Journal Website:
http://www.fhss.uaeu.ac.ae/journal/journal.htm
Naguib Mahfouz’s The Thief and the Dogs:  
A Pragmalinguistic Analysis

Ayid Sharyan  
Department of English, Faculty of Education – Sana’a  
Sana’a University

Abstract  
This research paper follows an interdisciplinary approach in analysing an Arabic literary text from a pragmalinguistic perspective to reveal insights a universal phenomenon (i.e. politeness strategies, and their unwritten conventions) so as to promote tolerance and a better understanding of cross-cultural settings. Such a thematic-pragmatic study takes up the issue of language in action or the characters’ manipulation of language to achieve their own aims and goals. Their uncertainty markers, for instance, are signs of politeness to avoid commitment. The characters, like their counterparts in life, tend to mitigate their directness and uphold truthfulness through the use of vague expressions. The focus here is on several pragmatic views that can serve as a basis for analysing and describing politeness in Arabic in terms of speaker, language, hearer and situation. Power strategies, politeness strategies and the marked choices made by participants are studied, analysed and compared.
ملخص

الدكتور/ عايض شريان
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية التربية
جامعة صنعاء

هـذه الدراسة (القصة والكلاب لنجيب محفوظ: تحليل لغوي؟ برامدياتي) تنقسم إلى ثلاثة أجزاء، بدأت في الفصل المقدم، والكتابة النسبية (1) البرمجات نسبيتية (القصة) والنصوص الأدبية، (2) رواية اللص والكلاب، (3) خصائص طرق الحوار في اللص والكلاب.

البرمجات نسبيتية كأسلوب لدراسة الحوار (هنا حوار الشخصيات الروائية) هو أسلوب جديد في الدراسات الأسلوبية اللغوية وبالذات على نصوص أدبية عربية، حتى يمكن استخدام هذا المنهج كوسيلة بحث، لا بد من عرض لأدب دباب هذا الأسلوب (الجزء الأول).

وأما أن دراسة الحوار الروائي يحتاج إلى معرفة الجو العام للنص الأدبي، فالدراسة تقدم الجو العام لرواية اللص والكلاب (الجزء الثاني)، الجزء الثالث من الدراسة يتناول النظرية البرمجاتية في حوار الشخصيات الرئيسية في رواية اللص والكلاب عن طريق أخذ عينات من الحوار ذا الصلة البرمجاتية في الرواية كتطبيق لهذه النظرية على اللغة العربية. الأمثلة المختارة تبين الأشكال المختلفة التي تستخدمها الشخصيات لتحقيق ما تريد ويفتقد منها المتكلم في صبيغة رسالته وتحفظ على ماهوج وإيقاف العلاقة مع الشخص الآخر في الحوار (المخاطب) دون ضرر. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الشخصيات الروائية في اللص والكلاب تستعمل أسلوبات متناغمة بالحوار. هذه الأسلوب بشكل غير مباشر تبين الأفكار والدُوافع للمتحدث، يتضح أن هناك أسلوب ذات علاقة بالمكانة الاجتماعية، الاقتصادية، السياسية...

الخ. هذه المكانة تتنتج للشخصيات المشتركة في الحوار استخدام أسلوبات مختلفة لتفهم أفكارها ودُوافعها من المخاطب، وهذا قد يكون لأسباب نفسية أو اجتماعية عند المتحدث. وبقدر ما يكون المتحدث قادر على استعمال الأسلوب البرمجاتي المناسب للأماكن والمخاطر (السياق)، يستطيع تحقيق ما يريد من مستقبل الرسالة.
Introduction

This study analyses Naguib Mahfouz’s novel *al liss wal kilab* (1961; trans. *The Thief and The Dogs*) from a pragmalinguistic perspective, with special reference to the unwritten conventions of politeness features. The orientation of examining the novel is bi-focal: thematic and pragmatic. The politeness and thematic implications of the novel are realised through the interactions and speech acts of the fictional characters. As a tool of enquiry and methodology of literary interpretation, pragmatics (particularly politeness strategies as a universal phenomenon) offers a fresh approach and yields insightful results. The politeness Principle addresses relational goals, serving primarily "to reduce friction in personal interaction" (Lakoff, 1989: 64). The most comprehensive study of the Politeness Principle was the one that was formulated by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983). It relates to how language expresses social distance between the speakers in their different role relationships. It also deals with face-work, reflecting how people in different speech communities attempt to establish, maintain, and save face during conversation. Languages differ in how they express politeness. Politeness markers differ in formal as opposed to colloquial speech. Brown and Levinson (1987) also distinguish between positive politeness strategies (those that show the closeness, intimacy, and rapport between speaker and hearer) and negative politeness strategies (those that indicate the social distance between speaker and hearer).

The validity of politeness has been emphasized by a number of scholars (Adams, 1985; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Sell, 1991; Havercate, 1994; Patil 1996; Sharyan 2000; Sharyan 2002). To give examples, Brown & Gilman (1989) analyse four major tragedies of Shakespeare, using politeness theory as a tool for interpretation. Patil (1996) argues that polite and impolite behaviour transcends its immediate context and generates various possibilities of literary interpretation. Politeness strategies, he argues, can be understood through video-cassettes prepared out of real life situations, that will directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly comment upon the real, personal, social, or cultural life situations. The linguistic behaviour or polite/ impolite strategy can also be thoroughly understood through the dialogic discourse employed in plays, novels, and short stories. On the other hand, politeness strategies (e.g. greetings, apologies, offerings, suggestions, requests, complaints,
refusals, disagreements, corrections, thanking, compliments) can be used as a parameter of analysis. Novelists, including Mahfouz, use and exploit this knowledge of tacit or unwritten conventions in building their characters’ dialogues. The realisation of this universal phenomenon differs from culture to culture and from language to language. The language of literature, therefore, cannot be understood without the appreciation of how ordinary language works to convey the “mock reality” of fiction. This underscores the importance of the pragmatic bearings to studying literature.

The choice of the novel is, thus, justified by pointing out how each selected scene sheds light on different aspects of the characters’ personalities. The selected dialogues between intimate and non-intimate characters of unequal power relations explain the linguistic strategies by which speakers achieve power in situations of conflict. The segments chosen from the text aim at exploring the following dimensions:

1. How does Mahfouz convey a character's power through his or her use of language in conversation?
2. To what extent do powerful characters use politeness strategies to mitigate Face-Threatening Act/s (FTAs) and enhance their image?
3. To what extent does Mahfouz portray characters as failing to achieve power in interaction?

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) is used and kept in mind while analysing the novel under discussion. Brown and Levinson (1987) have proposed that POWER (P), DISTANCE (d), and the RANKED EXTREMITY (r) of a face-threatening act (FTA) are the universal determinants of politeness levels in dyadic discourse. The linguistic strategies that are typical of powerful interlocutors are advice, bold imperatives, challenges, disapprovals and interruptions. Other strategies (e.g. marked stylistic choices, new topics, questions and silence, speech acts of introducing and accepting gifts) are also analysed while dealing with the selected segments. This conversational analysis is to discover the characteristics of the speakers’ speech and how conversion is used. This includes how speakers decide when to speak (turn-taking), and the functions of conversation in establishing roles, and communicating politeness or intimacy. In the acts of communication, there are role relationships which influence the way people speak to each other. One of
the speakers may have a role which has a higher status (permanent or temporary) than the other/s, e.g. father-son, school principal-teacher, teacher-student, lieutenant-sergeant, police officer-convict, bank manager-loan seeker.

Since literature in general, and fiction in particular, have received scant critical attention from the point of view of pragmatics, this study hopes to break new ground as Mahfouz has never been studied before from the pragmatic perspective. Existing politeness theories (e.g. Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983) are applied to the speech data or selected dialogues from al liss wal kilab. The study attempts a fresh approach towards the interpretation of the interpersonal dialogue between characters. The research also hopes to contribute to the growing body of research on the function of talk in action and the study of literary pragmatics.

The thematic-pragmatic analysis of a literary text exploiting politeness provides a novel point of entry for investigating the relationships between characters' language behaviour driven by psychological motives. Brown (1989) is of the opinion that politeness theory is a psychological theory. It deals with the individual, rather than the society as a whole. Moa (1996) supports this view. This is a proof, for him, of the difference between the way a person looks at himself in the eyes of the society and the way he looks at himself in his own eyes as an individual.

This analysis will reflect the characters' belief systems and social structures. It particularly emphasises the processes involved in the manipulation, development and violation of the phenomenon of politeness. So the study considers a number of socio-cultural factors that might affect politeness use as a whole with reference to status, power, role, distance, etc. Although some work has been done on English and Arabic pragmatics, but not much is available on politeness features in Arabic literature. This very fact justifies the need for investigating this issue that the study has taken up.

A study of this type is essential for a better understanding of language and cultural parameters influencing the literary consciousness and also the means and methods of literary interpretation. The theoretical orientation of this study is based on the assumption that language can be
better understood and analysed in terms of its relationship with a number of situational (themes and characters) and socio-cultural factors. Several pragmatic views will be focussed on to serve as a basis for analysing and describing politeness in Arabic in terms of who speaks what language to whom and when, i.e. in terms of speaker, language, hearer and situation.

I. Pragmatics and Literary Texts

The choice of pragmatics as a lens to examine a literary text is justified by the fact that this area is used by scholars who are interested in the question of meaning, rather than in other levels of language, e.g. phonetics, phonology, or syntax. Pragmatics is context-dependent unlike other levels of language in the organisation of a text, which Carter et al (1990: 9) summarises, as phonology (sounds), vocabulary (words), grammar (phrases, and clauses), discourse (relations between sentences; paragraphs; speaking turns) and context (relations between participants in a context). To study the organisation of a literary text (e.g. the selected novel) from the pragmatic viewpoint, there is a need to observe the contextual factors, rather than the structural layers. Pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of utterances rather than sentences or propositions which lie within the area of semantics. Pragmalinguistics is a recent use for pragmatics in many linguistic circles against what was seen as a narrow pen-cum-paper Chomskyian approach to the problems of language. Pragmatics is concerned with meaning that comes from the contextual and interpersonal situation which includes speaker and listener. An utterance like “Can you drive a car?” will have different meanings if the context and participants vary. If these words are spoken by a girl to a young man in a pub or by a driver to his passenger when taken suddenly ill, they have different implications and interpretations. Pragmalinguistics thus does not ask about “What does X mean?” but “What do you mean by X?” It is interested in the functions, intentions, goals and effects of language use in specific social situations, (Wales 1989). According to McArthur (1992), pragmatics refers to “a branch of linguistics which originally examines the problem of how listeners uncover speakers' intentions”. It studies the “speaker’s meaning” as opposed to the linguistic meaning. Pragmatics (the relations of signs to meaning) differs from syntax (the relations of signs to one another), and semantics (the relations of signs to objects). To take an utterance on its face value without looking
into the intention of the speaker is to misunderstand the proper use of language. An utterance like “I am running short of money and the bank is on holiday today” might need to be interpreted as “Lend me some money till the bank is open”. It surely is not a statement without a meaning behind it. Concepts like the cooperative principle, the politeness principle, power, status, role, turn-taking, etc are an integral part of pragmatics.

Literary pragmatics is part of pragmalinguistics; it has come into prominence in literary studies as argued in the 1980s (by Adams, 1985; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Sell, 1991; Haverkate, 1994; Patil 1996; Sharyan, 2000; Sharyan 2002). Marked developments then took place in the field of linguistic pragmatics, in speech act theory, text linguistics and also in stylistics. These studies were concerned with Literature as discourse; they focussed on its interactional and social context and also on its reception by the reader. Unlike literary semantics, which studies the meaning of a literary text on the levels of sound, syntax and lexis, literary pragmatics looks at the linguistic features of texts that arise from the real interpersonal relationships between author, text and reader in real socio-cultural contexts. Such features as deixis, modality, mutual knowledge, presupposition, politeness, etc. are scrutinised, (Wales, 1989; and Asher, 1994). Utilizing literary pragmatics as a tool of analysis, this study focuses on politeness features in the novel under discussion.

From the politeness and pragmatic points of view, a literary work exploits language in use, which calls for some competence to be understood. An understanding of what literature communicates involves an understanding of how it communicates. This study exploits this need and builds on it. From the viewpoint of context, the study of literary texts (till recently) has been confined to the lexical, phonological and syntactic properties, i.e. the prescriptive meaning of words. Consequently, the socio-psychological and cultural dimensions of linguistic strategies were deprived of their fuller exploitation. This kind of studies ends up in mathematical processes rather than in interpretation. Some studies now turn to the context and describe not only what is present in the text but also the social, cultural, literary or linguistic aspects that the text implies.

The study takes for granted that language, and hence the language of literature, is a useful mirror of social attitudes of real or fictional characters. The attitudes of speaker and hearer will be revealed through their use of language, showing whether relations are smooth or tense. A
proper use of language leads to getting across very easily and hence to using the right approach. Lyons (1995: 252) argues that politeness is but one aspect of the dimensions of cultural variation which regulates the use of allegedly basic speech acts.

Politeness does not manifest itself in the same way in all societies. Lyons (1995: 291) is of the opinion that “language behaviour” is a culture-dependent activity and what constitutes sincerity and politeness may differ from one society to another. Lyons (1995: 300) suggests that “human interaction is governed by a set of culturally determined conventions”. Everyone needs to know how to behave linguistically and culturally, i.e. how to act according to the rules of a certain community. Politeness as a culture-specific property has been the issue of recent studies. The way in which politeness is differently interpreted in (say) Chinese, Indian, American, or Arab societies, would lead us to realise that pragmatic descriptions ultimately have to be relative to specific social conditions. It is said that some societies (Poles, Russians) are never polite like other Europeans (Leech, 1983: 10). The Chinese and the Indians have different concepts of politeness (Mao, 1994 and Patil, 1994). In the criteria of a Western, a person who does not have some knowledge of their concept of politeness may seem lacking in polite behaviour. So politeness is a culture-specific concept. People thus exploit politeness differently in different societies and even between men and women in the same society (Coates, 1996).

The study assumes “politeness strategies” as a status-dependent and context-dependent concept in linguistic pragmatics. The affinity between real-life language and language in fiction is so strong since real-life language is employed in both. The social status (power) of a character or the context in which politeness operates determines the sort of politeness strategies employed. It also reflects the role relationships or power relations between characters. Therefore, politeness strategies are used as a lens for taking a close look at the role relationships between characters, and hence their unique employment in Mahfouz’s *al liss wal kilab*.

Characters adhere to shared assumptions that mark social power and social distance differentials in their interactions. Hence a character of high social position is bound to behave differently from the one whose position is low. This shows how linguistic usage is linked with social relationships. In any emerging speech event, or conversational interaction,
we normally mitigate disagreements and requests, for example. The natural language modes explain how, we as readers, arrive at varying interpretations of literary dialogue. If those abstract conventions of language use are true, it goes without saying that both speaker and hearer take them into account while indulging in dialogic exchanges. And hence the fictional characters, as reflecting real language and real people, employ those conventions of politeness strategies while interacting or participating in any speech event.

The focus of the study is the connotation, implication, and implementation of the politeness mechanisms, which are in-built in the dialogues of characters in al liss wal kilab. This is to go beyond the mechanical details of the Chomskyan rule-governed grammar. This is primarily to explore the pragmatic tools and their sequencing of meaning into the thematic texture of the novel. This thematic-pragmatic approach can only supply supporting evidence for the avant-garde judgements in the vast realm of literary criticism.

II. The Thief and the Dogs

Before presenting the pragmatics analysis of al- liss wal kilab (1961; trans. The Thief and the Dogs), one needs to introduce Mahfouz and the selected novel to establish a point of reference. Naguib Mahfouz, a master storyteller, is the Nobel Prize-winner of 1988 who provides a voice (a stable signifier) for his Arabic culture. He holds a massive readership all over the world. He has played an important role in the development of the modern Arabic novel. Throughout a long career he has indeed laid the groundwork for the emergence of this most taxing genre and then proceeded to experiment with a number of forms and techniques. Owing to more than 30 novels to his name and 13 collections of short stories, he can claim the title of the best-known and most studious Arab novelist in the world (El-Enany: 1993).

Mahfouz wrote in the historic, realistic, naturalistic and symbolic modes respectively (Sharyan 2000). The third phase to which The Thief and the Dogs belongs is characterised by a concern for the inner dimension of his fictional characters. He then started to write shorter, faster-paced, psychological novels with stream of consciousness narratives (free indirect speech) and script-like dialogue. Rather than presenting a full colourful picture of the society as in the realistic novels,
he now concentrated on the inner workings of the individual mind in its interaction with the social environment. In this phase, his style ranges from the impressionistic to the surrealist, using a pattern of evocative vocabulary and imagery that binds the work together. On the other hand, while the situation (in this case the suffering of Saëd Mahran, the main character in the selected novel) is based on reality, it is often given a universal significance through the suggestion of a higher level of meaning.

The novel opens with Saëd coming out of prison after serving a four-year sentence on charges of robbery. Saëd heads for his early house, in the old quarters of Cairo, to meet his former wife, Nabawiyaa, and his five-year old daughter, Sania. He intends to take back his daughter and settle the account with his wife. His wife is now married to his friend Êllîsh. Êllîsh has very shrewdly got hold of Saëd’s wife and money while Saëd was in prison. Saëd wants to take revenge upon Êllîsh who has committed a serious offence. But to his dismay, the traitors obtain the help of the police and are safe. He looks upon his daughter as the only source of reconciliation and reconstruction of his shattered life. However, Sania, being just a child, does not recognise him and he is again left alone disheartened and dejected.

This irresponsible and inhuman act of his wife and friend has shaken his belief in love, friendship and human values that make human life worth living. Deceived and disillusioned, Saëd desperately keeps trying to avenge himself on the entire oppressive and exploitative establishment. The only hope he has is his child whom he had left and longed for while in prison. He has lost love for everything and everyone except for her.

Saëd is condemned as a criminal. He is a frustrated man who has been moulded and mistreated by his own society. He is a victim of his community. He is born poor and deprived of the basic human needs. Son of an ordinary man, working in the boys’ hostel, Saëd has been deprived of all the pleasures of life. His poor father could not even provide him with the basic requirements of life. After his father’s death, he gets his father’s job and is placed at the boys’ hostel. It is here that Saëd comes across Râûf, a student of law. It was Râûf who justified Saëd’s first theft when he commented “So you’ve stolen. You have actually dared to steal. Bravo! Using theft to relieve the exploiters of some of their guilt is
Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and the Dogs / Dr. Ayid Sharyan

absolutely legitimate, Saëd. Do not ever doubt it.” Statements like these motivate him to formulate his opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards the rich. He, being honest at heart, thinks people like Râuf practice what they preach. This attitude of Râuf, however, proves to be an illusion. His selfish interests make him change attitudes and direction.

Once Saëd was initiated into a war against injustice and exploitation, he finds it extremely difficult to retreat. He has made a firm decision to protect the cause of the downtrodden and preserve human values. But Râuf, his mentor, who infused in him a political and moral spirit, has deserted Saëd and the like. In order to meet his selfish ends, he joined the main stream—the stream of power, politics, pleasures and corruption. Saëd, on the other hand, is led to be a criminal or rather a blot on the society—a society that begets and nourishes corruption. The delineation of Saëd evokes our sympathies for him in spite of his apparently anti-social activities.

When Saëd, being one of the have-nots, was betrayed by his comrades, he felt the loss of the moral values that inspired him to take action against the haves. Râuf who inspired him to such a political stand abandoned his own conceptions and joined the flow that hurled Saëd away. Saëd, being a criminal now, is looked at as a blemish on the society that is unwanted by both the powerful and the powerless. In his delineation of Saëd, Mahfouz seems to convey that this is a man who has been wronged by his society. Thus Saëd evokes our sympathy in spite of his anti-social activities. Mahfouz does not explicitly justify Saëd's deeds under some philosophy or another. He uses the conflict between man and society without overtones of this ideology or that. By revealing Saëd's revenge to be a failure, Mahfouz seems to tell us that a mistake cannot be rectified by another though the society is the culprit.

Saëd apparently is portrayed as a thief; his appearance, however, is very deceptive. Beneath the surface of his antisocial act is his critical conciseness, his acute awareness of corruption and degenerating human values. His self-imposed “mission”, therefore, is to undermine the kilab (dogs) who degrade the common man. Fighting against kilab or all the antagonistic forces operates as a leitmotif to interrogate the innate negative human dimensions. This also functions as an effective instrument for moral and social concerns. Mahfouz’s art of characterisation and diction calls for special attention here. His skilful
exploitation of the social language is simple but loaded with meaning. It helps present the hero’s colourful and many-sided personality through interpersonal interactions. Saëd’s internal crisis is portrayed explicitly through dialogic interactions as well as monologues.

The combination of dialogic interactions and monologues begets a technique, which penetrates into the human experience in depth. We, most of the time, tend to accept Saëd’s interpretations as we keep developing empathy for him. Mahfouz very subtly engages the readers in favour of Saëd; he portrays him, in his plights and predicaments, as an oppressed and exploited character. His development is well constructed with reference to many oppressors or irresponsible people such as his wife, daughter, friends (Nūr, Rāūf, Éllish), the Shaikh and the police. These characters throw light on his many-sided character of being intellectual, honest, dishonest and political. He likes to read and even collect books. Reading and thinking inspires him to found his beliefs and locate them on solid ground. This characteristic as well as the internal dialogue makes him similar to Raskilinkov in Crime and Punishment. When he came to his house to see his daughter, he asked about his books as one major thing he wanted to get back.

Saëd offers to work as a journalist (though half-serious) with his old friend Rāūf to publish their shared past experience. This shady past was before Rāūf abandoned his teachings and seemingly vigorous beliefs. He becomes a “dog” by jumping to the other camp’s practice and ideology. He has enjoyed all the advantages of his journalism. He initiates himself into the high political and social circles by exploiting his professional skills. He wants to apply Rāūf’s teachings on their originator. However, Rāūf incites the public against Saëd who appears to have turned hostile to him. Saëd is honest in his motives to fight the evil embodied in the socio-political situations and the men controlling them. In the matters of love, hatred, commitment and reciprocation, Saëd is absolutely clear. He loves his daughter more than any thing else in the world. In terms of his relationship with Nūr, however, Saëd often confronts ambivalence. Deceived by his own friend(s) and wife and deprived of all the anchorage and moral footholds in life, he accepts Nūr’s hospitality and love as the last resort in life. She provides him with shelter and comfort while he is being chased by the police. Nūr sells herself and earns for him in spite of her awareness of the fact that he does not love her. It is a painful thought.
for Saëd also. When she goes out to earn money, Saëd is tormented by his reluctance to reciprocate her love. He compares her to his unfaithful wife and her act of treachery. Nevertheless, he fails to reconcile himself to the idea of reciprocation. Despite his sufferings and fear of death, he remains committed to the social and political change.

In *al-liss wal kilab*, Mahfouz for the first time employs stream of consciousness technique unlike the earlier novels. The novel is a brilliant work with a rapidly moving story. The reader is engaged with accurate linguistic descriptions that are linked with the internal and external psychological implications. The hectic atmosphere in the novel is similar to the one in Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Both Saëd and Raskilinkov indulge in a long and passionate internal monologue with themselves. Because of their self-denying predisposition, they suffer both internally and externally. They are unable to come to good terms and harmony with their societies. They find it hard to reconcile themselves to the bitter reality, which surrounds them. The protagonists' inner thoughts are represented as the flow of life and as something beyond human control. We side with them, as we are touched by their tormenting sufferings, their painful awareness and their flow of thoughts. Ironically, both the protagonists are well read with some desires to uplift or better their respective economically-deprived communities. They seek to improve their respective societies.

In the novel under discussion, Mahfouz seems to pay special attention to the linguistic behaviour of Saëd and his interlocutors in spite of using a technique that demands the free flow of thought. The employment of the stream of consciousness technique has direct influence on the linguistic and thematic aspects of the novel. These aspects are, in fact, the central thrust of this study. Mahfouz very carefully and schematically handles this technique, even though *The Thief and the Dogs* is seen as a psychological novel with a prominent mode of stream of consciousness. The character’s speeches do not run into pages as in the novels of the practitioners of this technique but they are highly condensed. Saëd’s thoughts and his interpersonal interactions with his interlocutors are loaded with meaning in their Egyptian context. The careful choice of words and structures plays an important role in the psychological portrayal of an unjustly imprisoned man. Saëd Mahran is a case in point. One tends to think of Saëd in *The Thief and the Dogs* as a
convincing means of projecting the creative consciousness of Mahfouz. Such consciousness operates on the socio-political plane. These characters (Saēd and his interlocutors) convey their ideologies and veiled political views. This technique also helps Mahfouz to show the mental anguish of Saēd. (Ironically, in Arabic "Saēd" means "happy"). He is crushed by bitterness from his friends, wife and the society. Helpless and desperate, Saēd is motivated to take revenge against the individuals and the society that have cheated him and brought about his disintegration and self-destruction. The novel with some existentialist overtones delineates Saēd’s predicament and places him in a cul-de-sac. We observe him as a man with no exit to escape or retreat. His discontentment is due to the antagonistic social forces and hostile realities that continually loom larger than him.

The love scenes of Saēd (with his wife) are brought into the story in the form of short, dramatic flashbacks. These scenes underscore Saēd's present mental state and the root cause of his agony. His dilemma sharply reflects upon the phoney, close and intimate relations manifested in the characters' politeness strategies. It is through these strategies that the devastating comments are made on the disintegration of the human values and the integration and unity of the Egyptian and Arab society at large.

This discussion of The Thief and the Dogs underscores the thematic and narrative dimensions of the text. It also provides a context for an analysis of the interpersonal relationships and interactions of all the characters involved in terms of the socio-linguistic and politeness strategies.

III. Politeness Features in The Thief and the Dogs

To illustrate the implications of politeness forms in The Thief and the Dogs (hence TD), the paper takes up varied segments of the novel where the main character is a focal point: Saēd in relation to 1) his old friends, 2) the policemen, 3) Sanā, 4) Rāūf and 5) Nūr. The interpersonal interactions reveal motives, personal goals and desires. This analysis will reveal that a pragmatic interpretation of a literary work does not depend on the reader's knowledge of the language system alone. A literary work, as a piece of interactional activity between a writer and a reader, one character and the other, requires incorporating the meaning of the
characters' interpersonal talk exchanges in their respective contexts. It is through the shared knowledge that the speaker assesses or calculates the appropriateness of his turn-taking in relation to the context of the speech situation. The exploitation of politeness strategies in The Thief and the Dogs highlights Saëd's actions, reactions, attitudes, motives, beliefs and above all his dilemma (internal crisis) in adjusting himself to a hostile environment. In the light of the earlier discussion, one can agree that Saëd is more "sinned against than sinning". The linguistic and contextual illustrations of Saëd highlight his trauma. His interactions with other characters reflect his personality and mark his dilemma in his degenerate society. He is in need of mutual trust, which is to be worked out, with the community he lives in. This trust cannot be taken for granted without negotiating it and examining the feelings of each interlocutor. He lacks confidence in his community and has almost been a misfit. Even the Shaikh fails him. He desperately needs someone to restore confidence to him.

We observe that the talk exchanges with his addressees are of a peculiar type. He comes into contact with the traitors who make his life hell. He is unhappy though his name in Arabic (Saëd) indicates happiness. As a form of politeness and social obligation, he has to hide his feelings as others do behind an outwardly responsive grin. To fulfil some social and psychological requirements, people put on a mask of deceptive appearances and pretend that they are happy, comfortable, honest, cooperative and concerned. In the meantime, the truth is quite the opposite. Politeness in these examples is used as a protective mechanism.

Now the paper turns to the first excerpt of the novel: Saëd in relation to his old friends. The first segment (see below) occurs when Saëd comes out of jail and goes to meet the following characters: his daughter, his ex-wife, her husband and other friends. One needs to keep in mind the bitterness of Saëd when he is released after an imprisonment of four years. He intends to take revenge but his friends are well prepared to meet him with outwardly polite or pretentious smiles and apparently soft words that conceal their intentions and perhaps indifference.
[i] Politeness as a Defensive Mechanism

This dialogue is between Saēd and his old friends. It takes place immediately after he comes out of jail. Ėllīsh and the other friends are waiting for Saēd to come. Saēd is heading for his daughter and former wife but, to his dismay, he comes across a group of her husband's friends who come out to greet him. They indirectly defend Ėllīsh with the help of the police. A voice, which he did not expect, addresses him from behind:

(1) "Saēd Mahran... How are you?"
(2) "Thank you Mr Biyaza."
(3) "Thank God you're back safe and sound."
(4) "We congratulate ourselves, being your close friends! We all said we wished you'd be released on the anniversary of the Revolution."
(5) "I thank God and you gentlemen." (TD: 11)

These segments of Saēd's and the group's dialogue illustrate the role of language and politeness strategies that reveals the speakers' motives and real feelings. The realisations of their politeness strategies throw light on the attitude and nature of their relationship. A fake intimacy is projected but he, being in a certain speech situation, suspects their politeness and warm reception. He even anticipates the precautionary step they would have taken against him. However, as a politeness strategy and social custom of receiving a person who has been in a difficult situation, they show their happiness for his release very deceptively. Deep at heart, they want him to be away from them. Their actions, therefore, are negotiated with gentle words. Admitting their fault, they extend their hands urging him to forget about the past and start anew.

A considerable element of risk or a face threatening act takes place. They try to redress what they say with some soft words to make him feel easy and accept what they intend to pass on to him. Their words are to enhance their faces, to give him some support and soothe his anger and hide their negative feelings. In fact, they would be in peace if he were not free. They would carry their own treacherous life on without any fear or threat of being exposed. They flatter him and pretend that they are pleased that he is back again. We notice that there is an extensive repertory of verbal strategies apparently directed toward minimising the damage that
is done to their ties during and after Saëd's imprisonment. The use of such devices is to manage the risk, which results from their past stern connections.

In (1), the speaker uses politeness strategies as a social behaviour to show an outwardly warm reception, which is a requirement of the social custom. It is more of a habit than real feelings for the person who suffered the plight. The speaker uses strategies (e.g. the addressee's first name and greeting, etc.) to enhance solidarity and pave the way for harmonious bonds but they are not, as we know, accompanied by sincerity and honesty. Had it been so, they could have surely strengthened their genuine bonds with him. These devices, therefore, would have worked in altogether a different way in a friendly and congenial socio-linguistic context. Saëd did not expect such friendly greetings. Recognising the group and their intentions, Saëd does not react angrily. Employing the same strategies, he thanks Mr Biyaza in (2) for such a salutation. The group, even though annoyed, wants to make Saëd feel that he is accepted and that he is a part of their group. As a politeness marker, they in (3) “thank God” that he is safe and back again in their group.

This type of politeness has been referred to as "strategic," or volitional politeness. It is motivated by personal goals. It needs to be distinguished from politeness as "social indexing" or discernment. Unlike strategic politeness, discernment operates independently of the speaker's current goals. Rather, it represents the interlocutor's ascribed and achieved social properties as these are linguistically encoded in address terms and other forms of personal reference (Alrabaa, 1985; Fasold, 1990). Honorifics, which are complex politeness formulae in Arabic, are used by fictional characters to further their personal interests. The speaker's covered attitude to the hearer in this situation lends itself to strategic exploitation (e.g. the choice of more or less formal or intimate terms of address). Exchanges like “Saëd Mahran”, “Thank you Mr Biyaza,”, “We congratulate ourselves,” and “I thank God and you gentlemen” reflect that the participants obey the interactional implicatures and cooperative principle in their conversational interaction. Instrumentally used, politeness (e.g. titles, kinship terms, address terms) marks intimacy, solidarity and in-groupness.

The politeness realisations in their speech expose their attitudes towards him. They go further to congratulate themselves in (4) that he is
[iii] Politeness of Innocence and Experience

This section takes into account the emotions and feelings of Saéd towards his five-year daughter; the politeness features of their social and linguistic interactions reflect the father’s call on every possible strategy to evoke intimacy and solidarity with his child. The father’s social and linguistic experience does not succeed in manipulating the innocent child to come to him. Perhaps the policeman’s presence, as well as the traitors’, is threatening to Saéd in this situation. This limits the loving father’s social and linguistic manoeuvres. He excuses all his linguistic skills to achieve his goal of winning back his lovely child. As a symbol of authority and the powerful, the policeman, not others, keeps things under control and limits Saéd’s freedom of choice to act or behave to crush the traitors or persuade his little child. The officer introduces the child to her father:

(9) “This is your father, child,” said the detective impatiently.
(10) “Shake hands with Daddy,” said Řlísh, his face impassive.
(11) “No”
(12) “Come to me, Sanä” he pleaded unable to bear her refusal any longer, half-standing and drawing closer to her.
(13) “No” she shouted.
(14) “I am your Daddy... I am your daddy come to me... I am your daddy, don’t be afraid. I am your dad.” (TD: 15)

In (12), Saéd pleads with his daughter Sanä to come to him, using her first name as an endearment form of address. Once more in (14) he tries to establish a familial bond with her: “I am your Daddy”. He almost begs her to come into his arms. He does his best to calm her but in vain. As a child, she knows little of the social conduct and the cooperative principles of conversation. She bluntly says “No” in (11). Directness and brevity is what characterises her turns. This thwarts his attempts to win her back. She leaves him with no choice but to submit. He remembers her mother and their former attachment and affection and his heart beats louder. He touches Sanä and the old memories are aroused. The memories of her
mother’s scent, her gestures and her soft touch make him feel excited. But all this is over now; things are totally different. The little girl knows no father except for Ellish who is always there at home with her mother.

Despite all his genuine attempts to charm her with soft words (e.g. “Daddy,” “Sanâ,” “don’t be afraid” and “dad”) and affection as a form of parent-child politeness strategy, Sanâ fights to go back and finally runs away to her mother. She has never heard of such a person who comes out of the blue to claim he is another father for her. Her spontaneous reaction shocks or stupefies him. Both the officer and Ellish cleverly try to calm the girl and facilitate the meeting superficially. Sanâ innocently acts out their intentions. Her words and reactions are very blunt and straightforward. Her rejection is a heavy blow to him, which he finds extremely hard to endure. It almost drives him crazy. Saêd is passing from one rejection to the other as we see him in the next subsection. Râûf, for example, denies his past acquaintance with Saêd and incites the public against him.

A cursory look at The Thief and the Dogs shows that the relation between Saêd and all that he clings to is fragile. He is crushed to see his wife with someone else. The lashings of prison were not as cruel as his daughter’s refusal to come to him. He bears great love for her but she knows nothing of his emotions nor does she understand them.

**[iv] Politeness and Asymmetrical Power Relation**

The asymmetrical power between Saêd and Râûf reveals a different form of interaction. In terms of characterisation, Mahfouz takes utmost care in delineating his characters that behave in their own way despite the authorial presence. The characters’ actions and reactions and their psychic structures are determined by the cultural ambience. Mahfouz’s art of portrayal, therefore, is in line with his socio-moral concerns. Râûf represents a society that is guided by ulterior motives and selfish interests. It is a world infested with corruption and the drive for power and position. Hypocrisy reigns supreme in this world. In order to achieve his power and position, Râûf joins the mainstream. He makes use of his professional journalism to publish and publicise ideas and ideologies of the establishment. Earlier he had been the spring source of inspiration for Saêd. He was the one and only man who had appreciated and glorified
Saëd's first theft as an act of defiance and protest against the rich and exploitative stratum of the society. Now he turns hostile to Saëd who reminds him of his earlier commitments. Râuf, supported by journalism and authority, tries to incite people against him and urge them to beware of him. Disillusioned and frustrated, Saëd breaks into Râuf's house to avenge himself. But people like Râuf can never be caught unaware; he is all prepared to confront Saëd:

(15) “It was idiotic of you to try your torches on me; I know you. Can read you like an open book.”
(16) “What have you come for?... You have forgotten my kindness, my charity. You feel nothing but malice and envy. I know your thoughts, as clearly as I know your actions.”
(17) “I feel dizzy. Peculiar. It’s been like that ever since I came out of jail.”
(18) “Liar! Don't try to deceive me. You thought I'd become one of the rich I used to attack. And with that in mind you wished to treat me...”
(19) “It is not true.”
(20) “Then why did you break into my house? Why so you want to rob me?”
(21) “I don't know... I'm not in my proper state of mind. But you don't believe me.” (TD: 35).

Well aware of Saëd’s moves, Râuf had already prepared a trap for him. Saëd had approached him soon after his release from prison to seek his help to begin a new life. But he was simply non-plused by the drastic changes that had taken place. Râuf was no more the same man. Dejected and disappointed, Saëd returned with a firm decision to annihilate the world that had turned him into a rogue and a social threat. Looking at the conversation from the pragmatic viewpoint, we observe that they belong to different social strata now. Several social factors shape their relations and interactions too.

The power relation between them is not symmetrical; from the point of view of politeness, Râuf has an edge over Saëd. He speaks the language that reveals his power and the social status that he belongs to now. Râuf in (15) speaks as an authority that renders his addressee
speechless and helpless. At the mercy of Rāūf, Saēd can do nothing but lower his face and blink his eyes. The horrors of the prison loom large on his vision. Saēd in (16) tries to confess, as a sign of politeness, to influence his hearer and get away from this trap. He puts himself down so as to satisfy his powerful interlocutor. Rāūf in (17) reacts sharply and forcefully. Once again Saēd in (21) employs language and politeness strategies that correspond to his present psychological conditions. He speaks of feeling “dizzy” as a way or strategy to arouse Rāūf’s sympathy. It is through this strategy again that he defends his act of breaking into Rāūf’s house and seeks his forgiveness, even though in his heart of heart he is quite sure that Rāūf is reading his mind. His soft intonation and linguistic style is a strategy employed to get himself free. The following excerpt adds to the pragmatic analysis of the portrayal of the two conversationalists. Saēd says:

(22) “Please forgive me. My mind’s the way it was in prison, the way it was even before that.”
(23) “There is no forgiving you...And now it is time to deliver you to the police.”
(24) “Please don’t.”
(25) “No, don’t you deserve it?”
(26) “Yes, I do. But please don’t.”
(27) “Don’t ever show me your face again” (TD: 35-36)

As a face-saving strategy, Saēd in (22) begs forgiveness from Rāūf and makes numerous efforts to persuade him. He admits his fault, which is a kind of politeness strategy to clear the situation and start afresh. He loses his face and self-respect. The face-threatening act is menacing because of the poignant interaction between them and the perilous situation (Tracy, 1990). But Rāūf finds a chance to overpower his participant in this talk exchange, as he does not have any more trust in him. He in (23) threatens Saēd to hand him over to the police. He in (24) pleads intensely not to report him to the police. Rāūf in (25) seizes the chance and turns the table against him. He questions him if he does not deserve it. The consequences naturally frighten him. However, instead of acting impulsively, Saēd in (26) again is forced to be polite and imploring; any other strategy, he, is fully aware, would annihilate his life. He is, therefore, left with no alternative but to admit the proposition politely in order to dissuade him
from executing the threat. Politeness strategy alone could have rescued him. We can easily notice the impoliteness and politeness strategies being employed in the present segment. It is through a submissive politeness strategy that Râuf is led to ask Saëd to leave the place forever in (27). This is a release and a threat at the same time.

This illustration has demonstrated the working of politeness in the interactional relationships between the talk participants- Saëd and Râuf. Several politeness markers are employed to demonstrate the motives and attitudes, which depict the involved interactants. Saëd is still the subject of the next subsection.

[v] Impoliteness as a Seductive Strategy

The dialogues between Saëd and Nûr here present another aspect of politeness employed with different aims and objectives in the text. Nûr quests for reciprocation of love from Saëd who seems to be indifferent to her in this regard. Nûr knows well that Saëd is reluctant to respond to her demand. However, she does not give up hope. She keeps trying to win him to her side by using psychological and linguistic devices. She feels angry when he tells her about his wife's treachery; she says:

(28) "The bitch!" she said angrily. "A man like you deserves to be waited for, even if he's sent up for life."

She went on saying:
(29) "Anyway she is not the kind of woman who deserves you." (TD: 59).

Nûr's meeting reflects another facet of Saëd. She is deeply in love with him but he neither knows nor cares. He is obsessed with his own revengeful mentality. When Saëd approaches her, deceived and dejected, she simply takes him up with a brilliant rebuke for his ex-wife and she calls her a "bitch" in (28). Her tone is a little stern. The language, in the rest of (28), is meant to boost up his male ego. Motivated by an overpowering desire to have him, Nûr employs impolite words against his ex-wife. As a strategy, she employs deference mechanisms to win him over. This device is used to maximise his positive face but he remains
impervious and almost impenetrable. So she has to go on. She in (29) strategically lowers herself to eliminate his bitterness. But he is not returning her love or compliments. Deprived of his wife’s love, he does not accept the genuine concern and love of another woman, Nūr. Her care and concern, in fact, precipitate his anger and anxiety. This is how Saēd is not really Saed (happy) as his name indicates in Arabic. He is miserable for he is alienated and is unable to find peace and tranquillity. He swims against the current and thinks he can achieve what he fights for. Thematically, one can summarise his position by saying that he is wronged more than anybody else in the story.

Politeness strategies that are realised through the interpersonal interactions in *The Thief and the Dogs* reflect power, status, face, etc. The interactants, other than the main character, use this phenomenon as an instrument to cement their relations to a considerable extent. As a defensive mechanism, it fosters, at least, outwardly understanding amongst them and prevents the misinterpretation of what one character communicates to the other. It rectifies the chains of consequences that can build loops of immediate negativity. Because politeness is used in *The Thief and the Dogs* as a strategic, not a social index, to achieve immediate social purposes, politeness fails to yield harmonious blending of the minds and their interactions. It, on the contrary, functions as a device to conceal their antagonistic attitudes and hatred for one another. The speech of the characters violates the Grician maxim of being true to one’s addressee; therefore hypocrisy prevails through characters’ interactions and superficially soft utterances. Saēd, for example, is given such an outwardly warm reception and fake intimacy according to the social norms of his people when he approaches his ex-wife and her husband and friends. Politeness words spoken by Ėllish and his friends are not an evidence of genuine human concern. They are rather a shallow social necessity. This politeness strategy, however illusive or artificial, makes him feel that it is possible to establish a rapport with them; and he too puts on a polite armour like his fellow interlocutors. As politeness strategy fails to produce the desired results for Saēd, it fails with Nūr also.

It is a kind of truism that politeness is coloured with the culture where it originates, but the selected scenes in this part do highlight how Arabic politeness operates in different circumstances. Arabic politeness is characterised by the repetition of chunks of formulae particularly in
Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Thief and the Dogs* / Dr. Ayid Sharyan

greetings, blessing, compliments, forms of address etc. Arabic politeness, unlike the circumlocutive manoeuvres in these scenes, prefers directness, and less employment of hedges unlike Western politeness (Sharyan, 2002).

**Conclusion**

Politeness maxims, an aspect of social behaviour, in *The Thief and the Dogs* have been used to avoid communication conflicts in situations where speaker and hearer have conflicting interests and desires. Politeness as it is realised in Saëd’s and his friends' speech acts prevents, at least outwardly, aggression and violence. It fosters to some degree mutual respect and keeps the doors open for further negotiation. It also helps them avoid face-to-face confrontation. One defines his rights and responsibilities in relation to the circumstances. The shallow intimacy and bonds that Saëd obtains, for instance, are shattered if we do not redress our social interactions with politeness features. Thus through politeness, we explain ourselves (i.e. our needs, limitations and requirements, etc.) and expect others to grant us the social, psychological, and physical space we need and demand in the society.

Politeness, in short, is an ongoing process where we avoid making the listener feel resentful and treat us with consideration, respect and equal status. In essence, politeness strategies and mutual understanding are two faces of the same coin that must move together to be affective. It helps people get their ideas and intentions across through their social and linguistic polite behaviour. Due to role expectations and authority factors, it may not be possible to state one's feelings or intentions. But at least we can mitigate them with one politeness marker or the other and establish the bond to a great extent.
About the author

Dr. Ayid Sharyan did his B.A. in English (Saudi Arabia), his Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Sana’a University), his M.A. and Ph.D. in English literature (India). He worked as a lecturer in English at Faculty of Education, Hajja, and moved to the Department of English, Faculty of Education- Sana’a, Sana’a University. He taught a large number of courses in language and literature in many places. In addition to publishing a number of articles, he started a LITERATURE TEXTBOOKS SERIES that includes till now more than twenty books. He has been a referee for a number of theses.
References


London.


Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and the Dogs / Dr. Ayid Sharyan


*Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Vol. (19) No. (2) October 2003*
Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and the Dogs / Dr. Ayid Sharyan


Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and the Dogs / Dr. Ayid Sharyan


مراجعة كتاب الوظيفة الإعلامية لشبكة الإنترنت/ أ.د. عبد الرحمن عزيز

منهجياً و معرفياً مما يؤثر على معرفة القارئ الذي يبني تفكيره على هذا النوع من المعرفة المنقوصة والتي تحمل عدداً من المتناقضات والمغالطات التي كان بالإمكان تجاوزها.