

---

## Pashto Polite Expressions for Face-saving on Face book

Dr. Abdullah Jan Abid  
Muhammad Sheeraz\*

**Abstract:** *Drawing upon the traditional and postmodern views regarding politeness studies, the present paper investigates the frequency of the use of various polite expressions by Pashto speaking face book users. The study takes into account the various contexts of the choice as well as the age variation. Two hundred status updates and comments open for public were selected for the analysis. The data shows that relatively younger Pashto speaking face book users make a less frequent use of polite expressions while interacting with their age-fellows. However, the frequency of the polite expressions is high when the interaction happens between seniors (in terms of age) and juniors or even between two seniors. The expression of respect 'grana' was found to have the highest frequency with 22% of all occurrences of the politeness expressions, and was followed by 'dera manana' with 19% of them.*

*Key Terms: Pashto, Politeness, Face book*

### 1.Theoretical Background

The research in the area of linguistics has helped expand the area, and caused the development of many related fields such as pragmatics, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, conversational analysis, etc. These fields, like many others, have developed certain theories which can be considered as being traditional due to their faith in the classics of the area. However, during the recent decades, the influence of the critical theories such as postmodernism and deconstruction has brought a seismic change that took the focus away from authority to the lay people's perception. But this does not mean that the traditionalist studies have been totally divorced: they exist, and have also contributed towards the creation of a theoretical bipolarity in these fields.

This polarity can also be found in the politeness studies in pragmatics in which traditional view and postmodern view regarding politeness have led various

---

Head Department of Pakistani Languages Allama Iqbal Open University  
Islamabad

\* Ph.D. scholar, Department of English International Islamic University  
Islamabad

---

research ventures into the field (see Terkourafi 2005). The former view also termed as politeness to acknowledge the existence of Model Persons and their face as perceived by the theorists such as Grice (1989 [1967]), and reflected and further developed in the works of Lakoff 1973, Brown and Levinson 1987 [1978], Leech 1983, etc. This view has retained its theoretical appeal and terminological currency for long and exists even today, though shaken by certain severe criticisms (Terkourafi 2005). The latter view (also termed as politeness 1), emphasizes the role of lay people's face and perception in the conceptualization of politeness as studied by Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003, etc. This postmodern politeness view considers the rapport management to be at the heart of politeness practices (Terkourafi 2005: 241).

Both the views regarding politeness studies have their potential strengths, some of which coincide as well (see Terkourafi 2005). These strengths may strategically be combined and applied for the better results of the future researches in the area. For instance, both have a common standing that politeness should be analyzed "on the pragmatic level as a particularized implicature" (Terkourafi 2005: 246). Secondly, one of the assumptions of the traditional view is that certain norms exist a priori whereas the postmodern view stresses the lay man's perceptions and choices. This contradiction, if negotiated, may lead to a reconciliation that would allow a point of departure to be determined for many new politeness studies as this. If looked closely, it is true that certain politeness norms exist a priori, and those used in verbal interaction are called as polite expressions. However, their appropriateness is decided by the common interlocutors' perception and choice. Drawing upon this theoretical negotiation, the present study gives a discussion on the polite expressions existing a priori in Pashto language, and works out the frequency with which the Pashto speakers choose them for their verbal interaction in the form of statuses and comments on face book.

## **2. Introduction**

The present paper investigates the polite behavior in verbal interaction done on face book. The aim of the paper is to explore the frequency of the various politeness expressions used by the face book users. Within verbal interaction we have focused only on isolated utterances considered to be the politeness expressions rather than on the bigger chunks of cooperative and harmonious interaction. While studying these isolated expressions, Eelen's (2001) concerns regarding the early researches in politeness were considered and the 'hearer' was also taken into account along with the 'speaker'. According to Eelen, "(im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour [...] the very essence of (im)politeness lies in this evaluative moment" (Eelen 2001: 109). Some researchers even believe that

---

“...politeness is not behavior per se but an evaluation of behavior” (Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010). Spencer-Oatey (2005) and Locher (2006) also have the similar opinion. However, “evaluation is itself a complex concept that can be seen as an umbrella term that refers to the expression of the speaker's viewpoint, attitude, or stance toward or feelings about what somebody else has said or done” (Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010), and also suggests that non-linguistic behavior is also important to be considered while researching politeness, which, due to the limited scope of the present paper, has not been taken into account here.

Although the overwhelming majority of the respondents involved in some of the recent research works have conceptualized “polite behavior as being strictly nonverbal” (Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010), yet the importance of the verbal polite expressions, particularly on social networking sites as face book, cannot be neglected as because of the geographical distancing the non-linguistic behaviors cannot be expressed properly there. It is also relevant to state here that: “In most of the studies, the politeness has been conceptualized especially as strategic conflict-avoidance or as strategic construction of cooperative social interaction (Vilkki, n.d: 323)”, and as the chances of misunderstanding and conflict increase on written public comments and statuses, therefore the speakers need be more careful with their verbal politeness strategies.

### 2.1 Two Key Terms

**Pashto:** Pashto is an ancient language of Iranian family (see Grierson n.d.; Abid 2006, etc) spoken by a large population especially those living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan and eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan.

**Face book:** The face book is a social networking site which “provides a convenient environment for the development of discourse communities with its varied participatory mechanisms. On face book, users create their personal profile page allowing them to list interests and activities they share with others. They also belong to a ‘Network’ defined primarily by the educational institution with which they are, or have been, affiliated. Communication with others within face book takes place via a range of tools including email, discussion boards, uploaded videos and picture galleries that include a space for comments and a ‘wall’ in which users can exchange messages with nominated friends. Other popular features include status updates, ‘poking’ friends (an ambiguous tool but one of the many phatic uses of face book) and gift giving (fish, flowers etc.)” (McNeill 2008: 3). The privacy settings of the site allow the users to decide whether the comment, status or post they make is meant for a group of friends, all those entered in the friend list, friends as well as their friends or public i.e. anyone who uses face book.

### 3. Methodology

---

The first order politeness termed as politeness 1 or postmodern view on politeness studies (Terkourafi 2005) has been stressed to have the lay man's perceptions and selections of the various ways of politeness (see Watts 2003; Mills 2003; Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010 etc). The traditional politeness theories have asserted the existence of certain politeness norms a priori. The present study, as stated above, negotiates the two views extended by these contending theoretical groups to supply a comprehensive theoretical framework. Acknowledging the existence of verbal politeness expressions, the study focuses how frequently Pashto speaking lay face book users opt for any of these expressions.

The data for the present study was collected from face book. Two hundred public statuses and comments of various Pashto speakers were studied for the present paper. The data consisted of 5230 words. The frequency of the use of these expressions was worked out. Addresser/addressee's age group was particularly considered as one of the variables. The demographic information given on the profiles of the users was believed true. All the two hundred comments/statuses were posted by male face book users from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan with the exception of five comments which were made by female users from the same province.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The data shows both the types of politeness expressions i.e. non-linguistic and linguistic. Among non-linguistic politeness behaviors, accepting various types of requests such as friend requests, etc, commenting on the statuses in response to others' comments, complimenting pictures, food, etc, clicking "like" as an acknowledgment/alignment token, etc are conceptualized as politeness in the comments made by various Pashto speaking face book users. This is in line with the assertion of Pashto Cultural orientations (2010) which says, "It is *polite* to compliment the quality of the food". However, as the focus of the present study is the isolated verbal polite expressions, we will discuss them at length.

Following politeness expressions were used in the comments/statuses made/updated by Pashto speaking face book users:

To pay thanks / gratitude: 'Dera manana' / 'dera dera manana' / 'yow jehan manana', etc were used as strong polite expressions whereas 'manana' was used as a weak or ordinary expressions to show gratefulness. Expressions borrowed and adapted from Urdu language such as 'Dera mehrubani' and 'mehrubani' were also used for politeness in Pashto.

---

To apologize: ‘Dera bakhana’ was used as a strong expression of apology in Pashto whereas in some instances ‘bakhana’ was used alone which may be interpreted as weak.

To make requests: When an addresser intended to make a request, s/he used the Urdu expression ‘mehrubani’. As the data belonged to the face book discourse of the Pashto speaking Pakistanis, therefore it seemed influenced by Urdu – the national language of the country.

To show respectfulness: The expressions of respect for elders were used very frequently in the face book discourse under study. These expressions are given below:

Grana (singular) / grano (plural)

Qadar mana (singular) / qadar mano (plural)

khaghle (singular) / khaghlo (plural)

drund (singular) / drano (plural)

To pray: Praying to God for addressee’s long life, prosperity and happiness also seems to be an expression of politeness in Pashto. Following expressions were used in the discourse under study:

Khad ose (Stay happy)

Jawande ose (Stay alive/ Live long)

Abad ose (Stay prosperous)

Gul ose (Live like flowers)

To show intimacy: In Pashto, ‘lala’ is an expression for the elder brother. In the face book discourse under study, this expression was used by some addressees even though the addressers were not their elder brothers. Hence, this has been used as one of the politeness expressions in order to show intimacy and affection.

Table 1 given below shows the frequency of the use of various politeness expressions by Pashto speaking face book users in different contexts. The total number of occurrences of polite expressions was 108. This means that about 2% of the total selected Pashto discourse consisted of these polite expressions.

**Table: 1**

S. no.	Politeness Expression	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency (out of 10)
1	Manana	15	14%
2	Dera manana	20	19%
3	dera dera manana	3	0.27%
4	yow jehan manana	2	0.18%
5	Mehrubani	3	0.27%
6	Dera Mehrubani	5	0.46%
7	Bakhana	5	0.46%
8	Dera bakhana	2	0.18%

---

9	Grana	24	22%
10	Qadar mana	4	0.37%
11	Khaghle	2	0.18%
12	Drund	2	0.18%
13	Khad ose	5	0.46%
14	Jawande ose	3	0.27%
15	Abad ose	2	0.18%
16	Gul ose	1	0.09%
17		10	9%

The table shows that the expression of respect for elders i.e. ‘grana’ was used with highest frequency (22%) of all the isolated polite expression in the data under study. It is followed in frequency by ‘dera manana’ (19%), ‘manana’ (14%), and ‘lala’ (9%). Category wise, the most frequently used type of polite expressions are those of gratefulness with a total percentage of about 35%. The least frequently used expressions are: ‘gul ose’ (0.09%), ‘abad ose’ (0.18%), ‘khaghle’ (0.18%), ‘drund’ (0.18%), ‘dera bakhana’ (0.18%), ‘yow jehan manana’ and (0.18%).

In some instances, politeness effect has been enlarged by non-verbal ways like using similes and, at times, lengthening, upper-casing, or highlighting the verbal expressions to emphasize them e.g. “Deraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa Manana, Hasham Baber”.

Politeness expressions are used with higher frequency on the walls of the senior (age-wise) people than that on the young ones which also shows that using formal politeness expressions in frank atmosphere may be considered impolite by many speakers. However, while interacting on the walls of the seniors, the young users were found using these politeness expressions even for their age fellows perhaps because here their indirect ‘hearers’ were the seniors as well. On the walls of the senior and respectable members even the seniors themselves are using the politeness expressions which helps maintain distance and probably provide a model to their younger generation. Most of the polite expressions used by seniors were prayers and words of affection, etc. The pragmatic function of these expressions here seems formality and distancing.

The three out of the total five comments made by the female users used the expression of ‘lala’ and one used a praying expression.

## 5. Conclusion

Pashto speaking educated class has been found as the regular face book using people. They make extended comments on various issues. An average use of the isolated verbal politeness expressions can be noticed on their face book walls i.e. about 2% of the interaction.

---

No visible conflict was found in the discourse consisting of the two hundred comments/ statuses (5230 words) which shows that the users made an appropriate use of the politeness expressions for face-saving. It was found that the the frequency of the use of these expressions varies with the age group of the 'hearer'. If there is a generation-gap difference of age, then not only the addresser expresses his/her respectfulness through polite expressions but the addressee also makes use of these expressions.

It can be safely asserted that Pashto speaking face book users make appropriate choices of politeness expressions as a strategy of face-saving on the social networking site.

Finally, it is duly acknowledged that the present study is an introductory exploration into Pashto politeness, and optimistically hoped that it would prove a prelude to many scholarly works in the area in future.

---

---

## References

1. Abid, Abdullah Jan. (2006). *Pashto Zuban-o-Adab ki Mukhtasar Tareekh*. Peshawar: University Publishers.
  - Brown, Penelope and Stephen Levinson. (1987 [1978]). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - Eelen, Gino. (2001). *Critique of politeness theories*. Manchester: St Jerome Press.
  2. Grierson, G. A. (n.d.). *Linguistic Survey of Pakistan (II)*. Lahore: Accurate Printers.
  3. Grice, Herbert Paul. (1989 [1967]). *Logic and conversation*. In *Studies in the Way of Words*, 22\_40. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
  - Lakoff, Robin. (1973). *The logic of politeness; or minding your p's and q's*. In *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 292\_305. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
  4. Leech, Geoffrey. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
  - Locher, Miriam, A. (2006). *Polite behaviour within relational work: The discursive approach to politeness*. *Multilingua* 25(3). 249-267.
  5. McNeill, Tony. (2008). *Face work in Face book: An analysis of an online discourse community*. *Language, culture and communication in online learning*. <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/e-6>.
  6. [.learning/gallery/mcneill\\_face book.pdf](http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/e-6/learning/gallery/mcneill_face_book.pdf)
  7. Mills, Sara. (2003). *Gender and politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  8. *Pashto Cultural orientations*. (2010). Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.
  9. [http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/products/pashto/pu\\_co/pashto.pdf](http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/products/pashto/pu_co/pashto.pdf)
  - Sifianou, Maria, and Angeliki Tzanne. (2010). *Conceptualizations of politeness and impoliteness in Greek*. (Report). Retrieved on March 30, 2011 from
  10. <http://find.galegroup.com/gps/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC- Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=IPS&docId=A241861923&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=wash59545&version=1.0>
  11. Spencer-Oatey, Helen. (2005). (Im)politeness, face and perceptions of rapport: Unpackaging their bases and interrelationships. *Journal of Politeness Research* 1(1). 95-119.
  12. Terkourafi, Marina, (2005). *Beyond the micro-level in politeness research*. *Journal of Politeness Research*. 1: 237-262. [http://faculty.las.illinois.edu/mt217/Terkourafi\\_JoPR1%282%29.pdf](http://faculty.las.illinois.edu/mt217/Terkourafi_JoPR1%282%29.pdf)
  13. Vilkki, Liisa. (n.d.). *Politeness, Face and Facework: Current Issues*. *A Man of Measure: Festschrift in Honour of Fred Karlsson*. 322-332. [http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006\\_1/1.4.7.%20VILKKI.pdf](http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006_1/1.4.7.%20VILKKI.pdf)
  14. Watts, Richard J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-