Decision Letter (PR.2017.0045.R1)

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CC: 
Subject: PR.2017.0045.R1 - Decision Accept

Body: 08-Feb-2019

Dear Dr. Harb:

I would like to thank you for submitting your manuscript entitled "Disagreement among Arabic Speakers in Faceless Computer-Mediated Communication" to the Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture (JPLR). Your manuscript has been reviewed, and it is a pleasure to accept it for publication in JPLR. The comments of the reviewer(s) are included at the bottom of this letter.

Now your paper has been accepted, we invite you to send a document containing a short bionote (brief academic biography of the author in 50-75 words) on a separate .doc(x) file to . A bionote is necessary for publication, and all accepted manuscripts without bionote will be sent back to the author.

The JPLR production office will contact you for proofreading in the near future. Your article will be published ahead of print as soon as possible, and in the printed edition at a later time.

Thank you for your fine contribution. On behalf of the Editors of Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture we look forward to your continued contributions to the Journal.

Kind regards
Dr. Karen Grainger
Editor in Chief, Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture

Date Sent: 08-Feb-2019
Disagreement among Arabic Speakers in Faceless Computer-Mediated Communication

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Disagreement among Arabic Speakers in Faceless Computer-Mediated Communication

Abstract
This preliminary study provides a pragmatic taxonomy of asynchronous computer-mediated expressions of disagreement by Arabic speakers. It drew on a corpus of approximately fifty thousand words in the form of naturally occurring comments/posts compiled over a period of ninety days from 19 Arabic Facebook Pages and Groups in three topic areas: (i) religion, (ii) politics and (iii) society. Ten major discursive strategies were uncovered and proposed as underlying patterns, governing the pragmatic realization of disagreement among Arabic speakers. These were IRRELEVANCY CLAIM, CONTRADICTION, COUNTERCLAIM, CHALLENGE, EXCLAMATION, VERBAL IRONY, ARGUMENT AVIODANCE, MILD SCOLDING, SUPPLICATION, and VERBAL ATTACK. The identified examples of disagreement embodied both elements of politeness and impoliteness. I argue, however, that the majority of the strategies were neither polite nor impolite, but rather appropriate (i.e., politic) in the context of disagreement. It is also argued that the cultural, social and religious norms of Arab-speaking countries justify and give rise to the cultural-specific disagreement strategies SUPPLICATION and MILD SCOLDING, both of which are culturally appropriated in the context of disagreement.

Key Words: Disagreement; Arabic; Computer-Mediated Communication; Facebook; Taxonomy.
1. Introduction

Disagreements are significant speech acts in human interaction, yet they have received the least amount of attention in Arabic speech act research. This could be in part due to the fact that disagreements have acquired a bad reputation in existing scholarship, since they draw a thin line between politeness and impoliteness, with a greater possibility of the latter. This may have made Arab researchers shun away from exploring disagreements. Additionally, because most opposing views tend to be camouflaged, the task of collecting natural disagreement data representative of actual disagreement behaviors becomes much more difficult to obtain on the part of the researcher. CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) data, however, provides naturally occurring examples of disagreement in standard and non-standard forms of language. This rewarding aspect of CMC aroused the researcher’s curiosity and further drove him to explore the understudied topic of disagreement, so as to provide deeper insights into intercultural communication, pragmatics and interlanguage research.

There are no substantial studies on Arabic disagreements, but there exists a plethora of research on other speech acts such as apologies and requests (e.g., Al-Hami, 1993; Al-El-Shazly, 1993; Shalawi, 1997; Nureddeen, 2008; Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012; Harb, 2015, inter alia), compliments (e.g., Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Nelson, Al-Batal & Echols, 1996), compliment responses (Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001), giving directions (Taylor-Hamilton; 2002), swearing (Abdel Jawad, 2000) and refusal (e.g., Al-Issa, 1998; Al-Eryani, 2007; Nelson et al, 2002; Stevens, 1993). Although these studies have enriched our understanding of different speech acts in Arabic, they nonetheless are heavily reliant on artificial data collection methods, chiefly discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and role-plays, neither of which elicits instances of language in natural interaction. No study, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, has implemented a CMC-oriented approach for investigating disagreements in Arabic.

Responding to Herring’s (2010, 2013) call for studies focusing on CMC research in other languages and cultural contexts, the current study, therefore, addresses this gap with CMC data from Arabic. This study addresses the following research question: how do Arabic speakers express the speech act of disagreement in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)? This study differs from previously conducted research in Arabic in that: (i) it provides an account of the act of disagreement among Arabic speakers for the first time and (ii) it uses natural data from CMC. It is hoped that this study will spark further studies to examine the disagreement among Arabic speakers and encourage future researchers to adopt language-oriented CMC research in Arabic.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 On Defining Disagreement

Drawing upon Speech Act Theory, Sornig (1977: 363) defines the term disagreement as “any utterance that comments upon a pre-text by questioning part of its semantic or pragmatic information (sometimes its formal structure as well), correcting or negating it (semantically or formally).” This definition limits disagreements to only verbal expressions, excluding all other non-verbal means of expressing disagreement. Wierzbicka (1987: 128) sees the act of disagreement as a dual act: (i) an act of saying ‘what one [Speaker 1] thinks’ and (ii) an act of indicating ‘that one [Speaker 2] doesn’t think the same as the earlier speaker’. It is what speaker 2 says that constitutes the speech act of disagreement and as such it is much more important than the prior (i.e., Speaker’s 1 utterance). Sifianou (2012:1554) regards disagreement as “the expression
of a view” that basically “differs from that expressed by another speaker”. This definition leaves out the possibility that disagreement can be expressed indirectly. To Rees-Miller (2000:1088), disagreement is defined as “[a] speaker S disagrees when s/he considers untrue some proposition P uttered or presumed to be espoused by an Addressee A and reacts with an utterance the propositional content or implicature of which is Not P” [original italics]. This definition makes clear that disagreement can be expressed either directly or indirectly, i.e., via implicature (Grice, 1975). Similarly but more succinctly, Kavaka (2002) defines disagreement as “the negation of a stated or implied proposition” (1538). Koczogh’s (2013: 211) proposes that disagreement be defined as: “a situated activity whose function is to express an opinion (or belief) the propositional content or illocutionary force of which is – or is intended to be – partly or fully inconsistent with that of a prior (non-verbal) utterance.” Although it seems more capable of capturing the complex nature of disagreement, Koczogh’s definition, nonetheless, does not to take into account that disagreement can nowadays be expressed electronically (i.e., CMC). Accordingly, I propose an extended definition of disagreement as follows: disagreement is the negated expression of a stated or implied proposition either partially or fully in oral, written or electronic communication.

2.2 Disagreement Studies

In her examination of conversational styles among New Yorkers of East European background, Tannen (1981) found that it was rather normal for participants to argue, oppose one another and further intensify their opposing behavior. She suggests that the conversational style of Jewish New Yorkers – characterized by fast pace and overlap (two voices talking at the same time) – is used cooperatively as a “way of showing enthusiasm and interest” (p. 138) and further serves the need for involvement. For lower-middle class Jewish speakers in Philadelphia, Schiffrin (1984) also reports a preference for disagreement since it is not uncommon for interlocutors in this community to contradict, deny and negatively evaluate each other. In line with Schiffrin, Tannen & Kavaka (1992) argue that disagreement creates solidarity among participants.

Rees-Miller (2000) examined naturally occurring expressions of disagreement in U.S. university settings. She proposes a classification system of three categories: (1) softened disagreement sub-categorized as (i) positive politeness (e.g., humor, partial agreement) and (ii) negative politeness (e.g., questions, downtoners); (2) disagreement not softened or strengthened (e.g., contradictory statements), and (3) aggravated disagreement (e.g., rhetorical questions, intensifiers). Sixty-two percent of disagreement expressions in the data were softened interestingly by professors to rather than by students, indicating that the parameter of power (P) is not as significant as proposed by Brown and Levinson nor is students’ lack of softened disagreement perceived as face-threatening on the part of professors.

Although relatively less researched in L2 settings, disagreement produced by ESL learners has also been examined from within the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics (also known as acquisitional or developmental pragmatics). Kreutel (2007) analyzed the devices used for disagreeing by 27 ESL learners, representing eight languages and of varying proficiency levels. Data were collected via a written DCT. ESL learners’ responses were compared against responses gathered from 27 native speakers of American English, using the same DCT. She divides features of disagreement into ‘desirable features’ and ‘undesirable features’ (cf. Pomerantz, 1984). Desirable features are assumed to be native-like and include token agreement, hedges, requests for
clarifications, explanations, expressions of regret and positive remarks. Undesirable features are
those of non-native speakers and include message abandonment, total lack of mitigation, use of
the performative I disagree, use of the performative negation I don’t agree, use of the bare
exclamation no and blunt statement of the opposite.

The act of disagreement has also been studied in CMC environments including discussion
forums (Herring, 1993a, 1994; Baym, 1996; Graham, 2007, among others); personal blogs/diaries
(Bolander, 2012); instant messaging (Schieffelin and Smith (2011) and the like. Baym (1996)
examined (dis)agreement in one CMC-discussion group of Usenet devoted to discussions of soap
operas and dominated by well-educated females (i.e., 70 %). She collected a total of 524 messages
from the discussion of the soap opera All My Children. Of these, 51 were coded as disagreement,
70 as agreement, while the remaining messages (n = 403) were classified as neither. She proposes
a categorization scheme consisting of 17 categories including, among others, partial agreement,
elaborations, apologies and the like. The findings of this study indicate that (dis)agreement is
not much different from oral conversations and in writing. However, she notes that disagreement is
much more complex than agreement, as it requires more strategic mitigation and explicitness.
Disagreement is also more likely “to have reasoning, to be qualified, to acknowledge the other’s
perspective and to be frame as non-offensive” (p. 31). Most significantly, disagreement contains
more contradictory assessments and elaborations (about two thirds). She suggests that
disagreement is used for functions other than “the interpersonal ones seen in oral and epistolary
disagreement” (p. 32). She attributes this novelty in disagreement to the influence of medium,
context, topic, gender and the social context participants strive to create (p. 36).

In exploring the ChurchList, Graham (2007) demonstrates that the established norms of
this e-mail community (e.g., content of the subject line) can be contested, negotiated and changed
over time. Basing his work on a corpus of over 78 thousand messages, he shows how deviations
from the established norms in this CMC community often leads to disagreement evident in the
users’ responses to messages perceived as inappropriate or of impolite intent. However,
disagreement gives the community members an avenue to contest norms of (im)politeness and the
expectations for (polite/politic) behavior. He maintains that the different expectations and
interpretations of (im)polite and politic behavior (Watts, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2003) have
“a huge impact as well as reflect group identity formations and the demands of the computer
medium itself” (p. 757). In short, the norms of (im)politeness are realized according to the rules
and perceptions of the online community. This is in line with Weber (2011) who emphasizes the
role that disagreement and conflict play in the socialization of newcomers into a Usenet newsgroup
for sexual abuse survivors.

board systems (i.e., Channel 2 and Yahoo). Four criteria are used to analyze the collected message:
uses/non-uses of honorifics, abusive content, interactional behaviors directed towards others (e.g.,
requests or commands) and flow of discourse. The findings of this study indicate that although the
two communities carry out similar purposes, disagreement and (im)politeness are
constructed/perceived differently due to different values, norms and linguistic features. In other
words, what is considered appropriate in one online community may be perceived as boorish in
another. She highlights that the online community norms are subject to participant’s perceptions
of ongoing events. This lack of uniformity in norms gives the members an opportunity to situate
their relations with others and further negotiate their identities.
Angouri and Tseliga (2010) examined disagreement in 200 posts collected from two Greek online discussion forums: a students’ forum and a professional academic forum (PA). The two forums share no similarities. The student forum aligns with an informal tone, tolerating colloquial language, while the PA e-community is seriously toned where only formal register is expected. The participants’ acts of disagreement were explicitly marked with special attention to ‘intentional impoliteness’ as perceived and evidenced in the users’ reactions. The findings of this study indicate that both forums are highly confrontational, which is rather natural. Disagreement, and consequently impoliteness, is introduced through the manipulation of particular discourse marker (e.g., [re]). Also, the participants use unconventional spelling and punctuation to express disagreement and to aggravate face-threatening acts as a way of substituting paralinguistic cues in these online communities. Nonetheless, the practices followed in both forums give different judgments of what constitutes impoliteness. As such, the authors contend that disagreement need not be regarded as a priori negatively marked act.

In line with the above-discussed studies, Shum and Lee (2013) report that disagreements are pervasive in Cantonese online discussion forums and are generally perceived as appropriate. They collected 317 responses from two Hong Kong Internet forums. A two-part questionnaire was administered to 30 browsers of the forum to seek their perception of (im)politeness in the identified disagreements according to (a) (im)politeness, (b) (in)appropriateness, and (c) positively/negatively marked behavior (Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004, 2006, Locher & Watts, 2005). Ninety-nine responses were identified as disagreements and classified into 11 strategies: giving negative comments, using short vulgar phrases, raising rhetorical questions, making a personal stance, making an ironic statement, cursing, giving opposite opinions, rewording, giving personal experience, giving facts and reprimanding. The majority were direct and unmitigated. A rating of 3 out of 5 was indicated for most of the identified types of disagreement. This suggests that disagreements are perceived as neither polite, appropriate and positively marked nor impolite, inappropriate and negatively marked. Nonetheless, cursing and using vulgar phrases were rated 1 out of 5, indicating they are impolite, inappropriate and negatively marked. Ten out of the 15 interviewees equate (im)politeness with (in)directness. The Spearman correlation conducted shows that the three parameters on the questionnaire affect each other positively. They conclude that CMC disagreements are not uncommon and should be “subject to the participants’ interpretations of behavior appropriate in an Internet community” (p. 72).

2.3 Summary & Research Question

Much of the research cited above is carried out on native speakers of English or on English as the medium of communication. This brings to mind the issue of ethnocentrism long noted by Wierzbicka (1985) and most crucially emphasizes the need to conduct research in languages other than English. This study responds to this call by exploring disagreement in Arabic. Although language-oriented CMC research has substantially increased over the last two decades, it is still limited to English and several European and Asian languages/countries. This research uses CMC data, fills the gaps and fulfills the many needs by answering the following question: How do Arabic speakers express the disagreement in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)?
3. Methodology

3.1 Data and Procedures

The study is based on a large corpus composed of over fifty thousand words extracted from 19 Facebook Pages/Groups ($n = 19$). The researcher joined only public groups. No data from closed or private groups were used. The researcher frequently visited the selected Pages/Groups during a period of 90 days from February to May of 2016. He did not interact with other subscribers, nor did he post or comment on the Page/Group ‘wall’. The responses were then classified as either agreement, disagreement or off-topic. Agreement and off-topic comments were excluded. Off-topic comments refer to comments that are irrelevant to the topic of discussion (e.g., a religion chant).

3.2 Data Analysis

The identified instances of disagreement were analyzed qualitatively, supported by descriptive statistics. They were categorized and analyzed initially in consideration of the taxonomy of disagreement proposed by Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) who view disagreements as “arguing exchanges” (p. 227) often constructed in a tripartite turn-structure (T1-T3), described below:

- **T (1):** Speaker A makes a claim;
- **T (2):** Speaker B disputes claim in T 1;
- **T (3):** Speaker A disagrees with B’s T2 claim/response by either supporting the original T1 claim or directly contesting the T2 disagreement.

In the current study, T (1) was invested in the original post published on the Facebook Page/Group. The responses (or comments) consequently constituted T (2). Examples of T (3) were minimal and were eliminated. Only the utterances in T (2) were examined to explore the act of disagreement. In line with Muntigl & Turnbull (1998), the speakers’ utterances in T2 are the most significant because they constitute acts of disagreement. These can be of five types, with varying degrees of gravity (229-233):

- **a)** Irrelevancy Claim (IC): previous claim is not relevant to the discussion.
- **b)** Challenges (CH): a speaker questions an addressee’s prior claim and demands that addressee provide evidence of his/her claim.
- **c)** Contradiction (CT): a speaker contradicts by uttering the negated proposition expressed by the previous claim.
- **d)** Counterclaim (CC): a speaker proposes an alternative claim that does not directly contradict nor challenge other’s claim.
- **e)** Act Combinations (ACs): two types of disagreement are combined, the most frequent being CT followed by CC.

While Muntigl and Turnbull’s scheme of classification was a good starting point for understanding the nature of disagreement, it nonetheless failed account for all types of disagreements found in the corpus. Accordingly, a new classification scheme was proposed to be introduced below.

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1 Following Maricic (2005), Langlotz and Locher (2012) and many others, it was considered ethically acceptable to use the data for this analysis, as the networking site Facebook is part of the public domain. (Cf. Ess & the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) ethics working committee, 2002: 5).
3.5 Coding Scheme and Theoretical Framework

Locher and Watts’ (2005, 2008) model of Relational Work (henceforth RW) was deemed the most adequate theoretical framework to account for the data in this study. First, the model does not reduce politeness to a set of isolated linguistics expressions. Second, the model covers more than the two ends of the spectrum (politeness and impoliteness), but also what goes on in between the two extremes (e.g., politic and overpolite). Third, it does not assume the universality of politeness, but advocates for cultural-specific practices. And finally, the model looks in detail “at the context, the speakers, the situation and the evoked norms” (Locher, 2004, p. 90).

RW refers to the “work individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others” (Locher and Watts, 2005, p. 10). It hinges on the concept of politic behavior (i.e., appropriate/polite), which includes “linguistic or non-linguistic [behavior(s)], which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction” (Watts, 2003 p. 144). It follows that what is considered inappropriate by interactants will be regarded/interpreted as impolite/inappropriate. Implied is the assertion that politeness (or lack thereof) is contextual and is not inherent in certain linguistic expressions, the lack of which renders impoliteness, rudeness and so on. This sets the RW in stark contrast with other models that reduce politeness to a set of linguistic devices/mechanisms. The basic architecture of the model is represented in Figure 2 below:

![Figure 1: Relational Work (Watts, 2005: xliii)](https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jplr)

As Figure 1 above shows, the spectrum of RW is not restricted to only polite/impolite behaviors, but also incorporates other types:

1. impolite and inappropriate (non-politic = negatively marked);
2. non-polite but appropriate (politic = unmarked);
3. polite and appropriate (politic = positively marked);
4. overpolite and inappropriate (non-politic = negatively marked).

Although Locher and Watts’ (2005, 2008) theoretical framework was deemed fit to account for the data elicited, it nonetheless does not (i) include non-rude behaviors or forms under politic and (ii) specify which linguistic (or non-linguistic) behaviors are polite, politic or impolite or alternatively which linguistic (or non-linguistic) behaviors are positively marked, negatively marked, or neither. Nonetheless, these shortcomings can be easily salvaged and should not alter its essence nor will it render different implications that what was originally proposed and intended in the model.
3.7 A Modified Theoretical Framework of Relational Work

The proposed modification is twofold. First, the concept of ‘politic’ behavior is expanded to include common, non-rude, non-aggressive forms of scolding with advice overtones and implications that the person being scolded knows better. I argue that this modification justifies MILD SCOLDING as a politic behavior among the Arabic speakers (further clarification will be provided below). Second, the other suggested modification is basically to point out which of the pragmatic strategies in the context of disagreement can be regarded as polite, politic and impolite/overpolite or alternatively which strategies are positively marked, unmarked, or negatively marked. The corpus of this study revealed several linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors (e.g., spitting) that are polite, politic and impolite. No overpolite utterances were observed. The proposed taxonomy is presented in Figure 2 below:

<table>
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<th>Politic (Unmarked)</th>
<th>Impolite (Negatively Marked)</th>
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<td>VERBAL IRONY</td>
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<td>Argument Avoidance</td>
<td>CHALLENGE</td>
<td>VERBAL ATTACK</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>EXCLAMATION</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CONTRADICTION</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IRRELEVANCY CLAIM</td>
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</table>

Figure 2. Proposed Taxonomy of Disagreement from within RW

As Figure 2 above shows, the newly proposed classification scheme builds on that of Muntigl & Turnbull (1998) by integrating the five original strategies (IC, CH, CT, CC, AC), yet it identifies and adds six additional strategies (VA, SP, AA, VI, MS, EX) that are of significance to understanding disagreements among Arabic speakers. Theoretically, the scheme specifies which disagreements are polite, politic and impolite in accordance with Locher ad Watts’ (2005) RW.
4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Pragmatic Vehicles of Expressing Computer-Mediated Disagreements

The combinations of syntactic forms and lexical meanings constituted conventional disagreement strategies among Arabic speakers. These ranged from polite ones (e.g., COUNTERCLAIM and ARGUMENT AVOIDANCE), to socially acceptable or politic strategies (e.g., CONTRADICTION, CHALLENGE, SUPPLICATION, EXCLAMATION, MILD SCOLDING and IRRELEVANCY CLAIM) and to impolite ones (e.g., VERBAL ATTACK and VERBAL IRONY). Overall, negatively marked behaviors constituted 29%, positively marked behaviors 26%, and unmarked behaviors 45%, constituting almost half of the data. What follows is a detailed description of each strategy.

4.2 Politic Disagreements

Politic behavior constitutes the unmarked form of disagreement, which is appropriate to the situation. In the data, politic disagreements appeared in the following strategies: CONTRADICTION, CHALLENGE, SUPPLICATION, EXCLAMATION, MILD SCOLDING and IRRELEVANCY CLAIM. The use of these strategies is guided by the posters’ knowledge of the context of the discussion and the understanding that no need for offense to be taken.

4.2.1 CONTRADICTION (CT) - Politic

CONTRADICTIONS (CTs) surfaced as the most frequently used strategy of disagreement within the politic category with 428 occurrences, which constituted 27% of all identified disagreements (n = 1605). In this strategy, the Arabic speakers voiced their disagreement by uttering the negated proposition expressed by the previous claim. CTs were either positive or negative, contingent upon the previous claim. That is, if the claim in T (1) was positive, the CT in T (2) was to be negative and vice versa. Examples 2 and 3 below demonstrate the polarity aspect of CTs:

(1) T (1) la: ju:dząd mu$ltaqalu:n ?aw ta$fī:b fis-sud$jū:n
   not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons
   ‘There are no political prisoners or torture in prisons.’
T (2) ju:dząd ja sa$fād ʔi:l-baʃʃa
   exist O Excellency the-Pasha
   ‘there are, your Excellency the-Pasha.’
   [#61 [POL.M.EG.MSA.PG]]

(2) T (1) 99% min ʔumana: ʔif-furTa ʃurafa:-ADJ
   99% from deputies police honest
   ‘99% of police officers are honest.
T (2) 99% min ʔumana: ʔif-furTa ɣayir ʃurafa:-ADJ
   99% from deputies police except honest
   ‘99% of police officers are not honest.
   [#418 [POL.M.EG.MSA.PG]]

CTs are oriented towards closing the discussion rather than allowing further development in the negotiation of meanings; thereby, CTs are contractive, since they directly deny a prior claim and fail to provide alternatives in the context of established disagreement. CTs are realized syntactically and semantically with more directness. Syntactically, CTs are realized by the negation word, whether as a flat no or preceding the main verb (e.g., la: ‘no’; la: ʔuwaʃiq ‘I do not agree’). Semantically, they are realized through either inherently negated lexical verbs (e.g., ʔarfuZ
‘refuse’; ʔuxalif ‘oppose/disagree’) or adjectives (e.g., ɣalaT ‘wrong’; faZi ‘empty’). Although CTs are more direct than CCs, CTs do not necessarily attack the competency, rationality of the other or even the speaker’s identity as in VERBAL ATTACKs (discussed below). Consider the conversational exchange in (3) below:

(3) T (1) ʔal-hidżāb laysa farZZan wa Allah ʔasqal min ʔan ʔaʔmūr ʔan-nisa: bil-hidżāb
   The-hijab not obligatory and Allah wiser from that commands the-women fi-the hijab
   ‘The veil is not obligatory and Allah is wiser than ordering women to wear the veil’
T (2) ʔatafiq maʔak fi haذاhi ʔal-nuqTa
   no agree with-you in this the-point
   ‘I do not agree with you on this point

[1023 [REL.M.EG.MSA.GR]]

In (3) above, the speaker in T (2) is in direct disagreement with the speaker in T (1) through the use of the implicit performative verb la: ʔatafiq (I do not agree). He is simply opposing the content of the speaker’s statement in T (1), as clearly indicated by the use of the lexically euphemized expression fi haذاhi ʔal-nuqTa ‘on this point’ to maintain social harmony. While the speaker in T (2) directly disagrees with the speaker in T (1), he may be in agreement with the speaker in T (1) on other issues, but not on the current issue. This reinforces the claim that CTs do not necessarily attack the rationality of the other party, but rather object to the content of the statement under discussion.

4.2.2 CHALLENGE (CH) - Politic

The second most commonly used strategy within the politic category was the CHALLENGE (CH), syntactically realized through the use of interrogatives (polar and non-polar). CHs constituted 7% with 107 occurrences. CHs included utterances in which a speaker questioned an addressee’s prior claim and demanded that the addressee provide evidence of his/her claim as demonstrated in (4) below:

(4) T (1) ʔal-ʔima:r qaβlat ʔalmufsidi:n
   the-Emirates destination the-corrupt
   ‘The UAE is a destination for the corrupt.’
T (2) ʔala ʔai: ʔaʔas:s
   on what basis
   ‘On what basis [the UAE is a destination for the corrupt]?’

[114 [SOC.M.UAE.MSA.PG]]

In (4) above, the speakers are arguing about the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The speaker in T (1) makes the claim that the UAE is basically a corrupt country. The speaker in T (2) disagrees with the speaker’s claim in T (1) by questioning his knowledge of the UAE and further demands that he provide evidence for this claim. Via the use of the pragmatic strategy CH, the speaker in T (2) implicates that the addressee cannot back up the claim and therefore is making a false claim. Unlike CONTRADICTIONS (CTs) discussed above, CHs attack the knowledge and competency of the addressee.

Contrary to Muntigl and Turnbull (1997) claim that CHs in English are used exclusively to demand evidence, I argue that CHs serve other sub-functions such as casting doubt on a speaker’s prior claim as exemplified in (5) below:
In (5) above, the speaker in T (2) does not agree with the Minister of Interior’s statement by questioning the rationale behind building new facilities so as to cast doubt on the claim provided in T (1). Given his position, it can be assumed that the Minister of Interior is (or at least should be) aware of any new prisons being built. In this sense, the use of CH does not necessarily implicate lack of knowledge on the part of the Minister nor does it demand evidence; rather, it serves to cast doubt or more succinctly to imply that the Minister is lying or simply not telling the truth.

CHs are regarded as the second most aggravating according to Muntigl and Turnbull (1997) and as an undesirable feature in Kruetel (2007). Although this may be true in face-to-face disagreements, it, nonetheless, does not seem applicable to faceless communication, where participants appear to use CHs as a way of voicing their disagreements to previously presented information. It is culturally appropriate to voice disagreement via the use of CHs, as a high value is placed upon the act of questioning, for it creates a sense of involvement. The practice of questioning is deeply rooted in the Arabic culture, where it is believed that the more questions one asks, the smarter he/she will sound. It is not uncommon for Arabic speakers to contradict, deny and negatively evaluate one another. In this sense, CHs among Arabic speakers are similar to Jewish (Schiffrin, 1984) and Greek (Tannen & Kavaka, 1992) disagreements characterized by confrontation and a considerable amount of questioning.

4.2.3 SUPPLICATION (SP) - Politic

Another relatively frequent and commonly used strategy among the Arabic speakers was seen through the use of SUPPLICATION (SP). This culturally specific strategy (not catalogued by any other researchers investigating the act of disagreement) had an overall frequency of 88 instances, constituting 5% of the data. In disagreement, SP revolves around the use of a strictly religious language, wherein the speaker in T (2) expresses his/her disagreement via the use of a certain religious statement to indicate their disapproval of the claims/propositions made in T (1). Primarily, SP utterances were invested in the use of the religious expression known as *the hawqala*, which is the semi-acronym for the Arabic statement لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله/la: hawla wa: la: qu:wata /illa: billa:h/, roughly translated into English as *There is no power or might except in Allah*. The *hawqala* is a form of *du'a*: (literally supplication or prayer) used among Muslims, whenever they are faced with a calamity or simply something beyond their control. Significant to understanding this expression is the lexical noun حول *hawla*, which semantically encodes the concept of not only change but also transformation. That is, real change and transformation can only be done through the power of Allah. In the data, the interlocutors implemented this expression to convey disapproval of a prior claim. That is, they are not in agreement; yet, there is nothing that can be done about it, but to disagree indirectly via supplications that only Allah can change the current status, as exemplified in (6) below:

(6) T (1) la: ju:d3ad mu:staqalu:n ?aw ta:d:i:b fis-sud3u:n not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons ‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’

[#114 [POL.F.EG.MSA.PG]]
For Preview Only

In (6) above, the female speaker in T (2) disagrees with the statement in T (1). She personalizes her stance via the use of the first person pronoun ʔana, followed by the lexical verb ʔaqu:l, which – taken together – is a metalinguistic comment to preface her disagreement. She chooses to go off-record by being indirect through the implementation of the religious expression of ħawqala. That is, she is indirectly communicating that she does not approve of the Minister’s claim, but she is powerless; therefore, she seeks refuge in Allah who has the power and might to change the status quo. By uttering the ħawqala, she flouted Grice’s Manner Maxim for being ambiguous (i.e., religious quote) and for being incomplete (i.e., incomplete utterance).

Other supplications included the use of حسبى الله ونعم الوكيل/hasbi: Allahu wa: naʕmal-waki:l/, roughly translated as Allah is Sufficient, and He is the Best Trustee. This statement is sometimes referred to as hasbla, a semantic blend of the first two words of the statement hasbi: Allahu. Similar to ħawqala, the hasbla indicates disagreement on the part of an interlocutor to a prior claim and/or proposition. It uses the same logic as the ħawqala, wherein a speaker disagrees with another, but chooses to render his/her disagreement rather indirectly through the use of this religious expression. The hasbla had a total of 31 occurrences in the corpus, which constituted 35% of all SP instances (n = 88). Consider the following example:

(7) T (1) ʔal-ʔazhar mafraxa lil-ʔirhab
   The-Azahr incubator for-terrorism
   ‘Al-Azhar Mosque is a breeding ground for terrorism.’

   T (2) hasbi: Allahu wa: naʕmal- waki:l
   sufficient Allah and best guardian
   ‘Allah is Sufficient for me and the Best Trustee.’

   [#801 [REL.M.PA.MSA.PG]]

In (7) above, Ahmad Musa, an Egyptian TV broadcaster and journalist, attacks Al-Azhar by describing it as a breeding ground for terrorism and terrorists. His statement stirred the feelings of some of the online subscribers (n = 4,332,554 at the time of data collection) of the Arabic Facebook Page Al-Shorouk News, who appear to view Al-Azhar as the chief center of Arabic literature and Islamic learning in the world. The speaker in T (2) does not hold the same opinion as Mr. Musa. He indirectly disputes Mr. Musa’s claim through the hasbla expression. That is, he does not believe that Al-Azhar is a breeder of terrorism. However, he is unable to do anything about it so as to change Mr. Musa’s view; therefore, he chooses to go off-record to express his disagreement.

4.2.4 EXCLAMATION (EX) – Politic

EXCLAMATION (EX) is another politic strategy found in the data. It occurred 45 times (3%). In this strategy, the speakers expressed their surprise and/or astonishment to a prior statement. That is, the speaker emphasized his/her emotional reaction to what they take to be a falsity by either casting doubt on the truth value of the other party’s statement or accusing the other party of some wrongdoing. Consider the following examples:
The speaker in T (1) makes the claim that the number of harassment cases are increasing in the Arab World. This statement gets disputed by many subscribers of the Facebook Group ‘Ladies Only’, which is mostly dominated by females. One of the female subscribers (T2A) expresses her disagreement by strongly stressing her emotional reaction by casting doubt on the truth value of the claim expressed in T (1). She describes such as a claim as being one of the strangest things she has ever heard of. Given that she is a woman in the Arab World, she is indirectly saying that she has not been harassed, nor has she noticed any changes. She cannot relate to the claim clearly stated in T (1); therefore, she holds it to be false and should be taken with caution. Unlike the speaker in T (2A) casting only doubt, the female speaker in T (2A) above accuses the speaker in T (1) of fabrication through her use of the exclamatory construction to denote the possessor of the quality being affectively reacted to; that is, lying.

4.2.5 MILD SCOLDING (MS) - Politic

Another common, non-rude politic strategy found among the Arabic speakers in disagreements is – termed in this research – MILD SCOLDING (henceforth MS). There were 29 instances of scolding, constituting 2% of the data. Broadly speaking, MS in Arabic-speaking societies occurs when an older speaker (e.g., parents) explicitly uses the Arabic word عيب/ʔajb/² ‘shame’ to a younger speaker (e.g., children), as an indicator of some violation of socially or religiously agreed-upon rules. In this sense, I argue that MS in this study is different from Goffman (1956), whose work centered on embarrassment, but is more similar to Scheff (2006) who sees shame as arising from a threat to the social bond, no matter how slight. In the established context of disagreement where age is irrelevant (or inaccessible for the most part unless indicated somehow), the use of MS signals that one speaker has found a fault or an unsoundedness in another’s claim (i.e., T1). As such, it is used to point out the fault and further make the other party feel disgraced by his/her prior statement(s), which are deemed as lacking truth-value and are threatening the social bond, hence the need to feel ashamed and disgraced. Consider the following example:

(9) T (1) ءل-ٌٌدءاب لايُسا فَارَZZان وَا لَللهُ ۙا؟قَال مِن ۚاۗن یاۗن ۚاۗن ياۗن ياۗن يَمۡر ۚاۗن ۚاۗن نِسۡا: بِل-ٌٌدءاب
   The-veil not obligatory and Allah wiser from that commands the-women fi-the hijab
   ‘The veil is not obligatory and Allah is wiser than ordering women to wear the veil’

T (2) ءيۡب ءل-الۡکلام دَا وَا-ۢاۗن يَمۡع اللۡمۡع
   shame on-you say-you the-talk this and-you Muslim

² Although the concept of shame covers other terms such as embarrassment, bashfulness, shyness, etc., it is only used in the current study to mean disgraceful or dishonorable.
‘Shame on you for making such a statement, [especially], when you are Muslim’

[978 [REL.M.EG.VER.PG]]

In (9) above, the speaker in T (2) does not agree with the speaker’s statement in T (1) and holds the view that the veil is not optional but obligatory to be worn by all Muslim women. To communicate this opposite view, he voices his disagreement via mildly scolding the other party for having violated a religiously agreed-upon rule (i.e., woman veiling) and as such should be ashamed of himself and of such a statement. Let us consider other examples, where MS is used to voice disagreement for violating a socially agreed-upon rule:

(10) T (1)   la:  ju:džad muštaqalu:n ʔaw tạšːib ʕis-sudžu:n
not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons
‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’

T (2A) ja: wazi:r ʕayb ʔikdɒːib
O Minister shame lie-you
‘Mr. Minister, it is shameful that you lie.’

T (2B) ʕayb ʕalayk fi sinak da wtku:n kaʔdab
shame on-you in age-your this and-be liar
‘shame on you for lying, given your age.’

[64 [POL.M.EG.VER.PG]]

[314 [POL.F.EG.VER.PG]]

In T (2A), the speaker does not hold the same view as that of the speaker in T (1). He takes the Minister’s statement, as a pure example of truth fabrication, for he believes that it just cannot be true that there are no prisoners nor is there torture. He expresses his disagreement by shaming the Minister for fabricating the truth, which is considered an explicit violation of religiously and socially agreed-upon rule (i.e., do not lie!). Although the use of the occupational term of address (i.e., Minister) can still be seen as an attempt to give deference, it is, nonetheless, used in this context to remind the Minister that given his position, lying is not an option.

Similarly, the female speaker in T (2B) disagrees with the Minister by scolding him statement. She, however, does not remind him of his governmental position, but rather of his age. In other words, age should be the drive behind telling the truth. As mentioned above, lying is often associated with children and it is taken to correlate negatively with age, i.e., the older one gets, the less lies he/she will tell. This again suggests that lying deliberately violates one of the socially agreed-upon principles in Arabic-speaking societies, hence the use of MS to remind and advise the speaker that it is not acceptable to do so and indirectly invites him/her to correct their actions.

4.2.6 IRRELEVANCY CLAIM (IC) - Politic

The IRRELEVANCY CLAIM (IC) strategy occurred when a prior claim was dismissed by one of the online commentators/posters. ICs had a frequency of 21 occurrences, which constituted only 1% of the data. This category manifested itself in several forms including, but not exclusive to, the following: (a) syntactically declarative nominal sentences (e.g., mish muhim ‘it is not important’), (b) syntactically declarative verbal sentences (e.g., la juhimuma ‘it does not concern us’), (c) syntactically imperative sentences (e.g., ghor bas ‘just get lost’), and syntactically imperative sentences (e.g., men ayana atyutm bihadhi alxurafat ‘where did you come up with these myths?’). Needless to say, this suggests that there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and function as the above examples show.
Muntigl and Turnbull (1997, 1998) contend that ICs are most aggravating, for they render one’s prior claim as irrelevant to any discussion. Langlotz and Locher (2012) support this view and further note that IRs constitute pure opposition, limiting any further development because they attack “the social skills of making relevant claims” (p. 1594). However, in the corpus ICs do not always dismiss one’s prior claim, nor they do implicate lack of making relevant claims, but rather sometimes invite the original poster to rethink his/her statement often times by rendering an alternative perspective to the issue at hand as seen in example (11) below:

Example (11) revolves around the current circumstances in the Middle East best characterized by the rise of ISIS and social upheavals. In T (1), the speaker makes the statement that Obama fools the Muslims, whether in the United States or anywhere else, by visiting a mosque in Maryland, USA. The speaker in T (2) finds the content of the speaker’s statement in T (1) to be irrelevant to the current discussion and dismisses the claim altogether. Yet, he invites the speaker in T (1) to adopt an alternative perspective by focusing more on the concept of unity, which should be the vocal point of the discussion. In this sense, ICs are not the most aggravating strategies and the data of this research do not support such a claim.

4.3 Polite Disagreements

Polite disagreements manifested themselves in COUNTERCLAIM and ARGUMENT AVOIDANCE. They are regarded polite because they attend to the face of the other party by providing alternatives, explanations, suggestions or refrainment from response to the matter under discussion.

4.3.1 COUNTERCLAIM (CC) -Polite

COUNTERCLAIMS (CC) surfaced as the most frequently used strategy of disagreement within the polite category with 395 occurrences (25%). This strategy occurred when the speaker in T (2) proposed an alternative claim that did not directly contradict nor necessarily challenge the other party’s prior proposition.

Unlike CTs discussed above, CCs allow for further development and negotiation of the propositions introduced in T (1), i.e., they are expansive for allowing room for diversity of opinions. In (12) below, the speaker in T (2) does not agree with the speaker’s claim in T (1) that the American President, Barack Obama, intends to fool Arabs and Muslims with his visit to one of the Islamic Centers in America. The speaker in T (2) claims the visit should not be interpreted as an act of deception, but rather as a normal visit from the American President to his own people, regardless of their religion.

Example (12) revolves around the current circumstances in the Middle East best characterized by the rise of ISIS and social upheavals. In T (1), the speaker makes the statement that Obama fools the Muslims, whether in the United States or anywhere else, by visiting a mosque in Maryland, USA. The speaker in T (2) finds the content of the speaker’s statement in T (1) to be irrelevant to the current discussion and dismisses the claim altogether. Yet, he invites the speaker in T (1) to adopt an alternative perspective by focusing more on the concept of unity, which should be the vocal point of the discussion. In this sense, ICs are not the most aggravating strategies and the data of this research do not support such a claim.

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Obama visits a mosque for the Muslim Americans. In other words, the American citizen is respected even if he is Muslim.

In line with Muntigl and Turnbull (1997), CCs in this study are expansive by keeping the conversation open as demonstrated in Example (13) below:

(13) T (1) ?al-wifa: fi haðaz-zaman ħaki faZi
The-loyalty in this time talk empty
‘Loyalty these days is pointless.’

T (2) ?al-wifa: qal bi-haðaz-zamin li?n mada Taţat ħalei-na
The-loyalty decreased in this time because-the material overshadow on-us
w-lakinu mawdʒu:d... ?axlifki ?ar-raʔi
and-but exist ... oppose-you the-opinion

‘Loyalty has decreased these days because materialism [money] has overwhelmed us, but it [loyalty] still exists [-] I disagree with you.’

T (3) ?a: mumkin
Yes possible
‘Probably yes.’

In (13) above, the speakers are arguing about whether loyalty still has any value today. In T1, speaker A (male) claims that being loyal does not seem to matter anymore; it is meaningless. Speaker B (female) disagrees via a CC in T2, partly agreeing (i.e., Loyalty has decreased these days), but offering an alternative claim that loyalty may have decreased due to the influence of money on people. By partially agreeing with the speaker in T (1), the speaker in T (2) acknowledges T (1)’s contribution and by providing an alternative claim, she tries to keep the conversation open, as evident in T 3 (i.e., yeah probably). Rather than prefacing her disagreement with an IC, the speaker in T (2) chooses to delay the use of ?axlifki ‘disagree’ until the very end of her sentence. This postponement of disagreement has been recognized by Kruetal (2007) as a desirable move on the part of the interlocutor.

4.3.2 ARGUMENT AVOIDANCE (AA)³ - Polite

Another strategy within the polite category took the form of ARGUMENT AVIODANCE (AA). There were 16 occurrences, constituting only 1% of all strategies used among the Arabic speakers. AA occurred when some subscribers deliberately refrained from commenting on a certain topic of discussion. The essence of this strategy is to avoid expressing disagreement and

³ It is to be noted that others have used the term ‘Message Abandonment’ for this category, but it is confusing, since saying ‘no comment’ is in fact a message. The term ARGUMENT AVIODANCE is more felicitous.
choose to be silent through the use of certain phrases (e.g., la: tašliːq ‘no comment’, biduːn tašliːq ‘without comment’, mif’harud ʕaliːq ‘I will not respond to you, la: jistahal ʔat-ταʃliːq ‘not worth commenting on, etc.). These phrases are often followed by a series of periods (i.e., ellipsis as a non-verbal cue) to indicate topic change/avoidance (Darics, 2010). This supports the claim that AAs are often used in the context of disagreement. In this sense, lack of commenting (or absence of direct disagreement) is not meaningless; it is meaningful, for it encodes dissatisfaction with a prior claim, yet indirectly expressing hidden disagreement. Its illocutionary force is used “to question, promise, [deny], warn, threaten, insult, request or recommend, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction” (Saville-Troike, 1985, p.6).

As seen in example (15) below, the speaker in T (2) denies the statement in T (1) by directly stating that he has no comment to share, for the statement in T (1) cannot be true. In other words, commenting (or lack thereof) will not make a difference, for the prior claim is obviously fabricated.

(14) T (1) laː juːdʒad muʃtaqaluːn ʔaw  taʃdiːb fis-sudʒuːn
not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons
‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’

T (2) laː taʃliːq
no comment
‘no comment’

[#53 [POL.M.EG.MSA.PG]]

It is worth mentioning that there was one instance of AA, followed by an explanation, justifying the lack of comment. In (16) below, the speaker in T (2) clearly stated that he does not wish to comment, for he may be imprisoned for doing so.

(15) T (2) miʃ ʕawiza ʔaʃliːq ʕjan ma-ʕbiʃf
not want comment for not-prisoned
‘I don’t want to comment to avoid imprisonment.’

[#205 [POL.M.EG.VER.PG]]

This strategy has been noted by other researchers, including Kruetal (2007), who describes it as an undesirable strategy of disagreement. In the current study however, the use of AA seems to be topic-dependent and its use is seen as one of the appropriate and possible ways to convey the emotional state of disbelief and dissatisfaction among the interactants. The view of ARGUMENT AVIODANCE being appropriate is in line with Brown and Levinson (1987), who consider it along with silence as non-face threatening acts.

4.4 Impolite Disagreements

Impolite behavior in disagreement was materialized in VERBAL ATTACK and VERBAL IRNOY. Both strategies attack the other party’s face and lead to create disharmony among the interactants.

4.4.1 VERBAL ATTACK (VA) - Impolite

VERBAL ATTACK (VA) here refers to the use of abusive, taboo language. VA had a frequency of 294 occurrences, constituting 18% of the data. The interactant(s) in T (2) used abusive language intended to discredit the other party through a wide array of ways including, but are not exclusive to, name calling, derogatory nominations, cursing, belittling, profanities, obscenities and
many others to cause severe face-damage, not only to the other party’s positive face wants but also their negative face wants as well (Culpeper, 2011 [1996]). Additionally, the interactants in T (2) also used non-linguistic cues to cause face-damage, like gestural spitting and farting sounds, both of which signify aggression and lack of concern for the other party. The following are some examples of this strategy from all three area topics:

(16) T (1) ʔal-ʔiṣdżaz ʔal-ʕilmi fil-quraːn kalam fariɣ
The-miracle the-scientific in-the Qur’an talk empty
‘The scientific miracles in the Qur’an are empty talk’
T (2) faʃlan ?innak jahuːdi Sahjuːni xanziːɾ
truly that-you Jew Zionist pig
‘Truly you are a Zionist, a Jew, and a pig.’

The exchange above revolves around the issue of scientific miracles in the Holy Book of Qur’an. The speaker in T (1) denies the fact that the Qur’an embraces scientifically proven facts and considers it empty talk. The speaker’s claim in T (1) aggravates the speaker in T (2). Rather than arguing back by possibly providing counter-evidence from the Holy Book of Qur’an to dispute the validity of the speaker in T (1), the speaker in the second exchange (T2) verbally attacks the speaker in T (1) by calling him names, a Zionist Jew, which evokes the images of betrayal and usurpation in Arabic-speaking countries, followed by xanziːɾ ‘pig’, which brings to mind images of filthiness and impurity. The speaker’s choice of words and sequence in T (2) is carefully calculated, for it is explicitly stated in the Qur’an that Jews were transformed into apes and swines as a punishment for their transgression in the matter of the Sabbath (i.e. Saturday4). In other words, he draws on his religious belief to construct the insult.

Example (17) below was extracted from the POL topic area of the corpus. In this exchange, the speaker (the Egyptian Minister of Interior Affairs) claims that there are no prisoners, nor is there torture in Egyptian prisons. The interlocutor in T (2) disputes the truthfulness of the statement in T (1) by using the extremely insulting vulgar phrase kus ??ummak ‘your mother’s vagina’. Indeed, the use of this vulgar phrase is the strongest form of aggravation, when used in disagreement or used elsewhere. In addition, the combination of the polite address term saʃadit (Excellency) and the occupational term wazir (Minister) is a case of mock politeness (Culpeper, 1996 & 2011); they are obviously insincere and in the example serve the reverse function of politeness.

(17) T (1) la: juːdʒad muʃtaqluːn ?aw taʃːiːb fis-sudʒuːn
not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons
‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’
T (2) kus ??umm-ak ja saʃadit ?al-waziːɾ
vagina mother-your O Excellency the-minister
‘Your mother is a cunt, your Excellency the Minister.’

The higher frequencies of VAs may be accounted due to anonymity of Computer-Mediated Communication (Baym, 1996; Locher, 2004, Angouri and Tseliga, 2010). The findings agree with those of Shum & Lee (2013), who report that using vulgar phrases was a common strategy of

4 As reported in the Qur’an, the Jews were ordered to refrain from fishing on Saturday, but they disobeyed God’s order and set up their nets the previous day.
disagreement among native speakers of Cantonese in two online communities. The use of VA as a direct strategy of disagreement was also attested in Locher and Bousfield (2008), Locher (2005), Cuplpeper (1996), Bousfield (2008), among others. Contrary to Muntigl and Turnbull (1997), who consider IRRELEVANCY CLAIMS (IC) as the most aggravating, in this study VAs constitute the most aggravating strategy.

4.4.2 VERBAL IRONY (VI) - Impolite

VERBAL IRONY (VI)\(^{5}\) is another impolite strategy within the negatively marked behaviors in the context of disagreement. VI had a frequency of 182 occurrences, which constituted 11\% of the data. In this strategy, the speaker in T (2) literally agrees to a prior claim, yet is understood as communicating the opposite of agreement. In other words, VI is not implemented to ground previously presented claims/propositions, but rather to express sarcasm or criticism. Consider the following example:

(18) T (1) la: ju:dad mu$t\(\ddot{a}\)lu:n ?aw ta\(\ddot{a}\)b fis-su$u:n not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons

‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’

T (2) ?ana $ar$? in mafi:* ta$\ddot{a}$b fi: bas hiza:r I know (AP) not torture in but teasing

‘I know there is no torture; there is only teasing.’

[\#11 [POL.F.EG.VER.PG]]

In (18), the speaker in T (2) literally expresses agreement with T (1) that there is no torture in the Egyptian prisons, but she sarcastically states that prisoners get teased. This flouts the supermaxim of the Maxim of Quality ("Try to make your contribution one that is true.") and the submaxim of the Maxim Quality ("Do not say what you believe to be false"). A similar effect is provided in Example (19) below:

(19) T (1) la: ju:dad mu$t\(\ddot{a}\)lu:n ?aw ta\(\ddot{a}\)b fis-su$u:n not exist prisoners or torture in the-prisons

‘There are no prisoners or torture in prisons.’

T (2) ?aSlan $i$hna ?ilbalad $i$la$\ddot{a}$da $i$lli mi$ fi-ha su$u:n Primarily we the-country the-only that not in-it prison

‘Indeed we are the only country that does not have prisons.’

[\#90 [POL.M.EG.VER.PG]]

Similarly, the speaker in (19) sarcastically agrees with the Egyptian Minister of Interior’s statement in T (1) by making the obviously false claim there are no prisons in Egypt to begin with.

The researcher’s observation of VI as a separate strategy in the context of disagreement is in line with Locher (2004), who also reports that irony/sarcasm is used by her participants to express the act of disagreement. It is also consistent with Shum & Lee (2013), who introduce

\(^{5}\) The strategy VERBAL IRONY is used in the current study as an umbrella term, covering several related terms such as sarcasm (Locher, 2004), sarcastic irony, conversational irony (Leech, 1983), and sarcastic humor. No attempt was made as to distinguish among these terms, for they are seen to fall outside the scope of this study and most crucially require access to paralinguistic cues (prosodic) to which the researcher had no access.
making ironic statements as one of the most commonly used strategies among Cantonese speakers in their expression of the act of disagreement.

4.5 Wrap up

As Table 2 below shows, the Arabic speakers used various strategies, ranging from polite ones (e.g., COUNTERCLAIM and ARGUMENT AVIODANCE), to socially acceptable or politic strategies (e.g., CONTRADICTION, CHALLENGE, SUPPLICATION, EXCLAMATION, MILD SCOLDING and IRRELEVANCY CLAIM) to impolite ones (e.g., VERBAL ATTACK and VERBAL IRONY). Overall, negatively marked behaviors constituted 29%, positively marked behaviors 26%, and unmarked behaviors 45%, constituting almost half of the data. The same numbers can be read

Table 1: Distribution of Pragmatic Strategies of Disagreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>(f)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cum %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negatively Marked (Impolite)</td>
<td>VERBAL ATTACK</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VERBAL IRONY</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positively Marked (Polite)</td>
<td>COUNTERCLAIM</td>
<td>395</td>
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<td>26%</td>
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<td>ARGUMENT AVIODANCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unmarked (Politic/Appropriate)</td>
<td>CONTRADICTION</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>CHALLENGE</td>
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<td>SUPPLICATION</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Shading indicates the level of Relational Work embedded in each strategy.

5. Conclusion

The preceding discussion has sought to provide an account of the speech act of disagreement by the Arabic speakers in their discussion of various topics on Facebook. The Arabic speakers employed a total of 10 major strategies, the majority of which were either polite (26%) or politic (49%) geared toward constructing normal interpersonal relationships (Locher and Watts, 2005, 2008), and promoting social harmony, whereas some (29%) were impolite leading to potential communication breakdowns. The findings of this study, as those of others before (Sifianou, 2012), point to the complexity of the act of disagreement but add to existing scholarship by identifying new cultural-specific strategies such as SUPPLICATION and MILD SCOLDING. As mentioned above, MILD SCOLDING – although slightly face-threatening – is still politic in Arabic-speaking societies, the use of which signals a breach of sociocultural norms established including, but are not limited to, lying, truth fabrication, falsification, and so on. The use of these two strategies are only fathomable to speakers of Arabic and may be in need of further explanation for learners of Arabic or those who are interested in Middle Eastern cultures. Additionally, the
findings also indicate that Locher and Watts’s (2005, 2008) Relational Work can be a useful theoretical framework in understanding the complex nature of disagreement.

5.1 Limitations & Recommendations

The study explored only the production of disagreements, but it did not look into the issue of perception. Disagreements mediated through voice communication such as Skype and other forms of Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) were not tackled in this study and no comparison across multiple modes of CMC were attempted here. Finally, the current study did not examine such variables as gender, topic and social status (to be addressed in future research). It is recommended that this work be expanded to research disagreement in individual countries to see if the results of this study can be confirmed or rejected.
References


