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Social Deixis in Relation to Politeness in Oral communication: A linguistic Perspective

*Hamid Salih Omar[1]
Department of English Language, Faculty of Education

Abstract

This study explores social deixis and politeness strategies in oral communication among Libyan undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)with the aim of examining how they use forms of address, honorifics, and politeness strategies in different communicative contexts. A descriptive mixed-methods survey design was adopted, and data were collected from (35) undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education, Fezzan University, using a questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended items. The findings indicate that students frequently use polite expressions and indirect requests, particularly when communicating with teachers, elderly people, and individuals of higher social status. The results also show that titles and honorifics are commonly used as markers of respect. Participants viewed politeness as essential for maintaining respectful relationships, promoting effective communication, and reducing misunderstandings. The study concludes that social deixis and politeness strategies play a significant role in shaping the communicative behavior of Libyan EFL students in both academic and social contexts. By focusing on an underexplored Libyan university context, the study contributes context-specific insight into how social deixis and politeness function together in Libyan EFL learners' oral communication.

Key Words: EFL Learners, Interpersonal Communication, Politeness Strategies, Pragmatics, Social Deixis.

1. Introduction and Previous Studies

Effective communication requires not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language appropriately across different social and cultural contexts. One important aspect of pragmatic competence is social deixis, which refers to linguistic expressions that encode aspects of the social relationship between speakers and listeners. Such expressions include titles, honorifics, forms of address, and other linguistic indicators that reflect social status, age, authority, familiarity, and interpersonal distance. In everyday communication, speakers use politeness strategies to demonstrate respect, maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships, and facilitate effective interaction. These strategies may involve indirect requests, respectful greetings, polite expressions, and appropriate forms of address. The relationship between social deixis and politeness is particularly important because language users need to select expressions that are socially acceptable and culturally appropriate according to the communicative situation. In EFL contexts, learners may develop grammatical and lexical knowledge while still facing challenges in applying pragmatic aspects of language use appropriately. Understanding when and how to use polite expressions and suitable forms of address is therefore essential for effective communication. In Libya, respect for teachers, elders, and individuals in positions of authority is an important social value and is often reflected in linguistic

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choices. Accordingly, examining social deixis and politeness among Libyan EFL learners can provide useful insight into how sociocultural values are reflected in English-language communication. Although social deixis and politeness have been widely investigated within pragmatics, relatively few empirical studies have specifically examined how Libyan EFL learners use these linguistic resources in oral communication. This represents a notable research gap because Libya's particular sociocultural norms concerning respect toward teachers, elders, and authority figures may influence learners' pragmatic choices in ways that are not fully represented in studies conducted in other EFL or Arab contexts. By focusing on Libyan undergraduate EFL students at Fezzan University, the present study seeks to address this gap and provide context-specific evidence concerning the relationship between social deixis and politeness strategies.

Politeness and appropriate forms of address are essential components of effective communication because they enable speakers to express respect, maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and reduce the possibility of misunderstanding or conflict. However, language learners may differ in the extent to which they recognize and apply politeness strategies and social deictic expressions across different social situations. Although Libyan EFL students receive instruction in English grammar and vocabulary, relatively limited empirical attention has been given to how they apply social deixis and politeness strategies in actual or reported oral communication. This lack of research makes it difficult to determine how learners adapt their language according to social relationships, authority, age, familiarity, and status. Moreover, insufficient attention has been paid to students' perceptions of politeness and the role they believe it plays in maintaining respectful and effective communication. The present study therefore investigates the use of politeness strategies and social deictic expressions among Libyan EFL students and examines how these linguistic choices relate to social relationships, respect, and effective interaction. Specifically, the study is guided by the following main question: What is the relationship between social deixis and the use of politeness strategies in oral communication among Libyan EFL students? To address this question, the study also examines the extent to which Libyan EFL students use politeness strategies in everyday oral communication; how they use titles, honorifics, and forms of address to express respect toward individuals of different social status; how they modify their language when communicating with teachers, elders, and classmates; which polite expressions and indirect requests they most frequently use in different communicative situations; and how they perceive the importance of politeness and social deixis in maintaining effective and respectful communication.

Accordingly, the study aims to investigate the use of politeness strategies in the oral communication of Libyan EFL students; examine the role of social deixis, including titles, honorifics, and forms of address, in expressing respect and maintaining social relationships; determine whether students adapt their language according to factors such as age, authority, and social status; explore students' perceptions of the importance of politeness in promoting effective communication and positive interpersonal relationships; identify the most commonly used polite expressions and indirect requests in different communicative situations; and highlight the relationship between social deixis and politeness strategies in academic and social communication contexts. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of pragmatic language use among Libyan EFL learners and

to provide context-sensitive insights into the role of social relationships and cultural values in English oral communication.

1.1 Theoretical Overview

This Section discusses the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to social deixis and its interaction with oral communication from a linguistic perspective. Before concentrating on social deixis as one of the main categories of deictic expressions, it first discusses the idea of deixis and its various forms. The taxonomy of social deixis, its function in pragmatics and oral communication, and its significance in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) are all covered in this chapter. Additionally, it analyzes earlier empirical research, examines politeness theory and its relationship to social deixis, and pinpoints the research gap that warrants the current investigation.

1.2 Deixis

Deixis is one of the core concepts in pragmatics and refers to the way linguistic expressions are interpreted in relation to the context in which they are used. The term "deixis" originates from a Greek word meaning "to point" or "to signal." Deictic expressions enable speakers to refer to people, locations, times, discourse elements, and social relationships whose meanings depend on the communicative context rather than on the linguistic expressions themselves [1]. Levinson [2] describes deixis as a linguistic phenomenon that connects language with context, emphasizing that many expressions cannot be fully interpreted without knowledge of the situation in which they occur. Expressions such as: I, you, here, there, today, and tomorrow continuously change their reference according to who is speaking, where the interaction takes place, and when it occurs. Hanks [3] further argues that the interpretation of deixis should not be reduced to physical location alone, as access to referents may also involve perceptual, cognitive, and social dimensions. This perspective reinforces the argument that deixis is fundamentally connected to the interactional conditions under which communication occurs.

Deixis therefore demonstrates the close relationship between linguistic form and contextual interpretation. Cruse [4] notes that the interpretation of deictic expressions depends substantially on the communicative situation. Similarly, Huang [5] emphasizes that pragmatic interpretation requires attention to the relationship between linguistic expressions and contextual information. In this respect, deixis represents an important area of pragmatic study because it illustrates how speakers and hearers use contextual knowledge to construct meaning [2], [6]. Kecskes [7] further emphasizes the importance of context and shared knowledge in intercultural pragmatic interaction, where participants may bring different cultural assumptions to the interpretation of language. This wide-ranging relevance of context is reflected across the field more broadly, as major reference works on pragmatics devote extensive attention to deixis and its contextual dependence [8].

Traditionally, deixis is divided into five major categories: person, spatial, temporal, discourse, and social deixis [2], [1]. Person deixis concerns the identification of participants in an interaction, spatial deixis relates to location, temporal deixis refers to time, discourse deixis points to elements within the discourse, and social deixis encodes information concerning social relationships and social status. Although these categories perform different functions, they frequently interact in actual communication. Social deixis is particularly significant because it reflects how speakers position themselves and others within a social relationship and how linguistic choices are influenced by factors such as status, familiarity, distance, and institutional roles.

1.3 Social Deixis

Social deixis refers to linguistic expressions that encode social relationships between participants in communication. Traditional accounts of deixis, particularly those of Levinson [2] and Huang [5], emphasize that social deixis reflects distinctions involving social status, familiarity, respect, and institutional position. This perspective has been influential because it demonstrates that linguistic meaning cannot be interpreted independently of the social relationships between speakers.

However, the literature also suggests that social deixis should not be understood merely as a fixed set of titles, honorifics, or forms of address. The meaning and appropriateness of such expressions are shaped by the particular interaction in which they occur. For example, an expression such as "Professor" may signal institutional respect in one context, whereas the use of a first name may indicate solidarity or familiarity in another. Therefore, the same linguistic choice may carry different pragmatic meanings depending on the relationship between interlocutors and the cultural norms governing the interaction.

Recent research supports this context-sensitive interpretation. Kretzenbacher et al. [9], for example, demonstrate that forms of introduction and address may vary across languages and communicative settings. Their findings are significant because they move beyond a purely structural classification of social deixis and show that socially meaningful linguistic choices are influenced by speakers' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This suggests that EFL learners may face difficulties not because they lack knowledge of English vocabulary or grammar, but because they must interpret and apply forms of address according to social norms that may differ from those of their first language. A similar pattern emerges in Al-Natour and Al-Yousef's [10] study of Jordanian and Omani academic discourse, which found that relational and absolute forms of address are applied differently across institutional settings, further underscoring that social deixis cannot be reduced to a single, universal set of rules.

Beyond traditional classifications, research on person forms and social relations demonstrates that deictic choices may also function as social indexical. Agha [11] and Siewierska [12] show that forms used to refer to or address interlocutors may reflect relationships involving power, solidarity, status, and social identity. This suggests that social deixis should be understood not simply as a category of linguistic expressions but as a means through which speakers position themselves socially in interaction.

Taken together, the theoretical and empirical literature indicates that social deixis should be viewed as a dynamic pragmatic resource rather than simply as a linguistic category. Although traditional studies provide a strong theoretical classification of social deixis, they provide less evidence concerning how EFL learners apply these forms during actual oral communication. This limitation is particularly relevant to the present study, which examines social deixis in relation to learners' communicative behavior within a specific educational and sociocultural context.

1.4 Social Deixis from a Pragmatic Perspective

A pragmatic perspective is essential to understanding social deixis because the meaning of socially marked expressions cannot be determined solely from their grammatical or lexical forms. Levinson [2], Mey [6], and Huang [5] all emphasize the importance of context in the interpretation of meaning. However, these approaches differ in emphasis. Levinson focuses primarily on the relationship between linguistic expressions and contextual information, whereas Mey places greater emphasis on language as social action. Together, these perspectives suggest that social deixis performs both a referential and an interpersonal function: it

identifies participants while simultaneously positioning them within social relationships.

This distinction is particularly important in EFL communication. A learner may know the literal meaning of expressions such as *Sir, Professor,* or *Doctor* but may still be uncertain about when their use is appropriate. Therefore, the central difficulty may not be linguistic knowledge itself but pragmatic judgement. Cohen [13] and Kasper and Rose [14], [15] provide further support for this argument by emphasizing that second-language learners must develop the ability to connect linguistic forms with social contexts and communicative purposes.

Nevertheless, previous research has shown that pragmatic development is not uniform. Learners' pragmatic choices may be influenced by their first language, previous learning experiences, opportunities for interaction, and awareness of cultural conventions. Kecskes [7] further argues that intercultural communication involves the interaction of different contextual assumptions. Consequently, EFL learners may interpret social relationships through cultural expectations that do not always correspond to English-speaking conventions.

The literature therefore reveals an important distinction between grammatical competence and pragmatic competence. While grammatical competence enables learners to produce structurally correct utterances, pragmatic competence enables them to evaluate whether those utterances are socially appropriate. This distinction is particularly relevant to social deixis because forms of address and politeness cannot be evaluated independently of factors such as power, familiarity, institutional roles, and cultural expectations. From the perspective of interlanguage pragmatics, the central concern is not only whether learners know particular linguistic forms but also how they acquire and use pragmatic knowledge as non-native speakers [16], [17]. This perspective strengthens the distinction between grammatical knowledge and contextually appropriate language use. Xiao et al. [18] provide direct empirical support for this view, showing that the development of interlanguage pragmatic markers is closely aligned with learners' evolving understanding of role relationships between interlocutors, rather than with grammatical development alone.

However, much of the existing theoretical literature explains how social deixis should function rather than investigating how learners actually manage these choices in spontaneous oral communication. This creates a need for empirical research that moves beyond the description of linguistic forms and examines learners' awareness and use of socially appropriate expressions in specific educational contexts. The present study addresses this issue by focusing on social deixis as it operates within EFL learners' oral communication.

1.5 Social Deixis in Relation to Oral Communication

The relationship between social deixis and oral communication extends beyond the correct use of linguistic forms. Masterson et al. [19] conceptualize oral communication as the exchange of ideas and information through spoken language, whereas pragmatic approaches emphasize that successful communication also depends on the ability to interpret and manage interpersonal relationships. Hymes [20] and Canale and Swain [21] provide the theoretical basis for this distinction by arguing that communicative competence involves not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic competence.

These perspectives are complementary because they explain why grammatically accurate communication may still be socially inappropriate. In oral interaction, speakers must make rapid decisions about forms of address, politeness, directness,

and levels of formality. Unlike written communication, oral interaction often provides limited time for planning or revising linguistic choices. Consequently, learners may rely on familiar expressions or transfer patterns from their first language when they are uncertain about the pragmatically appropriate form.

Research on EFL pragmatic competence supports this concern. Fareh et al. [22] found that Arab learners of English relied heavily on direct strategies when performing apologies, suggesting that learners may possess linguistic resources without fully developing the ability to adjust their language according to contextual and interpersonal factors. Abdulateef and Ali [23] similarly report that Arab EFL learners frequently transfer first-language politeness norms into English, occasionally producing face-threatening acts unintentionally, which points to pragmatic transfer as a further source of difficulty alongside limited strategy range. Similarly, Savić et al. [24] demonstrate that pragmatic development involves gradual changes in learners' ability to make contextually appropriate choices. These studies collectively suggest that pragmatic competence develops through experience and cannot be assumed to develop automatically alongside grammatical competence.

Research on instructed pragmatics also provides evidence that classroom instruction can support this development. Cohen [13] and Taguchi [25] emphasize the value of systematic attention to pragmatic features in second-language teaching. However, the existing literature has focused more extensively on speech acts such as requests and apologies than on social deixis as a distinct component of oral communication. As a result, there remains comparatively limited evidence concerning how learners select forms of address and other socially meaningful expressions during interaction. This limitation is particularly important in the Libyan EFL context. While studies conducted in other Arab and international contexts provide useful evidence concerning pragmatic competence, their findings cannot automatically be generalized to Libyan learners because sociocultural expectations concerning respect, hierarchy, familiarity, and forms of address may differ. The present study therefore contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between social deixis and oral communication within a specific Libyan EFL context. This need is reinforced by Daefous [26], whose descriptive account of pragmatic competence in Libyan EFL academic discourse highlights the same scarcity of context-specific evidence and calls for further research into how Libyan learners manage pragmatic choices in practice.

1.6 Politeness and Social Deixis in Oral Communication

Politeness and social deixis are closely connected because both involve the management of interpersonal relationships through language. However, they perform different functions. Social deixis primarily encodes information about relationships such as status, familiarity, distance, and institutional position, whereas politeness strategies enable speakers to manage the interpersonal consequences of their linguistic choices. Their relationship is therefore complementary: social deixis identifies the social dimensions of an interaction, while politeness provides strategies for responding appropriately to those dimensions.

Brown and Levinson's [27] politeness theory provides an influential explanation of this relationship through the concept of face, which builds directly on Goffman's [28] earlier account of face as a socially situated image that individuals seek to establish and protect during interaction. Their model suggests that speakers select strategies according to factors such as power, social distance, and the degree of imposition associated with an interaction. This framework is particularly relevant to

social deixis because the selection of titles, forms of address, and degrees of directness may reflect speakers' perceptions of these same social factors. Leech [29] offers a complementary account through a set of politeness maxims, including tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy, which similarly help explain why speakers moderate their linguistic choices according to the social relationship in play.

Nevertheless, later scholars have questioned the extent to which politeness can be explained through a universal model. Watts [30] argues that politeness is socially constructed and dependent on contextual expectations, while Spencer-Oatey [31] emphasizes the importance of culture and interpersonal relations. These perspectives do not necessarily reject Brown and Levinson's framework; rather, they suggest that its categories must be interpreted in relation to specific social and cultural contexts. This is particularly relevant to EFL communication, where learners may encounter differences between the politeness conventions of their first language and those associated with English. Culpeper [32] extends this discussion by examining impoliteness, arguing that many of the same social factors used to explain polite behavior — power, distance, and imposition — can equally account for language that is deliberately face-threatening, reinforcing the view that social deixis and politeness are two sides of the same interpersonal resource.

Recent empirical studies generally support the importance of social relationships in determining pragmatic choices, although they focus on different dimensions of interaction. Fatmah et al. [33] emphasize the relationship between social deixis, institutional hierarchy, and professional roles, whereas Maslucha et al. [34] focus more directly on politeness and face management in teacher–student interaction. Rahmi et al. [35] examine positive and negative politeness in formal university settings, while Wahyuni et al. [36] investigate politeness in online student–supervisor communication. Hidayah [37] similarly finds that speech acts and politeness strategies are closely interconnected in interpersonal communication, reinforcing the view that politeness cannot be examined independently of the broader speech-act context in which it occurs.

Although these studies differ in their settings and analytical focus, they reveal a common pattern: linguistic choices are strongly influenced by power, distance, familiarity, and institutional roles. At the same time, the differences between their findings suggest that pragmatic behavior cannot be understood independently of the particular interactional context. Politeness strategies that are appropriate in a formal university interaction may not function in the same way in peer communication or digital interaction. Rezki and Khaldi [38] support this point directly, showing that Algerian university students adapt their politeness strategies when moving from face-to-face to digital communication, which suggests that the medium of interaction is itself an important variable shaping social deictic and politeness choices.

Research in EFL classrooms further demonstrates that pragmatic competence can be influenced by instructional practices. Shen and Cheng [39] report that interactive oral activities can contribute to pragmatic development, whereas Wati et al. [40] emphasize the potential benefits of explicit instruction in politeness strategies. These findings support the argument that pragmatic competence is not simply acquired through exposure to grammatical structures but may require explicit opportunities to notice, practice, and evaluate socially appropriate language.

However, an important limitation in the existing literature is that many studies focus on particular speech acts or individual politeness strategies. Requests, apologies, and

indirectness have received considerable attention, whereas the specific relationship between social deixis and learners' oral communication has received comparatively less emphasis. Moreover, much of the available research has been conducted in Asian, European, and other Arab educational contexts.

Consequently, there remains a need to investigate how EFL learners use and understand social deictic expressions within their own sociocultural environment. This gap is particularly relevant to Libya, where social relationships, institutional hierarchy, and cultural expectations concerning respect may influence learners' choices of forms of address and politeness strategies. The present study therefore extends previous research by examining social deixis not merely as a theoretical category but as a practical component of oral communication among EFL learners in the Libyan context.

1.7 Synthesis of the Literature and Research Gap

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that social deixis is an important pragmatic resource through which speakers express social status, familiarity, respect, and institutional relationships. The literature also shows that successful oral communication requires more than grammatical accuracy, as learners must make contextually appropriate choices in relation to their interlocutors and communicative settings. Previous research has examined politeness strategies, speech acts, forms of address, and pragmatic competence in a variety of EFL contexts. However, these areas have often been investigated separately. Comparatively limited attention has been given to the specific relationship between social deixis and oral communication among EFL learners. Furthermore, despite the growing body of research on pragmatic competence in international and Arab contexts, evidence from Libya remains limited. The present study addresses this gap by examining social deixis as a practical component of oral communication among EFL learners within the Libyan educational and sociocultural context.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used a descriptive mixed-methods approach to look at the link between social deixis and politeness techniques in oral communication among Libyan EFL undergraduate students. The quantitative component measured the frequency of politeness strategy use and participants' opinions toward forms of address, whereas the qualitative component gave further information about students' perceptions of politeness and the function of social deixis in communication. Combining the two methodologies allowed the researcher to gain a thorough insight of students' communicative behavior and attitudes.

2.1. Research Design

The study used a descriptive mixed-methods survey design. This methodology was found to be appropriate because it allows researchers to describe, analyze, and interpret participants' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions as they naturally occur. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended questions to obtain quantitative data and open-ended questions to gain qualitative information about students' attitudes toward politeness and social deixis in oral communication. The study was cross-sectional in nature, with data gathered from participants at a specific moment in time. This methodology allowed the researcher to investigate the present use of politeness techniques and social deictic expressions among Libyan EFL students, as well as how social characteristics such as age, authority, and status influence language use in daily interactions.

2.2. Population and Sample

The subjects of the research consisted of undergraduate students from the English Language Department at Fezzan University's Faculty of Education. These individuals were chosen because they frequently communicate orally in academic and social settings where politeness and acceptable forms of address are expected. The study involved 35 undergraduate students. Participants were chosen through convenient sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate. The sample was deemed appropriate for investigating students' awareness and application of politeness tactics and social deixis in oral communication.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher based on the literature on politeness strategies and social deixis. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

1. **Politeness Strategy Usage:** This section included Likert-scale statements measuring the frequency with which participants use politeness strategies such as polite expressions and indirect requests during communication.
2. **Social Deixis and Communication Situations:** This section examined participants' use of titles, honorifics, and forms of address as well as their responses to different communication situations involving teachers, elders, and peers.
3. **Open-ended Questions:** This section allowed participants to express their opinions regarding the importance of politeness in oral communication and to provide examples from their own experiences where social deixis was used to show respect.

The questionnaire was administered to the participants during the data collection period, and all responses were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

2.4. Validity and Reliability

The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert review. Two experts in English language teaching and applied linguistics reviewed the questionnaire to assess the clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment of the items with the objectives of the study. Their comments and suggestions were considered before the final administration of the questionnaire.

The reliability of the Likert-scale sections was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire demonstrated an acceptable level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.675$.

3. Results and Discussion

The quantitative data collected from the closed-ended questionnaire items were examined using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These statistical measures were used to determine patterns and trends in participants' usage of politeness techniques and social deictic expressions. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions. Participants' comments were carefully analyzed, grouped into common themes, and interpreted to uncover recurring notions about politeness, respect, social rank, and modes of address. The qualitative insights were then used to supplement and improve the quantitative outcomes.

It should be noted that the relationship between social deixis and politeness use referred to throughout this study was examined through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis rather than inferential statistical procedures such as correlation or regression analysis. The findings therefore describe patterns of co-occurrence and association rather than statistically test the strength or significance of a relationship

between the two variables. Future research is encouraged to employ correlational or other inferential techniques, ideally with a larger sample, to examine this relationship quantitatively.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Politeness Strategy Usage among study group

study group	Study group					Mean ±STD	Response
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		
I use Polite expression in conversation	22(62.9%)	6(17.1%)	6(17.1%)	1(2.9%)	0	4.40±0.88	Always
I use Polites expression commands and prefer indirect requests	12(34.3%)	16(45.7%)	4(11.4%)	3(8.6%)	0	4.06±0.91	Often
I use politeness strategies more when talking to teachers \ elders than when talking to friends	21(60.0%)	6(17.1%)	5(14.3%)	2(5.7%)	1(2.9%)	4.26±1.09	Always
Total mean score						4.24±0.96	High

Table 1 presents the participants' use of politeness strategies in oral communication. The overall mean score was 4.24 ± 0.96**,** indicating a high level of politeness strategy usage among the study group. The first statement, *"I use polite expressions in conversation,"* obtained the highest mean score **(**4.40 ± 0.88**),** with 62.9% of the students reporting that they **always** use polite expressions and 17.1% indicating that they often do so. Only 2.9% reported using them rarely, while none selected "never." This finding suggests that the majority of students have developed a strong tendency to employ polite language during everyday interactions, reflecting positive communicative behavior and awareness of social etiquette. Regarding the second statement, *"I use polite expression commands and prefer indirect requests,"* the mean score was 4.06 ± 0.91**,** corresponding to the response category "Often." Nearly half of the participants (45.7%**)** reported often preferring indirect requests, while 34.3% indicated that they always do so. This result demonstrates that students generally recognize the importance of indirectness as a politeness strategy, although its use is slightly less frequent than the use of general polite expressions. The preference for indirect requests may indicate sensitivity to the listener's feelings and an effort to reduce potential face-threatening acts during communication.

The third statement, "I use politeness strategies more when talking to teachers or elders than when talking to friends," achieved a mean score of 4.26 ± 1.09, classified as **"Always."** Approximately 60.0% of respondents reported always adopting greater politeness when addressing teachers and elders, while 17.1% selected often. This finding indicates that students are aware of social hierarchy and adjust their language according to the status and age of their interlocutors. Such behavior reflects the influence of cultural norms that emphasize respect toward authority figures and older individuals.

Overall, the results indicate that the participants demonstrate a high level of awareness and application of politeness strategies in oral communication. The findings suggest that students not only use polite expressions regularly but also adapt their communicative behavior according to social relationships and contextual factors, which contributes to more effective and socially appropriate interactions

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Address and Honorific Usage among study group

	Strongly agree	Agree	Netural	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean ±STD	Response
I pay attention to the titles when addressing people	20(57.1%)	10(28.6%)	4(11.4%)	0	1(2.9%)	4.37±0.91	Strongly agree
I use honorifics or polite forms depending on the social status of the persons I `m speaking to	8(22.9%)	15(42.9%)	7(20%)	4(11.4%)	1(2.9%)	3.71±1.05	Agree
In oral communication, I change the way I address people based on age or authority	7(20%)	10(28.6%)	12(34.3%)	5(14.3%)	0	3.56±0.99	Agree + Netural
Total mean score						3.88± 0.98	Agree

Table 2 examines students' use of address forms and honorific expressions during communication. The overall mean score was 3.88 ± 0.98, indicating that participants generally agree that they pay attention to address forms and honorific usage in their interactions.

The first statement, "I pay attention to the titles when addressing people," recorded the highest mean score (4.37 ± 0.91), corresponding to "Strongly Agree." More than half of the participants (57.1%) strongly agreed with the statement, while 28.6% agreed. This finding demonstrates that students recognize the importance of using appropriate titles when addressing others, especially in formal settings. Such awareness contributes to respectful communication and reflects an understanding of social conventions.

For the second statement, "I use honorifics or polite forms depending on the social status of the persons I am speaking to," the mean score was 3.71 ± 1.05, indicating agreement among participants. Approximately 65.2% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they modify their language according to the social status of their interlocutors. This suggests that students are sensitive to social differences and understand the role of honorific language in expressing respect and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships.

The third statement, "In oral communication, I change the way I address people based on age or authority," obtained the lowest mean score (3.56 ± 0.99). Although the result falls within the "Agree" category, a substantial proportion of respondents (34.3%) selected the neutral option. This may indicate that some students do not consistently adjust their forms of address according to age or authority, possibly because of increasing informality in modern communication or varying personal beliefs regarding social hierarchy.

In general, the findings reveal that students possess a relatively positive awareness of address forms and honorific usage. They particularly emphasize the use of proper titles, while showing moderate agreement regarding adapting their language to age, authority, and social status. These results suggest that students understand the social significance of respectful forms of address, although the degree of adaptation may vary across communicative contexts.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Students' Responses to Appropriate Communication Situations

Statements	Frequency	Percentages
When I borrow a pen from my teacher, I say		
Give me a pen	2	5.7%
Could you lend me a pen please?	32	91.4%
Hey I need a pen	1	2.9%
When I meet an older profession in the hallway, I say		
Hello, sir	30	85.7%
Hey, what`s up	4	11.4%
Hi, prof. Ahmed, how are you today	1	2.9%
When I`m asking my classmate to lower their voice, I say		
Shut up , I`m studying	1	2.9%
Please, could you lower your voice?	31	88.5%
Be quite	3	8.6%

Table 3 assesses students' ability to select appropriate expressions in different communication situations. The findings indicate that participants report a high level of awareness of polite language use, although selecting a polite option on a questionnaire item does not, by itself, establish actual pragmatic competence in spontaneous oral communication.

In the first situation, "When I borrow a pen from my teacher," the overwhelming majority of participants **(**91.4%**)** selected the polite request, "Could you lend me a pen please?" Only 5.7% chose the direct expression "Give me a pen," while 2.9% selected the informal phrase "Hey, I need a pen." This result demonstrates that most students understand the importance of using respectful and indirect language when communicating with teachers. The high preference for the polite request reflects awareness of appropriate classroom etiquette and power relations.

In the second situation, "When I meet an older professor in the hallway**,"** 85.7% of respondents chose the respectful greeting "Hello, sir." By contrast, 11.4% selected the informal greeting "Hey, what's up?" and only 2.9% opted for "Hi, Prof. Ahmed, how are you today?" These findings suggest that most students recognize the need for respectful greetings when addressing senior academic staff. The preference for formal greetings reflects cultural norms that value respect for authority and seniority.

The third situation, "When I'm asking my classmate to lower their voice," revealed that 88.5% selected the polite expression "Please, could you lower your voice?" Only 2.9% chose the impolite command "Shut up, I'm studying," while 8.6% selected the direct command "Be quiet." This result indicates that students generally prefer polite and cooperative language even when making requests to peers. Such behavior reflects awareness of interpersonal politeness and the importance of maintaining positive social relationships.

Overall, the results of Table 3 suggest that students report a strong awareness of appropriate communication practices across various social situations. The predominance of polite and respectful responses suggests that participants recognize and endorse politeness principles, although since this is self-reported questionnaire data rather than observation of actual oral interaction, it cannot by itself confirm that students apply these principles competently in real-life communication. These findings support the results of Tables (1) and (2), which showed a generally high level of politeness strategy usage and awareness of appropriate forms of address.

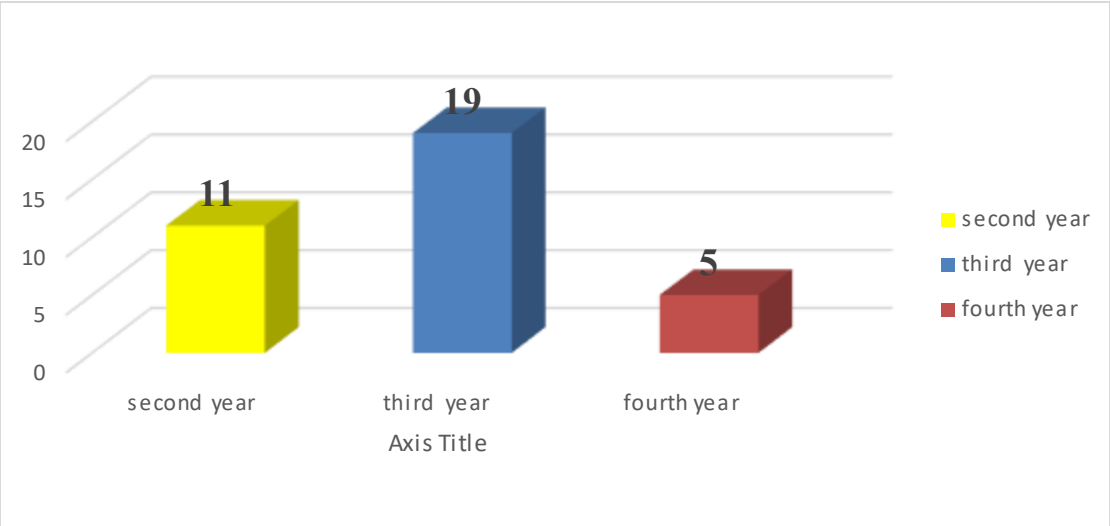


Figure (I) Distribution of Students According to Their Academic Year of Study (N = 35)

3.1 Research Question One: To what extent do Libyan EFL students use politeness strategies in everyday oral communication?

The findings of the current study demonstrated that participants exhibited a high level of politeness awareness and respectful communication behavior. The overall mean score for politeness strategy usage was high (4.24 ± 0.96), indicating frequent use of polite expressions and indirect requests during communication. This finding is consistent with the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson [27], who argued that speakers employ politeness strategies to maintain social harmony and reduce interpersonal conflict. The highest mean score was observed for the statement regarding the use of polite expressions in conversation (4.40 ± 0.88). This result is supported by Rahmi et al. [35], who found that university students frequently employ positive and negative politeness strategies when communicating with lecturers and academic staff, particularly in formal educational settings. The authors concluded that politeness contributes significantly to effective communication and strengthens interpersonal relationships. The open-ended responses further support these findings. Participants explained that politeness is important because it promotes mutual respect, helps maintain smooth and peaceful conversations, strengthens social relationships, and reduces misunderstandings and conflicts. These qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results and highlight students' awareness of the social value of polite communication.

3.2 Research Question Two: How do students use titles, honorifics, and forms of address when speaking to people of different social status?

The present study revealed that participants generally agreed with the use of appropriate address forms and honorific expressions (3.88 ± 0.98). The highest mean score within this domain was related to paying attention to titles when addressing others (4.37 ± 0.91). This finding is consistent with sociolinguistic studies showing that titles and honorific expressions function as markers of respect, professionalism, and social awareness. Open-ended responses provided additional evidence. Many participants reported using formal titles such as “Mr.,” “Miss,” “Doctor,” and “Sir” when addressing lecturers or individuals with higher social or professional status. These responses demonstrate that students recognize the importance of social deixis in expressing respect and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships.

3.3 Research Question Three: Do students modify their language when speaking to teachers, elders, or classmates?

Participants reported frequent use of politeness strategies when communicating with teachers and elders (4.26 ± 1.09). This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Al-Natour and Al-Yousef [10], which reported that Jordanian and Omani students commonly use positive politeness strategies when interacting with authority figures and older individuals. The researchers emphasized that cultural values and social norms strongly influence respectful communication behavior in Arab societies. Furthermore, the finding that students modify their language according to social status and authority is supported by previous research demonstrating that pragmatic competence involves the ability to adapt speech appropriately across different social contexts [37]. The author reported that students with stronger pragmatic competence are more capable of selecting suitable linguistic forms depending on interpersonal relationships and situational demands. The open-ended responses also indicate that participants view politeness as particularly important in formal situations, such as speaking with lecturers or people in higher positions. This suggests that social hierarchy and age influence language choices among Libyan EFL students.

3.4. Research Question Four: What types of polite expressions and indirect requests are most commonly used by students?

Regarding practical communication situations, the majority of participants selected the politest responses when communicating with teachers, professionals, and classmates. More than 90% preferred the expression "Could you lend me a pen please?" when requesting a pen from a teacher. This finding agrees with studies investigating request strategies among university students, which found that indirect requests and courteous expressions are generally perceived as more socially acceptable and respectful than direct commands [36]. Similarly, most participants chose polite expressions such as "Please, could you lower your voice?" rather than direct commands when addressing classmates. These findings indicate a clear preference for indirect and respectful language forms in everyday communication.

3.5 Research Question Five: How do students perceive the importance of politeness and social deixis in communication?

The open-ended responses revealed that students perceive politeness as essential for maintaining respectful and effective communication. Participants associated politeness with mutual respect, friendly interaction, conflict avoidance, and positive social relationships. Several respondents also emphasized the role of social deixis, noting that the use of titles, honorifics, and polite forms of address is important when interacting with teachers, elders, and individuals of higher status. The high percentage of participants selecting respectful greetings when meeting older professionals also reflects the influence of cultural norms emphasizing respect toward elders and authority figures. Similar findings have been reported in regional studies conducted in Arab educational settings, where respectful greetings and honorific forms remain important components of social interaction [10].Although the results generally reflected positive communication practices, the relatively lower mean score regarding changing forms of address according to age or authority (3.56 ± 0.99) may indicate the growing influence of informal communication styles among younger generations. Recent studies examining digital communication among university students reported increasing use of informal language and reduced reliance on traditional honorific expressions, particularly in online communication environments [38]. These changes have been attributed to globalization, social

media exposure, and evolving interpersonal communication patterns among young adults.

3.6 Overall Discussion

Overall, the findings of the present study are consistent with literature demonstrating that politeness strategies, respectful forms of address, and pragmatic competence remain essential elements of effective interpersonal communication. The high mean scores observed across the study domains suggest that participants report satisfactory awareness of politeness norms and of the importance of adapting language according to social context, age, authority, and interpersonal relationships; because this awareness was measured through self-report rather than observed oral performance, it should be interpreted as reported perception rather than demonstrated communicative competence. These findings support previous evidence indicating that respectful communication contributes positively to academic success, professional development, and social harmony [27], [35], [37]. In the Libyan EFL context, the findings suggest that students' use of politeness strategies is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by cultural values that emphasize respect for elders, teachers, and authority figures. The frequent use of polite expressions, formal greetings, and honorific titles reflects broader social norms within Libyan society, where respectful communication is considered an important aspect of interpersonal relationships.

3.7 Findings

The findings of the study indicate that Libyan EFL students demonstrate a relatively high awareness and use of politeness strategies in oral communication. The quantitative results revealed that most participants regularly use polite expressions during conversations and tend to prefer indirect requests rather than direct commands. This suggests that students recognize the importance of maintaining respectful and socially appropriate interactions. The findings also showed that participants are more likely to employ politeness strategies when communicating with teachers, elders, and individuals in positions of authority than when interacting with friends, reflecting the influence of social hierarchy and age on language use.

The results further revealed that participants generally pay attention to forms of address and honorific expressions. Most students reported using appropriate titles such as "Mr.", "Miss", "Doctor", and "Sir" when addressing lecturers and other respected individuals. The situational-response items supported these findings, as the majority of participants selected polite and respectful expressions in different communication contexts, such as borrowing a pen from a teacher, greeting an older professor, or requesting a classmate to lower their voice.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions provided additional insights into students' perceptions of politeness and social deixis. Participants emphasized that politeness is important because it promotes mutual respect, strengthens social relationships, facilitates effective communication, and helps prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. Many students associated politeness with creating a friendly and cooperative atmosphere in conversations. Others highlighted its importance in formal educational settings where respect for teachers and authority figures is expected.

Regarding social deixis, participants demonstrated a clear understanding of its role in expressing respect and maintaining appropriate social relationships. Their responses showed that the use of titles, honorifics, polite expressions, and respectful listening behaviors are considered important indicators of respect in Libyan society. Overall, the findings suggest that Libyan EFL students possess both theoretical

awareness and practical understanding of politeness strategies and social deixis, and that these linguistic features play a significant role in shaping their communication behavior.

3.8 Conclusion

This study investigated the use of politeness strategies and social deixis among Libyan EFL students in oral communication. The findings revealed that participants generally demonstrate a high level of awareness of polite language use and recognize the importance of respectful communication in both academic and social contexts. Most students reported using polite expressions, indirect requests, and appropriate forms of address, particularly when interacting with teachers, elders, and individuals of higher social status. The analysis of the open-ended responses further confirmed that participants view politeness as an essential component of effective communication. They believe that politeness contributes to mutual respect, strengthens interpersonal relationships, promotes cooperation, and minimizes misunderstandings and conflicts. The responses also demonstrated that students understand the significance of social deixis through their use of titles, honorifics, and other respectful linguistic forms. Although the findings indicate a generally positive awareness of politeness and social deixis, some variation was observed in the extent to which students adapt their language according to age and authority. Nevertheless, the overall results suggest that Libyan EFL students are conscious of the social and cultural dimensions of communication and actively employ politeness strategies to maintain harmonious and respectful interactions. Therefore, politeness and social deixis can be considered important components of communicative competence that deserve greater attention in EFL teaching and learning contexts.

3.9 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. EFL instructors should integrate pragmatic competence, including politeness strategies, social deixis, and forms of address, into English language teaching to enhance students' communicative competence.
2. Classroom activities such as role-plays, simulations, group discussions, and real-life communication tasks should be used to provide students with opportunities to practice polite language in various social and cultural contexts.
3. English language curricula should place greater emphasis on the relationship between language, culture, and social interaction to help students understand how politeness varies according to context, status, age, and social relationships.
4. Teachers should raise students' awareness of the importance of respectful communication in both academic and professional environments by providing authentic examples of polite and impolite language use.
5. Educational institutions should encourage the development of positive communication skills that promote mutual respect, cooperation, and intercultural understanding among students.
6. Future research should investigate politeness strategies and social deixis among larger samples of Libyan EFL learners from different universities and educational levels. Comparative studies may also examine gender differences, regional variations, or the influence of cultural factors on politeness behavior

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Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability

- Yes ☒
- No ☐

Authors' Contributions

N.	Author Name and Emai and ORCID link	Study Conception / Idea	Data Collection or Contribution to Data Collection	Contribution to Previous Studies / Literature Review	Study Methodology	Conducting Analyses (Practical Aspect)	Data Analysis	Interpretation and Discussion of Results	Approval of Final Version
1	Hamid Salih Omar-E.ham.abakar@fezzanu.edu.ly -https: orcid.org\0009-0007-31149763	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√