

Realizing Politeness via Impoliteness: The Use of “*akhs*” as a Positive Politeness Marker in Karaki Arabic

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Abstract

This study is aimed at examining the contextually variable meanings of the word *akhs* in Karaki¹ Arabic. The data of the study, which is based on authentic situations where the researcher was involved, was analyzed within the domain of politeness theory. Besides its main use as a swear word and as an abusive form of language that threatens the negative face of the addressee, *akhs* was found to be used as a tool to achieve relational work and politeness among associates and relatives. The usage of *akhs* as a positive signal of politeness was also found to be largely dependent on the dialogue parties' degree of familiarity, common background, and contextual features. *Akhs* could be used in some contexts as a tool to express camaraderie and as a device to evoke enthusiasm in the addressee, highlighting social solidarity and closeness and maintaining the social ties among friends and relatives.

Keywords: Politeness, Familiarity, Relational work, Swear words, Social solidarity.

1. Introduction

The use of mock or unreal impoliteness as aimed at not casting insult to the addressee has been investigated by a number of scholars (e.g., Leech 1983; Culpeper 1996, 2011; Haugh & Bousfield 2012; McKinnon & Prieto 2014; Dynel 2016). Within impoliteness theory, a distinction has been drawn between genuine and mock impoliteness with the former being viewed as a set of “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper et al. 2003, 1546), and the latter is seen as a way to create social bonding (Culpeper 1996). Culpeper (2011, 207) contends that “the recontextualisation of impoliteness in socially opposite contexts creates socially opposite effects, namely affectionate, intimate bonds amongst individuals and the identity of that group”. The role of the situational context is of a paramount significance in the determination of the mock politeness. In relation to this, Culpeper (2011, 208) says that mock impoliteness is based on “[...] an understanding on the part of a participant that the contextual conditions that sustain genuine impoliteness do not apply”. This being the case, the contextual factors should be highlighted in the determination of *akhs* as an example of genuine or mock politeness. The contextual variability of *akhs* meaning along with considering other factors including the shared background and the level of familiarity amongst

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conversation interlocutors are key factors in determining whether *akhs* is used as an offensive device or as a tool to build or maintain relations and stress solidarity. *Akhs*, which is originally a swear word, is used as a positive impoliteness marker to realize politeness and relational work amongst least distant people including relatives and friends. This paper, therefore, endeavors to substantiate that politeness and relational work could be fulfilled through polite or impolite expressions.

The methodology of the present paper is discussed in Section 1. Section 2 provides an overview on the definition and functions of discourse markers. It also reviews politeness and impoliteness literature tracking the development of (im)politeness theory. A dedicated subsection is devoted to giving an overview of what swear words are. The primary contribution of this study is presented in Section 3 in that the situational uses of *akhs* as an abusive form of language and as a positive impoliteness marker aimed at maintaining relations are discussed. The study's conclusion, which summarizes its key findings, is presented in Section 4.

1.2 Aims

The aims of the current research are as follows:

- 1) Exploring the contextually variable meanings of the word *akhs* in Karaki Arabic.
- 2) Recognizing and describing the word *akhs* as an abusive form of language that threatens the negative face of the addressee.
- 3) Analyzing *akhs's* potential use as a tool for fostering relationships and politeness among friends and relatives.

2. Methodology

The data used for the present study is based on authentic situations where the researcher was involved. All conversation interlocutors are locals of Al-Karak city. The short conversations upon which this study is based are parts of lengthy conversations. Only relevant portions which serve the study purposes were used as a source of data. The framework by means of which social interchanges were studied is discourse analytic, providing adequate informative background for every single situation and analyzing instances of the linguistic encoding of positive impoliteness in naturally occurring situations within the rubrics of (im)politeness theories. All situations were recorded from memory and they were written down immediately following their occurrence. Natural and spontaneous situations are likely to explain the phenomenon under study. Punch (2005, 152) claims that the observer has more opportunities to comprehend the group under investigation and to familiarize himself with the "shared cultural meanings" that are of use in understanding the group's social behavior when he (the observer) integrates himself into the natural setting. The involvement of the author in the situations upon which this study is based provides the author with an ample scope to learn about the common cultural meanings of *akhs* and how they can be utilized as a double-edged sword to contextually realize polite and impolite social behavior. The author's familiarity with the contextually and culturally determined meanings of *akhs* was supported by his native Karaki Arabic speaking background. All situations were translated into English by the author.

3. Theoretical background

As mentioned at the outset, this study is concerned with investigating how the impolite *akhs* could be used to realize politeness. To that end, a survey of the prior research on discourse markers, politeness, impoliteness and swear words is of particular importance in levelling the ground for discussions on the situational uses of *akhs* and how it could be used as an insulting device or a tool to express camaraderie and claim closeness to the addressee.

3.1. Discourse markers

Discourse markers, as an expanding body of research, have received the attention of many researchers (Brinton 1996; Fischer 2006; Fraser 1999; Schiffrin 1987; Schourup 1999). Discourse markers are defined as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (Schiffrin 1987, 31); and include particles such as *oh*, *well*, *now*, and *then* and connectives such as *so*, *because*, and, *but* and *or* (Schiffrin 1987). Discourse markers are also defined as linguistic devices that are associated with several functions in conversation and that contribute to the production of coherent discourse in textual, expressive, cognitive, and social domains (Schiffrin et al. 2001). There is a disagreement among researchers in this field regarding definition, features, terminology and classification (Schourup 1999). Such disagreement was the cause of having different perspectives on discourse markers and different approaches to tackle discourse markers. There is a disagreement evident in the variety of labels applied to this class: pragmatic markers (Anderson 2001; Brinton 1996), discourse markers (Fraser 2006; Müller 2005; Schiffrin 1987), discourse particles (Aijmer 2002; Hansen 1997; Hansen 1998; Schourup 1985; Abraham 1991), discourse connectives (Blakemore 1987, 1989, 1992), pragmatic markers (Anderson 2001; Brinton 1996), phrase cues (Knott 1993) and pragmatic connectives (Stubbs 1983; Van Dijk 1979). Despite having distinct definitions, these studies focused on the production of discourse markers by speakers and their reception by listeners (Schourup 1999, 228).

Discourse markers, according to Hölker (1991, 78–79), are expressions that serve emotive purposes as opposed to referential ones. They add nothing to the utterance’s propositional content and have no semantic impact on the truth conditions. Pragmatically, discourse markers, Hölker (1991) says, relate to the speech situation rather than the situation being discussed. Additionally, Hölker offers a functional description of discourse markers, stating that they serve an expressive, emotive purpose as opposed to a referential denotive one. Discourse markers are lexical or linguistic devices that serve a variety of pragmatic purposes by indicating the possible communicative intents, attitudes, or emotions of the interlocutors (Schourup 1999; Fraser 1990, 1996, 1999). According to Fraser (1990, 1996), discourse markers have two distinct purposes: propositional and non-propositional. The former focuses on the utterance’s truth-conditional content and illustrates the structural relationships among the individual utterances or discourse segments. Discourse markers are elements of discourse segments that indicate specific aspects of the message being conveyed, rather than being part of the propositional content of the utterance. In the latter case, they are associated with emphasizing the intentions, emotions, attitudes, feelings, and stances of interlocutors during a conversation. Schiffrin (1987, 31) outlines the primary

characteristics of discourse markers, stating that they are not dependent on the sentence structure, in that "removal of a marker from its sentence initial position, in other words, leaves the sentence structure intact". In the same vein, Brinton (1996) notes that spoken discourse is more likely to employ discourse markers than written discourse and they (discourse markers) are multifunctional. Rather than discussing the semantic functions of the *akhs*, this work focuses on the pragmatic functions since the non-propositional functions of discourse markers are not linked to the truth-conditional content of the utterance. The purpose of this study is to look at the contextual variability of meaning of this particular discourse marker in the speech exchanged among Karaki people.

3.2. *Politeness*

Politeness, as an interdisciplinary subject, has drawn the attention of many scholars from different disciplines (Goffman 1967, 1971; Lakoff 1973, 1975, 1990; Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Fraser & Nolen 1981; Leech 1983; Watts 1989, 2003, 2005; Locher & Watts 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Arundale 2006; Eelen 2001; Mills 2003 among others) and it has been the subject of extensive inquiry. Looking at the theoretical development of politeness theory, Grainger (2011), and elsewhere in Bousfield & Grainger (2010), Van der Bom & Grainger (2015) and in Van der Bom & Mills (2015), classifies politeness research into three waves. Primarily influenced by the work of J. L. Austin (1962) and Paul H. Grice (1975), the first wave of politeness theory incorporates studies conducted by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Leech (1983), and Lakoff (1973, 1989). The "discursive turn" in politeness research (e.g., Locher 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Locher and Watts 2005; Mills 2011) primarily informs the second wave of politeness research, which is linked to criticisms of Gricean approaches to politeness (e.g., Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003, 2005). Grainger claims that the third wave encompasses sociological and interactional theories of politeness, including those put out by Terkourafi (2005), Arundale (2006), Haugh (2007), and O'Driscoll (2007). Even though their definitions of politeness vary, researchers are rather similar in that they emphasize politeness's function as a bridge between language and the social world. Goffman (1967) explains the concept of face in terms of rituals and in terms of the idea that people in social interactions are constrained by moral guidelines that oversee the course of events. When adhered to, these guidelines provide individuals the ability to assess other participants as well as themselves in social interactions. When considered in this light, politeness can be thought of as a social behavior that is regulated by social norms and customs that a socio-cultural group creates to preserve social order and harmonious relationships among its members. (Níkleva 2017). The goal of politeness, as a set of "interpersonal relations," is to minimize the likelihood of confrontation and conflict in human communication while facilitating smooth communication (Lakoff 1990, 34).

Brown & Levinson (1978) build on Goffman's concept of face and offer the most thorough and in-depth explanation of politeness. They distinguish between "negative face" and "positive face," which are the two primary components of face that symbolize an individual's desire in any social encounter (1987, 61). The desire to be free from others' interference and imposition is known as negative face. Conversely, positive face describes a person's desire to be attractive to others and to have their self-image valued and accepted. According to Brown and Levinson, positive politeness conveys respect for the addressee's

individuality by fostering a sense of belonging among the group. On the other side, negative politeness concentrates on the addressee's face wants, which are reflected in his desire to be free from imposition. In-group identity indicators, demonstrating empathy, and demonstrating concern for the addressee are examples of positive politeness, according to Brown & Levinson (1978). On the other hand, using indirect requests, etiquette, demonstrating deference and respect, and other displays of politeness could be considered examples of negative politeness. Rather than emphasizing the hearer's intention to perform the face-threatening act, positive politeness concentrates on his or her conviction and sense of satisfaction. In addition to its role in redressing the face-threatening act, this strategy is employed to establish a friendly and sociable relationship between the speaker and the hearer (Friess, 2008, 115). Negative politeness tries to satisfy the hearer's negative face while minimizing the threat to it. In spoken language, special devices such as ‘on record’ expressions, that motivate a polite atmosphere, are used. This kind of expression can be observed in a friendly conversation in which the relationship between the addresser and addressee is relatively close. That said, the use of positive politeness expressions and markers is largely dependent on the social distance holding the conversation participants. More importantly, positive impoliteness markers could be exchanged between interlocutors if they are socially close, and this is the point that the present paper addresses; shedding light on the dynamic meanings of *akhs* which could, through situated (im)politeness, express various context-dependent meanings. Situated politeness is “[...] thus concerned with disentangling the factors both embodied in and affecting our behaviour and evaluations in a given social context” (Haugh et al. 2011). *Akhs* which is originally used as a swear word could be extended contextually and used as a positive impoliteness marker between socially intimate friends who could use swear words as a way to realize politeness via impoliteness. That is, it doesn't appear that the speaker is deliberately trying to offend the hearer with this kind of positive impoliteness. According to Holmes (2013), the primary contextual elements influencing the style of language used in contact are social distances, which include the degree of familiarity, differences in status, role, age, gender, social class, and education. In the same vein, Culpeper (1996, 354) asserts that “the more intimate one becomes, the more impoliteness one employs” and that, even though friends have equal authority, impoliteness can still occur between them since they are aware that it is only fake impoliteness that is left on the surface. Analyzing *akhs* within the aegis of situated politeness could explain the factor(s) that contribute to reusing this bad word as a positive politeness device in the speech of Karaki people. This kind of argument is likely to contest Brown & Levinson's (1987) categorization of speech acts as either intrinsically face-saving or face-threatening, in that situated language could create positive illocutionary forces out of words and expressions classified as face-threatening speech acts. Even an evaluation of (im)politeness may be fulfilled through the situated use of language (Haugh 2018, 153).

The interpersonal relationships between conversation participants and the cultural setting determine what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate linguistic behavior. Xia and Lan (2019, 223) argue that “the extension and transformation of (im)politeness in a multi-party context are culturally motivated and conditioned by the interpersonal relationships among the different parties”. Since no speech acts are intrinsically (im)polite, Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory is criticized (e.g. Culpeper 2005, Haugh 2011;

Watts 2003). This means that an interpretation depends on the speech situation or context that affects interpretation. In addition to the contextual factors, interlocutors' shared knowledge and common ground "[...] may restrict the interpretation process to the propositional content of utterances, which may result in an increase in the actual situational context-creating power of utterances" (Kecskes 2017, 8). Examining the factors influencing the perception of speaker's politeness, Vergis and Pell (2020, 45) argue that in addition to the linguistic structure, prosody has the most significant effect on politeness ratings. This demonstrates that factors such as the cultural context, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, common ground and prosody could play a major role in determining whether a speech act is categorized as polite or otherwise. Schlund (2014, 271) contends that linguistic choices are not only dependent on concrete contexts but also motivated by the language system itself.

3.3. *Impoliteness*

One of the main criticisms raised against Brown & Levinson's (1987) approach to politeness is the less attention paid to impoliteness and they just consider impoliteness as the lack of politeness (Mills 2009). As a result, several studies were published (Bousfield 2008; Locher and Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 1996, 2005 and others) that addressed impoliteness and the limitations of the classical studies on politeness. Culpeper (1996, 350) attempts to characterize impoliteness by defining it as the employment of communication techniques intended to attack one's face, resulting in discord and conflict. The hearer's important involvement in determining impoliteness led Culpeper (2005) to alter the definition of impoliteness to take this function into account. Culpeper (2011) states that because impoliteness is determined by context and social values operative in a culture, it is difficult to define impoliteness precisely as some linguistic behaviors are judged to be polite in one context and impolite in another context. This could indicate that the evaluation of a linguistic behavior as being courteous or rude is more dependent on the hearer's perception and evaluation of the language produced by the speaker than on the speaker's actual behavior. Impoliteness is defined as a form of "[...] behavior that is face-aggravating in a particular context" (Locher and Bousfield 2008, 3).

Culpeper (2008, 31-2) distinguishes between rudeness and impoliteness, stating that rudeness is inadvertent unpleasant behavior whereas impoliteness is intentional. Unlike Culpeper, Terkourafi (2008, 61-2) contends that impoliteness is inadvertent but rudeness is intentional. Terkourafi's (2008) model of (im)politeness is different from most politeness/impoliteness theories as much emphasis is laid on of the hearer's perception rather than on the speaker's intention. Because impoliteness could be fulfilled through the use of swear words, as claimed by Culpeper (1996), it is worth going over this particular area, providing the definition and the characteristics of this part of abusive language.

3.4. *Swear words*

Swear words are categorized as part of taboos and are connected with the function of expressing strong emotions or attitudes. Jay and Janschewitz (2008, 267) point to the connotative nature of swear words' meanings, saying that the main purpose behind the use of swear words, whose primary meanings are connotative, is to express emotions, especially anger and frustration. They argue that a person's

experience with culture and its linguistic norms influences the emotional impact of swearing. A contrast is made between swearing out of anger and social swearing by Ross (1969; as referenced in Beers-Fägersten 2012). The former is connected to higher transgression and a stressed-out swearer, whereas the latter is linked to a social setting where the swearer is at ease. It was suggested that social swearing would strengthen social ties and facilitate collaboration. In the same vein, Jay (2009, 155) states that “swear words function as a social and psychological phenomenon which personifies highly intense or inappropriately expressed emotions.”

Pinker (2007, 219) states that people can use swear words in descriptive, idiomatic, abusive, emphatic, and cathartic ways. The use of swear words to convey their actual meaning is known as descriptive swearing. The usage of swear words as idioms is known as idiomatic swearing. Abusive swear words are intended to hurt or insult other people, and they are more likely to convey the speaker's feelings, particularly rage. Emphatic swear words convey a more intense feeling from the speaker. For example, the expression “your idea is fucking brilliant!” expresses the speaker's appreciation of the idea, having no negative thought even though the speaker employs a swear word. Finally, cathartic swear words, Pinker (2007, 223) says, are employed to reflect an individual's spontaneous emotional outburst in response to an experience. Such type of expression is used when people are surprised or shocked. Cathartic swear words, such as *oh, fuck!*, are not directed to others, but might convey an unexpected hurt or annoyance (Pinker 2007, 226). Part of the discussion in the present paper would be focused on investigating which of the categories explained above the word *akhs* belongs to.

4. Discussion

In the context of Karaki Arabic, *akhs* could be used loaded with different meanings which could be recognized based on the context in which *akhs* is used. Besides its literal sense as a swear word or as an abusive language form, *akhs* was found to display a wide range of context-dependent meanings whose illocutionary forces could be recovered based on the situation, the relationship holding the conversation participants and the common grounds among interlocutors.

4.1. *Akhs* as a swear word and an abusive language form

When used literally, *akhs* expresses the speaker's anger and frustration and could be classified, employing Ross's (1969) terms, as part of annoyance swearing in that the swearer is stressed and is transported with extreme anger. Examples (1) to (5) could illustrate this particular function.

(1) *axs axs. Kam marrah xabbartak innuh ?wlad innas muj li?bih til?ab fihah. ?na ?rsaltak lilmadrasah mijan tudrus mij tud?rub ?l-?wlad. ūqsimu billah, rah ?xallik t?ad? ?s?ab?ak min innadam iða bti?malaha marrah θaniyah ?aw bis?alni jakwa ?annak fi ilmustaqbal*

akhs akhs. how many times tell-PST-OBJ-VOC-2 that boy-PL-POSS ART-people not ART-game play-PRES in it. I send-PST-OBJ-VOC-2 to school in order to study-PRES not hit-PRES ART-boy-PL. swear-SUB by Allah will make-VOC-2 bite-PRES finger-PL-POSS from ART-regret if do-PRES-OBJ-VOC-2 time second or reach-1-OBJ-PRES complaint about you in ART-future

'*Akhs akhs*. How many times have I told you that people's children are not a game to play with? I sent you to school to study not to hit children. I swear by Allah, I will make you bite your fingers out of regret if you do it again or if I receive any complaint about you in future.'

(2) A: kuluma zatat ʔarwatuhū zada buxluhū. La aḏkur innuh ʕimil ʕei? Kwayyies fi yūm min alayyam. axs ʕaleih wa axs ʕala masʕarīh

as increase wealth-POSS increase stinginess-POSS. no remember-1 he do-PST thing good in day from day-PL. *akhs* on him and *akhs* on money-POSS-3

'As his wealth increases, his stinginess increases. I don't remember he did a good thing one day. *Akhs* on him and *akhs* on his money.'

B: He works as a money guard.

(3) A: ʕūl hayatha wagʕih biʕanbuh ʕala ilhilwih wa ilmurrah, taḥammalat kul maʕakil ilhayah bidūn ʕakwa. intarakat sʕifir illīdein. isʕsʕaḥīh innuh naḏil nakir lilʕamīl. axs ʕaleih wa axs ʕala kul wahad miḥluh

long life-POSS-3 stand near-3 on sweet and bitter, endure-PST-3 problem-PL ART-life without complaint. leave-PASS-PST-3 empty hand-DU. indeed he bastard ungrateful. *akhs* on him and *akhs* on everyone like him

'Throughout her life, she has been standing beside him for better and for worse, enduring all life difficulties without complaining. She was left empty-handed. Indeed, he is ungrateful bastard. *Akhs* on him and *akhs* on anyone like him.'

B: Not in time. He should stand beside her in these critical circumstances.

(4) A: iʕi ma tawaqaʕnah. musʕībih. Allah yirḥamha. axs ʕaleih

thing no expect-PST-1-PL-OBJ. tragedy. Allah bless her soul. *akhs* on him

'Something we have never expected. What a tragedy! May Allah have mercy upon her soul? *Akhs* on him.'

B: He is one of many victims of drug abuse.

(5) A: lilʕsaf , haḏi ʕadah sayyiʕah. axs on him. buxḏak lilbaḥar wa biraʕʕak ʕatʕʕan. ana ʕassalit aday minnuh min zaman

to sorrow, this habit-SG bad. axs on him. take-3-2-OBJ to sea and return-3-2-OBJ thirsty. I wash- PST hand-PL-POSS from him from time

'Unfortunately, this is a bad habit. *Akhs* on him. He takes you to the sea and brings you back thirsty. I washed my hands of him a long time ago.'

B: Most of them never keep promises, especially after they have been elected.

All examples mentioned above are part of situated language exchanged between conversation interlocutors. The researcher was involved in these conversation as a friend and as a relative. Situation (1) refers to an over-phone conversation between the researcher's cousin and his eldest son. On the way back to Al-Karak from Amman, the capital of Jordan, the researcher's cousin received a telephone call from the school headmaster complaining about the cousin's son who keeps on bullying other students, and that frequent complaints were raised to school administration about the son's aggression against other classmates. Fueled by anger, the cousin immediately spoke to the son over phone and addressed him

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using the swear word “*akhs*” twice, verbally reprimanding him about his hostility towards others. The use of *akhs* in this context could be classified as, using Pinker’s (2007, 219) terms, part of descriptive swearing in that it is used as a swear word to express its literal meaning.

Example (2) is taken from a conversation in which the author and his brothers engaged in a discussion over the last phases of the multi-purpose hall’s completion, which was still under construction. The story of this hall refers to the wish of the researcher’s townspeople to build a hall in his town where people could plan their events and celebrations. Following many meetings gathering representatives of the town, it was agreed that the project funding would be based on collecting donations from the townspeople, as it would be in the interest of all people. To this end, a fund-raising committee had been established. It was tasked with gathering money from the town’s residents. All people were happy to make donations except a very few ones including a very wealthy but stingy person who refrained from providing assistance. As a reaction to his refusal to offer donations, one of the researcher’s brothers angrily expressed his resentment of this stingy person, using the word *akhs*.

Situation (3) is part of a three-party conversation where the researcher and two friends were talking about a man they know very well. The topic of discussion centered on that man’s ingratitude and disloyalty to his wife. They have been married for along. The wife, regrettably, fell down with cancer and was admitted to hospital to receive the proper treatment. Instead of standing beside wife, psychologically supporting her, he got married to another woman and became more attracted to the second wife caring less about the first wife. In response to this socially inappropriate behavior, and in sympathy with the sick wife, one of the researcher’s friends reacted violently and uttered the word *akhs* as an abusive form of language badmouthing that disloyal husband.

Example (4) was said reactively by the researcher’s wife about a shocking crime that had triggered widespread outrage in Jordan; a son, who was under the influence of drugs, killed his mother and pulled out her eyes. Example (5) was said by a friend who has been trying to find a job for his unemployed son. He was not pleased with one of the members of the parliament of his directorate who kept on promising to appoint his son in one of the governmental institutions, but then broke his word, and it seems that it is his habit not to honor his word. In addition to the use of *akhs*, the metonymy-based idiom “*He takes you to the sea and returns you thirsty*” was also used abusively to designate the speaker’s anger.

It is evident from the aforementioned examples that *akhs* is a swear word that is used to insult or mistreat others. Besides, *akhs* could be taken as part of descriptive swearing where it is used as a swear word to express its literal meaning; offending or abusing others. Idiomatic swearing could be used to strengthen the literal sense of *akhs*, as is clear in example (5). Used abusively, *akhs* could be said to be part of annoyance swearing, where the speaker is stressed and reacts aggressively to a certain action or behavior. Building on the distinction between impoliteness and rudeness made by Culpeper (2008, 31-2), it seems that *akhs* is an example of impoliteness in the sense it is used as an intentional negative behavior. Looking at the aforementioned situations again, we find that *akhs* is employed intentionally to signal the speaker’s displeasure with the form of behavior or action of a certain person. Any attempt to interpret the meaning of *akhs* should be context-dependent, as we will discuss later in this paper the other non-

offensive meanings of *akhs*, where it is used as a tool to mirror the social solidarity and a way to strengthen the social ties among close friends. There are many instances when impolite words and/or expressions such as *akhs* are used among friends to realize politeness. So, the role of context is crucial in delineating the difference between *akhs* as an offensive word to realize impoliteness and *akhs* as a sweet word to realize politeness, solidarity and in-groupness. In the next Section, instances of *akhs* as a positive politeness marker will be discussed, based on real-world scenarios where *akhs* is exchanged among close friends.

4.2. *Akhs as a positive politeness marker*

Akhs, which is employed as an abusive form of language, could also be used as a form of positive politeness and as a tool to signal camaraderie between friends of the same background and of the same social status; socially equal friends. Again, the recognition of *akhs* as a positive politeness marker is largely dependent on the context of use. The contextual variability of meaning allows multiple interpretations of the same word. That is, what counts as impolite word in one context might not count as such in another context. In what follows, the positive meanings of *akhs* as exchanged between friends with the aim of emphasizing the strongly tied relationships are discussed.

4.2.1. *Familiarity and camaraderie-displaying device*

The use of *akhs* between friends demonstrates that the speaker and the hearer have a lot in common and that intimacy and social solidarity are prioritized over deference and social distance. The following examples illustrate friends' predisposition to claim common ground and zero distance with the hearer.

- (6) A: *axs ya xuk liwayh ma tsolif wej sʔar mafak?*
 akhs brother-VOC why NEG say-PRES what happen-PST with you-SG
 'Akhs brother, why don't you say what happened to you?'
 B: Don't worry; it's just a cut.
- (7) A: *axs ya fein mi beinna*
 akhs bad man-VOC NEG between us
 'Akhs bad man, it is not between us.'
 What is between me and you is bigger than this.
 B: Let me pay, my heart.
- (8) A: *axs ya fein bazʕal minnak*
 akhs bad man-VOC-SG get angry-FUT from you-SG
 'Akhs bad man, I will get angry with you.'
 B: As you like.
- (9) A: *Axsu ya fein in wein ma leiku ʕineh*
 Akhsu bad people-PL-VOC where NEG to you news
 'Akhsu guys, where you were.' (Why did you disappear?)
 B: We missed you, indeed.
- (10) A: *Axs tʔaʕmīni min ʕibsak*
 akhs feed-IMP me from chips-POSS
 'Akhs give me some of your chips.'
 B: I give you chips and you give me a toffee.

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- (11) A: Axsu ya iṣyal wein balagi maḥal ḥalawiyyat mrattab
akhs.PL boy-PL-VOC where find-PRES store-SG sweet good
‘Aksu guys, what is the best sweet shop?’

B: Al-Khayyam is the best sweet shop.

In all examples mentioned above, *akhs* is used positively to stress intimacy and closeness in relation between the speaker and the hearer, produced by the speaker with the aim of establishing and/or maintaining camaraderie with the other party and understood by the hearer as a marker of the strongly tied and informal relationship holding him with the speaker. There are instances when close friends purposefully use impolite words in general and *akhs* in particular in front of other people to boast that they have close relationship, verbally exchanging *akhs* and other impolite words.

Example (6) refers to a situation when the researcher and his cousin met a friend and observed a large bandage over his right hand. The large bandage was indicative of something serious that did happen to the friend’s hand. The use of *akhs* along with the word “*brother*” could demonstrate that the speaker is deeply sympathizing with the friend. Moreover, asking the friend to provide a detailed account of what happened to his hand could substantiate the strong relationship holding the speaker and the hearer. The hearer is pleased being addressed with *akhs* and being asked to narrate in detail the story of cutting finger while slaughtering a lamb, as this shows to the hearer how much caring about him the speaker is.

Examples (7) and (8) were said respectively in one situation. At a restaurant, two persons – sitting around one table next to the researcher and his family – finished their lunch and left the table and moved together fast towards the restaurant cashier racing who paid first the price of the food. One of them looked at the other and said examples (7) and (8). Example (7) means that the close relationship between the two friends is much bigger than money and it, therefore, makes no difference who paid for the food. Example (8) is part of a conditional sentence whose if-clause was not mentioned but could be implicitly understood (I will get angry with you if you don’t stop trying to pay for the food). In addition to the use of *akhs*, the word *ya fein* (يا شين) which amounts to a very bad person was used, and this could mean that the two persons are socially intimates.

During the olive harvest period, the researcher and two cousins visited their close friend and his family who were busy harvesting their olives. They decided to visit the friend’s family that they know very well and help pick up olives. The friend’s family has a small farm in a beautiful place in Al-Karak and the researcher and cousins visit them regularly and have cookouts there. In contrast to normal, the researcher and cousins had not seen them for a while when they paid them a visit. When the friend’s father first saw the researcher and cousins, he smiled and uttered example (9). The use of *akhsu* (plural of *akhs*) and *ya feinīn*/يا شينين (plural of *ya fein*) by the friend’s father demonstrates how much he was longing to see the researcher and cousins, and the same feeling applied to the researcher and cousins.

In one of the researcher’s visits to his son’s school during the morning break to inquire about his son’s study and conduct inside the school, he parked his car in front of the school. While walking through the schoolyard heading towards the school administration building, the researcher overheard one student asking a fellow student who was eating potato chips to give him some chips, uttering example (10). The

use of *akhs* in this context, again, demonstrates they are close friends. Example (11) was said by one of the researcher's brothers who has been working in the United Arab Emirates and addressed to the remaining brothers including the researcher. He was spending summer vacation in Jordan and was looking for a good sweet shop. The question was directed to the remaining brothers as they are more familiar with the country than him. Though the brothers, including a judge and a university professor, are all married running big families, they were addressed with *akhsu/اخشوا* (the plural of *akhs*). It could be said that the use of *akhs* was aimed at reminding the brothers with the strongly tied sibling relations. It is quite common in some families that the brotherly relations prior to the marriage of family members are much stronger than they are after marriage. This might be due to establishing new families on their own part and undertaking new responsibilities which could lessen the magnitude of the brotherly relations. A tendency to formalize the relations between brothers following marriage could happen in some families due to the emergence of new factors which contribute to distancing the relations between brothers such as wives' insistence on having independent spousal relations free from husband's family intrusion. The use of the informal and impolite *akhs* in this context could be understood as an attempt on the part of the speaker to remind the other brothers that they, though married and have new families, still enjoy strongly tied brotherly relations, hence informally addressing them with *akhs*, realizing intimacy and closeness via positive impoliteness. This assumption is strengthened by the use of *ya iḡyal/يا عيال* (the plural of *ḡayyil* = boy). Like *akhs*, *ḡayyil* – which is used negatively to connote immature man known for irresponsible behavior – was used positively in this context to reinforce the good brotherly ties.

4.2.2. Chivalry and enthusiasm-generating device

In addition to its main role in emphasizing solidarity and closeness in relation among friends and relatives, *akhs* could also be used as a tool to informally spur others to, for instance, do something good. The use of *akhs* encourages the hearer(s) to abide by the speaker's request which is less likely to be declined by the addressee. The following examples could illustrate this particular function of *akhs*:

- (12) A: *axsu ya feinīn mīn fikum dammouh A-*
akhs-PL bad people-PL-VOC who in you blood-POSS A-
 'Akhsu guys, whose blood type is A.'
 B: (Different answers received)
- (13) A: *axs fīl maḡi.*
akhs-SG lift-IMP with me.
 'Akhs give me a hand.'
 B: OK.
- (14) A: *axs xallina inrouh inḡouf wejḡ fīh*
akhs-SG let us go see-1-PL what in it
 'Akhs let us go in and see what happened.'
 B: All right, let's go.
- (15) A: *axs balagī maḡak fakkit ḡafer nerat?*
akhs-SG find with you change ten dinar-PL?
 'Akhs do you have change of 10 JD?'
 B: *Ibḡir*
 Sure.

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While the researcher was sitting in a waiting room full of patients queueing to see the internist in the Outpatient Clinics building in Al-Karak Public Hospital, a young man, troubled and out of breath, dashed in the waiting room door and addressed all waiting patients using example (12) (*Akhsu ya feinīn, whose blood type is A-*). Later, we knew that his brother was suffering massive blood hemorrhage caused by receiving serious injuries in a traffic accident. Though the addressees were socially distant to the speaker, the worried young man addressed all using *akhsu ya feinīn/يا شينين/اخشوا يا شينين*. This could be justified by the severity of his brother’s health which caused the speaker to claim familiarity with the hearers assuming nobody would hesitate to assist. Such line of behavior – claiming closeness to people whom you do not know – is not uncommon in a call-for-help situations. The addressee (s) would be pleased to be resorted to as a source of help and be addressed with impolite words aimed at shortening distance between the speaker and the hearer in critical situations where prompt responsiveness is needed. Claiming a close relationship “[...] is often used to convey friendly feelings to the addressee as a way to shorten the distance between the conversation partners” (Al-Adaileh 2011, 244). One person, therefore, enthusiastically accompanied the young man to provide the necessary help.

Example (13), (*Akhs give me a hand*), refers to a situation that did happen when the researcher and sons were on a sheep farm during Eid al-Adha (Greater Bajram) planning to buy a lamb. In a small slaughter house inside the farm, the butcher slaughtered the lamb. Having finished peeling the lamb skin, the butcher attempted to hang the lamb on a hook suspending from ceiling, as this would help chop the lamb easily into small pieces. When trying to lift the lamb, the butcher got stuck with the heavy weight of the lamb and quickly looked at another worker and uttered example (13) *Akhs fīl maʿi/اخش شيل معي*, using *akhs* as a way to entuse him to help lifting the heavy lamb. Example (14), (*Akhs let us go in and see what happened*), refers to a situation when the researcher and his brother observed heavy smoke rising in the sky in the middle of the town. It was said by the researcher’ brother and addressed to the researcher encouraging him to accompany his brother there. Example (15) (*Akhs do you have change of 10 JD?*) was said in the farmers’ market by one grocer to his next-door neighbor.

People seem to attach weight to the degree of familiarity with the addressee when taking into account the speaker and addressee’s level of familiarity, hence the use of impolite words, like *akhs*, between friends and relatives as a tool to realize politeness and as a marker of the strongly tied relationships. More significant is the employment of other impolite words such as *ya feinīn* (يا شينين) and *ya iʿyāl* (يا عيال) to emphasize solidarity and closeness in relations. These findings show that the usage of swear words like *akhs* to fulfill politeness should not be discussed in isolation from other social factors. Originating from this mutual reliance, social distance in conjunction with social power should be taken into accounts when *akhs* is used as a positive politeness marker. The use of *akhs* as a positive marker of politeness between relatives and friends explains the relationship between language choices and social factors. On the basis of these findings, it could be said that Karaki people are more sensitive to the interdependence between linguistic choices and social distance, hence the use of *akhs* with the least

distant addressees. The use of swear words as a positive impoliteness strategy could mirror the social expectations of Jordanian people in general and Karaki people in particular which stress involvement and in-group- relation. Therefore, the usage of *akhs* by speakers to refer to their closest friends and family members may indicate that they are mindful of the social norms of the Karaki community, which emphasize friendliness. The use of *akhs* as a form of solidarity impoliteness could also mark Karaki people's inclination to behave informally. The use of *akhs* to maintain the strongly tied relations between least distant friends and relatives could mean that relational work could be fulfilled via polite and impolite behavior (e.g., Gu 1990; Holmes 1995; Holmes & Schnurr 2005; Watts 2003; Locher & Watts 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Arundale 2006). *Akhs* which could be face-threatening to the addressee's negative face could also be used among friends to establish and/or maintain good relations without bearing any threat to the hearer's face in Al-Karak community. This being so, relational work could be realized via the employment of impolite expressions and through adopting informal channels of communications. Claiming familiarity and common ground with the addressee could support the idea that, in social interactions involving members of the same group and even sometimes members who are seen as socially distant, people value closeness and solidarity above distance. (Al-Adaileh 2007, 209). Positive politeness strategies and solidarity impoliteness are, therefore, expected to be common in social interactions among friends and relatives who emphasize societal cohesion.

In addition to the degree of familiarity, the shared background is likely to determine the linguistic choices exchanged between conversation partners and could justify the use of impolite words to realize politeness and relational work. According to Eelen (2001, 127-140), language speakers are presumed to have common knowledge and in order to behave politely, one needs to act appropriately in accordance with the addressee's expectations, and since social norms govern appropriateness and are a cultural rather than an individual trait, the speaker will have little trouble understanding the hearer's expectations. In the same vein, Lakoff (1990) claims that all members of society act involuntarily since each person internalizes sociocultural norms in their minds. According to Eelen, Brown & Levinson's (1987) Model Person provides the best explanation for sharedness because, in the absence of shared notions like face, power, distance, and ranking, speakers of a given language would be unable to determine which strategy would be the most appropriate in a given circumstance, which would undoubtedly make the phenomena of politeness unpredictable. Eelen claims that sharedness also helps the speaker anticipate the hearer's expectations and respond correctly and courteously. As part of considering the hearer's expectations and acting appropriately in Karaki culture is the use of swear words like *akhs* among friends and relatives to realize polite and appropriate behavior. This would contest Brown & Levinson's (1978, 1987) classification of speech acts as being essentially face-threatening or face-saving acts, or as innately negative or positive politeness strategies. That is, our discussion in this study demonstrates that *akhs*, which is used originally as a swear word, could also be used as a positive marker of politeness and can serve as a means of expressing closeness and solidarity among people who belong to the same community.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the present paper discussed the contextually variable meanings of *akhs* in Karaki culture. It was found that *akhs* whose meaning is negative and threatens the negative face of the addressee could also be employed in friendly and familial contexts to realize politeness and relational work. This is, as explained previously in this paper, largely dependent on the context of use, common background and the degree of familiarity between the conversation partners. It was found that the face-threatening *akhs* could be used as a tool to express camaraderie and as a device to evoke enthusiasm in the addressee, strengthening the social ties, emphasizing camaraderie and intimacy while downplaying formality and distancing oneself from the addressee. People turn to using language expressions that are likely to conform to the addressee's societal expectations. Social norms and social expectations are, therefore, significant in determining whether an act is more or less polite. With this in mind, it becomes evident that a variety of tactful and impolite techniques can be used to achieve appropriate behavior. This implies that linguistic politeness is not universally understood or encoded in the same way across cultures and individuals.

تحقيق التأدب عبر لغة غير مهذبة: استعمال مفردة "أخس" كعلامة تأدب إيجابية في العربية المحكّية لأهل الكرك

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن المعاني المتغيرة سياقياً لكلمة "أخس" في العربية المحكّية في مدينة الكرك، وحلّلت بيانات الدراسة التي تستند إلى مواقف حقيقية شارك فيها الباحث، ضمن إطار نظرية التأدب، علاوة على استخدام "أخس" على أنها كلمة دالة على الشتيمة، وعلى أنها شكل من أشكال اللغة المسيئة التي قد تؤدي إلى فقدان ماء الوجه للشخص المخاطب، استعملت تلك المفردة استعمالاً يحقق التأدب، وقد وجدت الدراسة أن كلمة "أخس" تستعمل بين الأصدقاء والأقارب على أنها أداة لتحقيق التأدب والعمل اللائقي، وأن استخدام "أخس" كونها علامة تأدب إيجابية يعتمد إلى حد كبير على سياق الاستخدام، والخلفية المشتركة، ومستوى الألفة بين المتحاورين. وقد تبين أنه يمكن استخدام "أخس" في بعض السياقات على أنها أداة للتعبير عن الصداقة الحميمة، وعلى أنها وسيلة لإثارة الحماس لدى الشخص المخاطب، والتعبير عن التضامن الاجتماعي، والتقارب، والحفاظ على الروابط الاجتماعية بين الأصدقاء والأقارب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التأدب؛ الألفة؛ العمل اللائقي؛ الكلمات البديئة؛ التضامن الاجتماعي.

Endnotes

¹ Al-Karak is a Jordanian city that lies 140 kilometers (87 mi) to the south of Amman on the ancient King's Highway. Al-Karak is known for its big castle and has a view of the Dead Sea.

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Appendix A: Phonetic Symbols used in the study

Consonants: (adopted from Suleiman 1985: 30)

b	Voiced bilabial plosive	ʈʂ	Voiceless postalveolar affricate
m	Bilabial nasal	l	Postalveolar lateral approximant
f	Voiceless labiodental fricative	j	Palatal approximant
d	Voiced dental plosive	g	Voiced velar plosive
t	Voiceless dental plosive	k	Voiceless velar plosive
n	Dental nasal	ɣ	Voiced velar fricative
ð	Voiced dental fricative	x	Voiceless velar fricative
θ	Voiceless dental fricative	w	Labio-velar approximant
z	Voiced alveolar fricative	q	Voiceless uvular plosive
s	Voiceless alveolar fricative	ʕ	Voiced pharyngeal fricative
r	Alveolar trill	ħ	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative
ʒ	Voiced postalveolar fricative	ʔ	Glottal plosive
ʃ	Voiceless postalveolar fricative	h	Voiceless glottal fricative
ʤ	Voiced postalveolar affricate		

Pharyngealised consonants are marked with ʕ: tʕ, dʕ, sʕ, ðʕ, l ʕ

Vowels:

a for **ا** **i** for **ي**; **ay** for **اي** as a diphthong

u for **و** **ā** for **آ**; **ē** for **ي** as a monophthong (front, mid, unrounded, long vowel)

ī for **ي** **ū** for **و**; **aw** for **او** as a diphthong

ō for **و** as a monophthong (back, mid, rounded, long vowel)