

Are There Gender Differences in Politeness? A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Guests' Opinions in Podcast

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ABSTRACT

Studies on language and gender describe females as more polite, indirect, and cooperative, while males are portrayed as more assertive. However, these generalizations do not fully reflect the complexity of language use in the Arab digital context, as Arabic language use remains deeply embedded in gender-based social structures, including politeness. Podcasts, as an emerging digital medium, offer a more open space where guests may negotiate or even shift these expectations. This study raises an important question: do gendered politeness patterns in podcasts indicate a shift from traditional stereotypes, or continue to reflect established norms? This study examines two *Finjan* podcast episodes by (1) identifying the politeness strategies employed by male and female guests when expressing opinions and (2) examining the patterns and trends in its use. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the data were collected through *Simak* method and analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Findings reveal that both guests employed all four strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record, but with varying frequencies. Positive politeness was the most used by guests, reflecting the importance of solidarity and interpersonal closeness in discussions on parenting. The female guest consistently employed a combination of positive and negative politeness to maintain conversational harmony, while male guests, in addition to positive politeness, also employed off record strategies, including metaphors and illustrative examples, to reduce face threats. These tendencies suggest a subtle reshaping of gendered norms in digital interaction, while still reflecting broader social expectations.

Keywords: *Gender politeness, Arabic podcast, sociopragmatics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond biological distinctions, male and female differences also include sociocultural constructions that influence their identities and social responsibilities. As figures considered masculine, males are identified with autonomous, assertive, powerful, and involved in public life, while females are closely associated with warmth, gentleness, politeness, and domestic roles such as taking care of the home and family that are traditionally assigned to females (Putri & Firmonasari, 2024). This social construction of gender influences linguistic practices, such as who has more authority when speaking and how politeness is expressed in interactions.

Politeness is one of the most prominent stereotypes distinguishing male and female linguistic behavior. As a communicative strategy, politeness helps maintain social relationships, demonstrates respect, and prevents conflict. This strategy is influenced by situational contexts as well as gender. Females are often perceived as employing positive and negative politeness strategies, such as apologizing, choosing more polite forms of address, and using indirect expressions to avoid offending others (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995; Tannen, 1990). This is a pattern that is often linked

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to their stronger need to keep relationships harmonious. This pattern appears to be related to the higher value females tend to place on relationship maintenance and respect for established social norms. Males are often portrayed as more direct and assertive, showing fewer softening strategies and sometimes being perceived as less polite depending on the context (Coates, 2013; Haas, 1979).

Politeness is required when speakers create statements that potentially threaten the self-image of the other person, this is known as a Face Threatening Act (FTA), such as expressing opinion. Opinions are fundamentally subjective and evaluative, containing the power to create disagreement or conflict (Ruslan, 2002). Since opinions frequently entail evaluations of individuals, concepts, or norms, the use of politeness strategies is crucial in their expression because it reflects the speaker's position regarding the interlocutor and broader social relationship.

The sociocultural context in which a language develops also influences speakers' decisions of politeness strategies. These strategies represent values, norms, and established hierarchies within a community, including those related to gender. In some cultural contexts, norms regulating gender roles strongly influence how males and females express themselves. Arab society, known for its gender-based social hierarchy, clearly categorizes males and females into distinct domains, has become a significant phenomenon in the linguistic practices of males and females. Despite government reform efforts, globalization, and modernization, this gender-based social framework remains quite influential (Zamakhshari, 2018; Dewi et al., 2020). This undoubtedly influences Arab society's linguistic practices, including the use of politeness strategies, which are also influenced by gender roles (Alhwairiny, 2024; Abuarrah & Lochman, 2019; Almadani, 2021) in addition to collectivist cultural influences, religious norms, and social values (Samarah, 2015; Alkhonini et al., 2024; Alenzi, 2019).

Currently, expressing opinions has become accessible, notably through digital media. Among its many formats, podcasts have become an extremely popular form of audio-visual interaction. According to Dewi et al. (2024), podcasts are online content presented through audio or audiovisual media and can be accessed by electronic devices. Podcasts offer a relaxed, informal, and free-flowing atmosphere, allowing for spontaneous interactions and allowing speakers to express their thoughts honestly and naturally. This phenomenon has the potential to influence the politeness strategies used by male and female guests, as they have equal opportunities. In the context of Arab society, which is still quite tied to gender-based social structures, podcasts offer a new forum for discussion with several unique characteristics. This phenomenon can examine whether gender-based politeness patterns may shift, persist, or be negotiated in new ways.

The *Finjān* podcast, the focus of this study, is part of the *Iḡā'ab Samāniyah* YouTube channel based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This podcast discusses topics relevant to Arab society, such as education, marriage, health, history, and social issues, featuring guests from various social and professional backgrounds (Samāniyah, 2015). The *Finjān* podcast was chosen as a data source for this study because the interactions between male and female guests present various subjective perspectives that can be used as data for analyzing gender-based language practices in the context of digital media. This supports the analysis of politeness practices in spontaneous and natural conversations, a topic that remains under-researched in Arab digital media research, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabian society.

Brown and Levinson are prominent figures in formulating the theoretical framework used in this study, which focuses on the concept of face. There are two types of face: positive face, which refers to an individual's desire to be appreciated and liked, and negative face, which refers to the need to be free from coercion. Since face is thought to be a constantly at-risk aspect, speakers must employ a variety of politeness strategies to mitigate potential threats, also known as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). Therefore, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose four politeness strategies to address possible FTAs. First, bald on record, which describes statements made directly and without elaboration and is typically employed in intimate partnerships or emergency scenarios. The second is positive politeness, which attempts to build a space where people respect each other and become close to each other. People frequently demonstrate the previous point by making jokes, giving compliments, or showing support. Third, negative politeness emphasizes respecting the autonomy of the other person. People often use indirect speech patterns, hedges, apologies, or statements that reduce imposition to get this point conveyed. Lastly, off record refers to avoiding direct expression and allowing the other person to interpret the meaning themselves. Power, social distance, and ranking of imposition between the speaker and interlocutor may influence the choice of strategy.

Previous studies on politeness have examined various forms of interaction, including cross-generational interaction (Handriani et al., 2025; Nkirote, 2024), everyday conversation (Andriyani, 2022; Putri et al., 2024), classroom interaction (Syting & Gildore, 2022), social media (Waziri, 2022), and film dialogue (Kristyaningsih & Arifin, 2022). These studies have contributed to understanding how politeness operates across formal and informal settings. Nevertheless, most of them primarily focus on identifying linguistic forms of politeness within structured interactional contexts. These studies also tend to emphasize the classification of politeness strategies without sufficiently examining how those strategies are shaped by sociocultural expectations.

At the same time, research on gendered language use has developed through various linguistic perspectives, including turn-taking (Azzahidah et al., 2023; Rivai, 2019), discourse markers (Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024), and speech acts such as apologies (Rahi, 2025), refusals (Sharqawi & Anthony, 2019), and of gratitude (Benaicha & Al-Shara'h, 2024). Although these studies demonstrate that language use is influenced by gender differences, many of them examine gender through isolated linguistic features rather than through broader interactional practices such as politeness strategies in naturally developing conversation. Several studies have connected gender and politeness in contexts such as digital media (Aini et al., 2023; Tang, 2022), negotiation (Ba, 2023), and student interaction (Esfahlan & Boroumand, 2020).

However, these studies were conducted in Indonesian and English-speaking contexts, which means that the sociocultural dimensions influencing politeness in Arabic interaction remain insufficiently explored. In the Arab context, studies on politeness and gender have examined Saudi television programs (AlShurafa et al., 2022), request strategies among elementary school students (Al-Abbas, 2023), and online forums (Koka et al., 2023). While these studies confirm that politeness strategies are closely related to gender and social context, most of them focus on scripted discourse, short interactional exchanges, or text-based platforms. Consequently, there remains limited discussion regarding how male and female speakers negotiate politeness strategies in long-form Arabic digital discourse involving emotionally sensitive topics and spontaneous interaction. Studies examining how Saudi sociocultural values related to family, hierarchy, religious norms, and gender expectations influence politeness practices within podcast also remain limited.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that politeness and gender are connected to social context, relatively little attention has been directed toward Arabic podcast context, particularly in *Finjān*. This limitation is important because podcasts represent a distinctive interactional setting that differs from more structured or text-based media. Podcast conversations are longer, less scripted, and more flexible, allowing speakers to express opinions in ways that may not appear in other digital contexts. In addition, the Saudi sociocultural background surrounding *Finjān* provides an important setting for examining how gendered politeness practices are shaped by broader norms related to family relations, authority, interpersonal sensitivity, and public self-presentation. Based on this gap, this study aims to (1) identify the politeness strategies employed by male and female guests in opinions on the *Finjān* podcast; and (2) explore the patterns and trends of strategy use across both genders to determine whether gender-based language practices remain in the same form or have changed.

2. METHOD

This paper employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a sociopragmatic approach based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. This approach was chosen because it was relevant for uncovering patterns of gender-based politeness variation in podcasts within the Arab context. Sociopragmatics allow researchers to examine gender-based politeness patterns in Arabic-language digital media because this approach emphasizes the relationship between language practices, social norms, and contextual factors that influence linguistic choices, as previously conducted by Rabab'ah et al. (2022) and Hammouchi (2025) in their research.

The data in this study consists of opinion utterances produced by male and female guests on the *Finjān* podcast, hosted on the *Iḡā`ab Samāniyah* YouTube channel based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. At the time of data collection, the channel had approximately 4.65 million subscribers and uploaded over 1,500 videos as of March 2025. The *Finjān* program had released 253 episodes, with the most recent upload recorded on June 11, 2025. From this total, two episodes were selected through purposive sampling, guided by four criteria that were established in accordance with the research objectives.

The first criterion was that each episode had to contain a sufficient proportion of opinion-bearing utterances, particularly those in which the guest takes evaluative or advisory positions on a given issue, since this type of verbal output is most productive for examining how politeness strategies are deployed in the context of FTA. The second criterion required that the selected episodes feature one male guest and one female guest respectively, so that gender-based comparison could be conducted under equivalent interactional conditions. The third criterion stipulated that both episodes address the same thematic domain, in this case parenting and child psychology, to control for topical variation that might otherwise confound the analysis. The fourth criterion considered episode popularity, measured by view count at the time of data collection, as an indication that the selected episodes reflect discussions with considerable social reach. After reviewing the full episode list against these four criteria, the two episodes described below were identified as the most suitable, as they simultaneously satisfy all the conditions set out above.

The first episode, uploaded on May 8, 2024, with a running time of 2 hours and 23 minutes, is titled *كيف تتأثر بإساءة والديك وتتعافى منها* / *kaifa tata`assaru bi-isā`ati wālidayka wa tata`afā minhā* 'how to be affected by your parents' mistreatment and recover from it,' featuring 'Imād Rashād 'Uṣmān, a doctor and author specializing in mental health. The second episode, uploaded on November 29, 2023, with a running time of 2 hours and 45 minutes, is titled *متى أكون جاهزاً للتربية*

/matā akūnu jāhizān littarbiyah/ 'when am I ready to take on the role of caregiver?' featuring Dr. Hibah al-Harīrī, a psychotherapist and lecturer at the University of Jeddah. Given that the two episodes differ in total duration, only the first sixty minutes of each episode were analyzed to maintain comparability and avoid any analytical imbalance that might arise from unequal data volume.

Data collection was conducted through the *Simak* method (Mahsun, 2017), by carefully listening to the two guests' utterances as they expressed their opinions. The researchers then recorded linguistic forms such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences from the two guests' opinions. The researchers also transcribed the episodes orthographically and transliterated them based on the guidelines of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. As for data analysis was carried out in four stages. The first stage was identification. At this stage, the researchers examined each opinion expressed by the guests to identify linguistic markers related to the use of politeness strategies.

The second stage was classification. Once the relevant linguistic forms had been identified, the data were grouped according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theoretical framework. After classification, the frequency of each strategy was calculated to allow comparison between male and female guests. The third stage involved description and analysis. The data were described in detail in a narrative form, with attention to the patterns and tendencies that emerged from the use of politeness strategies across both genders. The final stage was conclusion and verification. The researcher formulated conclusions based on the results of analysis and verified them against the raw data and the theoretical framework to ensure objectivity and accuracy.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Politeness Strategies in the Expression of Opinions by Male dan Female Guests

Employing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy theory, the data from the *Finjān* podcast episodes with male and female guests were examined. Research findings suggest that both guests used at least all four politeness strategies equally, but with varying frequencies. Strategies that have been identified involve bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record.

Table 1. Politeness strategies in male and female guests' opinions

Politeness Strategies	Male		Female		Total	%
	Amount	%	Amount	%		
Bald on record	20	20,8%	13	12,9%	33	16,8%
Positive Politeness	33	34,4%	44	43,6%	77	39,1%
Negative Politeness	18	18,8%	27	26,7%	45	22,8%
Off record	25	26%	17	16,8%	42	21,3%
Total	96	100%	101	100%	197	100%

Table (1) demonstrates that male and female guests on the *Finjān* podcast used at least four of the same politeness strategies when they shared their opinions: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Although the two guests used similar strategies, the frequency distribution of each strategy shows significant variations. The male guest most frequently employed positive politeness strategies, accounting for 33 occurrences (34.4%), followed by off record strategies with 25 occurrences (26%), bald on record strategies with 20 occurrences (20.8%), and negative politeness strategies with 18 occurrences (18.8%). Similarly, the female guest also showed a tendency to use positive politeness strategies most frequently, with 44 occurrences (43.6%). This was followed by negative politeness strategies with 27 occurrences (26.7%), off record strategies with 17 occurrences (16.8%), and bald on record strategies with 13 occurrences (12.9%). These findings indicate that positive politeness was the dominant strategy used by both male and female guests, although differences can be observed in the distribution of the other strategies. The following section discusses each politeness strategy in detail based on the classified data.

3.1.1. Bald on Record

This strategy is considered the most direct among all politeness strategies, as the speaker aims to strengthen the FTA without engaging in regressive actions in the expression of opinion. Table (2) displays the data on the use of bald on record strategy along with its linguistic markers as employed by male and female guests in expressing their opinions. Data (1) to (3) consist of utterances produced by the male guest, whereas Data (4) to (6) contain utterances delivered by the female guest.

Table 2. Bald on record strategy in male and female guests' opinions

No.	Utterances	Linguistic Markers	Gender
1	وذا يعمل مشاكل كبيرة جدًا لأن القانون ما تم إدخاله 'and this creates very big problems because the law was not introduced'	مشاكل كبيرة جدًا	Male
2	ما فيه أحد فينا قادر يكون حقيقي تمامًا مع أبوه وأمه، مستحيل 'there is no one among us who is able to be completely real with his father and mother; impossible'	ما فيه أحد مستحيل	Male
3	لا يوجد عاقل على وجه الأرض يرى أن ذي نوع من أنواع الصداقة للأم مع الطفل، لا، ذا هنا فعلاً فيه جانب مشوه. 'there is no sane person on the face of the earth who sees that this is a type of friendship between the mother and the child. No, here there is indeed a distorted aspect'	لا يوجد عاقل مشوه	Male
4	صراحة لا 'Honestly, no.'	لا	Female

5	<p>لكن في الحقيقة، شئت أم أبيت، خلصت هذه المرحلة. طالما شرف الطفل، خلاص، أنت راح تنتقل إلى هناك.</p> <p>'But in reality, whether you like it or not, this stage has ended. As long as the child's honor (or chastity) is intact, that's it—you will move on to there.'</p>	<p>شئت أم أبيت</p> <p>Female</p>
6	<p>ما أصدق أي أب يقول "أنا ما عندي وقت". لو فعلاً ما عندك وقت، معناته ما عندك وقت لا لتويتر ولا لإنستغرام... لا نقول ما في وقت</p> <p>'I don't believe any father who says, "I don't have time." If you really don't have time, it means you don't have time for Twitter or Instagram either... we don't say there is no time.'</p>	<p>ما أصدق</p> <p>لا نقول</p> <p>Female</p>

Table (2) shows the use of politeness strategies in the expression of opinions by male and female guests in a parenting-themed podcast episode. The distribution shown in the table indicates that the male guest's use of bald on record strategy follows a pattern of firm, absolute, and evaluative statements, delivered without any evident attempt to mitigate the potential threat to the interlocutor. The markers that appear in these utterances point to a tendency to convey judgments directly, effectively narrowing the space for negotiation. In Data (1), which occurs in the context of discussing the impact of parental absence, the phrase */masyākīl kabīrah jiddan/* 'very big problems' functions as a direct intensifier that criticizes the situation under consideration. The FTA is oriented toward the interlocutor's positive face, as the condition is assessed as highly problematic without any softening. A similar pattern is found in Data (2). The expressions */mā fīh abad/* 'there is no one' and */mustabīl/* 'impossible' show absolute certainty, presenting the claim as an unquestionable truth. In this case, the interlocutor's positive face is potentially threatened because the idealized view of the parent-child relationship is rejected in a clear and uncompromising manner. The same pattern appears in Data (3), when the male guest addresses the nature of the mother-child relationship. The phrase */lā yujad 'aql/* 'there is no sane person' and the word */musyawwab/* 'distorted' assign a strong evaluative label to the view being criticized, expressed in a frontal manner and without any apparent face-saving strategy.

This formulation may threaten the positive face of those who perceive such a relationship as a form of friendship. Within the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), these forms can be categorized as bald on record strategy, as they are performed openly and directly, prioritizing clarity and urgency of content over face considerations, without regard to whether the interlocutor experiences the effect of the FTA. Functionally, in the male guest's data, this strategy serves to emphasize the importance of the opinion expressed, to establish normative boundaries, and to assert an argumentative position in a straightforward manner.

In the female guest's data, the use of bald on record strategy in Table (2) appears in a similar form, particularly in the use of direct assertions without any mitigating instruments. In Data (4), situated in the context of readiness for parenthood, the marker // no' shows an explicit rejection without softening. It functions to challenge a commonly held assumption and potentially threatens the positive face of those who perceive themselves as prepared. In Data (5), the phrase /*syi'ta am abayta*/ 'whether you like it or not' clearly limits the interlocutor's range of choice. This expression touches upon the interlocutor's negative face, as it narrows perceived freedom of action and it is delivered without any attempt at mitigation. Meanwhile, in Data (6), the markers /*mā aṣdaq*/ 'I do not believe' and /*lā naqūl*/ 'we do not say' show a direct critique of fathers who claim they lack time for caregiving. Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, these markers belong to bald on record strategy, since criticism and rejection are expressed openly, without softening instruments such as hedges or other mitigating forms, and with priority given to the clarity of the opinion conveyed. In this context, the function of the strategy tends to be corrective and persuasive, aiming to encourage awareness and responsibility in parenting practices.

Both guests, in parenting topic, employ bald on record strategy. Although with different frequencies, its use is more prominent in the male guest's data. This suggests that the male guest relies more often on direct strategies, a tendency that may also be influenced by the sensitivity of the topic, where clarity is considered necessary to ensure the message is fully understood. These findings resonate with previous studies by Muhammad and Diannurdianti (2024) and Akmal et al. (2022), which showed that male speakers tend to use bald on record forms more frequently to make their communicative intentions explicit. At the same time, the female guest is also shown to employ this strategy as a means of addressing parenting issues firmly. Its use in her data indicates an effort to negotiate her public role by articulating clear positions on socially sensitive matters. This pattern is also supported by Hamdan et al. (2024), who showed that female speakers draw on bald on record forms to clarify content in discussion and to participate in the construction of authority.

3.1.2. Positive Politeness Strategy

As previously mentioned, the positive politeness strategy is marked by statements showing concern, sympathy, and interest in the other person (Andriyani, 2022). Table (3) presents examples of data illustrating the use of positive politeness strategies by both male and female guests. Data (7) to (11) consist of utterances produced by the male guest, whereas Data (12) to (16) contain utterances delivered by the female guest. The words or phrases printed in bold indicate the linguistic markers associated with the strategy employed.

Table 3. Positive politeness strategies in male and female guests' opinions

No	Utterances	Sub strategy (B&L, 1987)	Gender
7	تصوراتي عن نفسي، للأسف، أحياناً تؤثر في تصور ابني عن ذاته... فنعم، الموضوع مؤثر بشكل ضخم 'My perceptions of myself, unfortunately, sometimes influence my son's perception of himself... so yes, the issue has a huge impact'	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	Male
8 <u>احنا</u> لما نجيب ولد، نتعامل بنفس الطريقة '...when we have a child, we deal in the same way.'	Include S and H in the activity	Male
9	فتحوّل الموضوع لعقلية عامة بلا أدنى شك بيحل مشاكل كثير جداً 'the shift to a general mindset will undoubtedly solve many problems.'	Be optimistic	Male
10	<u>جميل جداً أن يكون فيه قدر من القرب، لكن... محكوم بإطار مين أم مين</u> 'It is very beautiful to have closeness, but... it remains within a mother-child frame.'	Exaggerate Avoid disagreement	Male
11	النموذج المُستدمج شغّال، وله للأسف السلطة الأكبر علينا ما لم نعي ونبدأ نشتغل على أنفسنا 'The ingrained model is in operation, and unfortunately, it holds the greatest power over us unless we become aware and start working on ourselves.'	Include S and H in the activity	Male
12	هذا التواصل...يخدمنا أولاً <u>احنا</u> كأفراد، ويخدمنا في والديتنا مع أبناءنا. 'This communication...serves us first as individuals and serves us in our parenting.'	Include S and H in the activity	Female
13	فالتواصل مع أنفسنا، الشفافية مع أنفسنا، <u>تخلينا</u> أولاً نرتب البيت الداخلي <u>فينا</u> ...أقدر أفصل ما بين آلامي...وما بين هذا الوقت الحاضر الصغير البسيط مع أبنائي. 'Communicating with ourselves, being transparent with ourselves, allows us first to organize our inner house... I can separate my pains... from this small, simple present time with my children.'	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground Include S and H in the activity	Female
14	... <u>سبحان الله يعني</u> ... أن الأمومة هي اللي تلعب الدور الأكبر '...subhanallah...motherhood plays the bigger role.'	Use in-group identity marker	Female
15	... <u>نصيحتي لكل أب وأم: ... انتموها! لأنها شكلها مريح في البداية</u> ... لكن في الحقيقة، ما نقدر نعطي حلول جاهزة. '...my advice to every father and mother: ...be careful! Because it looks comfortable at first... but in reality, we cannot give ready-made solutions.'	Give gifts to H (advice) Give reasons	Female
16	...يا <u>عبد الرحمن</u> : هي كيف، وليس كم... لو هذه الأربع ساعات فيها جودة وتواصل جيد، فهي كافية.	Use in-group identity marker	Female

‘...O Abdulrahman: It's about how, not how much... If these four hours have quality and good communication, then they are enough.’

Based on the distribution presented in Table (3), the male guest's use of positive politeness strategy shows a pattern of inclusive and affirmative forms when delivering criticism or evaluations related to parenting. The FTAs that appear take the form of criticism toward certain mindsets or social practices; however, he is managed through the construction of solidarity and shared experience. In Data (7), the phrase */fa na'am, al-mawdū' mu'assir/* 'so yes, the matter is influential' realizes the sub strategy of presuppose/assert common ground. According to Brown and Levinson, this strategy works by assuming shared understanding between speaker and hearer. By using this expression, the guest does not impose a new claim but rather frames it as something already mutually acknowledged. In this way, the threat to the positive face of fathers as ideal figures is reduced. In Data (8), the use of the plural pronoun */ihnā/* 'we' clearly represents the sub strategy include S and H. Within this framework, such a form reduces social distance and emphasizes shared group membership. Although the criticism of inherited parenting patterns still contains an FTA, the guest positions himself within the criticized group, turning the threat into a form of collective reflection so that it easily accepted by the interlocutors.

The expression */bilā adnā syakk/* 'without the slightest doubt' in Data (9), which appears in a discussion about changing the belief that a perfect father makes no mistakes, demonstrates the sub strategy be optimistic. It shows confidence that the proposed change is both possible and acceptable. This optimism helps maintain the hearer's positive face by presuming cooperation. Meanwhile, the phrase */jamil jiddan/* 'very good' in Data (10), used in the context of discussing the mother-child relationship, reflects the sub strategy exaggerate, appearing before a subsequent limitation is introduced. As noted by Brown and Levinson, initial praise within an opinion can reduce the potential for disagreement. In Data (11), the inclusive plural marker */na-/* or */-n/* 'we' attached to verbs and nouns again realizes the sub strategy include S and H. In the discussion of internalizing parental models in children, this inclusive form frames the call for change as a shared responsibility. Functionally, the positive politeness strategy in the male speaker's data is oriented toward maintaining solidarity, so that FTAs, such as invitations to reflect, are conveyed as collective engagement.

In the female guest's data, Table (3) indicates a tendency to use strategies that emphasize emotional closeness and support. The FTAs that appear involve encouraging changes in attitude toward parenting practices; however, she is managed through expressions of empathy and group identification. In Data (12), the plural marker */-n/* 'we' attached to verbs, along with the word

/ihnā/ 'we', realizes the sub strategy include S and H. In Brown and Levinson's framework, such forms construct shared interests, so that the encouragement to engage in self-communication seems like something undertaken together. In Data (13), the forms */takballinā/* 'it makes us' and */finā/* 'in us' again show solidarity and presuppose similar emotional experiences. This aligns with the sub strategy that presupposes common ground. The use of the religious expression */subhān Allāh/* 'Glory be to God' in Data (14), in the context of discussing the role of mothers, represents use identity group marker. In this theory, identity markers strengthen social closeness because they refer to shared cultural and spiritual values. In Data (15), the word */naṣihatī/* 'my advice' and the provision of a reason through */li'annabā/* 'because' reflect the sub strategies give gifts to H and give reasons. Offering advice and explanations can be seen as attending to the hearer's positive face, since the speaker positions herself as supportive rather than commanding. The use of the vocative */yā 'Abd al-Rahmān/* in Data (16) also functions as an identity marker, reducing distance between the speaker and the addressee. Functionally, positive politeness in the female guest's data serves to build emotional support while delivering criticism, so that the message remains firm but carries a sense of care.

These findings show that both male and female guests draw on positive politeness strategies to maintain solidarity when expressing opinions that potentially contain FTAs. This pattern is also related to the topic under discussion and the nature of the interaction. Parenting is a sensitive issue, and the podcast setting constitutes public discourse. As a result, the guests appear attentive to their own image and that of their interlocutors, and they make greater efforts to create familiarity and solidarity when expressing their opinions. The presence of positive politeness strategies in both guests' data is consistent with the findings of Fauziah et al. (2025), who also report that male and female speakers in podcasts employ this strategy.

3.1.3. Negative Politeness Strategy

Wardhaugh (2006) states that the primary purpose of using negative politeness strategies is to demonstrate the speaker's effort to act cautiously in interaction so that their utterances do not impose on the interlocutor and to avoid expressions that may threaten the interlocutor's face. The use of negative politeness strategies by male and female guests when expressing their opinions is shown in Table (4). Data (17) to (20) include utterances from the male guest, while the female guest's utterances are presented in Data (21) to (24). The bold and underlined phrases mark the linguistic forms that demonstrate the use of this strategy.

Table 4. Negative politeness strategies in male and female guests' opinions

No	Utterances	Sub strategy (B&L, 1987)	Gender
17	وأحياناً العكس، الأم تحاول تعي...تمثل الاثنين. ذا أحياناً نعم، يلخبط الطفل شوية، لكنه يعدّيه 'and sometimes the opposite happens; the mother tries...she represents both. Sometimes, yes, it confuses the child a little, but it's manageable.'	Hedge	Male
18	في لحظة نتكلم بشكل أكثر فجاجة وصدمة... مش التحرش هو اللي يؤثر، لا كيف تم التعامل معه 'At a certain moment we speak more bluntly... it is not the harassment that affects, but how it was dealt with.'	Impersonalize S and H	Male
19	وكانت الفكرة السائدة للأسف ... أن الأب «رب» «رب البيت» فلا بد أن يتحلى بشكل من الكمال ولو هو عنده أخطاء لا، يخبئها كثير جداً من الأبناء 'The prevailing idea, unfortunately, was that the father was the "master" of the house, so he had to be perfect, and even if he had flaws, many children would hide them.'	State FTA as general rule Hedge Impersonalize S and H	Male
20	لو بعيد كثير، معناه كذا فيه مشكلة كبيرة If it is very distant, that means there is a big problem.	State FTA as general rule	Male
21	أنا ما أبغى أنظر وأكون مرة مثالية: افصل نفسك من برّا واجلس مع نفسك. نعم، هي فيها تحدي، مو أن ما فيها تحدي. 'I don't want to preach or be ideal: detach yourself from external influences and sit with yourself. Yes, there is a challenge, not that there isn't one.'	Hedge	Female
22	وهذا ممكن يكون أحد أسبابه خطأ من الأم ... فسحبت المسؤوليات بشكل غير مباشر، ويمكن بحسن النية من الأب. 'This may be one of its causes, a mistake from the mother... and perhaps with good intention from the father.'	Hedge	Female
23	طالما دخل الطفل في حياتك، أنت يُفترض أن تنتقل من هذه المحطة إلى المرحلة الثانية. 'Once the child enters your life, you are supposed to move to the second stage.'	State FTA as general rule	Female
24	كلمة "غير جاهز" كمان هذه كلمة مرة واسعة 'The word "not ready" is a broad word.'	Be conventionally indirect	Female

Table (4) presents the use of negative politeness strategies by both guests. In the male guest's data, there is a pattern of limiting statements, avoiding reference to specific individuals, and showing consideration for the interlocutor's freedom of action. In general, the FTAs take the form of criticism toward parenting practices, yet he is managed by reducing direct pressure and

respecting the hearer's autonomy. In Data (17), the marker */abyānan/* 'sometimes' shows the sub strategy hedge. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, a hedge functions to limit the speaker's commitment to a proposition, so that the statement does not sound absolute. Although the comment on the impact of mothers' dual roles and children's confusion still constitutes an FTA toward positive face, the presence of this marker softens the threat. In Data (18), the passive form */kayfa tamma at-ta'āmul ma'ah/* 'how it was dealt with' reflects the sub strategy impersonalize S and H. By omitting the subject, the focus shifts from the actor to the process, thereby reducing the potential of assigning blame to a particular party. This helps lessen the force of the FTA. In Data (19), two negative politeness sub strategies appear, such as state FTA as general rule and hedge. The phrase */wa kānat al-fikrah as-sā'idah lil-asaf/* 'and the prevailing idea, unfortunately' frames the criticism as part of a long-standing social norm, accompanied by a cautious tone. This strategy is consistent with the concept of negative politeness which respects individual freedom by framing criticism as an impact of social norms. Finally, in Data (20), the expression */ma'nāh kaḥā fih/* 'that means there is such (something) in it' also places an assessment of unhealthy parent-child relationships as a rule.

In the female guest's data, the general pattern involves the use of hedges, generalized evaluations, and indirect forms to reduce pressure on the interlocutor's freedom of action. The FTAs that appear usually take the form of encouraging change or assessing readiness for parenthood, yet she is conveyed in a way that preserves room for choice. In Data (21), the utterance */anā mā abghā unazẓir wa akūn marrāh mišāliyyah/* 'I do not want to theorize and be very idealistic' reflects the sub strategy hedge, as it clearly lowers the guest's position. According to Brown and Levinson, acknowledging one's own limitations in this way protects the hearer's negative face, since the guest does not impose her will or claim superiority. In Data (22), the use of */mumkin/* and */yumkin/* 'possible' also shows hedging, limiting the certainty of the statement so that any implied criticism does not appear absolute. The word */yuftarad/* in Data (23) represents the sub strategy state FTA as general rule. Here, obligation is framed as a general norm rather than an opinion in the discussion of a married couple's readiness to become parents. Meanwhile, in Data (24), the phrase */kalimah marrāh wāsi'ah/* 'a very broad word' is used as an indirect evaluation of criticism regarding mental readiness for parenthood. This aligns with the sub strategy be conventionally indirect, as the critique of the concept of being "unprepared" is directed at the meaning of the term rather than at a specific individual.

The use of negative politeness strategies by both male and female guests suggest that parenting is treated as sensitive topic requiring careful management of social distance and respect for the interlocutor's freedom. In relation to gender, although males are often associated with more

direct styles of communication, in this context the male guest also makes consistent use of negative politeness. This finding is in line with Hobbs (2003), who notes that while male speakers may appear more direct, they frequently employ hedging to avoid sounding forceful, especially when addressing sensitive issues.

3.1.4. Off Record

This strategy represents the safest form of politeness, as the speaker seeks to avoid performing a FTA while simultaneously avoiding direct responsibility for stating it explicitly. Typically, speakers convey disagreement implicitly, leaving the interlocutor space to interpret the intended meaning. As illustrated in Table (5) below, Data (25) to (27) consist of utterances produced by the male guest, whereas Data (28) to (30) contain utterances delivered by the female guest.

Table 5. Off record strategy in male and female guests' opinions

No	Utterances	Sub strategy (B&L, 1987)	Gender
25	هل عندنا الأب المثالي؟ الجيد تمامًا؟ 'Do we have the ideal father? The completely good one?'	Use rhetorical questions	Male
26	الارتطام الأول مش هو اللي يؤثر... مش الصراخ ولا ال«كف»... لا، '...the first collision is not what affects... not the shouting nor the "slap..."', no...'	Use metaphor	Male
27	فيه بعض البيوت فيها تعبير عن المشاعر لكن بتحطيم وتدمير وصراخ... ذي تعمل مشاكل رهيبة جدًا 'Some homes express emotions, but through destruction, demolition, and shouting... this causes terrible problems.'	Over-generalize	Male
28	بس هل كلنا جاهزين أن احنا يعني نعمل عملية التربية والتنشئة؟ 'Are we all ready to carry out the process of upbringing?'	Use rhetorical questions	Female
29	لا تجيبوا إنسان على هذا الدنيا وينحط بين يد خدم بس عشان كملنا الصورة قدام المجتمع، أب وأم وطفل. 'Do not bring a human being into this world and place them in the hands of servants just to complete the picture for society: a father, mother, and child.'	Give hints	Female
30	أنا منظومة قيمية، وهو منظومة قيمية... وتندمج وتبدأ تخلق عالم واحد. 'I am a value system, and he is a value system... they merge and create one world.'	Use metaphor	Female

Table (5) presents examples of off record strategy used by both male and female guests. In the male guest's data, this strategy appears through indirect forms such as rhetorical questions,

metaphors, and generalizations. In Data (25), the marker */hal...? / 'do...?'* shows the sub strategy use rhetorical questions. According to Brown and Levinson, rhetorical questions belong to this strategy because the guest does not state the statement directly but instead leads the hearer to draw the conclusion independently, in this case, that a perfect father does not exist. The FTA toward the positive face of fathers as ideal figures remains present, yet it is conveyed implicitly. In Data (26), the word */al-irtitām/* 'collision' is used metaphorically to refer to psychological conflict, realizing the sub strategy use metaphor. The criticism of harmful behavior is expressed through figurative language, requiring interpretation on the part of the hearer. Meanwhile, in Data (27), the phrase */ba'd al-buyūt/* 'some homes', used in a discussion about emotional expression within the household, represents the sub strategy over-generalize. By referring broadly to "some homes," the speaker avoids pointing to specific individuals, thereby diffusing responsibility, and making the FTA less direct.

In the female guest's data, a similar pattern appears, marked by an implicit way of conveying normative judgments through rhetorical questions, metaphors, and indirect cues. In Data (28), the interrogative form */hal...? / 'do...?'* shows the sub strategy use rhetorical questions. The criticism of readiness for parenthood is framed as a question that does not require an actual answer, leaving the meaning to be inferred by the hearer. This marker fits the concept of off record strategy, as the implicit meaning carries more dominant than any explicit statement. In Data (29), the structure of the utterance reflects the sub strategy give hints. This statement is a general prohibition, but in context, the guest is criticizing the practice of having children for the sake of social image through the depiction of social motivation. The criticism is conveyed implicitly, requiring the hearer to draw the intended conclusion independently. In Data (30), the metaphors */manzūmah qimīyyah/* 'a value system' and */khalq 'ālam wahid/* 'creating one world' shows the sub strategy use metaphor. The guest describes the relationship between spouses and children as the meeting and merging of two value systems. Criticism of the complexity of family relationships is conveyed through conceptual images that require interpretation.

Both gender groups show a balanced tendency to employ off record strategies when discussing sensitive issues that may touch on personal identity, such as readiness for parenting practices. This finding aligns with Holmes and Marra (2004), who report that off record strategies are used by both male and female speakers in professional contexts. In this sense, the strategy cannot be seen as exclusive to female speakers. The results also do not fully support the stereotype that females are always more indirect, since in these data both male and female guests rely on implicature as a way of managing FTAs.

3.2. Gendered Politeness Strategies in the *Finjān* Saudi Podcast

Table (1) shows that both male and female guests employed the four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) when express their opinions in the *Finjān* podcast: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Although the same strategies appeared in both guests' opinions, the frequency patterns show noticeable gender-based tendencies shaped also by the sociocultural norms surrounding interaction in Saudi society. Interpreting the use of these strategies involves looking at the social and cultural norms of Saudi society, which operates under a value system deeply grounded in Islamic ethics and Arab traditions (AlShurafa et al., 2022). Saudi Arabia is also highly collectivistic, people's primary loyalties lie with their family, tribe, and social circles, and social duties to fellow community members hold immense cultural and religious weight (Hofstede, as cited in Al-Ageel, 2016). These core values shape how individuals navigate their language practices in public discourse.

Positive politeness emerged as the dominant strategy used by both guests, accounting for 34.4% of the male guest's opinions and 43.6% of the female guest's opinions. The high use of this strategy is related to the relational demands of the podcast format, which is broadcast widely to the public, so that guests tend to maintain closeness, solidarity, and emotional alignment, especially when discussing sensitive issues related to parenting and family relationships. In Saudi sociocultural settings, conversations involving family matters are often approached carefully because they are tied to broader values of respect, dignity, family reputation, and collective responsibility. Saudi society is strongly collectivist, where loyalty to family and social groups occupies a central position in everyday life, and this orientation is often reflected linguistically through interactional practices emphasizing relational closeness and mutual support (Al-Ageel, 2016). Research on Saudi spoken interaction has similarly shown that politeness practices are strongly connected to collectivist values, social expectations, and the preservation of social relationships in public communication (Al-Zubeiry & Alzahrani, 2025).

This tendency is particularly visible in the female guest's opinions, which relied heavily on supportive expressions, agreement markers, and cooperative forms of interaction. Such findings support previous arguments by Lakoff (1975), Coates (1986), and Holmes (1995) who argue that female speakers tend to employ language to maintain interpersonal relationship and reduce conflict. At the same time, the high use of positive politeness by the male guest suggests that Saudi male in this study no longer appear to fully conform to stereotypical representations of masculinity linked with directness. Instead, the male guest frequently used inclusive expressions, shared experiences, and empathetic framing to position himself as emotionally engaged with the topic discussed, in line with studies by Arief et al. (2022) and Dari et al. (2025). This pattern appears to reflect broader

sociocultural shifts in Saudi digital media, where *Finjān* podcast increasingly function as conversational spaces that encourage openness, self-disclosure, and affective engagement.

The distribution of the remaining strategies also reveals how politeness practices are negotiated within the Saudi interactional context. After positive politeness, the male guest most frequently employed off record strategies, whereas the female guest more frequently relied on negative politeness. The male guest's preference for off record strategies suggests an effort to communicate potentially sensitive opinions indirectly through examples, metaphors, or generalized statements to soften face threats. In high-context communicative cultures such as Saudi Arabia, indirectness often functions as a socially appropriate mechanism for avoiding confrontation and preserving interpersonal harmony (Abdelhady & Alkinj, 2023). Previous studies on Saudi Arabic have similarly demonstrated that indirect and implicit expressions are commonly used to minimize imposition and maintain social balance in interaction (Al-Zubeiry & Alzahrani, 2025). In contrast, the female guest more frequently relied on negative politeness strategies, which indicates greater orientation toward caution, deference, and respect for the interlocutor's personal space and perspective. This finding is consistent with studies showing that Saudi female speakers often employ mitigating strategies to maintain politeness and avoid social tension in interactional settings (Al-Azraqi et al., 2024). Such tendencies may also reflect broader gender norms in Saudi society that continue to represent female with modesty, emotional control, and careful self-presentation in public interaction. Within conservative social expectations shaped by Islamic values of propriety and respectability, females are often encouraged to avoid communicative behaviors perceived as excessively confrontational or socially inappropriate.

On the other hand, the male guest also employed bald on record strategies more frequently than the female guest. This finding aligns with Coates' (2013) argument that male speakers tend to show greater directness and assertiveness in interactions. However, within the *Finjān* podcast context, such directness is not always interpreted as an expression of masculine dominance. The male guest frequently occupied the role of explaining, advising, and evaluating parenting issues from a professional perspective as a mental health practitioner, which positioned him as an authoritative source of knowledge during the interaction. In Saudi interaction culture, expertise, seniority, and professional authority often influence interactional style and may legitimize more direct forms of speech, particularly in educational or advisory discussions. This interactional tendency is closely related to the relatively high-power distance characteristic of Saudi society, where hierarchical relations and respect toward authority figures are generally accepted and socially reinforced (Samarah, 2015). At the same time, the female guest also occasionally used bald on record strategies, while the male guest repeatedly shifted toward more cautious and emotionally

supportive forms of interaction. These patterns suggest that gendered politeness strategies practices in *Finjān* podcast are also influenced by social and situational contexts.

The findings reveal that the practice of gendered politeness strategies in the *Finjān* podcast are in a process of negotiation and adjustment to the interaction contexts, including the characteristics of the podcast, the topic sensitivity, the purpose of the interaction, personal identity, and sociocultural expectations attached to gender in Saudi public life. Previous studies on Saudi interaction have often linked male speech with authority and directness, while female speech is more frequently linked to politeness, emotional sensitivity, and relational management (Abuarrah & Lochman, 2019; AlShurafa et al., 2022; Koka et al., 2023). The findings partially confirm this pattern, particularly in the female guest's stronger reliance on positive and negative politeness strategies and lower use of bald on record. However, the findings also extend previous perspectives by showing that male guest in *Finjān* podcasts may actively employ indirectness, empathy, and solidarity markers. This tendency seems to show that there is a shift in gender-based politeness practices in the context of *Finjān* podcasts, where conversational podcasts increasingly allow guests to negotiate identities that are simultaneously professional, emotional, and socially acceptable. The podcast setting appears to create a more flexible interactional space in which guests adapt politeness strategies according to communicative needs and sociocultural expectations.

The findings also support Bassiouney's (2009) statement that language use in Arab societies is governed not only by gender but also by the convergence of topic, social context, and normative expectations. The findings also align with Rassool et al. (2025) findings that the flexible characteristic of podcasts is one factor influencing the use of politeness by both guests. Additionally, the influence of topic is particularly evident in discussions of sensitive and emotionally charged issues within society, such as parenting. These findings are consistent with Hamdan et al. (2024) who argue that the topic of discussion plays a significant role in influencing the choice of politeness strategies and may even shift patterns that are typically associated with a particular gender.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper examines the use of politeness patterns by male and female guests in digital discourse in the Arabic context. By analyzing opinion utterances on the *Finjān* podcast, this paper found that both male and female guests used at least the four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Positive politeness is the most popular strategy used by both guests. Although both guests used similar strategies, the distribution of their frequency of use indicates variations influenced by the

topic of discussion and the podcast format. Female guests tend to use both negative and positive politeness strategies to maintain harmony, while male guests tend to combine positive politeness and informal strategies to establish a good emotional connection with his interlocutors and demonstrate caution. These differences suggest that rather than simply replicating traditional expectations, gendered language practices in Arabic digital media appear to be a compromise between gendered social structures and the demands of modern interaction. These results suggest a shift in traditional stereotypes regarding gendered language, demonstrated through more empathetic language behavior by male guest, who were previously perceived as direct and assertive. In contrast, the low use of the bald on record strategy by female guest suggests that she consistently prioritize maintaining face from threats by using hedges. This suggests that gender-based social norms regarding females' language still apply. As a new digital medium, podcasts create less rigid interactional space, providing opportunities for male and female language practices to become more flexible, but without completely dismantling existing rules. The findings also highlight that the choice of politeness strategies used by guests is not only based on gender factors, but also on the podcast characteristics and the topic sensitivity.

This study has several limitations. The analysis was confined to two *Finjān* podcast episodes centered on parenting issues, involving one male guest and one female guest, which limits the broader generalizability of the findings across other topics, interactional settings, and forms of digital communication. The identified patterns may also be influenced by individual speaking styles, professional backgrounds, and personal communicative tendencies of the guests rather than representing gendered language use alone. In addition, both episodes were hosted by a male host, whose interactional role and conversational management may have shaped the dynamics of the discussion and affected the way the guests realized politeness strategies. The study also did not account for other potentially influential social variables, such as age, social status, and interpersonal relations between participants, all of which may contribute to variation in language use and politeness behavior. Another limitation lies in the scope of the data, as the analysis focused only on the first sixty minutes of each episode, meaning that shifts in interactional patterns occurring in later stages of the conversation were not examined. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a larger and more varied corpus of podcast episodes, involving different hosts, guests, and discussion themes, while also considering additional sociolinguistic variables and longer interactional segments to capture a more comprehensive picture of politeness practices in Arabic digital discourse.

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