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Conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic

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Abstract: This paper explores (im)politeness conceptualizations and evaluations and the moral foundations of lay notions of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic. The data were collected using an online questionnaire which was administered to 88 native speaking participants. The results show that participants consider politeness and impoliteness as polar opposites; both are viewed as (in)consideration for others, chiefly conveyed through (dis)respect, and upholding/violating appropriate behaviors, respectively. Moreover, the results show that notions of hierarchical respect, face, equity rights, reciprocity, and attending to others' needs are central in motivating participants' views of (im)politeness. These notions are rooted in the moral foundations of authority/respect, fairness/reciprocity, and harm/care. Additionally, interesting findings emerge in that politeness in Syrian Arabic appears to be more of a relational phenomenon, based on morality, which is in line with contemporary views on politeness, than a rational and strategic behavior, as theorized in classical approaches.

Keywords: (im)politeness; moral foundations; social norms; Syrian Arabic

1 Introduction

Politeness research has seen a dramatic expansion over the past few decades since its beginnings with first-wave politeness theories (Brown and Levinson 1978/1987; Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983). The distinction between first- and second-order politeness, or politeness as practiced and understood by lay speakers as opposed to researchers' theoretically-imposed notions, respectively (Eelen 2001: 30), has marked the start of the discursive turn in politeness research (Watts 2003; Watts et al. 2005) which takes a predominantly user perspective to examining politeness. The discursive approaches have emphasized the elusiveness of the concept of politeness (Watts 2003: 13) and its dyadic nature as a social and linguistic phenomenon that involves not only what the speaker says but also how the hearer evaluates it (Mills 2011: 28).

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This has resulted in a shift towards examining how users conceptualize and evaluate politeness rather than how they produce it (Barros García and Terkourafi 2014). Following this change of perspective, this research aims to examine first-order, lay conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic.

Haugh (2012) warns that users' perspectives and that of the researcher/analyst may be in danger of being conflated. He further argues that any examination of (im) politeness involves multiple loci of understanding. The analyst's perspective is rooted in understanding the interpretations of the participants by inferring them through systematic observations, which may be couched in theoretical epistemologies (Haugh 2012: 10–13). This research subscribes to this characterization; I take a first-order, user perspective in examining (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic. I also use theoretical frameworks, as discussed later, which guide my systematic analysis of participants' understandings. Thus, this research is an example of contemporary approaches to (im)politeness that couch analyses in the perspectives of both users and analysts.

In addition to bringing to the fore the importance of examining politeness from multiple perspectives, recent approaches to politeness have also criticized the conceptual bias towards politeness in earlier theories (Eelen 2001: 87) in which impoliteness was considered a marginal phenomenon (Leech 1983: 105) or treated as the absence of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987). However, since Culpeper (1996), there has been an increasing interest in impoliteness in its own right. In more recent developments, Culpeper (2011: 21) argues that impoliteness arises with respect to face-offenses and offenses that result from violations of social and moral norms. In a similar vein, Kádár and Haugh (2013: 67) discuss the role of social and moral norms and maintain that, in evaluating behaviors as (im)polite, people appeal to a set of moral and social norms, a moral order, that guides their evaluations of (im)politeness. Thus, given the importance of morals and norms in (im)politeness conceptualizations and evaluations, a major objective in this paper is to identify the moral foundations that underlie participants' understandings of (im)politeness.

Based on this brief overview, this study explores conceptualizations of (im) politeness and their moral foundations in Syrian Arabic, which to my knowledge has not been researched from a first-order perspective before. By focusing on participants' conceptualizations of (im)politeness rather than their production of (im)politeness, the study also contributes to (im)politeness research, which has been dominated by a focus on production studies (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 662). I examine the following question:

RQ: What are participants' conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic? What are the moral foundations of such conceptualizations and evaluations?

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, I review lay and theoretical conceptualizations of (im)politeness. Section 3 tackles the role of social norms and morality in (im)politeness evaluations. Methodology and data are presented in Section 4. In Section 5, I discuss the research question and the results of the study and conclude in Section 6.

2 Conceptualizations of (im)politeness: from theoretical constructs to lay notions

As noted earlier, discursivists highlight the fluidity of politeness as a concept that is difficult to define. Fukushima and Sifianou (2017: 527) argue that this may be due to the multi-faceted nature of politeness; it is a social and linguistic phenomenon with both verbal and non-verbal manifestations, which may vary among members of the same culture. Nevertheless, classical politeness theories are replete with definitions of politeness, which they consider a universal phenomenon. For example, Lakoff (1979: 64) sees politeness as a "device to reduce friction in personal interaction". Similarly, Leech (1983: 82) maintains that politeness is needed to uphold the belief that our interlocutors are being cooperative and to maintain social equilibrium. For Brown and Levinson (1987: 1), politeness is a strategic device used to mitigate face-threat and possible aggression. The overall picture in classical theories is that politeness is a strategic and intentional behavior used by the speaker to achieve personal and communicative goals, with the hearer relegated to a mere recipient.

Discursive approaches have dismissed such analyses as second-order theoretical constructs, imposed by researchers (Watts et al. 2005), and emphasized the relational nature of politeness as part of the work in which people engage in maintaining, constructing, and redefining their interpersonal relationships (Locher and Watts 2008: 96). Thus, politeness research should be couched in a first-order perspective and should examine how lay speakers understand politeness as an everyday concept (Eelen 2001: 32). One method towards this goal is to examine users' (im)politeness metalanguage which reveals their awareness of (im)politeness as a social and linguistic phenomenon and allows us to "examine the conceptual underpinnings of politeness" (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 188). For example, Blum-Kulka (2005: 257) reports that Israelis associate politeness with restraint, tolerance, and good manners. For Greeks, politeness involves solidarity rather than distance and is characterized by love, generosity, optimism, discreetness, and selflessness (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010: 696).

Examining politeness metalanguage has also revealed that politeness in the lay sense involves behaving appropriately in accordance with "the expectations of the

place" Blum-Kulka (2005: 259), which resonates with Barros García and Terkourafi's (2014: 26) findings that politeness in Spanish and American English concerns adherence to social norms. Politeness is also understood as showing consideration and respect for others, which implies concern for and understanding of others (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017: 539; Haugh 2019). According to Travis (1997), consideration involves avoiding behaviors that reveal one has not thought of others, but Fukushima and Haugh (2014) argue that this is a narrow view of consideration which also involves empathy, attentiveness, and helping others. This has also been reported by Fukushima and Sifianou (2017: 534) who explain that Greek and Japanese informants conceive of politeness as consideration of others, conveyed through respect, help, empathy, and attentiveness.

Attentiveness as a form of consideration for others is a core aspect of lay conceptualizations of politeness especially in Japanese culture. Fukushima (2013: 279) defines attentiveness as a form of preemptive offering that shows concern for a beneficiary's potential needs in a particular situation. The concept of "attentiveness" is found in politeness literature and is synonymous with a range of helping behaviors (Fukushima 2013: 280). For example, Sifianou and Tzanne (2010: 671–672) implicitly refer to attentiveness as manifested through helping others, which constitutes part of Greek participants' understandings of politeness, and includes behaviors such as giving up one's seat in public transportation, one's turn in queues, and offering help to strangers in the streets.

The view of politeness as subsuming consideration and attentiveness contradicts classical views of politeness as a rational behavior and supports contemporary views that see it as a relational phenomenon; one cannot be considerate, attentive, and respectful in isolation from others. Overall, politeness is underlain by morality and emotion rather than mere rationality (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017: 546–547). As I will show in relation to Syrian Arabic, morals and norms are central to participants' conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness.

As for (im)politeness, there is not yet a consensus among scholars on what it subsumes (Bousfield 2010). "The lowest common denominator" is that "impoliteness is a behavior that is face aggravating in a particular context" (Locher and Bousfield 2008: 3). Culpeper's (2005: 38) definition of impoliteness as face-attack that may or may not be intentional also centers on face as the target of impoliteness. Similarly, Culpeper (2008: 36–38) discusses the interaction between impoliteness, face, and power. He argues that impoliteness causes face loss in that an interactant attempts to "devalue" the positive values of another interactant or impinge on their right to freedom from imposition, their negative face. Impoliteness relates to power in that impoliteness restricts others' freedom of action and pushes them to either accept face loss or attempt retaliation. Power is also manifested in other impoliteness behaviors such as insults, putdowns, and forcing a course of action on others. Culpeper (2008)

concludes that negative face, or equity rights which I further discuss in the upcoming section, suffers as a result of such impoliteness behaviors. More recently, Culpeper (2021: 5) discusses parallels between impoliteness and hate speech which targets intrinsic characteristics of groups of people such as gender, ethnicity, and disability, and so damages their sense of identity, or group face, as described by Spencer-Oatey (2008) and discussed in Section 3. Hate speech and impoliteness both damage group face (Culpeper 2021).

In addition to face, Culpeper (2011: 21–23) incorporates social norms and expectations in his definition of impoliteness as “a negative attitude” towards certain behaviors that run contrary to people’s expectations in a given context. Culpeper and Tantucci (2021: 147–149) argue that part of what people expect is reciprocity, which is integral to the concept of (im)politeness, in that there is pressure on participants to reciprocate other participants’ (im)politeness, what Culpeper and Tantucci (2021: 150) refer to as the Principle of (im)politeness Reciprocity.[1] Thus, polite behaviors such as greetings and thanks are expected to be reciprocated. Similarly, impolite insults give rise to counter insults. Violations of reciprocity as an expected behavior are abnormal, and abnormalities imply impoliteness (Culpeper and Tantucci 2021: 151). It follows from the preceding discussion that a behavior might be evaluated as impolite if it targets face or if it is seen as a breach of norms and social expectations about acceptable behaviors. As I show in the discussion, face considerations and violations of social norms turn out to be central to participants’ conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness in this research.

According to Bousfield (2010), studies on lay conceptualizations of impoliteness are scarce compared to their politeness counterparts (Bousfield 2010). Thus, by targeting lay conceptualizations of impoliteness on a par with those of politeness, this paper addresses this gap in the literature by contributing to previous studies on lay understandings of impoliteness. One such study is Culpeper’s (2009) research on impoliteness metalanguage in which he examined the lexico-grammatical patterns associated with “rude” and “impoliteness” in a corpus of British English. He found that the patterns shed light on behaviors considered rude/impolite in lay usage such as pointing, staring, and unannounced visits. These actions reveal “the social underpinnings of behaviors regularly evaluated as IMPOLITE” (Culpeper 2009: 81). For example, pointing and being interrupted are underlain by concerns about unwarranted intrusion. Similarly, in public service contexts, it is considered impolite when people’s expectations of being entitled to public service are violated and they are denied service (Culpeper 2009: 83).

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1 The notion of reciprocity is not original to Culpeper and Tantucci (2021), as they admit. It is introduced in Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) rapport management model.

In Australian English, Waters (2012) explores the meanings of “rude” by analyzing the formula “it is rude to VP…” and the collocation “rude word”. The study reveals a number of behaviors and contexts deemed rude for Australians, which again include pointing and staring, in addition to interrupting, which suggests that these actions are recognized as rude in Anglo cultures. Waters (2012: 1056) notes that for something to be rude for Australians, it must cause others hurt, resentment, and offense, and for such negative feelings to lead to a negative evaluation of the person causing them. Thus, Waters (2012) implicitly defines impoliteness as a negative evaluation of others’ behaviors.

Sifianou and Tzanne’s (2010) study of impoliteness in Greek shows that impoliteness can be manifested in verbal behaviors such as swearing, interruption, sarcasm, failure to produce a polite response when expected, and issuing orders and demands. It can also be manifested in non-verbal behaviors which subsume pushing, jumping queues, and littering. As can be seen from the studies reviewed so far, face, consideration for others, and social norms and expectations about appropriate behaviors underlie much of layperson’s notions of (im)politeness. Consideration for others especially through respect also figures in studies on lay understandings of (im) politeness in Arabic dialects, which, despite being limited, take a contemporary, user-perspective.

For example, Al-Adaileh’s (2007) study compares politeness orientations in Jordanian Arabic and British English, through examining apologies. Using the Relational Work model (Locher and Watts 2005), Al-Adaileh (2007) offers empirical evidence that shows that Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model is unfit for capturing the complexities of politeness conceptions and expression. The study shows that apologies are not intrinsically negative politeness strategies, as Brown and Levinson (1987) claim, and that Jordanians use them as positive politeness strategies. Al-Adaileh (2007) concludes that politeness facts are best analyzed using the Relational Work model.

Kerkam (2015) also takes a discursive approach and examines (in)directness and (im)politeness in Libyan Arabic and British English. Regarding (im)politeness which is of more relevance to this research, Kerkam notes that both groups define politeness in terms of consideration for others but have different understandings as to how consideration is shown; the British see it as conforming to expectations and norms, the display of respect and patience, among other values, as well as using verbal politeness markers such as *please* and *thanks*. This latter aspect of politeness was not noted by Libyan informants, who otherwise emphasized the importance of honesty, truthfulness, respect for older people, and showing the moral teachings of religion in their behavior. Similarly, impoliteness is evaluated by both groups as lack of consideration. However, whereas the British seem to view it as the exact opposite of their definition of politeness, the Libyans add to that an extra layer of understanding

of impoliteness as violating the teachings of religion and being a result of bad upbringing, thus, invoking the role of the social context in shaping (im)polite behaviors.

Also in Libyan Arabic, Asswae (2018) adopts Kádár and Haugh's (2013) framework to explore the norms that underlie politeness and the interaction between politeness, religion, and rituals. She finds that politeness is underpinned by the social norms of hospitality, respect for elders and higher ranking individuals, and is characterized by the use of religious address terms and academic titles to index deference. The results also indicate that speakers employ relational rituals primarily through the use of elaborate religious formulae to enact politeness in various religious and secular contexts.

Based on this brief overview of the literature, this study is a contribution to (im) politeness research in that it investigates a dialect of Arabic that has not been examined before, taking a contemporary approach that combines the perspective of participants as lay users as well as the perspective of the analyst. The study also attempts to overcome the conceptual bias towards politeness (Eelen 2001) by equally focusing on politeness and impoliteness conceptualizations. As my role as analyst lies in systematically analyzing participants' views on (im)politeness and their moral foundations, I do that by drawing on insights from Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management model and Spencer-Oatey and Kádár's (2016) discussion of the foundations of morality. I present the details of these frameworks in the next section.

3 Evaluations of (im)politeness: social norms and moral foundations

As seen in the discussion above, researchers argue that (im)politeness involves an evaluation of others' behaviors in a specific context. Different analyses have been proposed to account for how evaluations arise. Within the Relational Work approach, Locher and Watts (2008: 78) argue that evaluations of (im)politeness are made with reference to participants' expectations of what behavior is expected and accepted in any given context. Similarly, in her rapport management model, Spencer-Oatey (2008) appeals to shared expectations and socially accepted behaviors, as well as to face, to explain how relationships prosper or suffer as a result of (im)polite behaviors. She argues that face is connected to one's self-worth and is associated with a set of positive and negative attributes related to skills, physical qualities and personality traits. People are sensitive about these attributes and have a desire for others to recognize the positive qualities and ignore the negative. Face has three aspects: individual face, which refers to people as individuals, group face which is people's affiliation with groups such as family, and relational face, which indicates the way people view

themselves in relation to others, as in teacher/student relationships (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 14–15).

Sociality rights and obligations, which stem from people's social expectations about "what frequently or typically happens in a given context" (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 16) are underlain by people's concern with equity and propriety and have two types: on the one hand, people are concerned with equity and fairness; they expect people not to unduly impose on them and to respect their freedom of action. Reciprocity and the belief that the extent to which people impose on each other should be kept in balance are important aspects of equity. On the other hand, people expect to be entitled to association rights of involvement/detachment based on their relationship with different people. Rapport is also sensitive to interactional goals which people seek to achieve in their communication with others. If face, equity/association rights, or interactional goals are threatened, evaluations of impoliteness may arise and rapport suffers. For example, when we are disrespected or we are forced to do something, our face and sociality rights and obligations are threatened, respectively.

Kádár and Haugh (2013: 93) delve more into the nature of social expectations and explain that expectancies are informed by norms which include the behaviors that people approve or disapprove of in different contexts. These norms constitute a moral order that forms the backbone of (im)politeness evaluations; behaviors that contradict users' expectancies are open to evaluations as impolite. Furthermore, orientation to norms differs according to whether users are insiders to a social group (emic perspective) or outsiders (etic perspective) (Kádár and Haugh 2013).

Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2016: 82) address the values and norms that underpin the moral order by drawing on Haidt and Kesebir's (2010) universal foundations of morality. The first two foundations, in-group/loyalty and authority/respect, are relational and concern people's awareness of their obligations and loyalties as group members and their perspectives on respect and obedience in hierarchical relationships, respectively. The second two moral foundations are about treatment of others; whereas harm/care involves virtues of caring and compassion, fairness/reciprocity is concerned with unfairness, cheating, and justice. Finally, purity/sanctity is about personal morality and virtues of chastity and control of desire. Each of these foundations is important for (im)politeness evaluations and can form the basis of a group's injunctive norms (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016: 82). These foundations have different emic manifestations. For example, within the category of in-group/loyalty, individualist and collectivist societies have different perspectives on in-group vs. out-group relations. Clashing orientations to any moral foundation may lead to evaluations of (im)politeness (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016).

In the discussion of the data, I rely on concepts from Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management model and Spencer-Oatey and Kádár's (2016) discussion of universal moral foundations. Rapport management provides a good synergy of core

concepts in (im)politeness research such as face and social norms, capturing well how the latter are underlain by different social expectations. Similarly, the universal moral foundations form a restricted set of concepts that have clear parallels to (im) politeness-related notions such as consideration, power, distance, reciprocity, and cultural differences that give rise to different manifestations of (im)politeness. Thus, both frameworks can account for a wide range of (im)politeness data and shed light on the morals and norms that motivate lay conceptualizations of (im)politeness.

4 Methodology and data

4.1 Method

The data collection method was a self-report questionnaire where participants were asked to talk about their experiences and behaviors (Barros García and Terkourafi 2015). The advantages of the self-report questionnaire include ease of distribution and accessibility to a large number of informants. However, one of its major setbacks is that it might not be an accurate reflection of the informants' thoughts and actions. This may be because informants are not willing to elaborate on their answers; do not fully understand the question; or are led by self-representational bias (Barros García and Terkourafi 2015: 234). Despite the shortcomings of this method, Hill et al. (1986) argue that self-reports are beneficial in eliciting more stereotypical responses, which are important for first-order (im)politeness research as they reveal underlying social norms and expectations about appropriate behaviors in typical contexts. Therefore, I used a self-report questionnaire to collect the data for this study. The research design is partially based on Barros García and Terkourafi's (2014) work on first-order politeness in Spanish and American English.

4.2 Procedure

Following Barros García and Terkourafi's (2014) work, I used a seven-item self-report questionnaire, but for the purposes of dealing with the research question in this article, I will report and discuss only the results of the first four items. Items one and two target politeness; participants were asked to list the characteristics of a polite person and then describe a personal experience in which they showed politeness. Items three and four explore impoliteness, and participants were asked to define who they think an impolite person is and then report a personal incident involving an impolite behavior. The self-report questionnaire, which was administered in Syrian Arabic, is found in Appendix A and the English translation is in Appendix B.

4.3 Participants

88 Syrian native speakers filled in the questionnaire which was distributed online via Google Forms. Participants are 51 females and 37 males whose ages range from 18 to 72. Participants were distributed across age groups as follows: 19 participants (aged 18–26), 42 participants (aged 26–34), 16 participants (aged 35–49), and 11 participants (aged 50–72). Participants were assured that participation in the study is voluntary and that they could opt out of participation at any point, with their data kept anonymous and used for research purposes only. They were also instructed to write their responses in Syrian Arabic, the language used in everyday speech and communication.

5 Results and discussion

Questionnaire items one through four are customized in accordance with the research objectives as follows: items one and three are designed to elicit participants' (im)politeness metalanguage. Participants provided a range of descriptors to talk about (im)polite people, which are key for establishing their (im)politeness conceptualizations and evaluations (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 188). Their responses also reveal the moral and social roots of their understandings of (im)politeness; as established, in their evaluations, participants invoke their respective moral orders, which enables me to identify the moral foundations of the moral order that gives rise to their (im)politeness evaluations. Items two and four ask participants to talk about their personal experiences in dealing with (im)polite behaviors, and in doing so, participants will fall back on the moral order(s) that guided their evaluations of the incidents they report, which further sheds light on the moral foundations of their (im)politeness understandings.

To analyze participants' responses, I applied content analysis which involves the subjective interpretation and the systematic coding of identifiable patterns and themes in a text (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1278). After identifying key words and notions, I re-read the responses to classify them in groups based on similarities of concepts and key words. Through this process of coding and re-coding, I was able to establish major categories that captured participants' conceptualizations of (im)politeness, mainly drawing on the categorization proposed in Fukushima and Sifianou (2017). In what follows, I outline the results of this analysis and attempt to address the main research question with reference to the identified categories in each questionnaire item.

5.1 Question 1: What are the qualities of a polite person? Please write a list of these qualities.

Participants' responses show that the most frequently used labels to describe a polite person are *respectable/respectful*, *moral*, *kind*, *appropriate*, *honest*, *calm*, *humble*, *generous*, *quiet*, *straightforward*, *loving*, *caring*, *benevolent*, *transparent*, and *understating*. A first look at these labels suggests that participants perceive politeness as a relational phenomenon manifested only in dyadic contexts and being more directed at others (Sifianou and Tzanne 2010). A deeper analysis of the responses also shows that participants view politeness as consideration for others and as a set of appropriate behaviors. Table 1 below shows the categories of politeness based on frequency of occurrence.

Nearly all participants identify politeness as consideration for others,[2] with respect being the most frequently mentioned sub-category. Respect relates to face in the rapport management model (Spencer-Oatey 2008) and is implicitly referred to in Dunning et al.'s (2016: 8) definition of respect as a behavior whereby "one must not call the integrity, prestige, or status of that other person into question, or insult him or her". However, participants have a wider perspective on respect as including self-respect, respect for social conventions, and respect for people including family, relatives, the elderly, and teachers. For instance, a participant mentions that a polite person *respects people who are older than him; parents, teachers, and any elderly regardless of their social status*. Participants also emphasize *respect for the other regardless of age*, which Li (2006) classifies as ought-respect, directed at people in general, based on morality and avoidance of discrimination. Finally, participants

Table 1: Categories of politeness

Categories and sub-categories of politeness	Frequency of occurrence
1. Consideration for others	85
a. Respect	52
b. Avoidance of hurtful behaviors	8
c. Non-imposition	6
d. Helping others	3
2. Appropriate behaviors	70
a. Verbal	54
b. Non-verbal	16

2 Some responses contain more than one category which is why frequencies are more than the number of participants.

implicitly invoke respect for societal norms. One participant mentions that a polite person should not *overstay their welcome, avoid constant self-praising, and avoid asking for food at others' place*. That respect figures as a prominent aspect of politeness is no surprise; respect is identified as a major concept in lay understandings of politeness (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017). What is interesting is that participants in this study emphasize hierarchical respect, as seen in respect for parents, teachers, and the elderly, a trend which Kerkam (2015) and Asswae (2018) report in relation to politeness in Libyan Arabic. This suggests that both Syrians and Libyans seem to understand respect in terms of social power which means that for them "people with higher social status or authority deserve respect" (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017: 539).

Consideration also involves not hurting, annoying, or abusing others either verbally or non-verbally.[3] For example, a participant describes a polite person as someone who *cares about others' feelings and is honest within tact boundaries*. Another form of consideration is non-imposition (Haugh 2019: 212), as one participant mentions that a polite person *cares about others' circumstances and doesn't meddle in their affairs*. Interestingly, only three participants mentioned helping others and attentiveness as part of consideration. The following participant invokes attentiveness in that for him, a polite person is *one who [...] offers help and does things without being asked to do them*.

Appropriate behaviors are manifested both verbally and non-verbally, with the latter appearing in a minority of 16 responses. Verbal appropriate behaviors relate to conversational manners such as speaking calmly in a low voice, listening to others carefully, and not interrupting them. Additionally, a polite person not only avoids taboo language but also says nice words, chooses them carefully, engages in appropriate topics, and has a refined speech style. For instance, one participant mentions that a polite person *speaks nicely... about appropriate topics that are neither hurtful nor offensive*. Interestingly, a participant comments that a polite person *doesn't use sarcasm, is serious, appropriate, carefully chooses his words, and doesn't hurt anyone*. The participant implicitly evaluates sarcasm as an impolite behavior, which is in line with Culpeper's (1996) analysis of sarcasm as an impoliteness strategy. As for non-verbal appropriate behaviors, they are expressed mainly through demeanors such as restraint and calm, which is reminiscent of Israelis' view on politeness (Blum-Kulka 2005), in addition to smiling, avoiding excessive hand waving, and refraining from ogling (Waters 2012). The following response invokes a range of appropriate behaviors as characteristic of a polite

3 Non-verbal behaviors loosely refer to acts that can be expressed without language use (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017: 532).

person who *monitors the way they look at people and tries to control their reactions when feeling angry*.

Participants' view of politeness as consideration for others shows that equity/association rights and face concerns play a major role in their understanding. Face is especially relevant for respect, which relates to face sensitivities (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 14). Participants' view of politeness as respect for others, especially based on family hierarchy, age, and occupational status is based on the moral foundation of authority/respect. Concern with equity/association rights emerges in relation to non-imposition and avoiding hurtful behaviors, reflecting participants' orientation to fairness/reciprocity and harm/care, respectively. Finally, the various forms of appropriate behaviors reflect participants' evaluations of what counts as proper conduct, which in turn grounds their conceptualizations of these behaviors as polite.

5.2 Question 2: Talk about a personal experience in which you were polite to someone else. How did you show politeness?

Participants' responses in Question (henceforth Q) 1, form decontextualized conceptualizations of politeness, but as Haugh (2016: 50) argues, "the understandings of individual members of such concepts are ultimately rooted in their own personal, cumulative experiences". Thus, participants' personal experiences constitute situated contexts of politeness evaluations and are expected to shed more light on their understandings of politeness and their moral foundations. Table 2 below summarizes the results.

As Table 2 shows, responses offer more insights into participants' politeness notions in two ways. First, an aspect of politeness emerges in relation to reciprocity (Culpeper and Tantucci 2021; Spencer-Oatey 2008), which did not figure in Q1, and

Table 2: Categories of politeness in personal experiences

Categories and sub-categories of politeness	Frequency of occurrence
1. Non-reciprocation of impoliteness	32
2. Consideration for others	25
a. Respect	7
b. Attentiveness	8
c. Helping others	10
3. Appropriate behaviors	7

involves participants showing politeness either by not reciprocating impoliteness or by reciprocating politeness in showing gratitude in response to attentiveness, for instance. One participant reports expressing *utmost appreciation and gratitude to someone who spared me the trouble of a long ride and got me stuff without me asking him to do so*. While reciprocity of (im)politeness is expected, what is interesting is that most participants evaluate non-reciprocation of impoliteness as polite. One participant writes: *when I was insulted, I didn't retaliate. I kept my cool and was civil. I was able to contain the situation*. Thus, meeting impoliteness with politeness or "taking the moral high ground", is evaluated as polite (Culpeper and Tantucci 2021: 153).

The second way in which the results shed more light on the concept of politeness concerns consideration for others. Unlike in Q1, where only three participants invoked attentiveness and helping others as an aspect of consideration, in Q2, 18 participants mentioned attentiveness and helping others as their way of expressing politeness in real-life experiences. For example, a participant reports showing attentiveness to an elderly person: *an old man once boarded the bus. There were no empty seats, so he was standing. I went up to him and offered him my seat*. The results in this regard offer support for contemporary analyses of politeness as a relational phenomenon, underlain by morality and concern for other's needs and feelings (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017: 546). Thus, this conceptualization of politeness contradicts first-wave theorizations of politeness as a rational, strategic behavior employed to mitigate potential face-threat (Brown and Levinson 1987). Finally, appropriate behaviors such as saying nice things and not interrupting, in addition to dealing with others honestly, humbly, and with generosity were also reported.[4]

The discussion of the results in Qs 1 and 2 leads to a characterization of lay notions of politeness in Syrian Arabic as follows: politeness is viewed as consideration for others, shown mainly through respect and attentiveness, in addition to being a set of appropriate behaviors grounded in participants' normative expectations. These results are in line with previous studies that identify consideration for others as a core notion of lay understandings of politeness (Fukushima and Sifianou 2017; Haugh 2019). Notions of face, equity, reciprocity, hierarchical respect, and care for others underlie much of these conceptualizations, and they are, in turn, motivated by the moral foundations of fairness/reciprocity, authority/respect, and harm/care, respectively (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016).

4 Two participants did not respond. The rest gave metapragmatic comments that also refer to consideration and reciprocity.

5.3 Question 3: Who do you think is an impolite person? Please give an example of an impolite behavior.

This question elicits participants' decontextualized conceptualizations of impoliteness, with the aim of identifying the moral foundations of these conceptualizations. Participants describe impoliteness in terms antonymous to those describing politeness including *disrespectful*, *immoral*, *dishonest*, *liar*, *hypocrite*, *selfish*, *talkative*, and *haughty*. Other labels refer explicitly to verbal behaviors such as *foul-mouthed*, and *sharp-tongued*, in addition to other traits such as *rude*, *intrusive*, *annoying*, *bully*, and *ill-bred.*

Participants' responses, presented in Table 3, suggest that they view politeness and impoliteness as polar opposites, in line with analyses of (im)politeness in classical theories (Brown and Levinson 1987); whereas politeness is viewed as consideration for others through respect and attentiveness, impoliteness is seen as inconsideration for others, with disrespect being the largest sub-category of inconsideration. Also, impoliteness consists of inappropriate behaviors, unlike politeness which comprises a set of appropriate behaviors.

Disrespect includes disrespect for people, their feelings and opinions in general, and for the elderly, teachers, and people's educational backgrounds in particular. One participant mentions that an impolite person *neither respects people's age nor their educational attainment*. Again, the results are the polar opposite of those in Q1; while hierarchical respect in the form of respect for the elderly and teachers is a core aspect of consideration and politeness, disrespect for these individuals is a form of inconsideration. Additionally, participants label violations of social norms such as failure to apologize for pushing someone, and jumping queues (see Sifianou and Tzanne 2010) as disrespectful behaviors. Other forms of inconsideration include imposition and bullying, which underscore participants' concern with equity rights and fairness.

Table 3: Categories of impoliteness

Categories and sub-categories of impoliteness	Frequency of occurrence
1. Inconsideration for others	61
a. Disrespect	49
b. Imposition	6
c. Bullying	6
2. Inappropriate behaviors	40
a. Verbal	36
b. Non-verbal	4

As for inappropriate behaviors, participants also report behaviors that are the opposite of those reported for politeness. The majority of inappropriate behaviors are verbal and include sarcasm, blasphemy, taboo language, shouting, and lying. Non-verbal behaviors refer to snubbing and ignoring others (Culpeper 1996) in addition to ogling, which implies invasion of privacy. For example, one participant mentions both verbal and non-verbal behaviors saying that impoliteness is having *a shrill voice, being grumpy, and gazing sharply at others*.

Participants' responses in Q3 seem to be underlain by two main concerns. First, disrespectful behaviors reflect participants' orientation to face (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 14). Second, participants are concerned with adherence to social norms and conventions as seen in their view of impoliteness as inappropriate behaviors, in line with Culpeper's (2011: 21–23) analysis of impoliteness as a violation of social norms and expectations in different contexts. This is seen in participants' labelling of taboo language and blasphemy as impolite. Mentioning blasphemy as an instance of impoliteness reflects the great value Syrians as Arabs attach to religion (Nydell 2006: 81). Given that my participants seem to treat impoliteness and politeness as polar opposites, it is reasonable to argue that their views of impoliteness are motivated by the same moral foundations as those identified with respect to politeness. In other words, their conceptualizations are underlain by fairness/reciprocity, one the one hand; if people's opinions are disrespected or their turns usurped in queues, the implication is unfair treatment and violation of equity rights. On the other hand, disrespect of people deemed status-full by virtue of old age or occupation clearly relates to authority/respect.

5.4 Question 4: Talk about a personal experience in which someone was impolite to you.

This question examines participants' evaluations of impoliteness in contextual, real-life experiences to further understand their notions of impoliteness and their moral foundations. Participants' experiences can be categorized into three categories, as shown below in Table 4.

Table 4: Categories of impoliteness in personal experiences.[a]

Categories and sub-categories of impoliteness	Frequency of occurrence
1. Inappropriate behaviors	40
2. Face-related impoliteness	32
3. Discrimination and abuse of power	9

[a]I discarded 7 responses which did not involve personal experiences.

The first and largest category involves inappropriate behaviors that violate sociality rights and obligations (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 15) and conflict with participants' expectations about socially acceptable behaviors. They include shoving, usurping turns at public service points, and jumping queues, recounted by the following participant: *today while we were waiting in a queue, a woman tried to jump her way ahead of me. I sure didn't let her. Her wait was only just two minutes.* Participants also recall incidents such as being refused service by clerks, which invoke equity rights violations and breaches of their expectations of entitlement to public service (Culpeper 2009). Other incidents refer to violations of norms and expectations such as swearing and profanity and violations of reciprocity including failure to respond to a greeting, and failure to apologize and show appreciation. Other inappropriate behaviors include participants receiving rude, aggressive, and hurtful responses, and getting yelled at. For example, one participant mentions: *a bus driver once began yelling at me because I asked him twice to pull over*. Other inappropriate behaviors subsume interruptions, invasion of privacy, and inappropriate questions, which all comprise violations of equity rights (Spencer-Oatey 2008). For example, the following participant reported an inappropriate question, the content of which is an invasion of privacy: *a woman asked me why I haven't yet given my son a sibling!*

The second category concerns impoliteness that mainly targets individual face and includes behaviors that undermine one's personal qualities such as accusations of lying and false attributions. Other face-damaging behaviors include criticism of personal appearance, gossiping about one's abilities, and getting ignored. For instance, a participant reports an incident in which she had her appearance implicitly criticized: *I once dyed my hair. A woman commented that it was the first time she ever thought my hair color was nice!*

The last category involves evaluations of impoliteness resulting from abuse of power (Culpeper 2008) and discrimination. A number of participants reported incidents that tacitly refer to abuses of power in asymmetrical relationships; a boss making annoying remarks and unfair requests, in addition to harassment at workplace. As for discrimination, participants report being discriminated against based on disability, gender, and status as foreigners, which parallels what Culpeper (2021) describes as hate speech. As established, power abuses and discrimination based on group traits, in hate speech for example, are considered impolite because they violate equity rights and threaten group face, respectively (Spencer-Oatey 2008).

The results in Q4 reveal that violations of social norms play a major role in shaping participants' evaluations of impoliteness, which is most evident in the category of inappropriate behaviors. Furthermore, the incidents reported reveal participants' preoccupation with equity and association rights. For example, incidents about invasions of privacy, inappropriate questions, and unfair requests

from a boss imply unwarranted impositions, which violate equity and association rights. Both individual and group faces are also central to participants' evaluations as seen in the second category and in discrimination-related impoliteness. Overall, participants' evaluations of such incidents as impolite are made with appeal to the moral category of fairness/reciprocity.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to examine conceptualizations and evaluations of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic and the moral foundations that give rise to lay notions of (im)politeness. In line with previous findings on lay conceptualizations of (im)politeness, the results show that politeness is viewed as consideration for others, expressed mainly through various forms of respect and attentiveness, in addition to avoiding hurting others' feelings and non-imposition. Politeness also consists of appropriate behaviors such as avoiding taboos, inappropriate topics, sarcasm, as well as saying nice words and not interrupting others. These behaviors implicitly reveal participants' expectations about acceptable behaviors in a variety of contexts. As for impoliteness, the results indicate that participants view impoliteness as inconsideration for others in the form of disrespect, bullying, and imposition. Impoliteness is also about inappropriate behaviors that violate equity rights, expectations of reciprocity, and face sensitivities. These include queue jumping, shoving, and usurping others' turns at public service points, in addition to criticism, taboo words, shouting, and ignoring others.

The results also reveal that these views arise from participants' orientation to hierarchical respect, face, equity rights, reciprocity, adherence to social norms, and the value of helping others. Based on Spencer-Oatey and Kádár's (2016) discussion of the five universal moral foundations, it can be said that participants' lay notions of (im)politeness are rooted in three moral categories: authority/respect in relation to respect and individual face, fairness/reciprocity with respect to equity rights, reciprocity, and group face, in addition to harm/care, which underlies participants' evaluation of helping others and attentiveness as polite.

Two interesting findings emerge from these results. First, participants seem to view politeness and impoliteness as polar opposites, thus, lending support to first-wave theorization (Brown and Levinson 1987). Second, the results indicate, contrary to early approaches to politeness, that participants do not see politeness as a strategic, goal-driven behavior. Rather, similarly to Fukushima and Sifianou's (2017) observation about Japanese and Greek politeness, it is based on concern and care for others, manifested through helping behaviors and the various qualities associated with a polite person, specifically *love*, *care*, *generosity*, *understanding*, *kindness*, and

humbleness, which are relational in nature. All in all, then, this view is in tune with how politeness is viewed in discursive approaches as a relational behavior, invested in by both speaker and hearer to negotiate various aspects of their relationship, and not just a rational, face-saving behavior (Locher and Watts 2008).

This study contributes to (im)politeness research by offering insights into (im) politeness and its moral foundations in Syrian Arabic, thus shedding light on an under-researched dialect of Arabic. Additionally, by focusing on conceptualizations of impoliteness, the paper attempts to bridge a gap in the literature which is characterized by an abundance of politeness studies and a lack of impoliteness studies in comparison. Still, some important aspects remain unexplored. For instance, further research is needed to explore the co-constructed nature of (im)politeness and how evaluations of (im)politeness arise in real-life situations, which would further shed light on the role of social norms and context in giving rise to evaluations of (im) politeness in Syrian Arabic. Future research might also examine age-related differences in participants' evaluations, which would also deepen our understanding of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic.

Appendix A: The self-report questionnaire in Arabic

الأسئلة:

1. شو هيي صفات الشّخص المهذّب بالنسبة الك؟ الرجاء كتابة قائمة بهاي الصفات؟
2. احكي عن تجربة شخصية كنت خلالها مهذب مع شخص تاني. شو كان الموقف وكيف اظهرت تهذيبك تجاه الشخص الآخر؟
3. برأيك مين هوي الشخص الغير مهذب؟ قلة التهذيب شو بتعني بالنسبة إلك؟ رجاءا اعطي مثال عن سلوك برأيك هوي غير مهذب.
4. احكي عن تجربة شخصية صارت معك حسيت خلالها إنو شخص كان قليل أدب معك.

Appendix B: The self-report questionnaire in English

Question 1: What are the qualities of a polite person? Please write a list of these qualities.

Question 2: Talk about a personal experience in which you were polite to someone else. How did you show politeness?

Questions 3: Who do you think is an impolite person? Please give an example of an impolite behavior.

Question 4: Talk about a personal experience in which someone was impolite to you.

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Bionote

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