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**Politeness Strategies in the Speech Acts of Giving
Advice among Sana'a University Students and their
Relationship to Gender and Social Status**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at finding out the advice politeness strategies employed by Sana'a University EFL students when addressing their interlocutors in twelve stimulating Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) situations. The study also aims at identifying the degree to which the use of advice politeness strategies and politeness modifying devices (intensifying and mitigating) is influenced by the participants' gender and social status. The WDCT of twelve situations has been used to collect data from 98 English 4th level male and female students selected purposively from English departments at three faculties affiliated to Sana'a University, namely: Faculties of *Education, Languages* and *Arts*. The triple-taxonomy of advice politeness strategies developed by Hinkel (1997) has been adopted by the researcher in the present study in which eleven advice forms are classified into three major politeness strategies: *Direct*, *Hedged* (conventionally indirect) and *Indirect* (non-conventionally indirect). The fourth classification, namely '*Others*', has been added by Hinkel to cover the newly discovered forms of advice exist across-culturally. The modifying advices/markers taxonomy of Mwinyelle (2005), developed based on Blum-Kulka et al's (1989) general classification (The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) (CCSARP), has been also adopted in the study to find out the politeness intensifying and mitigating devices employed by the target students in the forms of advice offered by the target students. In Mwinyelle's taxonomy, politeness modifying devices are of three: *Internal Modifications*, *Formality Markers* and *External Modifications* (external move strategies). The study has come up with several detailed findings, the most common of which are as follows:

Sana'a University EFL students greatly use '*direct*' forms of advice (representing around half number of the utilized advice strategies across the study), the most

frequent forms of which are *obligation declarative* and *imperative advice*; whereas *'hedged'* advice, particularly *softened* and *conditional* forms, take the second rank (about one-third of the grand total). The direct forms of advice are employed by the Yemeni EFL students to show intimacy, solidarity, in-group rapport and kinship to the advisees, especially those of equal and subordinate social status to them as well as their associates (acquaintances). Such an extensive use reflects the transfer of the students' native culture into the target language structures. This is because Arabs, who belong to a collectivistic culture, believe that it is their social and religious duty to offer help and advice for others, even if they are not asked to do so. Such social and religious duties dictate to them the necessity of correcting any social unacceptable behaviors and habits of the people they confront in their daily activities; carrying out the Islamic religion tradition (Hadith), saying "*True religion principles lie behind advice*". The rare use of native-like *'indirect'* advice, more frequently expressive and factual indirect advice, in the Yemeni context indicates an unexpected progress attained by few Yemeni EFL students. Such noticeable progress in TL pragmatic competence contradicts what has been earlier demonstrated by previous studies in this respect in which *indirect* forms of advice can only be appropriately and expressively produced by native speakers.

The findings have also shown that thirteen new forms of English advice and semi-advice have been explored in the Yemeni context, the most frequent of which take respectively the following order: 'warning', 'offering help', 'expressing oneself', 'promise' and 'expressing adviser's final decision'; whereas the least frequent ones are 'flattering and sympathizing Advisee', 'supportive talk'; 'avoidance', 'questions', 'showing optimism', 'blaming others', 'insulting or taking revenge by praying for God', and 'cursing advisee'.

It has been also revealed that *politeness internal modifying devices* are found to be more prominently and extensively employed by Yemeni university students in the inner context of advice head acts. The students have a tendency to use *internal modifications* in their offered advice to perform two main functions: the first is to intensify the illocutionary force of advice proposition through the use of intensifying / upgrading tools of 'obligation modals', 'imperative forms' and 'other intensifying adverbs and phrases'; however, the second function is seen in the way advice head act is softened / downgraded through 'lexical and syntactical softeners', 'conditionals', 'impersonals', 'semi-lexicals & subjectivizers', 'modals of possibility' and 'suggestive phrases'. Besides, the target students have shown a considerable ability to mitigate the illocutionary force of their offered advice using the *politeness external strategies* of 'grounders' and 'disarmers'. Grounders are employed to justify advice proposition and provide the advisee with sensible reasons and justifications to increase the likelihood of accepting advice, whereas disarmers are employed to reduce or eliminate any possible decline of advice proposition by the participants. Formal markers of 'titles' are also found to be employed by the target when addressing the advisees, even those of equal social power and close distance to them. This is because Arabs feel honored and homage when they are addressed by their common titles and nicknames.

Furthermore, the findings have shown that Yemeni female participants outdo their male counterparts in the use of *direct* and *indirect* advice strategies. The direct forms of advice are noticed to be more frequently employed by the female students to address distant advisees (strangers), whereas the indirect ones are used to address relatives and close-friend peers. This is because the majority of Yemeni Muslim women, out of their social and religious principles, feel ashamed and nervous to communicate with strangers; consequently, their advice is performed in a short and

direct way. The other way around, however, happen with close distance addressees, that Yemeni females feel secured that they involve themselves in long indirect conversations with relatives and close friends. On the other hand, Yemeni male students have proven to be more capable and adequate than females in the employment of *external modifying strategies* of 'grounders' and 'disarmers'. This is due to the fact that convincing others is one of the social personal attributes Yemeni males are raised upon, and feel self-confident and proud of in front of the publics.

It has been also demonstrated that the male and female participants' use of advice politeness strategies of 'direct', 'hedged' and 'indirect' is influenced by the factor of social status. Yemeni subordinate advisers often prefer to employ direct advice forms with their superiors not to show rudeness and impoliteness, but to establish and maintain a formal professional relationship. Besides, the advisers of a low social power mitigate/soften advice illocutionary force, or perform it in an expressive and indirect way when the addressed advisee is of a higher social power or of far distance to them.