulation is used to maintain social norms, whether the occasion is personal or non-personal. In any occasion there are two interactants: a congratulator or a congratulatee. When an individual is having a happy event whether s/he is the agent or recipient of that event, others are expected to share this happiness. Therefore, they have to pay a positive linguistic act which reflects their happiness in the event. Thus, the concept of 'congratulation' is associated with happy occasions that are subject to cultural variation and specificity (Agha, 1999:2-5).

Commenting on the words that express good wishes such as "مبارك" Abdul-Raof (2006:151) says that they "are fore-grounded to deliver cheerful words that are pleasant to the addressee". Example:

(7)# 9: مبارك زواجك (May your marriage be blessed)

In this expression, the speaker wishes the listener (usually the bridegroom) happy marriage.

Congratulating is always followed by expressions that indicate gladness in our Arabic data. Examples:

(8) # 1: عيد ميلاد سعيد، سنحضر الدعوة بكل سرور (Happy birthday, it is a pleasure to attend your invitation).

(9) # 5: مبروك. يسرني أن أشارككم أفراحكم (Congratulation. It is a pleasure to share your happiness).

#### 4.5 Complimenting

Like praise, compliments are used to achieve rapprochement between the speaker and listener whether they are engaged in face-to-face conversation or through the modern telecommunication devices like cell phones. Arab speakers use utterances like (نعم البيت) 'your family is the best' when are invited. This sentence is used as an indirect acceptance and implies that the speaker is very happy to come to the inviter's house. Such expressions reflect solidarity between the participants in conversation (Al-Shahri, 2004:307). Examples:

(10)# 8: أنتم أهل الكرم (you are the family of generosity.)

(11) #1: نتشرف بحضور دعوتكم (It is a great honor to attend your invitation)

These sentences are used upon receiving an invitation to a feast (lunch or dinner) and they indicate acceptance. They are addressed towards the inviter's positive face and mean that his social image is highly esteemed and valued. In addition the word (أتشرف) 'I am honored' carries positive implications in Arabic culture.

After being offered something or a help, Arabs not only address the positive and negative face of the offerer but also address other parts of the body such as hands which are directly involved in the actual process of the offer. Examples

(12) # 10: سلمت يداك التي حملت الفنجان (God bless your hands that carried the cup)

This sentence is used especially after being offered something like (placing a cup of tea before the guest or handing in any type of soft drinks). According to the Arabic cultural norms, coffee should be taken by the right hand.

(13) # 9: عاشت الأيدي (God bless your hands)

This is used after being offered a hand or something.

As for complimenting behaviour, “members of Arab societies tend to use considerably more proverbs and precoded ritualistic phrases to praise others” (Feghali, 1997:358). Example:

(14) # 5: على قدر أهل العزم تأتي العزائم (lit. Actions come according to men)

This proverb is used to inform the inviter or offerer that the act of invitation or offer which is a good deed is only performed by good and generous people.

#### **4.6 Offering Good Wishes (OGW)**

Al-Khatib (2006:280) states that Arab speakers express good wishes when hearing that others are having invitations for happy occasions because of their positive effect on the hearer. Let us consider these examples:

(15) ألف مبارك (A thousand congratulations.)

(16) دامت أفراحكم إن شاء الله (Happiness will always be available in your home, God willing.)

(17) الأفراح عامره ببيتكم إن شاء الله (Your home is always full of happiness, God willing.)

(18) عقبى للأعزب إن شاء الله (It is the singles' turn, God willing.)

(19) ألدار عامره بأهلها إن شاء الله (your house is always inhabited by its owners, God willing.)

Sentence (16) is a general wish. It is used upon receiving an invitation of a wedding party, after being offered, for example, a pack of candy on the occasion of the success of one of the family members in the final examinations or after being promoted. The other sentences are specific to invitations of weddings. Arabs use these expressions rather than the direct “yes” which implies lack of interest and enthusiasm of the acceptor.

Emery (2000:205) says that the traditional invitation to coffee, in Arabic, is performed by (تفضل اشرب القهوة) ‘Have some coffee’. This type of invitation is accepted through the “deep-rooted reply” (دام فضلك) ‘Your bounty is unending’ or (زاد فضلك) ‘May your bounty be increased!’. Since such an invitation is made to be accepted, the second interlocutor has no other choice but to express his good wishes to address the inviter’s face and praise his hospitality.

People use religious expressions when accepting invitations such as (جزاك الله خيراً) ‘May God reward you well’ or (بارك الله فيك) ‘May God bless you!’.

This strategy has a wide collection of expressions which are viewed as invocations emanating from religious perspectives. It is clear that religion plays a vital role in the Arabic conversational style in general and accepting things (offers) from others in particular. Examples:

(20) # 5: أظعمك الله من ثمار الجنة (May God feed you from the fruits of paradise)

It is used to accept an offer such as a piece of cake.

(21) # 7: أسفاك الله من حوض الكوثر (May God quench you from Al-Kauthar {a river in paradise}). It is used when accepting a drink.

(22) # 5: حفظه الله ويربى بعزك (May God protect him. To be brought up with your prosperity). It is uttered after being invited by a neighbour on the occasion of having a new baby.

#### **4.7 Complaints that the Invitation or Offer is Troublesome**

Although the Arabic culture tends to be positive politeness, a considerable attention is directed towards the negative face in order to generate a positive feeling on the other party. Here is an exchange between two individuals:

(23) Guest: سامحونا أتعبناكم (Excuse us. We have caused you trouble.)

Host: تعبكم راحة لم نقم إلا بالواجب (Such a trouble is a repose. We have only done our duty.)

After accepting the invitation, the guest apologizes that he has troubled the host who, in return, replies that he has only done his duty to minimize his own negative face. The host devalues his her invitation/offer, while the guest uses opposite expressions in order

to highly evaluate it. As a sign of Arabic hospitality, not only the negative face can be addressed and saved but also a lot of consideration is paid for both interlocutors' positive and negative face simultaneously (Bentahila and Davies 1989 cited in Emery 2000:205-206).

The above mentioned discussion can also be applied to offers. When an individual offers another gift, the recipient says expressions like "ما هذه الزحمة" (lit. what is this imposition?) or (لم (كلفت نفسك) 'lit. Why did you trouble yourself?'. These replies are used as complaints that the initiator has troubled himself and wasted money. Although these sentences seem to be direct speech acts of complaints, they in effect imply gratitude which is an indirect speech act. In addition, such expressions are used before the gift is accepted. They also indicate that the speaker is going to accept the gift.

Other similar expressions have been used by our Iraqi Arab informants and the speaker's complaints in the following sentence do not mean refusals but the reverse:

(24) # 4: لا داعي للمطاعم الغالية. أتمنى أن نأكل في مطعم بسيط ( There is no need for expensive restaurants. I wish that we eat in a simple restaurant)

In this sentence the acceptor expresses lack of necessity through the use of (لا داعي للمطاعم الغالية) and accepts with an alternative 'eating in a simple restaurant' to lessen the amount of imposition and cost.

Some Arab speakers use this strategy along with ‘stressing common ground’ especially when the interlocutors are close friends or intimate. Example:

(25) # 8: أريد اعتباري كأخ في البيت مع عشاء متواضع: (I want you to regard me as a brother with a modest dinner)

In this sentence the speaker stresses common ground first through the use of (أريد اعتباري كأخ) followed by (عشاء متواضع) to inform the inviter that s/he need not bother himself/herself and wastes money since he (the invitee) will eat what is already cooked for the family members.

#### **4.8 Invoking the Name of God (ING)**

As part of the Islamic and Arabic culture and tradition, invoking the name of God is always used before doing something. Arabs and Muslims believe that they cannot do anything unless God will them to do it. Thus the expression (إن شاء الله) “If God will” is used to indicate the acceptance of the speaker to any proposed act whether it is an invitation, offer or request. This expression is sometimes accompanied by other expressions such as (إن شاء الله سأتي) ‘If God will, I will come.’ or (إن شاء الله مبروك) ‘If God will, congratulation.’ upon accepting an invitation of any happy occasion.

#### **5. Strategies of accepting invitations and offers in English**

Despite the fact that acceptances are preferred and require little effort and language on the part of the speaker, English speakers employ different strategies and expressions to accept such social acts. The following strategies have been collected and explained in detail:

### **5.1 Direct Acceptance**

Lee (2010:347) elucidates that the most explicit way of accepting invitations and offers is through the use of 'yes'. One can accept an invitation, offer or request with 'Yes, please' which is more polite than the bare 'yes'.

Our data is rich with the performative acceptances. Consider the following examples:

(26) # 6: I'll be on time.

(27) # 2: Sure auntie, I'll be there.

(28) # 5: Yeah, I'll definitely be there.

(29) # 1: Ok, I'll stop by.

These utterances represent the most direct and explicit acceptances in English since they are performed by the performative verbs. Such verbs are expected to reflect the literal meaning of acceptances. The addressee need not infer any additional meanings in such utterances.

Other expressions have appeared in our data and have been categorized under this strategy (e.g. sure, definitely, of course and alright). Using these words mean agreement and the invited person sets the inviter's mind at rest.

### **5.2 Thanks, Gratitude and Appreciation**

Expressing gratitude performs an important social function in English. Expressions of gratitude enhance solidarity among speakers and reveal the feeling of warmth. The disability to use such expressions endangers the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Expressions of gratitude can vary from simple

phatic expressions to long intimate conversations between the giver and recipient. The most widely used expression of gratitude is thank you. Breaking the social value may lead to loss of face which evokes negative feelings. However, when speakers say thank you, they express gratitude, but sometimes they say it coldly or with lack of enthusiasm so that it does not seem as gratitude to the addressee. Speakers need to express their gratitude in a warm tone (cf. Eisenstein et al., 1993:64; and wierzbicka,2003:262). Eisenstein et al (ibid) mention the following sentence as a reply to a given invitation:

(30) Thank you for inviting me.

In addition, the occasion varies considerably and cannot be predetermined by the speaker. "If someone gives you a cigarette , it is enough to say 'thank you'". But if someone sends you a box of cigars, it is necessary to give a larger amount of gratitude to the donor like 'thanks for the fine cigars', or something to that effect. Thus, the amount of thanks increases with the amount of benefit and the trouble undergone by the benefactor (Bach and Harnish, 1979:54; and Kasper, 2005:66).

### **5.3 Expressing Pleasure**

Like Arabs, English speakers react with pleasure to invitations and offers. Eisenstein et al (1993:72) point out that the occasions of invitations and offers are preferred social acts. Therefore, the two participants in conversation show their pleasure and gladness. In some situations the offerer explains to the recipient that the act of offering brings them pleasure and it is something good to accept it. To keep the balance of the social relationship, the offeree, in his

turn, feels himself obliged to express the appropriate sum of pleasure, gratitude and appreciation to the donator. Such expressions need to be uttered in a warm and sincere tone. In a gift-receiving situation, the Arabic culture conventions highly value the presence of the guest rather than his gift. Arabs open the gift later to avoid social embarrassment, whereas it is considered customary in the western culture to open the gift in front of the giver to share the pleasure (Kotthoff, 2007:174). The following expressions are used upon receiving a gift and indicate acceptance:

(31) That looks great.

(32) Yeah...Oh... handsome.

(33) That's wonderful. I really like it.

American English speakers respond to invitations with pleasure and use the following expressions:

(34) # 6: I'd like to very much.

(35) # 6: I'd love to.

#### **5.4 Expressing Surprise and Admiration**

This strategy is used by English speakers in general and women in particular who express their admiration in the object being offered rather than uttering a direct acceptance. It indicates that the speaker is well-behaved in his society, and that one pays back, through words, an incurred debt, which is claimed by Brown and Levinson, to the giver. The disparity between the object (gift) and the amount of thanks and admiration reflect the degree of two social variables: power (P) and distance (D) between the participants. For example, if the recipient of the object replies with

just “thank you”, this means that the two participants in this social act are friends or intimates (Mills, 2003:227; and Lee, 2011:240).

Some of our American English participants do not expect an invitation from their aunt and uncle; therefore, they react with surprise such as “Awesome!”, “Oh” or “Wow”. They also react to offers with surprise especially when the offers are expensive. Example:

(36) # 4: Wow! It is a beautiful watch. That’s very generous of you.

This response enables us to have a better view of how speakers react and express their admiration and praise of the gift. Thus, speakers indirectly accept offers.

### **5.5 Congratulating**

This strategy has been used by our subjects as adjuncts pre-modifying the direct acceptance, that is, when invited to a wedding party or any happy event, the English speakers congratulate the individual first before introducing their direct acceptance. Example:

(37) # 5. Congratulations, man. Of course I’ll see you there.

Congratulations have never been used by themselves as direct acceptances. They have been used with special contexts where the inviter or offerer is experiencing happy occasion.

### **5.6 Complimenting**

Complaints, thanks and compliments indicate that the addressee is engaged in a previous event. Bergman et al (1993:82) pinpoint that compliments refer to addressee-related events. A compliment is addressed towards the positive face of the hearer to enhance solidarity.

Although such types of expressions are mostly used in different situations such as complimenting the addressee for wearing a new suit or having a new haircut, the data that we obtained from American English speakers reveal that compliments are used by the speakers when they accept an invitation or an offer. Examples:

(38) # 3. That's very generous of you.

(39) # 6. You are a life saver.

(40) # 6. I suppose there are good people in the world.

The utterance (38) is used to accept an offer of a vacation trip. Whereas the other two responses were used to accept a gallon of gasoline from a stranger in time of bad need for the gasoline. Utterance (39) carries Western cultural implications. It is a hyperbolic compliment and means 'you have done me a favour' rather than really saving the accepter's life. Utterance (40) conveys similar implications to the addressee. Though these utterances are general compliments, they are used as indirect acceptances.

### **5.7 Conditional Acceptance**

There is a possibility for the speaker to accept an invitation that s/he may not be able to attend. This strategy is used when the speaker has a great desire and willingness to agree or pretends to agree with the hearer and accepts the invitation, but the circumstances prevent him/her from complying. Example:

(41) # 1: I will go if I have time.

Felix-Brasdefer (2008:78) mentions that this strategy is used to refuse an invitation or request indirectly when speakers create "a

hypothetical condition under which acceptance would occur”.

Example:

(42) If I find someone to give me a ride to your party, I'll be there after work.

Yule (1996:81) mentions some intriguing features of refusal expressions:

- 1- The speaker expresses doubt such as (I am not sure, or I do not know).
- 2- The use of agreement expressions before disagreement such as (That's great. I'd love to).

These ways of accepting or more specific rejecting stem from politeness perspectives where speakers pay great consideration to the initiator's feeling and try to keep rapport in the social relations. This strategy causes trouble for Arabs who visit an English speaking country like Britain or America.

### **5.8 Counter Question (CQ)**

Our data revealed that an invitation can be accepted by a rhetorical question such as 'why not which reflects the speakers' attitude towards the propositional content of the invitation. Consider the following examples:

(43) #2: when?

(44) # 8: what time?

(45) # 10: Where do you live?

(46) # 2: Do you want me to bring anything?

(47) # 10: Who else is going there?

Such questions not necessarily need answers on the part of the inviter but they reflect the eagerness of the invited person with this invitation. Brown and Levinson (1978:228) state “to ask a question with no intention of obtaining an answer is to break the sincerity conditions on questions”. They (ibid) say that such questions “leave their answers hanging in the air”. However, after realizing that his/her invitation has indirectly been accepted the inviter may provide further information requested by the invitee about the time and place of the invitation, or whether the invitee has to bring something or not.

### **5.9 Ostensibly Releasing from Obligation**

Eisenstein and Bodman (1993:68) point out that many English speakers express the lack of necessity of such lavish generosity when expressing gratitude for a gift.

This strategy is the most indirect acceptance in English. Adhering to Leech’s (1983) maxims and negative politeness which characterize the Western culture in general , American English speakers try to minimize the cost to the inviter or offerer. Examples:

(48) # 4: You don’t have to spend so much money for my birthday.

(49) # 4: You shouldn’t have to.

These two sentences are used by American English speakers after being offered an expensive watch from the friend’s father. This indicates that this strategy is employed when the gift or offer is too expensive and the offerer is either of a higher status or socially distant. Skillfully, using such expressions, speakers show deference to initiator. They also reflect the addressor’s acknowledgement that

the offer is a cost to the addressee and he does not have to do it. However, these are regarded as ingenuine expressions and need not be taken seriously. Apparently, they are ostensible refusals addressed to the negative face of the addressee, but are regarded as polite indirect acceptances according to the English conversational implicature.

## 6. Findings and Discussions

It is found that there are universal strategies such as ‘**thanks**’, ‘**congratulation**’, ‘**Expressing pleasure**’ and so on; whereas other strategies are found to be culture-specific. It is also found that speakers of both languages show more differences than similarities when accepting invitations and offers.

When accepting invitations Iraqi Arab speakers (henceforth IA) use more **thanks** than American English speakers (henceforth AE) who use more **direct acceptances** and **expressing pleasure** than IA speakers. This indicates that the Arabic conversational style is more polite and more indirect than the AE conversational style. In addition, the range of difference in the frequency of **congratulations** and **compliments** shows that IA speakers are more sensitive to their addressees than their AE counterparts (see the table below for percentages). The major difference in the use of strategies is that IA speakers use **ING**, **complaining** and **SCG** which are pure Arabic strategies (they do not exist in the English language). This is thought to be the influence of the Arabic culture on its speakers. AE speakers, on the other hand, use strategies peculiar to their language such as “**CQ**, **surprise**, **conditional**

**acceptance** and **releasing from obligation**". These strategies reflect the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture on AE speakers.

The range of difference in the frequency of **thanks** between the two cultural groups indicates that AE speakers value offers more than their IA speakers who seem to appreciate invitations. When accepting offers IA speakers tend to be more indirect than the AE speakers. AE speakers express their **pleasure** when accepting offers more than IA speakers do. IA speaker, on the other hand, employ more **compliments**. IA speakers are still characterized by the use of **ING**, **complaining**, and **SCG**, whereas AE speakers are characterized by **surprise**, **CQ**, **conditional acceptance** and **releasing from obligation**. Thus, each language provides its speakers with expressions that can be understood and appreciated by people who share the same socio-cultural background. The following table includes results and percentages of strategies used by the two cultural groups:

Table (1): frequency count of the semantic formulas used by both groups

Strategies of invitation acceptance	No.		Percentage(%)	
	IA	AE	IA	AE
Thanks	103	50	22	12.5
Offering Good Wishes	91	0	19.5	0
Direct Acceptances	92	109	20	27
Expressing Pleasure	50	70	10.5	17
Congratulations	43	28	9	7
Compliments	34	28	7.5	7
Invoking the Name of God	29	0	6.5	0
Counter Question	0	84	0	20.5
Surprise	0	19	0	4.5
Conditional acceptance	0	15	0	3.5
Complaining	15	0	3.5	0
Stressing Common Ground	7	0	1.5	0
Releasing from Obligation	0	3	0	1
Total number	464	406	100%	100%
Strategies of Offer Acceptance	IA	AE	IA	AE
Thanks	160	189	45	50.5
Offering Good Wishes	61	0	17	0
Direct Acceptances	23	32	6.5	8.5
Expressing Pleasure	20	41	5.5	11
Compliments	60	38	17	10
Invoking the Name of God	2	0	0.3	0
Counter Question	0	20	0	5

Strategies of invitation acceptance	No.		Percentage(%)	
	IA	AE	IA	AE
Surprise	0	37	0	10
Conditional Acceptance	0	7	0	2
Complaining	28	0	8	0
Stressing Common Ground	3	0	0.7	0
Releasing From Obligation	0	11	0	3
Total Number	357	375	100%	100%

## 7. Conclusions

- 1- Both languages have developed a wide range of strategies that can be employed to accept invitations and offers in different situations. However, a number of acceptance strategies in Arabic and English have been set.
- 2- Language interacts with the socio-cultural organisation and religion. This study supports the claim that linguistic polite expressions reflect the cultural background of their users.
- 3- Religious expressions embedded in the form of good wishes are heavily used by Arab speakers. English speakers make no reference to religious expressions or God's will.
- 4- Speakers of the two languages use an immense number of indirect strategies rather than using the performative verbs: the Arabic (أقبل) and the English 'accept' or the bare (نعم) and 'yes'.

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### Discourse Completion Test in Arabic

#### ١- قبول الدعوات

من فضلك اقرأ المواقف التالية. بعد كل موقف أرجو منك أن تكتب تعبير القبول في الفراغ بعد عبارة "أنت ستقول". اكتب تعابير القبول كما لو كنت تقبل الدعوات والعروض في المواقف الحقيقية.

١- أنت طالب في الجامعة . في احد الأيام دعاك رئيس القسم لحضور حفلة عيد ميلاد ابنه.

أنت ستقول:-----

٢- دعتك عمك لحضور وجبة طعام في بيتها.

أنت ستقول:-----

٣- أنت طالب في الجامعة. دعتك إحدى المدرسات لحضور وجبة العشاء بمناسبة الترقية.

أنت ستقول:-----

٤- لم تر عمك منذ فترة وتلتقيان في السوق فيدعوك لتناول وجبة الغداء معه في مطعم غالٍ.

أنت ستقول:-----

٥- أعد جارك وليمة بمناسبة مولود جديد ودعاك إلى بيته.

أنت ستقول:-----

٦- دعاك أحد زملائك الطلاب في نفس المرحلة لتناول وجبة الغداء مع عائلته.

أنت ستقول:-----

٧- بينما تمشي في شوارع مدينة ما في الليل إذ تصادف احد زملائك السابقين في الإعدادية

فيدعوك لتناول وجبة العشاء في بيته.

أنت ستقول:-----

٨- دعاك صديق حميم للعشاء في بيته.

أنت ستقول:-----

٩- أنت مدير شركة. احد العاملين سيتزوج الأسبوع القادم ودعاك إلى الحفلة.

أنت ستقول:-----

١٠- أنت مدرس في الجامعة. دعاك أحد الطلاب لتناول وجبة الغداء في بيته.

أنت ستقول:-----

## ٢- قبول العروض

١. عرضت عليك مشرفتك أن تساعدك في تحليل بيانات رسالتك أو بحثك.

أنت ستقول:-----

٢. أنت تعمل في شركة منذ فترة. عرض عليك رئيس الشركة زيادة في الراتب و ترقية ويطلب منك، بالمقابل، أن تعمل ١٥ دقيقة إضافية كل يوم.

أنت ستقول:-----

٣. عرض عليك عمك أن يدفع ثمن تذكرة سفرك لقضاء عطلة.

أنت ستقول:-----

٤. قدم لك والد صديقك ساعة غالية الثمن كهدية بمناسبة عيد ميلادك.

أنت ستقول:-----

٥. أنت في بيت صديقك ويعرض عليك قطعة كعك.

أنت ستقول:-----

٦. نفذ وقود سيارتك. عرض عليك رجل (لا تعرفه) غالونا من البنزين.

أنت ستقول:-----

٧. قدمت لك سيدة كأس من العصير في حفلة.

أنت ستقول:-----

٨. قدم لك صديقك سيجارة في حفلة.

أنت ستقول:-----

٩. أنت مدرس في الجامعة. قدمت لك إحدى الطالبات قطعة حلوى.

أنت ستقول:-----

١٠. أنت مدرس في مدرسة إعدادية. قدم لك أحد الطلاب هدية بمناسبة عيد ميلادك.

أنت ستقول:-----

**Appendix (2)**

**Discourse Completion Test in English**

**Instructions:**

Please read the following twenty four situations. After each situation you will be asked to write an acceptance response in the blank after 'you'. Please write down exactly the way you would accept the following invitations and offers in real life situations. Please accept in all situations.

**1. Invitation acceptance**

1. You are a student at university. One day, the head of the department invites you to his son's birthday party.

You:-----

2. Your aunt invites you to eat something at her house.

-----

3. You are a student at a university. One of the lecturers invites you to dinner. The occasion is that she got promoted.

You:-----

4. You haven't seen your uncle in a long time. You both meet at the market and he invites you to have lunch with him at an expensive restaurant.

You:-----

5. Your neighbour is having a dinner party for having a new baby. He invites you to his house.

You:-----

6. One of the students in your new class invites you to have lunch with his family.

You:-----

7. While walking in the streets of a city (not yours) at night, you come across an old high school classmate who invites you to dinner.

You:-----

8. A close friend invites you to dinner at his house.

You:-----

9. You are a manager of a company. One of the workers is getting married next week. He invites you to the wedding party.

You:-----

10. You are a lecturer at a university. One of your students invites you to lunch at his house.

You:-----

## **2. Offer Acceptance**

1. Your supervisor offers to help you in the data analysis of your thesis or your paper.

You:-----

2. You have been working in a company now for some time. The boss offers you a raise and a promotion if you work extra 15 minutes every day.

You:-----

3. Your uncle offers to pay for your vacation trip.

You:-----

4. Your friend's father offers you a very expensive watch as a gift for your birthday.

You:-----

5. You are at your friend's house. He offers you a piece of cake.

You:-----

6. Your car ran out of gasoline. A man, you don't know, offers you a gallon of gasoline.

You:-----

7. You are at the party, a lady offers you a drink.

You:-----

8. You are at the party, your friend offers you a cigarette.

You:-----

9. You are a lecturer at a university. One of your female students offers you a bar of chocolate.

You:-----

10. You are a teacher at high school. One of your students offers you a birthday present.

You:-----