

Silence and Politeness in Jordanian Society

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Abstract

In Western societies, silence has been the focus of the studies in the last two decades. However, it has not been studied to such an extent in the Arab World. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the employment of silence as a politeness strategy in casual conversation in Jordanian Arabic. Twelve dyadic conversations were conducted for 30 minutes each. The participants were 24 university students at Yarmouk University (Jordan): 12 males and 12 females. They were grouped into two main groups: friends and strangers. Ninety seconds were analysed from the beginning, the middle, and the end of each conversation; these extracts were chosen randomly. The theoretical framework of this study draws on ethnography of communication, politeness theory and Sack et al's (1974) turn-taking model. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence can be used as a positive politeness strategy to avoid confrontation and to save face.

Key words: silence, face, politeness, pragmatic, hesitation, interruption, turn-taking and casual conversations