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Terms of Endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic Family Discourse

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Abstract. Each culture has its own system of address forms, which vary not only across languages but across the varieties of the same language. This fact confirms the impact that sociocultural factors assert on the set of address forms and their functioning. The present study is focused on a sub-category of address forms, namely, terms of endearment, which are explored in American English and Syrian Arabic family discourse. The study aims to specify the set of the terms of endearment in two contexts and reveal similarities and differences in their usage related to their pragmatic meaning, im/politeness, and communicative values. It also investigates how frequently and in what contexts terms of endearment are used in the American and Syrian family circle. The dataset, which includes 312 interactions with 199 terms of endearment (87 English and 112 Arabic) were obtained from 20 hours of American drama television series, "This is us" and 25 hours of a Syrian drama television series, "Rouzana". The data were categorized and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively implementing discourse analysis theory, politeness theory, and cultural studies. The results of our analysis have shown that the American English and Syrian Arabic terms of endearment are used as indicators of personal attitude and emotion, as well as markers of informality, closeness, and emotive politeness. They indicate that in Syrian Arabic, terms of endearment can also express respect and deference, they are more variable, expressive, and conventional which may suggest that they are a salient feature of the Arabic family discourse. The findings of the present paper add to the existing writings on forms of address and can be useful for further research in sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: emotive politeness, endearment terms, family discourse, linguacultural identity, American English, Syrian Arabic

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Ласковые формы обращения в американском английском и сирийском арабском семейном дискурсе

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Аннотация. В каждой культуре есть своя система форм обращения, которые различаются не только в разных языках, но и в вариантах одного и того же языка. Этот факт подтверждает влияние социокультурных факторов на набор форм обращения и их функционирование. В центре данного исследования — одна из категорий форм обращения, а именно ласковые формы, которые исследуются в американском английском и сирийском арабском семейном дискурсе. Цель исследования — уточнить набор ласковых форм обращения в рассматриваемых лингвокультурных контекстах, выявить сходства и различия в их использовании в отношении прагматического значения, не/вежливости и коммуникативных ценностей. В фокусе внимания также частотность использования данных форм обращения и контексты их употребления. Материалом послужили 312 ситуаций с 199 случаями употребления ласковых форм обращения (87 английских и 112 арабских), полученных при просмотре 20 часов американского телесериала "This is us" (Это мы) и 25 часов сирийского телесериала "Pouzana" (Рузана). Данные были классифицированы и проанализированы качественно и количественно с применением дискурс-анализа, теории вежливости и культурологического анализа. Результаты исследования показывают, что в обеих лингвокультурах ласковые обращения используются как для выражения личного отношения и эмоций, так и в качестве маркеров неформальности, близости и эмоциональной вежливости. При этом было выявлено, что в сирийском арабском ласковые формы обращения также используются для выражения почтения, они более разнообразны, экспрессивны и частотны, что позволяет предположить, что они являются важной характеристикой арабского семейного дискурса. Результаты исследования дополняют имеющуюся литературу о формах обращения и могут быть использованы для дальнейших исследований в области социолингвистики, кросс-культурной прагматики и межкультурной коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: эмотивная вежливость, ласковые формы обращения, семейный дискурс лингвокультурная идентичность, американский английский, сирийский арабский

Introduction

Address forms continuously draw scholarly attention in semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and intercultural communication [e.g., 1—6 among many others]. They explicate and reflect the norms of a specific speech community and provide significant information about its social structure. From a sociolinguistic point of view, they can be perceived as a starting point leading to a good understanding of the relationships among the members of a community, and the way how these relationships are structured both socially and strategically [e.g., 7—11]. The strategies that people employ to address one another play a significant role in defining their relationships [c.f. 5. P. 2]. G. Leech [7] asserts that address forms, such as titles, endearment terms, personal names, nicknames, etc. are very critical for maintaining and establishing social bonds.

The role of social context, including such factors as the degree of intimacy, and distance, as well as age, gender, social status, are crucial in the choice of address forms [e.g., 12]. As numerous cross-cultural studies show, in addition to social context, cultural context also has a significant impact on the set of address forms and their functioning [2; 13—16]. Additionally, address forms are a significant means to convey cultural messages and contain information about the norms, values, and social practices of a given society.

Each culture has its own system of address forms, which vary not only across languages [e.g., 2; 5; 6; 17—19] but across the varieties of the same language [e.g., 6, 7; 13; 14; 20—22;] which reaffirms the impact that sociocultural factors have on the set of address forms and their functioning. Address forms represent a principal feature of identity [e.g., 23; 11; 19], and encode cultural, social, and religious values of the interlocutors in addition to their understanding of (im)polite behavior. Issues of identity, face, exclusion, and inclusion are crucial in the choice of address forms [2. P. 398].

Address forms have occupied a prominent place in sociolinguistic research since the mid-1950s, whereas terms of endearment have not been paid due consideration in comparison with other sub-categories. The study of these terms is of considerable interest, since they embrace a wide range of issues related to identity, in/formality, im/politeness, and emotions among others.

To fill this lacuna the present study focuses on terms of endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic family discourse and aims to specify the commonalities and differences in the set of endearment terms and their usage with regard to their pragmatic meaning, im/politeness features, and communicative values. The study also investigates how conventionally, how frequently, and in what contexts these terms of endearment are used in American English and Syrian Arabic within the family circle.

Theoretical background

Terms of endearment can be regarded as expressions that convey intimacy; they are usually used to address those who are close to the speaker. D. Crystal [24. P. 169], for instance, states that terms of endearment are defined in

sociolinguistics as words of address such as *love*, *honey*, *mate*, etc. that speakers use to address others such as people with whom they regard their relationship to be intimate. Endearment terms also represent verbal expressions employed to address one's family members and friends in order to strengthen relationships and show intimacy [e.g., 25; 26]. In addition, they refer to expressions or words used in a dyadic, interactive and face-to-face situation for the purpose of describing or addressing a person for whom a speaker feels affection or love [27. P. 92].

Social factors, such as gender and social status of a speaker and an addressee may play a crucial role in the choice of an endearment term when it comes to addressing those who are not sexually or emotionally intimate. According to R. Lakoff [28], saleswomen and other female personnel may use terms of endearment to address men and women, i.e., adult strangers while heterosexual men use such terms to address only women provided that they are absolutely in "an inferior position" [28. P. 99]. Male dentists, doctors, and gynecologists use terms of endearment, such as *dear* to address their female patients but they do not use them to address male patients [ibid].

The use of endearment terms is governed by both context and function rather than semantic or formal characteristics [1]. They are conventionalized to a certain degree; however, the imagination and linguistic creativity of the speaker are also significant [ibid]. Correspondingly, Z. Griffin [29] states that endearment terms are not always identical to the addressee's characteristics. Thus, the speaker may use *honey*, *honey bunny*, *love*, *sweetie*, etc. depending on his/her preferences. The use of *mate* among Australian English speakers, for example, is perceived as a friendly term or an endearment term when used to address women and men in a relaxed, causal context [21. P. 253].

Terms of endearment, depending on the context and function, are regarded not only as means that establish the interlocutor's relationship through expressing the speakers' feelings but also as means of condescension [30]. For instance, Afro-Americans recognize a difference in the meaning of the term *nigga* uttered by an in-group member (Afro-American) or an out-group member (White). When used by in-group members, the term *nigga* is seen as an endearment term, but when used by out-group members it is considered offensive [31]. Moreover, terms of endearment can be also utilized for providing emotional support, i.e., vocatives may shift to mirror the actual attitude of the speaker regarding the relationship, addressee, or even the message to be transferred [21]. This is clear when the speakers use endearment terms, such as *sweetie* to support their addressee emotionally.

Terms of endearment deal with emotions of speakers and their attitude to an addressee. However, while analyzing their pragmatic meaning it is essential to distinguish between emotions and emotives resulting in a distinction between emotive and emotional communication [32; 33]. R. Janney and H. Arndt [32] maintain that emotive communication refers to a conscious and strategic use of "affective displays" in various social occasions in order to influence someone's interpretations and perceptions of conversational events, while emotional communication refers to "affective displays" that are unplanned, spontaneous physical outcomes of feeling the underlying emotional state [32. P. 27].

Emotive communication deals with emotive politeness [34; 35] rather than display of feelings. There is a correlation between the domain of emotive communication and positive politeness, which exhibits communication strategies of sympathy and approval, avoiding disagreement, seeking agreement, seeking common ground, inter alia [36]. Such terms of address as *love* and *mate* can be seen as markers of solidarity and positive politeness [20. P. 7]. However, we would like to note that we view positive politeness and terms of endearment not only as expressions of solidarity, informality, and familiarity which is relevant in Western cultures but also as a way of showing respect and deference.

Just like address forms in general the use of terms of endearment varies from one culture to another. Some scholars note that in such speech communities where there is a tendency towards lesser addressee-orientation and greater content orientation, the frequency of endearment terms is less as compared with communities enjoying a greater addressee orientation [20. P. 13]. In some cultures, using terms of endearment seems to be almost exclusive to parents, when addressing their children and not vice versa [37].

In this paper, we aim to show that terms of endearment are a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon that is associated with both situational and cultural expectations relating to their pragmatic meaning, politeness and impoliteness, formality and informality, and contextual acceptability.

Data and Methodology

The data for the study were obtained from viewing 20 hours of the American drama TV series, "This is us" (2016), and 25 hours of a Syrian drama TV series, "Rouzana" (2018). They were produced almost at the same time and describe the lives of families with their children. We analyzed 312 interactions (155 from the American series and 157 from the Syrian one) where terms of endearment were used 199 times (87 English and 112 Arabic). The data were categorized and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively drawing on Politeness Theory [8; 9; 36; 38—44, etc.], discourse-pragmatic approach to emotion [33; 45; 46, among others], and Cultural Studies [47; 48].

Implementing both the qualitative and quantitative analyses, we focused on defining the set of the terms of endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic, specifying their pragmatic meaning, and finding out in what contexts they are used conventionally. We have also attempted to explain the revealed differences taking politeness strategies and communicative values into account.

Data analysis

Lexical characteristics of terms of endearment in American and Syrian family discourse

The results of the analysis have revealed some similarities and differences concerning both — the terms of endearment and their functioning in the two cultural contexts. Our findings show that the set of linguistic terms of endearment in

American English is rather limited when compared with the Syrian Arabic terms. The most frequently used terms of endearment in American English disclosed in the present study are *baby*/*babe*, *sweetheart*, *sweetie*, and *honey*. From a lexical point of view, they correspond to conceptual categories of food (e.g., *honey*, *sweetness*) and conceptual categories of children (e.g., *baby*/*babe*, *kiddo*). The Syrian endearment terms, on the other hand, correspond mainly to the categories of love, soul, and heart (e.g. *Habib Albi*(Masc.) 'love of my heart' *Habibi*(Masc.) 'my beloved one', etc.).

The set of Syrian Arabic endearment terms demonstrates more variability. They are more descriptive and metaphorical (e.g., *Rouhi* 'my soul', *Eyoon Emmak* 'eyes of your mother, etc.). Superlative expressions of endearment in Syrian Arabic, such as *Ahla Em* 'the sweetest mother', *Atiab Em* 'the kindest mother', *Ahsan Akh* 'the best brother' are also to be found. Other terms include expressions of endearment coined from the addressees' first names. Some of these terms undergo phonological processes, such as insertion or deletion of vowels and consonants whereas others undergo reduplication. *Damdoom* or *Damdoomeh*, for instance, can be derived from *Dima* and *Rezzeh* can be derived from *Razan*. This coinage makes the personal name sound lovelier and more adorable. Moreover, most of the endearment terms found in the material related to Syrian are characterized by the possessive pronoun 'my' that shows intimacy and closeness (e.g., *Habibi*(Masc.) and *Habibti*(Fem.) 'my beloved one').

In the section below we present our findings related to the functioning of the terms of endearment where some discursive differences have been revealed.

Discursive characteristics of terms of endearment in American and Syrian family setting

Terms of endearment in the American family discourse

According to our findings, terms of endearment are frequently used in the American family discourse among spouses and to address one's own children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. 155 occurrences within the American family sitting were analyzed in which terms of endearment were expressed 87 times (see Table 1).

In the material related to American discourse, wives and husbands interacted 49 times, during which endearment terms were employed 51 times (29 were used by wives and 22 by husbands). They were used both in private (36 times) and in the presence of other people (15 times). The terms of endearment used were *baby*/*babe*, *honey*, and *beautiful*. The most frequent terms among spouses were *baby*/*babe* (45) times (see table 1).

(1) Rebecca: All right, *baby*. Bye, see you later (A wife talking to her husband in private).

(2) Rebecca: You suck, Bradshaw! Come on, man.
     Jack: *Babe*… The man has three Super Bowl rings (A husband talking to his wife in public).

Table 1 / Таблица 1

American terms of endearment in family setting /
Ласковые формы обращения в семейном дискурсе американского английского

Family Total situation count: 155								
Setting	**wife** ⬇ **husband**	**husband** ⬇ **wife**	**parent** ⬇ **child**	**child** ⬇ **parent**	**aunt/ uncle** ⬇ **nephew/ niece**	**nephew/ niece** ⬇ **aunt/ uncle**	**grand-parent** ⬇ **grand-child**	**grand-child** ⬇ **grand-parent**	**sibling** ⬇ **sibling**
Situation count	49		56		9		6		35
Frequency	29	22	27	∅	7	∅	2	∅	∅
Terms used	baby/ babe (25) honey (4)	baby/ babe (20) honey (1) beautiful (1)	baby/ babe (15) sweetheart (5) honey (2) kiddo (2) sweetness (1) my love (1) beautiful (1)	∅	baby (1) sweetheart (3) honey (2) kiddo (1)	∅	baby (2)	∅	∅

American parents use endearment terms to address their children quite often and regardless of their age. Our data consisting of 56 parent-children interactions reveal that terms of endearment (e.g. *baby*/*babe*, *sweetheart*, *kiddo*, *honey*, *sweetness*, *my love* and *beautiful*) were used 27 times.

(3) Randall: Come on, Annie! Go get the ball, *honey*! (A father encouraging his 6-year-old daughter).

(4) Rebecca: Hey, *sweetheart*, um...we should find some time to talk today (A mother talking to her 36-year son).

It is noteworthy to mention here that using endearment terms in American English is very prominent when the parent addresses the child. In our material, none of the sons and daughters used endearment terms to address their parents. A similar asymmetry can be observed in conversations between grandparents — grandchildren as well as uncles/aunts — nephews/nieces.

(5) Tess: Grandma and grandpa are here! Hi, *grandpa* (A 12-year-old girl greeting her grandfather).

(6) Rebecca: Hi, *baby* (A grandmother greeting her 5-year-old granddaughter).

(7) Tess: Uncle Kevin, what are you writing in your book?
Kevin: Play, *sweetheart*. It's a play. (A 36-year old uncle talking to his 12-year old niece)

(8) Kevin: *Sweetheart*, ghosts aren't real (A 36-year old uncle explaining to his 5-year old niece).
Annie: So what happens when you die?
Kevin: What happens when you die is... you die.
Annie: Forever?
Kevin: Sure... or not. I do not know. *Honey*, here is the thing, you know...

American siblings do not appear to demonstrate a tendency to use endearment terms while talking to each other. In our material, in 35 analyzed occurrences, no endearment terms were employed.

Discursive characteristics of terms of endearment in Syrian family setting

Our findings show that in Syrian families terms of endearment are used more frequently. We analyzed 157 occurrences within the Syrian family setting in which terms of endearment were observed 112 times. They were used as address forms among spouses and to address one's own children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. In contrast to the American data, they were also used by children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews to address their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts correspondingly. They were also observed among siblings (see Table 2).

Table 2 / Таблица 2

**Syrian Arabic terms of endearment in family setting /
Ласковые формы обращения в семейном дискурсе сирийского арабского языка**

Family Total situation count: 157									
Setting	**wife** ⬇ **husband**	**husband** ⬇ **wife**	**parent** ⬇ **child**	**child** ⬇ **parent**	**aunt/ uncle** ⬇ **nephew/ niece**	**nephew/ niece** ⬇ **aunt/ uncle**	**grand-parent** ⬇ **grand-child**	**grand-child** ⬇ **grand-parent**	**sibling** ⬇ **sibling**
Situation count	51		55		9		6		36
Frequency	22	4	48	3	5	1	5	1	23
Terms used	habibi (14) rouhi (8)	effo (4)	habibti (12) habibi (10) rouhi (18) rouh emmak (2) eyoon emmak (2) habib albi (4)	ahla em (2) ahla ab (1)	habibi (5)	habibti (1)	hbibi (4) rouhi (1)	habibti (1)	damdoom/ damdoomeh (8) rezzeh (8) habibi (2) rouhi (4) habibti (1)

In the material analyzed, Syrian spouses have interacted 51 times, during which endearment terms have been used 26 times (22 by wives and 4 by husbands). These are — *Rouhi* 'my soul', *Habibi(Masc.)* 'my beloved one' and *Effo* 'endearment of Afaf'. Our findings testify that in the Syrian culture the use of terms of endearment among spouses is highly context-dependent. For instance, Syrian spouses may use terms of endearment as well as first names exclusively to address one another in private but avoid using them in the presence of their children, some relatives (e.g., cousins, brothers, sisters, etc.), or casual acquaintances, since this would be considered a violation of societal norms.

(9) Em Basem: Wake up or you will be late for work, *my beloved one* (A wife waking up her sleeping husband).

إم باسم: فيق حبيبي أحسن ما تتأخر عالشغل.

(10) Hesham: O, *Effo*, why does this drink have a taste of diesel? (A husband talking to his wife in private)

هشام: يا عفّو، ليش هالمشروب طعمو مازوت؟

In the presence of other people, such as acquaintances or close relatives, teknonyms are the most acceptable forms of address. Teknonymy is the practice of designating people according to the names of their children, parents, brothers, and sisters, etc. (e.g., mother of A, father of A, sister of A, etc.) [1. P. 9]. The following example is presented to illustrate it.

(11) Abu Basem: Em Basem, what do you think? (A husband talking to his wife in the presence of his employee and his daughter).

أبو باسم: شو رأيك إم باسم.

Parent-children interactions occurred 55 times in the material analyzed, in which terms of endearment were used 51 times (48 by parents and 3 by their children). The terms of endearment used were *Habibi(Masc.)* and *Habibti(Fem.)* 'My beloved one, *Rouhi* "my soul", *Rouh Emmak* 'soul of your mom', *Habib Albi(Masc.)* 'love of my heart' and *Eyoon Emmak* 'eyes of your mother'. According to our results, Syrian parents use terms of endearment to address their children regardless of their age.

(12) Em Basem: O, *My soul*, seeing you this way breaks my heart. O, *the soul of your mother*, and *the eyes of your mother*. *My soul*, get up (A mother talking to her comatose son).

إم باسم: يا روحي، شوفتك بهالحالة بتقطع قلبي. يا روح إمك، يا عيون إمك. يا روحي، فيق.

As mentioned earlier, terms of endearment in Syria do not seem to be exclusive to parents as sons and daughters may use these terms to address their parents.

(13) Razan: Here is the coffee. Good morning to *the sweetest mom ever* (An adult daughter addressing her mother).

رزان: هي القهوة. صباح الخير لأحلى إم بالدنيا.

(14) Razan: Okay, *the sweetest father ever*. (An adult daughter talking to her father).

رزان: ماشي يا أحلى أب بالدنيا.

Uncles as well as aunts use endearment terms to address their young nephews and nieces. Such terms can also be used to address adult nephews and nieces especially when the relationship among uncles/aunts and nephews/nieces is close.

(15) Razan: *My beloved one*, Wael, she is not upset, but she has a headache (An adult maternal aunt talking to her 4-year-old nephew).

رزان: حبيبي، وائل ماما مو زعلانة بس هي راسا واجعا.

Our data shows that nieces and nephews may use endearment terms to address their uncles and aunts, especially when their relationship with their uncles and aunts is close. 9 aunt/uncle- nephew/niece interactions were analyzed during which endearment terms were used 6 times. Terms of endearment observed among uncles/aunts and nephews/nieces and vice versa were *Habibi(Masc.)* and *Habibti(Fem.)* 'My beloved one'.

(16) Anwar: My maternal aunt, O, *my beloved one*, please go back to work (An adult nephew trying to persuade his maternal aunt).

أنور: يا خالتي يا حبيبتي، خلص روحي عالشغل.

Similarly, grandparents employ endearment terms to address their grandchildren. Interactions between grandparents and grandchildren occurred 6 times, during which terms of endearment were used all 6 times; they are *Habibi(Masc.)* and *Habibti(Fem.)* 'My beloved one; and *Rouhi* 'my soul'. These terms were used 5 times by grandparents and once by grandchildren.

(17) Em Basem: Bon appetite, *my soul*. Okay, *my beloved* one, you can go to play now (A grandmother talking to her 4-year old grandson).

إم باسم: صحة وهنا يا روحي. طيب حبيبي، فيك تروح تلعب.

(18) Jood: O, *my beloved one*, O, grandmother, May God be your guardian (A 30-year-old grandson talking to his grandmother).

جود: يا حبيبتي يا تيتة، الله يخليلنا اياكي.

In contrast to the American data, we find that Syrian siblings, especially adult females, make use of endearment terms to address each other. Interactions among siblings occurred 36 times, in which terms of endearment were used 23 times: *Damdoom / Damdoomeh* 'endearment term of Dima', *Rezzeh* 'Endearment term of Razan', *Habibi(Masc.)* 'My beloved one' and *Rouhi* 'my soul'.

(19) Dima: Basem, this is your friend, Salem, who came from Aleppo to see you. Wake up! Wake up, *my beloved one* (An adult sister talking to her adult brother)

ديمة: باسم، هي سالم رفيقك اجى من حلب مخصوص ليشوفك. فيق حبيبي، فيق.

(20) Basem: *Damdoomeh*, what is the matter? (An adult brother talking to his sister)

باسم: دمدومة، شبك؟

Discussion

The study has revealed both similarities and differences regarding the set of terms of endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic and their functioning in the family setting. Syrian terms of endearment seem to be more expressive, descriptive, and metaphorical than the American English ones. They are more diverse and include superlative expressions and coined terms of endearment. In addition, most of the endearment terms found in the Syrian data are used in combination with

the possessive pronoun 'my' that shows intimacy and closeness as innate values and indicates we-identity [49] of the representatives of the Syrian culture.

The data show that in both cultures terms of endearment are used among family members within informal or casual contexts to show intimacy and affection, which may be extended to express sympathy and compassion towards the addressee. Although endearment terms may be used as markers of emotive politeness in both cultures, their use does not seem identical. The revealed differences concern the frequency of use of endearment terms and the contexts in which they are used.

The regular use of endearment terms within the Syrian family setting (112 times out of 157 situations) suggests that they may be considered a conventional discursive practice; however, there are some contextual limitations for their use. While American spouses deploy these terms both in private and in public, the Syrian ones use them only in private and consider it inappropriate to do so in the presence of other people, even if they are close relatives or acquaintances (see examples 1, 2, 9, and 10). This may suggest that in the Syrian context, the terms of endearment used among spouses express personal feelings and cannot be considered as markers of emotive politeness.

American and Syrian parents use terms of endearment to address their children to show their affection (see examples 3, 4 and 12). Moreover, the analyzed interactions have shown that American children do not use endearment terms to address their parents in contrast to the Syrian ones, who use such terms to address their parents (see tables 1 and 2). This use seems to be a conventional discursive practice in the Syrian culture. It shows respect to parents, which is one of the important communicative values. The importance of saying loving words to parents is manifested in the Qur'anic verse:

"Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "uff,"[2] and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word"[3].

The same feature can be seen in the interaction of grandparents, uncles, and aunts who deploy endearment terms to address their grandchildren, nephews, nieces in the American and Syrian cultures (see tables 1 and 2). Nevertheless, none of the analyzed American interactions has revealed that grandchildren, nephews and nieces use endearment terms to address their grandparents, uncles, aunts in contrast to Syrian nephews, nieces and grandchildren. (See examples 16 and 18). These facts allow us to suggest that in asymmetrical contexts from bottom to top, terms of endearment in Syrian Arabic are used to express respect rather than solidarity.

The findings of the study have not revealed that endearment terms can be used among American siblings. By contrast, the Syrian siblings use endearment terms frequently to address each other, as it is a good strategy to establish closeness and intimacy characterizing the polite communicative behavior among siblings in the Syrian culture (see examples 19 and 20). The findings show that in the Syrian context terms of endearments are mostly used by females.

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[2] An expression of disapproval or irritation.
[3] The Qur'an, 26:23

To sum it up, the use of endearment terms among Syrian family members such as parent ↔ child, uncle/aunt ↔ nephew/niece, sibling↔ sibling and grandparent ↔ grandchild may refer to a salient discursive practice in the Syrian culture. This can be seen often when a family member leaves the house to go somewhere, or when they come home, some specific prayers and nice words (e.g., endearment terms) are conventionally used. For instance, if an adult son tells his mother that he is going to visit his friend for a couple of hours, the following conversation may occur:

(21) Son: Mom, I am going to visit my friend for a couple of hours.
Mother: Okay. May God protect you, *my beloved one*. (From personal observation)

الابن: إمي، بدي روح لعند رفيقي ساعتين زمن.
الأم: طيب، الله يحميك، حبيبي.

Although studying terms of endearment beyond family circle was not in the purview of our study, we have observed in our material that American and Syrian boyfriends and girlfriends employ terms of endearment to address one another. However, while American boyfriends and girlfriends use terms of endearment both in private and in public, the Syrian ones only use them in private, the same as spouses do. This observation reinforces our assumption that in these situations endearment terms are used to express feelings rather than emotive politeness. On the other hand, Syrian friends and acquaintances use terms of endearment (e.g., *Habibi(Masc.)* and *Habibti(Fem.)* 'My beloved one') to address each other unless they are of an opposite gender (see examples 22, 23). In such contexts, terms of endearment can be considered markers of emotive politeness; they show solidarity and closeness rather than feelings.

(22) Basem: Have you brought the accounting software that we talked about?
باسم: جبت برنامج المحاسبة يلي حكينا عنو؟
Salem: Yes, I have brought it, *my beloved* one (A male friend talking to his male friend).

سالم: إي حبيبي جيبتو.

(23) Em Jood: Hello. How are you? *My beloved one*, where is the white envelope? (A woman talking to her son's female friend)
إم جود: مرحبا، كيفك؟ حبيبتي، وين الظرف الأبيض؟

We would like to add that it is difficult to distinguish between the emotive and emotional use of endearment terms especially in the family context. We can only generalize with caution regarding emotives and emotions because it is not easy to know for sure what members of a specific speech community really feel or want to express. Further research would help us to obtain some conclusive results.

Concluding remarks

The present study focused on the terms of endearment in American English and Syrian Arabic family discourse. We aimed to reveal similarities and differences in their usage in the two contexts relating to their pragmatic meaning, politeness

and impoliteness features and communicative values. We also investigated how frequently and in what contexts the terms of endearment are used in American and Syrian family circle.

Our contrastive analysis has revealed both similarities and differences in the two language systems and has shown that terms of endearment are a socially constructed phenomenon that is associated with both situational and cultural expectations. The results of our analysis have shown that American English and Syrian Arabic terms of endearment, depending on the function and context, can be used as indicators of personal attitude and emotion, as well as markers of informality, closeness and emotive politeness. The results indicate that in Syrian Arabic, terms of endearment can also express respect and deference; they are more variable, expressive and conventional, which may suggest that they are a salient characteristic of the Arabic family discourse. The findings show that the functioning of terms of endearment as well as other categories of terms of address is largely determined by cultural values and identity of speakers.

The findings of the present paper add to the existing literature on forms of address and can be useful for further research in sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication. For a broader perspective, further studies of terms of endearment in other social and cultural contexts need to be conducted

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