A pragmatic analysis of diminutives in Palestinian society

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This study explores the pragmatic functions of diminutives as used in Palestinian Arabic. Brown and Levinson's model of linguistic politeness is considered as a theoretical framework of the study. Discussion and analysis of naturally occurring data of diminutive use shows that, as an extension of their central use with children, diminutives in Palestinian Arabic have taken on the pragmatic functions of minimizing imposition, "hedging an utterance, expressing a pejorative attitude, showing affection and endearment, intensifying the speaker's emotions, showing modesty and avoiding bragging", and expressing intimacy and connectedness (Badarneh, 2010, P. 153). The diminutive in Palestinian Arabic is thus used both as a positive politeness strategy, oriented toward showing solidarity, expressing affection and endearment and establishing a friendly context for the interaction, and as a negative politeness strategy aimed at minimizing imposition and softening negative statements. These functions reflect the role of diminutives in Palestinian colloquial discourse as a device utilized by Palestinians to mark, establish, or assert social relationships including connectedness and solidarity. It is noted that the diminutive is mainly hearer-supportive, boosting the force of the utterance in positive politeness contexts while mitigating the force of the utterance in negative politeness contexts (cf. Badarneh, 2010).

Keywords: Diminutives; Pragmatic; Palestinian Arabic; Politeness; Imposition

1. Introduction

In our everyday interactions with other people our ideas and thoughts expressed in words seem to flow naturally. Interrelations between participants are an area that is explored by pragmatics. As stated by Verschueren (1987, p. 68), "social role relationships as determined by social structure, including role conflicts and the notion of social power definable as the extent to which a participant can impose his/her wants on another participant." Participants may exhibit many properties that play an important role in interactions, such as cognitive properties (biographies, experiences, previous knowledge, etc.), beliefs, attitudes, motives, emotions, and sympathy vs. antipathy (Dressler & Merlini-Barbaresi, 1994, p.19).

Diminutives are linguistic forms used in almost every language (Jurafsky, 1996). Cross-linguistically, the term *diminutive* is interpreted as a category expressing smallness and endearment. The Arabic language is characterized by the productive formation of diminutives from any noun via one or several competing suffixes. Noun diminutives provide the largest group of suffixed noun derivatives. Even though the diminutive basically conveys the idea of *smallness*, it is capable of communicating a variety of pragmatic meanings that extend well beyond the notion of *smallness*. According to Mendoza (2005, p. 171), the diminutive is a prime example of a linguistic device that is charged with socially motivated meanings and which stands as a reflection of ''how social considerations impinge upon language''.

Diminutive forms are among the first forms that a child acquires and uses in his/her speech, therefore; diminutives are a characteristic of child-directed speech (CDS). There are only few studies about their use in adult interactions (adult-directed speech). Most studies show that the highest frequency of diminutive use by adults occurs in child-directed speech, followed by lover- and pet-directed speech. Adults also use diminutives when talking to good friends, especially women talking to their female friends. The prevailing meaning of diminutive use is closely related to emotions such as love and kindness, especially when the addressee is a dear person in situations that have been defined as *not serious* (Dressler & Merlini-Barbaresi, 1994). However, there are other situations where diminutives in adult directed speech (ADS) may also occur with strangers, usually for pragmatic purposes, i.e. requests, offers, services, etc. This paper describes the way diminutives *behave* in speech acts and in speech situations with different participants and explores the different pragmatic functions conveyed by their use.

2. Background

2.1. Diminutives in different languages

Some previous studies have examined the uses of diminutives in a specific language as it is the case in this study, whereas other researchers expanded their focus to explore similarities in the use of diminutives cross-linguistically. It is very necessary to explore the usage and the pragmatic functions of diminutives in order to understand how this linguistic device is employed in social relations and interactions. According to Wierzbicka (1984), rich and productive systems of diminutives in languages, such as those found in Greek, Spanish and Italian, "seem to play a crucial role in cultures in which emotions in general and affection in particular is expected to be shown overtly" (1984, p. 168). Dossena (1998, p. 34) explores other ways in which studying the pragmatic functions of diminutives can be useful:

An analysis of the pragmatic function of diminutives thus presents us

> with another aspect of the multi-faceted structure of spoken language: in speech the cohesiveness of the texture is such that even one morpheme (apparently unimportant, like a diminutive-ie) may shift the overall balance of discourse and move its focus onto the speakers' role, the listener's perceptions, or the connotational assumptions that they both share.

In her study of Spanish diminutives, Travis (2004, p. 250) states that diminutives play an important role in personal interactions, as they can be employed as a "vehicle for the expression of good feelings." Similarly, Mendoza (2005, p. 165) argues that the diminutive in Spanish "can be used to soften or weaken the illocutionary force of an utterance, and therefore, as a politeness marker." Moreover, Jurafsky (1996), for instance, conducted a large-scale study to systematically seek the universal tendencies in the semantics of the diminutive based on a large body of cross-linguistic research.

Several other studies have investigated the pragmatic functions of the diminutive. Compared with other languages, particularly Western European languages, Greek and Spanish have been the object of the largest number of studies, as they have complex and productive systems of diminutives. Sifianou (1992) has explored the pragmatic functions of diminutives in English and Greek within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, basing her research on data collected from contemporary Greek and English plays as well as recorded conversations. She found that diminutives are used in Greek as a positive politeness strategy to show informality and solidarity, as opposed to English, where they are used to minimize impositions.

Alexopoulos (1994) noticed similar findings based on a questionnaire given to 50 native Greek speakers. In Spanish, Alonso (1961) analyzed the pragmatic functions and uses of diminutives in Spanish. He observed that diminutives perform many pragmatic functions. He also observed that the meanings and effects of diminutives depend on the context, the attitudes of the participants and the speech act itself.

In a recent study, Travis (2004) examined the pragmatic functions of diminutives in a corpus of spontaneous conversation in Colombian Spanish. The findings added further support to claims made by Wierzbicka (1984; 1992) that frequent use of diminutives in languages such as Russian and Polish plays a valuable role in realizing the cultural goal of expressing good feelings toward others. In addition to these uses, the diminutive has been found to have an affective function in communication. For example, Rudolph (1990) showed that diminutives in Portuguese serve as indicators of emotions, expressing the emotions of the speaker toward what is said, toward the interlocutor, or used as emotional expressions reduced to conventionalized intensifiers.

However, I do not expect to find all functions of Classical and Standard Arabic diminutives in present-day colloquial Arabic, especially the aesthetic and the glorification functions which appear to be restricted to literary discourse. This study, therefore, attempts to provide a complementary investigation and analysis of diminutive usage in the context of spoken discourse in Palestinian Arabic.

Salmani Nodoushan (2008a, p. 257) confirms that the seminal work of Brown and Levinson (1978) on "politeness" and its relation to "face" resulted in an upsurge of interest in conversational analysis (See also Allan & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 2006a,b; 2007a,b,c; 2008b; 2013a,b; 2014a,b,c; 2015a,b; 2016; Salmani Nodoushan, in press; Salmani Nodoushan & Allami, 2011). According to Salmani Nodoushan (2012, p. 119), face "suggests that each and every speech act is issued as a result of the interplay between self's intention and his motivation, with intention being the ignition, and motivation the fuel." One such speech act is diminitivization. The present study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness as theoretical framework of the study. Brown and Levinson tackle the diminutive as a marker of politeness. They do not discuss diminutives in depth. Rather, they merely refer to diminutives as address terms having a "function of claiming in-group solidarity" and as forms employed to soften face-threatening acts with directives (1987, p. 108). They further refer to diminutives in some languages, specifically diminutivizing adjectives or adverbs, as having "hedging functions" (1987, p. 157).

Thus, based on the data presented by Brown and Levinson, diminutives may serve as a positive politeness strategy to stress the emotional bond between the speaker and the hearer, or as a negative politeness strategy to minimize impositions.

This study argues that diminutives, as interactional devices in this dialect of Arabic, are pragmatically utilized as both positive and negative politeness markers, and as acts that might threaten the hearer's positive face. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will fill a gap in Arabic pragmatics studies in particular and contribute to the understanding of the pragmatic functions of diminutives in general.

The present study aims to explore potential pragmatic functions of diminutive usage in the everyday speech of the speakers of Palestinian Arabic (hereafter PA). It is based on data that come from naturally occurring instances of diminutives used in spontaneous colloquial discourse. The material was collected and recorded from participant observation for over 6 months. The use of authentic, naturally occurring data for the study of the pragmatics of such language feature as the diminutive provides, in my opinion, a better

basis for understanding the functions of diminutives in social interaction. In Palestinian Arabic, as in many other languages and dialects, diminutives are more likely to occur in natural conversational settings that involve communicating more than what is being said. The Arabic instances are followed by a word-for-word translation and a freer translation. Needless to say, it has been very difficult, if not possible, to produce an exact translation of Arabic utterances that include diminutives. Therefore, the renditions given in this paper should be seen only as relative approximations.

2.2. Diminutives in Arabic

Diminutivization is a highly productive morphological process in Classical Arabic. In his review of Sibawaih's analysis of the diminutive in Arabic, Fayez (1991, pp. 83-85) states that diminutives in Classical Arabic essentially denote smallness in size (*kitab* "book" > kuttayyib) or in quantity (*waraqat* "papers" > wurrayqqaat). They can also be used to express shortness of distance (*fawq* "over" > fuwayq) or of time (*qabl* "before" > qubayl "shortly before"). Diminutives are also used for expressing connotative meanings, such as endearment (*bint* "girl" > bunayyah "dear daughter,"), mercy or sympathy (*miskin* "poor" > musaykin, "contempt,"; *sayif* "sword" > suyayf "not much of a sword"), and even enhancement (*malik* "king" > mulayk "a great king").

The use of the diminutive in modern Arabic dialects has been explored in very few studies. Some of these studies are not exclusively focused on the diminutive; rather, they tackle the diminutive within a general description of a specific dialect. Other studies have addressed the morphological formation of diminutives in Arabic dialects (e.g., Fayez, 1991; Johnstone, 1973; Masliyah, 1997; Watson, 2006).

To my knowledge, only two studies have attempted to investigate the pragmatic implications of Arabic diminutives as utilized in contemporary colloquial Arabic dialects. Nakshbandi (1996) explored and compared the uses and structures of diminutives in Classical Arabic with those found in Urban Hijazi Arabic. He found that diminutives are rarely used in Urban Hijazi Arabic and are used for a limited set of connotative meanings. Nakshbandi attributed the rarity of diminutives in Urban Hijazi Arabic to the possibility of expressing the concept of diminution through other structures, such as adjectives and periphrastic forms. In a recent study, Badarneh (2010) investigated the pragmatic functions of diminutives in colloquial Jordanian Arabic. Analysis of naturally occurring conversation revealed that diminutives are pragmatically employed to express a pejorative attitude, show affection and endearment, intensify the speaker's emotions, hedge an utterance, minimize imposition, show modesty and avoid bragging, and assert intimacy in joking situations.

Diminutives in Palestinian Arabic frequently occur in everyday- often informal- interactions. As in Classical Arabic, diminutives are used in Palestinian Arabic for a variety of semantic and pragmatic functions. However, no previous study has explored, described or analyzed the various possible meanings and functions of diminutive use. As in many other varieties of Arabic, the diminutive forms are most commonly used with nouns and adjectives.

Based on the gaps in the existing literature, the present study investigates pragmatic functions of diminutive use in everyday conversation in Palestinian Arabic. More specifically, the current study has two objectives: (1) to provide a basic description of the use of diminutives in PA, and (2) to investigate the different pragmatic functions.

3. Methodology and the corpus

The data for this study were drawn from a corpus of 28 informal conversations collected by the author between March 2015 and August 2015. The length of each conversation was between 20 and 30 minutes; the total duration of all of the conversations was approximately 14 hours. The procedure for the data collection was simple: the author visited the participants in their homes, offices, etc. and recorded spontaneous conversations with them as well as their friends and/or family members.

The data were spontaneous and naturally occurring intraconversational situations in real environments of everyday communication between intimates. Among the many sources we collected our data from are: daily interactions between dyads in the workplace, family gatherings, campus, coffee shops, etc. Whenever we tried to collect the data no attempt was made by us to inform the participants being involved in the interactions about our intention.

4. Discussion and analysis

The first aim of the present study was to provide a basic description of widespread diminutive use in PA by speakers from different ages and gender. The results revealed that diminutives are used for a variety of pragmatic functions. Such a finding confirms the previous studies reviewed above that emphasize the multifunctional pragmatic nature and value of diminutives, particularly in social interactional settings such as informal conversations, where interlocutors often rely on diminutives in expressing their emotions and attitudes toward others and things.

For the analysis, the collected data were transcribed and all instances of diminutivized words in the transcripts were extracted and coded for the

pragmatic function for which it was used in the conversation. As stated by King and Melzi (2004, p. 242), it is sometimes difficult to infer exact pragmatic functions or intentions, such as those mentioned in the literature reviewed above (e.g., endearment and affection), for every instance of diminutive use. Thus, I adopted a broad classification of diminutive realizations by taking into consideration the sequential context of an utterance, the temporal development of the interaction and its paralinguistic and, importantly, prosodic features. Furthermore, the author is a native of PA and thus familiar with local social relations and social interactions, which helped in identifying and analyzing the potential pragmatic purpose of diminutive usage. The following four codes were adopted as broad classifications of pragmatic functions for diminutive use:

4.3.1. Addressing/referring to children

As observed in many cultural contexts in the world (cf., Andrews, 1999; Badarneh, 2010; King & Meliz, 2004; Sifianou, 1992; Travis, 2004), using diminutives in addressing and referring to children in PA shows the features of endearment, affection and small size. In particular, speakers attempt to use diminutives to express good feelings toward children by showing endearment, empathy and sympathy, as well as to highlight the fact that the addressee/referent is a child. This includes the use of diminutivized forms of children's names, terms of endearment, and adjectives and nouns related to the addressee. In Palestinian society, such uses are frequently limited to persons closely related to children, including relatives and friends. The example below in (1) illustrates how children are referred to by diminutivized forms of their first names and how things related to the children (e.g., toys) are also diminutivized (the Arabic diminutive is italicized).

(1)   [Mother talking about her own young child]
      Ya maħlăha arnūbitna
      How beautiful rabbit-Dim our!
      'How beautiful our *rabbit*-Dim is!'

In the above example, the mother, while talking to her neighbor in an informal situation, refers to her child as if she is a small rabbit to show small size, affection and endearment and hence show positive politeness.

4.3.2. Pejoration

Arabic diminutives, however, are not restricted to interaction with children. They might have originated in such contexts and then expanded to topics related to adult-directed speech. Palestinians might use diminutives to show a

negative evaluation and attitude toward the listener/referent. This includes the use of diminutivized forms of the referent's name, shape, and belongings, as well as common nouns and adjectives that describe the addressee or referent. The following example shows how this function is used in PA:

(2)   [A woman criticizing her 17 year-old son]
       anta eiŝ mălak habūl fi imtiħănak
       You what's wrong with fool-Dim in exam you.
       'What's wrong with your exam, fool-Dim?'

In the above example, a woman was talking to her 17-year-old son in an attempt to criticize his performance in a certain exam. The diminutive pragmatically marks the mother's anger and dissatisfaction. Specifically, the diminutive is used in a context where the mother is angry that her 17-year-old son Sami is not studying hard enough for his upcoming exams, which will decide whether he will or will not go to college. As an indication of her dissatisfaction, she addresses her son by the diminutive *habūl* rather than the base form of his name, i.e. Sami. Through this selection, the mother expresses her intention to insult her son by communicating to him that, like children, he is being irresponsible and immature about his own future. Although the diminutive is understood as an insult, using it as an alternative to explicitly insulting expressions makes the tone of the mother's words less direct and less offensive.

A similar case can be noticed in situation (3) below where a man is trying to prevent his 15-year-old son from talking in the presence of other aged siblings.

(3)   [A man talking to his son]
       ya bunay ihda?
       Son-Dim my, be quiet.
       'Oh, my son-Dim, be quiet.'

To sum up, in some cases, speakers might not want to give the impression that they do not like the conduct of children/adults, so they soften their utterances with the use of the diminutive. Without the diminutive, such utterances would sound harsher, which would threaten their own positive face in front of others. The use of the diminutive makes the complaint focused on the behavior made by the children rather than on the children themselves.

4.3.3. Intensification

Diminutives in PA are often pragmatically employed to increase/amplify the

speaker's positive attitudes and emotions toward the addressee or referent. In such usage, the meaning expressed by the diminutive is an expression of endearment, intimacy and affection; it sometimes extends to showing sympathy and compassion toward the addressee/referent.

In some cases, it can be used to communicate the speaker's sense of appreciation of and admiration for something the addressee/referent has. It occurs often with proper names, terms of endearment, and fictive kin terms. It can be used in addressing or referring to both adults and children. The use of diminutives in PA in relation to children does not depart from this universal function of the diminutive. Thus, the diminutive form may be used for either referring to or addressing children, as the two examples below serve to illustrate:

(4)   [A woman playing with her seven-month-old daughter]
      hăði ħabūbit omha
      This love she mother her
      'This is the love-Dim of her mother.'

The mother identifies with the small world of her infant. In addition to reflecting the denotative meaning of smallness, the use of the diminutive in this child-focused context adds the connotation of affection toward the infant.

Furthermore, these diminutives show other people who may be present in this context how much the mother loves, identifies with, and cares for her child. Thus, in addition to expressing affection toward her child, the mother in this context attempts to "represent the world as a friendly place" (Sifianou, 1992, p. 158) and create an atmosphere of love and endearment that not only affects her and the child positively, but also perhaps those around her. This use of diminutives in PA is consistent with their use in other cultures to establish "attachment and intimacy" and create "emotional bonding" in mother–child interaction (King & Melzi, 2004, p. 257). The example below can also be used for more illustration:

(5)   [A woman talking to her daughter about a meal that she just has eaten]
      Wa allăh inhau akūleh ħelwa
      By God it is meal-DIM nice
      'By God! It's a nice meal-DIM.'

Moreover, diminutives usually convey an emotional aspect when used in speech acts involving lovers and pets. An emotional component is brought out when diminutives are used to express tenderness, compassion, pleasantness, and even soft irony. Diminutives in such situations have a meaning of

tenderness and intimacy; sometimes they convey specific erotic connotations. The main difference is the participants who are responsible for defining the speech situation. Usually only two persons (speaker and hearer) participate in a conversation and create intimate exchanges. Another person or a wider audience would disturb the nature of a lover-directed speech situation, the naturalness of emotions, unless they do so on purpose. It is worth noting that love letters represent lover-directed speech situations as well.[17] In example (6) below a wife is addressing her husband as *hamouda* "Ahmad-Dim" instead of *Ahmad.*

(6)   [A wife talking to her husband, Ahmad]
         ħamūda, eiŝ tūkil
         Ahmad-Dim, what you eat
         'Ahmad-Dim, what would you like to eat?'

In lover-directed speech, as it is the case in the above example, the most frequently used forms are vocatives, i.e., the noun forms lovers call each other. Playfulness is a characteristic feature of the language of love; as regards the linguistic creativity of lovers, the phenomenon of the 'childish behaviour of lovers' is often noticed. Therefore special words and names are created for specific purposes when the intimate memories and experiences of two persons are shared.

It is interesting to note that in the speech situation of lovers' talk women use more diminutives than men. This could be explained in terms of the inequality of their status. In example (7) below, a man is requesting his wife, Amal, to bring him some tea:

(7)   [A man talking to his wife, Amal]
         amūli, ħăti ŝăy.
         Amal-Dim, bring you tea.
         'Amal-Dim, would you bring me some tea?'

In Palestinian culture, usually women are treated as weaker and smaller, therefore, they need support. Women are metaphorically equated to children since both of them belong to a weaker group, and the stronger side always has a right to use diminutives. Thus, we can assume that, even in very intimate speech situations where two close adults interact, one of them gets an advantage and a superior status expressed in the linguistic form of diminutives. In most cases, diminutives are very often used for the benefit, interest, or profit of the speaker.

4.3.4. Pragmatic hedging

In Palestinian culture, diminutives may facilitate conversational interaction as it is the case in example (8) above. Diminutives are sometimes employed to function as pragmatic hedges by weakening the illocutionary force of an utterance, especially speech acts such as requests, offers and commands. In such cases, the diminutive acts as a negative politeness marker by minimizing imposition on the hearer. Similar to usages found in a number of languages, the use of diminutives as a hedging device extends in PA to encode the speaker's downplaying of his or her own material possessions, achievements and characteristics in order to show modesty and avoid self-praise and bragging. The next example (8) illustrates the use of a diminutive (*ŝantayă* 'bag') as a pragmatic hedge to lessen the imposition in a request.

(8)   [An old man talking to a girl]
       saçidi:ni fi ħamil <u>alŝantayă</u>
       Help you me to carry the bag-Dim
       'Would you help me carry the bag?'

The old woman in this context tries to convince the boy she is talking to help her carry a bag which is not heavy by using the diminutive form of "bag." Hypocorisms in PA are chiefly used to express warm feelings of love and kindness. Nevertheless, the basic forms of names in our data are not rare at all. Actually, the girl's name used by her mother in the base form acquires a different pragmatic value:

(9)   [A mother talking to her daughter, Shahid]
       <u>ŝahūdi</u> ijlisi çindi.
       Shahid-Dim sit you next to me.
       'Shahid-Dim, sit next to me?'

In the situation cited above, a mother used the basic form of the name in its diminutive form in order to discipline the girl whose behavior was a face-threatening act to the mother, whereas in other situations, the mother mostly uses the hypocoristic form to emphasize their love and tender feelings. Thus, the basic form of the name used in such situations acquires an entirely different negative pragmatic meaning. When mother calls her daughter *ŝahūdi* (or Shahid) she stresses the fact that the girl is doing something wrong.

Therefore, example (9) above shows that Diminutives in children's language situations often occur in orders, requests, prohibitions and questions and mitigate the strictness of the speech act.

Sometimes, Palestinians use diminutives to minimizing the value of an invitation to convince the invitee accept it. In this case, the inviter attempts not to limit the invitee's freedom of action. In fact, diminutives might function as markers of solidarity and connectedness as it is case in example (10) below:

(10) [A man offering his married sister some more meat]
      Kul haði <u>elhabūra</u>.
      Eat this meat-Dim.
      '*Why don't you eat this small piece of meat-Dim?*'

Being polite is largely a matter of minimization of impositions while using proper mitigation devices. Special devices have to be used, especially in the speech acts of requests. In situation (11), a diminutive might reduce the severity of an FTA as it is the case when speakers tend to extend requests that limit listeners' freedom of choice.

(11) [An old woman talking to her daughter]
      <u>ṣatūra</u>, iftaħi elbăb
      Successful-Dim, open you the door.
      '*successful-Dim, would you open the door?*'

While addressing her daughter, the woman also uses hypocorisms frequently. The woman's utterance clearly demonstrates that it reflects a request directed to her daughter to perform something, which is accompanied by an imperative verb form.

We expect diminutives to be used in familiar, informal, and intimate interactions involving people who are close to each other. Such speech situations usually present a high degree of cooperativeness and a low degree of psychological distance. Familiarity, intimacy, and informality are always expressed in the language of love, and in child- and pet-directed speech. Formality, on the other hand, is present in the speech situation that is marked by an increased psychological distance and thus does not favor the use of diminutives.

As we have seen, diminutives are most frequently used in situations between close participants in familiar settings, usually at home. However, interactions that do rarely occur between strangers in formal institutional contexts, for example, in banks, hospitals and supermarkets, The use of diminutives here is most often a sign of reduced psychological distance and signals the playful character of the exchange.

Diminutives are more likely to accompany positive rather than negative emotions. Emotions that seem to disfavor the use of diminutives are fear, pain and anger. Thus, if diminutives are used in connection with these emotions, then they are used for the purpose of mitigation. Sympathy is another area that shows the use of diminutives. According to Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi (1994, p. 206), "sympathy is a direct, dyadic relation between speaker and referent." It represents the speaker's affinity to, and positive attitude towards, persons or things."

Diminutives in PA seem to have moved into areas where they serve a wide variety of polite needs. Such derivates usually express politeness either by claiming common ground and showing solidarity towards the addressee or by showing affectionate concern for imposing on his or her freedom of action. By using a feature associated with children, adults signal interpersonal involvement and show modesty. In other words, the use of diminutives marks the interaction as "positive and polite" (Sifianou, 1992, p. 159).

To sum up, in a given speech situation the use of diminutives that involves the pragmatic feature *nonserious* has the primary function of mitigating the request, of making the request more acceptable by decreasing the obligation of the addressee. In fact, a speaker, by uttering a request, may obtain satisfaction of his needs, but may sound arrogant or obtrusive. By mitigating the request via a diminutive, on the other hand, the speaker may take care of the negative effect and still get what he or she needs. According to Sifianou (1992, p. 161), the everyday function of diminutives is not mainly to soften impositions, but "to express the speaker's wish to maintain or establish a common ground and solidarity with the addressee."

5. Conclusion:

Conversational signals and devices convey implications about the involvement of the interlocutors. These implications or metamessages reflect the nature of our interactions, and they express and negotiate our relationships with each other, including the relative power and solidarity entailed in those relationships. When Palestinians use diminutives in informal or familiar and intimate situations, they try to make their communication more friendly by trying to reduce the psychological distance. By removing barriers of social status (power), age or gender, Palestinians challenge hierarchies and become more equal. However, as discussed above, even when an advantageous position or a superior status of one of the speakers is established, very close and intimate exchanges can still be observed.

Different conversational strategies and the use of diminutives enable Palestinians to change the pragmatic values of asking questions, giving orders, or making requests and offers. Diminutives are very often used for the

benefit, interest, or profit of the speaker. It is hard to observe these features directly, but research shows that even the relationship of love aimed at children or adults involves manipulation and control.

Despite this study's limitations, the use of naturally occurring data is an advantage that bolsters the validity of the patterns identified and the conclusions drawn from these patterns. Moreover, there are other social and cultural factors that may contribute to speakers' variation in diminutives use. This study, therefore, opens the door for future research to explore and broaden our understanding of the effects of other macro-social factors, such as region, social class and education, and micro-social factors, including power, distance and other situational factors, on the use of diminutives at a variety of levels of analysis using a range of data. For example, an interesting topic for a future study may involve comparing and contrasting the use of diminutives in a number of regions and varieties of Arabic spoken in Palestine according to speakers' level of education.

Much research also remains to be conducted on topics such as power and distance and how they affect the selection and pragmatic function of diminutive usage in different interactional settings.

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Appendix: Transliteration Key

The following system of transliteration has been adopted in this study.

1. Consonants

Phonetic Symbol	Arabic Sound	Phonetic Symbol	Arabic Sound
?	ء	ŝ	ش
b	ب	ş	ص
t	ت	Ď	ض
θ	ث	T	ط
j	ج	ž	ظ
ħ	ح	ς	ع
x	خ	γ	غ
d	د	f	ف
ð	ذ	Q	ق
r	ر	K	ک
z	ز	L	ل
s	س	m	م
n	ن	w	و (Semi Vowel)
h	هـ	y	ى (Semi Vowel)

2. Vowels

Phonetic Symbol	Arabic Sound	Description
a	َ	(Short Vowel)
ă	ا	(Long Vowel)
u	ُ	(Short Vowel)
ū	و	(Long Vowel)
i	ِ	(Short Vowel)
ū	ى	(Long Vowel)